School-based assessment: the leash needed to keep the poetic 'unruly pack of hounds' effectively in the hunt for learning outcomes

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The problem with assessment in South African public schools persists. In 2008 thousands of candidates taking South Africa's first ever National Certificate Examination could not be resulted because of a failure to report school-based assessment (SBA) tasks. Only 62.5% of candidates prepared for the final external examination through a process of continuous SBA passed. In 2009 the pass rate dropped to a new low of 60.7%, which begs the question: why is SBA not serving its purpose of enhancing learning and preparing candidates for the high stakes external examinations? We focus on English First Additional Language (EFAL) teachers' perceptions of SBA in the Further Education and Training (FET) band and the challenges they face with the implementation of the curriculum that calls for drastic changes in assessment practice.

Last lesson of the afternoon
When will the bell ring, and end this weariness?
How long have they tugged the leash, and strained apart
My pack of unruly hounds! I cannot start
Them on a quarry of knowledge they hate to hunt,
I can haul them and urge them no more.

<div align="right">D.H. Lawrence</div>

Introduction
In his poem "Last lesson of the afternoon", Lawrence laments the fact that he unsuccessfully tries to teach a group of children likened to 'a pack of unruly hounds'. He has become weary of trying to focus their attention on new knowledge while they are 'tugging' the leash and 'straining' apart. Contrary to Lawrence's experience, the new National Curriculum of South Africa (DoE, 2003) that was introduced to the FET band in 2006 envisages learners who actively take part in learning experiences tailor-made for the context in which they find themselves and whose learning is driven by assessment that focuses on continuous improvement so that by the end of Grade 12 they will be able to perform at the maximum level of knowledge and skills while portraying positive values and attitudes.

In November of 2008, Grade 12s wrote the first National Senior Certificate examination based on the new curriculum introduced at Grade 10 level in 2006. During her speech releasing matric results in 2008, the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, acknowledged that with a pass rate of 62.5%, widespread criticism "largely for our failings in implementation and interpretation" was justified (DoE, 2008). A year later the pass rate reached a new low of 60.7%.

The picture looks bleak if one bears in mind that the results of 56,351 of the 589,912 candidates who had written the 2008 examinations could not be reported because they "either missed one or more components of the examination or failed to produce the school-based assessment and hence were not resulted" (DoE, 2008:8). Furthermore the 2008 SBA moderation report by Umalusi (the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training in South Africa) highlighted "the poor quality and standard of the tasks set by educators; the low validity of internally set assessment tasks; the unreliability of marking instruments and the discrepancies in allocation of marks; and the unbalanced weighting of the cognitive demand and difficulty of the tasks" (2009:10). Umalusi's conclusion regarding the quality of the 2009 National Certificate assessment and examination was that much more needs to be done to improve the quality of SBA. Two areas in particular must be attended to: monitoring to ensure that SBA is conducted and conducting checks for compliance, and in-service teacher training and support with regard to the development of valid tasks of good quality (Umalusi, 2009:19).

The relevant question in this article is: what are the challenges that teachers of EFAL in public schools in South Africa face with the implementation of continuous or SBA in the FET band? The terms SBA and continuous assessment (CASS) are seen as similar for the purposes of this article.

Assessment of EFAL in the FET band
EFAL is the subject with the largest number of registrations, attracting 86.99% of all Grade 12 candidates in 2008 and 85% of all candidates in 2009 (DoE, 2010).

The National Protocol on Assessment requires every teacher to submit an annual formal programme of assessment to the Subject Head and Management Team of the school in order to draw up a school assessment plan (DoE, 2005:6). Living up to its aim of regulating SBA and the recording and reporting of learner performance, policy prescribes a Programme of Assessment for the FET band (DoE, 2005:15-16).

The suggested Programme of Assessment for FAL in the FET band provides for 16 tasks to be formally assessed (DoE, 2007:15).

Since all assessment for Grades 10 and 11 are school-based or internal, the formal Programme of Assessment consists of tasks undertaken during the school year. The Subject Assessment Guidelines for Languages sees the formal Programme of Assessment and informal daily assessment as comprising CASS. CASS makes up 25% of the total mark for the year whereas the end-of-year examination mark counts 75%. In Grade 12 CASS counts 25% and all assessment tasks are internally set and assessed and externally moderated. The remaining 75% of the final mark for certification in Grade 12 is made up by an examination which is externally set, marked and moderated. The end-of-year examination in the FET band counts a total of 300 marks, of which 50 marks are allocated to the assessment of the learner's oral pro-

ficiency. Orals in Grades 10 and 11 are internally set, assessed and moderated, while in Grade 12 they are internally set and assessed, but externally moderated.

Tasks 1–15, which together make up 100 marks or 25% of the total mark of 400, include three tests and a midyear examination in Grades 10 and 11. The department suggests that the three tests count a total of 110 marks and the mid-year examination a total of 250 marks. This means that time-based pen-and-paper testing comes to a total of 360 marks. The suggested total of the other 11 assessment tasks, which allow the teachers of Grades 10 and 11 to use a variety of assessment forms, methods and tools is 340 marks. The total mark for tasks 1–15 (including the tests and examination) is 700, which is divided by 100 and added to the November examination mark. The November examination is the 16th assessment task and counts 300 marks: 80 marks for language in context, 70 marks for literature, 100 for writing and 50 for oral tasks.

In Grade 12, three tests totalling 115 marks are suggested, together with one mid-year examination and one preparatory examination, which each count out of 250. In effect five of the 15 SBA tasks in Grade 12 take the form of pen-and-paper testing while 10 assessment opportunities remain where alternative means of assessment may be used. The suggested total for SBA tasks in Grade 12 is 900 marks. However, this makes up only 25% of the final promotion mark.

In its current form CASS or SBA in South Africa, especially in Grade 12, thus seems to serve the purpose of accountability. This is directly in contrast with international literature that sees CASS as "the frequent interactive assessments of student understanding and progress to identify learning needs and shape teaching" (OECD, 2005:5).

One would expect that such a system of continuous SBA for accountability would give the Grade 12 learners a realistic picture of their own competence. Umalusi however found that inaccurate continuous assessments were sending the wrong signals to learners and parents throughout the FET band, resulting in a large number of under-prepared students entering the matriculation examination (Van der Berg & Shepherd, 2008:30).

Research methodology
Research design
A cross sectional survey was used.

Study population and selection of participants
In 2006, the Statistical Services Department of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) drew a random sample of 527 schools from a data disc with the names and contact details of public schools in all nine South African provinces where English was taught as an FAL in the FET band. This sample included 83 schools in Limpopo, 66 in the Eastern Cape, 77 in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, 53 in the Free-State, 54 in Mpumalanga, 51 in the Western Cape, 58 in the North-West, 27 in the Northern Cape and 58 in Gauteng.

Data collection method

A questionnaire was used to determine the challenges faced by EFAL teachers in the FET band in public schools regarding the implementation of the new curriculum and assessment policy. Biographical and demographical information from the participants such as age, teaching experience and location of schools were collected together with quantitative and qualitative information with regard to participants' experiences with curriculum training and implementation. Structured items requested participants to give quantitative responses by selecting item response options of their choice while open-ended items allowed participants to share their own views and offer suggestions on aspects related to CASS.

Of the 527 questionnaires mailed, 61 were returned to the researcher, 7 responded after being followed up and 25 questionnaires were collected on special visits to various schools. Thus, the data contained in 93 questionnaires (response rate = 17.6%) could be analysed. The researcher found it difficult to follow up on all questionnaires because of absent principals, unmanned telephone lines or broken facsimile machines.

Results and discussion

The quantitative part of the questionnaire

It was important for the researcher to know whether the participants had been empowered with the knowledge and skills to implement the new curriculum by following an outcomes-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment and whether or not they were assisted in coping with this challenge. Thus, the structured items focused on in-service teacher training and support, implementation of the curriculum, availability of resources, lesson planning and presentation, the generation of teaching and learning material, learner activities, and assessment.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the quantitative data. In this process the data were ordered and summarized by means of tabulation and graphic representation and the calculation of descriptive measures so that inherent trends and properties of the observed data could clearly emerge (Steyn *et al.*, 2000:2).

Discussion of participants' responses to the structured items

The majority of participants indicated that they did receive training for the implementation of the new curriculum in Grade 10 in 2006. Training mostly lasted for 5 days while the literature makes it quite clear that it is impossible to implement any new curriculum successfully if teachers have not undergone thorough training (Todd & Mason, 2005; Chisholm, 2000).

The majority of participants reported that training equipped them professionally well enough to implement CASS in the FET band. Those who felt that training had not sufficiently equipped them were given the opportunity to

indicate what they perceived as lacking in training by responding to an open-ended item. Responses are discussed in the section dealing with the qualitative results.

Although the majority of the participants felt that training equipped them well enough to implement the curriculum, only 14% expressed competence in unpacking the Assessment Standards (ASs) and setting outcomes. 51.11% felt fairly competent while a third admitted that they battled with breaking down ASs and setting outcomes. This admission was reinforced by responses to the item enquiring whether participants could identify the most appropriate outcome for a poetry lesson. Only 26.19% of the respondents selected the most suitable answer. This raises serious concerns about the competence of these teachers faced by the daily challenge of implementing a changed curriculum. They might have felt equipped enough to cope with curriculum and assessment changes after they had received the theoretical training, while the practical implementation remained a huge challenge (Schlebusch & Thobedi, 2005; Kaiser, 2007).

Another practical challenge that the participants faced was the generation of teaching material. Less than 10% of the participants thought they were very successful in generating their own teaching material, 32.97% described themselves as fairly successful, 21.98% were not quite sure that their material led to the achievement of desired outcomes while 2.2% admitted that they did not have a clue what to do and tried to find material elsewhere. Since the Learning Programme Guidelines advocate the "designing down" method, it is important to establish whether teachers have mastered this technique (DoE, 2005: 44). It is worrying that more than half of the participants indicated that they were unsure whether or not they were actually designing down. Only 27.38% of the respondents expressed confidence using this technique.

Progression built into Learning Outcomes (LOs) and ASs from Grades 10–12 was said to be clear to 64.52% of the participants, but only 43.01% felt they had been trained to incorporate it into their teaching material. 35.49% indicated that progression was either unclear (21.51%) or they were unsure (13.98%). The implication is that proper planning cannot be done if all teachers involved do not understand progression and how to incorporate it into planning.

While the successful implementation of an outcomes-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment involves the active participation of learners (Botha, 2002:364; Spady, 2005:1), only 39.78% of the participants indicated that they involved learners in classroom activities. Activities were employed only sometimes by 55.91% of the participants and 4.30% of them admitted never actively involving learners. More than half of the respondents (54.95%) did not find it important to align activities with LOs while 3.3% felt that the learners would learn something as long as the activity was enjoyable. Teaching strategies and learning activities that focus on the attainment of specific outcomes will leave little room for coincidental learning. Such activities will be meaningful and the assessment thereof will enhance both teaching and learning while a steady pace is being kept.

Furthermore, the study revealed that assessment was mostly not transparent. A third of the participants indicated that they always shared assessment criteria with learners while 9.68% said they never did. The majority of participants (56.99%) only sometimes shared specific assessment criteria with learners at the onset of a task. Research, however, indicates that learners should be well informed about the assessment criteria to be implemented before they start working on an assessment task (Assessment Reform Group, 1999:7; Race, 2001:33-34) and "have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to attain" (Black & Wiliam, 2001:7).

As far as assessment of learning activities was concerned, only 15.38% of the participants indicated that they always assessed the process. Thus, only 15.38% regularly made use of formative assessment. This implies that the majority of learners (84.62%) could not always rely on timely feedback for improvement. Participants who indicated that they did not always assess the process could mark a reason. Most of them (61.29%) either indicated that classes were overcrowded (38.71%) or that they had other important tasks to finish (7.53%) or both (15.05%).

The questionnaire, however, revealed that most participants tried to carry out all the assessments themselves and did not find the time to assess both the process and the product. 85.71% of participants were convinced that only teacher assessment was valid and reliable. Only 3.57% involved learners in self-assessment while only 10.71% of the respondents used peer-assessment.

It is disconcerting that participants portrayed a misunderstanding of both the types and purposes of assessment. When participants were asked which type of assessment they used to assess the process (i.e. the chance is there for the teacher to intervene and guide the learner), only 17.20% acknowledged that they implemented formative assessment while 13.98% opted for both formative and summative assessment and 23.66% indicated that they used formative, summative, diagnostic, and baseline assessment in assessing the process.

Ignorance about different types and purposes of assessment was confirmed by the participants' responses to another question item enquiring about the type of assessment used to assess whether the desired outcome(s) has/have been reached. The most appropriate type of assessment would be summative assessment. Yet only 23.66% of participants chose this option, 23.66% opted for formative assessment, 11.82% said they would use both formative and summative assessment, 7.53% indicated that they would use only diagnostic assessment and 11.82% of the participants indicated that they would use all types of assessment to establish whether the desired outcomes had been attained.

Once a task has been assessed, proper feedback needs to be given so that both teaching and learning can be enhanced (Black *et al.*, 2003:2-3; Green, 2006:8). It makes little sense that teachers spend hours on assessments if less than half (46.24%) of the participants always manage to give proper feedback while the majority (53.76%) said that they only managed to do so

sometimes.

The majority of participants (80.65%) indicated that they considered assessment results in planning future teaching and learning. The teacher thus identifies advantages and shortcomings but instead of sharing this information he/she again takes sole responsibility for addressing the problems. Learners stay uninvolved and do not take responsibility for their own progress. Considering assessment results, in planning future teaching and learning, would surely have a much bigger effect and play a more meaningful role if it involved the learner. One way of ensuring this would be to carefully select the most appropriate type, method and tool of assessment for a particular situation instead of automatically engaging in summative teacher assessment (Race, 2001:94; OECD, 2005:65).

Although there may be various reasons for it, there seems to be an acceptance of mediocrity among teachers who participated in this study. A mere 5.38% of the participants managed to definitely always challenge a learner with activities to excel once he/she had achieved a certain outcome, 56.99% said they sometimes found the time to do so while nearly a third of the participants (31.18%) simply moved on to new outcomes once the set outcome(s) had been reached. On the other hand, most of the participants (82.80%) acknowledged that some learners got bored while others still battled to reach the desired outcome. If some of the more advanced learners got bored in 82.80% of the cases, then surely they should have been offered the opportunity to excel. Apart from the fact that these learners would be robbed of the chance to be engaged with more challenging activities, while others were still working on reaching the minimum outcomes, they may end up disrupting the class and hating the boring subject. Masters and Foster (2000:20) argue that "in high stakes contexts, teaching and learning can be focused on ensuring that low-achieving students are brought up to the level of the minimum standard (but) the implications for students already performing well above the minimum may be less desirable if they are not also challenged and extended by classroom teaching and by the assessments themselves".

64.52% of the respondents felt that they did not have the necessary resources for the practical implementation of the curriculum. A mere 24.73% indicated that resources were available. Shortage of resources was not limited to only one type of school. One would expect the Department of Education to ensure the general availability of resources for the successful implementation of a challenging curriculum aimed at transforming the post-apartheid education system and society.

Another point of criticism against various provincial Departments of Education is the urgent lack of support from subject advisors during the implementation process. Only 17.2% of the participants indicated that they often received assistance by means of guidance and/or visits from the subject advisor in their areas, while 45.16% said they never did, and 37.63% acknowledged that they were assisted sometimes. With the new curriculum only being implemented in the FET band in 2006 and only reaching Grade 12 in 2008, one would expect the authorities to have systems in place to lend sus-

tained support to teachers. More so, since the majority of teachers had only attended five-day-long training sessions, mostly hosted by ill-equipped and ill-prepared facilitators who did not pay much attention to the practical implementation of the curriculum (see discussion of qualitative results).

Although most participants were finding it hard to cope with the workload, 88.76% of them managed to keep teacher portfolios as models for what was expected of the learners.

The qualitative part of the questionnaire

Participants were given the opportunity to express themselves freely in responding to the six open-ended items in the questionnaire. The researcher wished to get an idea of the participants' attitudes towards the new curriculum and what they perceived as challenges in the teaching, learning and assessment of EFAL in the FET band.

The verbatim responses were coded and categorized. Comments were mainly made on Training and support, Lack of resources and support material, Workload, Weighting of CASS, Standards and moderation, and Illiteracy of learners in the FET band.

Training and support

While international studies prove that "If you can grab the teachers and get their support for the process, then whatever you put in the plan becomes almost 'kindred' " (OECD, 2005:190) and the international literature makes it clear that it is impossible to successfully implement change in an education system if serious investments are not made in the professional development of teachers (Hargreaves, 2003; OECD, 2005), participants experienced the following:

"*Not enough chance to learn*"; "(*The training*) *was rather done in a chop, chop way*"; "*Time allocated for training too short*"; "*Lack of time for training*"; "*Presenter couldn't answer questions raised*"; "*Facilitator* (*was*) *totally ill-equipped … knew less than we did … couldn't answer questions*"; "*Too much indecision as to what will be required*"; "*It was long and boring with too little practical training*".

After mostly being subjected to frustrating micro-wave training sessions, participants were sent back to school to implement the new curriculum, feeling that educational authorities had adopted a "*see-if-it-works*" policy. They found themselves "*still in the dark about many things*" and realised that "*To have something in writing and to implement are very different*". They called for "*… timely* (*training*) *i.e. on quarterly basis*" stating that "*Follow ups will help as one cannot know everything after being trained for four days*".

Without any "*efficient help from either the department or subject advisor or curriculum advisor*" most of the participants in this study had to make sense of and implement the EFAL curriculum with its four main LOs and 16 ASs, each heading a group of smaller outcomes to the total of 106 that have to be attained progressively from Grades 10–12. Implementing the curriculum meant unpacking significant LOs into specific, measurable, attainable, rele-

vant and traceable lesson outcomes, generating fit-for-purpose teaching and learning material, planning assessment and designing assessment tools i.e. a process of backward design had to be followed — something that most participants in this study were clearly not equipped for. Trying to survive in a sea of change while still being rendered accountable for what happens in their classrooms, most participants therefore resorted to a type and method of assessment that they felt comfortable with: summative assessment where the teacher took on the responsibility as assessor.

Lack of resources and support material

Participants were concerned about a lack of physical resources, even basic resources like enough learner desks and chairs: "*Overcrowding and shortage of furniture make (it) difficult to group learners*". Particular mention was made of a "*shortage of machines i.e. photocopy machines, … overhead projectors …*" and the fact that "*Learners with internet access or involved parents are greatly advantaged*". For the new EFAL curriculum to be implemented in its intended form, more than the basics are needed. If public schools are expected to deliver, then all of them should at least be equipped with photocopy machines ("*… there is a lot of photocopying that has to take place in order to make sure that each learner has the relevant assessment tool …*"), overhead projectors, information technology, books and printed media like newspapers and magazines.

At the time of the study some teachers had still not received the new policy documents: "*The supply of some of the documents that I (am) supposed to use still present a challenge and still others are outdated and there is not efficient help from either the department or subject advisor or curriculum advisor*" while others expected the department to supply learning programmes, work schedules and Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM): "*Failure to design a learning programme and work schedule. The Department should provide us with these latter documents*"; "*LTSM is not readily available. Must make do with own creations*". Educational authorities on the other hand had the vision of teachers generating their own LTSM and assessment tools fit for the context of their learners. Ironically enough this was the exact same reason why one of the participants felt it was the department's responsibility to make material available: "*In a rural situation the LOs are often beyond some of the learners who struggle to master the language*".

Participants complained about not being trained to compile their own material: "*It is difficult to find or design rubrics*"; "*I am not familiar with rubrics*"; "*No proper assessment tools or how to compile (my) own for oral, literary essays, etc.*" and were concerned about mark allocation: "*Exact marks to be allocated for certain tasks must be clearly indicated*"; "(*Are my rubrics*) *accurate?*"

Individual teachers developing their own assessment rubrics or marking guidelines would always lead to a variation in the scoring of assessment tasks among teachers. Taylor (2003) warns that the degree to which raters agree with one another when assessing learners' work becomes a critical problem

when including SBA in large-scale test programmes like the National Senior Certificate. She postulates that teachers must be taught how to select, modify and develop assessment tasks, as well as how to develop assessment tools and consistently evaluate the work of learners.

There were participants who had managed to find their own way: "(*The*) *teacher must understand his own context and then plan from there — it is so logical you don't need 5-day sessions*". Whether these teachers were finding the right way is debatable. On the other hand some believed that there was "*Far too much focus on daily (and) weekly assessment … if one implemented it, there would hardly (be) any time for teaching*", that assessment for learning "*… is designed in the way that it caters for classes with reasonable learners — not black schools*" and that to get the learners involved in learning activities was nothing but "*playing around*". Remarks like these portray a misunderstanding of assessment for learning that needs to become part of classroom practice. In classrooms where the focus is on teaching and learning, interactive formative assessment takes place all the time, while a variety of assessment tasks play an important role in learner improvement and tests and examinations are used for evaluation of learners' learning at the end of units or grades and for reporting. To involve learners in activities would never be "*playing around*" and to employ formative assessment would never take time away from teaching or leave some learners out in the cold if the emphasis is on the assessment of "*meaningful, contextualized and purposeful activity which focus on demonstrations of what students know and can achieve*" instead of focusing on learners' "*shortfalls in knowledge and failure to achieve*" (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999; Gipps, 1994).

In some provinces schools were clustered together with the idea that teachers would regularly meet to discuss challenges experienced with the implementation of the curriculum, and where teacher dialogue around issues of assessment could be supported with a view to monitoring assessment practice and moderating results in adherence to standards, but some of the participants responded that the clusters did not work. Long (2006:5) blames this on the weakness of cluster leaders and points out that, while the Independent Examination Board (IEB) in South Africa provides workshops to train examiners and moderators of the external examinations, resources have yet to be found for the training of cluster leaders.

Workload
Participants complained that CASS, in its current form, adds heavily to the workload of teachers and learners: "*The choices of assessment tasks are too many*"; "*Honestly, I feel there are too many tasks set out in the Assessment protocol. The learners and the teachers have a heavy load and the number of tasks could be reduced in order to rather use one task to assess more than one outcome*". Instead of CASS being treated as "*the frequent interactive assessments of student understanding and progress to identify learning needs and shape teaching*" (OECD, 2005:5), the current situation in public schools in South Africa seems to be the following: learners are forced by their teachers

to complete the prescribed assessment tasks within certain time limits ("… *learners do their work or they do not pass*"; "*… due to time limits not always practical*"); the tasks do not always flow naturally from teaching and learning: "*(I) sometimes question the meaningfulness of tasks*"; "*… It wastes teaching time*"; the process is not always formatively assessed and teachers mostly see the marking of these tasks as an additional brunt to bear, so that each learner can at least have a reliable, official CASS mark: "*I find it bothersome and fairly useless. No matter how often a learner is assessed, he/she stays within ±5% of (his/her) usual average score*".

Seeing CASS as a 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 learners), reduces parts of the curriculum to a set of administrative requirements that must be followed without understanding the principles on which those procedures are based (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003:133).

Participants expressed concern about the fairness and reliability of alternative methods of assessment: "*It is not fair*", "*CASS is somehow unreliable because learners cheat. It is not always a true reflection of (a) learner's actual performance*" and added to their workload by checking or re-assessing: "*It works if you as a facilitator are always fair, consequent in every situation and mark/remark/check everything yourself again*". The implication is that a teacher who chooses to do all the marking him-/herself and who may be responsible for five groups of 35 Grade 10 or 11 learners each will mark 1,925 assignments throughout the school year plus 350 tests and 350 examination papers, the latter with different sections for language, literature and creative writing. It will be humanly impossible to do all the marking within certain time frames in order to give constructive and timely feedback by which learning can be enhanced. One of the participants remarked that "*burnout*" because of a heavy workload is soon to follow. Jackson and Rothman (2005) found that the negative outcomes of burnout, that include depression, a sense of failure, fatigue and loss of motivation, are indeed evident in the South African education system.

It is not only the actual assessment that adds to the teacher's workload but also the careful recording of each learner's mark for each of the 15 suggested tasks and the calculation of each final CASS mark that are seen as the last straw to break the proverbial camel's back. Some participants perceive CASS as "*just paperwork required by (the) department*" which is "*very time-consuming*" and which "*takes up valuable teaching (and) learning time*". Others are faced with loads of work because of overcrowded classrooms or teaching learners in various Grades: "*It's a lot of admin for which teachers with such large classes have no time!*"; "*CASS is a good form of assessment, but the problem is it has a lot of paperwork considering the huge number of learners we have*"; "*In a language it is an excessive amount of marking (and recording)*". Sishi and Poliah (2006:4) and Chisholm *et al.* (2005:146-150) confirm that, because of extensive record keeping and monitoring of individual learners, CASS in the South African system leads to an increase in teacher workload.

On the international front Yip and Cheung (2005) report that many teachers see SBA as additional work imposed on them by the authorities. They, however, postulate that SBA is seen as adding extra workload and pressure to teachers' routinely busy timetables, mainly because teachers lack implementation skills and supporting resources.

In response to the open-ended item that invited participants to come up with suggestions regarding teaching, learning and the assessment of EFAL in the FET band, respondents mostly suggested how their workload could be cut. They felt that it would help a great deal if language teachers were kept to one phase, classes be kept small and manageable, paper work and administration minimized, and everything made simpler by losing all the jargon: "*Still waste too much time ... trying to name things correctly ...*".

Weighting of CASS

While teachers of EFAL in the FET band feel that a lot of work is going into CASS in its current form in public schools in South Africa, they cannot understand why it makes out such a small percentage of a learner's promotion mark: "*So many tasks to assess and eventually all this work only counts 25% of (the) final promotion mark*"; "*CASS takes up a lot of teaching time. I do not find it worth all the effort, seeing that it only counts 25% of the final mark*".

The main reason for the relatively small weighting attributed to CASS may be ascribed to the fact that there are concerns about assessment leniency (where CASS marks are much higher than examination marks and low assessment reliability (where performance measured by CASS and the examination marks are only weakly correlated) (Van der Berg & Shepherd, 2008: 2).

Standards and moderation

According to participants "*standardization is a huge problem. Teachers and schools that follow rules and instructions work very hard, while some do virtually nothing*" and "*clusters (that moderate) have no clue what they are doing ... in some cases (it costs) hard working pupils their distinctions ... exam papers set by clusters (are) not up to standard ... memo's often grossly incorrect, yet we are forced to write these papers!*". "*(CASS) makes it too easy for learners to pass*"; "*It gives ... the weak learner 'free marks'; (There) should (be) one team that moderates at all schools to ensure that standards are the same*"; "*CASS can be misleading to a learner because the examination afterwards demands specific learning and reading skills*".

Umalusi warns that with the 25% weighting given to CASS marks in matriculation, and the limit of a mean deviation of 10% either way between examination and CASS marks, differences in strategic behaviour between teachers or schools can have important consequences. Schools that set high standards in CASS in order to induce intensive examination preparation may place their candidates at a considerable disadvantage in the final matriculation mark (up to 5 percentage points) relative to schools that are exceedingly lenient in assessment (Van der Berg & Shepherd, 2008:30).

Illiteracy of learners in the FET band

Participants expressed serious concern about the illiteracy of learners in the FET band. "*Learners cannot read, write and understand when they reach FET*"; "*… the whole system fails to teach learners properly — learners can't read, write or comprehend properly*". Some participants blamed the outcomes-based approach for this problem: "*(The system) is not based on grammar, which is vital, thus senior learners do not have the basic language skills*"; "(*Assessment*) *is often designed to allow learners who can't read, spell or write to pass the subject*".

Taylor (2003:2) agrees that "South Africa is not getting value for money from its public school system. Although school is accessible to the majority of children, the skills produced are expensive and their quality low". It is important that learners have a high level of cognitive demand of English to be able to use the language skilfully and teachers should realize that they have been given the freedom in the NCS to generate their own challenging teaching material and devise plans to address shortcomings in their learners' proficiency. They set the standards and they are the ones who have to ensure that each learner does not only reach the desired outcomes, but also gets the opportunity to excel.

Summary and concluding remarks

The main problem with SBA assessment lies with the implementation of policy. What matters is what teachers and learners do in classrooms. Participants in this study were faced with the following challenges regarding the implementation of a changed curriculum, and assessment policy: poor understanding of the curriculum and assessment due to inadequate training, a lack of support during the implementation process, a lack of resources and support material, a heavy workload, a lack of standards and poor moderation, and the illiteracy of learners coming through the system.

The way forward is for the Department of Education to seriously invest in targeted, subject-specific training and continuous support of in-service teachers. An opportunity to address the challenges brought about by initial poor training and a lack of support may present itself if a single Curriculum and Assessment Policy is introduced as recommended by the task team (DoE, 2009:27). When the opportunity presents itself, EFAL teachers ought to be empowered with a thorough understanding of policy and a clear vision of how it should be implemented to take language teaching, learning and assessment to a new level. With continuous support from highly knowledgeable, development-oriented subject advisors they ought to be assisted in backward design and the generation of context-specific material for effective teaching, learning and assessment. While the Minister announced that teachers should use nationally approved textbooks (DoE, 2009:6), content may never be followed slavishly but should be adjusted for relevance. Teachers should furthermore be assisted in setting standards by means of subject group meetings and moderation activities in their school districts.

The issue of workload has been addressed with the announcement by the

Minister that learners are no longer required to keep CASS portfolios in addition to scripts. Teachers' workload will not necessarily be lightened but this move may result in CASS being seen as a part of what happens in the classroom instead of some form of separate assessment for accountability purposes. Only when the benefits of SBA for learning are realised and teachers implement it as a process by which learners get to know exactly what is expected of them in order to perform and what to do to fill the gap between not performing and performing, will FET learners find themselves prepared for the high stakes end-of-year examinations.

What so many officials, school management teams, teachers, learners and parents seem to be missing at this stage of public schooling in South Africa is that SBA, if implemented correctly, can change the frustrating and ineffective hunt where the 'unruly hounds' need to be 'urged' and 'hauled' to learn something into exciting, interactive learning environments where 'hunting dogs' that understand the rules and can visualise the outcome of the hunt will be straining the leash held by the professional hunter to effectively begin the chase.

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