

Teaching Natural Sciences and Technology in an OBE system - Steps towards assessment for learning

Moodie, Peter ¹ Xipu, Thembeke ² Dr. Macdonald, Carol ³

1 Visiting researcher, Setlhare Science Curriculum Trust, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. peter.moodie@wits.ac.za

2 Programme implementer, Setlhare Science Curriculum Trust, University of the Witwatersrand thembeke.xipu@wits.ac.za

3 Visiting researcher, Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand carolmacdon@gmail.com

In South Africa, the curriculum reforms of the schooling system, which began in 1997, created a new emphasis on assessment to enhance learning, contrasting with the traditional purpose of reporting its results. This intention was amply supported by research overseas, such as the well-known review by Black and Wiliam (1998) which was summarised in “Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment” (1998) and much more work that has followed. This research showed not only *that* formative assessment had a large effect on learning gains, but also showed *how* it can be done in ordinary classrooms through effective questioning, feedback, peer assessment and self assessment.

It has been difficult to establish a widely-shared understanding of formative assessment methods in SA in the absence of a group of schools where it could be credibly demonstrated by teachers. The policy guidelines on assessment have thus attempted to change schools’ practices through changing the administrative procedures which control assessment. However, these policy guidelines have been assimilated to the traditional practices of assessment in schools: norm-referenced and summative assessment predominates, and many school administrators view accountability in terms of compliance with the detail of recording and reporting. Teachers complain about the administrative burden of record-keeping; the most conscientious teachers keep records but at the cost of time they might spend on feedback to their learners.

In the paper we present our findings from primary schools involved in Natural Sciences and Technology in-service training programmes. We offer examples of the effects of the present norm-referenced assessment in the schools, and some positive changes in the assessment practises of programme teachers. We suggest the kinds of teacher professional development that are needed to free the teacher to focus more on the learner and his/her learning, give appropriate feedback, and spend less time on the defensive practices of record-keeping. We also offer a force-field analysis (K. Lewin) of the current situation which could enlist the support of policy-makers, teachers and school administrators.