

PREAMBLE

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The dawn of a democratic government in 1994 marked a great turning point in the history of South Africa. Change in all spheres of life was expected, and education was no exception. There were two fundamental reasons, which arguably, were cited as both critical and central to the call for a change in the South African education system.

The apartheid education system was racially orientated and irrelevant to the modern global economic challenges. Many people, including academics and politicians, argued that for decades the South African education system had failed to produce a competent labour force which was not only responsive to the economic needs of this country, but also failed to contribute substantively to its growth. In addition, the legacy of apartheid left South Africa with an education system that was characterised by fragmentation, inequity in provision of funds and physical resources, questionable legitimacy, lack of a culture of teaching and learning in many schools, and a resistance to changing the way things were done in the past (Department of Education, 1997). In light of these factors it was felt that there was a need for educational transformation that would unite all racial groupings. According to the Department of Education (2003), the kind of education envisaged should be able to produce learners who would be equipped with knowledge and skills which would enable them to actively participate in the economic development of a new democratic society.

Many also argued that the new democratic South African society needed an education system which would uphold and promote the values of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). In support of this, theorists and educational reformers like Martin (1992), Darling-Hammond (1996), and Sizer (1984) maintained that preparations for a democratic citizenship required more than literacy skills or knowledge about government, but required providing learners from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to learn to live and work together in this new society and the world at

large. In 1997, a new curriculum which was referred to as Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was introduced in all South African primary schools. Following this, the Department of Education made an announcement that Curriculum 2005(C2005) would be implemented as an interim syllabus and that it would remain in place until 2008 when the new curriculum for Further Education and Training (FET) would be fully implemented. The new Constitution of South Africa had provided the foundation for the development of this new curriculum, as its objectives included, inter alia, the following:

- to improve the quality of life of all the citizens of South Africa and free the potential of each person; and
- to heal the division of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.

However, shortly after its implementation, the new curriculum was met with criticism from different sectors of South African society. Many educators criticised it for the lack of practical connections with the reality of how things were in South African classrooms. In support of this, Jansen & Christie (1999) maintained that its hasty implementation became problematic as, inter alia, learner support materials were variable in quality, and often unavailable. Following these criticisms, the Chisholm Committee was appointed by the Minister of Education (DoE 2001). The conclusion of the three months study was that the complexity of the structure and design of the curriculum had compromised the implementation process of C2005 (Chisholm, 2000). In addition, Chisholm (2000) argued that poor departmental support for teachers, weak support of teachers training, the lack of enough learning support materials and general lack of resources had negatively affected the implementation of C2005.

In response to the findings of the Chisholm Committee, the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, decided to establish a Ministerial Review Committee. Its fundamental mandate was to refine the C2005 policy documents. According to the Department of Education (2001:21-22) the main findings that had to be addressed included the following:

- there was wide support for the curriculum changes envisaged (especially its underlying principles), but the levels of understanding of the policy and its implications were highly varied.
- there were basic flaws in the structure and design of the policy. In particular, the language was often complex and confusing (including the use of unnecessary jargon). Notions of sequence, concept development, content and progression were poorly developed, and the scope of the outcomes and learning areas resulted in crowding of the curriculum.
- follow-up support for teachers and schools was too little.
- training programmes for teachers, in concept, duration and quality, were often inadequate, especially early in the implementation process.

In an attempt to address the above listed findings, a Ministerial Project Committee was established and its main tasks included to lead, plan and to implement the refinement of the Curriculum 2005 policy documents (DoE 2001). Guided by the findings and the recommendations of the Review Committee, a National Curriculum Statement was published at the end of July 2001.

The introduction of the National Curriculum Statement and its subsequent implementation was hailed as a remarkable achievement considering the racially-orientated education system that majority of the South Africans were subjected to for many decades. Jansen & Christie (1999) confirm that the new curriculum received overwhelming support and was regarded as the most ambitious curriculum policy ever in the history of this country. The National Qualification Framework (NQF) provided a structure for this new curriculum, and through this, many changes in the South African education system were introduced. This included the introduction of levels, bands and types of qualifications and certificates envisaged in the Further Education and Training (FET) band. All these changes were, aimed at providing learners with learning opportunities which would make them competent, both in the social and economic development of the country.

2. STATEMENT PROBLEM

The South African post-apartheid educational reform initiatives by the Department of Education which culminated in the introduction of the National Curriculum Statement placed a range of challenges and demands on school management team (Botha, 2004). This new curriculum, with its outcomes-based approach, introduced new concepts, teaching and learning methods (styles) to the education system. This implied that the educator, as opposed to being a repository of all knowledge and wisdom, was required to facilitate and mediate the educational experiences of the learners. In practice, this implied that learners were required to play an active role in teaching and learning activities, unlike during the apartheid education where they were regarded as the passive recipient of knowledge (Jacobs et al., 2004). This, by implication, called for a new assessment policy to underpin and complement the new classroom dynamics. In the light of this, the Department of Education (2001) claimed that a paradigm shift was needed in assessment practice in education and training in South Africa, as a logical and essential part of the transformation envisaged in new policies.

In response to this call, a new assessment policy in the form of Continuous Assessment (CASS) was introduced. This curriculum initiative was hailed as a positive development as it also marked a shift from the traditional model of assessment which, according to Kramer (1999), was examination-orientated (summative), to the CASS which is formative in nature. The critical characteristic of this shift was to move away from an old assessment system which was judgmental to the new approach which was developmental (DoE, 2001). It is for this reason that the Department of Education (1997) claimed that assessment in NCS requires the use of tools that appropriately assess learners' achievement and encourage lifelong learning skills. Continuous Assessment was considered an appropriate model to assess learning outcomes (LOs) throughout the system and enable improvements in learning and teaching.

Following the introduction of CASS in 2001, school management teams (SMTs) under the leadership of principals have a critical role to play in its implementation. The school management teams effectively, are the ones who should play a leading role in terms of generating an in-depth understanding of how the implementation process should unfold. In view of this, it can be argued, that it was imperative that school managers should have been included in the initial process of decision-making with regard to the development of this assessment policy. Their inclusion would not only have made them ready for the implementation process, but also helped them to develop a deep conceptual knowledge of the principles underpinning its development and implementation. It is in this regard that Swanepoel (2008) argues that the necessity of involving principals and members of the SMT not only as implementers but also as shared decision-makers during the initiating, planning and management phases can no longer be emphasized. According to Lieberman (1998) change at school level cannot be successfully implemented without the support and active participation of members of the SMT. The more principals and members of the SMT participate in responsible and initiating roles in the curriculum, the more positive they feel about the change, and the more willing they would be to seriously engage in future change (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004).

In the South African context, many principals and members of the SMT were not involved in the debate which led to development of the National Curriculum Statement and Continuous Assessment. Complicating the situation further is the fact that it is alleged that some members of the SMT and educators did not receive training prior to the implementation of Continuous Assessment. What would make the situation more catastrophic, according to Swanepoel (2008), is that many principals and other members of the SMT had advanced to their current administrative posts with little or no management training. As a result, this situation has the potential to compromise the successful implementation of CASS, because to embrace transformation when one is not properly qualified or trained is quite demanding (Swanepoel, 2008). In some schools this curriculum change is disastrous, as it is driven by political imperatives, which have little to do with the realities of school activities. It is therefore debatable if an educational reform of this nature could successfully be implemented (Jansen, 1999). It is against this

background that I feel there is a need to investigate the experiences of secondary school management teams in the implementation of CASS.

3. RATIONALE

As outlined in the preceding section, the introduction of CASS and its implementation not only had an impact on the classroom practice, but also on how schools were managed. In 2000, The Department of Education (2000a) maintained that the new education dispensation required school managers to work in a democratic and participatory way with all the stakeholders affected by this change in order to build sound relationships and ensure efficient and effective delivery of this assessment policy. This, effectively, implies that the new education system requires that the functions of management be executed in a collaborative effort. This means that in the school context, it is the responsibility of all the role players, that is, SMT under the leadership of the principal, educators and parents, collectively, to ensure that this assessment policy is successfully implemented. However, for the purpose of this study, the central focus will be on investigating the experiences of the secondary school management teams in the implementation of Continuous Assessment.

In the National Curriculum Statement assessment is considered as an integral part of teaching and learning. This effectively means that assessment should form part of every lesson and that its ultimate purpose should be the attainment of the learning outcomes (LOs) by the learners. The emphasis here is not only on the cognitive development of the learners, but also on the development of their attitudes, values and knowledge. This paradigm shift in assessment has placed an enormous challenge on members of the school management teams since part of their managerial functioning the implementation of CASS is to monitor and provide classroom support to the educators. Jacobs et al. (2004) maintains that the new assessment policy requires members of the SMT in schools to play an active role in evaluating and monitoring educators' progress towards the achievement of specific skills and knowledge by the learners. This calls for the members of the SMT to demonstrate a sound conceptual knowledge of the principles underpinning

this new assessment policy. According to Early and Weidling (2004) the effective implementation of curriculum change, for instance, depends on the principal's ability to coordinate, lead and guide the implementation of ways of teaching, learning and assessment, all of which are essentially school management tasks. In this regard Ndou (2008) contends that if school management teams do not recognize and accept the need for a particular curriculum innovation they will become resistant to it and this could place the success of the curriculum in jeopardy. Failure on the part of the SMT to effectively monitor and support educators on the basis of lack of skills and knowledge can compromise the successful implementation of CASS.

My interest in this study was motivated by my personal experience as an educator. After I was promoted to the position of deputy principal, part of my daily managerial responsibility has been to monitor, evaluate and provide practical guidance on how educators should carry out their daily classroom practice. I have since learnt that members of secondary school management teams have a critical role to play in the implementation of Continuous Assessment. However, my participation in some of the principals' meetings where curriculum related issues like assessment are discussed made me realise that many members of the secondary school management team do not have adequate knowledge about how this new assessment policy should be implemented.

4. AIMS OF STUDY

The underlying aim of the curriculum reform in the South African education system is to produce learners who would be able to think critically and contribute to the upholding of democratic values. The Department of Education (2001) maintained that the curriculum change is aimed at producing more qualified South Africans by equipping them with skills for real life. In current practices of assessment, the term authentic has been widely used to connote assessment that is context-based and composed of tasks that can be applied in real world applications (Stefanakis, 1998; Stuart, 2003). However, an achievement of this feat depends on the in-depth knowledge and understanding of the

role that secondary school management teams should play in the implementation of Continuous Assessment. The overarching question is:

- What are the experiences of secondary school management teams in the implementation of Continuous Assessment?

The sub-questions that will be explored in relation to the main question are:

- What is the understanding of Continuous Assessment by secondary school management teams?
- What is the role of the SMT in the implementation of Continuous Assessment?
- What kind of support does the Department of Education provide in creating a better understanding for the implementation of Continuous Assessment?
- What successful experiences have there been of secondary school management teams in the implementation of Continuous Assessment?
- What challenges are secondary school management teams experiencing with regard to the implementation of CASS?
- What recommendations would secondary school management teams offer for the successful implementation of Continuous Assessment?

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The introduction of Continuous Assessment as part of the South African education transformation placed a mammoth challenge on the abilities of the school management teams to effectively lead change. The school management teams, by virtue of their positions were expected not only to manage their schools, but also to mobilise educators and guide them towards the implementation of this change. This was a daunting task since they (members of the SMT) were expected to implement an educational policy which they were not a part of in terms of its formulation and development. However, since the implementation of this assessment policy in 2001, very little research has been conducted on how CASS has impacted on the professional responsibilities of the SMT.

Given this context, I believe that the experiences of SMT's in the Limpopo Province on the role that they play in implementing CASS would add valuable knowledge to the existing body of literature on curriculum change in general and CASS in particular.

In addition, the Limpopo Department of Education would benefit immensely from the findings and recommendations of this study as it seeks to make a meaningful contribution both in theory and practice to the existing knowledge on assessment. By relating the experiences of secondary school SMT's, this study could offer the Department of Education an understanding of some of the challenges that secondary school SMTs are experiencing in the implementation of CASS. Informed by these findings, it may be possible for the Limpopo Department of Education to develop strategies which could assist secondary school SMTs in their effort to successfully implement Continuous Assessment.

Furthermore, I hope that the findings and recommendations of this study would benefit school management teams from other provinces. The challenges and also the successful experiences of the secondary school management teams of the Malamulele area, (where the study would be conducted, could serve as a valuable lesson to secondary school management teams in other districts and provinces with regard to the implementation of CASS.

6. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

South Africa is constituted of nine provinces, namely: Gauteng, Free State, North West, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. Vhembe is one of the districts within the Limpopo Province (See Figure 1). It is located in the eastern side of Thohoyandou and it falls under the Thulamela Municipality. The Vhembe District is comprised of twenty-seven circuits which include Malamulele, Thohoyandou, Vumbedzi etc. Malamulele is comprised of four circuits, namely Malmulele East, North East, Central and West.

This study focuses on secondary schools under Malamulele East Circuit. The circuit stretches from Nyavani Village along the R525 Punda Maria road (which leads to the Kruger National Park) to Mtititi Village in the South-eastern part of Malamulele Township. The circuit has eleven secondary schools which are located in villages or rural areas; poor socio-economic areas where many households depend on government grants to make ends meet. As a result, the schools fall under quintile two and are regarded as non fee-paying schools. Most of these schools are characterised by over-crowding and a lack of educational resources like libraries, laboratories and school furniture. In addition, structures like School Governing Bodies (SGB) do not have the required knowledge and skills needed to raise extra funds to supplement the annual funds which they receive from the Limpopo Department of Education.

7. CONCLUSION

This preamble has provided a broad overview of the South African education system during the apartheid era. The objective was to highlight some of the critical deficiencies of the summative evaluation practice which, in my view, contributed significantly to the call for the curriculum change which culminated in the introduction of Continuous Assessment. It has also indicated how the introduction of this assessment policy had an impact on the school management teams. Finally, this preamble outlined the purpose of this study, which is to investigate the experiences of secondary school management teams in the implementation of CASS.