ASSESSMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA - CHALLENGES FOR IMPROVING LEARNING

READ Global Conference
‘Developing a Vision for Assessment Systems’
30 Sep. – 2 Oct. 2009
Moscow

Yusuf Sayed
Overview

- Education quality and assessment
- Post-apartheid education policy
- Assessment policy in South Africa
- Taking stock
- Concluding reflections
Education quality and assessment
Quality and EFA

- is at the heart of teaching and learning. The EFA mention excellence in learning. Yet there is not target or much clarification.
- As NERs increase, quality becomes important
- Quality also has a crucial effect on enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion
Assessment and Quality

- Increasing emphasis on assessment due to concern with declining quality
  - national priority that requires involvement and engagement throughout all levels of our society - SA Minister of Education, August 2005.

- Emphasis translates to focus on achievement scores, in “core subjects”

- The discourse of quality redolent with the technology of testing in SA
  - National assessment, TIMSS, PIRLS, SACMEQ, project evaluations, exams

- Caution: testing indicates areas in need of intervention but not what is required
  - Assessment and testing does not equal quality
Post apartheid education policy
Education policy in post apartheid South Africa: from needs to means

Drivers of changes/policy concerns

- The historical inheritance
- Equity, Redress and Justice as policy concerns
- Democracy and participation as policy concerns
- Economic and global influences
- Efficiency, Effectiveness and quality
## A brief chronology

160 policy texts 7 white papers, 3 green papers, 26 bills (17 amendment bills), 35 Acts (22 amendments of existing laws), 11 regulations, 52 government notices and 26 calls for comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Key changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994-1999</td>
<td>Policy frameworks and documents</td>
<td>NEPA, OBE, NQF, SASA,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘Framing and frames’</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2004</td>
<td>Policy implementation and systems development</td>
<td>Values Manifesto</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(delivery)</td>
<td>Split between GET and FET</td>
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<td>‘Tirisano’</td>
<td>Mergers and closures of HE</td>
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<td>2004-2009</td>
<td>Improving quality</td>
<td>FLC</td>
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<td>‘measuring impact’</td>
<td>Revised Assessment Framework</td>
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<td>Fee free schools</td>
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<td>2009 -</td>
<td>The split between basic and higher</td>
<td>Green Paper on performance</td>
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<td>The split between basic and higher</td>
<td>Service agreement with Ministers</td>
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<td>‘performativity’</td>
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<td>Bills</td>
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<td><strong>Minister Pandor</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Assessment policy in South Africa
Assessment driving by the ‘scientific’ theory of Fundamental Pedagogics

Assessment practices and systems played a critical role in maintaining oppressive apartheid policies

Assessment used to sort and rank

An emphasis on rote learning – examinations focuses on recall and memorisation

Inefficient; failure of black students
Post-apartheid assessment

- Assessment was neglected aspect of education change in the immediate post-apartheid period even though it formed the basis of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) that underpinned the new education system.

- Strong international influences on education and assessment policy e.g. OBE,

- Influenced by the WEF in 2000 in particular rise of LSAS, participation in international assessment exercises.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training Band, Grades R to 9 and ABET</td>
<td>This policy outlines new assessment practices to be applied in Grade R-9 and ABET that are in line with the newly introduced outcome-based education (OBE).</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Policy on Whole School Development</td>
<td>Declares the National Policy on Whole School Evaluation to be a national policy.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>General &amp; Further Education &amp; Training Quality Assurance Act</td>
<td>Establishes the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council (GFETQAC); provides for control over norms and standards of curriculum and assessment; provides for the issue of certificates at exit points; and provides for the conducting of assessment.</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>The National Protocol on Assessment for Schools in the General and Further Education and Training Band (Grades R-12), Oct 2005</td>
<td>Provides requirements and exemplars for the design of portfolios, reports, cards, record sheets, schedules, and learner portfolios.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>The National Senior Certificate: A qualification at Level 4 on the National Qualification Framework (NQF)</td>
<td>This policy describes the regulations, rules and provisions for the awarding of the National Senior Certificate (NCS) qualification – replacement of Matric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>National policy on assessment and qualifications for schools in the General Education and Training Band</td>
<td>This policy provides for a framework for assessment and qualifications for all public and private schools and community-based sites with learners registered in the General Education and Training (GET) band.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Addendum to the NCS on the National Qualifications Framework regarding National Protocol for Assessment – Grades R-12</td>
<td>This protocol provides requirement for and example of the design of learner profiles, teacher portfolios, report cards, record sheets and schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Foundations for Learning Campaign</td>
<td>The Foundations for Learning Campaign requires all schools to regularly assess, track and record learner progress and achievement in reading, writing and numeracy on a monthly basis for class records and quarterly for district office in Grade R to 6.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Key directions of changes in assessment policy and practice

**Classroom level**
- Continuous assessment
- Foundations of Learning
- Common tasks of Assessment

**School level**
- Whole school evaluation

**External examinations**
- Continuous Assessment

**Systems level**
- Systemic Evaluation 3, 6
- FLC Census testing
- Provincial tests
- Regional – SACMEQ
- International – TIMSS, PIRLS,
Classroom level

- Flagship assessment policy promulgated in 2007 which revised 1998 policy:
  - Greater emphasis on classroom based assessment
  - Requires teachers and schools to apply a greater range of assessment methods beyond paper and pencil tests
  - More structured ito of frequency and type of assessments (how and what)
  - Provides a reporting and interpretation framework

- National level provided more support wrt:
  - Common Task of Assessment (CTAs)
  - Grades 10, 11 & 12 assessment
  - National Database of items
School level

WSE

- A shift in terminology from ‘inspection’ to ‘whole-school evaluation’
- Aimed at encapsulating school self-evaluation as well as external evaluation
- Provided for schools to receive advice and support in their continual efforts to improve their effectiveness
- Policy places particular emphasis on the need to use objective criteria and performance indicators consistently in the evaluation of schools
**Systems level**

- Grade 3, 6, 9 Systemic Evaluation Study

- **LSAS**
  - Majority of studies were designed to provide information to policy makers, to evaluate specific intervention programs, and to obtain baseline information.
  - No studies focussed specifically on providing information to teachers.
  - Aggregated reporting in terms of the structural features of the SA system (national, provincial or district level), socio economic variables such as gender, language and geographical location (urban, rural); and learning area (e.g. mathematics) as well as the sub-domains assessed (e.g. by learning outcomes or content areas). While this is important, very rarely was reporting done with the school as the unit of analysis.
  - Rare advanced methods of analysis such as path analysis multi-level modelling.
Large scale assessment in SA 1994 - 2009

- 1994-1999: 5
- 2000-2004: 16
- 2005-2009: 24
Taking stock
Gains

- A revised assessment policy and the development of structures for developing, reviewing and monitoring assessment practices.

- Traditional assessment practices such as tests and exams were reconceptualised as a process of continuous assessments.

- Assessments were now directly tied to learning areas and specified competencies.

- Success no longer measured by single assessment points - took the form of a more dynamic, holistic assessment.

- Significant policy activity aimed at centralising assessment and developing the appropriate structures for overseeing assessment practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>System</th>
<th>Examinations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Idea of WSE sound  
• Union and teacher resistance  
• Conflation of appraisal and development  
• Sanctioning a problem  
• Poor reporting to community | • Shift in thinking  
Weak teacher capacity  
• Lack of tools  
• Weak formative assessment practices  
• Poor feedback to parents | • Tradition of external assessment established  
• Capacity outside rather than inside the system – but slowly increasing  
• Ad hoc and not routinised  
• Weak interaction  
• Poor routing into system reform  
• System capacity constraints  
• Main challenge on use of information | • Essentially unchanged in focus and practice  
• Still high stakes for certification and university entrance  
• Key shift is inclusion of school based into final mark  
• Concern of dilution with new NSC examination (first implementation in 2008) |

Lack of capacity to deliver

Strong policy framing
Concluding reflections
Change and development needed...

School and teachers

- Developing Capacity
- Providing Tools
- Ensuring regular and consistent support
- Develop effective monitoring
Change and development needed ... system

- Integrating assessment into the system
- Using information for reform and for planning
- In house capacity
- Tackle capacity constraints at lower levels of the system (district, area office)
- Become an agent of support to the school
Positive drivers to build upon ...

- Strong policy environment
- Committed leadership and civil service
- External (to Ministry) expertise and skills with some in house
- Political will
- Structures and mechanisms in place e.g. UMALUSI
- Attention beginning to be paid to resources and tools for schools to improve assessment
Thank you

Yusuf Sayed

ymsyd1@gmail.com or y.sayed@sussex.ac.uk