Assessment Practices in Africa today

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Abstract

The 1990 Jomtien World Conference 'Education for All' and the 2000 World Education Forum in Daka encouraged governments in developing countries to shift their emphasis from measuring outcomes to establishing the extent to which their education systems could provide quality in education (Howie, 2012, p. 81). Within the global economy, governments are held responsible for providing adequate education. This increased political pressure has led to direct links between national economies and education. The purpose of this paper is to identify tensions found in the various types of literacy and numeracy assessments within Africa; from large international high-stakes testing to local classroom formative and summative assessments. Four high-stakes tests commonly found in Africa are discussed. They are: school-leaving exams which assess all subjects at Grade 12 level; Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ); and, finally, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). I discuss four principles of summative and formative assessments based on the work of Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 256-265). They include: assessment as a social practice, minds in society, representation and interpretation and, lastly, practices of teacher assessments.

Keywords

quality education, high-stakes testing, formative and summative assessments

Introduction

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss assessment practices in Africa. Literacy can be said to have begun in our continent so it can be claimed that writing and literacy are African. Literacy began here. We, as Africans, therefore, have a direct responsibility to ensure that literacy is promoted and adequately assessed throughout our continent. So my question is: 'Are we, in fact assessing our literacy and numeracy in a responsible and accurate manner?' I begin by looking briefly at education in ancient civilizations and how educational practices and assessments are conducted today. Then I proceed to the present. The purposes of assessment and the various audiences are considered. The paper then reviews the four most common high-stakes testing systems currently in operation in some African countries followed by a discussion on principles of formative and summative assessments. The presentation is concluded by offering a few comments.

Since the beginning of human existence, every generation somehow passed on its stock of values, traditions, methods and skills to the next generation (Gersick, Davis, McCollom Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997). The history of the curricula of such education reflects history itself, the history of knowledge, beliefs, skills and cultures of humanity. Ingold (2002) state that as the customs and knowledge of ancient civilizations became more complex, many skills were passed down from a person to person: whoever was skilled at the job generally taught someone of the next generation; be it animal husbandry, farming, fishing, food preparation, construction, and military skills.

Oral traditions were central in societies without written texts (Shils, 1981). Literacy in ancient societies was associated with civil administration, law, long distance trade or commerce, and religion. The development of writing started in about 3500 BC. In Africa, Egypt fully developed hieroglyphics as early as 3400 BC. Our continent is the cradle of writing and reading. We have a proud tradition. We need to take the responsibility for raising the standards of literacy as high as we possibly can. Africa is where it all started: so we have a duty to honour our origins. Formal schooling in ancient Egypt was provided to an elite group either at religious institutions or at the palaces of the rich and powerful. Schools for the young were historically for priests, bureaucrats and businessmen (Shils, 1981). But recent archeological discoveries show that ordinary labourers of both sexes also wrote to each other about daily life on clay shards. Africa needs to regain this broad level of basic reading and writing skills.

Over the centuries, through Greek and Roman times, schooling was generally of a higher standard for the offspring of aristocratic citizens. Only in the industrial age did there emerge a demand for egalitarian education. However, over the last few centuries, schooling has experienced radical changes. Allington (2000, p. 162) states that our schools now educate larger numbers of children to higher levels of literacy and numeracy proficiency than

ever before. The historical goals that our schools set have today been met or exceeded (Allington, 2000, p. 162). Society has put a great deal of pressure on schools to educate all students to levels of proficiency expected historically of a few. Governments around the world have been challenged to develop more advanced academic skills in their schools (Allington, 2000, p. 162).

The demand for universal literacy keeps growing louder and rightly so: it is a right not a privilege any more (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 257). Many social boundaries of the old order have been broken down by technology of mass media. Literacy has been spread exponentially by cell phone messaging alone. Widespread democratization has been furthered by social media such as facebook, MIxit, twitter and many more. The continuing debate about the quality of education at our schools has led to a rise and a new focus on standards and assessment (Farr, 2000, p. 505). Robinson (2013, p. 27) explained that the core argument of education seems to have deserted the visionaries and today is mainly in the hands of bureaucrats and data-chasers.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves: 'What is the purpose of today's schooling?' Christie (2008, p. 21) suggest that the primary purpose of schooling is: to provide an environment where teaching and learning take place, to prepare people for the world of work beyond school, to provide nation-building and citizenship, to teach the values of a society to children and young adults and to develop the individual. Robinson (2013, p. 27) expands this argument by saying that by clarifying the purpose of education we can make judgments about what to bring to the curriculum and how best it is measured.

Since the 1990 Jomtien World Conference 'Education for All' and the World Conference Forum in Dakar (2000), governments have shifted their focus from measuring input to an increased emphasis on educational quality outcomes. The purpose of this is to ascertain the extent to which their education systems are meeting the needs to deliver quality in education (Howie, 2012, p. 81). This has led to a proliferation of new assessments – both formal (including high-stakes and systemic assessments) and informal classroom-based assessments.

This increased amount of testing is the result of greater accountability demands from government and society. In order to think more clearly about assessments, we need to consider to whom and why these results are important. Different groups use assessments for different purposes. They are conducted more or less frequently: different groups or individuals are assessed and different information is needed (Farr 2000, p. 506). Assessments are used by a variety of people for a variety of purposes. These are discussed in more detail both below and in Table 1.

Governments and policy makers are ultimately responsible for improving the quality of education (Howie, 2012, p. 82). They conduct national assessments or testing on a large scale using standardized assessments that have been used for many years. The purpose of national assessments is to compare student performance against a clearly defined curriculum. They measure student learning outcomes and monitor school systems (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008, p. xiii). The designs and programmes implemented to improve teaching and learning in school are assessed. Student achievement scores can then be used as evidence to inform education policies and decisions. In addition, these tests identify slow learners so that they can get the necessary support , appropriate technical assistance and training. These tests are normally conducted on either a sample or a whole population of students (Howie, 2012, p. 82). Howie states that the type of assessment, which is externally conducted, is likely to impact on the quality and act as a lever for reform.

School administrators are primarily interested in performance assessments that are typically criterion-referenced. These performance measures usually compare student performance with a clearly defined curriculum (Farr, 2000, p. 506).

Greaney and Kellaghan, (2008) expound that parents have a particular invested interest in their own individual children. In order to monitor their children's progress and to be active in their education, parents want to know how their children perform on criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests.

A teacher's primary concern is helping students learn (Farr, 2000). They are accountable to the education system and to parents. They are essentially interested in the kind of information that will support the daily instructional decisions they need to make. This kind of information is generated from criterion-referenced tests and other types of assessments that can be more effectively utilized in the classroom as part of instruction (Howie, 2012).

Howie (2012) claims that learners themselves should be their own assessors of their own academic development. They should be asking how to improve their own literacy and numeracy skills. If they understand their own needs they will improve. Table 1 below briefly discusses who the audiences of assessments are, their purposes, the frequency of testing, who is tested and what type of information is required.

Table 1: Audiences, purposes, frequency, who is tested and types of information required of assessments

Audiences	Purposes	Frequency	Who is tested?	Type of information required
Government	*Judge the effectiveness of an education system*	*Generally every 5th year or annually, this depends on the country*	*All learners as well as a sample of learners at a particular grade or age level*	*Statistics for policy makers used as advocacy for reform*
School administrators	*Judge the effectiveness of curriculum, materials and teachers*	*Again this depends on the country but annual and/or semester tests are conducted*	*Groups of teachers and learners*	*Related to broad goals – criterion- and norm- referenced*
Teachers	*Plan instruction, strategies and activities*	*Daily or as often as possible - continuous*	*Individuals, small groups and the whole class*	*Primarily diagnostic and focused on teacher decision making*
Learners	*Describe learners learning, to diagnose learning problems*	*Daily or as often as possible - continuous*	*Individual*	*Related to specific goal*

Adapted from Farr (2000, p. 507) and Howie (2012, p. 82)

High-stakes Testing

In Africa most countries which have experienced high-stakes testing owe their origins to international influences and have had mixed motives for their introduction (Lewin & Dunne, 2000, p. 379). New developments and enthusiasm for types of assessment spread from developed to developing countries. The discourse that surrounds assessment is infused with examples to replicate innovations in assessment from the North to countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Lewin & Dunn, 2000, p. 391). There have been mixed motives for the introduction of high-stakes testing. They include the need to select the highest achieving students for the next level of education as in many of the African countries, since only a minority of students can proceed to secondary school. Governments need to have some control over the curriculum and what is learned. Lewin and Dunne (2000, p. 380) clarify that in many African countries, the results of high-stakes testing are critical to career and life opportunities and access to employment.

Johnson and Costello (2005, p. 258) suggest that high-stakes testing has been demonstrated to undermine the teaching and learning particularly for underachieving students. They explain that high-stakes testing restricts the curriculum, thus defeating the original intention to improve literacy learning. Howie (2012, p. 84) agrees that high-stakes testing narrows the curriculum to that which is tested and in so doing lowers rather than raises educational standards. A further implication, according to Johnson and Costello (2005, p. 258), is that there is growing outrage and diminishing morale. As a result of this, many teachers exit the teaching profession due to the immense pressure put on them.

In Africa, the four most well-known high-stakes tests currently in practice are:

1. Secondary school leaving examinations which assess all subjects at Grade 12 level

2. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) which assess mathematics and science using Grade 4 and 8 learners;

3. The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) addresses literacy and numeracy from Grade 1 – 7; and

4. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, (PIRLS) which assesses literacy skills in Grade 4 and 5 learners.

Each of these four tests will be briefly discussed through an African lens.

1. Secondary school leaving examinations

Secondary school leaving examinations (Grade 12) give access to qualifications that have international currency (Lewin & Dunne, 2000, p. 395). In South Africa about half a million students write this exam annually (Howie 2012. p. 89) and their future careers depend on the results of these exams. Lubisi and Murphy (2010, p. 262) state that these final examinations can be seen as gatekeepers to employment and higher education. They are highly regarded by the public because they are seen to signify achievement.

External examination boards remain very active in much of Africa in supporting and influencing the development of assessment policy and practice at levels above primary school (Lubisi & Murphy, 2010, p. 262). Since the introduction of these assessments there has been better quality learning, materials have been developed, although their availability may have suffered from poor distribution and budgetary constraints. Lewin and Dunne (2000, p. 394) caution that statements of policy on curriculum and assessment have not necessarily led to changed practice.

Lewin and Dunne (2000, p. 394) offer four provocative speculations as to why examination reform may not be occurring as much as some would wish. Firstly, it may be that reform is undesirable simply because there is too much change. If African examination boards are not structured to be developmental, have divergent relationships with curriculum development, and administration is given more prominence than professional functions, advancements may be obstructed. Second it may be that technical and administrative capacity to design, develop and undertake broader based assessment strategies may be lacking. Third some reforms in assessment may not be for the better. Some innovations may prove to be unworkable though technically attractive. Finally, in some African countries, significant amounts of external services, such as printing, are done in developed countries. These publishers have an interest in manipulating the curriculum reform and assessment strategies to maximize their print runs (Lewin and Dunne, 2000, p. 394).

2.   Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

TIMSS is a large-scale comparative study and is conducted internationally at the end of Grade 4 and Grade 8 (Reddy, 2006). The first international assessments in forty-one educational systems around the world were conducted in 1995. To better understand what this test assesses, I briefly describe the content. TIMSS assesses Mathematics and Science and in each subject there are two domains: the content and the cognitive domains. In Mathematics the content domain includes: number, algebra, measurement, geometry and data handling. The cognitive domain involves: knowing facts and procedures, using concepts, solving problems and reasoning. In Science, the content domain includes life sciences, chemistry, physics, earth sciences and environmental science. The cognitive domains were: factual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, reasoning and analysis. Both subjects assess knowledge levels within the full spectrum of Blooms taxonomy.

Reddy (2006) explain that in 2003 the highest performing countries were Singapore, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Chinese Taipei and Japan. The lowest performing countries were Lebanon, the Philippines, Botswana, Saudi Arabia, Ghana and South Africa. According to Reddy (2006) Ghana and South Africa had the highest percentage of learners achieving a score of less than 400 points, which is below the Low International Benchmark.

In 2011 the TIMSS was again conducted, including new countries such as Ghana Morocco, and Botswana in Africa (HSRC, 2011). Three countries, South Africa, Botswana and Honduras administered the assessments at the Grade 9 level (HSRC, 2011). Although there was a slight overall improvement in achievement scores in these countries, their scores were still below the Low International Benchmark.

3.   The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ)

SACMEQ is a large international non-profit developmental organization of fifteen Ministries of Education in Southern and Eastern Africa that decided to work together to share experiences and expertise in developing the capacities of education planners to apply scientific methods to monitor and evaluate the conditions of schooling and the quality of education, with technical assistance from UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).   SACMEQ's mission, inspired by the goals adopted in 1990 in Jomtien and subsequently those adopted in 2000 in Dakar - Senegal (Murimba, 2005, p. 77), was to undertake integrated research and training activities that would expand opportunities for educational planners and researchers to:

   a)   receive training in technical skills required to monitor, evaluate and compare the general conditions of schooling and the quality of basic education; and

   b)   generate information that can be used by decision makers to plan the quality of education.

In 2012 the fifteen Ministries of Education that constitute the SACMEQ network included: Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Murimba (2005, p. 79) describe that most of the countries were former colonies and that different colonial powers influenced the development of education in different ways. It was only after 1960 that many of these 15 countries achieved their political independence, often after long emancipation struggles that interrupted the development of education. School structures, teaching and learning practices as well as curricula and language policies have all been influenced by these complex historical realities (Murimba, 2005, p. 79).

SACMEQ has completed three major education policy and achievement research projects (SACMEQ I, SACMEQ II and SACMEQ III) between 1995 and 2007. These research projects include assessments on language and mathematics. Grade 6 was chosen, rather than an age group in most of the fifteen SACMEQ countries, as it is the final class for primary examination (in Kenya and Malawi it was Standard 8).

When looking closely at the results of four countries (Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Mauritius) that participated in the 2009 SACMEQ11 research, Figures 1 - 2 below indicate interesting results. When looking at Figure 1 it appears that the Numeracy results of the four countries are generally high in the lower levels of numeracy (emergent, basic and beginning numeracy) for all four countries with very low results at the "abstract problem solving" level. Namibia has the highest results in the "emergent" stage of Numeracy. Figure 2's Reading results generally follow a bell curve with Mauritius having the highest

results at the "critical reading" level. On the other hand, Namibia has the highest results in the "pre-reading, emergent reading and basic reading" levels. Both graphs show that the higher order thinking skills for both Numeracy and Reading achieve the lowest results.
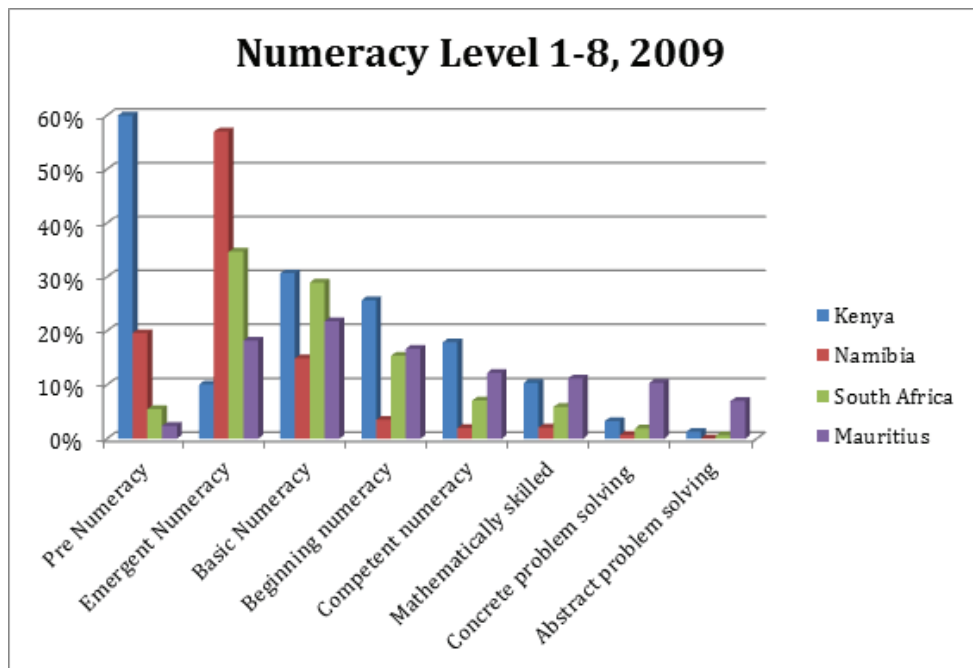

Figure 1: *Numeracy levels 1-8, 2009 of Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Mauritius*
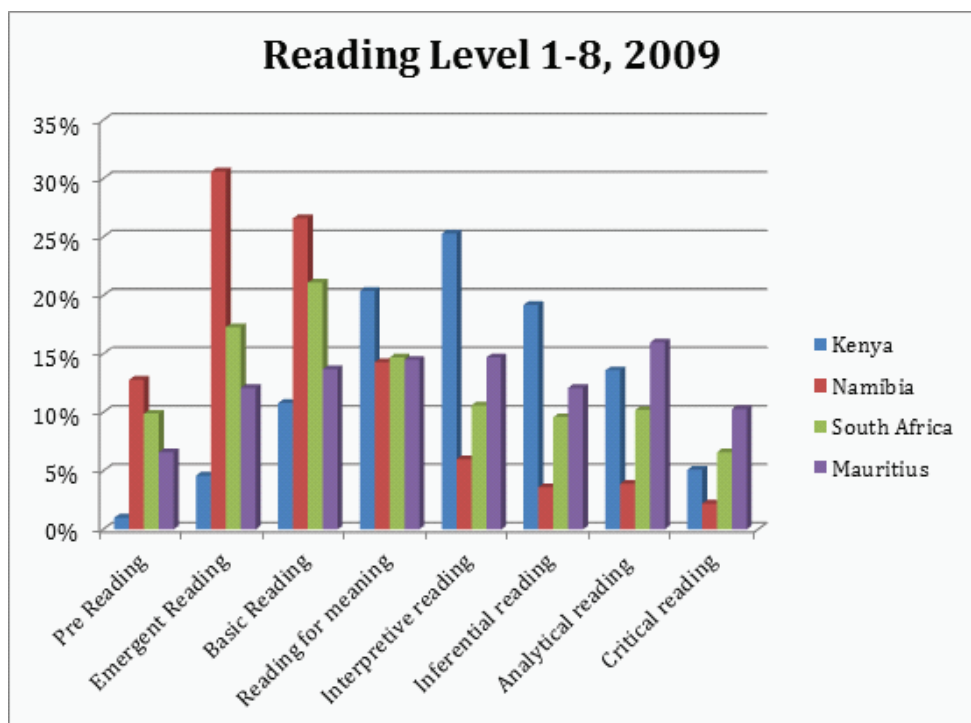
Figure 2: *Reading levels 1-8, 2009 of Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Mauritius*

Murimba (2005) elucidates that there are a few key factors that make SACMEQ results so successful. First, educational policy reports published from SACMEQ 1 and 11 have featured prominently in presidential and national commissions on education (for example Zimbabwe and Namibia). Second, prime ministerial and cabinet reviews on educational policy (for example Zanzibar), national education sector studies (for example Kenya and Zambia) and reviews of national education master plans (for example Mauritius) have been published. Third, the high quality of the SACMEQ reports and research materials have also been recognized by major universities, for example Harvard and Melbourne University, research organizations, for example the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and international organizations such as UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report Division (Murimba, 2005).

4.   Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS)

PIRLS is one of the largest international studies of reading achievement. It has targeted fourth graders (Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse, Zimmerman, 2012) and was the

fourth set of tests conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The purpose of PIRLS is to measure children's reading literacy achievement, to provide a baseline for future studies of trends in achievement, and to gather information about children's home and school experiences in learning to read. These tests are conducted every five years. PIRLS 2006 tested 215,000 students internationally from 46 educational systems. Only South African and Morocco participated in this study. PIRLS 2011, however, tested 325,000 students from 49 countries including Botswana, South Africa and Morocco participated in the sample. In 2011, the International Association for the Evaluation for Educational Achievement (IEA) (Howie, 2012, p. xv) initiated a new test – prePIRLS – for those countries whose learners had performed below the international benchmark in previous studies. In Africa, only South Africa, Botswana and Morocco, participated in the prePIRLS (Grade 4). The international PIRLS scaling rate ranges from 0 – 1000 metric points with a centre point, which is 500, and stays constant between assessments. Most learner performance from Africa ranges between 300 – 700 (Howie, 2012, p. 27).

van Staden (2013) reflects on a few significant results from prePIRLS and PIRLS, South Africa, 2011 study. The South African Grade 4 pupils who wrote the prePIRLS test were still performing at a low level. There was a substantial gender gap in achievement; Grade 4 girls performed better than the Grade 4 boys. Learners who wrote the tests in either Afrikaans or English performed above the international centre point (medium) of 500. Those tested in all nine African languages achieved very low outcomes. Only six percent of South African learners were able to read at the advanced level. The Grade 5 PIRLS results were similar to those from 2006. The Grade 5 learners tested in Afrikaans or English were still performing below the international centre point. Their levels of achievement were similar to learners in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Qatar, and Botswana and well above the learners in Oman and Morocco. Again t Grade 5 girls performed better than boys. Forty-three percent of learners in English and Afrikaans-speaking South African learners were unable to reach the low international benchmark (300 points) and only four percent reached the high international benchmark. Suburban schools performed better than the urban schools. Township and rural schools performed the worst. Teachers with a four-year diploma in education had the best results. Teachers with the highest achievement rates were aged 60 or older and aged less than 25. The lowest achievement rates of teachers were found in the age range of 50-57. The schools that had more than 5000 books had the best results while those schools with no libraries performed the worst.

Principles of summative and formative assessments

To foreground this discussion on summative and formative assessments, I offer a definition of each of these terms. A general discussion about these assessments follows and finally

four general principles of summative and formative assessments from Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 259) are debated. Johnson and Costello suggest the following definitions:

Summative assessments are:

> … the backward-looking assessments of learning, the tests we most commonly think of that summarize or judge performance as in educational monitoring, and teacher and student accountability testing.

> Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 259) continue to elaborate on formative assessment: …assessment for learning is the forward-looking assessment that occurs in the process of learning, the feedback that the teacher provides to the student and the nature of the feedback.

'What gets assessed is what gets taught' state Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 256). And learning must form the basis of our assessment practices. Commeyras and Inyenga (2007, p. 271) concur with this statement saying that assessment is an inevitable and necessary area of concern. Performance on examinations is a deciding factor for an individual's future in education and eventual participation in nation building. They confirm that assessments inform the general teaching of literacy and numeracy. It is incumbent upon class teachers to find out what each child has achieved, to identify where students are struggling so further instruction focuses on those strategies that can improve the students learning. Class teachers' judgments must be valued (Lubisi & Murphy, 2010, p. 265). Carter, Lees, Murira, Gona, Neville, and Newton (2011) expand this idea by stating that assessment techniques need to be culturally and linguistically sensitive in order to determine the academic achievement and potential of diverse students. While it is ethical and professional to provide an equitable and quality service to all, the importance of using culturally fair assessment tools cannot be overemphasized.

Since 2011, in South Africa, the 'Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement' (CAPS) (Naicker, 2011, p. 60) has replaced the old Outcomes Based Education system. The Department of Basic Education (DoBE) (2011, p. 89) clarify that assessments are an integral part of teaching and learning because they provide feedback for teaching and learning. Assessing different skills in numeracy and literacy should be integrated and not seen as separate activities. It is important to assess what learners understand and not what they can memorize. The CAPS document offers various forms of assessments teachers can possibly use in their classroom, the assessment methods and suggestions of types of assessment tools. They suggest the following forms of assessment teachers can use: observations, orals, practical demonstrations, written recordings, and research projects. Finally, the document offers a variety of assessment tools, such as: observation book, observation sheet, checklist, rubrics and learners' class workbooks. Burke (2005, p. 13)

agrees that teachers need to develop their own classroom assessments. He offers further methods such as: journals, debates, projects, products, performances, experiments, portfolio, writing activities and skill tests.

By using the above assessment strategies, one can see that both formative and summative assessments affect learning (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 259). Lubisi and Murphy (2010, p. 265) furthers this argument by suggesting that formative and summative assessments emphasize providing quality feedback rather than assigning marks.

I proceed to discuss four principles of summative and formative assessments based on the work of Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 256-265).

Assessment is a social practice:

Noticing, representing, and responding to learners' work is what makes assessment a social practice. Meaning needs to be made for particular purposes and audiences (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 258). Comments from teachers can improve performance and keep leaners thinking they are doing well. Trust, sensitivity and motivation are characteristics that support the social practices of assessments. Johnston and Costello suggest that when engaging in assessments, the emphasis should be on fairness. Fairness is about ensuring that learners are developing adequately. As teachers, we should aim to create an ethos in our classroom in which assessment practices socialize children into developing themselves as learners at the same time as developing their literacy and numeracy achievement rates.

Minds in society:

Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 258) describe that children's thinking patterns evolve from the people that they are surrounded by. Together they construct knowledge. An example of this is found in Kenya. Commeyras and Inyenga's (2007, p. 265) results revealed that children in rural monolingual and multilingual schools reported being most comfortable learning in their mother tongue or Kiswahili but not English. They reported that rural teaching is often characterized by a disproportionate use of mother tongue by the teachers and poor teaching strategies.

They found that many pre-service teachers performed badly in English on their final Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) Grade 8 exams. Therefore teaching would be their only option for a professional career. Commeyras and Inyenga suggested that teachers needed better teacher education in reading to develop their own language skills so they could be better prepared to teach and conduct formative and summative assessments.

Representation and interpretation

Teachers and parents can interpret a child's assessment differently because they have different histories and goals. A mark, a number or a percentage will mean different things to different people (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 261). Language used in any assessment task influences the interpretations made.

We tend to categorize our learners, for example 'learning disabled'. Once 'identified', categories tend to be used to describe learners but within a medical deficit model. Sayed, Subrahmanian, Soudien, Carrim, Balgopalan, Nekhwevha and Samuel (2007, p. 118) agree that 'marginalized people should not be seen as backward, suffering from an exclusionary deficit, but as bearers of rights whose dignity needs to be reaffirmed and whose needs become the drivers of policies'. For learners who need extra support, Bouwer (2011, p. 53) suggests that teachers need to know the level and the ways in which learners learn so that teachers devise appropriate strategies for the most effective learning support.

Practices of teacher assessments

Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 262) suggest teachers need to make their literacy and numeracy learning spaces in such a way that learning is visible and audible. Children should be given opportunities to talk about the process and experiences of their practices and engage in manageable challenges. Teachers need to notice what children can do, become 'kidwatchers' and know how they are engaging in the development of the new knowledge and competence (Goodman, 2005, p. 25). Clay (1991, p. 232) suggest that teachers can become astute observers of literacy behaviours and skilled at producing responses which advance the child's learning. Observing behaviours of children informs a teacher's intuitive understanding of cognitive processes and her teaching improves. Consistency in formative and summative assessments across the curriculum is essential.

Improving performance on summative assessment requires improving formative assessment. Johnston and Costello (2005, p. 262) suggest that change may be slow because of the way teachers understand students, themselves, and what they are trying to accomplish. Successful assessment systems develop constructive teacher-student relationships and are able to influence change and improvement.

Conclusion

To draw this debate to a close, this paper has attempted to offer a critical review of assessment practices relevant to African. While there are some similarities in the histories and politics of many of the developing countries in Africa there are also many differences. African countries are relatively new to high-stakes testing. It would appear that the results could have a higher impact on decision makers, researchers, communities and the clients of education. A challenge for the future development of assessment policies in Africa is to decide on what is valued and what price is worth paying to acquire it.

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