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IMPLICATIONS OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A LEARNER-CENTRED CURRICULUM

by

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a thesis

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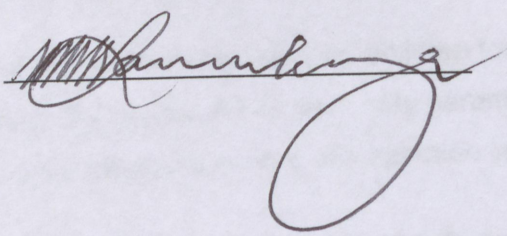
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DECLARATION

I, Ephraim Takalani Happy Ramakhanya declare that:

A Study of Implications of Continuous Assessment For Effective Teaching and Learning in a Learner-centred Curriculum

Is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any other University, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Signature:  Date: 18/09/2011

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ABSTRACT

A study of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning at vhembe district in Limpopo province by E.T.H Ramakhanya.

This study examines the manner in which assessment is applied in a learner-centred approach. The way in which teaching and learning processes are understood influences the kind of assessment practices that are used. In this regard, teachers were faced with the challenge of how to shift from traditional form of assessment to authentic assessment as they were trained in the old traditional methods of teaching and learning.

The research methodology used in this study was: Quantitative Research. The data gathering tool used was: Effective Teaching and Assessment Survey (ETAS). Data was collected from two hundred and forty (240) Grade ten (10) teachers who responded to the same questionnaire instrument.

Literature review in this study has clearly revealed the shortcomings of traditional assessment which refers to 'pen and paper' tests and examinations. This include the ranking and separating of learners according to test scores. The problem with tests is that, tests are often a one-off chance for a learner to show what he or she knows, and even when the teacher suspects that the test result is artificially high or low, the results stand. In authentic assessment various techniques are employed allowing teachers to develop a broader picture of the learner from a wider range of sources of evidence, for instance, portfolios, projects and practical tests are used in this approach. In this way, therefore, authentic assessment would include guidance, multiple chances to improve competence and performance as well as a variety of techniques that would provide learners with a range of opportunities to develop and demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed through the statistical package (SPSS). The following major themes emerged:

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- The majority of grade ten teachers found it hard to apply continuous assessment especially in large classes.

- More than half of the respondents agreed that they could not implement continuous assessment due to lack of training on the assessment strategies.

- The majority of teachers completed their teacher training courses more than ten years ago and were trained in the old traditional way of assessment.

There is a greater need for teachers at Vhembe District to be given enough training on the new strategies of assessment which are in line with the present learner-centred approach.

Lastly, findings in this study demand the attention of all stakeholders, especially teachers. The study will benefit the Department of Education officials such as planners, managers, curriculum advisors, principals, teachers and learners. Recommendations have been suggested addressing each shortcoming. The following ethics were considered: freedom from harm, freedom from exploitation, right to self-determination, right to full disclosure and informed consent.

Key concepts: Authentic Assessment, Learner-centred curriculum, Effective Teaching & Learning, Constructivism, Outcomes-Based Education, Traditional assessment.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THIS STUDY

CASS	Continuous Assessment
CO	Critical Outcomes
DOE	Department of Education
DSM	District Senior Manager
ETSA	Effective Teaching Assessment Survey
FET	Further Education and Training
FT	Facilitating Teams
LRC	Learner Representative Council
NDA	National Department of Education
NRA	Norm-Reference Assessment
SAQA	South African Qualification Framework
SMT	School Management Team

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The process of preparing young people for life as productive citizens, creative and independent thinkers has become increasingly challenging to most teachers in this country. I think the challenge became more evident during the transition from apartheid system of education to the new Curriculum 2005 approach which was introduced after the emergence of democracy in 1994.

During the years 2001 to 2003 I worked as a circuit Manager at Soutpansberg West Circuit of Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. During my visits to schools, I was amazed by what I saw in the classrooms when teachers would teach for the whole learning period applying traditional assessment strategies. They would ask very few questions or none during the lesson presentation. Most of them would teach for the whole learning period and expect learners to ask questions for clarity at the end of the lesson. Those teachers were supposed to apply continuous assessment strategies as per the Department of Education (DOE)'s Draft Assessment Policy which was released in May 1998. In this document, assessment is viewed as an integral part of teaching and learning. It is an ongoing process that finds out what a learner knows and understands during the process of teaching. Teachers therefore are expected to ask questions and give learners an opportunity to express their views during lesson facilitation (DOE 1998: IV).

According to Muijs and Reynolds (2005:66), assessment in traditional classroom, is seen as a separate activity, and occurs through testing whereas in Outcomes-Based education (OBE), assessment is seen as an activity integrated with teaching, and occurs through Questions, observation and the completion of portfolios.

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In agreement with the above, Van der Horst and MacDonald (1997:167) said that Assessment is not something that one thinks about at the end of a unit of work, or at the end of a lesson; it must be an integral part of all planning and preparation. OBE assessment is said to be mainly formative, which means that it helps to shape or build the learner through the learning process.

Clayton, Atkinson, Osborn and Wallace (1996:33) in addition to the views expressed above, made this statement concerning assessment:

> *Whether we like it or not, assessment drives learning, and therefore the type of assessment we use will play a large part in determining the learning attitudes and strategies that learners adopt, and also influencing the extent to which learning, whether in school or professional setting, offers the opportunity to develop learning ability itself.*

Assessment has become both the vehicle and the engine that drive the delivery of education as we currently know it in schools. The central role played by assessment in shaping the way in which education is delivered has come into increasingly sharp focus in recent years as governments have shown a growing awareness of the capacity of assessment policies to effect desired changes in the education system (*Clayton et al.*1996:35).

Taking the above sentiments into consideration, it becomes very clear that teachers are entrusted with a huge and crucial responsibility of assessing learners. In this regard Airasian (1991:24) cautions, that regardless of the nature of the assessment process or the type of decision it is intended to help make, there are ethical responsibilities regarding the collection and use of assessment information. Teachers are granted the right to assess and make decisions about their learners. Many of these decisions can have important academic and personal consequences for learners. So, along with the right to assess and judge, comes the responsibility to exercise that right with care and understanding. In classroom assessment this means collecting appropriate data and using it in ways that are not damaging to the learner.

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Duke (1990:120) believes that continuous assessment is probably more useful to provide information on difficult-to-evaluate areas such as leaner creativity, appreciation and character. However, he warns that no teacher should underestimate the value of good questioning techniques when continuous assessment strategies are applied. He believes that questioning provides one of the easiest ways to monitor learner's progress on a continuous basis and detect problems before great harm occurs.

Asking and answering questions are central to the learning process and to effective teaching. The types of questions posed and the sequencing of questions should capture learner's attention, arouse their curiosity, reinforce important points, and promote active learning.

Davis (1993:83) believes that when learners respond to questions, a teacher gains insight into how well they are learning the material. She also maintains that like other aspects of teaching, the ability to develop good questioning skills can be learned. She identifies the following aspects as general strategies on preparing for asking questions:

- Identifying key questions in advance.
- Preparing strategies for asking questions.
- Deciding whether to call on learners individually.
- Being aware of the manner in which questions should be asked.
- Varying the cognitive skills questions call for.

Different questions require different levels of thinking.

- Asking one question at a time.
- Avoiding yes/no questions.
- Asking focused questions.
- Avoiding leading questions.
- Structuring questions to encourage learner-to-learner interaction.

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This failure by teachers to apply continuous assessment puzzled me because it makes a teacher a lone crusader in this educational journey. I wondered how those teachers determined the learners' understanding as the learning progressed. After observing several lessons I approached some teachers and asked how they gauged the understanding of their learners about what they had just taught. Most of them told me that they would find out about their learners' progress during the weekly or monthly tests. When I asked them if they had any knowledge about continuous assessment, they seemed to have very scanty knowledge thereof. I then felt the need to call a meeting of all grade 10 teachers in that circuit to find out the cause for failure to apply continuous assessment.

Concerning this state of affairs, Dennison and Kirk (1990:11) believe that the attitude of teachers towards didacticism should not be discounted lightly. The tradition in which many have been educated themselves is important. They were taught in this way for much of their time at school and college, and went on to pass conventional examinations.

I was surprised to learn that some teachers had feelings that continuous assessment might not be effective in a large class. I then realized that they had wrong conceptions about continuous assessment.

In 2006 I was a centre manager at Makhado Education Multi -Purpose Centre. During my visits to schools as a way of monitoring what the curriculum advisors were doing, I discovered that at many schools, continuous assessment was still difficult for teachers to apply. I discovered that there was a general belief amongst teachers that continuous assessment is not effective when it is applied during the learning period because it is time consuming. This is due to various interpretations of how continuous assessment should be applied. Most teachers believe that continuous assessment refers to asking questions only, and they argue that asking each learner a question is time consuming especially in large classes. In this regard they resort to summative assessment, where they would give learners weekly or monthly tests in order to assess learners' performance. They seem to be lacking knowledge on

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strategies such as cooperative learning; where learners work on activities in small groups, and they receive rewards or recognition based on the overall group performance (Sadker & Sadker 1991:94).

The Department of Education (DOE)'s Draft Assessment Policy released for discussion in May 1998 exemplifies the ambivalent attitude towards the role of summative assessment. Summative assessment is explained in the following way: When summative assessment is carried out, either at the end of a term or at the end of a grade, assessors should include information about a learner's progress drawn mainly from continuous assessments made throughout the learning process (DOE: 1998: IV).

According to Jansen and Christie (1999: 251), summative assessment is a summary of the learner's achievements over a period of time, and the information included in the summary is gained both through carefully designed assessment tasks and observations noted by the teacher and the learner during the course of teaching and learning. However, the fact that a good summative assessment can also be used formatively does not mean that the results of formative assessment should be constantly recorded to produce a summative record.

Noting the above sentiments, I realized that assessment of learners against the identified learning outcomes is an essential part of the teaching and learning process

Although this facilitating process might sound daunting for teachers with large classes, I think it is important to remember that to most learners the fact that they are moving through the activities successfully indicates progress. It will be clear to the teacher which learners are falling behind and which are achieving results beyond expectations. Hence the purpose of the ongoing formative assessment is to guide the teacher and encourage the learner, using constructive feedback.

In this regard, Carl (2002:24) maintains that teachers will have to use a variety of methods which promote learner involvement and co-operative learning. Strategies will have to be devised and applied which will enable these methods to be used in

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classes with large numbers, in schools with no teaching and learning materials and also in schools where teachers themselves have not been prepared to use these methods. They will have to make adjustments in the classrooms depending on how learners react.

It was because of the experience I gained while I was supporting schools as well as the views I read from other scholars that prompted me to investigate the implications of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning in a learner-centred curriculum.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM.

The influence of apartheid on curriculum in South Africa has left a legacy which would take some times to erase. Managing the transition process from the apartheid education system, which was teacher-centred to the current learner-centred system, has been a great concern for curriculum designers in this country (Mc Intrye & O'Hair 1996:98).

Since assessment is an indispensable part of any curriculum, the problem to be investigated in this study is:

The implications of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning in a learner-centred curriculum at schools.

Jansen and Christie (1999:219), confirm that it was a serious indictment of the education establishment that the implementation of the Outcomes Based Education started before a coherent policy on assessment had been formulated. They believe that part of the reason for this is the structural separation of the assessment and curriculum units at both national and provincial departments of education.

The situation leaves most teachers so perplexed in the learner-centred approach to a point that they revert to the norm-referenced assessment strategies. Teachers regularly work out class average and compare individual learners' achievements. They also regularly use predetermined marks or norms to decide whether learners

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should pass or fail a test or examination or class. On most subjects, for example, 40% is the norm required for a pass and 80% the norm for gaining a distinction (Malan 1997:27).

The first step in norm-referencing is the determination of a norm (or standard) which learners are expected to achieve in a test or examination. Learners' marks are then measured against this norm to determine whether their performance can be regarded as good, average or poor. If the majority of learners have performed better than the norm, the test or the examination may be regarded as having been too easy. If on the other hand, too many learners have performed below the norm, the test or the examination could be considered to have been too difficult.

Malan (1997:28) then concludes that these procedures have been severely criticized. Some of the more common criticisms are that norm-referenced assessment, being concerned with general comparisons, perpetuates class, racial and gender distinctions; and does not supply specific information about what an individual learner knows, understands or can do.

In OBE assessment is said to be mainly formative, which means that it helps to shape or form the learner through the learning process. The learning outcomes which have to be attained by the learner are very clearly defined. Through assessment, both teachers and learners are able to determine whether these outcomes have been achieved (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:170).

Curriculum 2005 indicates that the learners' progress will be measured against these outcomes rather than against his/her performance compared to other learners, and for this reason there will be no passing or failing (curriculum 2005 life long learning 21st century 1997). However, it should be noted that though the words passing and failing will not be used in the same way as in the past, it does not mean that learners will be able to advance without having achieved the required learning outcomes. This is based on the principles of OBE whose major proponent is William Spady.

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According to Spady (1994:9), all learners can learn and succeed but not on the same day or in the same way.

According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:171), Outcomes-Based Education does not imply: "pass one, pass all". It means: show that you understand, that you can apply a skill, that you have developed a positive disposition. Assessment in OBE will be ongoing, which means that a learner's progress will be monitored continuously. The methods used will not interfere unduly with learning. Infect, they will enhance learning.

Teachers therefore, are supposed to use five main kinds of assessment: diagnostic, formative, summative, criterion-referenced and ipsative-referenced assessment.

When diagnostic assessment is used prior to teaching or at the beginning of a lesson, it provides a teacher with planning information. The information gained in this way helps the teacher to know what the learners' entry levels are - what they know about the lesson topic.

Formative assessment is conducted during instruction, either formally or informally, for example (teachers' questions or observations). Both teachers and learners receive information from this kind of assessment: information about problems, errors, misunderstanding, understandings and progress.

Formative assessment helps the teacher to adopt teaching strategies and methods during lesson time in order to effect greater understanding and learning (Van der Horst & MacDonald 1997:172).

Summative assessment is usually conducted at the end of a lesson, a unit or a course. It is the final measure of what was learned. Summative assessments offer an opportunity for some learners to demonstrate what they have learnt. Summative tests can measure learner outcomes, but are unfortunately often only used to test learners' recall of knowledge. According to Freiberg & Driscoll (1996:48), this practice has led to great criticism of summative assessment. For others, alternative

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summative assessments, such as projects and performance tasks are necessary if we are to obtain a true picture of individual learning. When summative assessment is well developed and matched to individual learners, it will tell a teacher about his/her teaching as well as about his/her learners' learning. Learner's portfolios can also provide such comprehensive information. This is what teachers should aim for in OBE.

Criterion-referenced assessment measures the child's performance against predetermined expectations, which are usually written down and built into the assessment process. The assessment procedure is then designed to provide evidence, for each learner, of whether those specific expectations or criteria for success, have been effective, there is no reason why any of the learners should fail. Bell-shaped curves of results are irrelevant here (Sutton 1995:5).

Ipsative-referenced assessment is the assessment process by which a child's performance is measured against that same child's previous performance. It is used to gauge individual progress over time. The word 'ipsative' derives from the Latin word for self- "ipse" (Sutton 1995:7).

I think the problem is that many teachers find it difficult to assess the learning outcomes in their preferred learning areas. This is because of insufficient knowledge on the assessment procedures. During my interaction with them, when I visited schools, I noticed that they struggled to explain and assess the knowledge, concepts and skills they were supposed to teach.

1.3 STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

My hypothesis is:

There is a significant difference in the manner in which Grade 10 teachers apply Continuous Assessment with regard to learner-centred approach.

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1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

According to DOE (1998:14), the practice of continuous assessment implies a paradigm shift from promotion decisions based on the results of a single test or examination to the on-going formative assessment of the learner.

In order to improve the methods employed by the teachers during teaching and learning process as suggested above, the aim of this study is as follows:

1.3.1 To conduct a field of study for the purpose of assessing the level of competence within which teachers apply continuous assessment, and

1.3.2 To suggest practical ways in which teachers can confidently apply continuous assessment irrespective of class size.

1.4.3. To conduct a field of study for the purpose of finding out how teachers view continuous assessment.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided me to find out the extent to which teachers apply continuous assessment in their classrooms and its impact.

1.4.1 To what extent is continuous assessment applied in the classroom?

1.5.2. How effective is continuous assessment in the classroom?

1.5.3. Do teachers understand the practical implications of continuous assessment?

1.6. DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

Curriculum is a vast field of study with numerous concepts related to it. In order to conduct fine research in this field, one needs to have a broad understanding of various concepts such as Curriculum 2005, Outcomes-Based Education, Assessment, Teaching and Learning. Although numerous scholars have commented

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upon different concepts as they perceived them, in this research, concepts are defined as follows:

1.6.1 CURRICULUM 2005

Curriculum 2005 is the new national framework for South Africa, which was implemented in 1998. This new curriculum aims at changing the face of South African education and training. It identifies teaching and learning instruments such as learning outcomes and assessment criteria, which are applied to all learners, irrespective of whatever barriers to learning they might experience DOE (1998: 27).

However, curriculum 2005, in this research means a process of teaching and learning which accepts as its premise that the definition of learning outcomes should form the basis of all educational activities.

1.6.2. OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE)

Outcomes-Based Education is a learner-centred approach and in it the emphasis is on what the learner should be able to know, understand, achieve and to become. It is based on the understanding that all learners can learn. It is a system that implies emerging with a clear idea of what is important for learners to be able to do, thereafter, developing the programmes for learning, implementing it and assessing the learner on a continuous basis to ensure that learning has ultimately taken place Spady (1994:1).

According to Kelly (1999:47), it is a system that can accommodate all learners, including learners who experience barriers to learning and learners who are regarded as gifted.

In this research, outcomes-based education means the approach which offers an alternative to the traditional approach - an approach which takes continuous assessment as the integral part of teaching and learning.

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1.6.3. LEARNER-CENTRED CURRICULUM

Learner-centred curriculum is often attributed to scholars such as John Dewey, Pestalozzi and Froebel who maintained that the approach to institution should be somewhat free, drawing on the child's innate tendency to become engaged in things that interest him or her (Orstein & Hunskins 1993:250).

Learner-centred curriculum uses the learner-centred approach. This approach places a much stronger emphasis on the learners' role in the learning process. It focuses on the learner and his/her needs. Acknowledgement of human diversity (learners' differences is accommodated). The learner's accountability is emphasized.

The teacher's main role is to facilitate learning rather than to be a source of all knowledge. This means that teachers have to help learners construct their own knowledge, rather than simply telling them things that they are expected to memorize. All individual learners must be allowed to learn to their full potential. This means that all educators and learners must have high expectations for successful learning on the part of all learners, regardless of background age, sex, learning style or other factors (Van der Horst & McDonald 2008:5).

Middlewood and Burton (2003:39) believe that learner-centred approaches are those where top-down control is relaxed, such that learners can to a degree determine educational means and ends. However, they caution that it should be noted that learner-centred work does not deny teachers' authority, it simply gives them a facilitating and guiding role (for example, clarifying which goals are and are not of intrinsic value, rather than controlling one).

However, in this research learner-centred curriculum means the learning programme, which is focused on the learner with the educator as a facilitator. This learner-centred approach is guided by four simple questions: What do we want learners to learn?

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Why do we want learners to learn these things? How can we best help learners to learn these things? And, how will we know when learners have learned (Killen 2000:7)?

1.6.4. ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a strategy for measuring knowledge, behaviour or performance, values or attitudes. It is a data-gathering strategy. The measurement or data people gain from assessment helps them to evaluate (Van der Horst & McDonald 2008:167).

In this study, assessment would mean the process through which both teachers and learners are able to determine whether the learning outcomes have been achieved.

1.6.5 CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT (CASS)

Continuous Assessment is an ongoing everyday process that finds out what a learner knows, understands, values and can do, providing information that is used to support a learner's development and enables improvements to be made in teaching and learning process (Hargreaves 1989: 87).

In this study, continuous assessment means a general description of an approach which is designed to encourage learners to develop and demonstrate competence in a variety of ways and across numerous contexts throughout any learning programme (Jansen & Christie1999: 249).

1.6.6. SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Summative assessment is the assessment which gives a picture of a learner's competence or progress at any specific moment. It can occur at the end of a single learning activity, a unit, cycle, term, semester or year of learning (DOE 2003a: 36).

Jansen and Christie (1999:251) define summative assessment as a summary of the learner's achievements over a period of time, and the information included in the summary is gained both through carefully designed assessment tasks and

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observations noted by the teacher and learner during the course of teaching and learning.

1.6.7. FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

According to DOE (2003a: 37), any form of assessment that is used to give feedback to the learner is fulfilling a formative purpose. Formative assessment is a crucial element of teaching and learning. Constructive feedback is a vital component of assessment for formative purpose. It helps learners to improve their performance, maximize their learning and reflect on and improve their own learning-it forms and shapes learning.

The National Assessment Policy (DOE 1998:19) states that this approach requires the collection of sufficient, appropriate evidence on which to base a judgment about achievement against the relevant national standard. It is also stated (NDE 1998:20) that assessors should include information about a learner's progress drawn mainly from 'continuous/formative assessments' made throughout the learning process.

In this study the explanation of Ecclestone (1996:79) is considered. She thus explains that formative assessment is not only concerned with what learners know or can do, but more importantly to discover how they know something (or do not), how they are (or are not) able to demonstrate different skills, and what the barriers are to achievement, and it is an integral part of teaching and learning process.

1.6.8. DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

Diagnostic assessment is the strategy applied by teachers prior to their teaching or at the beginning of a lesson to know what the learners' entry levels are –what they know about the lesson topic. Unstructured strategies are often used in the form of questions asked by the teacher. It is also used to identify the nature and cause of barriers to learning experienced by specific learners. It is followed by guidance, appropriate support and intervention strategies (Van der Horst & McDonald 2008:170).

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In this study, diagnostic assessment would mean the strategy used by the teacher, formally or informally in their planning process which gives them a complete picture of the learners' readiness for and interest in their teaching. This must also show up the learner's pre-knowledge, pre-skills, pre-attitudes and values. The diagnosis does not have to stop once the planning is completed; the teacher needs to continue to diagnose learners' understanding and interest throughout each lesson or unit of teaching.

1.6.9. NORM-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT (NRA)

Norm-referenced assessment is the assessment which is conducted with the purpose of grading learners. The results could, for example, be used to determine whether a learner's performance is average, below average or above average. It compares the learners' performance with the performance of other learners (Malan 1997:26).

In this study, norm-reference assessment would mean an assessment which takes into cognizance the determination of a norm (or standard) which learners are expected to achieve in a test or examination. Learners' marks are then measured against this norm to determine whether their performance can be regarded as good, average or poor.

1.6.10. EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Effective teaching and learning is the process whereby the teacher expresses a clear view of what he/she teaches. During this process learners demonstrate an understanding of the whole process by participating in the learning process (Jansen & Christie 1999:207).

More (1992:4) defines teaching as the action of a person imparting skill, knowledge, or giving instruction: an attempt to assist students in acquiring or changing some skills, knowledge, ideal, attitude or appreciation.

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MacGrath (1995:84) describes effective learning as active learning which encourages more participation and interaction, which is often social and offers a learner many opportunities to respond and engage in dialogue with the teacher or other learners.

However, in this research, effective teaching and learning would mean more teacher facilitation and learning by discovery on the part of learners, with continuous assessment as an integral part of this process.

1.7 REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORY

Since every researcher owes much to his or her predecessors and contemporaries at work in the field or in libraries, literature is herewith presented.

1.7.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by the philosophy of "success for all learners" developed by William Spady who is regarded as the father of Outcomes-based Education (OBE). This statement regarding OBE is based on three assumptions formulated by Spady (1994a:9). They are:

- All learners can learn and succeed, but not on the same day in the same way.
- Successful learning promotes even more successful learning.
- Schools control the conditions that directly affect successful school learning.

OBE is considered to be a learner-centred, result-orientated education system which is based on the belief that individuals have the capacity to learn, as well as to demonstrate learning after having completed an educational activity. OBE therefore claims to encourage independence of mind. That is, learners are to develop, through a system of fixed outcomes, into autonomous beings, (McGrath 1995:70)

According to Spady (1994b:11), implicit in the OBE paradigm, is the desires to have all learners emerge from the system as successful learners.

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Spady (1994b:20) believes that OBE's purposes would be achieved if educators apply the principles consistently, systematically, creatively and simultaneously.

The four principles which inform its underlying philosophy of success for all are as follows:

- Clarity of focus on culminating exit outcomes of significance.

According to this principle, the whole curriculum is geared towards what the learners must be able to demonstrate at the 'real' end-that is, at the end of their schooling before they go on to fulfil their roles in life.

- Expanded opportunity.

Implicit in this principle, teachers must provide more than one opportunity to learners, if they are not successful, to demonstrate important learning. Rigid time frames and schedules must not restrict learning, although there must be limits to every expanded learning opportunity. The application of this principle also implies that teachers must change their teaching methods to ensure successful learning for all.

- High expectations.

Learners must be exposed to challenges on a higher level of performance for successful learning. This higher standard must be supported by the necessary motivation of learners. Norm reference assessment, where a learner is compared with the performance of a group, must be replaced by criteria reference assessment, where every learner performs against a pre-set criterion.

- Design down.

The designing down process starts with what learners should be able to do at the end of their official learning experience. In designing and planning a curriculum at micro level, that is, a learning experience and/or a learning programme, the teacher must start with the culminating outcomes and then design back towards the enabling outcomes and the discrete outcomes.

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It is important, however, to note that according to Spady and Marshall (1991:64-71) the theory describes three outcome-based approaches in practice, namely the traditional approach, the transitional approach and the transformational approach.

- The traditional approach.

In this approach outcomes are defined as instructional aims based on the content syllabus. The teacher selects certain aspects in the curriculum to form the basis of a new curriculum. The context in which learning takes place is found to the classroom and the school. Learner participation is of lesser importance. This approach is rarely driven by a framework of exit outcomes, but it is rather a strive towards academically competent learner (Maree & Fraser 2004:12)

- The transitional approach.

In this approach content is based as a means to attain higher-order competencies such as problem solving, critical thinking, technological applications and effective communication. The learning material is adapted to enable learners to demonstrate these high-level competencies in an integrated manner. It is adapted to both the curriculum and the learner and there is a sound interaction between the teacher and the learner (Brady 1995:19).

- The transformational approach

The outcomes in this approach are constructed in terms of real-life roles that competent citizens must fulfil in real life. Spady and Marshall (1991:70) state it as follows:

> *Success in school is of limited benefit unless learners are equipped to transfer that success to life in a complex, challenging, high-tech future. Our prevailing, century-old, industrial age curriculum structure and delivery model lack credibility and the capacity to generate these kinds of results*

According to King and Evans (1992:73-75), it seems that there was gradual shift in the development of OBE over the last two to three decades from traditional through

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transitional to a transformational approach and from a product-versus-process orientation towards an orientation which acknowledges their interdependence. The outcomes of this approach are referred to as transformational outcomes.

It is essential to point out that the policy makers of South Africa decided on the transformational outcomes-based approach for South Africa, National Department of Education (NDE: March 1997a:31)

It is also vital to find out what exactly transformational OBE entails. In the following table, Spady and Marshall (1991:68) compare characteristics that are associated with transformational OBE with those of traditional OBE.

Table 1.1

A comparison of Traditional OBE with Transformational OBE

Traditional OBE is:	Transformational OBE is:
❖ Calendar-defined (schools, programmes, Processes, credentialing and decision-making priorities)	❖ Outcome-defined (schools, programmes, processes, credentialing and decision making priorities).
❖ Constrained in opportunity (which limits time for teaching and successful learning to occur).	❖ Expanded opportunity (which enables successful teaching and learning for all to occur).
❖ Custodial in credentialing (credit-based on seat-time attendance and ambiguous criteria).	❖ Performance credentialing (credit through accomplishment using clear criteria and demonstrating success of priority outcomes).
❖ Tied to curriculum coverage (approach teaching and testing).	❖ Aided by instructional coaching (fostering successful performance for all learners on essential

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❖ Segmented in content (curriculum structure, instructional delivery, testing and credentialing).	outcomes). ❖ Integrated in concepts (cross-curriculum approach to outcomes, curriculum structure, instructional delivery and assessment).
❖ Based on cumulative achievement (approach to curriculum planning, teaching, testing and grading).	❖ Based on culminating achievement ('end-result' approach to outcomes, curriculum design, instruction, assessment and grading).
❖ Selection orientated (opportunity structures, grading and curriculum tracking).	❖ Orientated to inclusionary success (structure of curriculum cross-groupings, learning, assessment and credentialing opportunities).
❖ Characterized by contest learning (learners compete for scarce rewards).	❖ Characterized by co-operative learning (to foster learning success for all). ❖ Confirmed by criterion validation (expectations of high-level performance on clearly defined outcomes and standards).
❖ Dependent on comparative evaluation (emphasizing relative quality of work accomplished and grades assigned)	❖ Formed on collaborative structures (for curriculum planning, instructional delivery and learner learning).
❖ Composed of cellular structures (school and curriculum organization, learning environments and credentialing)	

Table 1.1: A comparison of Traditional OBE with Transformational OBE

(**Source:** Adopted from Beyond Traditional Outcomes-Based Education. Eductaional Leadership. By Spady and Marshall, page 49:1991)

Since the word outcomes is central in all the three approaches of OBE, it is essential to describe its meaning in the context of the OBE.

1.7.1.1. What is an outcome?

According to Maree and Fraser (2004:13), in the South African context, the word outcomes is broadly used as an inclusive term. It refers to everything that has been learnt, including social and personal skills, learning how to learn concepts, knowledge, understanding, methodologies, values and attitudes. It can thus be concluded that outcomes are the end products of a learning process. They argue that this view is a passive description of an outcome if compared to Spady's description of an outcome where the emphasis is on the active involvement of a learner by means of demonstrating and doing the mentioned end products.

Spady (1994a:49) describes outcomes as:

> *the learning results we desire from learners that lead to culminating demonstrations occur at or after the end of significant learning experiences; hence the term 'culminating'. This means that an outcome is not a collection or average of previous learning experiences, but a manifestation of what learners can do once they have had and completed all those experiences. Outcomes are not simply the things learners believe, feel, remember, know or understand, but instead, outcomes are what learners actually can do with what they know and understand.*

Looking at the above explanation, Spady (1994b: 18), believes that outcomes should be meaningful to learners in the sense that:

- Learners will remember and apply them long after a particular curriculum episode has ended.
- They will truly be important in fulfilling learners' future life roles as citizens of their country and the world.

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In outcomes-based education teachers develop the curriculum from the outcomes they want learners to demonstrate, rather than writing objectives for the curriculum they already have (Spady 1988:6)

Having noted the principles underlying the OBE approach, it is imperative to note that for any educational reform there must be an appropriate educational assessment system which is integral.

In this regard, Maree and Fraser (2004: 147) maintain that the most important feature of Outcomes-Based Education is that all learners are expected to be successful. It is this desire to have learners succeed that determines what content is presented to learners, what learning experiences are made available to them, how long they will be engaged in learning particular knowledge or skills, and above all, how they are assessed.

The key to making OBE successful is to apply outcomes-based assessment. This assessment is an integrated part of teaching and learning, it determines whether outcomes have been achieved, it is learner-paced rather than syllabus-paced and above all it is continuous in nature.

The way in which the teaching and learning processes are understood influences the kind of assessment practices that are used. Since the introduction of the interim syllabi in 1995, which signified the start of some form of transformation in education in South Africa, assessment was a prime focal point for educational reform. The first hint of assessment change was the introduction of continuous assessment into school settings in 1994. Currently in South Africa, reform in assessment has been accompanied by widespread political and social changes, which have impacted on education, with the introduction of curriculum 2005 and an outcomes-based approach to education (Maree &Fraser 2004: 32).

In this regard, Spady (1994:189) is also of the opinion that assessment is the process of gathering information on the quality of a product, performance or demonstration.

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With regard to the philosophy of Spady (1994b:21), that "success breeds more success", one can conclude that in order to be sure about learners' success, continuous assessment needs to be applied. It is important to note that even informal and seemingly unimportant situations do warrant assessment as long as the teacher understands the reasons for assessing a learner or a group of learners. Since assessment is ongoing, a learner's progress is monitored continuously.

1.8 THE CONCEPT CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN CONTEXT

The dynamic nature of contemporary forms of teaching and learning require on-going assessment. This assessment is viewed as an integral part of teaching and learning process, as a feedback mechanism for teachers and learners alike. According to (Kelly 1999:128) assessment is essential for effective teaching, all teachers, whether conscious or unconscious, are continuously assessing their learners.

Le Grange and Reddy (1998:03) believe that the way in which learning and teaching process is understood influences the kind of assessment practices that are used. The traditional curriculum is based on certain understanding of what educational processes try to achieve, so it has a certain form of assessment to match that understanding of the learning and teaching process. The new outcomes-based education and training curriculum is based on a different understanding of the learning and teaching process and therefore requires a different form of assessment.

Naicker (1999:112) agrees with the above sentiments as he states that outcomes-based assessment is part of learning and should match its purpose. Assessment should therefore be structured to allow for the differences in learner's styles and for responses in different modalities.

Various types of assessments will be critically analysed in order to find out the ones which are applied by educators as well as their effects in the classrooms.
The researcher will also look into ways of designing assessment strategies.

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After critically analyzing various views on assessment, the researcher will try to find out whether continuous assessment is applied effectively by educators in the classroom.

1.8.1. Continuous Assessment as Component of Learner-Centred Approach.

There should be a radical departure from previous forms of assessment within the new framework. According to Le Grange and Reddy (1998:76), the way in which the learning and teaching process is understood influences the kind of assessment practices that are used. The traditional curriculum was based on a certain understanding of what educational process try to achieve, so it has a certain form of assessment to match that understanding of the learning and teaching process. The New Outcomes-based education and training curriculum is based on a different understanding of the learning and teaching process and therefore requires a different form of assessment.

I believe that it is vital that new methods of assessment should match the new learner-centred approach so that learners are not confused. The traditional assessment was syllabus-based, mainly concerned with sifting and categorizing learners on the basis of the final product of "learning" at the end of a period of teaching and learning. Memorizing and recall of knowledge was the order of the day. Emphasis was on rote learning and the regurgitation of facts that teachers imposed on learners.

Assessment within OBE aims to assist the learner and to help the educator improve their teaching. This approach to assessment pays attention to both end products and processes. End product could be acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes. A central characteristic of assessment within the new system is that educators have to give learners continuous feedback during the learning process. This helps them to learn and to improve their competencies.

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It should be noted that continuous assessment does not mean that teachers have to give test after test, but rather that they should give feedback on many different kinds of assessment activities. Outcomes-based assessment is part of learning and should match its purposes. In this new framework, assessment should therefore be structured to allow for the differences in learners' styles and responses in different modalities.

According to Malan (1997: 24), assessment is the crux of learning; assessment for the sake of assessment alone is a useless activity. If assessment has to be part of learning, it needs to be functional, valid and reliable. It needs to challenge and stimulate learners to try harder, to aim higher and to achieve better results. It needs to support and encourage learning.

1.9. BACKGROUND TO LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH IN EDUCATION

It is important, for the purpose of locating the relevance of the approach to South Africa, to understand where OBE comes from. Outcomes-based education has its basis in two educational reforms, namely, competency-education and mastery learning. The former was a reaction to the changing job market in the late 1960's in the United States when there were queries regarding the role of education. The primary questions related to whether education was preparing young people adequately and not merely for their life roles. This posed a challenge to the education system on how to prepare learners to live for change and change for life.

The fundamental premise of competency-based education is that it should be fabricated around the integration of outcome goals, instructional experiences and assessment mechanisms. The mastery learning movement, established by Benjamin Bloom, is built on the assumption that all learners are able to master desired outcomes if teachers reconstruct the time and instructional parameters in which learning is set (Jansen & Christie 1999:133).

This necessitated a paradigm shift in education in South Africa. The emphasis must be on what the learners know and can do at the end of a course of learning and

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teaching, instead of the means that are used to achieve these results. To accomplish this, a shift from a content-based curriculum to an outcomes-based curriculum, was essential National Department of Education (NDE: 1997b:11)

This is seen as a major paradigm shift from a content-driven to an outcomes-driven curriculum and is assumed to be the necessary response to the complex educational dilemmas of South Africa.

According to Naicker (1999:87), OBE is a system of learning and teaching that is learner-centred and is based on the understanding that all learners can learn. An outcomes-based system is a single system of education that can accommodate all learners, including learners who experience barriers to learning and learners who are regarded as gifted.

The entire system is involved in planning the exit outcomes of the education system and is organized to ensure that learners can demonstrate the desired outcomes.
He maintains that learners need to demonstrate clearly what they have learnt and that outcomes are described with clear action verbs, such as "construct" "explain" and "design" as compared to non-observable events like "understand" "know", "believe" or "think". Learning is therefore contextualized. The starting point of learning should preferably be the learners' immediate environment. More complex understandings are usually achieved later (Naicker 1999:88).

OBE is a comprehensive approach to organizing and operating a curriculum that is focused on the successful demonstrations of learning required from each learner. The most important thing is what all learners are able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. Learners do not achieve outcomes through a set of prescribed learning experiences in one learning programme, one learning area or in one grade. They attain these outcomes through a broad range of learning experiences on a number of grades (DOE 1997b:19).

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1.9.1. The Need for Introducing Outcomes-Based Education in South Africa.

Outcomes-Based Education as a new curriculum approach was introduced in South Africa in 1997. The Ministry of Education felt the need to move away from apartheid education and introduce a new curriculum which will serve the interests of all South Africans.

Naicker (1999:90) believes that as rapid changes are taking place in the world, schools cannot just teach what is in the old-style text-books because the information may be outdated. The best knowledge may be that which helps people to think and solve problems. Huge amounts of information are being produced daily and are easily available on communication networks, such as the Internet. This makes the teaching of old content by schools insufficient, learners need to know how to access, transform and use this information.
He further maintains that South Africa is part of the larger world and has to compete with other countries. Therefore learners in South Africa have to develop the skills needed for involvement in this competition.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used the quantitative approach.

Maree (2010:145) defines quantitative research as a process that is systematic and objective in its ways of using numerical data from only a selected subgroup of a universe (or population) to generalize the findings to the universe that is being studied.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:177), quantitative measurement uses some type of instrument or device to obtain numerical indices that correspond to characteristics of the subjects. The numerical values are then summarized and reported as the results of the study.

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Gay, (1996:12) believes that the quantitative approach involves the collection of numerical data in order to explain, predict, and or control phenomenon of interest.

Looking at the above view points, the three most crucial elements surface clearly, namely; objectivity, numerical data and generalisability. In this regard, therefore, one can conclude that the quantitative research strives for maximum precision and objectivity.

1.10.1 Population:

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119), a population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research.

The population consisted of Grade 10 teachers in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province.

1.10.2 Sample and Sampling Procedures

In this study I used two sampling procedures; namely, cluster and random. 285 schools were grouped into 5 clusters of 57 schools each. 48 teachers were randomly selected from each cluster.

The sample consisted of 240 teachers who teach grade 10.

1.10.3 Research Procedures

I requested the District Senior Manager of Vhembe District for permission to conduct the study within randomly selected schools. I wrote a letter to the principals of selected schools to inform them about the permission to conduct the study and to prepare them about my impending visits.

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1.10.4 Ethical Consideration

The rule of confidentiality, that is, not to divulge information used in this study was observed.

The researcher acknowledged the principle of human dignity and respect, which involves people's right to make informed voluntary decisions about their participation in the study.

1.10.5 Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed through the SPSS.

1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study would contribute to the already existing body of knowledge and benefit teachers. After the completion of this study teachers would gain knowledge and competence on assessment strategies. Learners would benefit from teachers whose knowledge and competence on assessment would have improved as a result of this study.

Managers will be able to plan and devise better strategies for teachers' workshops on assessment. Scholars will benefit especially when they need to do further research. When teachers teach well and learners learn effectively, results will improve. Communities will benefit from skilled citizens.

1.12 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted at Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province. Vhembe district consists of 5 cluster areas; each cluster area consists of 5 circuits. Soutpansberg area will be focused.

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1.13. ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to assess the level of competence within which teachers apply continuous assessment, and to design a model which teachers can use when applying continuous assessment.

Chapter Two deals with the results of the literature study on the meaning and role of continuous assessment, effective teaching and learning, as well as learner-centred curriculum from a theoretical point of view.

Chapter Three deals with the research methodology which is quantitative..

Chapter Four deals with data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter Five presents the summary of findings, recommendations and conclusion of the study.

1.14 CONCLUSION

Teaching is a complex and multifaceted activity. The crucial role played by assessment in this multifaceted activity cannot be over emphasized. (Broadfoot 1996:4) believes that teachers need to evaluate their own teaching in order to judge the value of particular teaching strategies and to discover to what extent the class as a whole has mastered a particular unit of work and thus can usefully be moved on to the next topic.

Confirming the above sentiments, Trice (2000:18) said, "Teaching begins by thinking about two things at the same time. First, we often begin by thinking about what we as teachers will do. But the second thing is really the more important. What do we want learner's to be able to do at the end of instruction that they cannot do at the beginning. When we focus on what learners will learn to do, rather than on what we

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as the teacher will do, the integration of learning, curriculum institution and assessment becomes much clearer".

Taking the above assertion into account, it becomes abundantly clear that quality teaching and quality assessment are intertwined: together they greatly improve the learners' opportunity to learn (Nitco 2004:101).

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of literature study on the meaning and role of continuous assessment, effective teaching and learning, as well as learner-centred curriculum from a theoretical point of view.

After the first democratic elections of April 1994, educationists, supported by the wider public, started speculating about the feasibility of developing national frameworks for school curricular. The possible advantages and disadvantages of national systems of assessment were passionately debated.

According to Jansen and Christie (1999: 247) it is widely agreed in educational policy circles in South Africa today that a paradigm shift in assessment is required in order to ensure that assessment practice guide can support and underpin our transformative outcomes-based model for education and training.

Jansen and Christie (1999:247) contend that the practical implications of this shift are not well understood. They maintain that in spite of evidence put forward over the last thirty years showing the powerful influence (for better or worse) of assessment, it is still the most neglected aspect of Curriculum 2005 whose main focus is learner-centred. Although they agree that a general understanding of the need for a paradigm shift on assessment policy and practice has now been acknowledged, they believe that the actual implementation is hampered by a lack of understanding of the complexity of the issues involved. As a consequence, essential research and development on assessment is not given the priority it deserves.

Jansen and Christie (1999:248) argue that assessment guidelines and policies cannot be implemented effectively unless teachers understand why they assess, what they assess and how to assess in a manner appropriate to the purpose of the

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assessment. They thus conclude by indicating that there is very little practical help for teachers and other practitioners who assess learners within the new outcomes-based curriculum.

In concurring with the above sentiments, I believe that for any teaching and learning to be effective, assessment should be an integral part of any teacher's own daily professional competence. However, it is not any type of assessment which is appropriate for effective teaching and learning. It is vital that in outcomes-based curriculum, continuous assessment be applied when teaching takes place. Continuous assessment is in contrast to traditional assessment which often used to be exclusively focused on grading learners or placing them in rank order and which took place at the end of a fixed period of study. It is therefore essential for teachers to know that teaching and learning is effective when continuous assessment is applied during facilitation.

2.2. WHAT IS ASSESSMENT

The term assessment refers to all information gathered about learners in the classroom by their teachers, either through formal testing, essays and homeworks or informally through observation or interaction (Muijs & Reynolds 2002:186).

It is important to note that various terms are used in the literature, such as, "Alternative assessment", "Authentic assessment", Performance assessment" and "Outcomes-based assessment" to convey a very different approach to assessment as it has traditionally occurred (Marsh, 1997:175).

According to Rowntree (1997:4), assessment in education can be thought of as occurring whenever one person, in some kind of interaction, direct or indirect, with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, or abilities and attitudes of that other person. He believes that to some extent or other it is an attempt to know that person. In this light he contends that assessment can be seen as a human encounter. He thus concludes that in education we are mainly conscious of this "encounter" when teachers find out about

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their learners and when learners assess one another, especially when they work together as co-operative teams.

2.2.1. Continuous Assessment

In the new paradigm, assessment is continuous within an outcomes-based system where the process of learning is as important as the end product. In the traditional system the focus was on the end product (Naicker 1999:96).

Taking the above explanation into account it becomes clear that assessment plays a pivotal role in any educational system. In this regard, Arends (1994:139) maintains that it is important to use assessment and evaluation strategies that are consistent not only with the goals and objectives of a particular lesson but also with the particular model of instruction used.

Looking at the dynamic nature of OBE, I think it is imperative for a teacher to gather sufficient evidence of a learner's progress towards achieving the stated outcomes on an ongoing basis.

Affirming this, Muijs and Reynolds (2002:185) believe that continuous assessment is an invaluable tool for teachers and education systems. It allows teachers to plan their lessons by taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. It allows teachers and schools to see whether learners are actually learning what is taught and to adjust their teaching if this is not the case.

Apart from being an invaluable tool for teachers, Perrone (1991:164) believes that continuous assessment moves activities closer to the actual work of teachers and children, making classrooms the starting point for linking learning to large educational social purposes.

However, Clayton, Atkinson, Osborn and Wallace (1996: 35) contend that while it may be true to say that there is a growing acceptance of more learner-centred theories of assessment among educational professionals around the world, such

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novel perspectives have done little, as yet, to challenge the power of traditional forms of assessment, and the way in which they influence conceptions of learning and teaching.

2.2.2. Assessment Procedures

Assessment of learning is an essential element of Outcomes-based education. Without valid and reliable assessment procedures teachers will not know whether or not their learners have achieved the learning outcomes that were the focus of the programme, unit or lesson, and neither will the learners know whether they have learnt well. It is important that assessment procedures give a clear indication of what learners are learning. Assessment procedures need to be flexible and equitable, and designed specifically to match the learning outcomes learners are expected to achieve. The more realistic the assessment procedures, the clearer will be the picture of what the learners are learning (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:170).

To construct an assessment procedure, it is necessary to have specifications. These specifications should state what it is hoped to measure, and by what methods. Ideally, the specifications should go so far as to state how reward is to be assigned, and for what reasons. If a mix of methods is proposed, weights for each method should be stated and defended. Specifications will have different characteristics according to whether the assessment is of aptitude or achievement. With aptitude tests, the object of interest is a blend of skills and abilities which for instance, it is thought the budding law student should have. With achievement tests or school-based assessments, the object of interest is the performance learners can be expected to produce after they have followed a prescribed course of instruction and learning (Wood 1993:2). Assessments often use tests or examinations which learners complete under direct teachers' control or examination conditions (Jolliffe, Ritter & Stevens 2001:134).

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2.2.3. Dimensions of Assessment

In providing a framework for exploration of assessment, (Rowntree 1997:11), identifies five dimensions. These five dimensions refer to five kinds of mental activities among people who undertake assessment. The five dimensions correspond to the key activities in the process of assessment. The questions underlying these five dimensions are as follows:

(a). Why assess? Decide why assessment is to be carried out; what effects or outcomes it is expected to produce.

(b). What to assess? Decide, realize or otherwise come to an awareness of what you are looking for, or remarking upon, in the people you are assessing.

(c). How to assess? Select, from among all the means we have at our disposal for learning about people, those we regard as being most truthful and fair for various sorts of valued knowledge.

(d). How to interpret? Make sense of the outcomes of whatever observations or measurements or impressions we gather through whatever means we employ, explaining, appreciating and attaching meaning to the raw "events" of assessment, and

(e). How to respond? Find appropriate ways of expressing our response to whatever has been assessed and communicate it to the person concerned.

2.2.4. The purposes of Assessment.

Assessment should be purposeful. Assessment will not serve any purpose nor help the learner if it is not well planned with a definite objective that it is intended to achieve. It helps to determine the success of teaching and learning by monitoring the progress of learners. Teachers assess for a variety of purposes as they are required to make a broad range of decisions in their classrooms. Some of these decisions are about the scholastic characteristics of learners, while others are about their personal and social characteristics. Some decisions are about institutional adjustment and behaviour. However, teachers are in most cases, constantly on the

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lookout for learners who have learning, emotional or social problems in the classroom. Teachers then try to identify these problems, document their frequency, understand their basis, and select remedial activities. Remedial activities may be in the form of counselling, motivation and giving learners some extra simplified learning materials. But most of the decisions have to do with assigning grades of making judgments about learners' academic performance. Hence some teachers make decisions about the placement of learners according to their abilities in their class (Arasian 1991:26). However, it should be noted that such placements are not allowed in the OBE environment (Department of Education, 2001:29).

2.2.4.1. Motivation of learners

Assessment provides incentives to motivate learners. This can be done through giving them feedback, some of that feedback is in the form of marks, stickers or comments which may motivate learners if they are well planned and communicated in good manner. Learners need the feedback which is positive from assessment, information about their learning and information about their accomplishments. This information is necessary for learning and serves to motivate learners (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:175).

2.2.4.2. Maintaining standards

According to Sutton (1994:8) assessment is expected to be more diagnostic and formative in purpose, to have a greater impact on our planning of children's learning, and on progression from one learning environment to the next, within schools and between schools. Information resulting from assessment is specific, and subject to public and parental scrutiny. It is therefore vital that assessment be conducted in the manner that will maintain or enhance the standards of learning.

In support of the above view Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:179) bring some aspects concerning maintenance of standards in assessment in the form of questions as follows:

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(a). Relevance: Do the items in this test match the objectives and content of my teaching? Does this test measure the learning that I intended for my learners?

(b). Balance: Does this test represent all of the important content that I taught? Is important information given proper weight in the test items? Is any information given too much representation in the test items? Is there a balance between knowledge, skill and attitude outcomes?

(c). Efficiency: How much time will this test take? Is the amount of time appropriate or in proportion to the amount of time I spend teaching the content?

(d). Objectivity: When I look at answers to the test items, are they fair?

(e). Specificity: Is there a match between the curriculum information and the test items? Could a learner who missed class do well in this test? and,

(f). Fairness: Will all learners have an equal chance of doing well on this test? Does the test favour a particular group?

Considering the above aspects, it becomes essential for a teacher to see to it that there is a match between the content of assessment and the content of teaching and learning. As a starting point, the teacher should think about learners and the expected learning outcomes. It is also advisable to consider the content in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It is therefore essential to integrate these outcomes. It is important for a teacher to be able to describe what his/her assessment would be able to measure.

2.2.4.3. Feedback to the teacher

Assessment is the process of gathering, interpreting and synthesizing information to aid decision making in the classroom. All teachers collect information to help them make decisions about their learners learning and the success of their classrooms.

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Whether that information will help teachers to make good decisions depends on whether the assessment information itself is good. The key characteristic of good assessment information is that it allows teachers to correctly make the decision they want to make (Arasian 1991: 21).

2.2.4.4. Feedback to learners

One of the vital purposes of assessment is feedback to learners. Formative assessment can have a strong positive impact on learners performance, especially if particular feedback strategies are used such as, written feedback and timing of feedback. Good communication by the teacher when giving feedback to learners is essential in building the self-esteem of learners. As learning objectives are shared, the learners themselves can be increasingly involved in monitoring their own progress, and the feedback becomes more integral to the process of teaching and learning (Sutton 1995:53).

2.2.4.5. Self-Assessment

For effective learning, there is a need for learners to understand themselves and their progress in the classroom. Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:201) contend that self-assessment deserves special attention from teachers because many learners, particularly young children, may need help in learning how to assess their academic skills and performance appropriately. Learners need to know that the teacher's subjective approval is not the only form of evaluation but that there are task-specific criteria for performance (criterion-referenced assessment). Learners may also need help in learning to maintain records and provide summaries of their work. The above authors conclude by summarizing four phases of self-assessment that are fundamental to the approach to assessment:

(a). The knowledge phase: Learners will recall previous experiences, review their work, and provide concrete records.

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(b). The analysis/understanding phase: Learners will seek to understand why things happened and to make attributions for their performance.

(c). The evaluation phase: Learners will make judgments about the quality of their work and construct plausible explanations for their evaluations, and

(d). The synthesis phase: Learners will organize their new knowledge with past experience, fit their evaluations into a larger context, and set future objectives. and

(e). According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:202), even primary school learners are capable of self-assessment, provided they are given suitable guidelines or criteria. Teachers in all grades can foster continuous self-assessment by encouraging learners to:

- Examine artefacts that they created;
- Review progress through record keeping,
- Document their interests, choices and preferences,
- Confer with teachers,
- Write collaboratively, and
- Share personal responses.

They thus conclude by stating that the most important reason for using continuous self-assessment may be that it contributes to authentic, learner-centred assessment practices that promote learning, not just accountability. Learners need to be empowered to have a say in the instructional process.

Self-assessment and self-improvement are valuable goals for South African pupils who have often been "spoon-fed" in the past and therefore have not learnt to think for themselves.

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2.2.5. Types of assessment

Since assessment is international and of essence in teaching and learning, teachers certainly, must plan and evaluate their assessment methods in relation to the purposes they pursue. It is up to the teacher to choose the type of assessment they will use while facilitating learning. Before much can be said about types of assessments, it is vital to indicate the importance of preparing for assessment for learners.

Planning assessment occurs during quite time, when the teacher is alone and has time to reflect on the upcoming lesson. Planning assessment is focused on identifying appropriate objectives, content topics, and activities to carry out (Duke 1990:128).

Brown and Nacino-Brown (1990:32) believe that, just like any other teaching-learning activity, testing must be planned carefully ahead of time. They maintain that it helps if teachers ask themselves some questions before preparing an assessment:

(a) Why do they want to assess?
(b) What do they want to assess?
(c) How much time do they need for assessment? and
(d) What type of assessment would best suit their purpose?

Having asked such questions, teachers will be able to design an assessment that will measure what it is intended to assess.

In addition to this, Davis (1993:83) identifies some general strategies on preparing for assessment:

(a) Identifying key questions in advance.
(b) Deciding whether to call on learners individually.
(c) Being aware of the manner in which to ask questions and treat responses.
(d) Varying the cognitive skills questions call for, and

(e) Structuring questions to encourage learner -to learner interaction.

Having taken the above views into consideration, it becomes important to note that when learners respond to questions, a teacher gains insight into how well they are learning the material. Here are some types of assessments which are considered effective in teaching and learning.

2.2.5.1 Diagnostic Assessment

This type of assessment is used prior to teaching at the beginning of a lesson; it provides teachers with planning information. Teacher's strategies for diagnostic assessment may be informal. For example, unstructured strategies are often used in the form of questions asked by teachers. The information gained in this way helps teachers to know what learners' entry levels are, what they know about the lesson topic. A formal diagnostic assessment could be a pre-test (Van der Horst & MacDonald 1997:171).

The above authors contend that diagnostic assessment does not have to stop once planning is completed. They maintain that effective teachers continue to diagnose learners' understanding and interest through each lesson or unit of teaching.

Considering the above argument, one can add that diagnostic assessment is not only concerned with what learners know or can do, but more importantly to try to find out how they know something, how they are able to demonstrate skills they have learnt and what the challenges are to achievement.

2.2.5.2. Formative Assessment

According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:171), formative assessment is conducted during institution either formally or informally. Both teachers and learners receive information from this kind of assessment, such as information about problems, errors, misunderstandings, understandings and progress.

From the above explanation, one can clearly see that formative assessment helps teachers to adopt their teaching strategies and methods during lesson time in order to effect greater understanding and learning.

In this regard, Ecclestone (1996:12) contends that formative assessment is a powerful aid to learning as it can provide teachers with information which they can use as feedback to learners about strengths and weaknesses in their learning. When used well, Ecclestone (1996:13) believes that the outcomes of formative assessment can provide learners with a powerful impetus to monitor and evaluate their own learning. Its outcomes provide information and feedback primarily for learners and teachers as it can be used to:

(a) Guide and advise learners about various opportunities, choices and possibilities open to them, either inside the school or in other agencies;

(b) Find out what a person's learning needs are at the beginning of the whole programme, or for different modules during it;

(c) Draw up a learning plan, action plan or learning agreement;

(d) Offer constructive written or oral feedback about someone's skills, knowledge or understanding;

(e) Review progress and achievements in line with a learning agreement or action plan drawn up at the start of a programme, and

(f) Motivate learners to improve their own performance by becoming more reflective and able to monitor their own learning.

Considering the above explanation, I observed that formative assessment is therefore crucial for effective teaching and learning, and feedback in order to increase the effectiveness of learning. One can easily conclude that it is difficult to improve the quality of teaching and learning without formative assessment.

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2.2.5.3. Summative Assessment

Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:172) maintain that summative assessment is usually conducted at the end of a lesson, a unit or a course. It is the final measure of what was learned. Summative assessment offers an opportunity for learners to demonstrate what they have learnt. When summative assessment is well developed and matched to individual learners, it will tell teachers about their teaching as well as about their learners' learning. This is what teachers should aim for in OBE.

According to Ecclestone (1996:14), the outcomes of summative assessment provide information which is publicly available for a number of external stakeholders or interested parties. Summative assessment is therefore associated with the public evaluation of 'quality'. Although learners need the information so that they can make decisions about progression, it is primarily carried out on behalf of admissions tutors, institution managers, employers and funding councils. It can be used to provide information for education and training organizations, employers and funding bodies which enables them to:

(a) Make selection and entry decisions;

(b) Infer someone's potential at the next level of employment, education or training;

(c) Certificate (or accredit) someone's prior learning and achievements for all or part of a qualification;

(d) Formally confirm achievement at the end of a learning programme or module;

(e) Make decisions about funding; and

(f) Evaluate organizational and teachers' performance.

Having noted and discussed the above types of assessment, it is important to indicate that assessment can be more effective in teaching when assessment tasks are applied. It is essential to discuss some of these assessment tasks here.

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2.2.5.4. Assessment tasks

Various methods, tools and techniques should be used in assessing learners, so that they can be given a chance to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in a number of ways. When designing an assessment task, teachers should identify specific outcomes they want to assess. They should select the performance indicators they are going to focus on and state clearly what the learner must do (DOE 2001:29).

(a). Observation-based assessment task

This is the most common basis for judgment of learners' behaviour and progress. By observing learners' behaviour an alert teacher is often able not only to conduct authentic assessments of learners' schoolwork, but also to spot clues to the causes of learners' behaviour or lack of understanding (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:93).

However, the above authors caution that although this technique is as old as human kind, it has two unfortunate limitations:

- Observers are notoriously unreliable since they might be subjective, and
- Learners behave differently when they know they are being observed.

These limitations however can be reduced by careful observation when the teacher has determined in advance what to look for, and how to look for it, especially if a teacher uses a checklist, rating scale, or some written guide (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:173).

(b). Portfolio Assessment task

A portfolio is a file or folder that contains samples of the learners' work such as themes, homeworks, papers, teacher's ratings on the work performed, descriptions of

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the learner's accomplishments, scores on tests, and other significant materials gathered by the learner during the term (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:193).

Learners' portfolios provide important formative assessment data. Portfolios are collections of students' work that are longitudinal, diverse in content and collaborative in their selection. Portfolios are intended to emphasize strength, development of skills, improvement, and personal reflections, thus providing a broad picture of learners' learning (Freiberg & Driscoll 1996:123).

(c). Performance Assessments task

They have been called authentic assessments because they are valuable activities in themselves and they involve tasks that are directly related to real-world problems. They involve tasks that focus on learners' use of knowledge, skills and attitudes in variety of realistic situations and contexts. These tasks can be loosely or ill-structured, so that learners' must not only figure out how to solve the problem, but also decide what the problem is. Performance task assessments can also be complex enough to require learners to work together in small groups (Van der Horst & McDonald 1997:198)

2.2.6. Validity of Assessment Results

According to Sutton (1995:9) validity is an essential criterion for good assessment. In fact, if an assessment is 'invalid' it probably is not worth doing at all. The practical implications of the pursuit of validity in assessment are as crucial as the theoretical. However, she cautions that absolute validity is impossible in reality: working teachers in real classrooms with real children have neither the time, the resources, nor the mind-reading abilities.

She further argues that learners who are poor readers may not be able to read the question given and do not therefore know what teachers want, which they might have been able to manage if the question had been posed a different way. Those same learners might have difficulty with a multi-choice test where each alternative answer

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could contain words that they do not recognize. Learners who write well, but very slowly, could be inhibited by a writing task to be completed in a time period just too short to allow them to finish. In each of these cases, what we have actually been assessing is not the understanding that we start out to check, but other things such as reading and speed writing. She then goes on to explain that, clearly, it is possible for the same assessment to be valid for one child and less valid, even invalid, for another because children have different ways of receiving and presenting information. Some read well, others do not. Some children can explain orally for more successfully than they can in writing, while others would express themselves by diagrams or drawings, using a minimum of words. She thus concludes by stating that: we can only do the best we can (Sutton 1995:10).

Having noted the above sentiments, it becomes imperative for us to wish to understand more about the meaning of validity.

2.2.6.1. What is Validity

Nitco (2004:34) believes that validity is the soundness of your interpretations and the uses of learners' assessment results. To validate interpretations and uses of learners' assessment results, teachers must combine evidence from a variety of sources which demonstrate that these interpretations and uses are appropriate. Teachers must also make sure that learners experience no serious negative consequences when they are given results. He contends that the question: "Are the assessment results valid?" has different answers depending on how the results are interpreted and used.

He mentions that when discussing the validity of assessments results, one should keep in mind the following points:

a) The concept of validity applies to the ways we interpret and use the assessment results and not the assessment procedure itself.

b) The assessments results have different degrees of validity for different purposes and for different situations, and

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c) One should make judgments about the validity of one's interpretations or uses of assessment results only after studying and combining several types of validity evidence (Nitco 2004:36).

Considering the above explanation, it becomes clear that validity plays a significant role in assessment. According to Trice (2000:39), validity refers to the extent to which a test accomplishes a specific goal. It is therefore crucial that teachers strive for perfection when they conduct assessment.

2.2.7. Reliability of Assessments Results

Nitco (2004:38) believes that reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results. The length of an assessment procedure affects the reliability of the results. For example, a single assessment task is but a tiny sample from a pool of thousands of similar tasks that could have been used. As such, one task is an unreliable basis from which to infer a student's mastery of learning targets. In general, longer assessment (with more tasks per learning targets are more reliable than shorter assessment).

In this regard, the instrument used is also of high significance. An assessment instrument is reliable if it consistently measures what it claims to measure and if we have a high degree of significance in the scores that it produces. We would like to be able to say with confidence that learners who achieve a high score on assessment are competent, and learners who score poorly are not competent (Smith & Regan 1993:107).

Trice (2000:37) describes reliability as the degree to which scores on two tests designed to be equivalent are the same.

Assessment is a human process that is subject to all variables such as a process entails. In this regard, Sutton (1995:12) maintains that the pursuit of reliability involves recognizing the possible variables that could affect the outcome of

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assessment and reducing them as far as we can. For the purposes of teacher assessment, there are four major variables to be considered:

(a) Interpretation of the given criteria for assessment;
(b) Levels of teacher involvement and intervention in the conduct of the assessment task;
(c) 'Reter' variables-the perception of the person making the assessment, that is the teacher, and
(d) The circumstances and environment in which assessment takes place.

Considering the above sentiments I believe that if the assessment approach does not produce consistent information, the teacher should exercise caution in using the information to make a decision about a learner or the class. Essentially, reliability is concerned with the consistency of assessment information.

2.2.8. Evaluation of learners' performance.

According to Rodgers and Badham (1992:3), evaluation is the process of systematically collecting and analyzing information in order to form value judgments based on firm evidence. The above authors believe that these judgments are concerned with the extent to which particular targets are being achieved. Such judgments should therefore guide decision-making for development. When an evaluation process is conducted, Cangelosi (1991:141) believes that the following questions should be asked:

(a) What did my learners really learn from the lesson?
(b) Is my learner ready to try that experiment?
(c) Should I increase the pace of this activity or slow it down?
(d) What grade should I assign this learner?
(e) Did that last assignment change any attitudes about homework? and
(f) Can these learners actually apply these principles or have they only memorized them?

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To address questions such as these, Cangelosi (19991:142) alludes that teachers must evaluate their learners' achievements (i.e., what learners have learned or are learning). He states that teachers spend 20 to 30 percent of their time directly involved in data or information gathering activities. These include designing, synthesizing, selecting, administering, scoring, interpreting and revising tests and other types of observations of learners' performances and behaviours.

Tests and observations provide the information base for teachers' evaluations of learners' achievement. Unfortunately, studies examining the validity of tests commonly used in schools (both commercially prepared and teacher-prepared) and the evaluation methods of many teachers suggest that testing malpractice and inaccurate evaluations are widespread. Consequently, assessment of learners' achievement for both formative and summative purposes should be a major focus of instructional supervision (Airasian1988:86).

2.3. EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

It is now accepted that successful modern economies and societies require citizens with a strong foundation of general education; with the desire and ability to continue to learn, to apply and to develop new knowledge, skills and technologies. It is the critical role of the education and training process to prepare learners to be such citizens. In this regard effective teaching and learning is highly significant (Gultig, Hoadly & Jansen 2005:4).

By linking classroom activities to the economic, political and social issues, Carl (2002:28) believes that the practical application of school knowledge is promoted. He contends that there will have to be a close link between the classroom and the reality outside if the learner is to be prepared for the life outside the classroom. Since effective teaching plays a pivotal role in preparing the learner for the world of work, it is essential to understand more about it.

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In this study, the theory of effective teaching and learning is underpinned by the philosophy of constructivism.

2.3.1 What is Constructivism?

Borich and Tombari (1997:178) define Constructivism:

> *as an approach to learning in which learners are provided an opportunity to construct their own sense of what is being learned by building internal connections or relationships among the ideas and facts being taught.*

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge which argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Piaget's theory of constructivist learning has had wide ranging impact on learning and teaching methods and is an underlying theme of many education reform movements. According to this theory, through the process of *accommodation* and *assimilation,* individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences. When individuals assimilate, they incorporate the new experiences into an already existing framework without changing that framework. Accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences (Wertsch 1997:48).

According to Wertsch (1997:52), it is important to note that constructivism is not a particular pedagogy. In fact, constructivism is a theory describing how learning happens, regardless of whether learners are using their experiences to understand a lecture or following instructions for building a model airplane. In both cases, the theory of constructivism suggests that learners construct knowledge out of their experiences. However, constructivism is often associated with pedagogic approaches that promote active learning or learning by doing.

From the above sentiments, it is clear that a constructivist learning intervention contextualises activities (tasks) that are used to provide learners with an opportunity to discover and collaboratively construct meaning. In this case learners are respected as unique individuals, and instructors act as facilitators rather than teachers.

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Constructivist teachers encourage learners to constantly assess how the activity is helping them gain understanding. By questioning themselves and their strategies, learners in the constructivist classroom ideally become "expert learners". This gives them ever-broadening tools to keep learning. With a well-planned classroom environment, the learners learn to How Learn. When they continuously reflect on their experiences, learners find their ideas gaining in complexity and power, and they develop strong abilities to integrate new information. One of the teacher's main role is to encourage this learning and reflection process.

It should be noted that constructivism does not discuss the active role of the teacher or the value of expert knowledge. Constructivism modifies that role, so that teachers help learners to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce a series of facts. The constructivist teacher provides tools such as problem-solving and inquiry-based learning activities with which learners formulate and test their ideas. Constructivism transforms the learner from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process (Chandler & Sweller 1992: 46)

According to Muijs and Reynolds (2005:61) a teaching philosophy that has become increasingly popular in teaching over the past few decades is constructivism. Constructivism is a broad movement that is as much a philosophical position as an educational strategy. Constructivism has been highly influential in education, and has led to a variety of new teaching methods and strategies.

Killen (2000:xvii), believes that the basic premise of constructivism is that knowledge is obtained and expanded through active construction and reconstruction of theory. This approach emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge for themselves by forming their own representations of the material to be learned, selecting information they perceive to be relevant, and interpreting this on the basis of their present knowledge and needs.

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From my practical experience I had with learners, it is true that learners learn easily when they associate what is being taught to what they already know. They construct meaning of the knowledge they get in their minds by associating it with something tangible. For example, if a teacher is teaching about the tallest mountain in Africa he/she must first give an example of the local mountain if he/she is in South Africa no matter how small the mountain maybe so that learners can have a picture of how Kilimanjaro looks like in their minds.

Muijis and Reynolds (2005:62), explain the principles of constructivist as follows:

(a) Learning is always an active process.

The learners actively construct their learning from the various inputs they receive. This implies that learners need to be active in order to learn effectively. Learning is about helping pupils construct their own meaning, not about 'getting the right answer', as pupils can be trained to get the right answer without actually understanding the concept.

(b) Learning is a search for meaning.

Learners actively try to construct meaning. Therefore teachers should try to construct learning activities around big ideas and explorations that allow learners to construct meaning.

(c) The construction of knowledge is not just an individual thing.

Learning is also constructed through interaction with peers, teachers, parents and so on. Group work and discussions are encouraged.

(d) Learning is always contextualized.

Learners don't learn facts in a purely abstract way, but in relation to what they already know. Learners also learn in relation to their preconceptions. This means that they learn best when new learning is connected to what they already know.

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(e) Teaching is about empowering the learner.

Learners should be allowed to discover and reflect on realistic experiences. This will lead to authentic learning and deeper understanding, compared to the surface memorization (Muijs & Reynolds 2005:63).

In this regard, Taylor (1996:257) believes that most researchers at least share the philosophy that constructivist teaching is based on the generalized belief that learners develop understanding when they are active and seek solutions for themselves.

I concur with the above view, taking into consideration my experience with learners in the classroom. Learners forget easily what they have been told but they do not forget easily what they have discovered on their own. It is also interesting to note that when learners participate in developing an understanding of something and seeking solutions thereof, they don't become bored instead they become more attentive and alert.

In a summary of research on learning and teaching, Brandt (1993:66-70) gives the following exposition about constructivist approach to teaching and learning:

(a) People learn what is personally meaningful to them.
(b) People learn more when they accept challenging but achievable goals.
(c) Learning is developmental-novices typically approach learning tasks differently from those who know more about the issue.
(d) Individual learn differently, but, in general, people construct new knowledge by building on their current knowledge.
(e) Much knowledge occurs through social interaction.
(f) People need feedback to learn but the feedback needs to be accurate, useful and timely.
(g) Most people have to learn how to use successful learning strategies.
(h) A positive emotional climate strengthens learning, and

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(i) Learning is influenced by the total environment so teachers need to attend to the physical, social and psychological aspect of the setting in which learning is supposed to take place.

2.3.2. Dimensions of Constructivism.

As a matter of fact, when new development in the field of learning and instruction emerged, especially shifts towards constructivism and learner-centred approaches, great interest amongst scholars developed. Constructivism became the focul point with the result that different dimensions associated with it, emerged.

2.3.2.1. Constructivist Learning intervention

According to Chandler and Sweller (1992:24), constructivist learning has emerged as a prominent approach to teaching during this past decade. He believes that the work of Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Parpert, Bruner and Vygotsky among others provide historical precedents for constructivist learning theory. Constructivism represents a paradigm shift from education based on cognitive theory. He maintains that behaviourist epistemology focuses on intelligence, domains of objectives, levels of knowledge, and reinforcement. Constructivist epistemology assumes that learners construct their own knowledge on the basis of interaction with their environment. He thus outlines four epistemological assumptions that are at the heart of what he refers as constructivist learning:

(a) Knowledge is physically constructed by learners who are involved in active learning

(b) Knowledge is symbolically constructed by learners who are making their own representations of actions;

(c) Knowledge is socially constructed by learners who convey their meaning making to others; and

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(d) Knowledge is theoretically constructed by learners who try to explain things they don't completely understand.

From the above assumptions one can conclude that constructivist learning implies the acquiring of knowledge through an active process of constructing understanding rather than the passive receipt of information

Social constructivism views each learner as unique individual with unique needs and backgrounds. The learner is also seen as complex and multidimensional. He/she is encouraged to arrive at his/her background, culture or embedded worldview. Historical developments and symbol systems, such as language, logic, and mathematical systems, are inherited by the learner as a member of a particular culture and these are learned throughout the learner's life. This also stresses the importance of the nature of the learner's social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society. Without the social interaction with other more knowledgeable people it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems and learn how to utilize them. Young children develop their thinking abilities by interacting with other children, adults and physical world. From the social constructivist viewpoint, it is thus important to take into account the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process, as this background also helps to shape the knowledge and truth that the learner creates, discovers and attains in the learning process (Wertsch 1997:78)

Furthermore, it is argued that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner. Social constructivism thus emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process, unlike previous educational viewpoints where the responsibility rested with the teacher to teach and where the learner played a passive, receptive role. Social constructivism emphasizes that learners construct their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read. Learners look for

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meaning and will try to find regularity and order in the events of the world even in the absence of full or complete information (Glaserfeld 1989:36).

2.3.2.2. Constructivist teaching approach

According to the social constructivist approach, instructors have to adapt to the role of facilitators and not teachers. Where a teacher gives a didactic lecture which covers the subject matter, a facilitator helps the learner to get to his or her own understanding of the content. In the former scenario the learner plays a passive role in the latter scenario the learner plays an active role in the learning process. The emphasis thus turns away from the teacher and the content, and towards the learner (Gamoran, Secada & Marrett 1998:64).

In this regard, there is a dramatic change of role which implies that a facilitator needs to display a totally different set of skills than a teacher. According to Chandler and Sweller (1992:48), a teacher tells, a facilitator asks; a teacher lectures from the front, a facilitator provides guidelines and creates the environment for the learner to arrive at his or her own conclusions; a teacher mostly gives a monologue, a facilitator is in continuous dialogue with the learners.

The above sentiments hold water, however, I think it is vital to note that a teacher can combine both lecturing and facilitation to create a learning environment which supports and challenges the learner's thinking. While it is advocated to give the learner ownership of the problem and solution process, it is not the case that any activity or any solution is adequate. The critical goal is to support the learner in becoming an effective thinker. This can be achieved by assuming multiple roles such as instruction, lecturing and facilitation.

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Dynamic interaction between task, instructor and learner.

It is important to note that a further characteristic of the role of the facilitator in the social constructivist view point, is that the facilitator and the learners are equally involved in learning from each other as well. This means that the learning experience is both subjective and objective and requires that the facilitator's culture, values and background become an essential part of the interplay between learners and tasks in the shaping of meaning (Holt and Willard-Holt 2000:69)Learners compare their version of the truth with that of the facilitator and fellow learners in order to get to a new, socially tested version of truth. The task or problem is thus the interface between the facilitator and the learner. This creates a dynamic interaction between task, instructor and learner. This entails that learners and facilitator should develop an awareness of each other's viewpoints and then look to their own beliefs, standards and values, thus being both subjective and objective at the same time (Sweller 2003:46)

2.3.2.3. Lesson plans according to constructivism.

According to Brooks and Brooks (1993:36), conventional lesson planning focuses on what the teacher will do. If learning is teacher directed, then the focus of the lesson plan is on what the teacher does. When designing a learning experience for learners, teachers focus on what learners will do. Teachers should organize what learners will do rather than plan their teaching behaviours.

According to constructivism, when planning the lesson, knowledge should not be divided into different subjects or compartments, but should be discovered as an integrated whole.

The world in which the learner needs to operate, does not approach one in the form of different subjects, but as a complex myriad of facts, problems, dimensions and perceptions. Learners should constantly be challenged with

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tasks that refer to skills and knowledge just beyond their current level of mastery. In order to fully engage and challenge the learner, the task and the learning environment should reflect the complexity of the environment that the learner should be able to function in at the end of learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000:34)

It is also important for teachers when planning the lesson to realize that although a curriculum may be set down for them, it inevitably becomes shaped by them into something personal which reflects their own belief systems, their thoughts and feelings about both content of their teaching and their learners. Thus, the learning experience becomes a shared enterprise. The emotions and life contexts of these involved in the learning process must therefore be considered as an integral part of learning (Arends 1994:54)

It is therefore, important to achieve the right balance between the degree of structure and flexibility that is built into the learning process. The more structured the learning environment, the harder it is for the learners to construct meaning based on their conceptual understanding. A teacher should structure the learning experience just enough to make sure that learners get clear guidance and parameters within which to achieve the learning objectives, yet the learning experience should be open and free enough to allow for learners to discover, enjoy, interact and arrive at their own socially verified version of truth (Banner & Cannon 1997:64)

In this regard, one can clearly notice that the planning approach advocated by constructivists is based on engaging learners in situations that involve their own explanations for phenomena, resolutions to problems, or formulation of questions. Learners are asked to actively construct their own knowledge by making meaning out of the situation by themselves with support and guidance from the teacher. Teachers are only required to organize the situation and then

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provide encouragement and questions to groups of learners who are trying to construct their own explanations.

2.3.2.4. Constructivist view on Assessment

The concept of dynamic assessment is emphasized. This is a way of assessing the true potential of learners and it differs significantly from conventional tests. Here the interactive nature of learning is extended to the process of assessment. Instead of viewing assessment as a process carried out by one person, such as a teacher, it is seen as a two-way process involving interaction between both teacher and learner. The role of the assessor becomes one of the entering into dialogue with the persons being assessed to find out their current level of performance on any task and sharing with them possible ways in which that performance might be improved on a subsequent occasion. Thus, assessment and learning are seen as inextricably linked and not separate processes (Holt & Willard-Holt 2000:68)

According to this viewpoint teachers should see assessment as a continuous and interactive process that measures the achievement of the learner, the quality of the experience and courseware. The feedback created by the assessment process serves as a direct foundation for further development (Holt & Willard-Holt 2000:76)

2.3.3. What is effective teaching?

According to More (1992:30), teaching is not, as some critics seem to think, just a matter of teachers talking and learners listening. Effective teaching involves interactive communication patterns that are skilfully directed. Thus, observers and teachers should be interested in looking at and analyzing classroom interaction patterns. From such analysis, one can learn whether a class is teacher-dominated or learner-dominated. He goes on to explain that effective teaching is a challenge that requires long hours of work and preparation. But above all, it requires skill in

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planning and skill in classroom. Therefore, a broad definition of teaching might be the actions of someone who is trying to assist others to reach their fullest potential in all aspects of development (More 1992:31).

The key to effective teaching is planning. The planning process can be thought of as a sequential decision making process.

One must decide sequentially on answers to the following questions:

(a) What content should be taught?
(b) What are the desired learner outcomes?
(c) What teaching materials will be needed?
(d) What is the best way to introduce the subject?
(e) What is the best instructional strategy for the intended learning?
(f) How should the lesson be closed? and
(g) How should students be evaluated?

In considering the above explanation, it becomes important for teachers to think about the assessment strategies they can apply when answering such questions in order to make their teaching more effective. These assessment strategies should then be included in the planning because teachers will be able to place learners and provide enrichment for faster learners.

Sadker and Sadker (1991:68) in describing effective teaching, said:

> *despite seventy-five years of research on the topic, relatively little is known about effective teaching. Advances in methodology and conceptualization have begun to make a difference in the last fifteen years or so, but the research is still in its infancy.*

The above two authors mention that in the years since that pronouncement, there has been a resurgence, almost a revolution, in teacher education research. They maintain that new studies, sometimes called process-product research, have identified specific teaching skills and behaviours and have analyzed the effects these have on learner achievement. Sadker and Sadker thus believe that because of this

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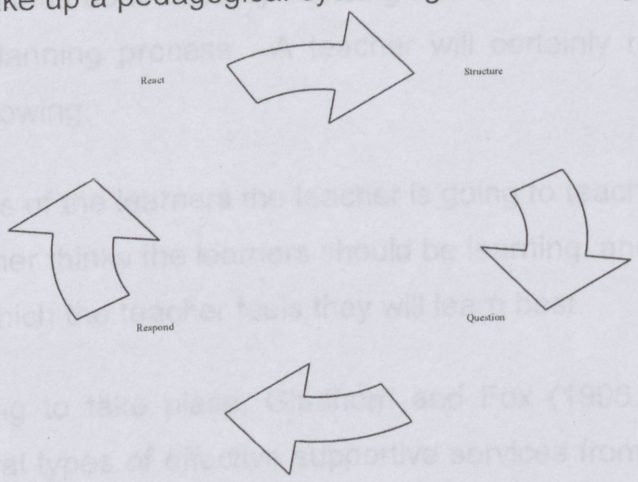
new research, we now have an emerging blueprint of what makes effective teaching the kind of teaching that enables students to learn and achieve.

Taking the above views into account, I allude to the fact that effective teaching in this country, at our schools in particular has been an issue subjected to various interpretations. To others effective teaching meant giving so many tests to learners; to others it meant covering the syllabus within a short space of time. It is now during the post apartheid era that teachers and other stakeholders involved in education are becoming aware that effective teaching involves various aspects such as planning, gathering sufficient information about learners, identifying assessment practices appropriate in an OBE environment and recording and reporting on learner performance.

Sadker and Sadker (1991:75) maintain that good questioning is at the very core of effective teaching. They demonstrated this by using Arno Bellack's pedagogical cycle, which they explain as follows:

- Structure: The teacher provides information, direction, and introduces the topics.
- Question: The teacher asks a question.
- Respond: The learner answers the question or tries to.
- React: The teacher reacts to the students' answer and provides feedback.

These four steps make up a pedagogical cycle diagrammed in figure 2.1 as follows:



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Figure 2.1: Arno Bellack's pedagogical cycle

[**Source**: Adopted from: Teachers, schools and society 2nd ed. By Sadker, MP & Sadker, D.M. Page 91. 1991]

Sadker and Sadker (1991:71) maintain that since questioning is a key element in guiding learning; all learners should have equal access to classroom questions and academic interaction.

Taking the above sentiments into consideration, one clearly sees that the above authors consider questioning as the most essential teaching skill which brings about effective teaching and learning. However, it is important to note that questioning is just but one aspect of assessment procedures in the process of effective teaching and learning.

In agreement to the above thinking, Butt (2006:3) adds that the key to effective teaching, purposeful class management and the achievement of sustained educational progress lies in effective planning. He argues that it is very rare for a 'good lesson' to result from the teacher entering the classroom unprepared, without any procedure for the lesson being clearly planned before hand. There is certainly substantial evidence to suggest that poor teaching is usually linked to inadequate lesson planning. He thus concludes by advising that a number of factors need to be considered in the planning process. A teacher will certainly need to have some knowledge of the following:

(a) The capabilities of the learners the teacher is going to teach.
(b) What the teacher thinks the learners should be learning. and
(c) The ways in which the teacher feels they will learn best.

For effective teaching to take place, Glatthorn and Fox (1996:20) believe that all teachers need several types of effective supportive services from the principal. First

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they should receive frequent informal visits from the principal. Such informal observations need to last only 5 to 10 minutes.

The principal drops in, makes an initial scan of the learning process at work, noting how many learners seem on task, and then observes what the teacher is doing to facilitate learning. Many principals have found that a "no-carbon-required" form is useful in giving the teacher prompt feedback. It looks similar to the form shown below:

Informal Observation form

On June 10 I briefly visited your Maths class, I liked the way small groups were solving a meaningful problem. I had a question about why two boys were working at the back of the classroom on their own; they did not seem engaged in the task.

Date: June 10 *Signature: ----------*

Glutthorn and Fox (1996:21) contend that these informal observations serve many purposes. Most importantly, they give the principal an opportunity to give the teacher specific, timely, and merited praise.
They enable the principal to make an informal assessment of curriculum implementation. They also keep the principal highly visible, a principal behaviour that teacher's value. These observations, however, should not be used in the formal teacher evaluation system in that they are brief and unstructured. Next, all teachers need structured opportunities to meet with the principal to exchange ideas, to identify emerging concerns, to share views of current issues (Glutthorn & Fox 1996:22).

Considering the above view concerning informal visit by the principal to the class, my experience is that teachers may interpret it as though the principal is 'policing' them. This informal visit can be effective only if it is first agreed upon at the staff meeting by all teachers.

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2.3.4. What is effective learning?

Smith and Ragan (1993:16) define learning as the relatively permanent change in a person's knowledge or behaviour due to experience.

In describing effective learning, Petersen (1995:112) states that learner achievement, how much and what learners learn, is the single most important concern about teacher quality. In particular, the interest is in what learners gain while working with the teacher and the difference between where learners start and end in their achievement. Essentially, this data source requires a determination of the contributions of the teacher or teacher effects, on learners' learning.

In this regard, Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:36) associate effective learning with the learning behaviour and argue that sometimes it is difficult for a teacher to ascertain whether learners are participants, or even interested, in issues related to their own learning. Learners may be quiet and uncreative. Not all of them will take part in discussions or be willing to answer questions from teachers. There are many explanations for such silence, lack of confidence, uncertainty as to how others will react to comments or inability to articulate clearly. In the context of learning, enthusiasm follows confidence which, in turn, is established through achievement.

Van der Horst and McDonald (2008:121) explain further, that as teachers persuade learners who have been successful, they are motivated to become even more effective learners.

Learners can learn effectively if they can refine some specific skills such as:

(a) The ability to identify their own learning needs.
(b) The ability to plan their own learning.
(c) The ability to use learning opportunities.
(d) The ability to review their own learning processes.
(e) The ability to listen to others.
(f) The ability to seek out and accept help.

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(g) The ability to confront any unwelcome information.

(h) The ability to take risks and accept uncertainties.

(i) The ability to observe the learning of others.

(j) The ability to learn about oneself, and

(k) The ability to share information (Van der Horst & McDonald 2008:138)

2.3.5. An approach for effective teaching and learning

Having noted the importance of effective teaching and learning, it becomes essential to mention an approach which can be applied to drive that process. Such as an approach critical to enhance a close link between the classroom and the reality outside if learners are to be prepared for the real life situation and that there should be a clear shift of emphasis regarding the role of the teacher.

2.3.6. Learner –centred approach

Learner –centred approach places a much stronger emphasis on the learners' role in the learning process. This approach is sometimes referred to as discovery learning, inductive learning or inquiry learning. When teachers use a learner-centred approach to teaching, they have much less direct control over what and how learners learn. More meaningful involvement of learners is encouraged. In this approach, the teacher is the facilitator and constantly uses cooperative learning. The learning programmes are seen as guides that allow teachers to be innovative and creative in designing programmes. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and are motivated by constant feedback and affirmation of their worth. The emphasis is on outcomes, what the learner becomes and understands (Department of National Education 1997c:18).

In this approach learners are involved actively in learning. The critical point is in how the teachers structures and mediate his/her learners' learning.

Some guidelines for motivating learners in a learner centred approach are as follows:

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(a) Learner's activities should provoke learner curiosity. (They should encourage learners to ask why, how and what if ?)

(b) Learner's activities should be appropriate to learners' level of academic and social development.

(c) Learning activities should be related to the everyday life experience of learners (so that they learn to make sense of the world).

(d) Learners should be encouraged and helped to understand how their learning is relevant to their lives outside school and into the future. (This is the basis of SAQA's critical outcomes) South African Qualification Authority, and

(e) Learners need to experience success if they are to have a positive attitude towards learning and a high self esteem (This is one of the basic principles of OBE.)

2.3.7. Teaching strategies.

According to Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:124) a teaching strategy can be defined as a broad plan action for teaching activities with a view to achieving an aim.

When developing teaching strategies and learning activities, teachers should take into account the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their learners. Teachers should emphasize that the development of understanding of concepts and principles is more important than the recall of factual information or the development of routine skills.

Taking into consideration the above description, one clearly sees the importance of planning in order to achieve certain goals after learning has taken place. Longhran and Russel (1997:63) agree that teaching is inextricably linked to learning and therefore it is a two way process. They maintain that teaching and learning are interconnected through a dynamic system in which one continually influences the other.

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In order to achieve worthwhile goals in teaching I think good teaching strategies that promote learning should be employed as Olson (1992:22) stated that

> *teaching is a moral enterprise not only defined by skill or craft in the production of things, but also by the worth of what is learned, and the manner of its learning.*

2.3.7.1. Discussion as a teaching strategy

According to Chisholm (2000:31), discussion is an orderly process of face-to-face group interaction in which people exchange ideas. The purpose of the discussion might be to solve a problem, answer a question, enhance the learners' knowledge or understanding, or reach a decision. Discussion is a versatile teaching and learning strategy that can be adapted to suit any subject at any level. Discussions can involve the whole class or they can be used with small groups.

Bridges (1990:32) suggests that in order for an exchange of ideas to be called an academic discussion, it should satisfy some logical conditions: people must talk, listen, respond to one another, they must be collectively putting forward more that one point of view and they must have intention of developing their knowledge, understanding or judgment of the issue under discussion. It is very important that the teacher does not dominate the discussion; learners should be talking for the majority of the time.

According to Graham and Nell (2004:212), discussion should not seek to find the correct answer to any question. It should seek to reach informed and rational consensus. This would not happen unless all contributions to a discussion are valued and judged only on the extent to which they help the class achieve the desired outcomes of the discussion.

However, Brookfield (1990:90) cautions against the teacher guiding a discussion towards some previously defined end point. He suggests that, teachers enter a supposedly free-ranging discussion in which they ask students to create meaning

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through a process of collaborative inquiry; it is basically dishonest to have established privately what these meanings are to be. He suggests that because a discussion is, by definition, a free and open process; an end point cannot be specified in advance. However this does not mean that teachers cannot write outcome statement for discussion lessons.

Considering the above explanation, it becomes clear that the most common reasons for using a discussion are to help learners solve a problem or to encourage them to explore an open-ended issue. In this regard Brookfield (1990:92) identifies the most appropriate times for using a whole-class discussion as a main teaching strategy as follows:

(a) When teachers want learners to work together and share their ideas by talking about them publicly; that is when teachers want to encourage learners to think and act democratically by allowing freedom of expression, having respect for minority opinions, tolerating diversity and participating openly.
(b) When teachers want learners to compare their ideas and understandings with those of other learners so that they can use this as a trigger for further learning.
(c) When teachers want learners to explore a diversity of perspectives and see that there are many different ways to interpret the same, apparently objective, facts, and
(d) When teachers want learners to discover that different approaches to a problem can be equally legitimate, theoretically sound and practical.

If teachers can take the above sentiments into consideration, and use the discussion as a teaching strategy effectively, they can immediately notice the following advantages as outlined by Hopmann (2003:465):

(a) Learners are active and feel that they are making a real contribution to their own learning.

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(b) Active involvement in learning motivates learners, particularly if they can see that others value their contributions and respect their points of view.

(c) Discussion can generate new ideas or produce original solutions to problems by stimulating divergent or lateral thinking, and

(d) Discussions are better than lectures as a way of helping learners develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

2.3.7.2. Problem Solving as a teaching strategy.

According to Huang (2004:104), problem solving is the process of applying existing knowledge to a new or unfamiliar situation in order to gain new knowledge. It is a form of inquiry learning. When used as a teaching strategy, problem solving can help learners to realize that the knowledge they have already gained can be applied to new situations, and that this process can lead them to gain knew knowledge.

When applying this teaching strategy, Steinberg (1999:24) believes that teachers will need to explain to learners what they want them to learn, why they are using problems as a way to teach, and how they expect learners to interact with teachers and with one another as they learn. Throughout this learning process, the focus must be on learners developing their understanding, rather than on their finding 'the' answer to the problem. This is best achieved with problems that give the learners time and opportunity to develop their understanding, rather than problems that can be solved in a few minutes.

In this regard, Schuell (1990:103) states:

> *The ability to solve problems in a particular area is so dependent on specific knowledge relevant to that area that one would expect minimal, if any, transfer of problem-solving ability from one area to another.*

Considering the above explanation, one can immediately notice that problem solving depends heavily on domain-specific knowledge. This view therefore is counter to the more traditional idea that problem solving strategies can be generalized across different areas of learning.

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According to Myers and Myers (1990:128) problem solving is a strategy that poses significant, contextualized, real world situations, and providing resources, guidance and instruction to learners as they can be used alone or in conjunction with other teaching strategies.

In support of the argument above, I believe that problem solving is a basic human learning process and the information learners gain from their daily experiences influence their thinking much more than the information they have read or been told. This suggests that problem solving should be effective as a teaching strategy. It is clear that learning that takes place when solving the real problem is very clearly focused on an immediate need. This is very different from many classroom situations in which learners are presented with new information and examples and are then asked to solve a 'problem' to show that they have understood the information. Such 'problems' are not focused on a real need. Learners may not know why they are solving them and, therefore, they are much better referred to as 'exercises'.

The reason for having learners to solve problems is to help them gain insights that will enable them to understand the subject matter and to look at it from different perspectives. Killen (2000:133) indicates the most appropriate times to use problem solving strategy as follows:

(a) When teachers want learners to gain a deep understanding of the subject matter, rather than just remembering bits of it.
(b) When teachers want to develop learners' thinking and reasoning skills, that is, their ability to analyze situations, to apply their existing knowledge to a new situation, to recognize the difference between facts and opinions, and to make objective judgments.
(c) When teachers want to develop learners problem-solving skills such as their ability to assess and respond to new situations, synthesize ideas, make comparisons, make interferences, locate information, and organize information, and

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(d) When teachers want learners to understand the relationships between what they are studying and the real world

The above sentiments clearly indicate to us that there are so many advantages attached to the use of problem solving as a teaching strategy. When used effectively, Kramer (1999: 48) believes that problem solving can bring the following advantages:

(a) Providing a challenge for learners and they can derive great satisfaction from discovering new knowledge for themselves.
(b) Problem solving engages learners actively in learning.
(c) Problem solving helps to make learners responsible for shaping and directing their own learning. It is rewarding for them to see that their learning is a result of their own efforts.
(d) Problem solving teaches learners that their solutions should be explainable and justifiable, but emphasizes that is acceptable for them to develop their own attitudes and beliefs.
(e) Problem solving can develop learners' critical thinking skills and their ability to adapt to new learning situations, both of which are very important outcomes in the context of recent curriculum reforms in South Africa, and
(f) Problem solving, particularly in groups, encourages learners to talk about the concepts they are trying to understand. This helps them to evaluate their own understanding and to identify flaws in their thinking. It also develops their language skills.

Having noted the above advantages, it is vital to take some words of caution from John (1993: 13) as he indicates that when problem solving is used as a teaching strategy, the emphasis must be on learners learning about the subject, rather than simply learning to solve problems. The problem should be a means not an end. By its very nature, to solve a problem one must think about the problem; choose, try, and test strategies for solving it; and finally find an answer. To be told how to solve a problem immediately reduces it to an exercise.

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In addition to the above viewpoint, he indicates the limitations of using problem solving as follows:

(a) Learners who are accustomed to their teacher being the main source of knowledge may feel uncomfortable with the self-directed learning necessary for problem solving.
(b) Unless learners are interested and believe that they can solve the problem, they may be reluctant to try.
(c) Unless learners understand why they are attempting to solve a particular problem, they may not learn what you want them to learn, and
(d) Successful problem solving lessons require a lot of preparation. Appropriate problems take time to develop since each problem needs to be carefully structured to produce specific learning outcomes.

In view of the above arguments, I believe that motivation is a key element in problem solving. Unless learners want to solve the problem, and believe that they have a reasonable chance of success, they are unlikely to persist and, therefore, are unlikely to learn what the teacher wants them to learn. It is inappropriate for the teacher to assume that they will automatically be motivated to solve whatever problems the teacher confronts them with. The teacher needs to make his/her problems interesting and relevant if he/she hopes to engage learners in effective learning.

2.3.7.3. Co-operative learning as a teaching strategy.

According to Van der Horst and MacDonald (2008:125), co-operative learning is an instructional design that stimulates peer interaction and learner-to-learner co-operation in the process of fostering successful learning by all. This model has two types of primary aims. The first is to improve learner understanding and skills in the learning area being taught and the second is for the learners to develop co-operative group skills and to gain an appreciation for the different individuals and cultures found in our South African classrooms. It is based on

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the belief that learners of any age or ability can help one another to learn if they are given appropriate opportunities. They thus identify five basic elements that need to be present for small group work to be considered truly co-operative;

(a) There must be positive inter-dependence so that learners perceive that they need one another;
(b) There must be face-to-face promotive interaction, such as sharing and encouraging, so that learners help one another to learn;
(c) There must be individual accountability so that all learners within a group are responsible for learning the material;
(d) The learners must use appropriate interpersonal skills, such as communication, trust building and conflict resolution, so that all interactions are productive; and
(e) Each group must analyze the outcomes they achieve and how well the group functions, so that the participants become reflective learners.

Killen (2000:103) believes that co-operative learning can be an effective and motivating way of achieving both academic and social learning outcomes, and is particularly useful in the following circumstances:

(a) When the teacher wants to encourage and develop co-operation among learners and develop their respect for one another's strengths and weaknesses, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms and in classrooms that include learners with disabilities.
(b) When there is a need to improve learner's communication skills as they learn the curriculum content.
(c) When the teacher wants to show learners that both their individual and collective learning effects are important. This can improve their self-esteem.
(d) When learners are required to exchange ideas and to see that they can learn from one another and learn from helping one another.
(e) When the teacher wants to improve learners' problem-solving skills and have them discover that there are multiple solutions to a problem.

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(f) When teacher wants to encourage learners to think about their learning processes, identify the limitations of their knowledge, and learn to seek help when necessary.

(g) Apart form encouraging group work among the learners as is required by the new approaches such as OBE, co-operative learning entails some advantages outlined as follows:

(h) Co-operative learning teaches learners to be less reliant on the teacher and more reliant on their own ability to think, to seek information from other sources, and to learn from other learners. Working in co-operative learning teams helps empower learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning and for the learning of others.

(i) Co-operative learning is an effective strategy for having learners achieve a range of academic and social outcomes, including enhanced achievement, improved self-esteem, positive interpersonal relations with other learners,

(j) Learners will improve time management skills and positive attitudes towards school. Learners will learn more, like school better, like one another better and learn more effective social skills when co-operative learning is used, and

(k) Co-operative learning encourages learners to verbalize their ideas and to compare them with the ideas and feelings of other learners. This can be particularly useful when they are solving problems. Co-operative learning can change the way learners interact, so that they communicate in ways that are believed to be related to increased learning. It provides them with opportunities to test their ideas and understandings, and to receive feedback in a relatively safe and non-threatening environment. Learners can practice problem solving in a low-risk environment, because it is much less threatening to make a mistake in front of two or three peers than in front of a whole class (Mc Neir 1993:78).

Having noted the advantages of co-operative learning, one suddenly realizes the essential element of taking care of the underachievers, learners with disabilities and learners whose first language is not the language of instruction. These

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learners can learn in a more relaxed atmosphere as Killen (2000:106) correctly asserted. Co-operative learning provides many opportunities for learners to compare answers and to judge the appropriateness of those answers, rather than relying on someone to tell them whether or not their answer is correct. This helps them to become more active in learning.

Having realized the benefits that are entailed in co-operative learning, it is important to think about learners who do not like to learn co-operatively. These are learners who prefer to work alone. Learners who prefer to apply their intelligence to things or ideas in isolation from other people. It is important to realize that such learners do not necessarily lack ability and that they do not necessarily try to be disruptive through their lack of co-operation. One needs to be patient, recognize that these learners may be anxious about working in groups, and help them to become flexible in their approaches to learning.

The most important thing to understand about co-operative learning is that, it is not simply a matter of putting learners into groups to learn. Levin and Nolan (1996:74), agree that the idea of teaming learners and allowing them to work on their own, although it sounds simple can be a nightmare. They maintain that the teacher's task is to get the learners to work as a team, exchange ideas, think critically and help one another to learn. This requires careful planning. The teacher has to create a learning environment in which there will be face-to-face interaction and the appropriate use of interpersonal and small group skills.

Having noted the above teaching strategies, I believe that it is not sufficient to examine only the teachers' ability to implement these strategies and also to teach a subject in isolation, rather, teachers of the twenty first century must have a deep knowledge of the complexities of teaching. To supplement the above strategies teachers must also apply action research in the facilitation of learning. According to Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993:4), action research is the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it. Action

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research helps to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as the conditions under which teachers and learners work in schools.

According to McLean (1995:67) action research is not a program or specific intervention, but a process of evaluating the effectiveness of materials and processes used to achieve student learning. It arms every teacher with the skills and attitude not to accept the status quo but to ask, "Is there a better way"? A teacher knowledgeable of action research feels empowered because they are no longer merely the consumer of research or products of other people; the action research can determine for him-or herself if an educational practice is more or less effective for his or her specific situation. The action researcher is on equal footing with textbook authors, curriculum developers and educational theorists. Even if a teacher or school adopts a nationally recognized and validated program, the program may not work in a particular school or classroom, or it may need to be modified to gain maximum advantage. Teachers and principals are the best ones to make these judgments. That is, we should design procedures into our teaching to evaluate its effectiveness just as we include methods to evaluate how well our students learn. People closest to the students are in the best position to make this judgment, based on personal observation and decision making.

McLean (1995:9) believes that implementation of the action research has three steps:

(a) Measurement of the outcomes identified in the conceptualization phase.
(b) Identifying a standard of comparison, and
(c) Comparing current performance with the standard.

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2.4. LEANER-CENTRED CURRICULUM.

Before much can be said about whether the curriculum is learner-centred, teacher-centred or content-centred, it is crucial to try to understand what a curriculum is.

2.4.1. What is curriculum?

Curriculum has been a matter of intense debate during the twentieth century. Numerous scholars have commented upon what they perceived to be curriculum. For example, Goodson (1994:111) describes curriculum as:

> *a multifaceted concept, constructed, negotiated and renegotiated at a variety of levels and in a variety of arenas.*

Longstreet and Shane (1993:7), view curriculum as an historical accident that has not been deliberately developed to accomplish a clear set of purposes. Rather, it has evolved as a response to the increasing complexity of educational decision making.

According to Orstein and Hunskins (1998:11), curriculum can also be viewed as a field of study, comprising its own foundation and domains of knowledge, as well as its own research, theory, and principles and its own specialists to interpret this knowledge.

From the above views, one can easily deduce that there is no single description which can encompass all view points to an extent that we may tell what curriculum is. However, the explanation by Zais (1981:32) seems to enjoy popular support as he explains that, the concept curriculum originated from the Latin word **currere**: *a race course to be run or covered.*

2.4.1.1 Curriculum as a field of study.

According to Carl (2002:24), when education in Southern Africa is placed under the spotlight from national to local level, it is clear that many problems are directly

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related to the curriculum. To be able to solve these problems meaningfully and to ensure that dynamic and relevant curriculum development takes place, reflection on and study of the field of the subject of the curriculum studies is essential. While explaining further that it is necessary to reflect theoretically on the subject of the curriculum with a view not only to understanding practice better, but also with a view to improving it. This reflection and acquisition of knowledge is very much in the service of teacher empowerment.

When reflecting on curriculum as a field of study, Gordon (1981:10) believes that a curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles (concerning context, teaching strategies, and evaluation) and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice.

However, Doll (1992:12) takes it further and argues that the curriculum of a school is the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciations, and values under the auspices of the school.

The varied explanations of the field of study on curriculum, is a clear indication that this concept is complex.

2.4.1.2 The problem with curriculum definitions.

According to Orstein and Hunskins (1998:10), numerous definitions of curriculum exist. To some, such variety creates confusion, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. They contend that the plethora of definitions demonstrates a dynamism of varied voices in the field. These voices introduce diverse interpretations by drawing on specific modes of thought, particular ideologies, diverse pedagogies, unique political experiences, and various cultural experiences.

Orstein and Hunskins (1998:12) go further to explain that over the decades many definitions of curriculum have been provided but because key players in

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education represent a diversity of values and experiences, it is extremely difficult to get wide public or professional consensus. They thus conclude by providing the following selected definitions of curriculum for consideration.

(a) Curriculum is that which is taught at school.
(b) Curriculum is a set of subjects.
(c) Curriculum is content.
(d) Curriculum is a set of materials.
(e) Curriculum is a set of performance objectives.
(f) Curriculum is that which is taught both inside and outside of school and directed by the school.
(g) Curriculum is that which an individual learner experiences as a result of schooling, and
(h) Curriculum is everything that is planned by school personnel.

Looking at the above varied definitions of curriculum one immediately notices the confusion that is created in this field due to the divergent viewpoints of various curriculum theorists who cannot agree on just what curriculum is.

2.4.1.3 The South African transformational curriculum development model.

After the emergence of democracy in South Africa in 1994, educational issues such as curriculum development became significant. This necessitated a paradigm shift from the apartheid ideology curriculum to a more relevant and transformational curriculum for schools. To this effect, the official document entitled curriculum 2005, was released in 1997 by the Department of education and reflects the current approach in South Africa.

2.4.1.4 Curriculum 2005.

According to the Department of Education (DOE) (1997d:25), curriculum 2005 marks a major shift from the old school curriculum in South Africa and towards an OBE curriculum.

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It includes aspects of knowledge previously ignored in the curriculum (such as Technology), and emphases the importance of other areas that were previously marginalized (such as Arts and culture and Life orientation) or ignored in the primary and junior secondary phase (such as Economic management sciences). Each learning area has specific forms of the broader critical outcomes. Assessment criteria and even more concrete performance indicators are provided to make clear the sort of evidence that could be used to evaluate the progress of learners toward achieving the outcomes (DOE 1997d:26).

The Department of Education (DOE) has developed new learning frameworks and learning programmes. In the Curriculum 2005 document learning areas are proposed as follows:

- Language, literacy and communication
- Human and social sciences.
- Technology
- Natural sciences
- Mathematical literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical sciences
- Arts and culture
- Economic and management sciences
- Life orientation

The learning areas relate to the critical outcomes (CO) and derive from South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)'s twelve fields of learning (DOE 1997d:27).

The following critical outcomes are proposed:

Learners will:

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking,

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- Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organization and community,
- Organize and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively,
- Collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information,
- Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and /or language skills in various models,
- Use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others,
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related system by recognizing that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation,
- Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively,
- Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities,
- Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts,
- Explore education and career opportunities,
- Develop entrepreneurial opportunities (DOE 2005:7).

2.4.1.5 The Outcomes-Based Education

According to Van der Horst and Mc Donald (1997:7), Outcomes-Based Education can be described as an approach which requires teachers and learners to focus their attention on two things:

(a) The focus is on the desired end results of each learning process. These desired end results are called the outcomes of learning and learners need to demonstrate that they have attained them. They will therefore continuously be assessed to ascertain whether they are making any progress.

(b) Outcomes-Based Education is thus learner-centred, results-oriented approach to learning which is based on the following beliefs:

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- All individual learners must be allowed to learn to their full potential. This means that both teachers and learners must have high expectations for successful leaning on the part of all learners, regardless of background, previous achievement, age, sex, learning style, or other factors.
- Success breeds further success. In Outcomes-Based Education, "Nothing succeeds like success" is a guiding principle. Every success which a learner experiences builds his or her self-esteem and the motivation and willingness to strive for further success.
- The learning environment is responsible for creating and controlling the conditions under which learners can succeed. Teachers are charged with the responsibility of creating learning environments which are inviting, challenging and motivating.
- All the different stakeholders in education such as the community, teachers and parents share in the responsibility for learning.

From the above explanation, one can clearly see that learners know what the purpose of their learning is. They know that they will have to demonstrate their competence within a particular learning area. On the other hand, education can choose content and methods appropriate to the contexts and abilities of their learners rather than being forced to use centrally determined syllabuses. However, it should be noted that this freedom comes with responsibility. Outcomes are publicly stated so that educators can be held accountable for not achieving them.

2.4.1.6 Some critical aspects about OBE

Jansen and Christie (1999:147) critiqued the Outcomes-Based Education approach in the following manner:

- The language of innovation associated with OBE is too complex, confusing and at times contradictory. A teacher attending to understand the concept of

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'outcomes' requires an understanding of competencies, unit standards, learning programmes, assessment criteria, phases, levels, to name but few;

- ❖ It is based on the flawed assumptions about what happens inside schools and how classrooms are organized, and may need highly qualified teachers;
- ❖ OBE as curriculum policy, is lodged in problematic claims and assumptions about the relationship between curriculum and society, and there is no shedding of evidence that altering the curriculum will necessarily influence change in national economics;
- ❖ This approach offers an instrumentalist view of knowledge, a means-ends OBE stance that violates the epistemology of the structure of certain subjects and disciplines;
- ❖ It trivializes curriculum content even as it claims to be a potential leverage away from content coverage which besets the old education system.

In view of the above discussion, I assume that the approach needs further consideration and that certain concepts need through clarification for most teachers to implement. However, a comparison of the old and new approaches can assist to shed the light on crucial aspects of teaching and learning.

2.4.2. A comparison of the Old and the new learner-centred approach.

In order to understand the old and the new approaches well, it is crucial for one to look closely at the two scenarios described by Jansen and Christie (1999:148:) as follows:

> *In the old education system only the content of the courses and what the teacher or the textbook had to say was important. Learners received information from the teacher and did not play a very active role in the learning situation. Most of their learning was memory-based. Learners were seldom given the opportunity to show what they learned and how to use their knowledge. It was important that learners remembered and repeated everything they learned, and not whether*

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they understood and were able to use what they had learned in different ways or situations.

Current learning institutions place the teacher in a particular role. The teacher is seen to be in a position of authority to the learner and an authority in terms of content which must be transmitted The teacher, as opposed to being the repository of all knowledge and wisdom, must now facilitate and mediate the educational experience. The teacher, now a facilitator of learning, will create relations between learners and facilitator which engender values based on co-operative learning. The teaching and learning strategies which will mediate the learning are the responsibility of the teacher and must reflect the learning outcome.

Van der Horst and McDonald (1997:27) believe that some of the comparisons are not true reflection of what has been accomplished in many South African classrooms in the past. They argue that many excellent teachers have, for instance, employed methods purported to be typical of an Outcomes-Based approach for years. These are teachers who have placed a high priority on learner participation and who have encouraged learners to think and solve problems. They maintain that although the old curriculum was content-driven, many teachers managed to guide learners to become thoughtful and skilled people. The opposite is, however, also true, for many South African teachers are text-book bound and do not seem to have a proactive work ethic. It is specially these teachers (and their learners) who will benefit from employing an outcomes-based approach. They thus conclude by making a comparison of the old and new approach in tabular form in the following way:

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Table 2.1.

A comparison of the Old and New approach of Assessment.

OLD	NEW
Passive learners	Active learners
Exam-driven	Learners are assessed on ongoing basis
Rote learning	Critical thinking, reasoning, reflection and action
Syllabus is content-based and teacher-centred	An integration of knowledge; learning is relevant and connected to real-life situations
Textbook/worksheet-bound and teacher-centred	Learner-centred; teacher is facilitator; teacher constantly uses group work and teamwork to consolidate the new approach
Sees syllabus as rigid and non-negotiable	Learning programmes seen as guides that allow teacher to be innovative and creative and creative in designing programmes
Teachers responsible for learning; motivation dependant on the personality of the teacher	Learners take responsibility for their learning; pupils motivated by constant feedback and affirmation of their worth.
Emphasis on what the teacher hopes to achieve	Emphasis on outcomes (what the learner becomes and understands)
Content placed into rigid tome-frames	Flexible time-frames allow learners to work at their own pace.

Table 2.1. A comparison of the Old and New approach of Assessment.

Source: Adopted from: Outcomes-Based Education: A Teacher's manual. By Van der Horst, H. & McDonald, R. Page 148.

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The above comparison makes us aware of questions such as: Why should we teach this rather than that? Who should have access to what knowledge? How can the various parts of the curriculum be interrelated, in order to create a coherent whole?

One can therefore assume that these questions form the foundation on which teaching is based.

2.5. CONCLUSION

The initiative by the government to purge the apartheid curriculum of racially offensive and outdated content and the introduction of continuous assessment was a commendable move to the majority of South Africans. However, this move brings with it certain implications for our teaching.

Learners need opportunities to develop the required abilities and practice them in different situations and combinations. To do this, they need to be involved in learning activities that engage their critical thinking and sharpen problem-solving abilities. Therefore, it becomes important that educators set tasks that afford these opportunities.

In support of the above, Shepardson (1997:37) contend that no matter what type of understanding you want your learners to achieve, you cannot avoid the fact that learning requires thinking on the part of the learner. Further, students cannot develop their thinking unless they are engaged in activities that promote such outcomes.

The educator's task therefore is to structure learning experiences that will encourage learners to think in particular ways about the things that he/she wants them to learn. Often this thinking will not be something that learners can arrive at on their own. In this regard Leach and Scott (1995:48) add that "it is clear for example, that students cannot develop an understanding of the theories of science through their own observations because learning science requires a

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particular way of thinking rather than individuals making sense of the world in their own terms".

On the other hand, Malan (1997:74) argues that, while the shift to outcomes-based learning and teaching does make good sense in may ways, educators need to remember that human life is more than the performance of specific activities and that education should therefore be more than a process which prepares learners definitely and adequately for such activities alone.

The above sentiments bring us to the importance of empowering teachers views of the curriculum. In this regard, Carl (1997a:3) contend that the empowered teacher will probably not regard the syllabus as a recipe from which one may not deviate, but rather as an opportunity to experiment and still to make it relevant and meaningful. This requires specific knowledge, skills and proficiency.

The importance of teacher empowerment concerning curriculum issues cannot be over-emphasized. I think if teachers can be empowered to an extent that they become effective curriculum agents, the quality of education will be enhanced significantly in this country.

Lastly, it is also noteworthy that the quality of education in this country is of greater concern for most stakeholders, for instance, the minister of education, the minister of labour as well as the teachers unions as they correctly stated:

> *we will continue talking about importing skills and skills shortages, for the next 20 years if we do not improve the quality of our education and clearly the teachers are not well trained* (The star, 12 February 2008:6).

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose in this study was to investigate the implications of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning in a learner-centred curriculum in schools at Vhembe District in Limpopo Province.

3.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The importance of research methodology in scientific investigations cannot be over-emphasized. According to Waxman & Bright (1993:44), research can be conceived of as a chain of reasoning, stating problem formulation and clarification and progressing through investigation to findings. The total process, from problem isolation to the addition of new knowledge, is logically structured into some well-defined problem. In this study therefore, quantitative research was applied.

Quantitative research is also known as a *positivist philosophy* of how we generate new knowledge. The positivist believes that there are facts with objective reality that can be expressed numerically. Consequently, there is a heavy reliance on numbers, measurement, experiments, and numerical relationships and descriptions (Tisher & Wideen 1990:46).

3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach used in this study is the survey.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:233), in survey research, the investigator selects a sample of respondents from a larger population and administers a questionnaire to collect information on variables of interest.

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I used survey research because according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:233), in education, primarily for three reasons: versatility, efficiency and generalisability. Surveys are versatile because they can be used to investigate almost any problem or question. State departments of education use surveys to determine levels of knowledge and to ascertain needs in order to plan programs; schools use surveys to evaluate aspects of the curriculum or administrative procedures and governmental agencies use surveys to form public policy.

The advantages of a survey research are that credible information from a large population can be collected at a relatively low cost especially if the survey is distributed and collected by mail. It is also faster to use survey because data on many variables can be gathered without substantial increases in time or cost.

Surveys are also popular because small samples can be selected from larger populations in ways that permit generalizations to the population.

3.4. THE POPULATION

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119), a population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research. This group is also referred to as the *target population* or *universe*. The target population is often different from the list of elements from which the sample is actually selected, which is termed the *survey population* or *sampling frame*. Taking the above facts into consideration, my target population was all the teachers who teach Grade 10 at the Vhembe District Secondary Schools.

3.5. THE SAMPLE

According to Bell (1996:90), a sample is a group of targeted population in a research study on which information is obtained. The process of selecting the fractional part is called *sampling*. However, he goes further to explain that while the basic motivation for sampling is the simple impossibility of studying every

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respondent, the process is sensible because in practice it is not necessary to obtain data from all possible respondent to accurately understand the nature of the phenomena under study. Typically we can achieve this understanding with some portion of the respondents. Since this is so, we can enjoy the advantages of sampling, that it cuts the cost of research in terms both of time and money. But, the cautions that saving time or money through sampling is sensible only in instances when you can defend the fact that the data obtained from the sample will provide a sound basis for accurately understanding the phenomena under study. It would be absurd to save time and money through sampling if the data to be obtained would be spurious.

The sample is constituted by the following teacher representations: Two hundred and forty (240) teachers who teach Grade 10 in secondary schools of which eighty (80) taught languages, eighty (80) taught science subjects and eighty (80) were teachers of commercial subjects.

The three groups of teachers were administered the Effective Teaching Assessment Survey (ETSA) Questionnaire in order to get different views across all the learning areas.

3.5.1. Sampling Procedures

In this study I used two procedures; namely, cluster and random sampling. Circuits within the Vhembe District served as clusters. From these clusters I randomly selected schools and from these schools I randomly selected the participating teachers.

285 schools were grouped into 5 clusters of 57 schools each. 48 teachers were randomly selected from each.

The sample was made by a total of 240 teachers who teach grade 10.
See appendix.

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3.6. INSTRUMENTATION

According to Brown and Dowling (1998: 76), the whole process of collecting data is called instrumentation. This process involves not only the selection or design of the instruments but also the *conditions* under which the instruments are administered.

I used a self-designed data gathering instrument called *The Effective Teaching and Assessment Survey (ETAS).* The ETAS has two parts, namely, the Biographical Information and the Content Section.

The Biographical information section has seven items that required participants to give their personal information.

The Content section required the participants to give information with regard to how they deal with learner's assessment during their classroom teaching. This part has 50 items contextualised on continuous assessment and effective teaching. Each of the 50 items is well addressed within the review of the related literature in chapter 2. The ETAS was reviewed and edited by my supervisors and was accepted for the purpose of data collection.

3.7. RESEARCH PROCEDURES.

I wrote two letters to different stake holders, namely, the District Senior Manager of Vhembe, District in Limpopo Province and the teachers who would respond to the questionnaires.

The purpose of covering letters to teachers was to indicate the aim of the survey, its importance, to assure them of confidentiality, and to encourage their replies.

The purpose of writing to the District Senior Manager was for seeking permission to conduct the study within the schools under his/her jurisdiction.

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The questionnaires were distributed to teachers who teach grade 10. Three teachers per school were administered the ETAS questionnaire, that is, one who teaches languages, one who teaches science subjects and one who teaches commercial subjects. The intention is to get an overview of all subjects. In this regard two hundred and forty (240) questionnaires were distributed to eighty (80) schools which were randomly selected.

3.8. ETHICAL CONCERNS

Burgess (1989:16) believes that ethical principles in survey research, concern the proper conduct of relationships between researchers, respondents and resource providers.

Participants were given full assurance in the debriefing session that their identities were protected and would remain anonymous. This was done when the questionnaires were handed to them at their work places. Full disclosure of the nature of the study was made to all participants.

It is essential that the researcher establishes a good relationship with his/her participants, taking into consideration that every one of them receives full respect and trust. Participants were treated as autonomous agents, capable of controlling their own activities and destinies. Participants were allowed voluntarily to participate in the study or not to participate in the study, without the risk of incurring any penalties or prejudicial treatment. Again participants were given the right to terminate their participation at any point of the research process or refuse to give information, or to ask for clarification about the purpose of the study or specific questions.

The researcher provided the participants with a letter before engaging in any activity of the research study. This decision was made in order to allow individuals to make an informed decision about their participation in the study.

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The participants were not exposed to either physical or psychological harm. There was no harm whatsoever that needed the calling off of the study because there was no exposure to environmental hazards.

It was very important that the risk benefit ratio be considered. The researcher made it clear to all participants that the benefit of the study would benefit the schools and increase the body of knowledge in the teaching profession.

3.9. LIMITATIONS

This section takes into consideration the constraints beyond the researcher's control that might have influenced the objects of the enquiry.

Since the questionnaire was distributed to schools, and that teachers were requested to respond during their spare time, some might have influenced one another in answering the questions, which is problematic, verging on unethical.

Another limitation was that some teachers with so many periods to teach, had limited free periods which they use to prepare for next lesson presentations and this resulted in the hurry-hurry situation where teachers did not answer the questionnaire in a relaxed mood. This might impact on the answers provided.

3.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the research approach, the population, the sample, the nature of the data gathering instrument and the statement of hypothesis.

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CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the field study undertaken in the Vhembe District. The objective of the fieldwork was to solicit information from respondents with regard to Continuous Assessment for effective teaching and learning with special reference to Grade 10, the entry level of the FET Band.

This chapter comprises of the following main sections:

- Teachers' responses
- Consolidation of findings
- Conclusion.

Empirical data was obtained by administering the instrument, namely, Effective Teaching and Assessment Survey (ETAS) for details of the instrument refer to appendix D. Respondents of the questionnaire comprised of Grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District.

As indicated in chapter three the target group of the sample consisted of two hundred and forty (240) teachers, forty six (46%) drawn from the population of five hundred and twenty (520) grade 10 teachers in Vhembe District. Data returns were 207 which were 86% of the sample. The researcher was satisfied with the number of returns.

The structured items were analyzed by means of a computer using the SPSS programme. Data has been presented in the form of tables. Each presentation of analysis is followed by discussions and interpretations. The order of data presentation is in accordance with the major sections of this chapter as mentioned earlier. Each main category consists of sub-categories.

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4.2. SECTION A: TEACHERS' RESPONSES:

4.2.1. Biographical Information

In this section the main categories are personal data, working environment and size of numbers of learners in classrooms. The findings are presented according to the above mentioned categories. Crosstabulations did not produce any level of significance for age of the respondents and years of teaching experience.

4.2.2. Teachers' personal data

The quality of human capacity plays a pivotal role in the application of assessment, teaching and learning. The effectiveness of assessment depends entirely on the role played by teachers in any education system. The achievement of national outcomes concerning learners' performances can be influenced directly or indirectly by the background characteristics of teachers. The first three items of the questionnaire established the state of representativeness of respondents with regard to gender, age and teaching experience.

Table 4.1. Gender structure

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Male	129	62.3
	Female	78	37.7
	Total	207	100.0

Table 4.1 shows that the distribution of teachers was 62,3% male and 37,7% female. It proves that the sample was not gender biased and that opinions expressed were inclusive of both gender. However, the results imply that the majority of teachers teaching grade 10 in Vhembe District are males.

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Table 4.2. Age Distribution of Teachers

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	25-35 Years	40	19.3
	36-45 Years	104	50.2
	46-55 Years	58	28.0
	56-65 Years	4	1.9
	66-87 Years	1	.5
	Total	207	100.0

Table 4.2 indicates that a majority of participants 50,2% were within the age group 36 to 45 years. The situation gives the impression that half of the teachers needs professional development in their teaching career as they have been there for some time. Only 1,9% of respondents were above 55 years old.

The results show that all age groups of teachers relevant to this study were represented. This means that the views expressed by the sample are inclusive of opinions of all age groups of the population.

Table 4.3. Teaching Experience

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	0-10 Years	61	29.5
	11-20 Years	88	42.5
	21-30 Years	51	24.6
	31 and more	7	3.4
	Total	207	100.0

Table 4.3 clearly shows less than half of the respondents 42,5% had experience of between 11 and 20 years while 24,6% of respondents had an experience of between 21 and 30 years. The smallest group was the ones with the experience of 31 years and above. The results show that educators of all experiences were

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reasonably included in the sample. Opinions obtained reflect a broad population of various teachers' experience.

Overall findings show that the majority of grade 10 teachers in the Vhembe District have been in the field of teaching for a reasonable number of years. This situation might imply that teachers would need extensive guidance to change their attitude toward new assessment strategies as they were trained in the old approach.

The working conditions in which teachers operate at schools play a significant role in the assessment of learners. The successful application of new assessment procedures depends on the conducive environment in which teaching and learning take place. This section reports teaching disparities in conditions concerning types and locations of schools where grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District operate. The following table presents results on the types of schools.

Table 4.4. The type of schools (government or private)

	Frequency	Percentage
Valid Government	185	89.4
Private	22	10.6
Total	207	100.0

Table 4.4 indicates that an overwhelming majority 89,4% of participants was operating in government schools while only 10,6% were private schools. The results point out clearly that government schools are in the majority in Vhembe District. These results confirm that schools differ in terms of types and this might be attributed to the socio economic status of communities. These differences in types might suggest the possibility of differences concerning the availability of resources needed in conducting continuous assessment. However, all types of schools were represented in the sample. This means that opinions obtained represent teachers working in both government and private schools.

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Table 4.5. The Geographical area of schools (urban or rural)

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Urban	42	20.3
	Rural	165	79.7
	Total	207	100.0

According to table 4.5 the majority of grade 10 teachers 79,7% works in schools situated in villages while schools in urban areas constituted only 20,3%.

The results are in agreement with the fact that Vhembe District is predominantly rural with more villages than town. It is therefore clear that a majority of teachers operate in schools located in villages. Disparities need intervention in order to enhance performance of all learners without discrimination in all areas. The constitution of South Africa emphasizes the right to equal access to education regardless of place of birth or the social status of learners (Nemadzivhanani, 2007).

Table 4.6. Number of learners in one class

	Frequency	Percentage
Valid 0-35 learners	34	16.4
36-70 learners	158	76.3
71-105 learners	15	7.3
Total	207	100.0

The findings in table 4.6 indicate that more than three quarters of teachers 76,3% teach classes with close to seventy learners.

However, a small percentage 16,4% teach classes with less than thirty five learners, while 7,2% of teachers teach classes with more than seventy learners. The observed variation in the number of learners seems to be a major factor influencing capability of teachers in the application of continuous assessment as required by the Department of Education.

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In this regard one can infer that the majority of teachers in Vhembe District are engaged with learners exceeding the stipulated departmental teacher pupil ratio of 1:35.Thus a large percentage of teachers at Vhembe District find it difficult to apply continuous assessment in a large class as indicated by their responses on table 4.27.

4.2.3. SECTION B: CONTENT VALIDITY

The key that was used in responding to the factors was:

1	Strongly Agree
2	Agree
3	Disagree
4	Strongly Disagree.

The responses to the various factors were:

Table 4.7. Evaluation of learners' performance after teaching them.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	145	70.1
Agree	48	23.2
Disagree	5	2.4
Strongly disagree	9	4.3
Total	207	100.0

Concerning the analysis of statistics, the researcher has combined the percentages of the respondents who agree with those who strongly agree to the statement. Likewise the researcher has combined the percentage of the respondents who disagree with those who strongly disagree.

Another requirement of the National Assessment Policy is that learners performance should be evaluated after teaching them. This will assist the teacher to find out whether his/her teaching strategies are effective or not as well as

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helping the learners to find out if they are coping with the tasks assigned to them. Van der Horst and McDonald (2008:126) believe that after evaluation phase learners will make judgements about the quality of their work and organize their new knowledge, fit their evaluations into a larger context, and set future objectives.

A significant percentage (93, 3%) of respondents believe that learners' performance should be evaluated after teaching them. This shows that the majority of teachers see the need for evaluation of learners' performance in order to find out the level of their understanding. However, a small percentage (6,7%) of respondents do not agree with the theory of evaluating learners after teaching them. It is surprising how these teachers find out the level of learners' understanding. This can be interpreted that is either these teachers are lazy to evaluate or they do not understand the importance of evaluating learners' performance.

Table 4.8. Observation of learners to find out their lack of understanding.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	101	48.8
Agree	92	44.4
Disagree	8	3.9
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

In OBE, the most common basis for judgement of learners' behaviour and progress is through observation. An alert teacher is often able to conduct authentic assessments of learner's school work and also to spot close to the causes of learners' behaviour or lack of understanding by observing them.

A reasonable group of teachers with a percentage of (93, 2%) believed that observation of learners is necessary in order to find out causes of their behaviour

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or lack of understanding. This will assist teachers to adjust their lesson plans while facilitating learning. A small percentage (6, 8%) however, disagreed with the theory of observing learners in order to understand their lack of understanding. This can be attributed to the fact that either these teachers view this as time wasting or they prefer other methods of finding out causes learners' behaviour.

Table 4.9. Asking questions during lesson presentation

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	104	50.2
Agree	91	44.0
Disagree	6	2.9
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

Successful implementation of continuous assessment in the classroom requires that teachers should ask questions during lesson presentation. This helps the teacher to find out from learners if they are moving together with him/her or not. It further promotes learners' active participation in the learning activities.

The majority of respondents, 94, 2% agreed that it is important for a teacher to ask questions regularly while facilitating learning. This clearly indicates that most teachers view continuous assessment as an effective way of teaching. This is in line with the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) approach where assessment should be an integral part of teaching.

Only 5, 8% of the respondents disagreed with this approach. This can be interpreted in this manner, that there are teachers who still believe in the traditional method of teaching for the whole period and then ask questions at the end of the lesson or give tests at the end of the week.

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Although the percentage is small, there is need for these teachers to be brought on board to understand the new approach.

Table 4.10. Contributions of learners during lesson presentation.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	113	54.6
Agree	78	37.7
Disagree	9	4.3
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

Making provision for each learner to contribute their own opinions during lesson presentation is essential in the current curriculum to maximize learner performance.

There were 92, 3% of the respondents who believed that learners should be encouraged to contribute their ideas during lesson presentation. This is in agreement with the principles of learner-centred approach whereby learners are encouraged to be actively involved in the learning process by taking responsibility of their own learning. This indicates that teachers understand the importance of the new teaching strategies as outlined in the curriculum 2005.

A small percentage of 7, 7% of the teachers in Vhembe district felt that learners should not be encouraged to contribute their ideas during lesson presentation. This may be interpreted in the manner that some teachers still believe in the old lecture or pulpit method where learners were regarded as empty vessels wherein the teacher only pours knowledge. In this method learners are regarded as passive listeners who do not make any contribution to the learning process.

Of these results more males (55%) than females (53%) indicate that learners should be encouraged to contribute their ideas during lesson presentation. Crosstabulations reveal significant level (chi-square = 15.688; $p < 0.05$; Cramer's

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v = 0. 275) on the item 10. Males tend to agree that learners should be encouraged to contribute their ideas during lesson presentation.

This shows that males and females think differently on the issue of giving learners freedom to express themselves in class. This may be attributed to the fact that females are less confident to handle ideas that might be brought forward by learners.

There is a need for workshops to get these teachers informed about the new approach in teaching and learning. Teachers should be discouraged from applying the traditional teaching method where the teacher talks alone in the class while learners listen. The OBE approach demands that learning should be learner-centred rather than teacher-centred.

Table 4.11. Discovery and reflection on realistic experiences.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	84	40.6
Agree	106	51.2
Disagree	9	4.3
Strongly disagree	8	3.9
Total	207	100.0

This question establishes the importance of learning through discovery which encourages creative and independent thinking for learners. Gaining knowledge through discovery helps learners to remember what they have learnt and makes it easy for them to apply the gained knowledge to realistic experiences. Constructivist approach encourages learners to learn by experimentation, and not by being told what will happen. They should be left to make their own inferences, discoveries and conclusions.

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A significant percentage (91,8%) agreed that learners should be allowed to discover and reflect on their experiences. This is needed by the Department of Education as per the outlined teaching strategies in curriculum 2005. This view, however, is countered by a small percentage of 8, 2% of teachers who did not agree. This can be interpreted in the manner that such teachers may be lacking experience or knowledge on how to motivate learners to discover new facts relating to their experiences.

Crosstabulations reveal significant differences for male (45%) and female (33.3%) in their rating of the item. Learners should be allowed to discover and reflect on realistic experiences. (Chi-square = 11.425; $p < 0.05$; Cramer's v = 0.234).This might provide evidence that males tend to view allowing learners to discover and reflect on realistic experiences as being important. It can also be interpreted that males are confident to allow learners to bring out various ideas in order to guide them.

Table 4.12. Relevance of learning to learners' lives.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	110	53.1
Agree	84	40.6
Disagree	8	3.9
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

Curriculum 2005 emphasises the fact that learning should be relevant to learners' lives. The context in which learning occurs is central to the learning itself.

Table 4.12 indicates that majority of the respondents, 93, 7%, saw the need to help learners to understand how their learning is relevant to their lives. This augurs well with the principles of constructivism as expounded by Muijis and Reynolds (2005:127) whereby learning is viewed as a search for meaning which

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is relevant to life experiences. In this regard, the Department of Education encourages teachers to move away from traditional curriculum which was compartmentalized in such a manner that learners would cram facts not related to their life experiences. However, 6, 3% of teachers saw it differently. It is surprising how these teachers view knowledge in relation to life experience. The implication here is that there are still teachers in Vhembe District who do not see the need to help learners to understand how their learning is relevant to their lives.

Table 4.13. Taking learners' previous knowledge into cognizance.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	96	46.4
Agree	99	47.8
Disagree	4	1.9
Strongly disagree	8	3.9
Total	207	100.0

According to the Outcomes Based Education approach the teacher is expected to find out the learners' previous knowledge and recognize it before engaging them into learning new activities. In this way the teacher will be able to link the previous knowledge with the new materials presented to the learner in a more meaningful manner. This view is also supported by the constructivist theory which maintains that learners learn the new information which is presented to them by building upon knowledge which they already posses.

A very significant percentage 94, 2% of teachers were well-vested with the importance of taking the learner's previous knowledge into consideration while facilitating learning in their classrooms. This helps learners to adjust well in the classroom situation. In agreement with Taylor (1996:87), the Department of Education expects teachers to know the background of learners and their experiences so that they can adjust their learning activities accordingly. The

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majority of teachers are working according to the Department of Education (2003b:28) guidelines for the implementation of continuous assessment.

The minority percentage of 6, 8% may be viewed as being negligent or not interested in finding out more about learners' background due to laziness or having the perception that it is time wasting.

Table 4.14. Group discussions amongst learners

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	103	49.8
Agree	92	44.4
Disagree	5	2.4
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

This question establishes the fact that discussion is a versatile teaching and learning strategy which can be adapted to suit any subject at any level. During discussions learners are encouraged to think and act democratically by allowing freedom of expression, having respect for minority opinions tolerating diversity and participating openly.

Within the context of their respective schools, a significant 94, 2% of respondents agree that discussions amongst learners should be allowed as a way of facilitating learning. According to Killen (2000:88), discussion is a versatile teaching and learning strategy that can be adapted to suit any subject at any level. This percentage of teachers at Vhembe District indicates that teachers are aware of the significance of this teaching strategy as it is also recommended by the Department of Education guidelines on effective teaching.

The small percentage of 5, 8% of respondents may indicate that some teachers did not know how to apply this type of teaching strategy.

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Table
4.15. Learners' capacity to solve problems on their own.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	68	32.9
Agree	82	39.6
Disagree	44	21.2
Strongly disagree	13	6.3
Total	207	100.0

In OBE, the importance of developing learners' thinking skills is highly emphasized. Problem solving involves the application of existing knowledge to a new or unfamiliar situation in order to gain new knowledge. This question seeks to find out whether teachers encourage learners to solve problems on their own or not.

Although the percentage 72, 5% of respondents which is above half, agreed that learners should be allowed to be creative in order to solve learning problems on their own without telling them how, it is not impressive to note that a reasonable percentage of 27, 5 held a different view as indicated by statistics on table 4.15. Problem-solving as a teaching strategy is highly recommended by the Department of Education in this new approach, namely, OBE.

The reason for having learners to solve problems without telling them how, is to help them gain insights that will enable them to understand the subject matter and look at it from different perspectives. This view is also supported by Mayo, Donnelly, Nash & and Shwartz (1993:106).

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Table
4.16. Learners' use of skills during co-operative learning.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	65	31.4
Agree	119	57.5
Disagree	18	8.7
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

In strategies of teaching cooperative learning is one the requirements teachers are expected to implement. It is an effective strategy which teaches learners to be less reliant on the teacher and more reliant on their own ability to think, to seek information from other sources, and to learn from other learners. It is during cooperative learning where learners verbalize their ideas and compare them with ideas and feelings of other learners.

There were 88,9% of the respondents who saw the importance of encouraging learners to use their interpersonal skills during co-operative learning. The purpose of co-operative learning is to give learners more responsibility for their own learning development. It is not pleasing, however, to note that 11, 1% of the teachers did not see the importance of encouraging learners to be independent thinkers through co-operative learning as recommended by the Department of Education.

Of these results, more males (34,9%) than females 25,6%) indicate that learners should be encouraged to use interpersonal skills during co-operative learning. These are significant differences in the rating of this item by respondents of different gender (by males and females). (chi-square = 11.586; $p < 0.05$; Crammer's v = 0.239)

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Table 4.17. Consideration of diverse cultural and linguistic background

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	98	47.3
Agree	88	42.5
Disagree	14	6.8
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

Cultural and linguistic diversity can be a barrier in learning if teaching strategies are not planned accordingly. It is encouraging to note that 89, 8% of teachers in Vhembe District agreed that when developing teaching strategies it is essential to take into account the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the learners. The democratic state of South Africa appreciates the diversity of these cultures and encourages teachers to take care of them while facilitating learning. The other percentage of 10, 2% of the respondents did not agree with this notion. One wonders how these teachers tackle the challenge of cultural diversity. It may be interpreted that they may be lacking knowledge of preparing a teaching strategy that may address this challenge.

Table 4.18. Understanding of concepts and principles by learners.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	78	37.7
Agree	112	54.1
Disagree	12	5.8
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

The new approach in a learner-centred curriculum, emphasizes the development of understanding of concepts and principles by learners. This is a contrast with the old approach where learners would learn facts and regurgitate them without understanding. On table 4.18 statistics shows that there were 91, 8% of the

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respondents who agreed with this new approach. This therefore, implies that the majority of teachers at Vhembe District see the need to help learners in understanding concepts and principles while facilitating learning.

It is not encouraging however, to note that there are still teachers, constituting 8,2%, who did not see the need for learners to understand concepts and principles of the subject they learn. This may mean that they are still sticking to the old traditional approach where teachers just pumps in facts into learners heads expecting no analysis nor interpretation of these facts by learners.

Table 4.19. Learners sharing ideas openly

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	122	58.9
Agree	68	32.9
Disagree	10	4.8
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

According to the learner-centred curriculum approach, when learners discuss issues openly in their small groups, they can maximize their own learning and the learning of their peers if they are given appropriate opportunities. According to table 4.19, the statistics indicates that 91, 8% of the teachers at Vhembe District believed that during the lesson presentation learners should be encouraged to work together and share ideas openly. It is not encouraging, however, to note that 8, 2% of the teachers did not encourage learners to work together and share ideas openly.

Of these results more males (63,6%) than females (51,3%) indicate that during the lesson, learners should be encouraged to work together and share ideas openly.

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Crosstabulations reveal significant level (chi-square = 12.494; p< 0. 05; Cramer's v = 0.247) on the item 19. Males tend to agree that learners should be encouraged to work together and share ideas openly.

Table
4.20. Problem-solving as a teaching strategy

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	74	35.7
Agree	95	45.9
Disagree	32	15.5
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

Problem solving can develop learners' thinking skills and their ability to adapt to new learning situations, both of which are very important outcomes in the context of recent curriculum reforms in South Africa. When applying this teaching strategy teachers need to explain to learners what they want them to learn, why they are using problems as a way to teach, and how they expect learners to interact with teachers and with one another as they learn. According to table 4.20 above, the data indicate that 81, 6% of the respondents understood the manner in which problem-solving as a teaching strategy, should be applied.

A sizeable percentage 18, 4% of the respondents did not agree to the fact that teachers should explain to learners what they want them to learn, when using problem-solving as a teaching strategy. This disagreement can be attributed to the fact that maybe teachers lack knowledge on the application of this teaching strategy.

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Table
4.21. Action research in the facilitation of learning

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	46	22.2
Agree	119	57.5
Disagree	38	18.4
Strongly disagree	4	1.9
Total	207	100.0

A significant 79, 7% of the respondents viewed action research as essential and that it must be applied in the facilitation of learning. To supplement the teaching strategies, the twenty first century teacher must apply action research while facilitating learning as is required by the Department of Education guidelines on effective teaching. A reasonable amount of percentage, 20, 3% did not agree with the principle of applying action research in the facilitation of learning. It is surprising how these teachers improve the quality of their teaching without applying a small research in their classes. This may be attributed to the fact that they either did not understand it or they feel it is time wasting to conduct it.

Table
4.22. Diagnosis of learners

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	78	37.7
Agree	106	51.2
Disagree	15	7.2
Strongly disagree	8	3.9
Total	207	100.0

The National Assessment Policy Document (1997:34)requires the teacher to apply diagnostic assessment prior to teaching at the beginning of a lesson. This will assist the teacher to know what learners' entry levels are and what they know about the lesson topic.

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The importance of intervention in carrying out assessment procedures effectively cannot be overemphasized. Diagnosis is an important part of assessment activities in ensuring that learning needs of all learners are met. This type of assessment further helps the teacher to discover the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. Table 4.22 indicates that 88, 9% of teachers in Vhembe District saw the need for diagnostic assessment for effective teaching and learning. It is however, surprising that 11, 1% of teachers held a contrary view about diagnosis of learners. It is also not clear how these teachers find out the strengths and weaknesses of their learners.

Table
4.23. Specification of assessment strategies.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	96	46.4
Agree	90	43.5
Disagree	12	5.8
Strongly disagree	9	4.3
Total	207	100.0

According to the Department of Education document on guidelines for assessment (2003c:29), when teachers prepare a lesson, they should include specifications of assessment strategies to be applied. This helps teachers to ask themselves questions such as: why do they want to assess? What do they want to assess and how much time do they need for assessment. In this way teachers will be able to design an assessment that will measure what is intended to assess. In this regard, table 4.23 indicates that a significant percentage of 89, 9% of the teachers agreed with the Department of Education's guidelines on assessment strategies. However, a small percentage of 10, 1% disagreed.

Of these results, more females (52,6%) than males (42,6%) indicate that when preparing a lesson, it is necessary to include specifications of assessment strategies to be applied. Crosstabulations reveal significant level (chi-square = 15. 249; $p < 0.05$; Cramer's v = 0.268) on the item 23.Females tend to agree that

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when preparing a lesson, it is necessary to include specifications of assessment strategies to be applied.

Table
4.24. Identification of key questions in advance.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	89	43.0
Agree	104	50.2
Disagree	9	4.4
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

The Department of National Education (2000:32) requires that teachers must prepare questions in advance before they present their lessons. This will stimulate learners' thinking and motivate them to participate actively in the lesson presented to them by the teacher.

It is important to note that when learners respond to questions, a teacher gains insight into how well they are learning the material. When preparing a lesson, it is therefore necessary for the teacher to identify the key questions to be asked in advance. In this manner, the teacher will be able to structure questions that may encourage learner-to-learner interaction. It is encouraging to note that 93, 2% of the respondents saw the necessity of identifying key questions in advance while preparing their lessons. However, 6, 8% of the respondents held a different view as shown by statistics on table 4.24.

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Table
4.25. Asking questions before the lesson presentation.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	112	54.1
Agree	84	40.6
Disagree	5	2.4
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

The Department of National Education (1998:35) which drew some guidelines on assessment basing them on well researched different theories, indicate the need for asking appropriate questions at the beginning of the lesson in order to find out how much learners know. This will assist the teacher to adjust his/her lesson plan according to the level of his/her learners' level of understanding.

There were 94, 7% of the respondents who saw the need for asking appropriate questions before the lesson presentation. The small percentage of 5, 3% held a contrary view as indicated by statistics on table 4.25.

Crosstabulations reveal significant differences for males (52,7%) and females (56,4%) in their rating of the item 25. (Chi-square = 15.171; $p < 0.05$; Cramer's v = 0.254). This might provide evidence that females tend to view asking learners questions, to find out how much they know at the beginning of the lesson, as being important.

Table
4.26. Feedback to learners.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	127	61.4
Agree	67	32.4
Disagree	5	2.4
Strongly disagree	8	3.8
Total	207	100.0

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This question seeks to find out whether teachers see the need for feedback to learners after assessing them as required by the Department of Education's Assessment Guidelines (1997a:26).

One of the significance of assessment is feedback to learners. Assessment feedback provides vital information for evaluation and continuous improvement of the learning experience. Feedback can have a strong positive impact on learners' performance, especially if particular feedback strategies are used such as, written feedback and timing of feedback. Good communication by the teacher when giving feedback to learners is essential in building the self-esteem of learners.

Table 4.26 shows that more than three quarters of teachers 93, 8% agreed that feedback to learners after assessing them is essential, while the minority of teachers 6, 2% held a different view.

Table
4.27. Implementing continuous assessment in a large class.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	20	9.7
Agree	47	22.7
Disagree	70	33.8
Strongly disagree	70	33.8
Total	207	100.0

In the new paradigm, assessment is continuous within an outcomes-based system where the process of learning is as important as the end product. According to the Department of Education Guidelines on Assessment (2003),, assessment should be an integral part of the lesson presentation. It should not be seen as a separate activity as it was done in the traditional approach. It does not matter whether the class is large or small, as the teacher facilitates learning

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there should be some form of assessment either by asking questions or observing learners' behaviour.

It is surprising to note that table 4.27 indicates that more than half 67, 6% of teachers believed that it is not easy to implement continuous assessment in a large class. These results show that many teachers lack the knowledge on how continuous assessment can be applied in a simple way to a large class. Although 32, 4% of the respondents agreed that it is easy and motivating to implement continuous assessment in a large class, it is discouraging to find that these teachers constitute a small percentage. There is a greater need for Grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District to find more knowledge on how different strategies could be applied while facilitating learning whether the class is large on not.

Table 4.28. Assessment brings out what the teacher wants to know from learners.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	66	31.8
Agree	115	55.6
Disagree	19	9.2
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

According to Goodwin (119:44), assessment needs to be developed with a clear sense of curricular purpose and clear levels of analysis which will include for whom or for what assessment is playing out its role, for what precisely assessment is thought to be promoting or preventing. Appropriate assessment strategies therefore need to be used to attain the assessment aims.

Assessment should be purposeful. Assessment will not serve any purpose nor help the learner if it is not well planned with a definite objective that it is intended to achieve. One of the objectives of teachers is that assessments they conduct

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should help them to bring out what they want to know about learners, so that lesson plans can be adjusted accordingly in order to assist these learners.

It is encouraging to note that statistics on table 4.28 indicates that 87,5 of teachers perceived assessment as an essential tool to bring out what they want to know about their learners.

However, 12,5% of the teachers did not believe that assessment can help them to find out what they want to know about their learners, one wonders what these teachers use to bring out what they want to know about their learners and how.

Table
4.29. Assessment enhances learning activities

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	69	33.3
Agree	120	58.0
Disagree	12	5.8
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

Since assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, it is supposed to enhance learning activities in the classroom if it is well planned.

Assessment guidelines and policies of the Department of Education Northern Province (2001:36) require teachers to apply assessment with the purpose of enhancing learning activities rather than using assessment to grade learners as it was practiced in the old traditional approach. Learner-centred assessment practices promote learning and empower learners to have a say in the instructional process.

Self-assessment and self-improvement are valuable goals for South African learners who have often been "spoon-fed" in the past and therefore have not learnt to think for themselves.

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It is impressive to note that 91,3% of teachers believed that assessment enhances learning activities in the classroom. The small percentage of 8,7% held a contrary view as depicted by statistics on table 4.29.

Table
4.30. Assessment requires sufficient depth of subject expertise.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	85	41.1
Agree	91	43.9
Disagree	25	12.1
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

There were 85% of respondents who agreed that assessment is well applied when teachers have sufficient depth of subject expertise. This is in line with the assessment guidelines outlined by the Department of Education Northern Province (2000:22) whereby teachers are required to have sufficient knowledge about the subject matter on which they assess learners. It is commendable that more than three quarters of teachers see the need for deeper understanding of the learning areas they are supposed to teach so that they can assess learners with ease.

It is however, not impressive to learn that table 4.30 indicates that there are still 15% of respondents who did not see the need for deeper understanding of their learning areas they teach. One wonders how they can assess learners on the subject they do not have deeper knowledge of.

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Table
4.31. Aligning assessment to a defined purpose

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	74	35.7
Agree	107	51.7
Disagree	17	8.2
Strongly disagree	9	4.4
Total	207	100.0

Table 4.31 shows that a significant 87, 4% of respondents found it necessary that assessment should be aligned to a clearly defined purpose as per outlined guidelines by the Department of Education (1997b:31). When learners respond to questions, a teacher gains insight into how well they are learning the material. Since there are different types of assessment, the teacher should conduct them differently in order to achieve different purposes. For example, diagnostic assessment will be conducted with the purpose of finding out how much learners know about the lesson the teacher is going to present while formative assessment will be applied while the lesson is on so that the teacher can adjust his/her teaching strategies during lesson time in order to effect greater understanding and learning. However, 12, 6% of the respondents did not agree with the above view. This can be the worst scenario where assessment should not be aligned to a defined purpose.

Table
4.32. Teachers sufficiently trained in assessment strategies.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	33	15.9
Agree	67	32.4
Disagree	81	39.1
Strongly disagree	26	12.6
Total	207	100.0

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Research (Mastropiero & Scruggs 2000:45) report that one of the measure features that will characterize classrooms of the new century is learner diversity. Learner diversity may be observed with respect to race, religion, ethnicity and other potential disadvantages and disabilities as well as exceptional learners who are gifted and talented. For reasons such as the above it is impossible to design any single assessment task as it may disadvantage some learners. In this regard therefore, teachers need to be sufficiently trained in assessment strategies. In this way they will be able to make sure that every learner is given an equal opportunity to demonstrate what he/she has learned.

Less than half 48, 3% of respondents agree that teachers are sufficiently trained in the assessment strategies. Statistics on table 4.32 clearly indicates that more than half 51, 7% of the respondents did not agree that teachers at Vhembe District are applying assessment well in their classrooms. They do not agree that teachers are sufficiently trained in assessment strategies.

Assessment strategies are invaluable tools for teachers in the classrooms. According to Clayton, et al (1996:96) as indicated previously on item 2.2.1, there is a growing acceptance of more learner-centred theories of assessment among educational professionals around the world.

It is unimaginable how a teacher can conduct a successful lesson without knowledge of assessment strategies.

Table 4.33. Achieving learning outcomes without valid and reliable procedures.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	22	10.6
Agree	51	24.6
Disagree	94	45.4
Strongly disagree	40	19.3
Total	207	100.0

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According to Nitco (2004), validity is the soundness of interpretations and the uses of learners' assessment results. Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results. Understanding of these two terms is therefore crucial to teachers.

Validity and reliability are the cornerstones of an assessment. Validity refers to the extent to which a test accomplishes a specific goal. It is therefore crucial that teachers strive for perfection when they conduct assessment. Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results. An assessment instrument is reliable if it consistently measures what it claims to measure and if we have a high degree of significance in the scores that it produces. Table 4.33 shows that 35,2% of teachers in Vhembe District believed that without valid and reliable procedures a teacher can still know whether learners have achieved the learning outcomes that were the focus of the unit. This is a significant percentage of teachers who do not see the value of validity and reliability of assessment procedures. A slight percentage above half 64,7% agreed that validity and reliability are essential in assessment procedures and assist a teacher to know whether learners have achieved the learning outcomes that were the focus of the unit.

Table 4.34. Understanding practical implications of assessment.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	19	9.2
Agree	97	46.9
Disagree	69	33.3
Strongly disagree	22	10.6
Total	207	100.0

According to Boschee and Baron (1993:107), understanding the practical implications of assessment is essential for any teacher. This will assist teachers to identify important issues within the theme that the learners are studying. They will be able to identify learning outcomes for the task that is the knowledge skills and values or attitude learners will demonstrate in completing the task. Teachers

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will also be able to identify the criteria that will be used for the selected learning outcomes. They will be able to focus on important criteria rather than trying to assess all the possible criteria for each learning outcome.

Slightly more than half of the respondents 51,1% maintained that teachers at Vhembe District understand the practical implications for assessment. Assessment helps the teacher to find out whether learners have really learned from the lesson and whether they can actually apply those principles to real life situation or they have just memorized them.

Statistics on table 4.34 clearly shows that 43,9% of teachers did not agree that teachers at Vhembe District understand the practical implications for assessment. This is however, a significant percentage of the respondents.

Table
4.35. Usage of variety of assessment methods

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	104	50.2
Agree	84	40.6
Disagree	13	6.3
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

Curriculum 2005 required that various assessment methods should be used in order to assist the learner to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

In order to be in line with the OBE stipulations, teachers need to use a variety of methods in order to allow each learner to give his/her best performance in skills, attitudes and values.

It is impressive to find out that 90,8% of the teachers in Vhembe District saw the need to use a variety of assessment methods to assess learners while facilitating learning. However a small percentage of 7,2% believed otherwise as shown on table 4.35 by statistics.

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Table
4.36. Learners working at own pace.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	57	27.5
Agree	100	48.3
Disagree	43	20.8
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

The National Assessment Policy (1998:23) identifies the following trends in contemporary educational assessment:

- That all learners can learn and achieve learning outcomes through not at the same pace.
- That assessment must be learner – paced rather than syllabus – paced
- That learner-paced assessment enables learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

The current learner-centred curriculum makes provision for each learner to work at his or her own pace to maximize learner performance.

Table 4.36 reveals that 75,8% of teachers at Vhembe District saw the need to make provision for learners to work at own pace while facilitating learning. It is however not pleasing to note that 24,2% of the teachers in the same District held a different view. The implication is that a reasonable number of learners are denied the opportunity to develop in accordance with their individual uniqueness.

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Table
4.37. Involving learners in self-assessment.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	69	33.3
Agree	114	55.1
Disagree	16	7.7
Strongly disagree	8	3.9
Total	207	100.0

Self assessment is one of the valuables goals for South African learners who have been "spoon-fed" in the past and therefore has not learnt to think for themselves. Van der Horst & McDonald (2008:148) maintain that self assessment deserves special attention from teachers because many learners may need help in learning how to assess their academic skills and performance appropriately. Learners may also need help in learning to maintain records and provides summaries of their work.

According to the current learner-centred curriculum, the purpose of self-assessment is to give learners more responsibility for their own learning development. For effective learning, there is a need for learners to understand themselves and their progress in the classroom. The statistics in table 4.37 clearly shows that more than three quarters 88,4% of the respondents were in agreement with the principle of involving learners in self-assessment. The minority 11,6% of the respondents held a different view.

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Table
4.38. Peer Assessment as a learning strategy.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	74	35.7
Agree	107	51.7
Disagree	19	9.2
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

The purpose of peer assessment in learner-centred curriculum is to promote learners co-operation among fellow learners rather than competition in the completion of a single task.

There were 87,4% of respondents who agreed that learners should be involved in peer assessment as an effective learning strategy while 12,6% held a contrary view as depicted by statistics on table 4.38.

Table
4.39. Understanding learners' learning skills through assessment

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	81	39.1
Agree	111	53.6
Disagree	9	4.4
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

According to table 4.39 a significant percentage 92,7% of the respondents agreed as is stipulated in curriculum 2005, that assessment helps teachers to see learners and perceive what they can do in the hope of understanding how they learn and assist their learning.

The small percentage of 7,3% of the respondents did not agree that assessment can help them to perceive how their learners learn.

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Table 4.40. Usage of appropriate assessment strategies.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	85	41.1
Agree	104	50.2
Disagree	12	5.8
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

Since assessment is purposeful, according to curriculum 2005 assessment guidelines, teachers are required to use appropriate assessment strategies in order to attain assessment goals intended for. It is impressive to note that a significant percentage of 91,3% of the teachers were in agreement with the requirements of assessment stipulated by the Department of Education. However, a small percentage of 8,7% of teachers held a contrary view.

Table 4.41. Assessment support teaching and learning

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	102	49.3
Agree	92	44.4
Disagree	9	4.4
Strongly disagree	4	1.9
Total	207	100.0

The new approach in curriculum stipulates that learner assessment should be undertaken on a continuous basis. This continuous assessment should provide constructive information about learner performance in relation to the specific outcomes. Because assessment is integral in the lesson plan, it serves to support facilitation of learning.

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Statistics in table 4.41 clearly shows that the majority of teachers 93,7% saw the critical role of assessment in teaching and learning, while an insignificant percentage of 6,3% of teachers saw it differently.

Table 4.42. Assessment helps in the adjustment of teaching strategies.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	92	44.4
Agree	102	49.3
Disagree	8	3.9
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

There were 93,7% of the respondents who agreed that assessment informs teachers about their teaching so that they can adjust their teaching strategies. Both teachers and learners receive information from this kind of assessment, such as information about problems, errors, misunderstandings and progress.

This is in line with assessment guidelines as stipulated by curriculum 2005. It is unfortunate, however the few respondents, 6,3% did not perceive assessment as a tool that can assist them in adjusting their teaching strategies.

Table 4.43. Assessment follows stages.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	101	48.8
Agree	94	45.4
Disagree	8	3.9
Strongly disagree	4	1.9
Total	207	100.0

In the new approach, namely OBE, assessment should be systematic. It should be administered in accordance with stages, such as, gathering of information, recording the results and then giving feedback. It is impressive to note that the data in table 4.43 clearly indicate that the majority of respondents 94,2% were in

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agreement with this view while the minority of the respondents 5,8% held a different view.

Table
4.44. Determining if outcomes have been achieved

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	105	50.7
Agree	92	44.5
Disagree	6	2.9
Strongly disagree	4	1.9
Total	207	100.0

Assessment in OBE should be designed in such a manner that specific outcomes which are intended are achieved. It should assist learners to reach their full potential. A significant percentage of 95,2% of teachers perceived assessment as a relevant instrument to determine the achievement of such outcomes. The small percentage of 4,8% however did not agree.

Table
4.45. Assessment is integral part of teaching and learning.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	108	52.2
Agree	88	42.5
Disagree	4	1.9
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

In the new learner-centred curriculum, assessment should be integrated throughout the teaching and learning process. In this way learners can be assisted to reach their full potential.

Table 4.45 indicates that many teachers 94,7% at Vhembe District viewed assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning while 5,3% of the respondents believed otherwise.

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Table
4.46. What learners should know and do after learning.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	103	49.7
Agree	84	40.6
Disagree	12	5.8
Strongly disagree	8	3.9
Total	207	100.0

It is encouraging to note from the above results that a majority of teachers 90,3% agree that a learning outcome describes what learners should know and be able to do at the end of the grade. This is the essence of Outcomes Based Education.

It is however, surprising to note that there are still some few teachers 9,7% who do not see the importance of learning outcomes.

Table
4.47. Assessment as a purposeful activity.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	81	39.1
Agree	105	50.7
Disagree	14	6.8
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

As indicated in the assessment guidelines, assessment will not serve any purpose nor help the learner if it is not purposeful in nature. Assessment should be planned with a definite objective that it is intended to achieve.

The majority of teachers 89,8% as indicated in table 4.47 agreed that assessment should be purposeful in nature. Other teachers 10,2% did not see the need for assessment to be purposeful. In this regard one wonders how teachers can assess learners without any objective in mind.

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Table
4.48. Unearthing the full potential of learners.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	68	32.9
Agree	105	50.7
Disagree	28	13.5
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

Assessment in OBE is a process of gathering valid and reliable information about the performance of the learner, on an on-going basis, against clearly defined criteria, using a variety of methods, tools, and techniques in different contexts. It is through the use of diverse assessment strategies that the full potential of learners is unearthed.

More than three quarters 83,6% of teachers agreed that using diverse assessment strategies helps to unearth the full potential of learners. However, there is 16,4% of teachers who held a different view.

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Table
4.49. The importance of portfolio assessment.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	78	37.7
Agree	110	53.1
Disagree	14	6.8
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

According to the Department of National Education (2002) there is a need for a record that can document in some detail what learners have accomplished as a result of their experiences in the classroom. Portfolios provide evidence of the learner's knowledge, skills, attitude and academic development that affords the teacher opportunities for formative and summative evaluation. It also offers a concrete way for learners to evaluate their own work. When learners are responsible for deciding what to include in a portfolio, they are forced to examine their work from new perspectives.

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of learners' work such as projects, journals and assignments. These exhibits to the learner, parent teachers and other stakeholders, the progress, growth and achievement of the learner in relation to expected outcomes. The National Assessment policy requires that teachers and learners regularly review portfolios and agree on significant evidence of learners' performance. Table 4.49 reveals that the majority of teachers 80, 8% believed that portfolio assessment helps to develop learners in self-reflection, critical thinking and responsibility for learning. However 7,2% of teachers held a contrary view.

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Table
4.50. Planning is key to effective teaching.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	114	55.1
Agree	84	40.6
Disagree	3	1.4
Strongly disagree	6	2.9
Total	207	100.0

On OBE, planning plays a significant role for effective teaching. Skills are required in planning. The planning process can be thought of as a sequential decision making process where the following questions need to be answered; what are the desired learner outcome? What is the best way to introduce the subject? And what is the best instructional strategy for the intended learning? It is impressive to note that in table 4.50 statistics shows that the majority of teachers 95,7% in Vhembe District consider planning as a vital tool for effective teaching. There are however very few teachers 4,3% who held a different view.

Table
4.51. Effective teaching involves interactive communication

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	94	45.4
Agree	100	48.3
Disagree	6	2.9
Strongly disagree	7	3.4
Total	207	100.0

In learner-centred curriculum, teaching is not, just a matter of teachers talking and learners listening. Effective teaching involves interactive communication patterns that are skilfully directed. It is interesting to note that table 4.51 shows that the majority of the respondents 93,7% agree that for effective teaching to take place communication should not be one-way, that is from the teachers to

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learner. It should be interactive and reciprocal. However, some few respondents, 6,3% held a contrary view.

Table 4.52. Learners identifying their learning needs.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	70	33.8
Agree	119	57.5
Disagree	13	6.3
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

It is one of the priorities of OBE that learners should be encouraged to be responsible for their own learning. When they are given chance to identify their learning needs, it becomes easier for them to carry out their learning activities with interest and enthusiasm. According to the statistics in table 4.52, more than three quarters of teachers 91,3% saw the need to give learners an opportunity to identify their learning needs.

However, a small percentage 8,7% of teachers did not agree with the above view point.

Table 4.53. Helping learners to construct their own meaning.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	64	30.9
Agree	107	51.7
Disagree	31	15.0
Strongly disagree	5	2.4
Total	207	100.0

In constructivist approach, learners are provided an opportunity to construct their own sense of what is being learned by building internal connections or relationships among the ideas and facts being taught. This is the approach on which some principles of OBE are based. Learners are encouraged to be active

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in order to learn effectively. Learners are not encouraged to learn facts in a purely abstract way, but in relation to what they already know. This leads to authentic learning and deeper understanding, compared to the surface memorization. In this regard table 4.53 shows that a significant percentage 82,6% of the respondents saw the need to provide learners opportunity to construct their own meaning during the learning process. However a sizeable percentage 17,4% of the respondents did not agree.

This may be alluded to the lack of understanding on how the theory of constructivism works.

Table
4.54. The new approach is influenced by total environment.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	109	52.7
Agree	78	37.7
Disagree	10	4.8
Strongly disagree	10	4.8
Total	207	100.0

The new approach in learner-centred curriculum requires the teacher to create environment conducive to learning. This has a direct bearing on the learner's physical, social and psychological development. This can be particularly useful when they are solving problems in a none-threatening environment.

It is encouraging to note that the statistics in table 4.54 indicates that the majority of teachers 90,4% agreed that learning is influenced by the total environment while the minority of teachers 9,6% held a different view.

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Table
4.55. Provoking the learners' curiosity.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	109	52.7
Agree	78	37.7
Disagree	10	4.8
Strongly disagree	10	4.8
Total	207	100.0

One of the basic principles of OBE is that learners need to experience success if they are to have a positive attitude towards learning and high self-esteem. Therefore, learners' activities should provoke learner curiosity. Teachers should encourage learners to ask why, how and what if? This can be achieved when teachers take into account the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners bring with them to the classroom. It does not matter whether these have been learned formally or informally. The real difference is in how the teacher structures and mediates his or her learners' learning. It is commendable to note that the majority of teachers 90,4% agreed that learning activities should be planned in such a manner that they provoke the learner's curiosity. However, the minority of teachers 9,6% held a different view.

Table
4.56. Discussions help to develop critical thinking skills.

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	107	51.7
Agree	89	43.0
Disagree	7	3.4
Strongly disagree	4	1.9
Total	207	100.0

One of the basic principles of learner-centred curriculum is to encourage learners to actively participate in discussions during the process of learning. The purpose of the discussion might be to solve a problem, answer a question, and enhance

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the learners' knowledge, understanding or reach a decision. Unlike lecturers, discussions help to develop learners' critical thinking skills as they exchange ideas during discussions.

Table 4.56 shows that the majority of teachers 94,7% agreed that discussions are better than lecturers as a way of helping learners to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills. However few teachers 5,3% held a contrary view.

4.3. CONSOLIDATION OF FINDINGS

The aim of data collection and analysis was to endeavour to find answers to research questions and achieve the objective of the study. This section integrates related sub-sections. The intention is to come up with main findings, implementation of principles of equality and equity through Continuous Assessment, reach a main conclusion and then come up with recommendations.

Continuous assessment supports learners developmentally by means of ongoing assessments. The major goals of the department of education are access, redress, quality and equity for all learners in line with the constitution of the country (National Department of Education 1998:17).

Results also show that schools were located in rural and urban geographical areas. It is commendable to note that findings showed no significant difference in treatment of schools regardless of geographical disparities. This is in line with the government's recommendation of single system of education ensuring that all learners are empowered to become caring competent and contributing citizens in an inclusive, changing and diverse society (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht 1999:6)

The level of understanding policy documents on assessment needs attention. The results showed that there is a genuine need to bring teachers to the same understanding of policy documents in all schools. Results indicate that 67,6%

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believed that it is not easy to implement continuous assessment in a large class while 32,4 believed that it is possible and easy.

4.3.1 Teachers training on assessment strategies.

Results on the training of teachers on assessment strategies indicate that more than half 51,7% of teachers were not sufficiently trained on assessment strategies while 48,3% of the respondents agreed that the training was sufficient. This shows disparities on the application of training programmes at different schools in the District.

4.3.2. Responses according to grouped items

The responses of questionnaire items 7-37 indicate that many teachers agreed to the fact that continuous assessment plays a pivotal role in the facilitation of learning. It is also encouraging to note that many teachers believed that assessment should be planned in advance before lesson presentation so that the teacher will be able to know what and how to assess learners during lesson presentation.

The responses of questionnaire items 38-49 show that three quarters of teachers at Vhembe District believed that a variety of assessment strategies should be applied while assessing learners. In order to find out whether learners understood what they learnt and that they can employ their knowledge wisely, fluently, flexibly and aptly in particular and diverse contexts; teachers need to apply different strategies when assessing learners.

The responses of questionnaire items 50-56 indicate that most teachers maintained that various teaching strategies, such as problem-solving, co-operative learning, discussions, deductive and inductive teaching strategies should be applied for effective teaching and learning in order to achieve desired learning outcomes.

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4.4 TESTING OF THE NULL HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference in the manner in which grade 10 teachers apply continuous assessment with regard to learner-centred approach.

There are only six items in which cross-tabulations revealed significant difference: Item 10 reveals that more males (55%) than females (53%) agree that learners should contribute their ideas during lesson presentation.

On item 11crosstabulations reveal that more males (45%) agree that learners should be allowed to discover and reflect on their experiences while females (33,3%) hold a contrary view.

Item 16 reveal that more males (34,9%) agree that learners should be encouraged to use skills during co-operative learning while females (25,6%) think otherwise. Crosstabulations on item 19 indicate that more males (63,6%) agree that learners should share ideas openly while females (51,3%) hold a different view.

On item 23, more females (52,6%) than males (42,6%) agree that specifications of assessment strategies should be included in the lesson plan.

Crosstabulations on item 26 indicate that more females (56,4%) agree that questions should be asked at the beginning of the lesson to find out the learners' level of understanding, while few males (52,7%), hold a different view.

Since a majority of the items do not show any level of significance, I therefore rejected the hypothesis and retained the null hypothesis.

4.4. CONCLUSION

Looking generally at the responses of all participants, the survey reveals that implementers of Continuous Assessment have different views about the application of assessment strategies. In some cases there seems to be a lack of

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knowledge on the implementation of assessment as a teaching strategy. In other cases respondents just feel that assessment strategies are not worthy to be applied during lesson presentation. These will be covered in the section where the researcher makes recommendations.

Continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning takes place in various school context where a large number of respondents indicated some challenges they face while facilitating learning in classes with large number of learners.

The results reveal that teachers have a challenge with regard to understanding documents on assessment policy and the application thereof. This highlights concerns about the application of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning.

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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the implications of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning in a learner-centred curriculum, which is currently in operation at schools in Vhembe District. The main objective was to assess the level of competence within which grade 10 teachers apply continuous assessment and to suggest practical ways in which teachers can confidently apply continuous assessment irrespective of the class size.

Data concerning teachers' views on the implementation of continuous assessment as required by the Department was collected.

5.2. DISCUSSIONS

The preliminary literature review in chapter one was conducted to establish the historical background of the problem. Sources revealed that the application of continuous assessment in the classrooms has been a persistent challenge not only in Vhembe District but throughout South Africa.

Extensive literature review relevant to continuous assessment and effective teaching and learning strategies was carried out and presented in chapter two. Findings indicated that continuous assessment is an integrated part of teaching and learning. Findings further indicated that in a learner-centred curriculum, assessment must be learner-paced rather than syllabus-paced. The need for diagnostic assessment at the beginning of any lesson presentation, justifies the change from rigid traditional examinations to continuous assessment. The new approach in assessment is trusted by a wide range of proponents to promote effective teaching and learning. Continuous assessment can promote quality education and ensure the maintenance of educational standards in the whole country.

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5.3. RESPONDING TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

For this study to achieve the objectives and expectations the following research question was taken into cognizance:

To what extent is continuous assessment applied in the classroom by grade 10 teachers?

The research question was sub-divided into the following sub-questions:

1) How effective is continuous assessment in the grade 10 classrooms?
2) How do teachers view continuous assessment?
3) Do teachers understand the practical implications of continuous assessment?

Question 1: How effective is continuous assessment in grade 10 classrooms?

The findings indicate that continuous assessment in grade 10 classrooms is not applied effectively due to lack of knowledge and training of teachers on assessment strategies

In order to apply continuous assessment in the classroom more effectively the teacher needs to conduct diagnostic assessment with the purpose of finding out how much learners know about the lesson he/she is going to present. In this regard, therefore, sufficient training of teachers in assessment strategies is highly essential. Clayton, et al (1996:96) maintain that assessment strategies are invaluable tools for teachers in the classrooms as there is a growing acceptance of more learner-centred theories of assessment among educational professionals around the world.

For teachers to conduct diagnostic assessment effectively, some skills are required, such as the techniques of asking questions in an informal way. The strategies may be unstructured. Teachers may continue to diagnose learners' understanding through each lesson. When applying diagnostic assessment the

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process should also reveal how learners know something and how they can demonstrate such skills in a real life situation.

Furthermore, findings in this study have clearly revealed that the majority of teachers have been trained in the old school of thought with reference to methods of teaching.

They were trained before the ushering in of democracy in 1994 and they were not exposed to the new learner-centred approach with its related assessment strategies.

The new outcomes Based Education approach is so broad and sophisticated that it requires the teacher to be involved with it for the duration of a four year teacher training course. In this way the teacher can be confident while applying various assessment strategies in class.

In this regard, it is therefore inevitable that teachers with limited knowledge and insufficient training on OBE become ineffective when applying assessment strategies in their classrooms where learner-centred approach reigns supreme.

Question 2: How do teachers view continuous assessment?

When the new Outcomes Based Education approach was introduced in the education system after the ushering in of democracy, many teachers were sceptical about it. They viewed it as something very difficult to grasp. Findings indicate that they struggled to grasp the concepts in the learner-centred approach as a result of insufficient knowledge related to this new approach. Consequently, their lack of knowledge on the new approach impacts negatively on the application of continuous assessment during lesson presentation.

Findings in this study reveal that the majority of grade 10 teachers believe that applying assessment strategies during lesson presentation is time wasting, particularly in large classes. As a result, they stick to a traditional way of assessing learners at the end of the lesson or at the end of the week.

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The fact that teachers view continuous assessment as time wasting is because they tend to associate it with asking questions only. This is a traditional way of assessing learners where teachers ask each learner a question and conclude that learners have grasped what was presented to them if they give correct answers. This kind of assessment does not take into consideration how learners learn and whether they can be able to apply what they have learnt to the real life situation.

Furthermore, findings in this study have revealed that teachers view continuous assessment as difficult to implement because they lack knowledge on techniques of designing assessment tasks. If teachers cannot identify specific outcomes they want to assess, it becomes very difficult to design an assessment task, hence they view the new approach of assessing learners as difficult to implement due to lack of knowledge and training.

In Outcomes Based Education, continuous assessment is an invaluable tool for teachers during their lesson presentation because it moves activities closer to the actual work of teachers and learners (Perrone 1991:165).

It is crucial for teachers to have deep understanding of assessment strategies as this can assist them while motivating learners. This can be done through giving them feedback which is integral to the process of teaching and learning. It is essential for learners to understand themselves and their progress in the classroom through the feedback they get from teachers (Van der Horst and Mc Donald 1997:202).

Findings in this study have further revealed that due to lack of knowledge by teachers, they view continuous assessment as time wasting because they believe it calls for learner's individual attention. This is due to lack of knowledge on the part of teachers with reference to assessment strategies such as, diagnostic, observation, formative and evaluative assessment strategies which can be applied to a group.

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Question 3: Do teachers understand the practical implications of continuous assessment?

Findings in this study have clearly revealed that almost half (43,9%) of the respondents do not understand the practical implications of continuous assessment. Boschee and Baron (1993:108), maintain that understanding practical implications of assessment is essential for any teacher who strives for effective teaching and learning. Continuous assessment of learners during lesson presentation assists the teacher to identify important issues within the theme that the learners are studying. It further assists the teacher to identify learning outcomes learners will demonstrate in completing the task.

When teachers do not understand the practical implications of assessment, learners are disadvantaged in many respects. This may mean that teachers are unable to find out whether learners have really learned from the lesson and whether they can actually apply those principles to real life situation or they have just memorized them.

It also impacts negatively on learners when teachers are unable to use a variety of assessment methods in order to assess them while facilitating learning. Learners should be exposed to various opportunities when they are being assessed so that they can express themselves in various ways to demonstrate their talents.

Lack of knowledge on the practical implications of assessment also disadvantages the teacher because he/she may not be able to find out the learner's previous knowledge and recognize it before engaging them into learning new activities. When the teacher does not know the learners' previous experiences he/she cannot adjust their learning activities accordingly.

Understanding the practical implications of continuous assessment has a bearing on the linking of classroom activities to the economic, political and social issues. While facilitating learning teachers will have to bear in mind that the ultimate goal

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of all assessment is that learners' should be able to demonstrate what they have learnt in the real life. The essence of continuous assessment is realized when learners are involved in tasks such as, portfolios, projects and practical tests.

When teachers do not understand the practical implementation of assessment, evaluation of learners' performance will obviously be a mammoth task for them. Evaluation involves the collecting and analyzing information in order to form value judgment based on firm evidence. Rodgers and Badham (1992:4) believe that such judgments guide decision-making for development.

According to Cangelosi (1991:142), when an evaluation process is conducted questions to be asked are as follows:

- Should I increase the pace of this activity or slow it down?
- Can these learners apply these principles or have they just only memorized them?

Designing such questions involves synthesizing, selecting, scoring, interpreting and revising tests and other types of observations of learners' performance.

All these techniques demands the teacher whose knowledge and skills are above reproach. In this way effective teaching and learning will be realized in classrooms. Learners produced from such classrooms will contribute meaningfully to society and communities will reap good fruits thereof.

5.4. CONCLUSIONS

While several conclusions were made regarding continuous assessment as the study proceeds, this section deals only with conclusions that I deemed significant.

5.4.1. Conclusion pertaining to assessment procedures.

Assessment of learning is an essential element of outcomes-Based Education. Without valid and reliable assessment procedures the teacher will not know

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whether or not learners have achieved the learning outcomes that were the focus of the programme, unit or lesson, and neither will the learners know whether they have learnt well.

Van der Horst and McDonald (2008:166) believe that the more realistic the assessment procedures, the clearer will be the picture of what learners are learning.

It is worth considering that mere traditional methods of assessment (exams and tests) may not give the learners appropriate opportunities to reveal their knowledge, skills and values or attitudes. Therefore alternative assessment measures should also be used. It is also true that the move toward Outcomes-Based Education has brought a move toward new assessment strategies.

In addition to the above facts, McCown, Drisdoll and Roop (1996:128) maintain that for assessment to improve learning, it should provide a multidimensional picture of what learners know and can do. It should respect learners' diversity in ways of understanding. It should suggest actions teachers can take to improve the educational development of their learners and the quality of their educational programmes. To accomplish these goals, teachers have available to them a broader way of assessment techniques than ever before. Taking advantage of them however requires understanding of assessment goals, procedures for constructing assessments, and criteria for judging and improving the quality of assessments.

The results in this regard show that some teachers do not understand the requirements of the policy with regard to assessment procedures and therefore revert to traditional methods of assessment. Lack of sufficient training for grade 10 teachers by the Department of education concerning assessment procedures was a great challenge. The trend appears to have been that of simply distributing documents to schools with no measures taken to ensure their usability.

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5.4.2. Conclusion pertaining to continuous assessment support system

Grade 10 teachers have indicated that it was difficult for them to apply continuous assessment in large classes. Findings described a working environment with problems of infrastructure such as inadequate classrooms, furniture and learning materials particularly in rural schools. The Outcomes-Based Education emphasizes that learners should work both individually and in groups. These activities require sufficient space and enough furniture. Learner-pace learning demands that the teacher should give enough individual attention to each learner. It is obvious that teachers operating in large classes without enough space cannot assess in accordance with the requirements of OBE.

The results revealed that teachers were not receiving enough support from the Department of education in as far as the learning materials for workshops were concerned with regards to understanding assessments requirements. It was clear that the support system put in place for such activities could not assist in the implementation of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning.

5.4.3. Conclusion pertaining to teachers' experience

Results indicated that majority 70,5% of grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District have been in the teaching profession for more than ten years. This clearly shows that this generation of teachers was trained in the old traditional way of assessment. Thus, designing assessment tasks, recording and reporting throughout the year require accuracy, proficiency and efficiency.

Although the District of Vhembe has played an essential role in empowering teachers through workshops not all teachers understood the processes involved when applying continuous assessment. It appears the training of teachers during the workshops was fraught with so many challenges, such as, centralization of venues where training occurred, inconvenience of transportation of teachers to the venues of workshops, working within time constraints as the Department of Education requires teachers to be trained after twelve in the afternoon and

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dealing with a large number of participants at the workshops. These challenges suggest that quite a number of teachers were not effectively trained in the application of the new assessment strategies.

5.4.4. Conclusion pertaining to teachers' workload.

Assessment in a learner-centred curriculum is a very involved activity demanding that learners must have something to think about, for instance, facts, ideas, concepts, principles, theories, explanations, images and opinions. Although well-designed traditional tests can evaluate learners' knowledge effectively, teachers will need to determine how well their learners are learning the content. Knowledge also has to be tested as it is applied in real-life situations. Understanding cannot be measured by tests that ask learners to use skills and knowledge out of context.

In this regard, Woolfolk (1995: 166) believes that learners cannot be said to understand something unless they can employ their knowledge wisely, fluently, flexibly, and aptly in particular and diverse contexts. This concern of teachers has led to the development of several new approaches based on the goal of performance in context. Instead of clinging to factual questions in isolation, learners are required to use facts in a context where they not only have to apply facts or principles, but where they also have to solve real problems (holistic approach).

To construct an assessment task that can assist learners to think wisely and flexibly in particular and diverse contexts; requires an enormous amount of time from the teacher. In the same way such assessment tasks also require more resources and considerable effort on the part of the teacher. When creating tasks for assessment purposes, the following guidelines are necessary:

- Identifying a few important issues within the theme that learners are studying.

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- Identifying learning outcomes for the task, that is, the knowledge, skills and values or attitudes learners will demonstrate in completing the task.
- Identifying the criteria that will be used for the selected learning outcomes. Focusing on several important criteria rather than trying to assess all possible criteria for each learning outcome.
- Identifying the criteria that will be used for assessing the thinking processes selected.
- Guiding learners through the completion of the task and assess each learner's performance using the assessment tools selected and the assessment scoring sheet the teacher has constructed.

Ideally, such activities would require teachers with a well balanced workload and sufficient time. However, results have indicated that teachers were responsible for quite a large number of Grade 10 learners grouped in different classes. Since teachers work within the allocated time frames, it would appear that workload made assessment difficult as required by the Department's assessment policy and thus forcing them to revert to traditional assessment in order to cope with working within time frames.

5.4.5. Conclusion pertaining to portfolio assessments.

Continuous assessment requires that there be a portfolio that contains samples of the learner's work such as themes, homework, papers, teacher's ratings on the work performed, descriptions of the learner's accomplishments, scores on tests, and other significant materials gathered by the learner during the term.

Portfolios provide evidence of a learner's knowledge, skills, attitudes and academic development that affords the teacher opportunities for formative and summative evaluation. It also offers a concrete way for learners to evaluate their own work. When learners are responsible for deciding what to include in a portfolio, they are forced to examine their work from new perspectives. Paris and

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Ayres (1994: 128), maintain that during the past eight years, teachers around the world have enthusiastically embraced the use of portfolios for learners' assessment portfolios have the potential to enhance both teaching and learning because they engage the teacher and his/her learners in reflective self-evaluation. Portfolios also accomplish an alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is seldom achieved with other assessment strategies (Boschee & Baron 1993: 122).

Results in this study have indicated that there were a considerable number of teachers (7, 2%) who did not take into consideration the importance of portfolio assessment. This may be attributed to the fact that there was lack of information to teachers on how portfolio assessment could be applied.

5.4.6. Conclusion pertaining to training of teachers in assessment strategies.

According to the National Department of Education (2001: 23), teachers are required to plan for continuous assessment. Teachers need to assess learners not only formally through marking their work, but also through assessing different kinds of written and oral work completed for examination or tests, as well as performance tasks. Learner progress is monitored in order to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Each teacher has to develop an own framework based on policy guidelines in order to assess achievement in a practical and functional ways. Assessing achievement in an integrated assessment programme will address outcomes and supportive tasks, and assessment criteria for corresponding targets of knowledge, reasoning, skills, products and values.

In order to design a well-balanced assessment task, a teacher has to be trained thoroughly in assessment strategies. In order to accommodate all learners with different limitations such as language barriers, cultural conflicts, physical and mental handicaps, a teacher should be able to design a range of authentic

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assessments for learners to express the outcomes of their learning. Every learner must have an equal opportunity to demonstrate what he or she has learned. This addresses the idea of empowering all learners.

Results in this regard indicated that more than half of teachers in this study agreed that they were not sufficiently trained in the assessment strategies. The key to making OBE successful is to systematically and consistently apply the assessment strategies when facilitating learning.

5.4.7. Conclusion pertaining to learners learning at their own pace.

The central point in the Outcomes-Based Education is that all learners can learn and achieve learning outcomes though not at the same pace. This also implies that assessment must be learner-paced rather than syllabus-paced. In this way learners are able to take responsibility for their own learning. This necessitates the construction of powerful learning environments to support learners to achieve and maximize these outcomes. According to this principle, the whole curriculum is geared towards what the learners must be able to demonstrate at the real end, that is, at the end of their schooling or university education before they go on to fulfil their real-life roles in the world. This principle provides a clear picture to the teacher of the type of learning the learner must demonstrated in executing a performance. Teachers must provide more than one opportunity to learners, if they are not successful, to demonstrate important learning. Rigid time frames and schedules must not restrict learning, although there must be limits to every expanded learning opportunity. The application of this principle also implies that teachers must change their teaching methods to ensure successful learning for all. Furthermore, all learners must have the opportunity to be exposed to a meaningful curriculum, quality learning experiences and multiple resources.

According to Clarke (1996:333), learner-pace assessment should also accommodate the following marginalized groups of learners:

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- Learners who understand the content but require more time to complete the required tasks than is provided in the assessment context.
- Learners who can complete tasks in class but whose performances are distorted by the stress of assessment situation.
- Learners whose first language is not the language of instruction (or assessment).
- Learners for whom the context of a task is unfamiliar (for reasons of personal history or gender or culture).
- Learners for whom the mode of assessment represents a form of cultural conflict.
- Learners who are capable of demonstrating understanding through physical activity or oral explanation but who are restricted to a written response.

In this regard, results in this study have clearly indicated that a considerable number of teachers (24,2%) do not agree to the fact that assessment should be learner-paced. This implies that most learners at the schools in Vhembe District are not given enough opportunity to develop in accordance with their individual uniqueness.

5.4.8. Conclusion pertaining to strategies for effective teaching and learning.

The successful implementation of continuous assessment depends on the application of effective teaching strategies. It must be noted that a strategy includes only the broad actions of teaching and learning and that refinement of these actions takes place at another level, namely, lesson planning. A strategy outlines the approach the teacher intends to take in order to achieve their learning outcomes. Teachers have to be very clear about their teaching

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objectives, the learning outcomes and the main content of the lesson, before deciding on a broad teaching strategy. Therefore, once the teacher has decided on a strategy, they will have to select methods, that is, the particular techniques they will use during each phase of his or her lesson. Teaching methods are the means by which the teacher attempts to attain the desired learning outcomes (Van der Horst & McDonald 2008: 121)

When using co-operative learning, for example, as a teaching strategy, learner participation will increase. Meaningful learning will also take place in classrooms. This will also provide teachers with possible means of coping with the question of how to teach large classes in the South African context. Large classes can be divided into small co-operative groups. This will improve learner understanding and skills in the learning area being taught. In this way learners also gain an appreciation for the different individuals and cultures found in South African classrooms.

It is encouraging, however, to note that results in this study have clearly indicated that the majority of Grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District (93,7%) agreed that assessment can help them to implement their teaching strategies effectively. It is crucial also that the minority of those teachers (6,3%) who held contrary view, be made aware of the importance of applying various teaching strategies while facilitating learning.

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the foregoing discussions, it is evident that Continuous Assessment in schools of Vhembe District is not being effectively implemented. This is because of the aforementioned shortcomings. The gaps between what the policy stipulates and what is actually happening in schools are obvious.

The analysis revealed that the majority of teachers see a greater need for the implementation of continuous assessment in their classrooms. To some extent, teachers need to be commended for their efforts despite the many constraints.

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Recommendations are classified as follows:

- Recommendations for corrective measures
- Recommendations for support systems
- Recommendations for further studies.

5.5.1. Recommendations for corrective measures

It is the intention of this study to reflect on the shortcomings and to propose possible ways of improving the situation by recommending the corrective measures.

5.5.1.1. Recommendations pertaining to assessment procedures.

The Department of Education views assessment as a process which starts when the teacher begins to prepare a lesson. When the teacher prepares a lesson he/she should be thinking about the procedures of assessment he/she will follow when introducing the learning task to the learners in order to stimulate their interest. It is also crucial for the teacher to select an appropriate assessment procedure so that learners may achieve required outcomes.

When teachers follow the correct assessment procedures when assessing their learners, it helps them to employ different techniques which allow them to develop a broader picture of the learner from a wider range of sources of evidence. A greater array of criteria is applied than those that fit the narrow context of examinations and tests. This approach to assessment would then not just include measurement of a learner's performance but also guidance, multiple chances to improve competence and performance, and a variety of techniques that would provide learners with a range of opportunities to develop and demonstrate what they know and are able to do. This fits the idea of assessing learners' progress with achievement of outcomes as required in an outcomes-based approach to education.

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When teachers ignore the application of assessment procedures, as it appears to have been happening with some grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District, what actually happens is that they resort to traditional assessment which employs tests and examinations only. Tests are often once-off chance for a child to show what he or she knows, and even when the teacher suspects the test result was artificially high or low, the result stands.

5.5.1.2. Recommendations pertaining to continuous assessment support system.

In order to be effective in this new way of assessing, teachers require continuous support from the Department of Education with reference to resources such as policy documents, enough learning materials for learners, sufficient classrooms and genuine assistance from supervisors addressing teachers' challenges. These supervisors should be individuals who are knowledgeable in as far as the policies for assessment are concerned. They should be creative, innovative and have imaginative abilities that suit OBE demands. They should be able to analyze research findings and implement them in order to offer appropriate assistance. Application in classrooms should be accompanied by appropriate corrective measures by curriculum advisors.

In order to have a common focus, support services should be developed and co-ordinated at the district level. Schools should group themselves and form learning area committees where they can share experiences and decide on the agreed programme of action. These learning area committees should be composed of grade 10 teachers of different learning areas, so that they can be able to identify strength and weaknesses in that particular learning area and attend to them with a shared vision. They should hold meetings to discuss support strategies for improvement of assessment procedures. It can be of great significance if these committees get their encouragement in the form of monitoring from the district level.

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5.5.1.3. Recommendations pertaining to teachers' experience.

The results in this study clearly indicated that majority of grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District have taught for more than ten years. This is evident enough to show that those teachers were trained in the old system and they are well vested with the traditional way of assessment. Designing assessment tasks, recording and reporting constitute a big challenge for them. It is crucial that these teachers be taken back to the institutions where they can get enough training on the authentic assessment procedures based on the new OBE approach. The workshops which they attend for two hours after school makes them to be half-cooked and they get more confused when they go back to the classroom.

Apart from lack of sufficient knowledge on the assessment procedures based on the new approach, they lack knowledge of the content of their learning areas and to a certain extent, they lack knowledge on the teaching strategies. It is very difficult to assess learners on the content for which the teacher has little knowledge. Teachers need to be given sufficient training on assessment procedures so that they can apply continuous assessment in their classrooms with greater confidence.

5.5.1.4. Recommendations pertaining to teachers' workload

Evidence in this study reveals that applying continuous assessment in large classes is a nightmare for teachers. It is also evident that the Department of Education should employ more teachers so that the teacher-learner ratio stipulated in the National Education policy should be adhered to and be sustainable.

However, in the meanwhile this situation can be overcome by forming teachers committees of different learning areas as indicated previously. Teachers can share information on the effective assessment strategies thereby improving assessment skills of the individual members of the committee.

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The challenge of large classes can be overcome by the provision of computers at schools and training of those teachers in the use of computers for assessment purposes. Technology offers assistance to teachers to function better and more effectively even in large classes. Computer-aided learning can automatically give proper remedial work to individual learners as well as giving them immediate results in each assessment activity. Computers can relieve teachers of heavy tasks of assessing large classes. The use of computers as an assessment aid can promote learner-paced and learner-centred approaches. The use of computer-aided learning will ensure reliability and validity to the assessment conducted by teachers and in this way maintenance of assessment standard is guaranteed.

5.5.1.5. Recommendations pertaining to portfolio assessments.

The learner-centred curriculum requires that learners should take learning as their own responsibility. Learners are encouraged to be independent and creative thinkers. Portfolio assessment promotes these virtues.

When using portfolios, the emphasis should not only be on the "best work" learners have produced. A wide variety of representative work samples will allow learners to see their progress from first to final drafts and see their positive as well as inappropriate attitudes and strategies. Teachers should develop a content guide for learners to help them select appropriate content for their portfolios.

Portfolios may represent a learner's cumulative efforts over a long period of time or focus on a specific task or assignment. A comprehensive portfolio will contain all learners' planning, research, and development documents, as well as the finished products. A limited portfolio will be selective, containing only documents directly related to a specific project, learning area or limited time period.

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Specific documents and records that would appropriately compromise a portfolio, should include:

- Tests, projects and essays
- Journal pages and entries
- Records of learner's self-appraisal
- Sketches and drawings
- Evidence of knowledge acquisition and skills development in specific content areas
- Indicators of leaner's growth
- Evidence of progress toward achievement of specific learning outcomes
- Observational records.

Findings in this study have revealed that some teachers do not agree to the use of portfolio assessment despite the recommendations stated in the National Assessment Policy document. It is crucial that such teachers, through the workshops organized by the District, be made aware that some portfolios may be used to monitor the day to day progress of learners and to encourage the learners to reflect on their learning. These portfolios focus on the process of the learners' development and are used for formative and diagnostic purposes. A deep understanding of the use of portfolios is essential for teachers so that they are able to choose the appropriate type when conducting portfolio assessment.

5.5.1.6. Recommendations pertaining to training of teachers on assessment strategies

Outcomes-Based Education implies that the learner can show understanding, apply a skill, and that he/she has developed a positive disposition. Assessment in OBE is ongoing, which means that a learner's progress is monitored continuously. The methods used do not interfere unduly with learning, in fact they enhance learning.

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For a teacher to apply assessment strategies effectively, he/she must have been well trained. Performance-based assessment, for example, is an assessment strategy that requires learners to perform a task rather than merely answering questions. Performance-based assessment integrates essential elements of outcomes-based assessment such as: what learners should be able to know, do and value, as well as assessment standards or the level and ways of demonstrating achievement.

In constructing performance assessment tasks, therefore, the teacher must be able to identify an idea for a task that involves learners' ability to use their knowledge and skills to produce their own work. A task description must be developed that clarifies the type of performance; for example individual or group achievement or both, description of learner activities, resources needed and the role of the teacher. This is followed by an outline for the task including learning outcomes with clearly defined targets.
Furthermore, requirements within a specific context must be indicated for learners to be clear about what is expected of them.

After the construction of any performance assessment, teachers are required to apply the following checklist:

- Are learners able to perform, create or produce something?
- Are reasoning skills needed and assessed?
- Does the task involve sustained work, often over a period of time?
- Does the task require learners to explain, justify or defend?
- Is performance directly observable?
- Is there more than one answer?

Evidence gathered in this study indicate clearly that more than half of grade 10 teachers at Vhembe District agree that they have not received sufficient training

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in assessment strategies. As indicated previously, a thorough training of teachers on assessment strategies is highly needed.

5.5.1.7. Recommendations pertaining to learners working at their own pace

The central point in OBE is that all learners can learn and succeed, but not on the same way. In this regard teachers should find ways of accommodating learners who cannot keep up with the pace of other learners. Teachers must provide more than one opportunity to learners, if they are not successful, to demonstrate important learning.

Schools and the Department of Education should make efforts to expose learners to computer-aided learning which will, amongst others, assist them in solving learning problems independently. In this way they will be encouraged to deal with difficult tasks without fear. Online tutorials will improve learners' competence levels and give them capacity to be active participants in their learning; to take charge of their learning experience and their personal development. This will encourage learners to be seriously involved in assessment tasks thereby contributing to their growth in academic performance while at the same time learning at their own pace. Online tutorials will also reduce the workload of teachers who always complain that learner-pace approach is time consuming and less effective.

5.5.1.8. Recommendations pertaining to strategies for effective teaching and learning.

In order for teachers to use those teaching methods which are appropriate for Outcomes-Based Education, they need to have a thorough knowledge of strategies for effective teaching and learning. If teaching is simply taken for granted it becomes mechanical and ineffective. It must, however, be placed under continual review if it is to improve. The importance of applying co-operative learning and problem-solving as teaching strategies cannot be over emphasized.

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If teachers use co-operative learning as a teaching strategy his/her role is not to deliver information or provide explanations, rather, his/her role is to plan, manage and monitor the learning environment so that learners can be effectively and productively engaged in learning.

The teacher can implement this approach by

- Forming the groups;
- Reminding learners of his/her expectations of them, particularly in relation to helping one another learn;
- Reminding learners of the learning tasks and the rewards for learning;
- Providing learning with resources if necessary;
- Providing assistance as required, monitoring the activities and making notes of matters that will need to be dealt with once the group sessions are over
- Assessing learning outcomes and helping them assess how well they collaborated with one another.

Teachers should note that special directions about the aims, objectives, activities and expected learning outcomes of a particular co-operative learning lesson should be given to learners in writing as hand-outs.

Included in these directions would be information about

- The objectives and the anticipated learning outcomes of the lesson;
- What learners are expected to do while working in learning teams;
- Time frames for completion of particular work or activities and
- Format for presentation of reports.

It should be noted, however, that teaching is not a simple task in which everything goes according to the teacher's plans. The teacher may find that there are many unexpected issues that must be attended to when using co-

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operative learning as a teaching; and he/she will have to keep experimenting to find an approach that suits both the teacher and the learners.

Furthermore, it is essential to realize that in the African context co-operative learning is particularly useful since it places emphasis on the value of the group. This is in line with the African global view that the group is more than the individuals making up the group, for a person's global view is defined by his/her relationship to the community or group.

5.5.2. Recommendation of a Model: Continuous Assessment Model

The most frequently asked questions with reference to the new learner-centred approach are: How does assessment fit into educational practice? And How can teachers be empowered to apply assessment with confidence in their classes? In an attempt to answer these questions, an assessment model is hereby recommended.

The most frequently asked questions with reference to the new learner-centred approach.

(a) School-Based workshop

This study has clearly revealed that more than half of the respondents 51,7% (refer to item 32) agree that they were not sufficiently trained on assessment strategies. This means that such teachers cannot apply assessment strategies with confidence in their classrooms.

Having noted that there is a greater need for knowledge concerning assessment strategies amongst teachers, it is highly crucial that an assessment model be formulated. This model entails empowerment of teachers on assessment procedures and the applications thereof. At the centre of this process there are learning areas. Every school should constitute a facilitating team consisting of teachers who teach the same learning area, for example, Life Sciences. This means that all teachers who teach life sciences from grade 8 to grade 12 come together and elect a team of not more than five teachers who will facilitate these

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hands-on workshops at their school. These workshops can be conducted during their spare times at that school having been organized by this facilitating team (FT). Each learning area should have its own facilitating team. From these facilitating teams one teacher should be selected so that a major team consisting of various teachers of different learning areas is formed. In this team there must be two learner representatives from the Learner Representative Council (LRC) and one member from the School Management Team (SMT).

It is at the major team's meetings where different stakeholders who represent their constituencies will be able to raise their challenges concerning continuous assessment or assessment in general without fear. Through the facilitating teams, new information concerning assessment procedures, techniques and strategies will be able to filter to all teachers at school.

This will assist teachers to share the same vision of the school as well as promoting uniformity in the application of continuous assessment in a learner-centred approach. This will save the Department of Education a lot of money and time when teachers no longer travel long distances to the places where workshops are held.

(b). Peer Assessment

Entailed in this model are learners who should be encouraged to assess one another in different learning areas. This could be done during their group discussions or when they conduct co-operative learning since continuous assessment is integral in every learning activity. Self-assessment amongst learners triggers their innate curiosity about the world and how things work.

When learners apply self-assessment during learning period, they learn to hypothesize, testing their theories, and ultimately drawing conclusions from their findings. This builds their self-esteem because learners express themselves freely amongst themselves than in the presence of the teacher. In this way, they can become more creative and develop greater measure of independent and

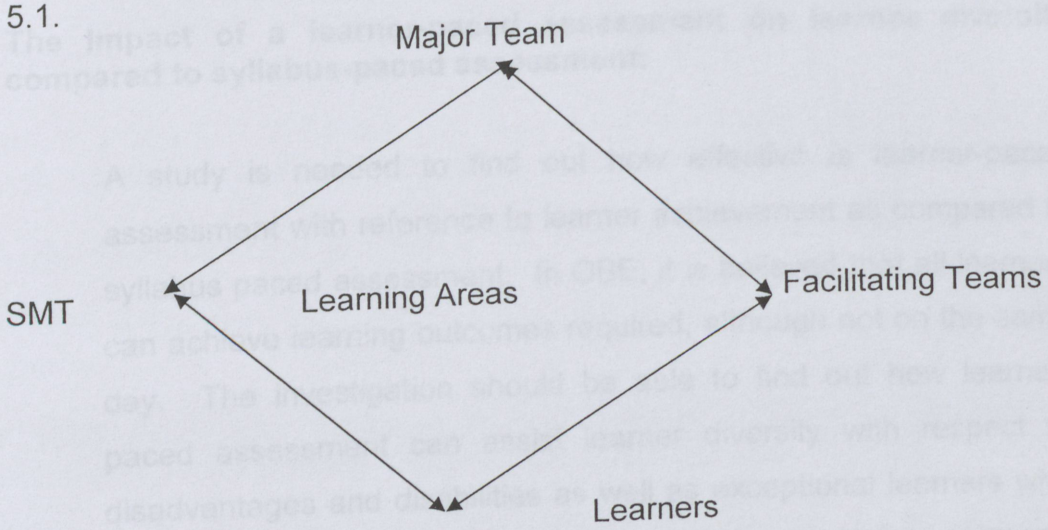
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critical thinking. The teacher can come in only to give guidance on the manner in which self-assessment should be conducted.

Diagrammatically the above explained model will look like this:

Figure 5.1.



Lastly, it is hoped that the implementation of the suggested model can have far-reaching impact on the successful application of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning. When teachers start to value learners' self-assessment, their focus will move from something that is done at the end of a lesson to something that occurs throughout the learning process.

5.5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

After making the above recommendations, it is important to mention that all research is intended to suggest further research because no research is complete in itself. In this regard, therefore, topics for further research suggested by this study include the following:

(a) **The impact of continuous assessment on the quality of teaching and learning in grade ten classrooms**: There is a need to establish whether there is a difference in the quality of teaching and learning through the use of continuous assessment as compared to the use of traditional assessment in grade ten which is the entry point to FET band. The study

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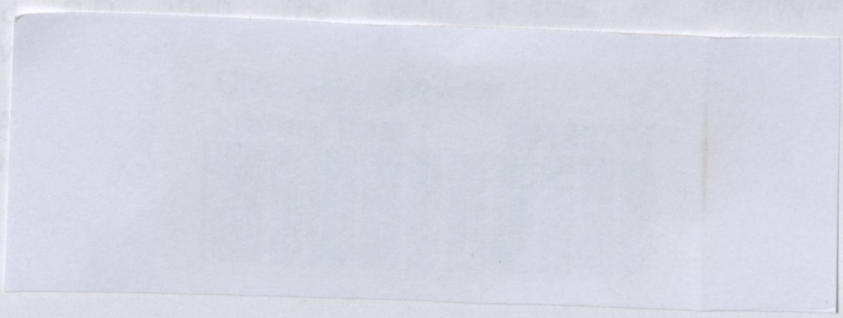
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should investigate as to whether continuous assessment provide indications of learner achievement in the most effective and efficient manner, and ensure that learners integrate and apply knowledge and skills.

(b) The Impact of a learner-paced assessment on learner diversity compared to syllabus-paced assessment:

A study is needed to find out how effective is learner-paced assessment with reference to learner achievement as compared to syllabus paced assessment. In OBE, it is believed that all learners can achieve learning outcomes required, although not on the same day. The investigation should be able to find out how learner-paced assessment can assist learner diversity with respect to disadvantages and disabilities as well as exceptional learners who are gifted and talented as compared to syllabus paced assessment.

If the recommendations resulting from the findings in this research can be utilized with the aim of improving education, hopefully effective teaching and learning will take place in an authentic context, not only in Vhembe District, but throughout the country.



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APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION

P.O. Box 568
Louis Trichardt
0920

19 January 2009

The District Senior Manager
Department of Education
Vhembe District
Thohoyandou

Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT.

1. The above matter has reference.
2. Kindly receive my request to conduct research at your District for the study I am engaged in, which is: Doctorate in curriculum studies, at university of venda.
3. The topic I am researching on is: The study of continuous assessment for effective teaching and learning in learner-centred curriculum.
4. The target group for my study is grade ten teachers.
5. I wish to make it clear that research will not temper with the teaching and learning process at the schools because teachers will be given questionnaires which they will answer during their spare times.
6. Hoping that my request will be considered favourably and urgently.

Kind Regards

E.T.H. RAMAKHANYA

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27January 2009

Ramakhanya ETH

P.O. Box 568

Louis Tricardt

0920

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT OUR SCHOOLS AND CIRCUITS

1. Your minute dated 19 January 2009 has reference.
2. Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct this research.
3. You are advised to produce this letter whenever you visit our schools and circuits.
4. We wish you success in our studies.

DISTRICT SENIOR MANAGER: VHEMBE DISTRICT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER FOR TEACHERS

P.O. Box 568
Louis Trichardt
0920
29 January 2009

Dear Teacher

It is a great pleasure for me to inform you that you have been selected as one of Grade 10 teachers in Vhembe District to kindly complete the questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about experiences you encountered in the implementation of Continuous Assessment in the classroom situation. This activity should never be associated with evaluation of teachers.

The research is part of Doctorate in the philosophy of curriculum studies at the University of Venda for Science and Technology. It is hoped that the study will help teachers, learners and the education system in the development of appropriate assessment for effective teaching and learning.

In order to reach insightful conclusion your contribution is highly valuable. Confidentiality will be adhered to. Your name is not required and should never be recorded by you or the researcher. Kindly feel free to honestly share your experiences, opinions and knowledge by responding to each item.

The questionnaire consists of seven (7) biographical questions and fifty (50) content validity questions. For better results, it is recommended that you complete the questionnaire without assistance from other teachers or publications.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research work. You are also assured that results will be made available to you through the University Library.

Yours Faithfully

E.T.H. RAMAKHANYA

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APPENDIX D

EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT SURVEY (ETAS)

PART A Biographical Information

Complete each of the items below by supplying an appropriate response in the space provided:

1. Gender
2. Your age in years
3. Your teaching experience in years
4. The type of your school (government or private)
5. The geographical area of your school (urban or rural)
6. The average number of learners in one class

PART B: Content validity

Complete each of the items below by deciding whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement by putting a cross in the appropriate space.

Key = 1 Strongly Agree 2 Agree 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree

7. It is important to evaluate learners' performance after teaching them.

   1 2 3 4

8. Learners should be observed in order to find out the causes of their behaviour or lack of understanding.

   1 2 3 4

9. A teacher asks questions regularly while facilitating learning.

   1 2 3 4

10. Learners should be encouraged to contribute their ideas during lesson presentation.

    1 2 3 4

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11. Learners should be allowed to discover and reflect on realistic experiences.

1	2	3	4

12. Learners should be helped to understand how their learning is relevant to their lives.

1	2	3	3

13. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners bring to the classroom should be taken into account.

1	2	3	3

14. Group discussions should be allowed amongst learners as a way of facilitating learning.

1	2	3	4

15. It is important to allow learners to be creative and solve learning problems on their own without telling them how.

1	2	3	4

16. Learners should be encouraged to use interpersonal skills during co-operative learning.

1	2	3	4

17. When developing teaching strategies, it is essential to take into account the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of learners.

1	2	3	4

18. While facilitating learning, it is important to emphasize the development of understanding of concepts and principles.

1	2	3	4

19. During the lesson, learners should be encouraged to work together and share ideas openly.

1	2	3	4

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20. The teacher should explain to the learners what he/she wants them to learn, when using problem solving as a teaching strategy.

1 2 3 4

21. It is important for a teacher to apply action research in the facilitation of learning

1 2 3 4

22. Diagnostic assessment helps teachers to find out the strengths and weaknesses of their learners.

1 2 3 4

23. When preparing a lesson, it is necessary to include specifications of assessment strategies to be applied.

1 2 3 4

24. When preparing a lesson it is necessary to identify the key questions in advance.

1 2 3 4

25. At the beginning of a lesson it is appropriate to ask learners questions, to find out how much they know.

1 2 3 4

26. Feedback can motivate learners to improve their performance.

1 2 3 4

27. It is easy and motivating to implement assessment in a large class.

1 2 3 4

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28. Assessment helps the teacher to bring out what he/she wants to know about the learner.

1 2 3 4

29. Assessment enhances the learning activities in the classroom.

1 2 3 4

30. Assessment is well applied when teachers have sufficient depth of subject expertise.

1 2 3 4

31. Assessment should be aligned to a clearly defined purpose.

1 2 3 4

32. In our classrooms assessment is well applied because teachers are sufficiently trained in those assessment strategies.

1 2 3 4

33. Without valid and reliable procedures a teacher can still know whether learners have achieved the learning outcomes that were the focus of the unit.

1 2 3 4

34. Practical implications for assessment are well understood by teachers.

1 2 3 4

35. It is important for a teacher to use variety of assessment methods to assess learners while facilitating learning

1 2 3 4

36. It is vital for a teacher to make provision for learners to work at own pace while facilitating learning

1 2 3 4

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37. It is essential to involve learners in self-assessment

1 2 3 4

38. Learners should be involved in peer assessment as an effective learning strategy.

1 2 3 4

39. Assessment helps the teacher to see learners and perceive what they can do in the hope of understanding how they learn and assist their learning.

1 2 3 4

40. It is essential for teachers to use appropriate assessment strategies in order to attain the assessment aims.

1 2 3 4

41. Assessment can serve to support teaching and learning, provide information about learners and drive curriculum and teaching.

1 2 3 4

42. Assessment informs teachers about their teaching and how to adopt their day-to-day approaches to work and teaching strategies.

1 2 3 4

43. Assessment, more broadly, can be thought of in terms of three stages, namely, gathering of information, recording the results and then giving feedback.

1 2 3 4

44. Assessment must determine whether outcomes have been achieved.

1 2 3 4

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45. Assessment is an integrated part of teaching and learning.

1 2 3 4

46. A learning outcome describes what learners should know and be able to do at the end of a grade.

1 2 3 4

47. An assessment should be purposeful in nature.

1 2 3 4

48. In order to unearth the full potential of learners' diverse assessment strategies should be employed.

1 2 3 4

49. Portfolio assessment helps to develop learners in self-reflection, critical thinking and responsibility for learning.

1 2 3 4

50. Since the key to effective teaching is planning, the teacher should prepare well to apply the best instructional strategies for the intended learning.

1 2 3 4

51. Effective teaching involves interactive communication patterns that are skilfully directed.

1 2 3 4

52. Learners can learn effectively if they can refine some specific skills such as the ability to identify their own learning needs.

1 2 3 4

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53. Learning is about helping learners to construct their own meaning, not necessarily about getting the right answer.

1	2	3	4

54. Learning is influenced by the total environment so teachers need to attend to physical, social and psychological aspects of the setting in which learning is supposed to take place.

1	2	3	4

55. For effective teaching, learning activities should be planned in such a manner that they provoke the learner's curiosity.

1	2	3	4

56. Discussions are better than lectures as a way of helping learners develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

1	2	3	4

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