

Actual and Ideal Assessment Practices in South African Natural Sciences Classrooms

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KEYWORDS Actual and Ideal Assessment. Compliance and Non-Compliance. Integration. Learning Outcomes

ABSTRACT Assessment practices form an integral part of science teaching and learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate actual assessment practices and compare them to ideal assessment practices according to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) policy documents. A purposive sample comprising five Grade 9 educators was selected: three from high performing schools and two from low performing schools. Data were collected through lesson observations, reviewing portfolios of the educators and learners, and also through semi-structured interviews. The results show that educators' understanding of the various ideal roles of assessment ranged from 0% to 60% with the majority of items scored at 40%. This suggests a huge difference between actual and ideal assessment practices. These differences were identified from the purpose of assessment, integrating assessment and learning processes, outputs of assessment, the role of assessment, educators' and learners' portfolios, performance-based assessment tasks, the use of rubrics, and from the assessment of learning outcomes. The findings of this study may have far reaching implications in light of compliance to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) introduced in the country.