

The Changing Nature of Assessment in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT Major changes in education policy in South Africa have affected teacher education on the whole and assessment in particular. Assessment policies changed to include transparency in assessment. The Norms and Standards for Educators identified seven roles that teachers must demonstrate when they teach, including foundational, practical and reflective competencies which inform the training and assessing of student teachers in schools. The new *Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* proposes 11 basic competencies of a beginner teacher, but retains the seven roles of the teacher. It is against this background that this article explores the changing nature of assessment in teacher education. Currently student teachers at the University of Limpopo are assessed on content knowledge in major subjects and practical skills of teaching. Re-conceptualisation of the initial teacher education qualification in the new policy documents requires institutions to examine their assessment practices. This article examines the implications of policy changes on assessment practices at higher education institutions through a critical analysis of the policy documents. It suggests ways in which changes in assessment practice can be implemented in order to address the changing school curriculum, as put forward in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. The recommendation is that the assessment of student teachers should change and a different format should be adopted, considering the amount of time that they spend in the field. There should also be greater focus on mentoring, reflection, cooperative and collaborative learning and different methods of assessing.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment in teacher education is driven by policy and context (Vandeyar and Killen 2003: 103), which implies that assessment in teacher education varies in different countries. It does vary at policy and context levels; however, the principles of assessment are more paradigm-driven than context-driven. For example, the nature of assessment in a constructivist paradigm may differ from assessment in a critical paradigm. In a constructivist paradigm, assessment is based on students' ability to construct new knowledge and make meaning of this knowledge, while assessment in the critical paradigm involves students' ability to critically reflect on knowledge. Assessment policy may also be socially embedded. For example, students from previously disadvantaged communities may be engaged in assessment practices that evaluate their ability to teach in a different social context. Therefore the assessment policy for student teachers includes assessment of the teacher in the community, as a citizen and in a pastoral role. Assessment theory may distinguish between 'fit for purpose' assessment, authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, and peer assessment, among others. These types of assessment are

more inclusive and cater for students with varying abilities and preferences (Brookhart 2004: 444).

In the South African context, assessment in teacher education has been influenced by the legacy of the apartheid education system. In pre-democratic South Africa teacher training was carried out in racially segregated universities and colleges. This had an impact on the standards of training and assessment practices employed. With the advent of democracy in 1994, segregated teacher training gave way to a united education structure that was in line with the principles enshrined in the new Constitution. After the initial upheaval and change, the *National Education Policy Act* was introduced in 1996 (DoE 1996a), followed by the *Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) policy* in 2000 (DoE 2000). The NSE focused on the seven roles of the teacher and the required competencies. After conducting research on implementation of the NSE, the DoE introduced the *Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification selected from Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF)* in 2011. This new policy is a modification of the roles and competences that teachers are expected to be trained in. This change in policy has implications for teacher

training and assessing. While assessment practices will have to be modified, they will also need to incorporate new components.

This article examines the change that has taken place and which continues to take place in teacher education in South Africa and its implications for assessment. The problem is that while change is necessary, it can become counterproductive if introduced so often that it does not allow for stability in an education system (Reddy et al. 2008: 143,160). There is ample evidence of the disastrous effects of too much change, with the total collapse of the outcomes-based education system in South African basic education (Marais and Meier 2004: 229).

The methodology employed in examining the changes in assessment in teacher education was to discuss the basic provisions of each policy on assessment issues. Thereafter common aspects that were repeated in later policies were identified and discussed. In particular, the changing role of the teacher as an assessor was examined. As links are made between each of the policies, current practice in teacher training is interspersed in an attempt to show how the policy impacts on practice on the ground. Models of assessing teaching practice and the different assessment tools used are also examined. In particular, there is a focus on the assessment of pre-service teachers during their teaching practice sessions. Since work-based experience is crucial to any would-be teacher, assessment of such practice can reveal important aspects of teacher training for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. The discussion also examines implementation issues regarding the policies.

THEORIES USED IN ASSESSMENT

Different theories may be used to explain how assessment should be done. This depends on the type of assessment being used. For example, formative assessment theory (Sadler 1989) is often cited when explaining the functions of student learning, showing how the instructional practices of formative feedback are linked to learning theory. Theory relevant to classroom assessment comes from several different areas of study: the study of individual differences (educational psychology, theories of learning and motivation); the study of groups (social learning theory); and the study of measurement (validity and reliability theory, formative and sum-

mative assessment theory) (Brookhart 2004). Therefore it is imperative that teachers understand their role in classroom assessment decision-making, as this affects the type of assessment they choose and the manner in which they implement it. Often, 'high-stakes assessment' forces teachers to adopt measurement strategies when assessing. According to McMillan (2003: 41), "Teachers need to conceptualise their classroom assessments in the context of overall educational beliefs and values, as well as overall goals for student learning. Placing assessments within more general beliefs, values, and goals should help teachers align classroom assessments so that their effects are consistent with what they believe and value".

An example of the above practice can be found in the School of Education at the University of Limpopo (School of Education 2009). As part of the review process of the undergraduate teacher education programme, the staff collectively had to identify their overall educational beliefs and values. They had to identify the conceptual framework that informed their practice as a teacher training facility. They chose to position the School of Education within the social critical paradigm. This implied that their teaching and assessing had to be aligned with social critical theory. They illustrated the pillars of their philosophy by using the 'egg metaphor' designed by Kwena Masha as shown in Figure 1. This meant that teaching and assessment had to take place within the context described.

In such a context, the use of assessment techniques is determined by the theoretical framework that underpins teaching and learning. The staff made use of portfolios, reflective journals, and a combination of peer, mentor, and lecturer assessments during work-based learning (teaching practice). It is from this theoretical angle of social critical theory that this article explores the changes in teacher education policies and associated assessment practice. Within the context of a democracy that has a transformative educational agenda, using the social critical theory approach to teacher training and assessing is crucial since it addresses the core issues related to a society in transition: providing education that will empower future generations and strengthen the democracy.

Other theories that can be applicable in the assessment process are framing theory (Tannen 1993) and socio-cultural theory. Framing theory

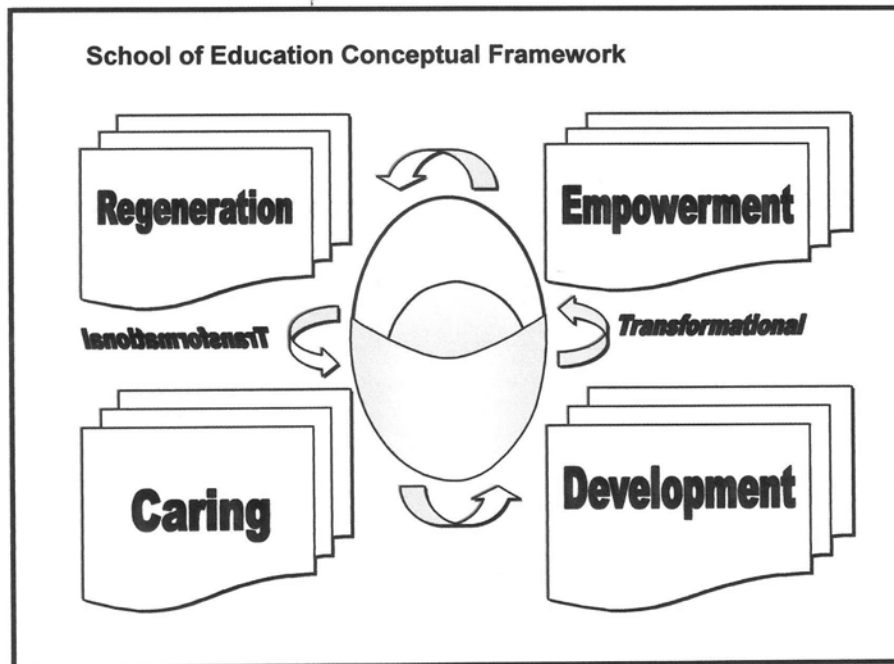


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework (School of Education 2009)

(Tannen 1993) was used to understand feedback comments on assessment tasks. “The basic premise of Framing Theory is that we interpret messages on the basis of various framing devices or ‘structures of expectations’ that we bring to any communication event” (Niven 2009: 280). This may also be linked to feedback theory, which explains the type and effect of feedback on assessments. Psychologists commonly research this area of assessment (feedback) together with student motivation during assessment. For example, Stiggins’ (1999) work based on motivation theory concluded that we should not only re-evaluate how we assess but how we use assessment in the pursuit of student success. In summary, theories on assessment are highly dependent on the context within which the assessment takes place. This implies that the assessor has to have a ‘decision-making rationale’ for the assessment and grading practices (McMillan 2003). McMillan (2003) explained this decision-making rationale as the difficulty teachers have in providing reasons for specific techniques and approaches adopted as well as justification for what they did. In addition, teachers’ assessment decisions were based largely on on-the-job experience.

The above theories are relevant to the policies discussed hereafter because they point to the finer details about assessment which the policies embody but do not clearly spell out. The result is that these explicit details are not implemented in practice. It is for this reason that specific recommendations are made later on that are crucial to assessment in practice; for example, regarding mentoring, reflection and cooperative and collaborative learning.

POLICIES ON TEACHER TRAINING

This section examines the various policies that govern teacher training and assessment at South African institutions of higher learning. The first, which formed part of the *National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996*, was the *Policy on Norms and Standards for Educators*. This policy was gazetted by the DoE in 2000 (Government Gazette No. 20844) and formed the basis for teacher training and assessing.

Policy on Norms and Standards for Educators

The cornerstone of the Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) policy is the notion of ap-

plied competence and its associated assessment criteria. This constitutes three interconnected kinds of competences: practical, foundational and reflexive. This policy is dominated by the seven roles for educators, which are actually “norms for educator development and therefore the central feature of all initial educator qualifications and learning programmes” (DoE 2000). The seven roles are: learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessor; and learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist. For each of these roles, the three competences need to be demonstrated. “The seventh role, that of a learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist, is the over-arching role into which the other roles are integrated, and in which competence is ultimately assessed” (Education Labour Relations Council 2003: A-47).

Morrow (2007: 3) argues that “the job of teachers is to teach”. Specialist knowledge is assessed through contact modules and summative assessment forms (like examinations) and through practical assessment (when pre-service teachers teach lessons in schools and are assessed). Falmagne et al. (2006) called this assessment of the ‘knowledge state’, which changes as students gain more knowledge and practical experience. The significance of the study by Falmagne et al. (2006) to assessment of pre-service teachers is that knowing the ‘knowledge state’ (that is, what the student can do and what the student is ready to learn) enables the assessor to plan appropriate assessment. The implication is that the pre-service teachers’ ‘knowledge state’ would change as they gained more specialist knowledge and practical experience.

Although the focus in the policy is on the role of the teacher as a subject specialist, their role as an assessor complements this. The role of the assessor is described as follows (Education Labour Relations Council 2003: A-52):

ASSESSOR

Practical Competences

(Where the learner demonstrates the ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action; make considered decisions about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action.)

- ♦ Making appropriate use of different assessment practices, with a particular emphasis on competence-based assessment and the formative use of assessment, in particular continuous and diagnostic forms of assessment.
- ♦ Assessing in a manner appropriate to the phase/subject/learning area.
- Providing feedback to learners in sensitive and educationally helpful ways.
- ♦ Judging learners’ competence and performance in ways that are fair, valid and reliable.
- ♦ Maintaining efficient recording and reporting of academic progress.

Foundational Competences

(Where the learner demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge and thinking which underpins the actions taken.)

- ♦ Understanding the assumptions that underlie a range of assessment approaches and their particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to the age of the learner and learning area being assessed.
- ♦ Understanding the different learning principles underpinning the structuring of different assessment tasks.
- ♦ Understanding a range of assessment approaches and methods appropriate to the learning area/subject/discipline/phase.
- ♦ Understanding language terminology and content to be used in the assessment and the degree to which this is gender and culturally sensitive.
- ♦ Understanding descriptive and diagnostic reporting within a context of high illiteracy rates among parents.

Reflexive Competences

(Where the learner demonstrates the ability to integrate or connect performances and decision making with understanding and with the ability to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances and explain the reasons behind these actions.)

- ♦ Justifying assessment design decisions and choices about assessment tasks and approaches.
- ♦ Reflecting on appropriateness of assessment decisions made in particular learning

situations and adjusting the assessment tasks and approaches where necessary.

- ♦ Interpreting and using assessment results to feed into processes for the improvement of learning programmes.

Finally, the NSE policy describes how applied and integrated assessment should be done. For example, accountability and transparency are necessary features for all assessment practices; evidence of assessment can be demonstrated through a variety of options, including case studies, problem-solving assignments, portfolios, projects, written and oral examinations; assessing the extent of horizontal integration (roles and knowledge from modules); assessing the extent of vertical integration of foundational, practical and reflexive competence; assessing the extent of students to teach in authentic and changing South African contexts; ongoing and developmental assessment; and keeping of detailed diagnostic records of learner progress (Education Labour Relations Council 2003: A-52).

In theory, the integrated assessment strategy outlined in this document demonstrates a balanced approach to assessment, however, in practice this is not the case. According to Vandeyar and Killen (2003: 133), the basic principles of assessment did not change with the new curriculum: the “major weakness is that teachers are still not provided with guidelines on the fundamental principles of good assessment practices”. Teachers’ perceptions of assessment are that “assessment is a matter of technical procedure (something that must be done to satisfy the bureaucrats), rather than a matter of professional judgement (something that should be done to help students learn)” (Vandeyar and Killen 2003: 133). In addressing assessment standards used by teachers, Potterton (2007) says that they have done little to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Morrow (2007: 9) raises a crucial point when he examines the NSE, arguing that “it entangles two strands of our thinking – a conception of teaching, and the roles of those employed as teachers”. Vandeyar and Killen (2007) found that teachers’ approaches to assessment were influenced by their backgrounds instead of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the learners. In the place of the cultural and linguistic capital of learners in their classes, the educators attempted to use the assessment tasks to reinforce the differences be-

tween the learners, or they forced “culturally different learners to blend into the hegemonic school culture” (Vandeyar and Killen 2007: 110). Teachers’ personal perceptions and limited language abilities (Vandeyar and Killen 2007) are best addressed in the teacher training process. Morrow (2007) concurs with the view that teachers do not have the competency or willingness to capably implement the policies; he contends that many school teachers are deficient.

Reddy et al.’s (2008: 155) study of institutional practices concerning pre-service teachers at nine faculties/schools of education at South African universities revealed that “assessment of practice teaching seems to be both a contentious and a complex issue at a number of institutions”. They also found an increase in the use of practice teaching portfolios, and self-reflection was encouraged. Interestingly, they report that a shortage of supervisors to assess student teachers often leads to quality assurance problems. As already discussed in this article, the assessment context plays a significant role in the assessment process, as discussed by Reddy et al. (2008: 159) concerning the instruments used to assess student teachers: “but these instruments are ... under constant review as new perspectives on what constitutes good or bad teaching emerge and as teaching-learning contexts vary”. Clearly, practitioners in teacher education were grappling with assessment-related issues that arose from the implementation of the NSE policy. Morrow (2007) also points to the ‘nightmare’ that continuous assessment brought about where teachers had little time to teach. The studies presented above indicate that the NSE policy (DoE 2000), although sound in theory, had many implementation problems for both educators in schools and those in training, especially with regard to assessment.

National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa

The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (DoE 2006b) was developed in response to the constant demand for teacher education to address the needs of a democratic South Africa: “The overriding aim of the policy is to properly equip teachers to undertake their essential and demanding tasks, to enable them to continually enhance their professional competence and per-

formance, and to raise the esteem in which they are held by the people of South Africa” (DoE 2006: 5). Much of the policy is based on the work of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education, which was engaged in a widely consultative process with various stakeholders in teacher education. Their work concluded with a report in 2006. The policy tried to address the holistic needs of teacher education in South Africa by addressing issues such as the successful recruitment, retention and professional development of teachers to meet the social and economic needs of the country.

However, one crucial aspect of this policy is that it was still based on the NSE policy: “The principles underlying the policy are the following, as expressed in the Norms and Standards for Educators (Government Gazette No. 20844 2000) which require a teacher to be: a specialist in a particular learning area, subject or phase; a specialist in teaching and learning; a specialist in assessment; a curriculum developer; a leader, administrator and manager; a scholar and life-long learner; and a professional who plays a community, citizenship, and pastoral role” (DoE 2006b: 5). In essence then, this policy did not address the actual teacher training processes; rather, it addressed the broader social aspects within which teacher educators work. A shortage of teachers, lack of resources, standardising qualifications and rural education are some of the issues dealt with. These are coupled with other factors such as teachers having to cope with rationalisation of the teaching community into a single national system; the introduction of new curricula, which require teachers to have new knowledge and applied competences, including the use of new technologies; and a radical change in the demographic, cultural and linguistic composition of classrooms. Indeed these are the very aspects identified by researchers as having a negative impact on assessment in the classroom (Potterton 2007; Vandeyar and Killen 2007; Reddy et al. 2008).

Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications Selected from the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF)

In an attempt to understand the practices of all the teacher training institutions across South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE)

conducted an evaluation of all teacher training programmes. The findings were translated into the *Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (DoE 2011a). This policy was approved in July 2011 and replaces the NSE of 2000. It addresses the aspects that the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (DoE 2006b) failed to do. For example, it was found (through the CHE accreditation process) that assessment of student teachers on the seven roles of the educator was being done in a compartmentalised way: “A critical issue for the design of purposeful qualifications was the interpretation of roles as different identities (for example, a teacher is an assessor as distinct from a teacher is a mediator of learning, rather than a teacher in her daily work assesses and mediates learning in relation to a specific school subject of which she is a knowledgeable classroom teacher)” (DoE 2011a: 8). This policy retains the seven roles of the educator; however, it clearly spells out that newly qualified teachers will have to have 11 competencies that are linked to the seven roles. The role of the teacher as an assessor is still maintained: “Newly qualified teachers must be able to assess learners in reliable and varied ways and to use the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning” (DoE 2011a: 55).

The *Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (DoE 2011a) also addresses other aspects of teacher training, like qualification paths in teacher education, qualifications and programmes for initial teacher education and continuing professional development. It acknowledges that the development of programmes was “pedagogically weak and content poor, particularly with respect to subject content” (DoE 2011a: 8).

In light of the changes proposed by the new policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications, the DoE (2011a) proposed an Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025, in which both the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training work together to improve the quality of teacher training and support given to practicing teachers. Of particular interest is that “universities will need to implement innovative mechanisms to strengthen the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) component of

teacher education programmes, for example, through the effective use of Professional Practice Schools (PPSs) and Teaching Schools (TSs)” (DoE 2011a: 3). Output 4 of this strategic plan is aimed at the Department of Higher Education and Training and teacher training in particular. Assessment is addressed in the first of four ‘activities’ which aims to develop teacher knowledge and practice standards.

Previous policies discussed in this article were formulated within the outcomes-based paradigm. Outcomes-based assessment was fraught with complexities (Combrinck 2003; Knight 2005; Le Grange and Beets 2005; Ramhurry 2006). The eventual downfall of outcomes-based education as a driver of curriculum change in South Africa is also acknowledged in the *Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications selected from the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF)* (DoE 2011a: 9). The focus of the policy is on a purely skills-based approach which relies almost exclusively on evidence of demonstrable outcomes as measures of success. This is done without paying attention to how knowledge must underpin these skills for them to impact effectively on learning. This approach produces technicians who may be able to replicate performance in similar contexts, but are severely challenged when the context changes. This is evidenced in the dismal performance of Grade 3 learners in Numeracy and Literacy in the Annual National Assessments that was revealed in 2011.

The curriculum policy that comes into effect in 2012 is the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which is compact and appears simple to understand and execute. The implementation of this policy will determine whether it lasts longer than previous ones. Morrow (2007: 6) argues that “our problem is lack of implementation”. As has been the case with implementation of previous policies, a pattern of late and short training sessions for teachers is already emerging. Morrow (2007) criticises the ‘workshop’ type of training that is used to skill teachers in new policies.

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The changing nature of teacher education policies and the curriculum in South African education is reflected in the way assessment is

conducted at various higher education institutions. Researcher Reddy et al. (2008) point to inconsistent ways of assessing. This can be attributed to various reasons like a lack of resources (Potterton 2007) and previous inequalities that existed in South African education. Simon et al. (2010) attribute measurement, psychological and social theories as having an impact on the decision-making process on assessment by pre-service teachers. The intersection between theory and practice and its impact on assessment practices of teachers is examined extensively by Brookhart (2004). In addition, classroom assessments need to be contextualised within the overall educational beliefs and values (McMillan 2003). The way that this unfolds in teacher education is determined largely by contextual factors.

In the South African context a decrease in the focus of outcomes has led to an increased focus on standards. With the added attention on accountability and standards, assessment for learning may lose out to assessment of learning (Hildebrand 2004; Bloxham 2008). Also, if within a particular context a conceptual framework is chosen (as with the School of Education at the University of Limpopo, see Fig. 1), then this dictates how assessment would unfold within this context. In this case, social critical theory underpinned the teaching and assessment practice. This implies that a ‘critical pedagogy’ (Keesing-Styles 2003) may be employed where an integrated approach to theory and practice is used. Evidence of this type of assessment is student-generated assessment criteria and assessment tasks, the removal of outcomes and peer and self-assessment (Keesing-Styles 2003).

The case of assessment in teacher education in an Australian context (Hildebrand 2004) is not inherently different. For example, the extensive use of ‘portfolios of evidence’ is common practice but, as Hildebrand (2004) warns, they can be abused by the students. The use of peer and self-assessment is also common practice. Self-assessment often takes the form of reflections in journals. Taylor and Biddulph’s (2001) experience in the New Zealand context with online peer assessment of student teachers suggests that peer assessment is a challenging but valuable experience. A major focus of assessment of student teachers is on competence of the student in teaching in a classroom situation. Struyven and DeMeyst’s (2010) Bel-

gian study points to the complexities involved in competence-based teacher education. Again the emphasis falls on the context of the learning experience and the assessment.

Reddy et al.'s (2008) study on the practicum of pre-service teachers at nine South African universities indicates the diversity of the problems encountered in the South African teacher education context. In addition to widespread issues concerning the organisation of teaching practice (finances, supervisors, transport, accommodation, length of teaching practice), the areas of concern around assessment are also numerous. Reddy et al. (2008) cite the change in the method of assessing (competence versus marks), assessment criteria for portfolios, difficulties and complexities of assessing practicums in terms of current policy documents, staff shortage of supervisors, and self-assessment by students as some of the problems that affect assessment of pre-service teachers during practice teaching.

Research on assessment of pre-service teachers is extensive both in South Africa and abroad. While there are many common practices across universities and countries, assessment is still highly controversial. In the South African context, policy on teacher education over the past 20 years is best described as 'developmental'. This 'experimental' phase in curriculum and teacher education policy has had long-lasting effects on teacher training and assessment. Sporadic translation of policy into practice may be attributed to a lack of attention to policy documents, a lack of understanding of policy documents and uncertainty about the nature of current policy documents (Reddy et al. 2008). The implementation of teacher education policy in the area of assessment has resulted in widespread fragmentation in practices at various higher education institutions.

THE WAY FORWARD

Assessment is dynamic in nature. However, there are certain considerations that are applicable in any assessment context. As a result of the changing nature of policy on teacher education and constant changes in the school curriculum over the last 20 years in South Africa, assessment practices have also undergone similar changes. Outcomes-based assessment heralded the concept of continuous assessment which

teachers had to adopt. In addition, other forms of assessment were also introduced, like self-assessment, peer assessment and group assessment. The CAPS which will be introduced in 2012 has further implications for teachers and their trainers. Based on these developments, the following strategies are suggested as a way forward for assessment issues related to pre-service teachers:

- ♦ The policies state that focus should be on assessing of pre-service teachers in the field under supervision of qualified teachers. To ensure that this happens in a formalised way, it is recommended that mentoring of pre-service teachers by qualified teachers should be introduced as a compulsory component of teacher training programmes, since it is through this process that pre-service teachers can be exposed to and engaged in developmental assessment practice. The process of mentoring ensures that the practicum experience of pre-service teachers is beneficial to them when they qualify as teachers (Pungur 2007; Frick et al. 2010).
- ♦ The reflective role of the teacher is also central in the policies on teacher education. Since reflection is a form of assessment, it is recommended that reflection plays a critical role in the dynamic environment of curriculum change and new teacher education policy and practice. Change, such as that being experienced in the South African teacher education context, involves reflecting on the coherence between assessment, curriculum and learning (Frick et al. 2010; Wang et al. 2010).
- ♦ The teacher education policies outline teacher competency in a number of areas. For this to take place effectively, it is recommended that cooperative and collaborative learning be used to improve the professional skills of pre-service teachers (Saka 2009). Through these styles of learning, students engage in student-centred activities, active participation in learning through hands-on activities, interaction with their peers, improvement in professional skills and development of critical thinking competences. In the assessment context this type of learning provides opportunities for improved competency of pre-service teachers.

- ♦ The policies also distinguish between different forms of assessment that go beyond written assessment. Higher and deeper levels of learning and understanding are demonstrated when other forms of assessing are employed. Therefore, it is recommended that other forms of assessment be employed; for example, an interview produces extended answers in conversation (Gopal and Stears 2007), portfolios of learning show progression in the learning process, and peer assessment indicates learning through interaction with peers.

CONCLUSION

The social, economic and political environment of any country influences the agencies of change in that environment. In the South African environment this change was necessary, and painful yet liberating. In a fledgling democracy, during the euphoria of freedom costly mistakes were often made. One such mistake was adoption of an outcomes-based system of education without carefully considering the impact that this would have on a totally unprepared teacher population and unsuspecting learners. The correction process of this mistake was in the form of numerous policies and revision of policies that spanned more than a decade. In the process, teacher education also suffered the effects, with constant change in order to align programme offerings to new policies. Assessment in particular has undergone constant revision. The result was 'questionable' assessment practices that were often discarded before being fully understood. In effect, change - which is often considered essential for the healthy functioning of any system - proved detrimental in assessment in teacher education.

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