

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Investigating the implementation of continuous assessment by Grade 7 Social
Studies Teachers in the Oshana Education Region**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Masters in Education
(General Education Theory and Practice)**

January 2007

ABSTRACT

Since independence in 1990, Namibia's Ministry of Education Sport and Culture has focused on curriculum and assessment reforms. The introduction of Continuous Assessment (CA) for appraising learners' achievement was considered to be a very important aspect of teaching and learning. This study focused on the implementation of CA in schools. The study explores how the selected grade 7 Social Studies teachers understand and implement CA. This study was conducted in the Oshana region of Namibia. Four grade 7 Social Studies teachers participated from two different schools. This study was done through a case study to gain insight into the implementation of CA in schools. Semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis were the research methods used to collect the data.

The findings indicate that these teachers have a theoretical understanding of what CA implies and what role it plays and are aware of assessment strategies. However these theoretical perspectives are not translated into practice. This implies a limited understanding of CA and reflects a gap between the teachers' theoretical understanding of CA and its practical implementation. The study also identified various systemic factors that hamper the implementation of CA, which include overcrowded classrooms, increased teachers' workload by CA, shortages of resources such as textbooks and lack of professional development.

The nature of pre-service teacher education the participants went through, professional development programmes that are given to teachers as in-service training and a lack of guidelines in the syllabus on how to approach continuous assessment are clearly evident in the findings as factors that contribute to the teachers' gap between theory and practice.

The study concludes that even though a number of workshops on continuous assessment were conducted, the teachers still could not implement it as expected. The study findings inform my professional context as an Advisory Teacher and that of my colleagues. Therefore it made me realize what the teachers' needs are and what kind of support they require.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my wholehearted thanks and appreciation to various people who contributed enormously to the completion of this research project.

In particular, I wish to thank my supervisor, Ursula van Harmelen, for her professional assistance, guidance and support which helped me to bring this research to a sound conclusion. She gave so much of her time and is indeed a true and knowledgeable supervisor who aided my thinking through her constructive criticism and helpful comments.

My special thanks go to the Oshana Education authorities and to the four research participants for their co-operation and for affording me time to interview them.

I am thankful to my colleagues Agnes Groleau and Anneke Garssen who motivated and assisted in proof reading my draft thesis.

I give my most honest and sincere thanks to my dearly beloved and understanding husband, Victor, for his support and encouragement throughout this study. I am equally highly appreciative to my two children Rejoice and Epaphras, for their patience and understanding.

I also wish to acknowledge my colleagues at work who have supported me in one way or another. Finally I acknowledge the Supreme hands of the Lord Almighty for making this research possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the background of the study and also highlight the aims and goals of the study.

1.2 Research site

The study was conducted at 2 selected schools in the Oshana Education Region of Namibia, which is situated in the far north central region of the country. The schools were chosen on the basis that they are part of my daily work, offer Upper Primary phase grades 5-7 and that they are close to my work place which makes access possible.

The Oshana region is the smallest of Namibia's thirteen regions in terms of size. The name Oshana lends itself well to this region as it describes the most prominent landscape feature in the area, namely the shallow, seasonally inundated depressions which determine the local agro ecological system.

The Oshana region is the smallest of Namibia's 13 regions in terms of size and it has a surface of 5 291 square kilometres. To the north, the region is bordered by the Ohangwena Region, to the east it shares a common border with the Oshikoto Region, to the south the Region borders onto the Kunene Region while the Omusati Region borders to the west. According to Mendelson, Jarvis, Roberts and Robertson (2002), the Oshana Region had a population of 222°900 by 2006.

The map below shows the location of the Oshana Region in relation to the rest of the 13 regions in Namibia.

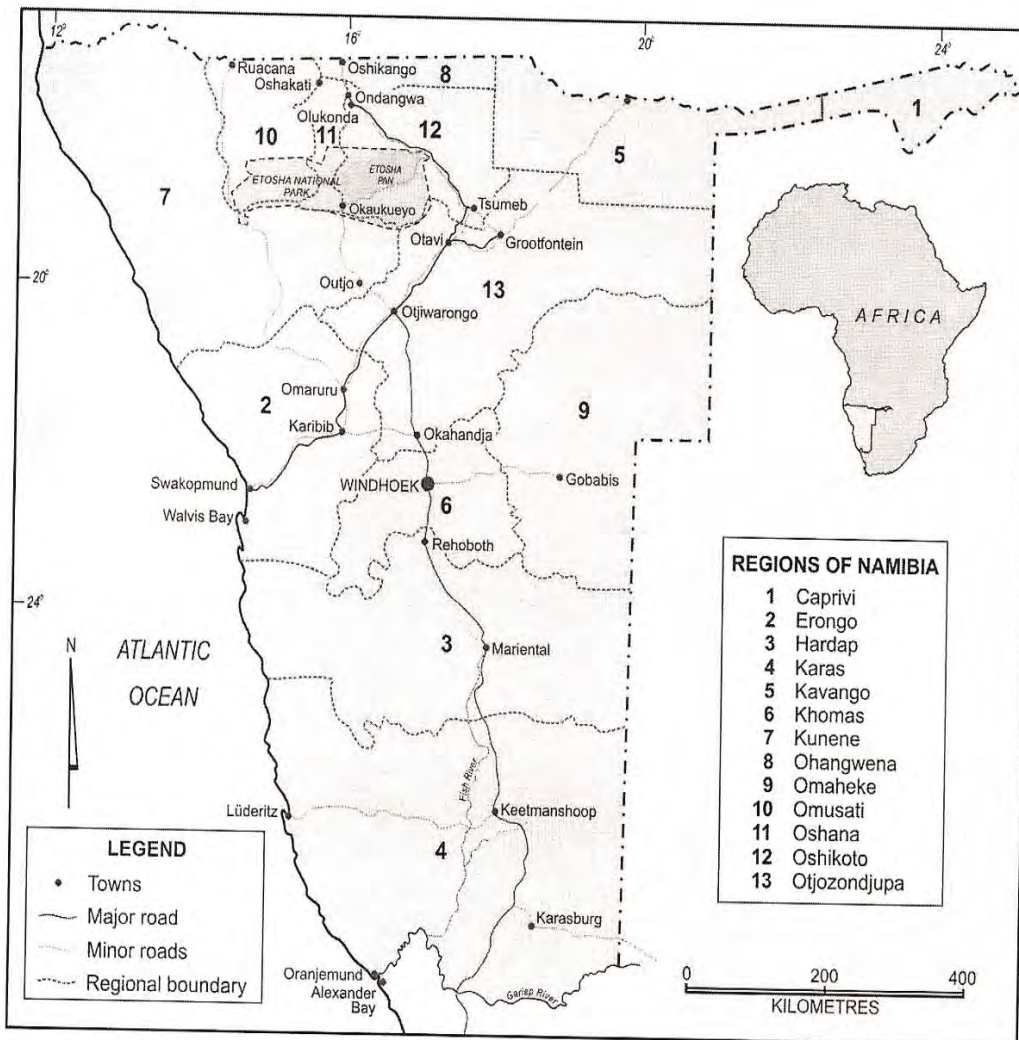


Figure 1: Regions of Namibia.

(S. Abraham, 2006. Graphics Services Unit, Rhodes University, Grahamstown)

According to the statistics of Oshana Educational Regional Office in 2006 there are 130 schools 92 of these schools offering the Upper primary Education (grades 5-7). The Oshana Education region has one College of Education, six Senior Secondary schools and has a campus of the University of Namibia the Northern Campus. Colleges of education provide teachers with a three year Basic Teacher Diplomas. The region has about 1755 teachers. Currently 368 of the teachers in this region are classified as under qualified teachers and 3 are unqualified. The enrolment of learners for 2006 was 52613. One of the schools in which I conducted the research is situated in an urban area while the other one is located in a semi-rural area.

The school in the urban area caters for people living in town and these generally have a higher income than rural communities. This means that they can afford better housing and pay school fees for their children. Due to its location, this school stands a better chance of attracting better qualified teachers especially in terms of accommodation. In contrast, the school in the semi-rural environment is characterized by a lower standard of living. Many of the community members in these areas still practice traditional communal and subsistence farming and have less disposable income which may hinder paying of the School Development Fund. The majority of people in the rural areas of the region live mainly on crop farming such as omahangu, maize and sorghum. Livestock farming such as cattle and goats is also an important economic activity in the region (Totemeyer, Tonchi & du Pisani, 1994).

1.3 Context of the study

In Namibia, the Ministry of Education is committed to education for all. The Basic Education reform process introduced after independence in 1990 was designed to reorient teaching toward a learner-centered approach. The role of examinations as the only measure of success has been challenged. There was a move from a narrow notion of examinations to a more inclusive assessment. That implied moving away from a product based approach toward an orientation that focused on learning to promote thinking and understanding (MEC, 1993).

The Basic Education policy stipulates that a central dimension of assessment in the upper primary phase, grades 5 to 7 should be both informal and formal (MEC, 1993). The policy document further outlined that assessment is to be done on a regular basis. In the context of learner-centered

education, this means assessing each learner's progress and achievement of the basic competencies in the syllabus. Assessment should also be integrated with teaching in order to improve learning and direct the teaching and learning process. The policy further emphasized that continuous assessment (CA) is important because it allows opportunities to assess performance-based activities in the classroom that cannot be assessed in examinations.

The Namibian education's change in assessment practices mirror broader educational trends and practices (Wilmot, 2003:2). This led to a reexamination and evaluation of theories that have informed practice. These ideas are supported by Shepard (2000) who claims that to be compatible with and to support a social constructivist model of teaching and learning as adopted by Namibia, classroom assessment must change its form and content to promote thinking and problem- solving.

According to Gipps (1996a:3) a paradigm shift in assessment is a move from testing and examination to a model, which gives candidates an opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do. The paradigm shift occurred because of the emerging issues and problems related to traditional educational theory and practice. Currently assessment requires achieving a wide range of purposes in teaching and learning, provides information about learners and teachers, and is important for selection and promotional purposes.

The report on the marking of the 2001-2003 end year results of grade 7 highlighted the various performances of the learners. When the examination marks were compared with the continuous assessment marks, in most schools there was no correlation between these two sets of marks. According to the Department of National Examination and Assessment, continuous assessment (CA) marks in many cases were significantly higher than the examination marks and that had cast doubt about the standard of the CA.

The National Institute for educational Development (NIED) stressed that assessment in learner-centered education must focus on assessing skills, knowledge and competence. More focus was also needed on to classroom based continuous assessment. However, the teachers to achieve these outcomes need to fully understand the theory and practice of CA. That means that teachers must be able to elicit reliable and valid information, to communicate what it means to the learners and to know what to do to improve performance (NIED, 2003:31).

One Namibian study (Nangombe, 1998:78) claims that the supervision and control of continuous assessment process by the school authorities is exercised with only varying degrees of success. The study further indicates that the current assessment and monitoring procedures and practices do not seem to contribute or to inform classroom practices as optimally as originally intended.

On the same note, the Social Studies curriculum emphasizes the role of assessment in the context of learner-centered education as being a way of assessing conceptual understanding, skills, values and attitudes relevant to the subject. Assessment in the Social Studies curriculum for grade 7 stipulates that formal assessment should include topic tasks, topic tests, a project and national examination based on the basic competencies of the syllabus. In addition to that, the teachers are expected to do informal assessment, class participation and to observe how learners approach various assessment tasks.

In my capacity as an Advisory Teacher I am responsible for Social Studies grade 5-7. I started working as an Advisory Teacher in the Oshana Region in 2001. I have been responsible for the professional development of Social Studies teachers by providing advice, training and support in order to motivate them to perform better. As part of my work I have to do regular school visits in order to give advice to the teachers on the spot and to give positive and meaningful feedback in reports after visits. My overall objective is to monitor the teaching and learning process as well as to render professional assistance to teachers regarding subject administration and curriculum implementation.

I am operating from the Ongwediva Teachers Resource Centre, which is a government institution based in the Oshana region in the far north of the country. The purpose of the institution is to serve as an in-service centre for teachers in the four north central regions of the country, Oshana, Oshikoto, Omusati and Ohangwena. Its main aim is to support the teachers and thereby all learners and community members in all aspect of their professional and academic development. Countless teachers visit the OTRC to seek information and advice from the Advisory Teachers. They also come for workshops and many other in-service training courses.

As an Advisory Teacher, during school visits I am expected to check the written work of the learners. I usually look at CA marks to see whether they are properly recorded and that they comply with the policy. Through this exercise I have realized that although the majority of the

Upper Primary teachers attended workshops on how CA is to be interpreted, many Upper Primary schools in my region are still far from meeting the implementation requirements. Consequently, my experiences in the field have led to my interest in finding out more about how the grade 7 Social studies teachers, with whom I have most contact understand, experience and implement CA.

1.4 Research goal

Since Namibia became independent, CA has been applied in all subjects grade 5-7 for promotion purposes.

In this study, I have addressed the following questions:

- How do teachers understand CA in Social studies?
- How do teachers implement CA in Social Studies?

My research goal is:

To investigate how a selection of Grade 7 Social Studies teachers understand and implement CA. The goal of the research is therefore to gain an insight into how teachers perceive and practice CA.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The dissertation will consist of six chapters and they are as follows:

Chapter one focuses on the context of the study, research questions and the research goal. It provides insights into some of my responsibilities as an Advisory Teacher. It also provides an overview of each chapter.

Chapter two provides a review of literature pertaining to the topic “Investigating the implementation of continuous assessment by grade 7 Social Studies Teachers.” It highlights the theoretical framework that influences Namibian assessment practices and assessment policies. It provides what research has already been done about CA. It outlines the challenges and problems associated with CA. It considers support for teachers as well.

In chapter three, I focus on the methodology and tools I used to collect data. I describe the research design and different research instruments such as interviews, observations and document evidence to develop a case study of Social Studies teachers' understanding and practice of CA in the Oshana Education Region. In this chapter I highlight the limitations regarding the methodology used in this study.

In chapter four, I present and analyse the results of the data collected from interviews, observations and documents evidence. I presented the data in the form of seven categories which emerged from data analysis. These include:

- The contextual background of the school and teachers involved in my study
- Teachers perceptions and understanding of CA in Social Studies
- Teachers' feelings about CA in Social Studies
- Assessment strategies that teachers use to implement CA
- The description of the teachers' lessons
- Support for teachers
- Documentary evidence

In chapter five, I discuss the research findings reported in chapter four. I discuss the findings presented in chapter four by interpreting and explaining the participants' views in relation to what other studies have discovered about the practices of CA in schools.

In chapter six, I present the main findings of the study, the lesson I learnt about the topic researched and I make tentative suggestions for action for future improvements of the teachers' assessment practices. I have also highlighted the limitations of the study. I provide suggested areas for further research in the area of educational assessment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

As indicated in my previous chapter, this study emerged from my concerns regarding the implementation of continuous assessment (CA) and the level of competence of teachers with whom I work. In order to undertake a study such as this I needed to examine various aspects that are related to the focus of my study.

My analysis in this chapter examines general views of assessment. I explore general theory pertaining to the changes in assessment and I refer to the work of Gipps, Shepard and Wilmot as these writers have placed the issues of assessment in the context of social constructivism, the theory underpinning Namibian Education reform. I apply these theoretical perspectives to Namibian policy, in order to clarify and to provide an enabling framework for practice in the Namibian context. I also examine how the Social Studies curriculum interprets assessment policy. After this, I focus on the challenges and problems associated with implementation of CA, and support services needed to eradicate these problems.

2.2. General views of assessment

2.1.1. Definition of continuous assessment (CA)

In order to better understand how teachers understand and implement continuous assessment, it is important to first look at the definition of the concept of CA. According to Falayo, (1986) as cited in Alausa (1999:6), CA of learner's progress could be defined as a mechanism whereby "the final grading of learners in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning systematically takes account of all the performances during a given period of schooling."

Assessment in the cognitive domain is associated with the process of knowledge and understanding. The affective domain applies to features such as attitudes, motives, interests and other personal traits. Assessment in the psychomotor domain involves assessing the learners' ability in terms of dexterity (e.g. in handwriting, construction and projects).

Another definition by Airasian (1991) as cited in Alausa (1991) describes CA as an assessment approach which should depict the full range of sources and methods teachers use to gather information, interpret and synthesize to help them understand their learners, to plan and monitor instruction and establish a dynamic classroom culture. Furthermore, Baker and Stites (1991) as cited in Alausa (1999) point out that continuous assessment should include a formal assessment of learners' affective domains and their motivation, in which they will need to demonstrate their commitment to tasks over time, and their competence in team or group performances.

In addition, Mazibuko and Ginindza (2005:78) describe continuous assessment as a formative evaluation measure conducted during the teaching and learning process with "the aim of influencing and informing the overall instructional process." They further claim that CA is the assessment of the whole learner on an ongoing basis over a period of time, where cumulative analyses of the learners' abilities in specific area are made in order to facilitate further positive learning. They also believe that continuous assessment allows early identification of problems in teaching and in the learning process and offer opportunity to assist learners before their problems worsens.

For Pido (2005) and Harris and Bell (1996), continuous assessment is regarded as a very important instrument in the promotion of effective teaching and learning. CA is seen as an essential component of classroom activities and its development could raise the standard of student's performance. They suggest that CA may also help to pace the students' learning, motivate them to study, reveal specific areas of learning difficulties and provide feedback to the students and teachers as well as parents regarding their process.

From these definitions, one could deduce that CA:

- Is an assessment approach which involves the use of a variety of instruments
- Assesses various components of learning.
- Assesses behaviour and personal development and values.
- Represents the learner in his/her totality.
- Presents opportunities to identify problems during the teaching and learning process and provides assistance to the learners.
- Provides feedback to all stakeholders which includes learners, teachers and parents, on how learners are progressing.

- Is a continuous process that will take place over a period of time.

Therefore, teachers are expected to assess throughout the school year in a continuous way. It will begin with the decisions that the teachers take on the first day of school and end with the decisions that the teachers and administrators make out about the learners regarding the end of year grading and promotion (Alausa, 1999:7).

The characteristics of CA discussed above are also reflected in the Namibian assessment policy. The pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Basic (MEC, 1996) recommends that CA should be integrated with the teaching and learning process to assess learners' process and achievements continuously. The policy also recommends that CA should be used to evaluate the teaching and learning process in order to improve methods of teaching and the learning materials. It also emphasizes various methods of assessment such as formal and informal that can be used to assess how well each learner masters the basic competencies in the subject syllabus. The fact is that some learners are able to demonstrate their learning better with one method than with another. Therefore the policy suggests that it is best to use more than one assessment method if the intention is to assess learning (MEC, 1999).

2.3. Theoretical frameworks

In order to understand CA better, it is important to explore the theories of learning that underpin assessment from within various approaches. It is also important to know that the way we think about and practice education and assessment today has changed considerably due to the radical theoretical shift in educational thinking. As a result, this has led to re-examination and evaluation of theories that have informed educational practice (Wilmot, 2003).

The study by Gipps (1996b) and Shepard (2000) reveal that any educational practice is underpinned by a set of beliefs about knowledge. In order to understand why and how assessment has changed requires understanding of the two epistemological positions that have shaped the Namibian curriculum. The first epistemology that shaped pre-independence educational thinking and practice is positivism; the second is constructivist epistemology that shapes contemporary educational thinking and practice.

In the following section, I will give a brief overview of traditional or positivist theory which influenced the pre-independence education and assessment practice to provide background information on assessment in the past. I will be looking at the constructivist theory which influences the post independence education system and current assessment practice.

2.3.1 Traditional Positivist views of assessment

The traditional or positivist theory suggests that knowledge is out there in the books and that knowledge is fact and truths (Hinchey, 1998). The theory believes that the teacher who is an expert discovers this knowledge through scientific research and investigation. Therefore it is the responsibility of the teacher to transmit knowledge to the learners and they are expected to reproduce what they have learned. In this case, learning is teacher-centered with “teacher telling” while learners are passive receivers of information. Therefore, learning was done through rote learning which requires learners to memorize facts without understanding (Hinchey, 1998).

From a positivist point of view, the main purpose of assessment is to test how much knowledge has been learnt after teaching (Murray, 2005). Here the focus is on measuring how much a learner is able to memorize and recall rather than how well he or she understands and can apply knowledge. In other words, assessment here is mainly checking whether the informal taught has been received (Gipps, 1996b:258).

The most common tools for assessment are written examinations and tests, which are designed to measure learners in relation to each other. This means that the performance of each learner is compared to that of others in the group, this is referred to as norm referring and the purpose is to select the best rather than to find what learner knows and is able to do (Pahad, 1997:41).

Stobart and Gipps (1997) point out that assessment through tests and examinations often encourages rote learning. This means knowledge acquisition in this approach is perceived through memorization that is a reproduction of facts. Facts learnt in this way may be easily forgotten and make it difficult for learners to apply them in other context, thus limiting the value of learning.

According to Murray (2005:3) traditional assessment practices have been criticized and some of the criticisms are discussed below:

- The focus is on how much a learner is able to memorize and recall.
- It has perpetuated the myth of the “right and wrong answer”.
- It finds out how much a learner knows rather than how well he or she understands and can apply knowledge.
- Key strategies include structured questions of “what”, “name”, “how many”, multiple choice, missing answers and matching questions.
- Examinations and tests have had a negative effect in labeling learners as failures rather than supporting and guiding learning.

2.3.2 A Constructivist view of assessment

Unlike the positivist/traditional theory, the constructivist theory of learning views learning as a process of personal knowledge construction and meaning rather than rote learning (Stobart & Gipps, 1997:16). Knowledge is being constructed in the mind of the learner rather than being transferred intact from the teacher to the learner (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998:6; Van Harmelen, 1999:80). Each learner brings his or her own prior knowledge and experiences to any learning situation that influences what new knowledge they will construct as a result of their learning experiences in the class (Sewell, 2002). Therefore what learners already know should always be considered as an important factor that serves as a bridge to new learning.

According to Ernest (1993:6) some teaching techniques may be more or less efficient than others, but the constructivist view of learning does not rule out any teaching techniques, nor does it equate to the discovery method or problem solving technique approaches (Gordin, 1989 as cited in Ernest, 1993). Moll (2002:7) describes assessment of learning as interwoven with teaching and occurs through educators’ observation of learners, teacher observation of learners at work, and through learners’ exhibitions and portfolios.

Stobart and Gipps (1997:16) describe assessment as a powerful tool to help gear teaching and curriculum. Assessment must constantly support the teaching and learning process to help the teacher understand how learners are progressing and help them to make important life and career choices (Pahad, 1997:39). In addition, assessment should encourage and promote the development of higher analysis order skills, thinking processes to enable learners to think critically and

creatively, to solve problems, to make decisions and communicate effectively (Stobart & Gipps, 1997; Pahad, 1997).

Furthermore this theory supports the criterion referenced assessment which focuses on what individual learners can do rather than where they are in relation to others. In this case the achievement of the learner is compared with descriptions which have been articulated. The aim is to have as many learners as possible achieve all the criteria regardless of how many learners do very well or badly (Sieborger & Macintosh, 1993:13- 17). The purpose is to get the learner and the teacher to understand each other better and consider what it is they have to do next (Lambert & Balderstone, 2000).

Wilmot (2003) emphasizes that assessment should strive to promote conceptual understanding and skills rather than recall and memorization of information. She further encourages teachers to develop and ask questions that will assess understanding and thinking in their classroom to make learners critical thinkers. This can be done by encouraging learners to formulate their own questions during teaching and learning situations.

Tolley and Reynolds (1977:77) stress the same idea indicating that: “Numerous studies have confirmed the significance of the teacher’s questions in the learning process and indicate that they can be used to promote constructive thinking and classroom discussion”. They further emphasize that classroom interaction point not only to teacher domination, but to a very high proportion of questions which require no more than the recall of information.

In addition, constructivism requires assessment to be more diverse and to assess the quality of learners learning and understanding (Stobart & Gipps, 1997). They further claim that assessment tools such as essays, small group tasks, projects, portfolios and pupils self- assessment are necessary to assess learning and understanding. In this way every learner is given a fair chance to apply their knowledge and relate it to real context and to his or her understanding and competence in different way throughout the year (Pahad, 1997).

In constructivism, assessment plays different roles that involve assessment of learning that is summative and assessment for learning which is formative. This takes place at the end of teaching and learning to find out what the learners knows, understands, and can do. It is concerned with the

product of learning. While assessment for learning can be done before or during teaching and the learning process to help the teacher further plan his or her own teaching (Murray, 2005). Wilmot (2003) and Murray (2005) highlight the role of the teacher in a constructivist frame work as a facilitator, who creates opportunities for learners to construct their knowledge of a topic in teaching and learning process and to act as scaffolder through demonstration and modeling to develop learning.

In light of the above discussion, Lambert & Balderstone (2000) claim that we should not think that norm-referencing is bad and criteria referencing is good hence they are not polar opposites. It has been realized that, “behind every criterion, lurks a norm” (Sieborger and Macintosh, 1998:17). In order to improve assessment, criterion-referenced assessment should be added to norm-referenced assessment, when appropriate. In this case, the intention is not to get rid of norm-referenced assessment, as there will always be room for norm-referencing particularly when selection is involved (Ibid).

Murray (2005) noted that as is the case with the traditional approach, the constructivist approach has also received criticism. One criticism is that many teachers lack understanding about the role of the teacher in learner-centred education. The reality is that teachers were taught in the system where the traditional approach was applied, so they were not exposed to experiences of becoming a facilitator rather than a transmitter of information. Therefore it is not surprising that their assessment practices often reflect the traditional approach to learning that is of teacher talk rather than support the learning process.

2.3.3 Reasons for the shift in assessment theory and practice

In this section, I will focus on the reasons for the changes in assessment and here I will rely heavily on the work of Gipps but I will also consider other people regarding the paradigm shift. I have chosen to focus more on Gipps’ work due to the fact that Gipps has made significant impact in the field of assessment. I believe that much of what she says will inform and support my studies on assessment.

Reddy (2004) writes that the 1990s was a period characterized by education reforms where assessment was prime focal point in many countries, including Namibia. Changes to assessment

have always been recognized as an important means of achieving curriculum change but have rarely been integrated with the development process. There are a number of reasons for change in assessment and I will explore these at international as well as at national level. The ideas of change in assessment came into existence when it was realized that traditional assessment in schools has paid little attention to the specific outcomes which focus on practical skills (Pahad, 1997). Thus the urgent need is to promote competencies that cannot be tested by traditional techniques including an ability to think critically and creatively, to identify and solve problems, to work independently and as a member of a group (Broadfoot, 1995; Murray, 2005).

Wilmot (2003) indicates that the reason for the current change is to move away from the dominant traditional approach to learning that is concerned with measuring how much knowledge an individual has acquired, to a constructivist approach that is concerned with how individuals construct knowledge and make meaning. Gipps (1996a) argues that measurement did not allow an involvement with the individual being tested rather it promoted passive learners and encouraged factual recall. The need is to move away from rote-learning toward the focus on meaning and understanding (Reddy, 2004). Le Grange and Reddy (1998) concur and feel that less focus should be placed on memorizing content and more on the attainment of a variety of learning outcome which requires a variety of assessment strategies. Therefore assessment should promote active interaction with content, in relating new ideas to previous knowledge and experience (Stobart & Gipps, 1997:15).

Furthermore Gipps (1996a:3) supports a paradigm shift in assessment what she described as a move from a testing and examination as:

The hurdle model (where you make examination as difficult as possible and give the candidate little guidance, the proof of quality being in the numbers that fail) to an assessment model where we try to give all the candidates a real opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do. This can be done by giving more guidance, by sharing criteria with the students and making the tasks match real life.

She further emphasizes the use of a wide range of assessments including coursework, examinations, portfolios and standardized tests as appropriate tools to assess learning. She also supports criterion-referenced assessment, formative assessment and performance assessment as

well as norm-referenced testing. In this latter case, she suggests that assessment is required to achieve a wide range of purposes such as to support teaching and learning by providing information about learners, teachers and schools as well as being used for selection and certification. The reason underlying the change means that the traditional model underpinning assessment theory is no longer adequate, hence the paradigms shift. Gipps (1996a) claimed that a paradigm shift occurred due to increased demands for testing at national level which focused on assessing a greater range of competencies and that needed evidence of not just how much learners knew but how well they knew it.

Gipps (1996a) argues that the most important function of assessment is to promote good quality learning. That means we need to design assessment programmes in such a way that it will have a positive influence on teaching and learning. She further emphasized that we must test for meaning and assesses understanding.

In addition, Stobart and Gipps (1997) argue that another reason for change in assessment is to reduce dependency on using assessment for selection, but also to enhance and support learning, meaning that the combination of both is needed. In other words, the focus has shifted toward enhancing learning for the individual, engaging with the learners during the assessment process as well as the involvement of teachers. Therefore the change in assessment requires teachers to create opportunities for learners to demonstrate what they know and can do (Gipps, 1996a).

2.3.4 Theoretical frameworks influencing Namibian Assessment practices

Namibia like other countries including South Africa focused on curriculum and assessment reforms after independence. These two issues were considered to be very important aspects of teaching and learning (Alberts, 1999; Nyambe, 2002). Nyambe (2002) writes that the assessment format before independence was examination based and that it was characterized by a summative format with a norm-referencing system. He further indicates that this form of assessment reflects little of what the learner understands and can do as it requires them to memorize for examinations without considering what they have learnt.

In this case, examination practices of the past are questioned, as it only assessed a limited range of activities. In order to capture the full range of competence, a variety of assessment situations is

needed in a continuous feedback during the teaching and learning process (MEC, 2003:31). This is why the current education system demands less focus on examination results and more on support and guides the learners help shape and direct the teaching and learning process. Further to this, assessment would also involve much more self assessment, and making time available for each learner to look at assessment and use them as feedback into his or her own learning process. Similarly, this will be for teachers to use them for feedback into the teaching process (Ibid, 2003:32).

In light of this, it was decided to reduce the dependency on terminal written examinations at the end of each educational cycle as it would not provide opportunity to see how learners are progressing (Ogunruyi, 1984 as cited in Nyambe, 2002).

To reverse this trend, it was decided to revise the system of assessment by moving away from a narrow notion of examinations to a broader range of assessment and evaluation (Nyambe, 2002: 33). According to Storeng (2001) and Nyambe (2002) the trends suggest the move from an approach that emphasizes failure towards success in terms of encouraging and supporting achievement. As a result CA was introduced in all schools in Namibia, this means that CA marks should be added to the end of the year marks and be used for promotion purpose.

2.4. Namibian Assessment policies

In order to understand CA better, I think it is important to also look at what assessment policies of Namibia say about assessment because assessment practice is informed by the policies. I am going to do this by analyzing the policy documents. I will look at the following documents one by one.

- Towards Education For All
- Pilot Broad Guide for formal Basic Education.
- Toward Improving Continuous Assessment in Schools.

2.4.1 Toward Education For All: A development Brief for Education, Culture and Training

After independence in 1990, the government of Namibia embarked upon the Education reform that is guided by the policy document “Toward Education for All” (MEC, 1993).

Education reforms in Namibia require a shift in teaching from a teacher-centered approach towards learner-centered education and re-think the role of examinations. In the past, examinations were regarded as the only measure of success for individuals and programmes, currently they become one of several tools for assessing and evaluating progress. Because of its dominant role in the education system, it will be difficult to de-link the system totally from examinations. However, the policy promotes the idea that more attention should be given to what is examined.

The policy document also emphasizes a shift in assessment, moving away from a narrow notion of examinations to a broader view of assessment and evaluation. This implies that we are moving from an approach that emphasizes success versus failure, towards an approach that focuses on encouraging and recording achievement (Ibid, 1993:124). As part of the reform, a new form of criterion-based assessment was introduced at all levels in order to develop a range of learners-focused and appropriate assessment strategies, as well as to reduce reliance on formal, external set examinations.

The policy document requires tests and examinations that will promote concept formation, analytic skills, thinking and understanding and not only simply recall with the intention to serve learning. In this case, tests and examinations should emphasize achievement and success, not failure (Ibid, 1993:126). The policy (MEC, 1993:128) further stipulates that the main purpose of assessment in basic Education will be to develop a reliable picture of each individual learner's progress and the level of achievement in relation to minimum competencies specified in the syllabuses.

The policy emphasizes that assessment will be used to:

- Inform learners and their parents of progress and achievements.
- Inform teachers of problems and act as a guide for compensatory teaching and promotion.

Assessment has a formative role in education when it:

- Motivates learners to extend their knowledge and skills and to establish sound values.
- Promotes good study habits.
- Helps learners to use what they learned to solve problems.
- Helps build a positive and realistic self-image and improves teaching methods and learning materials (MEC, 1993:129).

In upper primary education (Grade 5-7) evaluation should rely on both informal and formal CA. Formal assessment includes tests developed by classroom teachers. However, the policy document did not specify the examples of informal assessment. Regarding promotion at upper primary phase (Grade 5-7) learners are expected to attain a basic minimum level of competencies in the promotion subjects for each grade. Entry from upper primary to junior secondary, that is, from Grade 7 to 8, will depend on the learners' success in the external examination at Grade 7 (Ibid).

2.4.2 Analysis of assessment policy documents

In this section, I am going to analyze the two policy documents: "*The Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Basic Education*" (MEC, 1996) and "*Towards Improving Continuous Assessment in schools*" (MEC, 1999) in relation to the policy of education "*Toward Education for All*". I will apply six key points taken from the broad policy of education "*Towards Education for All*": A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training" (MEC, 1993) to make links and to see where there are similarities and differences in terms of assessment. I will deal with six point one by one.

First, the Namibian policy "*the Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Basic Education*" (MEC, 1996) and "*Towards Improving Continuous Assessment in Schools*" (MEC, 1999) continues to advocate for summative assessment which requires learners to write examination at the end of the year to sum up their progress and achievement throughout the year. The documents also emphasize the use of other assessment tools in the form of that complements the examination. This is evident that the documents link and translate the broad policy "*Toward Education for All*."

Secondly, the MEC (1996) and MEC (1999) support and clarify the issue of broader assessment and evaluation by referring to types of assessment methods such as formal and informal assessment. These policies provide examples of assessment activities to be done through formal assessment including tests, examinations, projects, quizzes and portfolios while examples of informal assessment involve questioning a learner, observing a learner at work and homework. The documents also emphasizes that marks given for assessment activities should be recorded to inform learners and their parents on their progress and achievements and for the teacher to provide remedial teaching when necessary. However, it is interesting to note that portfolios are not a feature of the

policy “*Towards Education for All*” nor in “*the Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Basic Education.*” This could result in portfolio development being neglected in some schools. Again the methods of assessment and their examples are not provided in the policy document “*Towards Education for All*” as it is in the policy “*Towards improving Continuous Assessment in Schools.*”

Thirdly, all these policies shed light on criterion- based assessment but only MEC (1999) elaborates on criterion based assessment and provides a better understanding of it. It states that learners should be aware of what criteria will be used to assess them when they are to carry out that task to ensure their transparency prevails. The policies further promotes the use of a variety of assessment methods as stipulated in the policy “*Toward Education for All*” which are not detailed. However, the policies (MEC, 1996) and MEC ,1999) elaborate on such methods that enable learners to demonstrate better what they know and can do as some learners can do better with one method than with others. Since the teacher wants to assess learners learning, not just their ability to use a method of assessment, more than one method is advocated (MEC, 1999).

Fourthly, the MEC (1996) and MEC (1999) do not specify what is to be assessed in tests and examinations, however they stipulate that teachers must link their assessment to the objectives and competencies in the subject syllabi and this is an indication of what will be assessed. In this regard, assessment should promote development of skills, knowledge, understanding and thinking (Ibid, 1996; Ibid, 1999). In light of the above information, it becomes obvious that the policy documents interpret “*Toward Education for All*” (MEC, 1993).

Fifth, “*the Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Education*” and “*Toward Improving Continuous Assessment in Schools*” promotes the same goals as “*Toward Education for All.*’ They focus on the use of assessment results that aim to inform learners, parents and education officials on their progress and achievement. The policies emphasize that assessment should also inform and allow teachers to take actions best suited to improve their teaching. It is only the MEC (1999) policy that suggests all stakeholders including education officials to be informed on learner’s progress and achievement. This is not the case with the MEC (1993) and MEC (1996).

Lastly, the policies stipulate that assessment at the upper primary phase should be both formal and informal (MEC, 1996; MEC, 1999). This means that these policies promote the goal of “*Towards Education for All.*” However, the difference is that the policies emphasize only informal assessment

for grade 5 and 6 but do not states anything about informal CA in grade 7 (MEC,1996; MEC, 1999). Both the MEC (1993) and MEC (1996) emphasize that entry from upper primary to junior secondary depend on examination at the end of the year. The concern here is that more emphasis is on examination than on both CA and examination. The policy “Toward Improving Continuous Assessment in Schools” says nothing about the issue of entry from upper primary to junior secondary.

2.5. Continuous Assessment in the context of Social Studies Syllabus

In this section, I will be looking at the role of CA in terms of the Social Studies syllabus and Grade 7 Social Studies CA Manual to see how the syllabus interprets the Namibian assessment policy. I will look at where there are problems, differences and where they match.

The Pilot Curriculum Guide for Formal Basic Education (MEC, 1996) stipulates that basic education should promote knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies that everyone must have to function adequately in society. It stipulates that assessing progress and achievement of each learner continuously should be an integrated part of teaching and learning. It further suggests that the variety of assessment methods and techniques should be employed to allow the learners opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of competencies. Assessment should be made as authentic as possible, meaning that the activities should provide learners’ opportunities to conduct enquiries, to solve problems and make decisions based on real life issues (MEC, 2003). In the context of social studies, the subject aims to promote and encourage learners to develop knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes, values and concepts. In this case, the syllabus reflects a link with the assessment policy because the syllabus’ learning objectives promotes the goals and aims of the policy which serves as a foundation of Basic Education in Namibia.

According to MEC, (2000) CA in Social Studies is an important part of everyday activities because,

- It provides regular information about teaching, learning and the achievement of learning objectives and basic competencies.
- It allows teachers to assess performance based activities which cannot be assessed by written examination including discussions role play, practical work and using investigative skills.

The purpose of CA in the Social Studies context is to gather evidence about a learners' understanding that is ongoing, integrated and practical within the context of everybody classroom situation. CA involves the assessment of all the basic competencies outlined in the subject syllabus. This assessment is based on criterion referenced. This means that the performance of the learner is not compared to the performance of other learners in the class. But the performance of the learner is only measured with reference to the competencies that have been taught.

Continuous assessment in Social Studies involves two approaches namely formal CA and informal CA.

2.5.1 Formal Continuous Assessment

Formal CA involves tasks and activities that have been designed and are used for the specific purpose of assessing certain competencies. These tasks and activities are carried out in everyday classroom situations and provide evidence of the learners' understanding of particular concepts with regards to the subject content. The marks awarded for planned and structured formal CA activities are recorded on a record sheet. The formal CA marks together with that of written examinations contribute to the grade 7 promotion mark. Formal CA consists of six assignments including two term tests, three topic tasks and a project. The results of learners' performance on all formal CA tasks are recorded and contribute 50% of the learners' final Namibia End of Primary Examination (NPE). It is worth mentioning that in this context, the performance based assessment is translated into norm referenced marks which defeat the CA purpose of providing evidence of learners' progress in the designated competencies. Further to this, the subject syllabus and grade 7 Social Studies CA manual do not provide any guidelines on the use of rubrics when assessing.

2.5.2 Informal continuous Assessment

Informal CA serves as a valuable preparation for the formal aspects of CA. It comprises of a variety of activities such as questioning during lessons, observing how learners approach various tasks and reviewing homework, worksheets and class participation. It enables the teacher to identify learners who are experiencing particular difficulties in achieving some of the basic competencies and would be useful in supporting a diagnostic assessment. Informal CA is important especially in case a learner misses the formal assessment and examinations and

judgment has to be made about their performance based on evidence from informal assessment. The judgment will be based on learners' progress throughout the year, because the records of informal CA are kept by the teacher (MEC, 2000). However, the validity of informal CA can be questioned since the CA manual stipulates that informal CA may consist of tasks and activities that need not be specially designed for their validity as assessment tasks and activities. The possibility may be that not all domains of learning are covered and mastered. Furthermore, neither the Social Studies syllabus nor grade 7 CA Manual provides guidelines on how to develop and use rubrics for assessment and this is also the same case with the general assessment policy.

The CA manual further emphasizes that by its nature, informal CA will be both unstructured and spontaneous. These records of informal CA do not have a prescribed format but records are kept by teachers for reporting and inspection purposes. The marks awarded for informal CA tasks and activities such as class work and homework would be recorded somewhere along with notes on learners progress and the issues of recording is entirely left on teachers shoulders to see how they wish to record such information. However these marks should not be added to the record sheet for formal CA (Ibid, 2000).

CA in Social Studies complements the work done by learners for the written examination for the Namibia End of Primary Examination (NPE). In Social Studies, there will be a summative assessment at the end of Grade 7, relating to the learning objectives and basic competencies of the syllabus. The summative assessment of Grade 7 will be a semi-national examination set by the Directorate of National Examination and Assessment and marked at the school by teachers. This summative assessment contributes 50% and CA count 50% towards the final year grade in the subject. Work undertaken for such assessment should motivate learners to progress in their knowledge and understanding of Social Studies and also develop qualities of creativity and inventiveness (Ibid, 2000).

The Social Studies syllabus for Grade 7 (MEC, 1998) also outlined the issue of criterion-referencing which states that when letter grades are awarded, they reflect the learner's actual level of achievement in relation to the basic competencies in the subject syllabus. The MEC (1998:33) emphasize that letter grades A-E are awarded indirectly when a percentage mark is used and then converted to the letter grade. Then the percentage marks must be related to criteria for assessing

learner achievement in same way as when awarding letter grades directly. Letter grade A, being the highest and E the lowest grade.

The following table should be used to convert percentage to a letter grade:

- A: Achieved basic Competencies exceptionally well 80%
- B: Achieved Basic Competencies very well 66-79%
- C: Achieved Basic Competencies 40-65%
- D: Partly achieved Basic Competencies 30-39%
- E: Not achieved the majority of Basic Competencies 0-29%

Conversion of letter grades to the 5 point scale for averaging out for an end- of year grade is as follow:

A-5 B-4 C-3 D-2 E-1 (Ibid, 1998)

Based on the information above, it is important to note that this criterion is only applied when it comes to the summative assessment, which is the end of year examination.

Furthermore, the Social Studies Syllabus (MEC, 1998) suggests some of the strategies that could be employed to provide a comprehensive reflection of the learners' development in all areas. Some of these strategies include project work, topic tasks and tests. However, assessment strategies such as journals and portfolios are recommended in the policy document (MEC, 1999) but they are not features in the syllabus.

When the project is carried by learners, the skills such as investigation, selection, presentation, interpretation and evaluation are to be assessed. In the two topic tasks completed in Term 1 and 2 the skills such as investigation and presentation will only be assessed while in the topic task done in term 3 the same two skills will be assessed plus one of the other skills assessed in a project will be assessed.

The Social Studies syllabus reflects Namibian assessment policy in terms of issues and intention of CA because there is an agreement on how assessment should be interpreted and what purpose it

serves. The policy (MEC, 1996) and Social Studies syllabus (1998) also have close link in terms of methods of assessment, way of recording CA and grading issues.

Furthermore, the policy (MEC, 1996) and Social Studies syllabus (MEC, 1998) also link with the learning theory particularly the constructivist theory that recommends that assessment should focus on and assess the quality of learners learning, knowledge, understanding and skills. Again the theory also supports the notion that assessment should include a variety of methods to allow teachers opportunity to better determine what learners know and can do. Unlike the “*Pilot Curriculum Guide*” and “*Towards Improving Continuous Assessment in Schools,*” the Social Studies syllabus does not provide enough information on CA to guide teachers. As a result teachers may end up interpreting CA differently.

2.6. Challenges and problems associated with continuous assessment

According to the literature consulted, the following factors were regarded as challenges and problems associated with CA. One Namibian study by (Alausa, 1999) emphasized that it is important to focus on the problems of CA that could be associated with the teachers because they are the main implementers of the programme. For Alausa, the problem of CA that could be associated with teachers involves their skills in setting up the tests and administration, as well as their attitudes towards CA and record keeping.

The other Namibian study by (Nangombe, 1998:79) revealed that the shortcomings of CA include the following:

- Lack of understanding of policy guidelines by some implementers.
- Lack of proper control and supervision mechanism especially at school level.
- Lack of INSET training for teachers in subjects without Advisory Teachers. In some cases teachers are changing subjects they teach too often, which leaves them with little room to specialize in any one of them.
- Lack of commitment on the part of the teachers and learners regarding CA which at the end of the day, results in fabricated marks.
- Inability of some teachers to understand how CA feedback can be used to inform classroom practices better.

In addition, January (2002:10) stressed that another challenge that teachers experience in Namibia is the lack of information and support especially in terms of CA materials as well as in-service training.

According to Gipps as cited in Maree and Fraser (2004) one outstanding problem is to develop and reconceptualise traditional views of reliability in the context of assessment. This is seen as a quality assurance device and has a role to play in the development of assessment strategies.

In another view of the implementation of CA in schools in Swaziland, it was noted that most teachers were in support of the principle of CA, but were not willing to implement it because of “large classes and lack of time to complete the syllabus” (Mazibuko & Ginindza, 2005:81). They believe that successful implementation of CA would require a class size of 25-30 pupils even though the average primary class is about 65-70. The large class size in most primary schools in Swaziland is a major problem because teachers are expected to mark and keep records of the progress of the learners (Ibid). They pointed out that work related to CA takes a lot of time for teachers. As a result teachers were concerned that time spent on remediation and enrichment was too extensive and therefore they would not finish the syllabus. They further reported on cases of resistance from teachers and head teachers who felt that CA was imposed and teachers were not fully involved in its initial stages. This report reflects Giroux’ warning (as cited in January, 2002) about reforms where teachers are reduced to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictated, objectives decided by experts far removed from everyday realities of the classroom life.

Le Grange and Reddy (1998:34) argue that CA increases the workload of both teacher and learner. For teachers extensive record keeping and monitoring of individual learners is required while learners are required to continuously assess their own work. They further maintained that CA may be difficult to apply with large classes because it takes time to assess individual learners authentically. They also claim that different schools may adopt different approaches to CA and this may impact on the transfer of teachers and learners from one school to another.

Gipps (1990:23) holds the view that the level of understanding about assessment varies tremendously among teachers as many will need in-service training before they can discuss results confidently and accurately with parents. She further stated that the best way to explain the results

to parents will be face to face, at a meeting, where detailed explanations of assessment can be made, so written reports will have to be available too.

Stobart and Gipps (1997) added that research on assessment in primary schools in the early 1980's had shown that teachers' understanding of issues in assessment was limited. There was little understanding of how the scores were derived, or what they meant, and no understanding of issues such as reliability and validity. For Gipps, teachers own assessments were intuitive and discursive, rather than viewed against criteria and were often not written down. She further pointed out that teachers found it hard to articulate their assessment practice with little training and few materials.

According to Le Grange and Reddy (1998) one of the challenges of CA is that it should be based on stated learning outcomes with their associated assessment criteria, range statements and performance indicators. They also maintained that in order to ensure that CA is reliable and valid; it should be moderated by teachers from the same school or from other schools.

Lambert and Lines (2000:197) suggest that although most teachers know perfectly well what methods and techniques are available for assessment, using them formatively has proved more difficult, requiring a leap of faith, courage and ambition.

When comparing the challenges of CA in Namibia with the other countries, literature consulted reveals that CA in many countries is implemented with some difficulties by some implementers and that similar problems regarding CA are experienced in Namibia. These include teacher's attitudes towards CA, lack of understanding of assessment policy guidelines and lack of in-service training. The challenge here is to find ways of improving the situation of CA practices in schools.

2.7 Support Services

In this section, I focus on support services. If support services to teachers are lacking then it may be one of the contributing factors that hamper proper implementation of CA in classrooms. Therefore it is important to understand better the role of support services and its importance in the education system.

Mazibuko and Ginindza (2005:88) claim that if teachers do not understand what CA about, the programme is not likely to receive the professional and material support needed in schools. There is a need for continuing training of teachers, curriculum developers, inspectors and other monitors of educational programme to keep up the standard of CA implementation. They also feel that inadequate training is likely to contribute to teachers not knowing exactly how to handle issues related to CA. This training should not be a one time thing, but should be an ongoing process of staff development and capacity building.

Furthermore, Alausa (1999:8) indicates that for successful implementation of CA approach, teachers need to be professionally prepared for operating the system. If the teacher is not adequately prepared for operating the system, it may lead to a tendency to ‘cook up’ scores for CA. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to develop positive attitudes toward the practice of CA. They should also be made aware of the requirements of CA, its importance and how to implement it.

If CA is to be implemented successfully in schools, it needs to be well planned, with in-service education and training programmes to support teachers. Teachers should experiment with different strategies on regular and informal basis and confer with colleagues at the same school or at other schools. Teachers are therefore urged to make the shift to that authentic assessment by introducing CA in their classrooms. This will make their teaching practices and their learners’ educational experiences more meaningful and valuable (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998:35).

In addition, after these services are in place, follow-up needs to be done to monitor implementation of CA and overcome the challenges as they arise before the situation worsens.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief summary of literature related to the topic of investigation on how the Grade 7 Social Studies teachers understand and implement CA in their classrooms. The role of CA and theories that underpin CA were also discussed. The challenges that teachers are facing in implementing CA were also highlighted. Support services needed to overcome these challenges to improve practices of CA in schools were also discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate how a selection of Grade 7 Social Studies teachers understand and implement Continuous Assessment (CA) in schools in the Oshana Educational Region. In this chapter I provide an overview and description of the research design and instruments I used for collecting data and I provide a description of the research site and explain how the study participants were selected. I also discuss issues relating to ethics and how the data analysis was carried out. The structure of this chapter will be as follows:

- Research design
- Sample and site
- Data gathering
- Data analysis
- Research ethics
- Limitations
- Conclusion

3.2 Research design

The Namibian Education reform process has adopted a social constructivist epistemology. This reform informed my study and this is why I selected a qualitative approach which focuses on how people make meaning and reach understanding. I selected it because my study is interested in how teachers make meaning and understand CA in Social Studies. I also believe that their understanding influences their assessment practices.

Further to this, because my study required me to interpret the meaning that teachers make. I located the research in an interpretive orientation within the selected qualitative approach, which I discuss below.

Given the nature of my study, I decided to base it on interpretive orientation, because I believe this orientation is suitable for answering my research questions as it gives me the opportunity to interact with participants in order to get a deep understanding of their perceptions, experiences and

implementation of CA. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), an interpretive orientation is primarily concerned with the research participants' understanding of the phenomenon being studied. For the interpretive researcher, "multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals" (Merriam, 2001:4). Creswell (1994:4) expands on Merriam's view that for the interpretive researcher "the only reality is that constructed by individuals involved in the research situation". Therefore for the interpretive researcher, the purpose of research is to describe and interpret the phenomenon under consideration in order to share the meaning given to it by the research participants. Further to this interpretation is a search for a deep understanding of particular events and for theoretical insights (Cohen & Manion, 2000). Given the above, I felt that an interpretive orientation would best serve my research goal.

Further to this, according to Merriam (2001), the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the meaning people have constructed in relation to the context of their own setting. This is achieved when the researcher goes to the people, observes their behaviour, and shares their experiences and perceptions. This relationship between an interpretive orientation and qualitative approach is highlighted by Anderson and Arsenault (1998:95), who claim that "qualitative research is regarded as a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them".

Merriam (2001:5) further defines a qualitative approach as "an umbrella concept that covers various forms of inquiry that enable us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena being studied with as little disturbance of the natural setting as possible." For Anderson and Arsenault (1998: 95), "deep understanding of the world can be gained through conversation and observation rather than through experimental manipulation" I opted to use a qualitative approach because it provided me with an approach to the collection of data, processing of data and data analysis that facilitated my ability to make sense of the teachers' perception and assessment practices through interviews and observations.

The nature of my research lends itself to a case study method. Anderson and Arsenault (1998) describe the case study as a holistic research method that uses multiple sources of evidence to analyse a specific phenomenon or instance. According to Yin (1994:13) a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". In my

case, I investigate the participants' experience and assessment practice of CA during their real lesson presentation in their classrooms. Merriam (2001:19 and 41) defines case study "as an approach, which enables the researcher to gather comprehensive, in depth information and gain in depth understanding about each case of interest". Stake (2000) supports Merriam in this regard and argues that we study a case of special interest by looking at depth, scrutinise context and the activities to enhance understanding of the case. Cohen and Manion (2000:184) assert that "case studies are a step to action, they begin in a world of action and contribute to it. These insights may be directly interpreted and put to use for staff or individual self-development".

Case studies therefore have the following key characteristics that helped me in framing the boundaries of my study and in better understanding these:

- Case studies are as suitable for answering my particular research questions because a case study is concerned with the particular as opposed to generalisation.
- Secondly I found the case study useful because it provides insights and illuminates meaning of the particular phenomenon being investigated (Merriam, 2001).
- I was able to focus on the specific context of the study site and on my respondents as individuals constructing meaning of the particular situation being studied, which is CA in learner-centred education pedagogy.
- I also found a case study useful because I was able to catch unique characteristics that could otherwise be lost in larger scale data such as a survey. These unique characteristics might hold the key to understand the situation (Cohen & Manion, 2000). This was evident during the interviews when I probed for in-depth information from the participants.

Apart from the strengths of a case study, it is important to note that a case study also has limitations. One of the limitations of a case study, according to Merriam (2001:41), is that it can "oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the researcher to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs". I attempted to counter this by using and cross-referencing multiple data sources.

3.3 Sample and site

Sampling refers to the way or method used to determine the number of people who will participate in the study as well as the time and accessibility needed to conduct the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

In my study, I used purposeful sampling to select my respondents for the study and I was influenced by Patton's (1990) claim that purposeful sampling is useful when selecting a small sample for the study in-depth to illuminate the questions under study. Patton (1990:169) argues that "the logic and the power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling." The researcher selects the respondents on the basis of their being valuable sources of information, rather than focusing on what may be a more representative sample. In my sample I selected those schools and those teachers who have a good reputation in terms of the teaching of Social Studies. The teachers I selected are experienced teachers and therefore more likely to provide me with rich information. Merriam (2001) concurs with Patton's view in claiming that purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand and gain insight; therefore sampling must be selective in order to provide as much valuable information as possible.

In my study I needed to work with a limited number of people as I wanted to get an in-depth understanding of their perceptions and assessment practices. I finally selected two schools only. This research was therefore conducted in two schools offering Social Studies Grade 7 in the Oshana region. My intended selection was based on the following criteria: firstly, the schools should be part of my daily life, meaning close to my work place which makes travelling possible. Secondly, I selected four grade 7 Social Studies teachers, three men and one woman with a Basic Education Teacher diploma, who would be expected to have a better understanding of CA because of the BETD focus. As will be seen later I had to adjust this as only one of my eventual respondents had a BETD. The other two teachers, although experienced, are still engaged in obtaining their BETD qualification through an in-service programme. Thirdly, I chose grade 7 because it is the final grade for the upper primary phase. Learners therefore have to write a national end of year examination used as a component of assessment for promotional purposes for the junior secondary phase.

To better understand my research, the following background of the schools is provided. The first school is a junior secondary school situated in a semi-urban area, approximately two kilometres from the town. I refer to it as Shilema Junior Secondary school. It has well-kept buildings. In the past, the school was a church school but now it is a government school, well known for providing quality education. The school has 26 teachers including the principal and head of department, one Secretary, two institutional workers and 720 learners. The school has a library with many resources. It has water, electricity, telephone connections and a photocopier machine. It accommodates grade 6-10.

The second school is a primary school, located at the centre of town, offering grades 1 to 7. I refer to the school as Cwena Primary School. The school environment is good with many big trees; a large playground and attractive buildings. The school consists of 12 teachers including the principal and head of department, one institutional worker and 449 learners. The school has a computer lab with seven computers. It has clean water, electricity, telephone and a photocopier machine.

3.4 Data gathering

According to Patton (1990:10) qualitative data consist of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge obtained through interviews, detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviours, actions recorded in observations and quotations or passages from various types of documents”.

Influenced by Patton’s ideas for this research process, I used semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis for data collection. Patton (1990) claims that using a combination of these methods helps to validate and cross-check findings through a process of triangulation. Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity in qualitative research through the use of two or more methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In this study I used multi-methods, which included interviews, observations and corroborate the findings. I also took the interview transcripts to the participants for them to verify whether the transcripts reflected what was discussed. This refers to what is called “member checking”, the most important way of ruling out possible misinterpretation of what the participants say and the perspectives they have (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Maxwell, 1996). Using this triangulation enabled me to compare and contrast evidence to enhance validity.

3.4.1 Interviews

Merriam (2001) describes interviews as a person-to-person encounter in which one person gets information from another. This encounter can be regarded as a conversation, the purpose of which is to obtain a specific kind of information.

Before I started with the semi-structured interviews, I developed the interview questions and they were piloted in one of the schools, which was not part of the sample. One of the benefits of a pilot study is to provide additional information with regards to improving the final draft of the questions (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2005). The rationale behind the piloting of the questions was to check whether they would really generate the desired information and if necessary make appropriate adjustments. During the piloting process it was evident that some of the questions were not clear, and some were repeating each other. Later some questions were rephrased and made clearer.

After piloting, the actual interviews were carried out. Merriam (2001) describes semi-structured interviews as a mix of structured and less-structured questions. For O’Leary (2004), semi-structured interviews are flexible in order to make the flow of conversation possible. During the process of interviews I used a list of questions I had prepared and also asked follow-up questions for clarity which prolonged the interview sessions. My semi-structured interviews were linked to open-ended questions as they allowed the emergence of new ideas on the topic (see Appendix 1) (Merriam, 2001). Cohen and Manion (1989: 313) emphasise that open-ended questions:

Enable the interviewer to test the limits of a respondent’s knowledge; they encourage co-operation and rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes.

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) highlight the value of semi-structured interviews that allow the researcher to probe with a view to clearing up vague responses, or to ask for elaboration of incomplete answers.

I felt that semi-structured interviews made conversations more relaxed and less contrived than would otherwise have been the case with structured questions. I used a tape recorder to record the conversations and I feel that this enhanced the ‘conversation’ as I was able to listen far more interactively than had I been solely reliant on notes.

Interviews are seen as needing to follow a particular ethical protocol as they are an invasion of the person's private space. Therefore I explained about the research process and the type of interviews to be used. I obtained permission from the interviewee to use a tape recorder and explained to them that the purpose of using it was to record their responses should I miss something in the process when taking notes. I negotiated dates and times then each interviewee suggested a suitable interview date and interview dates were set (see Appendix1).

All teachers were interviewed after school hours in their offices at their respective schools with the intention of not disturbing normal class routine. The interviews were conducted in the official language, which is English, this was in accordance with the participants' choice. All the interviews were recorded on tape and I also took notes. Using both aided my memory of the interview context and the particular situation and context. When I read through the interview transcripts I noticed issues that needed clarity that were followed up with the interviewees.

From the interviews I obtained a wealth of information on teachers' personal data, teachers' perceptions of CA, role of CA, assessment strategies and CA management. Issues such as lack of support and remedial teaching were raised during the interviews. I also experienced problems with one teacher who was not open to giving much information, however, she managed through probing to provide me with useful data. One other problem was that learners in one instance were making a noise during study time when the interview was conducted; however, the teacher urged them to lower their voices and the problem was solved.

I have transcribed the recordings of the interviews and each transcript was taken to the interviewee concerned to check whether my recordings reflected what was discussed. All the transcripts were combined according to the interview questions in order to determine similarities and differences among the teachers' perceptions and performance.

3.4.1.1 Limitations with regards to the use of interviews

Patton (1990) warns the researcher that the problem with interviews is that they are a limited source of data because participants can only report their perceptions of and perspectives on what has happened. Those perceptions and perspectives might be subject to distortion due to personal

bias, anxiety and lack of awareness. In this study, I did not only rely on interviews but considered lesson observations and documents analysis to ensure validity.

3.4.2 *Classroom observations*

After the interviews, I conducted classroom observations as one of the methods used to collect data. O’Leary (2004:170) defined observation “as a systematic method of data collection that relies on a researcher’s ability to gather data through his or her senses”. For Patton (1990) observation is a powerful tool for gaining insight into situation under study.

The observations allowed me to see how teachers implement continuous assessment during the teaching and learning process (Murray & Nhlapo, 2001). I used observation because I wanted to see whether teachers implement what they had said in their interviews. Also Patton (1990) claims that direct observation allows the researcher to learn about things participants might be unwilling to talk about in interviews. Through direct observation the researcher can gain information that would not otherwise become available. Observation provides a check on what is reported in interviews while interviews allow the observer to go beyond external behaviour to explore feelings and thought (Patton, 1990). Observation allows the researcher to obtain first-hand information as compared to interviews in which information is presented as second-hand (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). Patton (1990) support Welman, Kruger and Mitchell’s view claiming that “observation allows the researcher opportunity to look at what is taking place in situ rather than at second hand” (as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison).

Patton (1990) further asserts that observation allows the researcher access to understand and interpret the phenomena being studied. In this respect, observation is used to ensured validity and reliability (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Furthermore, I used non-participant observation. O’Leary (2004:172) describes non-participant observation as a “process of a one way mirror”, where the observer just watches without interfering. In this situation, I only interacted with participants after the lessons when doing follow-up for clarification.

Apart from that, it is important to note that observation is also characterised by some weaknesses. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) emphasise that the presence of the observer in class could influence the participants' behaviour.

Teachers were informed in advance about lesson observations in Social Studies. I observed three teachers' lessons for three consecutive days and one teacher's lesson for two days. Three teachers were observed from 27 to 29 May 2006, while the fourth teacher was observed on 15 to 16 June 2006. The duration of each lesson observed was 40 minutes.

All four teachers were observed while teaching in their classrooms. I have used a lesson observation schedule, which provided information regarding the name of the teacher, name of the school, date, grade, and number of learners, lesson length, topic and space for observer's comments and I focused on how CA was implemented in the classroom during the teaching and learning process and to what extent it was used.

Thus the approach to the observation was based on an observation form consisting of two parts (see Appendix 2). The first part recorded the key logistical issues involved in class observation while the second part recorded everything that took place in the class. This schedule was based on indicators that focused on classroom organisation, teachers' questions, type of assessment, the nature of each activity, participation, interactions, competences, assessment strategies and the use of teaching and learning materials. These indicators helped me to find out how CA was used formally and informally in classrooms.

The average learner ratio in the classes where nine lessons were observed in the first school was 1:30 while in the second school in two lessons observed the ratio was 1:47.

3.4.2.1 Limitations of observations

According to Patton (1990) the problem with observation is that there is a possibility that the observer may affect the situation being observed, in the sense that participants may behave in some atypical fashion when they know they are being observed. In my study, during lesson observations, my teachers were behaving normally because they are used to being observed by advisory teachers, principals and head of department.

3.4.3 *Documents analysis*

I collected additional data by scrutinising and checking documents and materials that could be relevant to CA and revealed how CA was developed, implemented and recorded. This include schemes of work, lesson plans, class record sheets, and the learners' written work as well as assessment policies. The data drawn from these documents was used in conjunction with interviews and observation data (O'Leary, 2004).

Together these documents provided evidence of what was happening in the classroom as well as checking whether the teachers' assessment practices were meeting assessment policies. These documents were selected to provide evidence of how continuous assessment is planned, implemented and interpreted and to see whether the assessment policy is followed.

3.5 **Data analysis**

After the data was collected, all the interviews and lesson observations were transcribed. The data from various sources was scrutinised to reflect patterns in the data. Data analysis enabled me to identify themes, categories and patterns (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2001:493). In this case, I organised the data collected on a matrix based on themes and categories related to the research question (see Appendix 7).

In this study, data analysis followed a number of steps. I first transcribed interviews and lesson observations. Then I processed interview data by placing all four teachers' responses on a table according to the questions asked as this allowed me to identify patterns and themes. I also categorised lesson observations according to various themes and put them in a table. Again this allowed me to identify patterns (see Appendix 8). I then related interviews findings to lesson observations findings in order to make further meaning on what was said in the interviews.

3.6 **Research ethics**

According to Anderson and Arsenault (1998) it is compulsory for the qualitative researcher to first obtain permission from a person with authority in the organisation when conducting research. In my case, before I started, I first wrote a letter to the Regional Director of the Oshana Education Region requesting permission to conduct the research (see Appendix 3). I also requested permission from the principals of the selected schools and from the participants. I provided the principals with permission letters, one from the university and the other one from the Office of the

Director. The principals and participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the research. I also gave the teachers opportunity to ask questions for clarity.

I informed the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time. I also explained to them about anonymity and confidentiality, assuring them that their identities and that of their schools would not be disclosed to anyone.

After a long deliberation with teachers we reached consensus and I was granted permission. I then requested them to sign the consent form (see Appendix 4).

3.7 Limitations of the research

One of the limitations was that three schools were targeted for the research. However I was only able to reach two schools due to my office workload and time constraints. The other limitation was that only one teacher out of four who were selected for the research is a BETD graduate. The other two are in their third year of BETD in-service, and one of them has a further diploma in Education as well as a BEd Honours. So even though I had set out to select BETD holders, this was not possible. The last limitation crucial to my study, is that I conducted the research as an inexperienced researcher because it was the first time I did research of such a nature. In spite of the above limitations I believe this case study has illuminated my research questions.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the research methodology that guided my research. I have described the various methods I used to collect data desired to answer questions. I have explained how the data collected was analysed. I have also discussed the issues of validity of collected data and ethics.

In the next chapter, I will present my analysis of the data collected.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present and analyse the research data obtained from the interviews, observations and documents examined to investigate the teachers' understanding of CA and the way it is implemented in Social Studies in the selected schools in the Oshana region. The data was collected from four individual teachers teaching Social Studies in grade 7. I have identified seven categories that emerged from the data that best describes the teachers' understanding and implementation of CA.

My data presentation is consequently based on the following:

- The contextual background of the school and teachers involved in my study
- Teachers perceptions and understanding of CA in Social Studies
- Teachers' feelings about CA in Social Studies
- Assessment strategies that teachers use to implement CA
- The description of the teachers' lessons
- Support for teachers
- Evidence of CA from learners work and other documents

4.2 Data collected through interviews

4.2.1 *The contextual background of the schools and teachers*

This section provides a contextual background of the two schools and four teachers who participated in this research. I refer to the teachers as Shino, Sara, Heimo and Jakes for the sake of confidentiality and anonymity. Shino, Sara and Heimo are teaching at the same school while Jakes is teaching at the second school.

In the table below I present the information and explanations of teachers' personal data including their qualifications and experience in teaching Social Studies at school:

Table 4.1 Teachers’ qualifications, experience and current studies at two schools offering Social Studies in the Oshana Education Region.

School (Pseudonym)	Teacher	Sex	Grade taught	Qualification	Teaching experience	Subject taught
Shilema Junior secondary (Semi-urban)	Shino	Male	7, 8-10	Grade 12&DPE	13	Mathematics & Social Studies
Shilema Junior Secondary (Semi-urban)	Sara	Female	7	ECP &DEAL	15	Oshindonga, Social Studies, BIS & RME
Shilema Junior Secondary (Semi-urban)	Heimo	Male	5-7	BETD	5	Social Studies, English & Mathematics
Cwena Primary(Urban)	Jakes	Male	5&7	LPTC, SED,B.Ed (Hons) Management & PGDE	23	Social Studies, NSHE, BIS, RME & Arts

Acronyms

- DPE - Diploma in Primary Education
- ECP - Education Certificate Primary
- DEAL - Diploma in Education for African Languages
- BETD - Basic Education Teachers’ Diploma
- LPTC - Lower Primary Teachers’ Certificate
- SED - Secondary Education Diploma
- B.Ed (Hons) - Bachelor of Education Honours
- PGDE - Post Graduate Diploma in Education
- BIS - Basic Information Science
- RME - Religious and Moral Education
- NSHE Natural Science and Health Education

Table 4.1 shows that three of the teachers teaching Social Studies Grade 7 are men while one is a woman. Their teaching experience in this study ranges from five to 20 years. The finding shows that all the teachers are qualified. Three of them are graduates from a College of Education while one is a university graduate. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that all the teachers interviewed also cater for languages and science subjects as well as non-promotional subjects.

4.2.2 Teachers' perceptions and understanding of CA in Social Studies

The first of the questions put to the participants was related to their understanding of the need for CA. Therefore they were asked why they thought CA was introduced as part of the reform curriculum.

All four teachers revealed similar opinions indicating that CA was introduced to:

- Promote interaction between teachers and learners as well as to enhance active participation and involvement of both teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process
- Enable them to diagnose the learners' strengths and needs in order to provide remedial teaching when necessary to cater for them all
- Provide opportunities to expose learners to various assessment activities such as topic tasks and projects as well as to give them a chance to assess basic competencies that are difficult to assess in examinations
- Encourage proper planning of lessons, including the use of teaching strategies and learners' activities
- Assist in case a learner misses the examinations due to illness or death in the family as well as for promotion purposes
- Inform various stakeholders in education on learners' progress including regional office, circuit office, teachers, parents and learners

As seen from above, the rationale for introducing CA was generally well articulated and indicated that these teachers had been exposed to the theory underpinning the introduction of CA being able to articulate the main ideas. It was however interesting to note that Sara added to the general response given by the other three teachers:

I don't support CA because it doesn't encourage hard work. For me I don't feel the importance of CA because learners are no longer competing but learning for the sake of learning. Nowadays, most learners don't study because they know that even if they don't work hard, they have to pass due to CA.

Given these teachers' comments about the rationale of CA, their responses to the questions related to their views about the role of CA in Social Studies was interesting as this question was applied directly to their subject rather than to the broader reform theory.

There was a general consensus that CA was a contributing factor that helped the teacher to gauge the learners' subject understanding and that it was a mechanism that helped the learners to understand. Heimo said, *"If we are talking of physical features of Namibia and you are only explaining to them and not giving them assessment tasks to explore in the field, to see for themselves, then they will not understand how they really looks like."*

A second factor that emerged was that teachers saw the role of CA as a vehicle that helps learners and teachers to assess whether the basic competencies in the syllabus are being achieved. The diagnostic value of CA in the context of the subject was also mentioned. Jakes responded that, *"CA helps the teacher to find out whether learners need further help in order to master the basic competencies."*

Sara seemed to contradict herself, because she indicated earlier that she does not support CA as it does not encourage hard work, but she did acknowledge its role in terms of assessing the acquisition of subject knowledge.

It can be deduced from the responses given by all four teachers interviewed that they recognise and are aware of the rationale and role of CA in Social Studies in terms of promoting knowledge and understanding of subject content through mastery of basic competencies of the syllabus.

When asked what their opinions were on the access to the assessment policy documents of Namibia, all teachers had more or less similar opinions. Three of the teachers confirmed that they have assessment policy documents at their schools. One of the teachers revealed that he had never seen these documents but relied only on the syllabus information given when he was studying. Heimo responded that, *"I never come across assessment policy documents. I don't have even CA Manual for Social Studies grade 7. I am not aware whether the school has such assessment policy documents."* It is surprising that even though three teachers are teaching at the same school one of them is not aware about the existence of assessment policy documents at their school. However, it is important to note that all four teachers use different sources such as the syllabus and Social

Studies CA Manual and Ministry assessment policy documents to guide them towards assessment implementation.

In this regard, they all show awareness of what assessment policy documents require. For example they agree that CA should be:

- Integrated with teaching and learning
- Formal and informal assessment
- Contribute 100% while end of year examination contributes 100% divided by two toward the final promotion marks out of 100% (However, one of the teachers had a different view from the others, as he pointed out that CA and end of year examinations contribute to the final promotion marks.)

4.2.3 *Teachers feelings about CA in Social Studies*

When asked about their feelings about CA in Social Studies, the teachers interviewed generally were positive about it. However, all of them experienced problems in implementing it. They indicated that absenteeism and lack of commitment from learners' as well as a lack of commitment from teachers were some of the problems identified. Shino found absenteeism to be a stumbling block that prevented learners from doing their work. He also said, "*Sometimes teachers discourage learners from doing activities as they fail to do the marking on time*". He pointed out that the instructions to the exercise should be clear and understandable otherwise the tasks cannot be successful. He also stressed again that CA enables the teacher to discover strengths and weaknesses of the learners in order to assist and to promote sound interaction between the teacher and learners.

In the same vein, Sara said, "*My experience for CA in Social Studies sometimes is bad and sometimes is good because when I give learners tasks to do, some will do it, others will not do it*". For her, learners who fail to submit their work get punishment to rewrite the same task several times. She found CA useful when there is a problem. Heimo claimed "*If you are not doing thorough preparation and planning you will find yourself not giving enough assessment tasks including tests and topic task*". He raised his concern about the CA record sheet for Social Studies Grade 7, saying that it needed to be expanded because it did not provide enough space for

assessment tasks. He felt that he possessed a good understanding of CA because he gave enough work and that he kept up with the marking and recording.

Jakes said, *“I experience passive participation of some learners.”* He found CA useful for higher achievers but not for slow learners, as they did not contribute during discussion especially those from rural areas. He regarded learners from urban areas as active learners because of their exposure to television and the internet which makes communication in English possible.

All the responses reflected that the teachers experienced some difficulty in assessing learners that prevented them from implementing CA properly. The teachers’ problems include unclear instructions for the exercises, problems with preparation and planning and the design of CA record sheets. On the other hand, the learners’ problems include reluctance to do the work, lack of communication in the official language and passive participation of some learners.

The teachers further indicated that there were still some issues that bothered them concerning the implementation of CA in Social Studies. For example, Shino stated that,

I find it difficult to assess assessment activities at different levels such as Mathematics and Geography at junior phase as well as Social Studies at upper primary because I end up making the tasks easy or too difficult. I did not specialise in Social Studies but I was taken to teach it just because I also teach Geography. I find the criteria for assessing projects and topic tasks difficult to apply and therefore sometimes ignore them.

His responses reflected that Social Studies was not the subject of his choice but that he was teaching it because there was a need. On the other hand, Shino and Heimo indicated that CA increased their workload and it was time consuming. Sara also said that a shortage of textbooks made the implementation of CA difficult.

Shino and Heimo found giving home work not effective because it was given on a daily basis and sometimes learners did not get enough time to complete it. However, Sara found that tests did not work well as learners’ performance was not that good. For Shino, Sara and Jakes, projects and topic tasks worked well as learners enjoyed collecting information. However, the situation was

different with Heimo, as he found tests and examinations work well and were easy to mark and that learners' performance was always satisfactory.

4.2.4 *Assessment strategies the teachers use to implement CA*

The importance of using a variety of assessment strategies designed to assess different competencies has been emphasised in the reform policy, which is the reason for including a specific question about assessment strategies.

In response to this question, Shino indicated that he used strategies such as asking questions, giving homework, tests and examinations to see whether learners have understood the topic being taught. Sara was of the same opinion as Shino, that tests, examinations, class work, topic tasks and asking questions were the strategies she used to check whether the learners understand the topic. She admitted that she was unclear about the use of criteria.

For Heimo, written tests, debates, asking questions, discussions, class work were part of assessment strategies used to assess learners' understanding on the topic based on the basic competencies of syllabus. He said, *"To be honest I don't use assessment criteria, I only rely on memorandum"*. Jakes said he used tests, examinations topic tasks and projects as assessment strategies in formal assessment while asking questions and class work were used for informal assessment. He said, *"I assess knowledge, understanding and skills such as communicating and interpreting. I don't use criteria because the issue of criteria is not well addressed in schools"*.

The findings above indicate that the teachers are aware of various assessment strategies. It is interesting however to note that assessment criteria are not generally used.

4.2.5 *The support that teachers received in implementing CA*

The teachers were interviewed regarding the support they received in implementing CA in Social Studies. All four teachers interviewed indicated that they received support in the form of guidelines which guide them on how to set, mark and record the marks obtained from various assessment tasks such as tests, projects and topic tasks. They indicated that support was received from various sources like the Head of Department, colleagues who attended workshops, subject meetings and various assessment policy documents. They found them all useful in facilitating the

implementation of CA. It is interesting to note that all four teachers possessed guidelines for implementing CA even though their sources were different.

When asked their opinions on support and motivation they received in implementing CA, their responses were as follows

Shino said: *“Many teachers including myself were not competent with CA implementation, but because of support from head of department, principal and advisory teachers through lesson observations, advice and encouragement on what and how to be done. I received support from community where some of the community members were invited to talk about the topic on which they are experts”*.

In the same light Sara said: *“I got support and motivation from the principal who encourages me to give more tasks to learners and make sure they are done. I did not receive any support and motivation from advisory teacher”*.

Heimo said: *“I got support of materials such as syllabus, previous question papers and CA record sheets from the subject head, head of department and from my colleagues who attended workshops which guided me on what to teach and assess”*. He indicated that satisfactory performance of learners and encouraging words of the headmaster motivated him.

Jakes also commented: *“I received support and motivation through attending workshops on developing materials for Social Studies including CA related issue”*. He emphasised that he attended several workshops conducted by the subject Advisory Teachers where he was provided with CA record sheets.

All four teachers interviewed indicated that they recognized and appreciated the support and motivation rendered to them in implementing CA. Their responses indicated that the support and motivation provided came in various forms and from different people and sources. The evidence shows that three teachers were supported and motivated by principals; two of the teachers were supported and motivated by advisory teachers while one teacher indicated that he got support and motivation from his subject head and colleagues.

4.2.6 Management of CA

When asked how they managed CA in Social Studies, all the teachers interviewed indicated that they planned their work in advance including assessment activities. They indicated that they planned at the beginning of the year. Their responses reflected that they acknowledged the importance of planning to facilitate implementation of CA. Shino said, *“I decide how many tasks to be done per year and how much to be completed in each term”*. He stated that when there was a shortage of resource such as textbooks and maps, learners had to share for assessment to be successful. He also gave learners a chance to swap their activities books and assess each others’ work by so doing; they learnt the skills for assessing.

Sara said, *“I normally come up with a year plan at the beginning of the year including assessment activities. When I start teaching at the beginning of the year, I also assess at the same time and this includes, orally and written work.”*

Heimo said, *“I plan tasks in advance for each topic”*. He indicated that he did the marking and recorded the marks on class lists before he handed books back to the learners. He then later transferred the CA marks onto CA record sheets and compiled CA marks at the end of each term and at the end of year. He indicated that he set assessment activities with deadlines.

Jakes said

I develop my scheme of work including assessment activities such as tests, topic tasks and projects at the beginning of the year. I plan my lessons consulting different components such as learning objectives, basic competencies, teachers and learners’ activities and evaluation of how the lesson went.

Three of the teachers indicated that assessment should be an integral part of the teaching and learning process, which means teaching and assessing at the same time. Two of the teachers revealed that a shortage of textbooks prevented proper implementation of CA tasks; however the learners succeeded through sharing. Marking and assessment was primarily seen as the duty of the teacher. Only one of the teachers interviewed mentioning the use of peer assessment. The interviews revealed that CA marks are moderated by heads of department and principals. However Heimo added advisory teachers to the list of the moderators.

4.3 Data collected through lesson observations

In presenting the lesson observations results in this section, I first give a brief overview of the areas covered by each teacher in the lessons observed. Secondly, I present an analysis of the extent to which learners were involved in the lessons and how they were involved as a means to indicate the possibilities that were presented in the lessons for CA. Thirdly, I provide the responses to the stimulated recall interviews that were held after each lesson. These interviews were undertaken to gain clarity on the approaches used in the lessons and to get a better sense of how the teachers saw the implementation of CA given what they had indicated in the initial interviews. The lessons were an illumination of the extent to which CA is seen as an integral dimension of teaching and learning in these classrooms.

4.3.1 Lessons overview

Shino was teaching the theme ‘mapwork’ in which two topics were covered in three lessons. The first lesson was about representation of height; the second and third lessons were about weather forecasting. During these lessons, the learning objectives were that learners would gain an understanding of height representation on maps; become familiar with contours; be able to convert a contour drawing into physical features and gain an understanding of a recorded weather forecast, as stipulated in the syllabus (MEC, 1998).

Sara was also teaching mapwork in the syllabus in all three lessons observed. All three lessons were on determining location. The learning objectives of these lessons emphasised that learners should be able to know and understand the different lines of latitude and longitude and become familiar with grid references as a method to determine location on a map.

Heimo taught two topics from the theme ‘mapwork’ in the syllabus covered in three lessons. The first and the second lessons were also on the topic determining location and the third lesson was on different types of maps. The learning objectives for these lessons were: Learners will know and understand the different lines of latitude and longitude; become familiar with grid references as a method to determine location on a map and become familiar with different types of maps.

Jakes was teaching about the two topics on the theme ‘revolution in communications’ in the syllabus covered in two lessons. The first lesson was about internet and e-mail and the second lesson was on how to read a newspaper. The learning objectives according to the syllabus were:

Learners will realise that forms of communication have changed over time with the development of new technologies; learn about different sections of a daily newspaper and understand the difference between factual and opinion pieces.

According to the syllabus, in Shino's lessons, learners are expected to demonstrate contours practically by drawing physical features from contours. They should be able to interpret and compare the weather for their areas on the basis of a weather report on the radio, television or in a newspaper. They should also be able to explain the concepts 'synoptic weather chart' and 'weather station'. What I observed is that Shino himself defined the terms 'contour lines' and 'contour intervals', which were identified on a map. He also first asked the learners to explain what a weather forecast was, to define weather elements and meteorologists; he later summed up their responses and provided them with correct definitions. However, he never probed in a manner that would lead to the understanding of concepts. It was observed that the learners did not do any drawing, interpreting, and comparing weather, nor did they explain the concepts outlined in the syllabus in those lessons.

Sara and Heimo's lessons will be coupled together because they taught the same topic: 'Determining location'. In these lessons, according to the syllabus, the learners are expected to develop an understanding of certain concepts and to be able to differentiate between lines of latitudes and longitude as well as to draw them on a map. They should be able to locate specific features on a map by using the lines of latitude and longitude. In Sara's lessons, learners were asked to identify different lines of latitude and longitude on a globe. This they did verbally. Certain learners were then given opportunities to draw in lines of latitude and longitude on a blank globe on the chalkboard. They were also asked to determine a location of a place using grid references on a map. Heimo involved the learners in the lessons through answering questions and doing many written and oral exercises. These exercises aimed to demonstrate their understanding and skills by locating different places on a map using global addresses individually and in groups. For example, they were asked to find a place at 20°N, 10°E; 19°N, 99°W; longitude line at 20°W using textbooks, an atlas and a flipchart.

In Heimo's lesson, which focused on types of maps, learners were expected to differentiate between different types of maps and to extract and analyse information from maps. In the actual lesson presentation, learners were provided with two maps and were asked to differentiate the

street map from the road map. They were also asked to identify main streets and types of roads on maps and give reasons for their answers. Sara and Heimo followed what was outlined in the syllabus.

In Jakes's lessons, learners were expected to explain what the internet is and to give one example of services available on the internet. They should be able also to identify four different sections in a daily newspaper; and analyse the difference between a news report and a letter to the editor. It was observed that the teacher asked the learners to explain what the internet was and to name services available on the internet. The teacher accepted responses without asking for clarification which would have been useful to further learners' understanding. Learners were asked to identify the various rubrics in a newspaper, but using only their textbooks.

The lessons that I observed promoted knowledge of the subject content, development of map reading skills including interpretation of maps and analysis of data as well as some reasoning. It was found that most classwork was taken from the textbooks and partly from syllabus documents. It is interesting to note that most of the homework was based on the basic competencies of the syllabus, using examples and activities based on the textbook. One of the teachers gave homework as a formal assessment task. In all the lessons observed, the teachers did not record who was responding or who did not respond, and none of the responses given by the learners was assessed in any way.

In the next section I analyse the teaching and learning and assessment strategies used by the teachers to promote learning with understanding.

4.3.2 Teaching and learning and assessment strategies used by teachers

In Social Studies assessment strategies are expected to analyse and to promote knowledge with understanding and skills. Approaches for assessment strategies included the following:

Strategy 1: Planning

The findings from lesson observation show that all the teachers planned CA as part of lesson and after lessons. Regarding the teachers' lesson plans I found that their planning was based on the competencies of the syllabus. They also planned how to find out whether the learners master what

is taught by asking questions and giving activities. I observed this during the actual lesson presentation.

Strategy 2: Questioning

All four teachers indicated in the interviews that they asked questions during their teaching as one of the assessment activities. Two of the teachers explained that they asked questions orally and through written work, while the other two teachers did not specify how their questions were used. It was evident in all the lessons observed that all the teachers asked questions at the beginning, during and at the end of the lessons.

Shino's questions included:

What is weather?

What make the condition of a particular place to be cold or hot?

What weather helps you?

Who don't like weather according to the passage?

Name weather instruments you see here.

Sara's questions included:

What do we call the lines that run from west to east on a map?

Who can show them on a map?

Which line of latitude divide the earth into two parts?

Which line of longitude divide the earth into western and eastern hemisphere? Show it on a map

Heimo's questions included:

Identify two main streets in Windhoek city plan

Why are you saying they are main streets?

Name two educational buildings shown in the Windhoek city plan

Jakes's questions included:

What is internet and what is e-mail?

Where is internet connected?

What is the name of the company which provides these services in Namibia?

Give services available on internet.

The findings show that most of questions asked by the teachers in the lessons observed focused more on factual recall and right answers. However, Heimo posed one question that provoked the learners' thinking. The teachers also provided the learners with the answers they considered as the correct answers. It was evident that all the questions were initiated by the teachers and mostly directed to the learners who put their hands up. Some of the learners who were quiet were also occasionally asked to respond to questions. It is important to note that although the learners were given opportunities to ask what they did not understand, only in one of Heimo's lessons did one learner ask the following question: *What is gravel road?* The question was answered by the learners and emphasised by the teacher. As indicated earlier no record of these interactions was made in any of the lessons.

Strategy 3: Involving learners

As indicated earlier, assessment is intended as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. In this section, I focus on both teaching and assessment strategies used by the teachers, as the two go hand in hand.

According to the information drawn from the interviews, all four teachers revealed that they used questions, class work, homework, tests, projects, topic tasks and examination as assessment strategies to assess the basic competencies of the syllabus. Apart from that, two of the teachers added that they also used discussion. In the lessons observed, I found that all four teachers valued and attempted to involve learners in the lessons through questions, class work and homework.

Group work was another method used by the teachers to involve the learners in the lessons. Only one of the teachers did not use group work in his teaching. Two of the teachers instructed the learners to get into groups and asked them to find the location of places on a map using the following grid-references: 30°N, 13°E; 60°N, 10°E; 60°N, 21°W. The other teacher requested the learners to read the passage about internet and e-mail individually then discuss and answer the questions in groups. While working in groups they were closely monitored by the teachers. One learner from each group was given an opportunity to report orally their findings.

Learners' homework books show that many exercises were completed and marked; some were marked by the learners with a pencil and endorsed by the teacher with a red pen. It was evident

that the learners made corrections of the work done. However, there was no record of this sort of work done, as neither norm referencing nor criterion referencing was employed to assess group activities or homework.

Strategy 4: Using teaching aids

In this study, I found that the use of teaching aids played a role in all the lessons observed. However, the resources used were in fact used as teaching aids and not as learning aids which incorporated assessing learners' use of the resources. Nor was the manipulation of resources used to assess learning.

Shino used the textbook to introduce and explain the use of contour lines and contour interval using topographical map. He drew physical features from contours on the chalkboard to show and explain concave and convex slopes to the learners. He used the atlas and asked the learners to identify the three highest places in the world. The teacher also used instruments such as a rain gauge, wind vane and wind direction to explain their uses.

Sara used the chalkboard, textbook and atlas like Shino. She used the chalkboard for writing the notes and for drawing a globe and asked the learners to draw in the lines of latitude and longitude. However, there was no record made of how the participating learners performed. She also used the textbook and atlas to explain how grid-references worked to determine the location of a place and gave the learners an exercise to do which was not assessed.

Similarly, Heimo used the textbook, chalkboard and atlas as teaching aids like Shino and Sara. He used the textbook and map for the learners to differentiate between streets and roads maps and asked questions based on them. Heimo used a flipchart with simple drawings and the atlas and world map to demonstrate how to find a place on a map using grid-references. He then gave them exercises based on these learning support materials that were done in groups. Again, these were not assessed. Jakes, like Shino, Sara and Heimo, also used the chalkboard and textbook. He used the textbook by asking the learners to read as individuals then discuss the questions in groups.

The findings revealed that while all four teachers are aware of the importance of teaching aids in supporting learning with understanding they do not relate these aids with any form of assessment.

4.3.2.1 Data collected through the stimulated recall interviews

In this section I provide the teachers' responses to the stimulated recall interviews that were held after each lesson (see Appendix 6). These interviews were conducted to provide better understanding of the approaches used in the lessons and to get a better sense of how the teachers saw the implementation of CA.

When asked their views on the use of questions at the beginning of the lessons, the teachers' responses were as follows:

- Shino said the intention of using questions was to find out what the learners already knew and to engage them in the topic taught.
- Sara indicated that she asked questions to assess the learners' prior knowledge; to revise the previous work to see whether the learners understood and repeat when necessary.
- For Heimo, the aim of asking questions was to check whether the previous work had been understood by the learners or not and to consolidate before starting a new topic. He asked questions by assessing the learners' prior knowledge to see how far they were in general as this helped them understand the topic to be introduced.
- Jakes indicated that he asked questions to test learners' prior knowledge and to attract their attention to what was going to be taught.

Evidence above revealed that all the teachers ask questions to:

- assess the learners' prior knowledge
- assess understanding of previous work

In response to questions asked during the lesson presentation, Shino indicated that he asks questions to make the learners follow and test whether they understood what was taught. Sara said the same as Shino, claiming that questions were asked to check the learners' understanding while teaching was in progress so that if they did not understand then the teacher could change her or his teaching methodology in order to cater for the learners' needs. Heimo had same the opinion as Shino and Sara that asking questions helped the learners understand the topic taught. For him, explaining did not help much but asking questions could generate discussion and help understanding. Jakes stated that he asked questions to find out

whether the learners understood what he was teaching. It is evident that all the teachers had similar views that they asked questions to test understanding and to ensure that learners followed.

Regarding the questions asked at the end of the lessons, the teachers responded as follows:

- Shino said that he asked questions to evaluate the lessons to ensure the learners have understood and to see whether the objectives were achieved and decide on what to do next to improve.
- For Sara, the purpose of asking questions was to evaluate the lesson presentation on what went well and what did not and to re-emphasise the main points of the lesson.
- Heimo responded that the aim of asking questions was to check whether the learners had gain something from the lesson taught and to repeat it when necessary. It was also useful as a tool for self-evaluation to check whether the methodology used was successful and to see whether there was a need to consolidate.
- Jakes said he asked questions to find out whether the learners had gained something from the lesson and to check whether the lesson was successful.

The findings show that the teachers had similar views in that they asked questions to evaluate themselves to see whether the lessons were successful and the lessons objectives achieved.

When asked their views on giving the work individually and in groups, Shino said: *“I use individual work because I want each learner to give his or her opinion, to think independently without others”* He found group work useful as it gave the learners the opportunity to share ideas and assist each other to reach common understanding with others. Sara stated that, *“I like to use individual work because I want each learner to come up with something”* She preferred group work as it promoted sharing of ideas; helping each other and promoting free communication.

Heimo said, *“I use individual work to test individual learner’s understanding of the topic. I allow each learner to use his or her own knowledge and give individual assistance.”* For him, group work provided the opportunity for the learners to put ideas together, to discuss in order to come up with ideas as some learners were slower than others. He also felt that group work made communication possible. Jakes on the other hand found individual work useful as it required individual thinking without depending on others. For him, group work promoted sharing of ideas and learning from one another.

When asked about the issue of giving homework, the teachers' responses were as follows

- Shino stressed that he gave homework to reinforce what was taught in class. For him, it was also important as it encouraged the learners to ask knowledgeable people at home, realising that the teacher was not the only source of information.
- Sara emphasised that homework helped checking whether the learners had understood what had been taught and encouraged them to find information about the new topic.
- Heimo felt that homework prepared the learners for the topic to be taught, gave them the opportunity to discover things on their own and discuss in class. He also viewed homework as training for preparing the learners for examinations.
- For Jakes, homework allowed more practice on what was being taught; reinforced learning and determined whether the teaching was effective.

The general feeling of the teachers was that homework enhanced understanding of what was taught, promoted discovery learning and served as a preparation for both new topic and examinations. The findings from the lessons observed revealed that all four teachers were aware of the importance of giving homework even though some did not give it daily. I also found that the nature of homework given varied from asking the learners to read in the textbook and work out questions.

When the teachers were asked their views on the role of teaching aids during their teaching:

- Shino said, *“I use teaching aids in my lessons to increase the learners’ understanding of the topic, by seeing real objects and touch will help them to remember what they were taught.”*
- Sara responded that, *“I used teaching aids for the learners to understand the subject content because teaching without teaching aids will not help the learners understand better.”*
- Heimo said, *“I used teaching aids for the learners to understand the topic taught.”* He believed that using learning support materials helped bringing reality to the class and helped the learners to remember easily.
- Jakes in this case emphasised that teaching aids made it easy for the learners to understand the topic as it focused on real situations.

These responses are analysed in greater depth in Chapter 5. At this stage however it is interesting to note that even though these teachers were able to see and to articulate how their actions were selected in relation to achieving particular objectives, none of them were able to relate their practices to the assessment of how well their objectives had been achieved in terms of individual learners' performance.

4.4 Data collected through document analysis

In order to confirm what the participants have said in interviews and what I have observed on the understanding and implementation of CA, I selected and studied some of the documents and materials that showed the rationale and implemented of CA, checking whether the assessment policy was followed. I looked at the following documents:

- schemes of work
- the teachers' lesson plans
- the learners' written work
- recording of CA

4.4.1 Schemes of work

Schemes of work include a plan of how teachers are going to assess the progress of their learners. What is to be taught and to be assessed is planned together. All four teachers who participated in this study were in possession of schemes of work. Two of the teachers used a pre-designed scheme of work from the Advisory Services comprising headings such as themes, topics, resources, assessment activities and a remarks column. However, as there was no evidence of remarks made; one wonders whether these documents are practical. Two teachers had developed their own schemes of work with weeks, date of completion, themes, topics and resources, with dates and signature attached to them indicating what was covered. Among all the schemes of work studied, only one teacher did not indicate assessment activities to be done. However, all schemes of work showed examinations and tests to be written. The findings showed that other formal assessment tasks were not reflected, for example topic tasks and projects. The schemes of work did not indicate performance based assessment approaches through the use of rubrics or learners' profiles.

4.4.2 *Teachers' lesson plans*

The findings indicated that all four teachers did preparation for their lessons. Three of the teachers (Sara, Heimo and Jakes) wrote their lesson plans in the ordinary books which comprise headings such as topic, learning objectives, lesson objectives, basic competencies, teaching aids, introduction, teachers and learners' activities, conclusion, assessment and reflection. Only Shino wrote his lesson plans in a pre-designed planning form with areas such as topics, aims of the lesson, teaching methods, teaching stages, resources and assessment. In some of his lesson plans forms, he sometimes wrote written homework in the assessment column or left blank.

It is interesting to note that even though three teachers are teaching at the same school, teaching the same subject, and the same grade, their format of lesson plans is different. Sometimes the teachers indicated what the learners were going to do during their lesson presentations without saying how the learners were going to be assessed. Evidence shows that the reflection part of the lesson plans was not always attended too; therefore sometimes it was left blank.

4.4.3 *Learners' written work*

4.4.3.1 Tests

Tests are one of the instruments used to assess learners' progress in achieving the basic competencies of the syllabus taught in the class. Three written tests were given at Shilema junior secondary school, while five were given at Cwena primary second school during the time of observation. All four teachers indicated that they set tests themselves and marked them. At Shilema junior secondary school, where three teachers teach Social Studies Grade 7, they take it in turn to set the tests. If one teacher set the test, the other two teachers will moderate the question paper and memorandum.

I analysed the two Social Studies grade 7 test question papers one from each school. The findings revealed that:

- All the teachers followed the format of the end of year National Examination in terms of multiple choice and source based questions which is useful to the learners when preparing for the examination.
- The teachers focused mainly on questions that assess recall of information.

- They did not consider assessment domains that assess understanding, thinking, application of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that the question papers looked at does not show a good balance of questions as not all assessment domains outlined in the subject syllabus were considered.
- Marking of tests is based entirely on normative assessment approaches, no criterion referencing or performance referencing is used in testing, and therefore the test scores revealed a cumulative approach to testing.

4.4.3.2 Topic tasks

In Social Studies, topic tasks are a form of assignment that is concerned with methodology especially with investigation and presentation to be completed by the learners at home. Topic tasks differ from other assignments because of their length (two to three pages) and the time-scale for completion which is two lessons and time at home. They give the learners opportunity to complete an investigation into one of the topics taught, based on the basic competencies in the syllabus. The emphasis on topic tasks is to assess the ability of the learners to investigate and to present information. Therefore they do not require one right answer. The topic tasks are already designed and ready to be used by teachers. However, teachers are free to design theirs as long as they are based on basic competencies in the syllabus.

The following are some of the selected examples of basic competencies sampled for CA which are outlined in the Social Studies examination syllabus:

- Interpret and compare weather for their areas on the basis of radio, television or in a newspaper.
- Identify four different sections in a daily newspaper. Analyse the difference between a news report and a letter to the editor. Write a short news report about an incident at their school, or a letter to the editor expressing their opinion about an issue.

Learners are expected to undertake three topic tasks per year, one in each term. The first two topic tasks to be done in Terms 1 and 2 are only concerned with the skills of investigation and presentation. In Term 3, the topic task includes one additional skill from selection or interpretation or evaluation to be assessed. Each skill is assessed out of a total of six marks.

At the Shilema junior secondary school, two topic tasks were completed for the two teachers, while for another teacher, four topic tasks were completed based on basic competencies in the syllabus. All the topic tasks were marked. However, the finding shows that there was no indication of the skills that were assessed as supposed to be the case. For Shino, each task was set for five marks, for Sara each topic task was set for 12 marks while for Heimo, the first task was out of nine marks, and the second was out of five, the third out of 10 marks while the fourth task was out of 18 marks. This is an indication that there is no uniformity in allocating marks for topic tasks, nor are these tasks specially analysing learners' development in the desired domains.

At Cwena primary school, two topic tasks were written for Jakes, both out of 12 based on basic competencies from the syllabus but no skills were assessed.

- It was evident that there was no indication of skills that were assessed.
- All the teachers marked the topic tasks in the same way as tests and this revealed that they are not applying what is stipulated by the Social Studies CA Manual.
- The teachers allocated different total marks for topic tasks completed which is a deviation from CA Manual.

4.4.3.3 Projects

In Social Studies, learners are expected to do a project in term two and marks awarded for this are to be recorded in term three as part of CA. The assessment of projects should assess various skills such as investigation, selection, presentation, analysing and evaluation. The projects should be based on the basic competencies in the syllabus and should be out of 30 marks. During the time of data collection, there was no project given to the learners at either school. However, the teachers indicated that they were going to do it toward the end of term two.

4.4.3.4 Recording of CA

One of the essential elements that ensure successful implementation of CA is record keeping. Record keeping involves the detailed recording of the learners' performance as assessed by the teacher.

The findings revealed that all the teachers have recorded the tests and topic tasks marks in the class lists. Only one of them has started recording the marks in the CA record sheet but some spaces were left blank. The CA marks for term 1 were in place.

The teachers explained that they usually record the marks on the class lists then later transfer the marks into official CA record sheets due to the fact that class lists have more space than the CA record sheet.

I found that the official CA record for Social Studies Grade 7 was available at both schools. It provided information on the type of assessment to be done per term and marks allocated for each task. It also provided space for total CA marks carried throughout the year, examination, and final promotion mark and letter grade (see Appendix 5). One can conclude that the teachers realised the importance of record keeping but also revealed their unhappiness with the design of CA record sheet.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the data I gathered from the interviews, observation of lessons, and documented evidence. In the next chapter, I am going to discuss my findings by interpreting and explaining the participants' views in relation to my research questions. I will do this by linking my findings to my literature review.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 I presented and analysed the data obtained from the interviews, observations and documents from four teachers to investigate their understanding and the way they implement Continuous Assessment (CA) in Social Studies Grade 7. In this chapter I discuss the findings presented in Chapter 4 by interpreting and explaining the participants' views in relation to my research question. I do this by linking the findings to the theory.

I identified the themes that are listed below for the discussion of those findings:

- Teachers' perception of CA
- Role of CA in Social Studies
- Assessment strategies
- Challenges and problems associated with CA
- Support for the teachers

5.2. Teachers' perceptions of CA

The results of the interviews focused on the participating teachers' views on CA from three main perspectives:

- The nature and role of CA
- Strategies for CA
- Challenges and problems

These perspectives revealed that the notions of CA that are identified by the participants are apparently in line with the CA policy but that neither the views behind that CA policy nor the teachers' views match the breadth and depth identified by the literature. The gaps identified will be discussed below.

As indicated in Chapter 2, after independence in 1990, assessment was one of the targeted areas of education reform as part of the teaching and learning process in Namibia. The reason was to minimise dependency on formal external examinations that were regarded as the only tool for assessing and to encourage a wide range of assessment that promotes conceptual development, analytic skills, thinking and understanding rather than memory recall (MEC, 1993). This means a shift from rote learning to meaning and understanding (Reddy, 2004; Le Grange & Reddy, 1998). In this case, assessment should encourage critical thinking, problem-solving skills and active participation with content by using a range of assessment strategies (Broadfoot, 1995; Murray, 2005; Stobart & Gipps, 1997; Gipps, 1996b).

My participants saw CA as an important part of the teaching and learning process. Below I reiterate the reasons provided, as discussed in Chapter 4:

- Promotes interaction between teacher and learners
- Promotes active involvement of both teacher and learners in the teaching and learning process
- Allows learners to demonstrate their understanding and express their views
- Allows identification of learner's strengths and weaknesses
- Gives the teacher the opportunities to provide remedial teaching
- Exposes learners to various assessment activities
- Encourages learning through exploring, problem-solving and communication
- Assists in case a learner misses an examination due to unforeseen circumstances

I found it interesting that all four teachers were able to explain why CA was introduced in Namibia. From the evidence given above, I concluded that the teachers have an understanding of why CA was introduced in Namibia. This is shown by their explanation based on the involvement of both teacher and learners and the active participation during the teaching and learning situation. They also emphasised the use of a wide range of assessment tools and support for teaching and learning in terms of the learner-centered approach. The responses given by the teachers are consistent with the results of an earlier study by Stobart and Gipps (1997), as well as the various policy documents. However, the question arises as to the extent that they were able to translate their articulation of the theory into appropriate practice.

5.3 Teachers' understanding with regard to the role of CA in Social Studies

The findings from the interviews revealed that the participants are also aware of and recognize the role of CA in Social Studies. While these teachers were able to express views about the role of CA in Social Studies when related to the context of curriculum, it was noted that the responses tended to be very general and did not relate to specifics pertaining to the skills, values and attitudes or even the concepts associated with Social Studies. Thus the question of how representative these views are of a deep understanding of CA in the context of Social Studies was raised (Stobart & Gipps, 1997; MEC, 1998; MEC, 2000 chapter two). Wilmot (2003) states that because CA encourages conceptual understanding and skills, teachers should be empowered to develop and ask questions that promote learning with understanding and thinking to make learners critical thinkers.

A further key focus of CA expressed in current educational literature is the need for assessment to include learners and to ensure that they play a key role in the assessment process. These views are also reflected in the policy documents (ME, 2000; MEC, 2003), which stipulate that CA involves self-assessment and peer assessment and provides the opportunity for each learner to look at assessments and to use them as feedback on his or her own learning process. Similarly, teachers can use them to feed back into the teaching process and to diagnose their own successes and weaknesses in teaching the subject. This means that the CA process includes judgements made about the learners' performance by the teacher, the learner and other learners (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998:19).

The lack of emphasis on particular aspects of cognitive and affective development and the relatively narrow conception of who assesses in the context of Social Studies were two significant gaps in terms of the views that emerged when these teachers were interviewed. Evidence from all the lessons observed showed that all assessment noted in these classes was teacher directed. Second, questions asked and exercises carried out focused mostly on information recall with some understanding and map reading skills. Again looking at the learners' class work, homework, tests and topic tasks it was revealed that the teachers focused on testing information, with little emphasis on understanding, application of knowledge, investigation and participation. For example Shino asked the learners to find the three highest places in the world in the atlas as homework. Sara asked learners to use a ruler to indicate the lines of longitude such as 30°E and 75°W on the map in the textbook. Heimo asked the learners to find places located at 39°S and 144°E as

homework. Jakes asked the learners to write a short news report about an incident at their school or write a letter to the editor expressing their opinion about an issue.

Findings from all the lessons observed showed that feedback on class work and homework given to learners was not sufficient. Evidence showed that only in one lesson out of 11 lessons were learners provided with an opportunity to report on their findings orally. The learners' responses were also accepted as they are without elaboration or explanation. The lack of feedback is a serious omission in the light of views relating to assessment's role in learning and in terms of assessment as a powerful source of motivation as revealed in Chapter 2 (Pido, 2005; Harris & Bell, 1996; MEC, 2003; MEC, 1993; MEC, 1996; MEC, 1999; MEC, 2000).

If learners are not provided with feedback then efforts to give homework as a way of assessing their progress remains a futile exercise. One can conclude that the participants have limited understanding of what role feedback plays in a learning process. This then is a further gap in the participants' understanding of how to apply assessment policy to their teaching and learning process.

In light of what is said above, one can conclude that all teachers involved in my study have been exposed in one or another way to the theory underpinning CA, because they are able to relate what is stipulated in the assessment policy document in terms of its role in education. However, their deeper understanding of the theory is flawed as well as being limited. It limits their ideas about how to implement CA especially when it comes to using CA to encourage conceptual development, critical thinking, understanding, explanation and interpretation or application of knowledge.

The views expressed by Hinchey (1998), Wilmot (2003), and Gipps (1996b) about the nature and role of assessment in the context of a constructivist approach clearly revealed the need for teachers in such a reform process to have a clear understanding of the fundamental theory underpinning the new assessment practices. What this means is that teachers need to have a real understanding of the view of learning, of knowledge and teaching that is at the heart of the shift to cognition as the determining theory of educational practice. All the literature reviewed points to the fact that assessment is an integral dimension of the process of learning. This, however, assumes that teachers are able to make the association between the cognitive theory and assessment in this

context. While this on one level appears to be obvious, what this study has revealed is that teachers have not understood this relationship and are grappling not only with a deep understanding of the cognitive constructivist theory, but also seeing the fit between this theory and assessment (Van Harmelen, 1999; *ibid.* 2005a).

Even though these teachers did indicate that they had been exposed in one way or another to in-service workshops it raises questions about these workshops and their focus. Questions are also raised about the nature and role of the syllabus in providing guidance in the new approach as well as about the clarity of the guidelines on CA in the syllabus documents.

5.4 Assessment strategies

As discussed in Chapter 2, a variety of assessment strategies facilitate successful implementation of CA (Moll, 2002; Stobart & Gipps, 1997; Le Grange & Reddy, 1998). The strategies that were highlighted, such as journals, diaries, projects work, practical, portfolios, exhibitions and demonstrations, essay assignments, reports, discussions and interviews, are viewed as necessary strategies to assess learning and understanding (Stobart & Gipps, 1997; Le Grange & Reddy, 1998). The reasons are to give every learner a fair chance to apply his or her knowledge and relate it to a real life context (Pahad, 1997). These authors all maintain that these strategies are all interrelated. For example, practical work could be part of projects and can be carried out simultaneously or individually, depending on the outcome that is to be assessed.

Namibian policy recognises and acknowledges the significance of assessment strategies that are discussed in the above literature. The policy documents therefore recommend the use of tests, topic tasks, projects, examinations, assignments, quizzes and portfolios to be used by teachers to assess the competency of the learners as formal CA, while informal CA involves the use of questions during lessons, observing how learners approach various tasks, homework, worksheets, class activities and class participation (MEC, 1996; MEC, 1999; MEC, 2000).

Furthermore, informal CA serves as preparation for the formal aspects of CA and provides the teacher with a record of progress should a learner miss the formal term tests (MEC, 2000).

The teachers indicated that they use various assessment strategies to assess the learners' attainment during and after the lesson presentation in the interviews. For example, teachers indicated that they

used questions, homework, tests, discussions, class work and projects for CA which corresponds with what is stipulated in the policy documents guide. As the results from the observations and other documentary sources revealed, these strategies were used. However, in the analysis of the strategies, two issues emerged. One was the fact that the use of strategies was somewhat limited, given those mentioned and observed. The second issue was, however, of more concern as this pertains to how these strategies were used. This forms the focus of the discussion below.

5.4.1 Informal CA

Question and answer techniques

Classroom practices revealed that the question and answer method played a dominant role during the teaching and learning process. I observed that when the teachers asked questions, an immediate response was expected from the learners. Most of the questions asked used cue words such as “what, who, where” and “name”, which do not encourage thinking. It was also noticed that the questions that were used do not touch on problem-solving and decision making aspects. While Wilmot (2003) and Tolley and Reynolds (1977) emphasised the importance of developing and asking questions that enhances understanding and critical thinking. In class, learners must be asked open and higher order cognitive questions to enable them to create new knowledge (Brown, as cited in Amutenya, 2002). One could expect the teachers to ask questions that cover all four assessment domains of learning, including knowledge with understanding, explanation and interpretation, application of knowledge as well as investigation and participation that are outlined in Social Studies syllabus (MEC, 2000). However, most of the questions asked focused only on factual recall.

Above all, the findings show that all the lessons observed focused more on knowledge “about” and knowledge “that” rather than knowledge “how” and knowledge “what to do”. According to Van Harmelen (2005b), knowledge “about” implies to have information or facts about something, while knowledge “that” means being able to justify or explain those facts. In light of the above, the findings indicate a gap between the teachers’ theoretical understanding and practice in terms of asking questions during lessons. This in turn seems to point to an apparent problem with understanding how to assess all four assessment domains of learning during the teaching and learning process.

Heimo, unlike the other teachers, despite the fact that he had the least experience in teaching, did attempt to ask a few open-ended questions as well as probing ones and also asked some thought-provoking questions that stimulated learners' thinking. The findings revealed that this was not really part of his normal approach to questioning and there was no evidence that this was part of a conscious and planned approach. It was noted too that none of the participating teachers gave learners opportunities to ask questions other than at a very basic level. Sealer, Turnwald and Bull (1994) indicated that one way to increase learners' participation within the lesson is for the teacher to ask questions. However, they stipulate that this should involve high-level cognitive questions that encourage critical thinking and problem solving and stimulate learners to assume greater responsibility in seeking information. Bailey and Binns (1987) also support the use of questions during the instructional process. They state that asking questions leads to the understanding of important organising concepts to do with space and the environment. Doyle and Mallet (1994) have revealed how important it is for learners to ask questions and to be encouraged to set questions that serve to frame or shape a learning situation.

Most importantly, however, this informal method of assessment was not linked to any recording approach or to any learner profile it was therefore difficult to see what role questioning played in terms of assessing and supporting learning other than being a basic check on information recall. Thus the way in which these questions were formulated, managed and utilized was problematic in the context of the reform theory and policy and raised questions about teachers' pre- and in-service professional development.

Group work

As indicated in Chapter 2, Murray (2005) claimed that the primary goal of the Namibian school curricula is to provide learners with education through which they develop skills, including an ability to think critically, work independently and as a member of a group. Therefore, the teachers are expected to create conducive environments for learners and encourage them to work confidently as individuals and with others to construct their knowledge of a topic. The findings from the lesson observations revealed that learners were involved in discussions that took place in group situations. It was also noticed that most of the learners were communicating with each other, listening to each other, and this supported them in reaching the desired answers. Although learners were given opportunities to report on their findings, one would expect them to be provided with an

opportunity for comments and questions after each presentation or to invite discussion, which was not done.

The study revealed that while these teachers are aware of their role when learners were working in groups, they did not capitalise on opportunities offered in the group activities observed. Firstly, they failed to encourage passive learners to be active in discussions. I felt that in order to maximise the participation of all learners in a discussion, the teachers should assign responsibilities to every individual in a group to ensure successful learning of the entire group. Secondly, through not opening the discussion, the level of interaction was limited. Further to this, I was expecting the teachers to have some structures in place to assess these activities. Unfortunately, as indicated earlier, there was no evidence of assessment being recorded during the lesson observation. While the group activities had potential, as identified by Bailey and Binns (1987:33) to promote the development of social skills and for learning to work and communicate with others, these competencies were not made explicit in any way, nor were they explicitly noted and recorded.

Homework

Another assessment technique used by the participants to assess learners' progress is giving homework. The issue of homework is confirmed by the policy document (MEC, 1999) that claims homework provides learners with the opportunity to practise what they have studied and reinforces their learning (see section 2.4.2). Homework helps teachers to determine whether their teaching has been effective with every learner. This assessment also helps them to decide whether re-teaching or correcting misunderstandings might be necessary for some or all learners. Homework tasks also offer opportunities for learners to practise and develop subject related skills, to develop problem solving and decision making skills and to develop creativity. The study revealed that most of the homework given to the learners assessed information recall and some basic subject skills and the application of knowledge in some instances. The findings, however, indicated that the teachers did not focus particularly on conceptual understanding, values and attitudes nor was homework used in systematic way of problems solving. While recognition is given to these teachers for their efforts in setting and monitoring homework, the tasks were somewhat narrowly conceived as being able to recall information or to provide the correct answers.

Homework tasks as indicated in Chapter 4 were seen as part of informal CA more often than not, and no marks were recorded, either as norm referenced or criterion or performance based records.

This meant that not only are a number of opportunities lost for providing a holistic picture of learners' development but this approach also limits feedback to learners and resultantly reduces the role of homework as a learning mechanism.

Interactive activities and resources

Furthermore, as indicated, the use of the textbook contributed greatly towards assessment practices, because most of the assessment exercises completed by the learners including class work and homework were from the textbook. This shows that the teachers rely heavily on textbooks and do not make effort to relate assessment tasks to the learners' immediate environment as required by a learner-centred approach. Therefore, one can conclude that the use of a textbook influences the nature of class work and homework as some of the textbooks indicated when exercises were to be done individually, in pairs or in groups. The types of activities provided in the textbooks that were used in these classrooms do not assess a variety of domains of learning. Also, observations revealed that textbooks have to be shared and this too could be seen as a limiting factor in using textbooks for homework tasks.

However, in addition to the textbooks, maps, globes and various weather instruments were used by the teachers as teaching aids to help bring reality to the classroom and to promote learning with understanding. Bailey and Binns (1987) emphasise the need for learners to understand and interpret a wide range of maps, diagrams and photographs, which is directly related to the need for the learners to interact with these materials to support learning. Thus they stress that learners need to measure and collect data from these resources and to use meteorological equipment that enhances their practical skills. The results revealed that while these teachers did use available resources they were not linked to actual hands-on activities and certainly were not part of the assessment process.

Given the topics observed, as well as the available learning support materials, I had expected more activities that focused on relating the textbook information to the learners' own situations and places. Activities such as these would have been both an opportunity to enhance learning and a means to assess that learning in a fairly straightforward manner. Another aspect, while not directly related to assessment, has a direct effect on how it will be applied. This issue pertains to the time allocated for the topics observed and hence to the issue of curriculum planning. A question worth posing and is worth following up is: to what extent does the lack of meaningful interaction though

the activities based approach stem from teachers' lack of knowledge of the pedagogy and curriculum management, or from a poorly conceived curriculum?

Informal CA practices will of necessity require more time and planning and therefore will need not only better curriculum management skills, but a curriculum that is structurally developed to allow for this sort of learning and assessment. It will also need to be located in an assessment approach that values and gives recognition to the role of so-called informal assessment on the basis of its importance to performance based assessment (Wilmot, 2003; Gipps, 1996b; Stobart & Gipps, 1997; Van Harmelen, 2005b).

5.4.2 Formal CA

As indicated in Chapter 2, the role of formal CA as part of formative assessment was acknowledged by these teachers. Literature suggests that formal tasks such as tests, topic tasks, projects, examination and many more should assess learning, understanding and thinking (Stobart & Gipps, 1997; MEC, 1993; MEC, 2000; see section 2.3.2; section 2.4.1 and section 2.5.1). The findings from interviews revealed that all the participants recognised the importance of formal CA and use it in assessing learners' progress. Findings, however, revealed that only in one of Jakes's lessons was a formal assessment activity given to learners which required them to write a short news report about an incident happening at their school or a letter to the editor, expressing their opinion about the syllabus. It appears that formal CA tasks were not used often: I observed long intervals between one task and another.

Evidence from documents showed that formal assignments done by the learners included written tests and topic tasks. The purpose was to assess learners' ability to recall information. It was found that these tasks were marked, graded, recorded and corrections were made. The tasks were done individually to practise what they have studied and to reinforce their learning at the same time. This study also revealed that the participants like Sara, Heimo and Shino primarily used a series of questions in the form of tests, including multiple choice and structured questions as topic tasks. This is a deviation from how these tasks are envisaged by the Social Studies syllabus.

Evidence from Social Studies summary note books revealed that learners used to keep a record of corrections of the written tests. These corrections simply replace 'wrong' answers with 'right' answers. This was apparent feedback on these tasks. The concern here is that to what extent these

answers are discussed with the learners. For example, if the answer to question 1 is A and the learner wrote down B (for multiple choice), do they know why their answer is wrong? One would also expect to see feedback given on other formal CA tasks such as topic tasks; however, this was not the case.

Further to this there was no evidence of criteria or rubrics used by the teachers. It was noticed that none of the teachers interviewed talked about journals, portfolios, diaries and quizzes as assessment strategies. The available evidence regarding what is seen as formal CA therefore reveals a limited view of the nature and role of this formal of assessment and in spite of teachers' views about the varied role of assessment; these roles did not play any obvious part in the manner in which these teachers applied assessment practices.

5.4.3. Concerns relating to assessment strategies

I am concerned about why teachers are not implementing some of the assessment strategies such as portfolios, journals and quizzes as required by the assessment policy. More worrying, however, is the fact that teachers in their assessment are not focusing on the various domains that are indicated by the competencies in the syllabus. Thus, the assessment reveals very little about either how well learners had performed or what aspects of their performance was developed. Added to this is the limited feedback provided to the learners, all of which reduced the effectiveness of the strategies that are used.

One can deduce from the data collected that the professional training obtained from different institutions may be one of the contributing factors for the limited implementation of CA. Findings revealed that only one of the participants received guidelines on how to implement various CA tasks through teacher education. The same participant (Heimo) made it clear that he is still experiencing difficulty in assessing topic tasks and projects and using assessment criteria. Despite the fact that some of the teachers attended workshops on CA and are in possession of CA guidelines, their assessment practices are still very different. Similarly, the Namibian study by Nangombe (1998) discovered that in many cases, training seems not to find application in the school situation. The other Namibian study by January (2002) also noted that few teachers received training in CA and the training that was provided was insufficient.

In this regard, I think one should not just blame the teachers, as sometimes weaknesses result from the system itself. This means that assessment strategies such as portfolios, journals and quizzes are outlined in the assessment policy guide documents; however, they do not feature in the Social Studies syllabus or in the Social Studies CA manual. Therefore, teachers might not be aware that these assessment strategies are also applicable to Social Studies. I therefore question the subject syllabus, because it lacks guidelines on how to integrate CA into lessons. There is nothing to guide the teachers on how to implement CA. As a result, teachers may neglect it. On the other hand, it could be the case that even though workshops on CA were conducted, sound-follow up to ensure theory was effectively implemented might not have been carried out. I feel that there is a need to improve CA at schools.

From what I learnt from the four teachers, I can conclude that even though several workshops on CA were conducted and guidelines were provided, what has been done has obviously not been enough. Therefore, monitoring of assessment needs to go hand-in-hand with professional development for CA. Based on the evidence above, one can conclude that the teachers have a limited understanding of what CA is and what role it plays in the teaching and learning process. I also question the nature of the professional training programme that the teachers received, whether it really acquainted them with skills to cope with the implementation of CA. However, one should not forget the professional training they went through that was done in a teacher-centred approach (see section 2.3.3 of Chapter 2). Even though in the interviews the teachers indicated that they received guidelines on how to set and mark CA tasks, they are not implemented as they are supposed to be. I also question whether the workshops conducted prepared the teachers and provided the relevant skills on how to implement assessment strategies such as topic tasks and projects.

5.5 Issues and challenges in implementing CA

In this section, I focus on the challenges and problems associated with CA, particularly in the Social Studies context, which prevent proper implementation of CA in schools. The findings of this study revealed that the participants are faced with many challenges in the implementation of CA. Much of what this study revealed in this regard is also reflected in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

One of the issues raised was that of lack of commitment given the pressure of work and the class size. Teachers indicated that these factors demotivated them and made them less committed to the demands of CA. The finding is reflected in the study by Nyambe (2002), who notes that teachers still experience some problems in the implementation of CA which include work pressure among teachers. The finding is also reflected in the study by Nangombe (1998), which shows a lack of commitment on the part of teachers regarding CA which results in unrealistic or fabricated CA marks. The issue of class size was also affirmed by Mazibuko and Ginindza (2005), claim that it prevents successful implementation of CA (see section 2.6).

Another of the issues raised was that teachers feel that they really did not fully understand what was expected in CA, despite their apparent familiarity with the policy. This study revealed that the participants possess limited understanding of using assessment criteria and what knowledge, skills, values and attitudes are to be promoted and this is a challenge to them. Having a thorough understanding of CA, and relating assessment to the goals and aims of curriculum enhances teachers' practice of CA. However, this should go together with effort to revise assessment documents and instructional materials to bring them in line with a learner-centred approach.

Another challenge that emerged from this study is the fact that teachers are concerned about time. They regarded time as a factor influencing the marking of assessment tasks, which resulted in their giving less work to the learners. The findings above are consistent with the results of an earlier study by Mazibuko and Ginindza (2005) who note that most teachers in schools are unable to implement CA, because of lack of time to complete the syllabus and large classes (see section 2.6 of Chapter 2). The average learners' ratio in the classes observed at Shilema junior secondary school was 1:30 and at Cwena primary school 1:40. Literature claims that CA possibly increases the workload for both teacher and learners. Teachers have to keep records and monitor individual learners and learners have to continuously assess their own work (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998). However, this as the study revealed, this problem is more complex and raises fundamental questions about how teachers understand how to manage assessment, especially that of CA, so that it is done effectively but is also a viable way of assessing learners and able to achieve the intended outcomes.

As indicated earlier from the lesson observations it was evident that there was a shortage of textbooks at Shilema junior secondary school. I noticed a few textbooks distributed to the learners

to share in groups. This is confirmed by Gipps (1997) claiming that teachers found it hard to articulate their assessment practice with little training and few materials (see section 2.6 of Chapter 2).

Alausa (1999) argues that another problem of CA that could be associated with the teachers involves their skills in setting up the tests and administration skills, as well as their attitudes toward CA and record keeping. As stated earlier (section 4.4.3.1), the teachers at both schools applied the format of year-end, national examinations to their written tests in terms of structure of questions like multiple choice and source based questions. Despite this, the teachers did not follow test specification grids, to ensure that a good balance of different competencies was tested by allocating marks to domains such as knowledge with understanding, explanation and interpretation as well as application of knowledge, as stipulated in the Social Studies Examination syllabus (MEC, 2000). As indicated, the focus of their tests is still on recalling information rather than on assessing conceptual understanding, skills, values and attitudes.

As indicated already, none of the teachers involved in my study showed any understanding of how to assess topic tasks, even though some of them attended workshops and were provided with CA guidelines. This is the reason why they assessed topic tasks in the same way as tests. This seems to indicate that the effort made in the CA workshops was unsuccessful for some teachers, as they still cannot interpret the guidelines correctly and find it difficult to implement them. Lack of training is another contributing factor, especially for those who did not attend any workshop, even though they have assessment documents. Some of the ideas discussed above are in line with what Nangombe (1998:79) says, “the shortcoming of CA include lack of understanding of policy guidelines by some implementers and lack of INSET training for teachers in subjects without advisory teachers”.

From the documents studied, it was evident that the teachers in my study did not have any problem with the recording of formal CA marks, but they hesitated to transfer the marks from the class lists to the CA official record sheet, claiming quite rightly that the official CA record sheet did not provide enough space for recording. This record sheet does seem to prevent teachers doing less than what is expected. Therefore, sometimes it is not entirely fair to blame teachers for not giving more assessment activities to learners while the official CA record sheet requires less assessment tasks to be recorded under each term (see Appendix 6).

In light of the above discussion, it seems clear that teachers still experience problems with the implementation and management of CA. Therefore, the above discussions provide a useful insight into some of the problems and challenges associated with implementing CA in Social Studies. In addition to this I have learnt that even if the assessment policy documents are available in schools, not all teachers have access to them. We do need to ensure that teachers have a thorough understanding of CA in order to implement CA successfully. The problems encountered by these teachers imply far more than just the problem of their having a superficial understanding of CA. Rather, these results have pointed towards a number of fundamental problems in terms of a real understanding of the reform epistemology and pedagogy.

5.6 Support for teachers

Literature has indicated the need for support services for teachers who are the main implementers of CA in the classroom and schools in particular. Le Grange and Reddy (1998) argue that if CA is to be successfully implemented in schools, it needs to be well planned with in-service education and training programmes to support teachers. The Ministry of Education has also emphasised the need for the development of a network of teacher centered activities to support in-service education at regional, districts and school cluster levels (MEC, 1993). It considers an education support scheme to be provided by resource teachers and subject specialists who also visit teachers regularly as another strategy for helping them to master both the subject and pedagogy. This is in line with what Alausa's (1999) claim that for a successful implementation of CA, teachers need to be professionally and attitudinally prepared for operating in the system. Therefore, they should be made aware of the requirements of the system, its importance and how to implement it.

From the interviews, it became clear that the teachers in my study acknowledged support received from different sources. As already pointed out, evidence shows that some of the teachers' lesson plans were monitored by the principals and comments were made as another form of support rendered to them, to enhance quality planning and teaching (see section 4.4.2). One can conclude that it is obvious that the support rendered to the teachers is not enough. Not all the teachers attended workshops on CA and not all of them possess a CA Manual or the assessment policy. Therefore, the findings indicate that support for teachers is not uniform. More support is needed to equip all teachers with the necessary skills that will enable them to implement CA in Social Studies as required by the assessment policy.

In light of what was discussed above, these findings will be useful to me as an Advisory Teacher as they made me aware of what the teachers' needs are and what is to be done next to address these needs. I have also found out what particular support is needed by other teachers who were not part of this study.

5.7 Synthesis of research

My research findings confirmed some of the problems experienced by the teachers in implementing CA as identified by Nyambe (2002), Nangombe (1998) and January (2002). The problems include:

- Absenteeism of learners
- Teachers' workload increased by CA
- Lack of commitment on the part of the teachers
- Reluctance of learners to participate in or do CA tasks
- Use of criteria in awarding marks to the learners
- Number of subjects allocated to the teachers
- Lack of resources
- Assessing is time-consuming

It is worth mentioning that my research added new insights to the findings of earlier research. These include:

- The lack of clear guidelines provided in the Social Studies syllabus on how teachers should implement CA as a contributing factor to teachers problems in CA.
- Particular gaps and inconsistencies between the theory and the practice advocated by the various policy documents. The study therefore indicates that the teachers are interpreting the syllabus as best they can and follow the syllabus rather than the other policy frameworks.
- Because some teachers are not teaching the areas for which they are qualified the problem of CA increases
- The teachers in my study found the CA forms problematic and not particularly helpful.
- This study identified fundamental gaps in understanding the theory and practice of the reform process

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the findings presented in Chapter 4. I have discussed how the teachers interpreted CA. The findings of the study reveal that the teachers have an understanding of CA from the assessment policy's perspective, although their practice was different. The findings show that the teachers employed some assessment strategies to assess the learners' attainment during and after presentation of lessons, while some strategies were not used. I have discussed the challenges and problems associated with the implementation and management of CA in Social Studies that the teachers are experience. Issues of support provided to the teachers in implementing and managing CA were discussed. This is a challenge to me as an Advisory Teacher and to other stakeholders in education. The issue of support needs more attention to ensure the effective implementation of CA in schools. In the next chapter, I reflect on what I learnt, and make some tentative suggestions for action.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the study. I do this by reflecting on the research process, the findings and the lessons learnt. The limitations of my study are indicated and giving due consideration to these I provide both tentative suggestions for action based on the research findings and discussions as well as areas for further research.

6.2 Critical overview of the study

This study aimed to investigate how Grade 7 Social Studies teachers understand and implement CA in the classroom. It is important to first provide an overview of my motivation to carry out this research. The interest was raised when I first realised that in most schools in Namibia there was not much correlation between the end of year examination Grade 7 marks and the CA marks. According to the Department of National Examination and Assessment CA marks in many cases were significantly higher than the examination marks and that had cast doubt about the standard of CA.

As an Advisory Teacher, I am expected to check the written work of the learners and to monitor CA during school visits. With many upper primary schools in my region still far from meeting the ideals of CA implementation, it was my hope that the answers to my research would inform my professional work as an Advisory Teacher.

This research enabled me to follow selected Grade 7 Social Studies teachers in order to understand their perceptions and practice of CA. It also provided me with an opportunity to explore the teachers' real life practice of CA in a classroom situation.

6.2.1 *Overview of the research process*

The interpretative case study approach provided me with opportunities to engage with my respondents in a meaningful way despite the limited time available. This would not have been possible had I involved more schools or more teachers. Although the small scale case study does have its limitations, the depth and richness of the data that I was able to access has been of value to me given the aim of my research. The case study approach I used was not that easy as I

experienced some difficulties in the process. For example, I found it difficult to identify themes and sort out information into themes or categories, since I conducted this research as a novice without any major research experience.

I also found that by using the set of data gathering tools that I had selected I had the opportunity to gain access and to understand the participants' beliefs, feeling and experiences of CA and to get information to check reliability and so to inform my own context.

When combined, through triangulation, evidence gathered enabled me to get the necessary insights into the teachers' perceptions and practice of CA rather than depending only on one source of data. The stimulated recall held after the lesson observations helped me to gain deeper insights into teachers' practices of CA.

Due to the small number of participants, I thought that semi-structured interviews might be more appropriate for this research. They were useful, as they provided me with the opportunity to probe, thereby increasing the richness of the data.

Lesson observations were also useful because this provided the opportunity to be in class and observe real life practice of CA by the teachers. The document analysis was also important in assisting me to understand the outcome of findings from the interviews and lesson observations and to provide relevant information for this research.

In light of the above discussion, I have also learnt that using triangulation was important because with interviews alone I could not have gathered sufficient information. This helped me validate the findings. Triangulation provided me with the opportunity to probe evidence using different sources such as classroom observation and relevant document.

Moreover, I found that doing research is not an easy process. When it came to meeting with participants, it was often hard to find suitable dates due to other commitments.

It is worth mentioning that during the process of data collection, the interviews worked well, as the teachers adhered to the interviewee's schedule. It also worked well because of the good interaction with the participants who were open when giving their views.

6.2.2 *Overview of the findings*

In this part of the chapter, I reflect on the findings that I felt were particularly significant in the context of the research question.

Evidence from the interviews revealed that although the teachers seemed to have a theoretical understanding of CA in the reform context, when it came to classroom situation, their implementation of assessment practices was still essentially based on traditional norm referencing approaches. Thus the focus was still more on factual recall and the right answer. The findings revealed that:

- Criterion referencing is not applied and these teachers apparently do not use rubrics, nor do they seem to understand how to construct them.
- Performance-based referencing is not applied and this is particularly pertinent in relation to the so-called informal assessment process.
- The uses of assessment strategies are limited to teacher assessment and it did not appear that peer-assessment or self-assessment approaches are used in class.
- Question-and-answer methods play a vital role during the lessons observed, but questions that were applied do not stimulate the learners' thinking as they focused more on factual recall and right answers.
- Tests were set rather than other formal assessment tasks such as topic tasks.
- Teachers planned their teaching, including assessment activities, which help determine learners' mastery of subject content.
- Class activities were taken from the textbooks and these seldom focused on thinking skills and inquiry.
- Formal CA tasks were graded and recorded in the class lists, but at the time of the research were not reflected on the official CA form.
- The recording of informal assessment during lessons observed was not evident during lessons observed, although teachers are expected to keep record of some informal CA for reporting and inspection purposes.

This study also revealed issues that emerged as challenges to the participants when implementing CA. These included:

- Lack of understanding regarding assessment objectives in the subject syllabus
- Workload of teachers
- CA not properly implemented because of large classes
- Lack of understanding about the use of assessment criteria
- Lack of assessment documents
- Teachers are not teaching within their area of specialisation

These results have I believe provide tangible data that have pinpointed issues about the implementation of CA that in previous research have tended to be glossed over as being related simply to teachers' superficial understanding of the policy and the underpinning education theory. Through this study I am better able to understand teachers' practice and the underlying assumptions which inform their practice. I believe that I am better equipped as a result to address the issues and problems that were identified.

6.3 The lesson I have learnt from this research

I have learnt many things from doing this study. From doing this research I have gained skills to gather data using various methods such as interviews, lesson observations and document evidence to validate the findings. I believe that the skills and knowledge that I have gained in doing this research could be applied to my work situation as we are frequently involved in research projects. I also believe that I will be able to make a contribution in guiding colleagues who are novice researchers when approached to do research.

Through this study I was exposed to elements that I was not aware of. I found that the teachers were familiar with what the policy assessment documents and subject policy stipulate about the implementation of CA. However, I realised that being able to articulate the policy does not necessarily indicate a real understanding of the theory when it comes to putting it into practice. The way in which informal assessment is applied was another valuable lesson. While I found that informal assessments played a key role in the teaching and learning process and serve as valuable preparation for formal assessment, the value of the process is reduced significantly when teachers do not keep records.

The teachers' way of assessing is still focusing more on questions that require factual recall rather than on "knowledge that," "knowledge about," "knowledge how" and "knowledge what if." This made me wonder just how well teachers really understand what learning is and how it occurs, or what their perception of knowledge is, and in particular their understanding of the conceptual frameworks of Social Studies. In addition, having to teach subjects for which they are not prepared did not provide these teachers with the opportunity to master the subjects and this then would affect the implementation of CA.

Passive learners during lessons were mostly neglected and often not given the opportunity to show what they knew and could do. Therefore, their involvement was very minimal. Some of the teachers did not feel they had ownership of the subject they were teaching as it was not their area of specialisation. That's why extra effort needs to be put into helping these teachers with support material to make them feel comfortable enough with the implementation of CA. Even though assessment policy documents were distributed to all schools, some teachers still have no access to them.

The study revealed that even though a number of workshops on CA were conducted, the teachers still could not implement it as expected. In addition, because the subject syllabus does not provide guidelines to teachers on how to implement CA, one cannot assume that teachers will know how to apply the guidelines provided in the assessment policies if they are not reflected in the syllabus. Given this, I have realised the need not only for greater support for the teachers in this area but have recognised the need for a different focus in providing professional support, which includes a far greater degree of practical application. These results have shown that it is not enough to work through policy and theory in workshops and professional seminars.

Successful implementation of CA in schools requires support and involvement of all stakeholders in education. They need to work as a team. At the same time this requires a change in teachers' thinking, beliefs and attitudes about teaching, learning and assessment as these inform their practices. It would be preferable for these changes to start in a college where educators prepare pre-service teachers on assessment so that when they assume duty at school, they should have some understanding of CA. This would need to be extended and strengthened through in-service practical workshops on how to assess and manage CA at a later stage. The networks between a

college and the advisory services therefore need to be maintained and strengthened. In light of the above discussion, there is a clear need to narrow the gap between theory and practice regarding CA implementation.

I realise and recognise the value of the lessons learnt because lessons learnt inform my professional context as an advisory teacher and that of my colleagues. This study enabled me to gain a better understanding of the teachers' practices of CA. It also enabled me to realise what the teachers needs are and the assistance they would benefit from.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The study has a number of limitations. The main reason for this is that it was a small-scale research. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all teachers. Only four teachers were involved and the study was conducted within a limited period of time. Due also to the vastness of the region and time and resources constraints, the study had to be limited to only two schools which offer upper primary education in the Oshana Region.

6.5 Tentative suggestions for action

In this section of the chapter I draw on the findings of this study (see Chapters 4 and 5) to identify some areas that could lead to positive action in the context of this study.

As I have already indicated (see section 5.6), support for the teachers is insufficient and more needs to be done to make the implementation of CA in schools successful. These should include the following:

- As advisory teachers we should continue to provide teachers, especially newly appointed teachers, with workshops to assist them in a practical manner with interpreting assessment policy documents to help understand and implement CA more effectively. This will also require intensive monitoring after training.
- Heads of Department and Principals need also to be supported to ensure that they are able to provide support to their teachers as well as to provide regular monitoring of CA implementation at school level. This too will within the ambit of the duties of an Advisory teacher.

- As Advisory teachers we could and should encourage the teachers to experiment with different assessment strategies and confer with colleagues at the same school or other school in clusters, circuits and the region at large.
- Whole the following is not directly linked to my specific role as an advisory teacher, it is necessary to lobby for the appointment of teachers appropriate to their areas of expertise, and where possible as in-service providers we must be able to support teachers who for some reason or another are expected to teach in areas for which they are not qualified.
- We also need to lobby to have consistency between assessment policies and the curriculum and syllabus in terms of provision of assessment guidelines.

6.6 Suggested areas for further research

Within the implementation process of CA, teachers might experience problems that could be revealed through research. In order to uncover the problems I therefore suggest that the following areas should be researched:

- Teachers' knowledge of skills of topic tasks and projects construction and administration
- Teachers' understanding and use of assessment criteria
- Teachers' attitudes toward CA
- The relationship between CA marks and end of year examination (Upper Primary Phase)
- Teachers' use of CA information / results.

6.7 Conclusion

Successful implementation of CA as revealed by this study will require greater cohesion between policy and practice. No matter how willing teachers are to implement the new theory they will not be able to do this on their own. As this study indicated, support for CA in the context of the reform ideals must be broadly based and involve all sectors of education community working together. Notwithstanding the former, this case study has provided me with valuable insights into the issues that underpin the problems that have been identified regarding the implementation of CA. These findings represent a challenge for me as an advisory teacher in the field of education and I need to be ready to help teachers at clusters, circuit and regional level to improve the practice of CA in schools in the region. Even though the findings are from a very small number of schools out of the

many in the region that offer Social Studies, the experiences gained through this study will aid my work in terms of awareness of the strengths and weaknesses relating to the implementation of CA in all schools I work with.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

A. General Information

Subject: Social Studies

Grade: ...

Age:

M/F: ..

Urban/ Rural:

B. Biography

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching Social Studies?
3. What kind of teacher training did you do?
4. Current studies (if any)
5. Why do you think Continuous Assessment was introduced in Namibia?
6. What do you think are the advantages of having Continuous Assessment? Who benefits and how?
7. What is your understanding about the reasons for doing Continuous Assessment in Social Studies?
8. What are your experiences with Continuous Assessment in Social Studies and how do you feel about it personally?
9. Do you have access to CA policies at your school? How do you understand the assessment policies of Namibia?
10. How do you plan to implement CA in your classroom?
11. What guidelines do you use and how helpful have these guidelines been?
12. What support and motivation do you receive that help you in the implementation of CA and by whom?
13. What sort of tasks in Social Studies do you find work well for CA and why? Which don't and why not?
14. What assessment strategies do you use and how do you find their effectiveness?

Thank you for your valuable time.

Interview schedule:

Name of the participants	Date	Time
Sara	28 March 2006	14 h00
Heimo	29 March 2006	14h00
Sheini	30 March 2006	14h00
Jakes	15 June 2006	14h00

APPENDIX 2

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Participant:		School:	Date
Class:		No. of pupils:	Lesson length:
Lesson topic:			
Time	Description of lesson		Comments

Investigating the implementation of continuous assessment by Grade 7 Social Studies teachers in the Oshana region.

Description

Comments

1. How did the teacher introduce the concepts for the lesson?	
2. How did the teacher promote learning with understanding?	
3. What kind of knowledge did the lesson	

focus on?	
4. How did the teacher assess the learners' learning and progress?	
5. How did the teacher involve the learners in the lesson?	
6. Does the teacher use a variety of strategies to assess learners? What are they and how often they are used?	
7. Are the teachers assessing knowledge, skills and values and attitudes? What are they and how they are assessed?	
8. What sort of learning support materials was used and how did the teacher use them?	
9. Does the teacher use a variety of instruments to record learners' learning and progress? What are they and how often they are used?	
10. What type of CA approach did the teacher use?	

APPENDIX 3

PERMISSION FROM REGIONAL DIRECTOR



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
OSHANA REGION

Tel: (065) 242500
Fax: (065) 240175

Private Bag 2020
Ondangwa
Namibia

Enquiries: Menette N. Nambala
Ref. 12/2/6/1

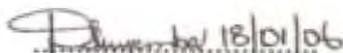
TO: Ms. Hilya Matthews
P.O. Box 891
Oshakati

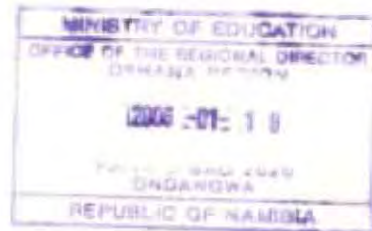
18 January 2006

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO DO REASEACH IN OSHANA

1. Your letter dated 1st December 2005 is hereby acknowledged.
2. The Office of the Director grants you permission to use the schools as necessary, on condition that the normal school work schedule is not disrupted due to research activities.
3. We wish you success in your studies.

Yours truly,


DUTTE N. SHINYEMBA
REGIONAL DIRECTOR



APPENDIX 4
CONSENT FORMS

Consent form 1

I hereby agree to participate in an interview with Hilya Matheus. I understand that she will be inquiring about my understanding of and implementation of CA with regard to the teaching of Social Studies in Grade 7 classrooms.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Consent form 2

Hilya Matheus is hereby given permission to record an interview conducted with me as part of the process of her data collection for a research report that she will be writing for the completion of her Masters' degree. I understand that transcripts will be made of the interview and that extracts from these may be used in the final report.

I have been assured that my school, my learners and I will have anonymity in the report. I have been further assured that I have the right to quit the research at any time and the phone number where I can reach her is 065-230025 (Home) or 065-230057 (Work).

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX 5

SOCIAL STUDIES : CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT RECORD SHEET	GRADE 7
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Names of Learners	Term 1			Term 2			Term 3			CASS Total(100)	EXAM Total(100)	Final Pro- nounce Mark	Letter Grade
	Test(14)	Topic Tasks(12)	Total(26)	Test(14)	Topic Tasks(12)	Total(26)	Test Exam(18) TASK	Project (30)	Total(48)				
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
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APPENDIX 6

Stimulated recall interview questions after lesson observation

1. Why do you ask questions

a) at the beginning of the lesson?

.....
.....

b) during the lessons' presentation?

.....
.....

c) at the end of the lesson?

.....
.....

2. Why do you prefer both individual and group work in your lessons?

.....
.....

3. Why do you assign learners homework?

.....
.....

4. What role do the teaching aids play during the teaching and learning process?

.....
.....

5. What do you think can be done to get passive learners involved in the lesson?

.....
.....

6. Why would you use various assessment strategies?

.....
.....

APPENDIX 7
DATA ANALYSIS
INTERVIEW

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT TEACHERS' BACKGROUND				
	SHINO	SARA	HEIMO	JAKES
Reasons for introducing CA	<p>Learners were not catered enough as education was TCE.</p> <p>To establish relationship between teachers & learners in their work.</p> <p>Introduced learner-centred to involve learners in education.</p> <p>Allows learners to give their opinion and ask questions.</p> <p>To analyse problems that affect learners performance e.g hearing, speaking</p> <p>Give remedial teaching.</p> <p>Expose learners to other assessment activities e.g projects & topic tasks.</p>	<p>To help learners in case they miss examinations due to illness.</p> <p>Help with promotion purposes.</p>	<p>To assess learners properly through the year before they are promoted.</p> <p>For proper teaching to take place</p> <p>Learners will carry out tests, examinations, projects & topic tasks.</p> <p>To promote involvement of teachers & learners in teaching & learning process.</p>	<p>To diagnose the learners 'strengths and needs.</p> <p>To find out what learners have mastered.</p> <p>Use remedial exercises.</p> <p>To provide basis for instructional and evaluation.</p> <p>To assess continuously, daily basis informally and formally.</p> <p>Requires learner-centred approach that focuses on active participation of learners, learn through exploring, problem solving, investigation, interpreting, communication and observation.</p>
The advantages of CA	<p>It help to practise and promote communication</p> <p>Learn different style of doing activities</p> <p>It encourages teacher to plan lesson including learners' activities & apply different strategies.</p> <p>It give moral support to</p>	<p>I don't support CA because it does not encourage participation and learners do not study hard.</p> <p>Learners don't work, still they have to pass due to CA.</p>	<p>Help learners to be promoted.</p> <p>Helps in case a learner misses examination due to illness or death in the family.</p> <p>Help to determine what learners know and can do.</p>	

	<p>teachers when learners are performing well.</p> <p>It promotes the goals of education e.g democracy, equity, access where teachers do not discriminate learners regards CA. Help to identify gifted and slow learners and to cater for them all. Gifted learners help others.</p> <p>Learners benefit from CA by getting more information and learn easily</p>	<p>Learners are no longer competing, so I don't feel the importance of CA.</p> <p>Learners benefit by doing homework. Help for promotion to the next grade.</p>	<p>Help to know who is capable of doing what and who is not.</p> <p>Both teacher and learners benefit from CA. Learners benefit more they are the ones to be given marks.</p>	
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APPENDIX 8

DATA ANALYSIS 1ST LAYER

Shino

Lesson Observation

Topic Representation of height grade 7 A class size: 31

Learning objectives	Assessment strategies	Teaching Resources	Classroom organisation	Assessment activities
Learners will know how to represent the height on the maps.	Questions and answer method Questions asked by teachers with cue words” “what”which”and “who” Groupwork Individual work Informal	Atlas Topographical map Chalkboard Textbook	Groups	Homework classwork

Sara

Lesson Observation

Topic Determination location Grade 7 class size: 32

Learning objectives	Assessment strategies	Teaching Resources	Classroom organisation	Assessment activities
Learners will: understand the lines of latitude and longitude.	Questions and answer method Questions asked by teacher orally with cue words: where, name, identify, how many, draw. Individual work Group work Informal	Textbook Chalkboard Globe	Organized in groups	Homework classwork

Heimo

Lesson Observation

Topic Determination location Grade:7C Class size:34

Learning objectives	Assessment strategies	Teaching Resources	Classroom organisation	Assessment activities
Learners will: become familiar with grid references to determine location of places on a map	Revise the previous work with questions. Question and answer method Questions asked by the teacher with cue words: what, find, locate. Individual, group work practical activities	Flipchart Chalkboard Atlas Textbook	Groups	Homework classwork