

CHAPTER FIVE

The Case of Dinzi: In Search of New Knowledge and Resources

*I am not conversant about the basics.
I cannot really get deep into it?
I don't have deep knowledge about it as such¹*

In this chapter I describe Dinzi's understandings and beliefs about the new assessment policy as well as her assessment practice in her classroom. I used the methodological plan described in the previous chapter to proceed into the school to collect data from this teacher. I drew on this data to construct the comprehensive case study report of Dinzi. The chapter will be both descriptive and analytical in nature. I first provide a detailed descriptive profile of Dinzi, the school where she teaches, and of the observed Grade 8 Natural Science class, followed by a discussion of her understanding of assessment policy. This is followed by a discussion of her observed assessment practice. I shall provide the analytical response to the reasons informing her assessment practice in Chapter Eight of this dissertation. In developing the case report of Dinzi, I draw on evidence from the various data points elaborated and discussed in Chapter Four.

The following summarised framework, coupled with the respective research instruments adducted as evidence, guided me in developing the case study report on Teacher Dinzi:

¹ Quotation from this teacher during an interview (July 2002)

- Profile of Teacher Dinzi
- Profile of school inhabited by Dinzi
- Profile of observed class – Grade 8 Natural Science class
- Dinzi’s understandings and beliefs with regard to the assessment policy using evidence from the following primary data points:
 - Questionnaire (A1)
 - Free writing schedule (A2)
 - Interviews prior to classroom observations (A3)
- Dinzi’s practice of assessment with evidence emanating from the following primary data sources:
 - Questionnaire (A1)
 - Interviews prior to classroom observations (A3)
 - Classroom observations – the fundamental and most critical data source (A4)
 - Teacher Documents (A5)
 - Teacher records (A6)
 - Student² Notebooks (A7)
 - Student Records (A8)
 - June and November examinations (A9)
 - Interviews after observations (A10)

Profile of Teacher Dinzi

I built the profile of Dinzi based on information obtained during formal interviews, informal conversations, as well as from the bio data questionnaire, which the teacher completed. This profile is essential to the focus of this study because personal and professional traits are inextricably linked to what people say and do. In other words it would provide a personal context to compliment and enrich the insights from the study.

Dinzi is a level one educator³, and is forty years old. Her first language is Xhosa while English is her second language. Her knowledge of Afrikaans is very limited. Her

² In the South African context the term ‘learner’ is used to refer to students and pupils. I will use the terms ‘student/s’ and ‘learners’ interchangeably in this study for practical reasons.

qualifications indicate that she is formally qualified as a teacher, that is she obtained a Junior Secondary Teacher's Diploma Certificate specialising in Science and Mathematics from the Cicira Training College of the then Transkei⁴ in 1977. This Certificate qualifies her to teach Natural Science, Biology and Mathematics. She also has a Bachelor of Arts Degree with Psychology and Sociology majors obtained from the University of Fort Hare in 1985. She is currently in her second year of study towards a Further Certificate in Outcomes Based Education (OBE)⁵ offered by a tertiary institution in the province and funded by the provincial Department of Education. Dinzi and two other teachers from her school had been nominated by the school principal to study towards this Further Certificate in OBE (personal communication with the head of department of science in the school).

Her teaching experience spans fifteen years, all in this same school called Delamani High School⁶. She has taught mathematics to Grades 8 and 9 for fourteen years. She has never taught Biology during her teaching career, and this is her first year of teaching Grade 8 Natural Science, of which she teaches one of the four classes. She reported that she taught this particular class, that is Grade 8 Natural Science, the focus of this study, in the first term, but a temporary teacher taught this class in the second term. Temporary teachers seemed to have been employed by the provincial Department of Education to relieve the heavy workload of staff at this school. However in the third term the provincial Department of Education did not renew the contracts of the temporary teachers. This resulted in the reorganisation of the school timetable, and Dinzi resumed teaching this Grade 8 Natural Science class in the third term. She also teaches mathematics to three Grade 9 classes and English to two classes, one Grade 10 class and one Grade 9 class. She reported that she was not qualified to teach English but was forced to because the school was short staffed (personal communication). She is the class teacher of Grade 10 A. Of the 40 period-week, Dinzi teaches 30 periods, which means that she has 10 non-teaching periods per

³ In terms of the Employment of Educators Act of 1995 school-based educators are categorised in one of five levels, ranging from level 1 to level 5. Level 1 is the starting category, level 2 being Heads of Department, Level 3 Deputy Principals, and levels 4 or 5 occupied by Principals depending on the student numbers.

⁴ Transkei was one of the Homelands for Blacks created by the apartheid government of South Africa.

⁵ The approach to education and training underpinning education transformation chosen by the post-apartheid government of South Africa

⁶ Not real name but pseudonym for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality

week. All her lessons are conducted in a classroom allocated to her, and students move to her classroom for lessons.

With regard to Curriculum 2005⁷ and OBE she “received training in mathematics, general OBE and for Grade 9 only but not for Grade 8, Natural Science and assessment” (personal communication).

She is a member of South African Democratic Teachers Union. Her extra-curricular duties involve memberships of the Sports Committee, School Development Team, Library Committee, School Governing Body, School Uniform Committee and School Assessment Team.

Profile of Delamani High School

Delamani High School is situated approximately fifteen kilometres from the city centre. It is regarded as a ‘township’⁸ school that had been established twenty seven years ago. It is supported by one of the twelve districts⁹.

The management team of the school includes the principal who is male, two deputy principals, one female and one male, and five heads of department for the different learning areas/subjects. There is a head of department for science who is female. Both the principal and the science head of department have been in the school for fifteen years. There are thirty-two members of staff whose racial composition is mainly homogenous in terms of race, that is, all are Black African but one exception, one Indian male who is a head of department. There are more female teachers than there are males. Most of the teachers in the school are studying OBE courses with UNISA¹⁰ sponsored by the provincial department of education (personal communication with the science head of department, July 2002). The science head of department had been

⁷ The new flagship curriculum introduced in 1997 by the post-apartheid government of South African

⁸ The apartheid government of South Africa had created specific and separate areas for the different groups of people based on race. Africans, Indians and Coloureds were each housed in group areas known as ‘townships’.

⁹ In South Africa the system of governance in education consists of 4 or 5 levels, namely, starting from the top: national (one) – provincial (nine) – regional (not in all provinces and where it is present the numbers vary) - districts (numbers vary in the different provinces) – schools (numbers vary in each province)

¹⁰ University of South Africa

away from the school for about three weeks, the last week at the end of the second term and the first week of the third term, attending a Teacher Enhancement Programme in the USA sponsored by a university in the province (ibid). She reported that she “did not know what happened while she was away ...my classes were left unattended” (ibid).

The non-teaching support staff includes two clerks, one caretaker, one gardener, one cleaner and one night watchman. The school has a School Governing Body that “is trying hard but more effort is needed” (personal communication with the teacher). Most parents belong to the working classes and are uneducated therefore their input in terms of decision-making at the school is minimal (ibid).

There are one thousand and seventy three (1073) students in this school, ranging from Grade 8 to Grade 12. This means that there are two educational systems operating at this school, one, the new the General Education and Training Band¹¹ made of Grade 8 and 9 students, and the old Senior Secondary Phase made of Grades 10 to 12 students. All the students are Black African¹². Many of the students come from the surrounding informal settlement characterised by socio-economic deprivation. Many live alone because their parents/mothers/fathers live and/or work in the rural or farm areas and these students attend this school especially because it accommodates students who speak Venda¹³. This is the only school in the township that accept Venda speaking students because of anti-discriminatory practice of the school (personal communication with the principal and teacher). The first language of most students in this school is Venda, followed by Tsonga, and Northern Sotho. Their language proficiency in English is very limited and in Afrikaans it is negligible. Each student is expected to pay one hundred rand (R100) per year towards school fees. However,

¹¹ The new South African System of Education since 1994 is made up of three bands, namely, General Education and Training (GET) consisting of Grades 1 to 9 that is compulsory; the Further Education and Training Band (FET) consisting of Grades 10 to 12 offered in schools and in technical colleges, and the Higher Education Band (HET) consisting of post Grade 12 students in Universities and Technikons. At the time of writing the new FET Curriculum is scheduled to be implemented in Grade 10 classes in 2006, in Grade 11 classes in 2007 and in Grade 12 classes in 2008. This means currently Grades 10 to 12 follow the old curriculum, known as NATED 550 for short.

¹² In terms of the post apartheid classification system, people are either Black or White; Blacks include Africans, Indians and Coloureds.

¹³ Venda is one of the African languages spoken in South Africa

many are exempted from payment because of poverty. There is a School Representative Council made up of representatives from each class.

The road leading to the school is tarred. The building is single storey, made of brick and tile, consists of six blocks with twenty five classrooms, one small, disorganised, and sparsely resourced laboratory that “needs to be made attractive” (personal communication with Dinzi), a small, poorly-resourced library, a small hall that is partitioned to serve as classrooms, one of which houses the home economics class, and a woodwork centre. When needs arise for the use of the hall, for example, to hold parents’ meeting, the partitions in the hall are removed for such occasions but even then it becomes overcrowded because of its small size (ibid). The small administrative block houses an office for the principal, two offices for each of the two deputy principals, an office for one head of department (the other four have no offices but use the staff room), and two offices for the administrative staff. The office spaces are reported to be inadequate (personal communication with the principal). In fact the principal’s office is very small and houses the single computer, the school’s prized possession. It also houses the single staffroom, which is not only extremely small to accommodate the thirty two staff members, but also lacks sufficient table and chairs, shelves and cupboards. The windows in the staff room have burglar bars, but lack curtains, and some window panes are broken, which allow dust to enter making the staff room very dusty. The sizes of the classrooms are also very small to accommodate the large number of students in the school.

The building is wired and supplied with electricity, but the classrooms lack electricity and plug points. The building is completely fenced with a gate at the entrance that is locked. Security seems to be a priority because of vandalism that is prevalent in the area. The gravel entrance into the school building gives it an untidy image, but the garden is receiving attention. The surrounding ground is un-tarred and un-grassed therefore dust spreads throughout the building. The verandas are extremely narrow forcing students to walk on the dusty path to their next classrooms. When it rains students have limited shelter to move from one classroom to another. The number of taps and toilets for students are insufficient. Litter is one of the major problems in the school because of insufficient bins and waste being collected once a week. However students are expected to clean up every afternoon. There is no parking facilities

present forcing cars to be parked in any suitable space available. The building needs painting and minor repairs. Since the school lacks a tuck shop, vendors are allowed into the school to sell their wares such as chips, sweets and cool drinks.

Dinzi believes that the school is “not conducive to teaching and learning” partly because of the nature of the school building described above, and because of lack of teaching and learning resources such as text books, photocopying paper, chalk and dusters (personal communication).

Two school timetables are in operation - one from Mondays to Thursdays and another for Fridays. From Mondays to Thursdays the school starts at 07:45 with assembly and followed by registration – both assembly and registration lasting fifteen minutes. This is followed by the first period starting at 08:00 and lasting forty minutes. There are seven periods each lasting forty minutes. The periods are interrupted by two breaks, the first one at 10:00 lasting fifteen minutes, following two periods, and the second one at 12:15 lasting thirty minutes, following three periods. There are two periods after lunch before the school day ends at 14:05.

On Fridays the school starts at 7:45 with assembly and registration lasting fifteen minutes as for Mondays to Thursdays. However each period lasts thirty five minutes with one break lasting thirty five minutes, with the school day ending at 13:00. The reason for the timetable being different on Fridays was not clear. The principal informed me that he continued the practice as he found it when he had arrived at the school but requested that I enquire from the teachers (personal communication). One teacher repeated the principal’s view, while another reported that it was to accommodate the Muslim students and teachers who had to attend mosque on Friday afternoons (personal communication with teachers). I learnt that there were no Muslim teachers in the school and a negligible number of Muslim students (personal communication). On the other hand, Dinzi reported that “most students run away on Friday afternoons and don’t come back after lunch” (personal communication).

Teachers are expected to report to school at 7:30 and leave at 15:00 depending on the duty roster. Teachers are expected to supervise students after school hours, mainly in the afternoons depending on a planned supervision timetable that ensures every

teacher has a turn on a rotational basis. Supervision in the afternoons ends at 17:00. The supervision after school hours is a response to the poor student performance in the school as well as to provide those students from poor homes with opportunities and conditions to learn with additional support from the teachers on duty. Dinzi reported that this after school supervision was a strain on her but the students, especially those in Grade 12 were benefiting.

Profile of the observed Grade 8 Natural Science class

According to the formal records of the school there are fifty students registered in this Grade 8 Natural Science class (class register from class teacher). However, this number was not present at any of the seventeen observed lessons when the numbers fluctuated from a minimum of twenty-eight to a maximum of forty one. All students are Black African. There is an almost equal distribution of male and female students. Most come from the surrounding informal settlement characterised by socio-economic deprivation. Many live alone because their parents/mothers/fathers live and/or work in the rural or farm areas and these students attend this school because their parents chose that they be schooled in an urban area. The first language of most students is Venda, others being Tsonga, and Northern Sotho. Their proficiency in English is very limited, while in Afrikaans it is negligible.

I did not see any student with a science textbook during my seventeen classroom observations. Many did not have class/notebooks (notebooks in future) in class. In fact during one observation lesson (A4, 20 August 2002) not one of the thirty-five students had a notebook in class. Many lacked pens or/and pencils. In the rare occasion when they were requested to write, some wrote on bits of scrap paper, while many would not write at all (A4). Dinzi reported that these students “could talk but not write because of English language” (A3). Their educational engagement in the observed lessons had been minimal (ibid).

During the classroom observations I had observed a worrying lack of discipline amongst the students with some walking into and out of the class as they chose, or coming in late, screaming across the classroom and talking during lesson time, eating during lesson time and throwing their litter on the classroom floor. Their attitude and

value to learning, schooling and the environment are open to question. Dinzi reported “they are like that” (personal communication). The question is why they are allowed to get away with this kind of behaviour by the teacher and the school. Why is she not more assertive in demanding and calling them to order?

A specific classroom has been assigned to Dinzi to conduct her lessons. It is in a separate block away from the administration block. The walls are bare of any pictures and wall charts, and in urgent need of painting. The desks and chairs occupy the entire classroom leaving no space for a table and chair for Dinzi. There is a wall cupboard in the corner of the class but not used by Dinzi as it does not have a lock therefore susceptible to burglary. Desks and chairs are arranged in groups and in rows depending on the preferences of the students. It is conspicuous by the absence of chalk, dusters and any other teaching and learning resources. The windows have no burglar-guards; some have broken windowpanes, and are painted half way. The door has no lock and is left open. This allows dust from the un-tarred and un-grassed surrounding to enter the classroom making the classroom very dusty. The general appearance and ambiance of the classroom is unwelcoming and educationally unappealing if not bankrupt. This raises the question why Dinzi and her students do not take care and pride in making the classroom educationally attractive.

During the seventeen observed lessons, the classroom had been characterised by a disturbing and unhealthy appearance – it was always filthy with empty chips packets, lunch wrapping, sweet wrappings, empty cool drink cans and other litter. There was no bin in the classroom. Even the area surrounding the classroom was more often than not littered. This begs the question about why this situation is tolerated by the teacher and students, and by the school generally.

This contextual background informs this study about the conditions in which Dinzi works. I now move from context to content - the main thrust that frames the study, namely, Dinzi’s understanding and beliefs of the new assessment policy, how she practices assessment within this context and why she practises in ways observed.

Dinzi's Understanding and Beliefs with Regard to the Assessment Policy

In this section I describe and analyse Dinzi's understanding and beliefs with regard to the new assessment policy, in response to the first research question. However I disturb the description and analyses with questions that are meant to establish an agenda for the explanatory section in Chapter Eight of this dissertation.

Dinzi indicated that not only was she aware of the new assessment policy but that she also had a copy of it (personal communication). The policy was given to her at a staff meeting but it had not been discussed properly (ibid). She believed that the policy was easy to understand, and that it provided clear guidelines for implementation (A1).

Her responses to the questionnaire (A1) indicated that she strongly agreed that the policy must be viewed in relation to our larger agenda of reconstruction and development; the policy provides the pedagogical basis for our new education and training system; the policy serves as a vital instrument to shape her educational practice; the purpose of assessment should always be made clear to students; assessment should be an integral, ongoing part of the learning process; students who do not meet the criteria must receive clear explanations with an indication of areas that need further attention; focusing on formal tests as the sole method of assessment should be avoided; the policy creates opportunity for feedback to the school, and other stakeholders about the schools performance; the policy provides a clear indication about how well every outcome in the learning programmes are being taught and learned; the policy informs and improves the assessment practices of educators; and the policy makes recording of assessment data cumbersome.

She also agreed (ibid) that the policy: creates opportunity for feedback to students to improve learning; the criterion-referenced approach should be used; creates opportunity for teachers to improve teaching and learning; enables assessment results to be communicated clearly, accurately, timeously and meaningfully; makes it possible for results to be reported both informally and formally; enables the reporting process to be used as a focal point of dialogue between the home and the school; allows for the assessment of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes; will enable teachers to use assessment information to assist students' development and improve

the process of teaching and learning; makes it possible to credit students' achievement at every level, whatever pathway they may have followed, and at whatever rate they may have acquired the necessary competence; requires the use of tools that appropriately assess student achievement and encourages lifelong learning skills; allows the internal assessment process to be moderated externally in accordance with specific provincial guidelines; the specific outcomes, which are grounded in the critical outcomes, will serve as the basis for assessment; and the various specific outcomes and their assessment criteria must be available to students.

Most of her responses to the questionnaire seemed to indicate that Dinzi's classroom assessment practice was aligned with the requirements of the new assessment policy (Chapter One and Department of Education, 1998). I would argue that these responses possibly indicate her awareness of the information about the policy but not necessarily her understanding, more specifically a deep understanding of the policy; this deep understanding can only be obtained by further probing that I did during the seven interviews¹⁴.

Her understanding with respect to the rationale behind the introduction of a new assessment policy was:

[In] the perception that all students can learn and succeed although not necessarily at the same time or level. Through assessment the students' achievement on this road to success can be measured against the expected outcomes. It therefore sees to it that students are given equal opportunities to succeed by implementing different methods of assessment in order to accommodate all the levels of abilities of students.

(A1)

She added:

The educators had their own way of assessing governed by the individual and the school where he/she teaches.

(A2)

[But] partly because of the way in which the student used to be assessed, the old system in which the students had to stick to time, given a question paper. Then after the question paper

¹⁴ Each interview lasted between one and two hours depending on Dinzi's availability.

went in, an hour or two hours later, and then the assessment was not done continuously, or not daily. To some extent it is of advantage to most students especially if they do their work. Maybe to change the approach of the educators towards assessing, to do it maybe fairly. To exchange the approach of the educators towards assessment, they thought it was unfair. It was unfair in the sense that you would find from experience, that because the student did something naughty because he did not understand, and the teacher would say. "Tomorrow I am going to give you a test", then some students were not prepared for the test, and the students were not told what to expect for the test, whereas now if you give them any work, any test, you have got to tell them what you are expecting from them. And to give the students equal chances of moving to the next grade.

(A3)

Her responses to each of the three different instruments are varied but synthesised analyses suggest that Dinzi has a general and superficial understanding of the rationale underpinning the new assessment system. It seems weakly connected to that provided in the assessment policy that clearly articulates the rationale, namely, “both the shortcomings of the current assessment policy, and the requirements of the new curriculum for grades R-9 and Adult Basic Education and Training, have made it necessary to develop a new assessment policy” (Department of Education, 1998:8, emphasis added). In fact the policy provides a lengthy criticism of the old/current¹⁵ assessment policy known as *A Résumé of Instructional Programmes in Public Schools, Report 550 (97/06)*; commonly referred to as NATED 550), namely, that it prescribes a complex set of rules and regulations for subject groupings and combinations, it lacks transparency and accountability, it embraces inadequate assessment practices, it encourages inappropriate use of tests and examinations contributing to high failure and drop-out rates among students, it allows for absence of meaningful feedback, and it allows for absence of support for students (ibid).

By comparing her response to the assessment policy and to the analytical conceptual framework I would argue that she has a surface or superficial understanding of the rationale underpinning the introduction of the new policy since she mentioned “measured against the expected outcomes” which indicate that she has an idea that

¹⁵ This particular policy is old compared to this new one of 1998 for GET Band (focus of this study), but it is current because it is being used in Grades 10 to 12 until the phasing in of the new FET curriculum in 2006 for Grade 10. Dinzi has to teach under both policies simultaneously.

outcomes were driving the new assessment policy, although this was at a general superficial level. However, she did not mention the shortcomings of the of the old/current assessment policy, which is detailed in the new policy on assessment. This raises two issues. Firstly, why does she have only a superficial understanding and how did she come to this understanding? Secondly, how will this surface understanding affect or influence her understandings and beliefs of the policy as well as on her assessment practice? What implications does her surface understanding have for policy change and educational change generally?

Her general understanding of the new assessment policy is that:

It's a standardised method of assessing in both FET and Grd R-9. The government made it to be uniform nationally.

(A2)

I understood it as the new way that was introduced by the National Department of Education; what should be done, what are the procedures to be taken, what forms of assessment the people have used. What tools and techniques and what methods should they be used, and then how much involved should a student be in the assessment.

(A3)

However she added:

I am not conversant about the basics. I cannot really get deep into it? I don't have deep knowledge about it as such.

(A3)

She admits that she lacks a deep understanding of the policy. Why? The analysis of her responses lead to the following questions: Why does she have a wrong understanding that this policy is for the “FET” band as well when it is only for one band, the GET band? What is meant by ‘standardised method of assessment’? Why is her response focused on ‘what’ is to be done with a conspicuous absence on ‘why’ and ‘how’ issues regarding assessment? How will this lack of a deep understanding of the new policy affect her assessment practice? What are its implications for educational change and policy change specifically? How could she develop a basic and a deep understanding of the new policy? She also added that she did not feel confident and empowered with regard to the new assessment policy (ibid). How

would this lack of confidence and empowerment affect her commitment and ability to understand and implement the assessment policy? These responses are inconsistent with her responses to the questionnaire where she reported that the new assessment policy was easy to understand, it provided clear guidelines for implementation and that it allowed for flexible implementation (Questionnaire A1). Why are there inconsistencies in her responses? What are the consequences of these inconsistencies to her understanding and implementing the new policies? However the analysis reveals that she is aware that assessment involves many “forms”, “tools”, “methods” and learner involvement (see A3).

With reference to the meaning of ‘critical outcomes’ she reported:

I am not very sure about it, I must be honest.

(A3)

She did not even want to try to provide what she believed it meant (ibid). Not only is this definition provided in the assessment policy but it also indicated “the specific outcomes grounded in the critical outcomes will serve as a basis of assessment” (Department of Education, 1998: 11, emphasis added). The new education system is based on the outcomes-based approach to education and yet she does not have any understanding of this fundamental concept! This begs the question why? What are the implications of this lack of understanding on her assessment practice?

Dinzi understands ‘specific outcomes’ as:

What is expected of students to know at the end of each lesson... the assessment is guided by this specific outcomes.

(A3)

This was partially consistent with the new assessment policy. She missed the “and do”. She added however that she did not have a good understanding of the specific outcomes in Natural Science *because now you find that certain specific outcomes are not commonly used although they are there* (ibid). Her response reveals a superficial understanding of this concept. The issue is why she lacks the deep conceptual understanding of a defining feature of the new curriculum and assessment system and how will it influence her assessment practice?

She reported that she was *not very sure* about the relationship between the new national curriculum policy and the new assessment policy, and *not conversant with*

the new national curriculum policy (Interview A3). This means that she has no understanding of this relationship. Again we need to ask why. Dinzi is currently teaching Grade 8 Natural Science (focus of this study) and Grade 9 Mathematics, both of which are supposed to be informed by new national curriculum policy and the new assessment policy. Why was she in this state of ‘policy ignorance or illiteracy’ if you like, despite the new assessment policy clearly articulating that “this new assessment policy for the General Education and Training Band, alongside the new national curriculum framework, provides the pedagogic basis for our new education and training system” (Department of Education, 1998: 7, emphasis added). It added, “The learning programmes for each phase will serve as a basis for assessment in each of the phase” (p14). How will this limited if not lack of this basic understanding impact on her understanding of the policy and its implementation? What does it imply about the strategy in bringing about changes in teachers? Who will address Dinzi’s predicament, when and how?

Her understanding of the main goal of the policy is:

[To] make it possible for the student to meet same standards in the same grade though they may be in different schools. It then accommodates students even if they need transfer from one school to another, if properly administered the student will fit in any school; it is to make the students to be independent, accountable and responsible citizens.

(A2)

She added:

[To] try and make things easier for the students and the educators, so that the students themselves should be able to fit in the outside world and even give the students equal chances of moving to the next grade.

(A3)

But this response is different to the new assessment policy that states that the aims of the policy are to “enhance the provision of education which is continuous, coherent and progressive, for each student, serve as a key element in the quality assurance system, and introduce a shift from a system that is dominated by public examinations which are high stakes, and whose main function has been to rank, grade, select and certificate students, to a new system that informs and improves the curriculum and assessment practices of educators” (Department of Education, 1998: 9-10).

It is clear that she has a different and superficial understanding of the goals of the new assessment policy. This raises the questions as to why Dinzi exhibits a surface rather than deep understandings of the assessment policy. Would this affect her understanding of the policy on the whole? How will her understanding affect her assessment practice? What implications will this have on understanding policy change and on developing strategies for professional development for teachers in the context of policy change?

She did not respond to the question on her understanding about ‘criterion-referenced approach’ to assessment in the free writing schedule (A2). Does it imply that she did not know what it meant? However in the interview she reported that it:

[Means] a certain criteria you set when you assess the students. But now the problem with it is that the criteria will differ from one educator to another because it depends now on what you expect from the students. Our criteria will never be the same.

(A3)

She added that she uses it:

To explain to them (students) how we are going to allocate marks. Part one if you give me this I will give you three marks, if the information is not all what I wanted then you have two marks, if there is nothing at all you get nought.

(A3)

Her understanding of ‘criterion-referenced approach’ to assessment is different compared to the assessment policy that defines ‘criterion-referencing’ as “the practice of assessing a students’ performance against an agreed set of criteria. In the case of OBE the student is assessed against agreed criteria derived from the specific outcomes” (Department of Education, 1998:19; emphasis added). This raises many questions: Why is her understanding so shallow? How will her shallow understanding/non-understanding of the concept ‘criterion-referenced assessment’ affect her understanding of the new assessment policy on the whole and on her assessment practice? What are its implications for the successful implementation of the assessment policy and for policy change more generally?

Dinzi also has a limited understanding of a related concept, ‘assessment criteria’ that she understands as:

What do you use to assess the students? Are you going to use question and answers or are you going to the groups themselves to assess themselves. ... I'm not sure I'm using it correctly.

(A3)

This understanding is not linked to the meaning provided in the assessment policy, namely, “evidence that the student has achieved the specific outcomes. The criteria indicate in broad terms, the observable processes and products of learning which serve as evidence of the students’ achievement” (Department of Education, 1998: 19; emphasis added). The policy adds that the specific outcomes and their assessment criteria must be made available to students to inform them what is to be assessed, and that students who do not meet the criteria must receive clear explanations with clear explanations with indications of areas that need further work and must be assisted to reach the required criteria (Department of Education, 1998: 11; emphasis added). Furthermore the agreed upon assessment criteria are explicit in the national curriculum policy (see Department of Education 1997; emphasis added). However she added:

We're still struggling to get to grips with it. Meaning to be able to know exactly what the terms mean, and how do you achieve those assessment criteria. Although they're listed they don't have application. ...I don't use it because they confuse me.

(A3)

She admits that she has a surface or limited and confused understanding of the concept and therefore she does not use it. This confusion poses serious questions relating to the successful implementation of the new assessment policy. The questions are: Why does she have this confused understanding? Who will help Dinzi address her confusion, how and when? How will students be affected?

Her understanding of continuous assessment is:

When students are assessed almost daily and this counts towards their CASS.¹⁶

(A2)

We have been using continuous assessment before the policy came with its new terminology called continuous assessment.

¹⁶ Continuous Assessment, the model of assessment underpinning the new assessment system of education in South Africa

We used class tests say fortnightly, you would give students class work and homework and record them towards the students year mark. Continuous assessment does not have a fixed time but can be done randomly.

(A3)

This response reveals a superficial understanding as well as some erroneous understandings compared to the assessment policy. The new policy does not state that students should be assessed “almost daily” nor “randomly” but rather on an ongoing basis (Department of Education, 1998: 19). Furthermore, the year mark system that characterised the old assessment system is philosophically, conceptually and theoretically different from the continuous assessment model. It appears from the response as if regular “tests” constitute the marks despite the policy making it explicit that the continuous assessment model should “not be used as a series of traditional test results” (Department of Education, 1998: 9, emphasis added). It also seems as if ‘recording’ of marks receives primacy rather than using the information to improve teaching and learning suggested by the continuous assessment model (ibid). Her responses raise questions relating to the source of her superficial and erroneous understanding of continuous assessment, the model underpinning the outcomes-based assessment system. What informs her understanding of the continuous assessment model? If she believes that continuous assessment is not new but equivalent to the year mark system of the past, how does this understanding influence her assessment practice?

She also believes:

Now they have made everything a bit more complicated.

(A3)

Why does she feel this way? How will this feeling affect her assessment practice and her students? Who will assist her in clarifying these issues and how?

She believes the continuous assessment marks should not be moderated externally because:

The rate at which students understand differs and so it may delay or accelerate the rate of the students.

(A3)

This seems inconsistent with the policy requirement that “moderation will be carried out to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained in the assessment process” (Department of Education, 1998: 10) and that “the internal assessment process should be moderated externally, for example, by professional support services” (p11). Why does she believe that continuous assessment marks should not be moderated externally? How would this affect the successful implementation of assessment processes generally and specifically the continuous assessment model? If the continuous assessment marks of students are not moderated internally and/or externally, would students be affected and how? Is continuous assessment being monitored, by who and how?

Some of the principles underlying the new assessment policy are that assessment should be authentic, valid, and sensitive to gender, race, and cultural background (Department of Education, 1998: 10). Her understanding of ‘authentic’ assessment was”

To use a memorandum from what you expect from students so that the students are able to say I’m right here or you marked me wrong and so on. It can be more than that, I’m not sure.

(A3)

Dinzi acknowledges that she is not sure about the meaning of authentic assessment. Why was she not sure? How will her not being sure impact on her assessment practice?

Her understanding of a ‘valid’ assessment is:

When the type of assessment you share with other educators and agree on it.

(A3)

This shows her superficial understanding of the principle. Why and how did she arrive at her understanding? What are its implications for her assessment practice?

She was not able to explain her understanding with respect to assessment being sensitive to gender, race and culture. Why was this so? If this non-explanation is interpreted as her not knowing what this meant then it may have serious implications

for the successful implementation of the policy. What impact will this have on assessment practice? How will this affect the educational change strategy?

She described student 'portfolio' as:

It is some class work, homework, some projects and so on and you put it in the file. It's a collection of student's work.

(A3)

She believes that the reason for having portfolios is

So that now students can be able to take his portfolio home and show it to the parents. ... And it helps the child to see whether he's improving in his schoolwork (ibid). She added that she is starting to use it now, just giving it a try, it's not something we're told to do.

(A3)

Although she believed that it is:

Positive having a portfolio, it was difficult because some students wouldn't do their work because they couldn't find relevant resources to do the work and also the laziness of the students. Well another reason is that because of the numbers of students that we have, it becomes an enormous task to assess their work. It is something new and we don't know what to expect there...it is frustrating and it de-motivates me for teaching.

(A3)

She continued that she was not using portfolios for the Grade 8 Natural Science Class but only for Grade 9 class. She also added that she keeps the portfolios in her cabinet and only gives them to the students:

Towards exam time ...after we recorded the marks of the students ...we are guarding against the students losing some of their work.

(A3)

Dinzi's understanding of what a portfolio is cannot be disputed, but her understanding of the reasons for having a portfolio seems superficial. The fact that she is not using it in her Grade 8 class but only in Grade 9 raises serious concerns for the Grade 8 students. Why does she not use portfolio assessment in her Grade 8 class? Why does she believe that she must be told to use portfolio assessment despite it being

articulated in the assessment policy as one of the techniques to be used by teachers (Department of Education, 1998:12)? In fact the policy expects all educators to have a sound knowledge of each technique, including, portfolios, and to use it in a balanced, fair and transparent way (ibid). Dinzi demonstrates receptivity to the idea of a portfolio but indicates a number of school level constraints that made it difficult for her to implement portfolios. The issue is who will assist and support her address her concerns, how and when? How could her frustrations and negative feelings be addressed, when and by whom? Why is Dinzi seemingly focusing more attention on ‘recording’ marks? What fundamental conditions are necessary for portfolio assessment to be used successfully? By giving the portfolios to students towards the time of the examination not militate against them using it to improve their learning continuously? How should students and teachers manage the portfolios so that some tasks do not get lost? Do teachers have sufficient storage space for the portfolios?

With regard to recording of student assessment results Dinzi reported:

With the new assessment policy now we've got to keep the record, as long as you assess the students you've got to record it, what used not to happen in the earlier days.

(A3).

Her understanding of the new recording mechanism seems extremely shallow. She indicates that recording students' assessment results is something new to her, that she did not do this in the past. This will have serious implications for her and the nature of the recording process which the policy demands “should provide a clear indication about how well each and every outcome is being taught and learned, and should include information on the holistic development of the student such as values, attitudes and social development (Department of Education, 1998: 12). How does she record students' achievement? She did not respond to the questions on where she records, what is recorded, how often recorded and any other relevant information that she wanted to share regarding recording in the free writing schedule. This begs the question: Why did she not respond to these questions?

Her understanding around the issue of reporting of assessment results was:

The report sheets should be well designed so that different tasks can be recorded.

(A2).

This does not illustrate her understanding of the new reporting process despite it being articulated in the assessment policy: “effective communication about students’ achievement is a prerequisite for the provision of quality education” (Department of Education, 1998: 12-13)? What did she mean by “well designed”? Can she construct a “well designed” report sheet, why and how? She did not respond to the questions on frequency of reporting, contents of the report, how it is communicated, and whether students and parents are encouraged to comment. Why did she not respond to these questions?

The new understandings and beliefs that she acquired as a result of the new assessment policy were:

At the end of a topic or lesson I as an educator must be able to know whether the student has reached a specific outcome for that “lesson”. If no, I must structure further experiences so that the student can reach the outcome, maybe by using a different type of assessment. If yes, I should structure the learning experiences to reach the same outcome at a higher level or to reach a next level. I then use the above information to help the student. I also use the information to improve my teaching too.

The standards have been elevated because you associate assignments with universities; you never thought you can give a Grade 9 child to do a project, to go do an assignment. We’d just give them home work; there was no emphasis to doing these projects and assignments. I would also say that it depended on the type of education that we were trained in. That made a difference, maybe with the other TED¹⁷ schools; they are used to those terms they used to practice assignments and projects, whereas the main Bantu Education¹⁸ had no emphasis put on those things.

(A1)

¹⁷ Transvaal Education Department – a system of education for the whites during the apartheid days

¹⁸ Education designed specifically for African Blacks to ensure it was inferior and that it equipped them as inputs into the unskilled labour market.

It seems apparent that she is aware that assessment in OBE focuses on the achievement of clearly defined outcomes as stated in the policy (Department of Education, 1998: 9). She is also aware that she must use different types of assessment and to use the assessment to improve teaching and learning (ibid). But this is inconsistent with her responses to the free writing schedule where she wrote that the new policy does not make much demand on her *except that what we have been doing in the past is given new names now* (A2). She confirmed this during the interview that the past assessment system and the new assessment system:

[Are] not that different, except that some of the new terminology; because we did interviews, we did question and answer methods, we did formative, they are new names - its just the terminology that is just new.

(A3)

Why are her responses inconsistent? What does it imply about her understanding of the new policy? If she believes that it is only the terminology that has been changed, how does that shape her understanding and implementation of the new assessment policy? What implication does this have for educational change generally and policy change in particular?

She reported that as a result of the new assessment policy she changed her belief with regard to students:

I had to change the fact that there are students who are “non achievers or stupid”. Given equal opportunities all students can achieve.

(A1).

Outcomes-based education is premised on the basis that ‘all students can learn or achieve’ as indicated in both the new national curriculum (Department of Education, 1997) and the new assessment policy (Department of Education, 1998). So in this respect her response is consistent with the policies. Her responses, while appearing consistent with the new assessment policy raise many issues. Firstly, what do equal opportunities mean? Secondly, what assumptions are made about students? Thirdly, is she able to provide equal opportunities and how? Fourthly, do equal opportunities translate to equal outcomes for all students? Fifthly, under what conditions can all students achieve? On probing deeper during the interview she added:

I won't say it (policy) has changed my role as a teacher.
(A3)

This response inserts another dynamic into her understandings, namely her belief changed but her role did not change! The question is why and how does this affect her assessment practice?

She believes that the new policy will benefit the students *if a child does his work properly* (A2). She also believes that it is difficult to assess in different ways as intended by the policy because:

The students don't go that extra mile to go and find information. Most of them haven't done their work.
(A3)

She is implying that the assessment policy would be successful on condition the students do their work, and that is unquestionable. What is questionable is whether students are the only condition? What about the role of the educators? Do educators not form part of the successful policy change equation? What about the role of other factors besides students and educators to bring about successful policy change? How should teachers address the situation when students do not do the work? How do teachers address this situation?

Dinzi believes that the policy was not well planned as revealed by her response to the interview:

I don't think it was well planned because now I think if they, the government, had planned it they would have considered the expenditure that the schools would get into, because now if we talk about a new policy and then having the OBE and so on, we are using - there is a lot of paperwork and so on, which is not necessary, where you have got to draw worksheets for the student and so on. If the school is a poor school, they cannot have funds to buy paper for the students, and the parents won't have money to buy those materials and the resources that are needed. And as I already mentioned, there are the small classrooms where you have to do the activities, shortage of resources, big number of students that the teachers deal with and shortage of staff.
(A3)

Embedded in this response are feelings that imply a certain degree of concern if not negativity. How would this feeling affect not only the implementation of the policy but more importantly her commitment and motivation to change?

She also believes the approach is top-down as illustrated by her response:

The government introduce the policy whatever it is and then from there they expect teachers to work on the policy, to implement the policy. When problems arise then they call for workshops

(A3)

Dinzi seems to be articulating a concern regarding the expectations of policy from teachers. How does this feeling affect her commitment and ability to understand and implement the policy? What is the lesson for policy reform and educational change?

She believes that:

If there is any change of policy that the Department is aware that is going to affect you in two years time, the educators should be trained before, they shouldn't be given crash courses over two weeks and then be asked to implement what we have done in the crash course, it is not possible, because when you are teaching children, you are dealing with the future of people, because at the end it reflects negatively on the educators when they look at the results and find that the children have failed and so on, they forgot that these crash courses are not proper training for the educators.

(A3)

She also believes that the facilitators of the training do not know their work to train teachers because

The facilitators they are taken by surprise. It is a top down kind of a thing. The National Education told us you have a class for the weekend, then you get to the teachers, then to the SMTs¹⁹ and the SMTs will get to the educators, They, the facilitators are frustrated. ...We attend workshops even it has not yet worked.

(A3)

Dinzi felt that the workshop conducted to prepare teachers for the use of student portfolios was not helpful:

¹⁹ School Management Teams

Because we were instructed what to do so I wouldn't call it a workshop. They should have just written letters to us to do 1, 2, 3, full stop. It was a waste of time.

(A3)

These responses seem to reveal negative feelings. What are the implications of these negative feelings on her commitment and ability to understand and implement the policy successfully?

She believes that for better understanding of the policy:

All educators from management to level one educators need proper and thorough training on assessment.

(A3)

What does this imply with reference to current training of school staff generally and for assessment in particular? What is 'proper' and 'thorough' training? How should this be achieved and by who and when?

Despite all this, Dinzi seems to be optimistic because she believes:

We need to be positive. With time, say in 2 years time, if there are no changes again we will make it. If what we are doing this year is going to be the same next year, then we will improve.

(A3)

What makes her feel positive? Is time the only resource needed for positive change in terms of policy implementation? What is implied by "if there are no changes again"? If changes do occur, what will be the consequence for the successful implementation of the policy? Is it possible to predict that things will remain the same next year, especially in a rapidly changing country like South Africa?

The above description and analysis show that Dinzi has fluid and unstable understandings and beliefs or attitudes with regard to the new assessment policy. Most of her understandings are shallow and superficial, a few non-existent, and much of it lacking consistency with the assessment policy. Most of her beliefs or attitudes are negative but some are positive. How these varied understandings and beliefs inform her practice of assessment in her classroom needs to be explored. I respond to this issue in the next section of the chapter.

Dinzi's Assessment Practice in the Classroom

In this section I shall describe Dinzi's assessment practice in her classroom in response to the second research question, namely, '*In the context of official policy, how do teachers practice assessment in their classrooms?*' I attempt to compare her assessment practice with her understandings and beliefs about the policy, with her claims about her practice and with the policy itself, in search for continuities and/or discontinuities.

As indicated previously the following primary data sources are drawn upon to respond to this question:

- Questionnaire (A1)
- Interviews prior to classroom observations (A3)
- Classroom observations – the fundamental and most critical data source (A4)
- Teacher documents (A5)
- Teacher records (A6)
- Student notebooks (A7)
- Student records (A8)
- June and November examinations (A9)
- Interviews after observations (A10)

I first examine Dinzi's reported assessment practice as revealed in the questionnaire (A1) and in the interviews (A3) to seek connections/disconnections with her understandings and beliefs about the policy, with the assessment policy and with the kinds of changes made, if any.

Reported Practice

Evidence from the Questionnaire (A1)

Here I report on the Dinzi's responses to the questionnaire (A1) on the match between her assessment practice and the assessment policy.

Dinzi claimed that most of her assessment practices mirrored the requirements of the policy, such as: assessment informs and improves her curriculum and assessment practices; assessment offers all learners an opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do; assessment helps learners understand what they can do and where they need to develop further; her assessment practices are sensitive to gender and learners' abilities; assessment is continuous; assessment decisions are based on pragmatic, trial-and-error grounds; facts, applications and higher order thinking skills are assessed; uses the criterion-referenced approach; assessments are not restricted to tests only; assessment is always undertaken for a specific purpose; learners are involved in assessing their own work; learners are involved in assessing the work of their peers; learners are provided with opportunities to reflect and talk about their learning and achievement; a wide range of assessment methods are used confidently and appropriately; assessment information is used to decide what to do next with individuals, groups or the class; portfolios are built over a period of time; marking involves both verbal and written feedback; marking focuses on the learning intentions as the criteria for success; prompt and regular marking occurs; the outcomes of marking, along with other information, are used to adjust future teaching plans; and reporting of results is both informal, namely dialogues in class and formal, namely written reports, amongst others (B1).

However she reported that there was room for improvement in some of her assessment practice such as generating and collecting evidence, evaluating this evidence against the outcomes, recording the findings of the evaluation and using the information to assist learners' development and improve the process of teaching and learning; identifying the key learning outcomes so that assessment against them can be made and used to help develop learning; assessment decisions are based on thinking through the purpose and principles of assessment; assessment informs daily and weekly practice; assessment allow learning to be matched to the needs of the learners; and prompt and regular marking takes place (A1).

She did not make any claim to show that her assessment practice does not mirror the assessment policy or requires re-thinking (A1).

The analyses of her claims suggest that most of her assessment practices match the requirements of the new assessment policy. I followed up these claims in the interviews for deeper information regarding her assessment practice.

Evidence from the Interviews (A3)

During the interview prior to the classroom observations Dinzi reported that she used various forms of assessment in her Grade 8 Natural Science class such as oral assessment, class-work, homework, experiments, investigations, assignments, portfolios, projects, tests, and interviews (A3). She added that she gets students involved in the assessment in the form of self-assessment and group assessment (ibid). She also indicated that she planned for assessment because:

[For] each and every lesson you've got to have ... how we are going to assess them. I think that is very important.

(A3)

She reported that as a result of the new assessment policy she changed her assessment practice:

Well I would say I have changed because I am able to assess the students randomly at any time. For example, I can assess them maybe weekly or maybe daily. It's unlike in the old time where we had to assess only by giving the children tests,...there is a mountain of tests. Now by even giving them class work, there are some class work whereby you feel you assess this one, allocate marks to that class work or homework.

(A3)

As indicated, her claims suggest that she has changed her assessment practice. I will now probe deeper into the dynamics of her classroom practice to explore whether it does actually mirror her stated claims, whether it does reflect her understandings and beliefs as reflected in the previous section, to get at her deeper, tacit knowledge that may have been hard to obtain during the interviews, and to investigate its relationship to the assessment policy. This might lead to different and more sophisticated insights that will help me craft a more productive understanding of the relationship between policy and practice in the context of educational change or transformation.

Evidence from the classroom observations

I had observed seventeen lessons in Dinzi's Grade 8 Natural Science class in a period of six continuous weeks from July 2002 to September 2002 (A4). One of these lessons was conducted in the science laboratory and one test was administered during this time.

In the first observed lesson (A4, 24 July 2002) Dinzi handed out a prepared worksheet to the thirty-eight students and requested that they answer the four questions that appeared on the worksheet. It seemed that the worksheet had been copied from a textbook because at the top of the page "UNIT 13" had been written and at the bottom of the page "36" had appeared indicating a page number. She read out the four questions aloud before requesting students to work in pairs to answer the four questions. They did not work in pairs but in groups of varying size depending on their choice. Most students seemed uninterested and were screaming across the class to such an extent that Dinzi had to repeatedly shout "shut up". This did not deter them; in fact some were talking to students outside the classroom via the window. Only four students had their notebooks in class. I had observed a group of six students who had been discussing the 'objectives' written on the worksheet and not the questions. They had not written anything. Ten minutes later Dinzi, standing in front of the class, provided the answers orally. Neither the teacher nor the students wrote anything. There was no chalk or duster in the classroom. During this lesson:

- The purpose of the lesson was not made clear to the students.
- The outcomes for the lesson were not given. The teacher made use of objectives, a practice that had been part of the old system.
- No assessment took place either by the teacher or the students (I also observed the students' notebooks for evidence of assessment, there was none).
- Neither the teacher nor the students did any writing.
- The teacher requested students "to paste your worksheets" as homework.

(ibid)

The issues relating to assessment emanating from this observation include:

- Why did Dinzi not make the purpose of the exercise clear to students?
- Why did she not provide the outcomes for the exercise?
- Why is she still using objectives, a characteristic of the old system of education?
- Why did she not assess this work?
- What is her understanding of ‘oral question and answer’? Who provides the questions and answers?
- Why were students not involved?
- Why was there a complete absence of any writing both by the teacher and by the students?
- Why is there a visible lack of discipline by the students in this classroom?

I had observed a similar pattern in the third lesson (A4, 31 July 2002) except that after issuing the hand-written worksheets Dinzi had informed the students that she would be using “certain assessment criteria to assess you”. She wrote the ‘assessment criteria’ as she understood it on the board as follows:

- a) Correct formulae ✓
- b) Correct units ✓
- c) Correct multiplied ✓
- d) Logical steps ✓

Again in this lesson Dinzi did not inform the students the purpose of the assessment; neither did she define the outcomes to be assessed. This begs the question why? Her understanding of assessment criteria is different from that given in the policy? This raises the question: Why and how did she come to this understanding? She seems confused between the uses of criteria in a rubric with assessment criteria. What implication does her understanding of assessment criteria for the successful implementation of the assessment policy and on student achievement? She collected five students’ notebooks and initialled and dated them. She informed me that this was a way of assessing the students work but that she did not record their work. Is this a type of informal assessment? If it is, how does she use the information, if she uses it at all?

Her misunderstanding of the concept ‘assessment criteria’ is also revealed in one of her Grade 9 mathematics class (A4, 21/08/2002). I had observed four lessons in her Grade 9 mathematics classes to supplement the Grade 8 Natural Science observations. The purpose was to observe whether she practised differently in different grades and for different subjects/learning areas. The following appeared at the bottom of the hand-written test question paper that she had administered to the class:

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	4	3	2	1
1. Addition and subtraction				
a) Like terms below each other				
b) Rules for addition				
c) Rules for subtraction				
2. Multiplication				
a) Sign rules				
b) Exponential rules				
c) Correct multiplication and division				

(Copy from test question paper, 21 August 2002)

It seems evident that Dinzi has different understandings of the concepts ‘criteria’ that are used in a rubric, a tool used for assessing students, and ‘assessment criteria’ that forms the foundation of assessment in the outcomes based assessment system. This different understandings or maybe misunderstanding raises serious questions not only for the successful implementation of the assessment policy and the new curriculum policy but also for outcomes-based education generally.

In the other three lessons when she issued worksheets similar patterns were observed. The purpose of the work was not given. None of the worksheets had outcomes indicated on them. Dinzi did not assess the students’ work. Neither did students assess their work. How will Dinzi and the students know whether they are achieving the outcomes?

Only during one of the observed seventeen lessons did Dinzi take her class to the laboratory (A4, 7 August 2002). While students were running around in the science

laboratory, she handed out worksheets and told them in the midst of the noise that “*we are going to find out about the topic density*”. Is this a clear purpose of the lesson? While the worksheet had the words ‘specific outcomes’ on it, no specific outcomes were written, but the space was left blank. This begs the question why? She requested that they form four groups, about ten per group with a maximum of twelve per group. When she said “*one member from each group come to the front for some apparatus*, a whole group of students ran noisily to the front table. It became extremely noisy with students not only screaming loudly across the classroom but also dragging the laboratory stools. It made it extremely difficult to hear Dinzi’s voice which was drowned by the students’ noise. Dinzi wrote on the board ‘pipette’ and showed them what it was. One student walked out of the laboratory without excusing himself – Dinzi either did not notice or did not mind. The students were moving from group to group just to chat to others. Discipline had totally collapsed when the teacher screamed: “Quiet in your group. Shut up!” Why did discipline collapse? She read the procedure aloud to them and asked one member per group to “fill the plastic basin with water”. They did but not without throwing water onto their friends, and messing the floor and the tables. Dinzi requested that they complete the table in their worksheet after they placed the objects into the water. She had to scream to get their attention. She told them what to do and re-drew the table on the board.

The group that I observed did not know the difference between a rubber stopper and a cork stopper as this was the first time that they saw them and their first visit to the science laboratory. Dinzi told them to place a tick in the relevant column. The observed group threw all the objects into the water simultaneously without writing what they observed. One student from another group asked the teacher: “What is ‘sinks’ and what is ‘floats’”? Dinzi explained the concepts very briefly. The observed group placed the cork stopper into the water, and filled in the table “cork sinks” (when it floated) in the column ‘floats’. The teacher tried to use one group to demonstrate to the class but was not successful because students were not paying attention but were playing with the water and apparatus. The observed group did not know what to do thereafter and were just playing with the water and apparatus, like the others until the lesson ended.

Despite all this effort, Dinzi did not mention the outcomes to be achieved in this lesson and she did not collect the students' work to assess them. This begs the question why? How will Dinzi and the students know whether they had achieved what they were supposed to have achieved? How and when will feedback be given to students, if it is given?

One of the worksheets that she gave to her students had in addition to activities four 'projects' to be done (A4, 16 August 2002). This worksheet was a photocopy from a textbook because at the top of the page appeared "ACTIVITY 4" and at the bottom "38" indicating a page number. Dinzi did not inform the class the purpose of the lesson. She also did not provide the outcomes for the lesson, either orally or on the worksheet (ibid). The activities were not done practically but orally with Dinzi reading the activities listed in the worksheet aloud as she stood in front of the class, and provided the answers orally. This begs the question why? What was the purpose of the worksheet? Furthermore, she only went over half the activities. She requested the students to do the 'projects' listed in the worksheet at home. But no student did it (see A4, 19 August 2002). The teacher provided the answers to the questions based on the first two 'projects' orally while standing in front of the class (ibid). The questions relating to the other two 'projects' were not done at all. Dinzi did not collect the students' notebooks. This lesson raises many issues. Why does she not make the outcomes to be achieved explicit? Why did she not collect and assess the students' work? Why does she provide all the answers, and why orally only? Why does she not find out the reasons students do not do their homework? What are her understandings of the concepts 'activity' and 'project'?

Two significant findings in the four mathematics classes (A4, 7/8/02, 8/8/02, 14/8/02, 21/8/02) and one English class (A4, 8/8/02) had supported my observations and findings in her Grade 8 Natural Science classes. One was her 'teacher-centred' and 'talk-and-talk' approach to teaching and learning characterised by Dinzi standing in front of the class asking the questions and providing the answers with limited if any involvement of students. Second was the lack of student discipline – students strolled into the class late, talked loudly to one another and across the classroom while the teacher was teaching, in fact the noise created by the students made listening to what the teacher said extremely difficult with Dinzi occasionally requesting students to

“shut up” (A4), and the students were eating openly during lesson time. This raises fundamental questions for successful educational change. First for the new system of education that is “student-centred” (Department of Education, 1998: 9). Second for teaching and learning generally, that is, how can effective teaching and learning and assessment take place in the absence of discipline in the classroom? And what kind of values and attitudes are being inculcated in students?

All sixteen of the seventeen lessons observed were characterised by the teacher asking questions and providing most if not all the answers, by a ‘talk and talk’ method and a ‘teacher-centred approach’ with the Dinzi standing in front of the class. The following lesson illustrates the modal patterns of her classroom practice (A4, 1 August 2002):

Teacher: *We want to calculate density, where do we start? Quickly, quickly.
Density is mass over volume.*

She wrote the formula for volume on the board and calculated the volume. She then asked:

Teacher: *What do we do with the volume?*

She worked out the problem on the board and explained what kilogram per meter cubed meant. She told them:

Teacher: *If other units given, for example, given density and volume and asked to find mass, how do you do it?*

She wrote the formula for density on the board. The teacher used a mathematics example to explain further by also writing on the board:

Teacher: *Density is mass over volume.*

She wrote on the board: Density = $\frac{\text{Mass}}{\text{Volume}}$

Teacher: *Given 10 grams over centimetres cubed as density and 15 grams as mass, what is the volume?
If you are given six is equal to eighteen divided by what?*

She wrote on the board: $6 = \frac{18}{?}$

Teacher: *How do you find it?*

Amidst the shouting of answers, one student screamed “divide by 18”.

The teacher continued:

Teacher: *The volume is equal to N for numerator over the Q for quotient.*

She wrote on the board:

$$\text{Volume} = \frac{N \text{ (for numerator)}}{Q \text{ (for quotient)}} = \frac{\text{Mass}}{\text{Density}}$$

One student informed the teacher that he did not understand the lesson but the teacher continued:

Teacher: *Volume is equal to the mass divided by the density.*

She wrote on the board as she stated:

$$V = \frac{M}{D}$$

She continued to explain using science and mathematics information:

Teacher: *In science density is equal to mass divided by volume. In maths the quotient six is equal to eighteen, the numerator, divided by three the numerator.*

She wrote on the board:

Science		Maths (numbers)
Density	$= \frac{\text{Mass}}{\text{Volume}}$	$6 = \frac{18 \text{ N (numerator)}}{3 \text{ D (denominator)}}$

Teacher: *“Volume is similar to finding quotient in maths”. Density is equal to mass divided by volume. Volume is equal to mass divided by density. Mass is equal to density multiplied by volume*

She wrote on the board:

- 1) Density = $\frac{\text{Mass}}{\text{Volume}}$
- 2) Volume = $\frac{\text{Mass}}{\text{Density}}$
- 3) Mass = Density x Volume

Dinzi did not mention nor write nor use the outcomes to be achieved in any of the observed seventeen lessons, or in the one test that I observed her administering. This test had three factual questions that had been done in class before, which means that rote learning is being encouraged. This begs the question why higher order questions are not set? Furthermore, the purpose of this test was not made transparent to the

students as required by the new assessment policy (Department of Education, 1998: 10). Why did the teacher not inform the students the purpose of the test or assessment? After the test Dinzi informed me that this was a standardised test:

To check with other teachers doing the same thing with students, its set as the pacesetter so that I mustn't relax, I must do my work ... and to check the level of the students on the topic.

(A10)

How did she come to that understanding of 'checking'? Why is 'checking' so important? What is meant by "I mustn't relax"? Dinzi did not mention the achievement of outcomes at all. This begs the question why? A week later Dinzi informed me that she did not mark the test as yet because she was *too busy preparing for the launch of the library* (personal communication). She also did not have a marking memo or mark sheet as yet.

My summary of the modal pattern of the seventeen observed lessons are (A4):

- What students were to learn had not been clearly defined.
- Outcomes were conspicuous by their absence.
- Lessons were teacher-centred with the teacher standing in front of the class giving information or asking questions and providing answers orally.
- Students' work was not assessed by the teacher.
- Students were not involved either in the lesson or the assessment.
- The teacher had administered one formal test, and only facts were assessed, but the test was not marked.
- Continuous assessment was conspicuous by its absence.
- Different forms of assessment such as oral assessment, class work, homework, experiments, investigations, assignments, portfolios, projects, and interviews were absent. (Students reported that they did not do any assignments, projects, or portfolios this year (see A4 15 August 2002).
- Misunderstanding of criterion-referenced assessment.
- No records of assessment data.
- No teacher guidance on how to improve.
- Very little writing on the board by the teacher.
- Very limited writing by students in their notebooks.

- Most students did not have notebooks during lessons.
- Students did not have textbooks in class.
- Lessons never started on time but between ten and fifteen minutes late.
- Students from outside the classroom not having lessons but disturbing the lessons of those inside classes.
- The teacher had been using two outdated textbooks, namely, “SEP – Physical Science Std. 6” dated 1980-1985 and “General Science in Action Std. 6” dated 1984.

These findings reveal firstly that there seems to be a correlation between her surface understanding and varied beliefs of the new assessment policy and her assessment practice, secondly that there is a mismatch between what and how Dinzi claims she assesses and what was observed, and thirdly a disconnection between how Dinzi practices assessment in her classroom and the demands made in the new assessment policy. This begs the question why?

Evidence from documents that Dinzi possess (A5)

Dinzi showed me her personal copies of the following documents with regard to assessment:

- The “Provincial Assessment Policy: From Grade R to 9 in the General Education and Training Phase and ABET. July 1999, Draft 8” which she said that she received in 2002 at a training workshop. In the questionnaire she indicated that this policy is easy to understand and implement (A1). During the interview she stated that this policy was not discussed properly at staff or departmental meetings and “it’s not constantly referred to but we refer when there’s a particular problem” (A3).
- “Circular Number 5/2000: National Assessment Policy as it relates to OBE and the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and Assessment in GET Grades” dated 19/01/2000 from the provincial department of education. She reported that she received this from the school management in 2002 and has read and understood it. This circular claims that it “**aims to assist educators in understanding, developing and implementing assessment practices** that are

appropriate for Curriculum 2005” (A5, emphasis in original). It is detailed in terms of what is expected of teachers (ibid). This raises the question: why did Dinzi not use this?

- “Natural Sciences: Assessment of Students in Grade 9” compiled by a Natural Science Facilitator but is undated. This document provides the reasons for assessment, the different approaches, types and tools of assessment as well as examples of assessment activities and recording sheets. She reported that she received this at a workshop in the course of this year (2002) but could not remember when. She reported that it was for Grade 9 as indicated on the cover therefore she did not use it. This raises the question regarding the value of the workshop? What did she learn/not learn at the workshop? Why could she not use the information in her Grade 8 class?
- “Rubrics”. Dinzi reported that she had received this document at a Grade 9 assessment course that she had attended in July 2001. It was at this course that she first came across the term ‘rubric’. She reported in the interview that she has problems with developing rubrics (A3)

These three documents collectively seemed to provide a relatively comprehensive landscape of the new assessment system, and some provided guidelines for classroom practice. It raises the question why Dinzi does not practice assessment as indicated in these documents that are shaped by the new assessment policy?

Teacher Records (A6)

Lesson Preparation

From July Dinzi reported that she was in the process of developing lesson preparation files for Grade 8 Natural Science (personal communication). I did not see them during my seventeen classroom observations and other visits including the follow up visits in October and November 2002. She reported that the reason for not having these documents was that the temporary teacher who had taught the class in the second term had taken the file away. This raises the question of whether she does plan for assessment, and if so how? Also if she does not plan for assessment how, does it affect her assessment practice?

Notes

I had however observed a hand written page with what seemed a title “RUBRIC OF ASSESSING A CALCULATION FOR DENSITY” for grade 9 (A4, 3). It had the words ‘specific outcomes’ with SO₁ (for specific outcome 1) left blank and next to SO₂ was written “CONCEPTS and PRINCIPLES”. I did not observe Dinzi using this in her class despite her teaching ‘density’ for the entire observation period. This begs the question why? Is she confused between Grade 8 and Grade 9 work? Why was specific outcome one left blank? Why was specific outcome 2 incompletely written?

Mark sheet for Grade 8 B

From July 2002 Dinzi repeatedly reported that either she was still working on the mark sheet where she recorded students’ marks or that she had left it at home. In fact, towards the end of the third term the class teacher of Grade 8 B (not Dinzi who is the learning area teacher) informed me that she had not as yet received the continuous assessment marks for Natural Science from Dinzi who “needed to prepare it correctly, and she would be doing this over the holidays” (personal communication, 21 August 2002). The issue is why did Dinzi not have a mark sheet ready? How does she record student achievement scores? What does preparing it correctly mean? By the end of September when I did not see nor receive the mark sheet from Dinzi I decided to stop pursuing the matter further. Then on 28 November 2002 I had received a copy of the mark sheet from Dinzi. It was recorded in the same form that had been used for the class register. Next to the name column was a column that indicated the maximum mark of “25” below which was written “EX” that I understood to mean examination, followed by another column indicating the maximum mark “75” below which was written “Y.M.” that I understood to mean year mark, followed by a column indicating a maximum mark of “100” below which was written “F.M.” that I understood to mean final mark. A column “SYMBOLS” followed this. The symbols were “O, A, PA, NA” meaning ‘outstanding’, ‘achieved’, ‘partially achieved’ and ‘not achieved’ respectively, and this symbol was written to corresponded to the relevant final mark of the student.

The science head of department had informed me previously that the:

- November examination mark had to be converted to a mark out of 25. I figured this was represented by the “EX” column on Dinzi’s mark sheet.
- Year mark or continuous assessment mark for Grade 8 Natural Science was to add up to a mark of 75 and would be made up of:
 - Tests (including June examination)
 - Investigations
 - Assignments
 - Projects

I figured this was represented by “75 Y.M” in Dinzi’s mark sheet.

- Promotion or final mark was 25 + 75, the total being 100 as indicated on Dinzi’s mark sheet.
- Each symbol corresponded to percentages and levels as required by the provincial Department of Education indicated in their District Memorandum dated 18 November 2002, and that is was amended for 2002 only.
- She had not moderated the mark sheet of Dinzi’s Grade 8 B class because Dinzi did not have it ready (as at 25 November).
- She will not be in school from Friday 29 November 2002 as she would be marking matriculation Biology examination papers.

(Personal interview with the science Head of Department on 25 November 2002).

This mark sheet raises a fundamental question: How did Dinzi arrive at the year mark or continuous assessment mark for her Grade 8B class? Dinzi reported that the continuous assessment mark was constituted from:

The notebook, and then you also check the handouts of the students ... and then the experiments...then the exam mark, ... then the assignment.

(A10)

The only form of assessment that is consistent with what the science head of department requested was the assignment. Furthermore, the examination mark was not supposed to be part of the continuous assessment mark. But when continuous assessment was practised is not clear because I did not observe any during the seventeen observed lessons and follow up visits to the school. The students also reported that they did not do assignments. My classroom observations revealed that

the notebooks and experiment were not assessed (A4 and A7). The issues that these raise are: Did the science head of department or the deputy principals or the principal monitor and moderate how continuous assessment scores were generated and assessed, and if so how and when was it done? How will students be affected with a lack of consistency from one teacher to another?

Dinzi reported that the Grade 8B class was given:

Not a project as such, we made it an assignment which I think they don't differ. They did an assignment on density.

(A10)

How does Dinzi's understanding of investigations, projects and assignments compare with that of the science head of department and the other science teachers? How does the understanding impact on her assessment practice and student achievement? Do some students benefit while others are disadvantaged? What implication does this have for equity? Students also reported that they did not do any investigations and projects (A4, 15 August 2002). Is there a discrepancy between what Dinzi claims she does and what she actually does in her classroom? If so...why? She also reported that "now what we do, all the test marks are then converted to 75" (A10, emphasis added). Does this imply that only test marks are used to compute the continuous assessment marks? Why are there anomalies in her responses? The importance of monitoring and moderating the continuous assessment marks should be seen in the context of Dinzi's response:

Sometimes a teacher can cheat; just write marks only to find out you haven't given the student any work or haven't marked the work of the student.

(A3)

This seems a serious issue for the successful implementation of the continuous assessment model. What are the implications if the marks, both continuous assessment and the final mark, are not monitored and moderated effectively and efficiently from the beginning of the year? How will students be affected in the absence of monitoring and moderation? What does it say about the new assessment system?

She also reported that the final mark is used solely for promotion purposes because:

[If] the child has been promoted to the next grade then there's nothing that we can do to change it, that child is over.

(A10)

Is this an appropriate use of the examination result, which the new policy urges us to move away from? The broader purpose of assessment is provided in detail in the new policy (Department of Education, 1998: 10-11). Why does she not know the broader purpose of assessment as indicated in the new assessment policy indicated above? Why does she still believe in this narrow purpose of assessment?

Student notebooks (A7)

During the seventeen classroom observation lessons I observed the notebooks of students who had them in class. It is important to note that on any one day only thirty to thirty five percent of the students had notebooks in the class. In fact on one particular day not a single student had a notebook in Class (A4, 20 August 2002).

Dinzi reported that the reason for this is:

They're just careless and lose them because the school provides them with notebooks.

(A10)

This raises many questions: Why is Dinzi not assertive with the students who do not have notebooks in class? Why are they irresponsible? The analysis of the notebooks revealed the following:

- There was no evidence of outcomes being used in the notes or any worksheets from the beginning of the year.
- No evidence of work being assessed by the students or teacher except for the teacher's signature and the date in some books. Although Dinzi reported that "it is continuous assessment" and that she gave them marks in the notebooks (A10) I did not see any in any marks in the observed notebooks. This signing pattern also varied, - of the six notebooks analysed, two had been signed once, while the four had not been signed at all.
- Incorrect work goes uncorrected, for example, one book and this was a book of a better student, revealed the following:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Density} &= L \times b \times h \\ &= 4\text{cm} \times 3\text{cm} \times 2\text{cm} \\ &= 24 \text{ m}\end{aligned}$$

Incorrect work seemed prevalent in most notebooks despite Dinzi reporting:

They are young and need to be checked if they follow and do the right thing. They don't write clearly, make spelling mistakes or they don't interpret correctly so you've got to guide them and try to remedy it in class.

(A10, emphasis added)

The remedies were neither evident in the notebooks nor during my classroom observations. Why is there this inconsistency between her stated claims and her actual classroom practice?

- There was great disparity in the sets of notes and worksheets amongst the various students - no two students had same or similar notes and worksheets. For example, one student had incomplete notes from February until March, and his next set of notes was for 31 July, and that consisted of five incomplete, incoherent lines only, and that is where it stopped. There were no notes for August and no worksheets at all. While another student had no notes from February, but incomplete notes and worksheets from July to August 2002.
- No notebook had the worksheet or exercise that had been conducted in the laboratory.
- Most notebooks contained notes from other learning areas as well.
- Most notebooks looked dirty and untidy and were coloured over. This colouring over the notes and worksheets obscured the notes and gave the book an unsightly and un-educational look.

This evidence reveals an absence of outcomes-based assessment generally and continuous assessment specifically being practiced by the teacher. In addition, the teacher was not using information about students' performance/non-performance or achievement/non-achievement to correct and improve learning. This begs the question why, since it has serious implications for the successful implementation of the new assessment policy.

Other student records (A8)

Test books

Dinzi reported that she did not see any test books of students this term but:

[Thinks] they have flip files in which they place all their tests.
(A4, 21 August 2002, emphasis added).

Upon enquiry from the students they reported that they had no pages with tests or files or test books (ibid). However two students showed me exercise books that they called their test books. One had answers to what seemed a science test because the heading was “Natural Science Test” dated 25 April 2002, but no question paper, and this was all that had been recorded to date as at 21 August 2002. The other had what seemed like answers but completely different to the first student and it did not have a heading or date.

This raises questions with regard to evidence of students’ achievement results. Where and how do students keep evidence of their achievement results? How will they learn from their mistakes or improve their learning if they do have records of achievements? If educational administrators, and students’ parents’ or guardians need information about their children’s performance, how will it be responded to if there is no evidence of achievement?

Projects

I did not observe any project work of the students. They also reported that they did not do any projects. This begs the question why?

Assignments

Again I did not observe any assignments of the students. They also reported that they did not do any assignments. This begs the question why?

Portfolios

I did not observe any portfolios for this class. The students also reported that they had no portfolios; in fact they did not understand what a portfolio was until I described it in detail to them. This raises the question why because portfolio assessment is a requirement of the new assessment policy that states “samples of students’ work included in portfolios should show that they are able to integrate knowledge, concepts and skills, and that students have not been assessed only on memorisation of information” (Department of Education, 1998: 12). On what will Dinzi base student progress in the absence of portfolios? Will the students be disadvantaged in any way and how? Should this process of keeping portfolios be monitored and moderated, by whom, how and when? What are the consequences to teaching, learning and assessment if portfolio assessment is not implemented by teachers?

Reports

Dinzi informed me that students received four reports, one per term (personal communication).

First Term Report

I was unable to get the first term reports from the students because most reported that they could not find it whilst others reported that it was with their parents who did not live with them, and others kept forgetting.

The Half-Year Report

The half-year report was called “Senior Phase Progress Report” (A8, 3) issued at the end of the second term in June 2002. The space for the ‘term’ to be written was left blank, and so was the space for the ‘number of days the student was absent’. The new assessment policy requires that the report must “comment on the attendance of the student at the learning site” (Department of Education, 1998: 13) but this was not adhered to, why? It had three columns; one reflected the “learning area”, another “marks achieved” and the other the “effort symbol” (A8, 3). In the column ‘learning

area' acronyms were used, for example LLC 1, NS, HSS and so forth for each of the eight learning areas, but what these acronyms meant was not indicated in the report. Are assumptions made that parents and the students know what these acronyms mean? How valid are the assumptions? In the column 'mark achieved' there was no total indicated, for example, for NS (Natural Science) a student's mark was indicated as "76" but the total was not indicated, that is, 76 out of what? In the 'effort symbols' column symbols such as "A", "S", "NAS" were used with their meanings indicated as, "achieved", "satisfactory" and "needs additional support" respectively. This begs the question: 'achieved what'? How will students, teachers and parents know what the students achieved and how? What does 'satisfactory' mean? In the 'remarks' column, which was relatively spacious to accommodate a lengthy remark, a one-word remark was written: "satisfactory". What does this 'satisfactory' mean to students and their parents/guardians? This is inconsistent with the policy requirement that requires the reporting process to comment "on the personal and social development" and to "give an indication of the strengths and developmental needs and identify follow up steps for learning and teaching" (Department of Education, 1998: 13). Why is this policy requirement not being complied with in the report? Does the teacher believe that this form of communicating assessment results meaningful to students, parents and to the education system, including herself? When I enquired from Dinzi whether students receive additional support she responded that they do in the form of after school support. But Dinzi did not refer to the progress/non-progress of students as indicated in the half-year report during my seventeen classroom observations. The question is why?

Third Term Report

Dinzi informed me that that there would be no report as such in the third term, but only a mark sheet indicating the continuous assessment marks (personal communication, 21 August 2002). However she did not have the mark sheet ready at the end of the term. The class teacher of Grade 8 B (not Dinzi who is the learning area teacher) informed me that she had not as yet received the continuous assessment marks for Natural Science from Dinzi who "needed to prepare it correctly, and she would be doing this over the holidays" (ibid). I did not see nor receive a copy of this continuous assessment mark sheet despite several attempts to the point of being a

pest. By the end of September I decided to stop pursuing the matter further. The question is why did Dinzi not have the continuous assessment mark ready? What implication does it have not only for student assessment and improvement but also for the successful implementation of the new assessment policy that is based on the continuous assessment model? How will students know their performance for the third term? This seems in contradiction to the policy requirement for “timeous communication of assessment results” (Department of Education, 1998: 10).

Year-End Report

The year-end report was called “Senior Phase School Report” (A8, 4) issued to parents at the Parents’ Meeting on 1 December 2002. The space for the number of days the student was absent had been left blank as had been for the half-year report. This is inconsistent with the new assessment policy that requires the report to “comment on the attendance of the student at the learning site” (Department of Education, 1998: 13) but this was not adhered to. Why was this so? It again had three columns; one reflected the “learning area”, another “marks achieved” and the other the “level achieved” (ibid). In the column ‘learning area’ acronyms were used again, for example LLC 1, NS, HSS and so forth for each of the eight learning areas but what these acronyms meant was not indicated in the report. Again are assumptions made that parents and the students know what these acronyms mean? How valid are the assumptions? In the column ‘mark achieved’ there was no total, indicated, for example, for NS (Natural Science) a student’s mark was indicated as “4” but the total was not indicated, that is, 4 out of what? In the ‘level achieved’ column letters such as “A”, “PA”, “NA” were used, but what they meant was not indicated. What is the meaning of ‘level’ achieved? Are they assuming again that parents and students will know what ‘A’, ‘PA’, ‘NA’ mean? What if parents do not know? However what was indicated in the “KEYS” section of the report was “Level 4, Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1 with their meanings, “excellent achievement (70%-100%), achieved (40%-69%), partially achieved (35%-39%), not achieved” respectively. In the relatively large ‘remarks’ column was written either “Achieved” or “Not achieved”. This raises the question again, achieved or not achieved what? Is this clear and meaningful to students, parents, and other stakeholders and to the education system? The new assessment policy requires the report to include comments “on the personal and social

development” and to “give an indication of the strengths and developmental needs and identify follow up steps for learning and teaching” (Department of Education, 1998: 13). Why is this policy requirement not adhered to in the report?

Examination Question Papers (A9)

Dinzi reported that two examinations were written, one in June - the half-year examinations and one at the end of the year – the final examinations (personal communication)

Half-year examination question paper

It was impossible to obtain a copy of the half-year science question paper from Dinzi, the science head of department, the other Grade 8 science teacher or from the students. None could find a copy. The way teachers and students manage the storage of documents is open to question. However I was able to obtain loose answer sheets from four students. These answer sheets revealed that three questions were set and all required factual, short answers, such as “kinetic energy”, and “conductors of heat” that carried two marks each. The question is why were only low-level factual questions asked? Why were higher levels, more cognitively demanding questions not tested?

November examination question paper

Dinzi and the other Grade 8 Natural Science teacher were examiners of this paper, while the science head of department was the moderator. The students were expected to respond to three questions with a total of twenty five marks in one hour. All questions were low level, factual questions, such as, “mention three ...; what are; name five; calculate the ...” This raises fundamental issues. Why were questions confined to this low level of cognitive operation? Why did they not assess higher levels of knowledge and skills? What are the implications of this for assessment change and educational change generally?

The evidence from all these data sources, namely, teacher documents and records, student notebooks and records and the examination question papers, suggest firstly a mismatch between Dinzi's stated claims and her assessment practice, secondly a correlation between her understanding and beliefs about the new assessment policy and her assessment practice, and thirdly a disconnection between Dinzi's assessment practice and the expectations of the new assessment policy. These findings beg the question why, the response to which is the focus of Chapter Eight and the third research question, namely, 'How the continuities and discontinuities between the official assessment policy and the teachers' assessment practice could be explained?

It seems clear that Dinzi has a surface understanding of the new assessment policy, that her beliefs or attitudes about the policy and the way it was introduced had been mainly negative, and her assessment practice was very weakly connected to if not disconnected from the official policy on assessment. These findings again beg the question: Why does Dinzi have a surface understanding of the new assessment policy? Why is she negative towards the policy and the way it was introduced to her? Why is there a distance between her assessment practice and the new assessment policy? I shall take up these questions in Chapter Eight as I had indicated earlier.

Summary of Chapter Five

In this chapter I described Dinzi's understanding and beliefs or attitudes concerning the new assessment policy in response to the first research question of the study. The chapter also describes how this teacher practices assessment in her classroom, thereby responding to the second research question. The findings suggest that Dinzi has a surface understanding of and negative beliefs or attitudes about the new assessment policy, and that her assessment practice is mostly discontinuous with the new assessment policy. I provide possible explanations for the findings in Chapter Eight.

The next chapter would examine Hayley's understanding and beliefs with regard to the policy and the way in which she practices assessment in her classroom.