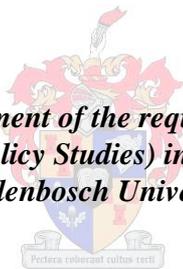


# **Exploring notions of assessment through three vocational education sites in the Western Cape**

by  
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## **DECLARATION**

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## ABSTRACT

With the coming of a new education and training dispensation in 1994 came the idea that equal opportunities for all learners could be created within different learning institutions - via the creation of new institutional and qualifications framework - and in so doing encourage equal opportunities through proper articulation, portability, and mobility within the different phases of the various education bands. As education and training provision and learning is complexly intertwined with its appraisal, assessment was regarded as one of the main processes to find out whether learning had taken place, on the goal and quality of that learning, as well as pointing to the kinds of ways in which teaching and learning could be further improved.

In my study I focused on how educators and trainers within the differentiated Further Education and Training (FET) Band spoke about and understood assessment, with the aim of the study being to analyse how assessment is understood in three different sites of provision within the FET band. The main goal was to better understand challenges at the ground level of policy implementation. A further goal was to explore some of the ways in which the role and function of assessment in our contemporary society was understood, and whether, in its present formulation, it served the purposes that much of the policies and reform statements claimed.

The study's main claim is that educators and trainers in the FET Band in South Africa mainly experience assessment processes, criteria, and frameworks as a form of jargon, and that they translate 'the jargon' into 'judgements of value' about learning and knowledge that lead to quite different approaches being followed at different sites. It is argued that this scenario would be acceptable in terms of different work settings - producing different kinds of skills for the economy- were it not that the education and training infrastructure in South Africa remains perhaps too preoccupied with achieving a *principle of similarity* across the FET Band.

**KEYWORDS:** *Vocational Education and Training (VET), Assessment, the FET Band in South Africa, the NQF, workplace-based learning, competence-based education*

## Glossary

- Assessment
- Continuous Assessment
- Criterion-referencing
- Further Education and Training (FET)
- Integrated Summative Assessment
- Internal Continuous Assessment
- National Qualifications Frameworks
- Norm-referencing
- Outcomes Based Assessment
- Outcomes Based Education
- Performance Assessment
- Portfolio of Assessment
- Portfolio of Evidence
- Site Based Assessment
- Vocational education and training (VET)
- Workplace
- Competencies
- Outcomes Based Education and Training

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CCFO	Critical cross-field outcomes
CETCs	Community and Education Training Centres
DoE	Department of Education
EwP	Education with Production
FET	Further Education and Training
ICASS	Internal Continuous Assessment
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISAT	Integrated Summative Assessment
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OBA	Outcomes Based Assessment
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PoA	Portfolio of Assessment
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SBA	Site Based Assessment
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades & Occupations
ESASS	External Summative Assessment
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
PAT	Performance Assessment Task
CASS	Continuous Assessment
SKVAs	Knowledge, skills values, and attitudes
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

As the thesis title suggests the study that is provided below explored how educators and trainers at three sites that provide vocational education and training to learners in the Western Cape region understood and spoke about assessment.

As such, the reader may be expecting a discussion of the nature and practice of assessment within one part of the education and training system in South Africa, and a description of how educators understood the purpose of assessment to steer their practices and the implementation of key vocational education and training policy goals.

However, my approach in the thesis tries to be a bit more ambitious than providing an outline of understandings of assessment and assessment practice. Rather, I show through the different debates in education policy reform how the issue of assessment was addressed in the restructuring and reorganisation of the education and training system in South Africa from 1994 (in terms of institutional function and curriculum), and what policy challenges this created for educators and trainers working on the ground in that sector.

I chose to focus on the issue of assessment (in what has since 1996 come to be called the FET Band in South Africa) as I felt that this would provide me with important insights into some of the thinking surrounding recent changes within this part of the education and training system. I felt that an exploration of assessment would provide some understanding as to whether the kinds of skills that are thought to be so necessary for the development of South African society (and its economy) are actually being sought, valued, and encouraged.

My starting premise in the thesis was that if quality education is regarded as one of the most valuable assets that a society and an individual can strive for in the competitive world that they currently inhabit, it makes sense that providing and improving the quality of education would be the key goal of all

education and training systems. This means that new institutional frameworks that are set up to create pathways for learners that encourage better opportunities and interactions between institutions and employment, must be primarily geared towards the provision of quality education for all.

And as learning is complexly intertwined with its appraisal, assessment is a key process that reflects on whether learning has taken place and also on the goal and quality of that learning, as well as pointing to the kinds of ways in which teaching and learning can be improved.

My goal in the study was to explore some of the ways in which the role and function of assessment in our contemporary society could be understood, and whether, in its present formulation, it serves the purposes that much of the policies and reform statements claim.

## **1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

### **1.2.1. Vocational Education and Training (VET) as part of an international discourse**

Over the past twenty years education systems have undergone massive realignment and change (Brown et al, 2011). This has occurred as education systems throughout the world interpret and respond to changing economic, social and political challenges, and contend with the differing contexts within which education takes place.

Most changes have been informed by the reconfiguration of global and national policies and authority structures that have been altered, and also transformed by different patterns of competition, co-operation, and public coercion in different countries (Rizvi & Lingard 2010). These recent changes - that have mostly taken on an economic form - have placed an emphasis within changing education policies on the production of human capital to ensure the competitiveness of national economies in the global context (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 16). Given its role in producing the required human capital for growing economies, education at this time in history has thus become 'the main economic policy of every country' (as noted by previous British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2006).

In his speech 'Explaining the Promise of Education in America' in the White House on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2009 US President Barack Obama observed that "in a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite" ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Fact-Sheet-Expanding-the-Promise-of-Education-in-America/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Fact-Sheet-Expanding-the-Promise-of-Education-in-America/)).

This thinking is not limited to governments or policy making. If the general public were also asked what the purpose of public schooling is, they would probably respond 'to get better jobs' and that 'schooling serves as an important training ground for the workplace'. Jobs mean everything in our contemporary world and 'just being educated' has become of little value unless it directly influences future work prospects (Kliebard 1999: xiii).

Campbell (2002: 44) notes that this focus on knowledge and 'investment in people' in a world of new technology and increased trade has driven up the demand for higher level skills and driven down the demand for lower level skills. Two issues have been emphasised as a result.

Firstly, questions have been asked about what kind of education provision is needed to deliver on the demand for skills and more productive workers, as well as how to ensure that this leads to a larger number of workers and learners getting access to suitable jobs. Secondly, questions have been asked about what measures and practices within education (and in its institutions) need to be reorganised in order to 'produce' and 'deliver' the kinds of learners desired by the labour market; while also ensuring a uniform level of focus, portability, and provision across and within the various education sectors.

In thinking about how schooling and learning can be better connected to life and work (Silver & Brennan 1988, Kliebard 1999, Clarke & Winch 2007), an increased focus has been put on the growth of the vocational education and skills training sectors and its potential to up-skill learners quickly, and according to immediate economic needs. Some say that the objective of better linking education to work has become the main focus of all educational provision systems (Rizvi & Lingard 2010), while others concede

that work-focused education provision has become a necessary part of current reforms because of its potential to solve key political challenges on economic productivity and current levels of unemployment (McGrath 2012).

In line with this focus on increased economic policy demands, *curriculum reform* within schools, colleges, and universities has become an important area of contestation. Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 18) argue that “the economising of education policy has led to a push for valid and reliable comparative measures of educational outcomes” so that countries (and nations) can “see where they sit within a global field of comparison”.

They note that policy makers/state officials have highlighted such measures to give them insight into the potential global competitiveness of their different countries, and also provide them (policy makers) with ways to ensure that the same kinds and levels of provision are being provided within and across different education sectors (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010: 18). Policy makers have claimed that such reform of education and training and its realignment in line with the changing face of economic activity will help to improve overall labour flexibility within economies (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 80).

Curriculum reform, according to Rizvi & Lingard (2010: 20), is also about the state putting in “tighter accountability frameworks to ensure the achievement of key policy goals”. This recent focus is what Basil Bernstein (2001, 2002) has referred to as the emergence of the ‘totally pedagogized society’ or what Young (1998) has described as the increasing ‘de-differentiation of educational institutions’, where key parts of debates about everyday life (like work and employment) have been picked up, tightened, reorganised, and reformulated within educational institutions (through curriculum reform) - in what they do and how they operate (cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 19).

### **1.2.2. The role of assessment in reinforcing education and training reform**

For this thesis I decided to explore as my research focus one aspect of curriculum reform and institutional change within the FET (Further Education and Training) education band in South Africa. The aspect I focused on was *assessment* as I concurred with Hargreaves (1990) that since the 1980s

assessment has become the most important focus of change within the educational landscape. My aim was to see how the restructuring and reorganisation in the FET band since 1994 in terms of institutional function and curriculum (to fulfil some of the above objectives) has created different challenges for FET educators and trainers on the ground.

I chose this focus because recent policy documents have emphasised a much bigger role (than before) for the FET band. It is thought that this will solve some of the problems that South Africa (SA) has faced before, and has previously tried to resolve (Cloete 2009; DHET 2012). The *Green Paper on Post School Education* of 2012 emphasised that:

It is our responsibility to ensure that those entering the labour market are qualified and competent to take up the employment and income generating opportunities that exist, and that will exist as the economy grows and changes in the future. We can do a lot more to give people a sound start to their working lives, and to address their ongoing education and training needs during their careers. Whilst we need an education and training system that will cater for the needs of all South Africans, particular attention will have to be paid to the education and training needs of the overwhelming majority of our people, the workers and the poor (DHET 2012: 9).

But a key problem for the sector is that we don't know what the FET Band should look like to achieve this - even though this has been discussed since the late 1980s - (Cloete 2009: 69) - nor what the various parts of the FET band contributes at the moment to the overall education and training system. We also don't have a full understanding of how key debates have practically unfolded in the FET sector since 1994, and how this has led to the reorganisation and thinking of key parts of the FET band. We further don't know how educators and trainers understand and apply key terms and responsibilities (such as curriculum change and assessment), and how this shapes what happens in the sector.

By exploring some of these issues and what the sector seems to be shaping up to do, I focused in the thesis on understandings of assessment at various points of provision within the FET band.

I argue that such a lens (assessment) offers some useful insights into what recent changes within the FET band may involve. Given Nzimande's (1995)

assertion in 1995 that assessment practices were used under apartheid as a tool to exploit and deny African learners access to economic and educational opportunities (Bulhan 1993; Mathonsi 1988), I explore the view that current developments continue to reinforce and reproduce life outcomes similar to those produced before 1994 for particular learner groupings.

If learners only attain pseudo- knowledge, pseudo-skills, pseudo-attitudes and pseudo-values upon completion of their studies, and are issued with certificates that claim that they have gained competencies when in fact they have not, then reforms in the FET band remain irreconcilable from key goals set out in government legislation since 1995 (Malan 2000:22).

As noted in the White Paper on Education and Training (WPET) in 1995 interventions in the FET sector in the beginning were meant to achieve very specific targets. The establishment of a new formulation of the FET sector in 1995 was meant to do very particular things:

The Ministry of Education considers that the Further Education levels needs to be planned as a comprehensive, interlocking sector that provides a purposeful education experience to learners at the post-compulsory (post-GETC) phase, irrespective age, place and time of delivery. There is immense scope, within the flexible structure of the National Qualifications Framework, for a modular curriculum of great variety comprising core, general education and optional vocational or academic subjects. The scope for well-functioning distance education is considerable. The mode of learning is well suited to the huge numbers out-of-school young people and unemployed adults for whom conventional school-type instruction is unappealing and inappropriate (White Paper on Education and Training, 1995 as cited in NACW, 2001).

This need for greater co-ordination and organisation within the FET band was further highlighted in the Department of Education's White Paper of 1998 *A Programme for the Transformation of FET: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century through Education, Training, and Work*. It noted that:

Our policy is to establish a co-ordinated FET system that integrates education and training. However, we have to recognise the substantial constraints and difficulties imposed by our history and by current arrangements. Across all levels and sectors of our education system, the social and economic divisions of the past remain strong in evidence. Our country still lacks a coherent, integrated strategy for *human resource development*. Education and training policies still operate largely along separate tracks, despite the unifying influence

of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Despite the existence of some excellent institutions and programmes, FET provision today is characterised by fragmentation, poor co-ordination, inefficiency, and inequality (DoE, 1998: 12).

As part of the reform process, the promulgation of South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act in 1995 had provided “a framework for the development and implementation of the NQF as an overseeing authority” to transform the differentiated education and training systems into a centralised system, and focused on delivering quality education to all citizens (HSRC, 2007:2). According to Malan (2000:22) the purpose of such a framework was to create teaching and learning environments that would bring about desired changes in learners, whether to be more knowledgeable, better skilled, or to influence their attitudes and values more positively.

In terms of this mandate the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) of 2004-2008 in the basic education band, 2006 in grades 10-12, and 2007 in the college sector, sought to generate educational environments that produced the kinds of competencies thought necessary for the growth of the country and the development of key skills. The focus was that by the end of 2008 the first cohort of learners would have completed the three-year National Senior Certificate (NSC) programme and the first National Certificate Vocational (NCV) learners completed their three-year level-4 programme by the end of 2009.

Furthermore, over the period after 1996, Outcomes Based Education (OBE) had also been gradually implemented - with continuous assessment as the preferred mode of assessment. This criterion-referenced discourse replaced the previous norm-reference assessment practices that was regarded as ‘judging and punishing’ learners rather than assessing them.

According to SAQA (2001:24), OBET assessment chose to focus on criterion-referenced assessment to highlight “the assessment of the individual and his/her achievement”. This meant that a learner was considered competent or not competent based on their assessment against a set standard, rather than in relation to each other. The table below

describes some of the key differences between criterion-referenced assessment and norm-referenced assessment.

*Table1: Criterion-referenced as opposed to Norm-referenced (SAQA 2001:25)*

<b>Criterion-referenced Assessment</b>	<b>Norm-referenced Assessment</b>
Makes judgements about learners by measuring learners' work against set criteria.	Makes judgements about learners by measuring them against each other.
An individual is assessed.	A group of learners are assessed.
The criteria are pre-determined and are part of the standard	Assessments are curriculum-based
The criteria are objective and attempt to be as clear as possible in terms of the nature of the assessment.	Associated with grading and ranking of learners.
Where grading is used, learners are graded against the criteria for assessment	Associated with averaging of scores or grading of learners.
	Associated with adjustment of scores to fit the profile of the learner group.

Another reason for the change in focus, according to Malan (2000: 24), was that criterion-referenced assessment was regarded as important to better levels of performance, and leveraging necessary forms of 'mastery learning'. Its aim was to attain specified objectives and to test for competence in terms of the criterion stated in the objective. This method of teaching compared a learning outcome or mastery of competencies with a predetermined external standard, which then indicated the meeting of a set standard or failing to meet the standard - followed by remedial intervention.

For the thesis my focus on assessment sought to understand whether, when new structures of FET provision came together, it could deliver on its promises. As such, assessment (and its practices) could never be objective and was often designed to specifically measure certain performances or capabilities of learners. As a socially constructed instrument, assessment was understood to be checking for:

1. Validity – where the assessment met the prescribed outcomes / unit standards had been covered
2. Reliability- where different assessors/ moderators had come to the same conclusion when using the same criteria
3. Fairness- where the rule and standard was confirmed instead of the background of the learner
4. Transparency- where the assessment process and outcomes was always made clear and communicated to learners

In using the lens of assessment as a mechanism to understand whether FET reforms and a transformed curriculum has reached their expected goals (Hlope, 2000:124), I was reminded by Steinberg's caution (1996: 194) that:

No curricula overhaul, no instructional innovation, no change in school organisation, no toughening of standards, no rethinking of teacher training or compensation will succeed if students do not come to school keen and committed to learning (cited in Weedon, Winter & Broadfoot 2002: 9).

Like Benveniste (2002: 89), I argue in the thesis that assessment in FET in South Africa is “a political phenomenon that reflects the agendas, tensions, and nature of power relations” between a certain group of citizens (learners, parents, and educators) and policy makers that reveal both strengths and deficiencies in the current system.

### **1.3. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

As noted above, education and training is probably the most important socio-cultural institution within society through which social and economic change can be generated (Jarret, 1996). It not only provides individuals with the opportunity to strengthen their individual development, skills, and knowledge bases, but is important as a basic human right and a condition for advancing social justice” in every country (EFA, 2010: 8). Education is thus equally important for communication between citizens, for societal growth, creativity, and for technological advancement (Jarret, 1996).

Also, thinking about education and the development of society in this way is not new. Prosser and Allen (1925: 3) observed that while ‘education in nineteenth century was the result of experiences whereby citizens became

more or less able to adjust to the demands of the particular form of society in which they lived and worked', it was also an important "path to worldly and spiritual redemption".

This thought of general education as an important way for children to learn moral character, civic instruction, punctuality, and hard work and application (in the United States for example) changed however from the 1920s to one where societal expectation shifted to a stronger focus on vocational education. Kliebard (1999: x) notes that:

Manual training gave way to a fully-fledged movement for vocational education, which provided the basis for an all-embracing vocationalisation- the idea that every school subject had to justify itself by its occupational utility. Public understanding of the purposes of mass education would never be the same again.

Westerhuis (2007: 25) notes that across the world in the 1920s the ability to work came to be seen as the "only productive thing" that gave entitlement to citizenship and was considered not only crucial for overall economic development but also for good use of educational resources (Clarke and Winch, 2007: 2). Kliebard (1999: 150) notes that vocational education became regarded as the best way forward in bringing about socio-economic change - and came to exist thereafter *alongside* general education as a possible alternative to it. Kliebard (1999: 171) described this development as:

The supreme criterion of efficiency in curriculum matters had led to the need to make fateful decisions as to each student's eventual occupational and social role. Only in this way could the curriculum be differentiated "to meet the needs" of a diverse school population. To do otherwise meant risking a dreadful waste. Algebra, literature, and history would be taught to large numbers of students who simply had no use for those subjects in terms of their adult functioning. Students were expected to adjust to the dictates of the new industrial society. Increasingly, however, the demands of the workplace and the well-being of society were being regarded as all of one piece. What had been the governing principles of vocational education were now being seen as the governing principles of all of education.

Yet, unlike what happened elsewhere in the world over the twentieth century, Kraak (1999) has noted that the formation of a single FET band in the 1990s was something completely new for South Africa. He noted that the four identified components in the new system – senior secondary

schools, technical colleges, industry trainers, and private providers- had never in the history of the country constituted one meaningful system. The bringing together of these diverse strands into one FET band was thus more of a policy idea in the 1990s than a fully thought-through plan or strategy (Kraak 1999: 19).

The focus on bringing a certain coherence to the four subsystems and developing one FET band was however strongly influenced by the need to develop a system to respond to the changing demands of the workplace, and to look after the overall economic wellbeing of society and its learners.

What was different in the 1990s was that the stronger focus on linking education and training provision with job creation and opportunities was heavily influenced by a worldwide trend on 'efficient articulation' between vocational education and training systems and the world of work, and a push to ensure greater mobility and portability of skills and learning across and between the various education and training bands. Given this, South Africa was pressured after 1994 to ensure the quality and relevance of all its newly developed educational programmes, so that young learners in the new democracy would be properly linked to real employment prospects in the world of work.

The problem however was that within each of the 'new FET' subsystems there existed significant fragmentation and disorganisation - with a confusing number of programmes that had few points of articulation and equivalence between them. Also, there existed two separate education streams – general education and training programmes- that were differently designed, had different (and few) linkages to the world of work, and did not really include viable vocational career pathways (Kraak 1999: 21).

For South Africa the establishment of an outcomes-based education system after 1994 - with a strong learner-centred approach – was thus seen as a crucial step forward in bringing about a more coherent FET system (USAID 2003:4). In formulating a new curriculum the Department of Education (1997a: 1) believed that the shift away from a content-based system to one that was based on outcomes would encourage all learners to equip

themselves with the knowledge, competencies and orientations that were required for success after the completion of school or training. Such a competency-based education system was based on six critical components, namely:

- Identifying explicit learning outcomes with respect to the required skills and concomitant proficiencies (standards for assessment);
- Providing a flexible time frame to master these skills;
- Providing a variety of instructional activities to facilitate learning;
- Including a criterion-referenced testing of the required outcomes;
- Certifying based on demonstrated learning outcomes;
- Offering adaptable programmes to ensure optimum learner guidance (Van der Horst & McDonald, cited in Malan 2000: 23).

Taking the form of Curriculum 2005 in schools and the National Vocational Certificate (NCV) in colleges, the introduction of a system based on outcomes-based education (OBE) after 1994 was deemed the key mechanism whereby educational transformation would be secured in South Africa - as had supposedly happened in Canada, the United States and New Zealand (Claasen, cited in Malan 2000: 22).

In line with this, the new system (the NQF) provided for three different quality assurance councils to oversee and be responsible for 'keeping standards' within the different education and training bands, namely higher education, further education and training, general education, and workplace-based education. For the FET band, two of the above quality assurance councils oversaw developments within this band, namely Umalusi (2008: 1) which was responsible for the General Education Band and the Further Education and Training Band (as noted in the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act of 2001 - Act 58 of 2001), and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) - that oversaw workplace-based learning. With regard to the latter, the QCTO served as the quality assurance custodian while the Sector Education and Training Authority served as its certification authority.

### *A focus on Assessment*

Having roughly outlined above the evolution of the current education system (and FET) in South Africa since 1994, it is the argument of this thesis that changes in the educational system was meant to do far more than just focus on the coherence of programmes, links to the world of work, and encouraging better competencies amongst learners. Rather, as noted by Benveniste (2002: 90), the reform of the education and training system was also meant to change the behaviour of the different educational actors – learners and educators- by linking learner outcomes to accountability structures and educator performance. Assessment in such a system was thus as much about ‘political structuration’, ‘legitimacy’, and ‘power’ over educators and learners as it was about evaluating learner achievement and competency gain (Benveniste 2002: 90).

As Reddy (2005: 16) observes, a number of global ideological and economic forces combined in the 1990s to help bring an assessment system into being that educators were expected to use to plan, develop, and evaluate learner competencies in ways that directly contributed to the broader economy and overall social upliftment (Kraak 2001; Allais 2003; Garraway 2005:94). This was part of the drive to make educators take responsibility over education processes and outcomes and provide the necessary impetus for educational changes, even though most of them were not adequately equipped with the necessary content knowledge, teaching methodologies, and assessment skills to cope with the demands of the new curriculum and continuous and summative assessment requirements” (USAID 2003).

Benveniste (2002: 91) suggests that this enthusiasm for assessment was fuelled by the belief that quality and relevant education was needed for national development within globalised economic environments, especially in the pursuit of high skilled labour. The ‘new work order’ of the 1990s, based on criterion-based assessment, became primarily focused on performance and educational improvement; achieved through incentives and rewards (Reddy 2005).

Based on the above view my focus in the thesis sought to explore the implementation of a new assessment framework after 1994 and how this focus was understood at the different points of provision within the FET band. I question whether, instead of encouraging educational transformation, the focus on performance and improvement within the logic of assessment has not prevented key transformational changes, and caused further confusion within the system. To explore this, I interviewed educators and trainers within the FET band to get their views on assessment and how they practiced this in 3 of the 4 subsystems that make up the FET band. My goal was to better understand challenges at the ground level of policy implementation (Hattam, Shacklock & Smyth 2000: 50).

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How is assessment understood at different points of provision within the FET band- namely at the school, college, and workplace training level?
- How do educators and trainers interpret and explain the purpose and process of assessment as set out by the Department of Basic Education (DoBE), Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and SETAs?
- Are understandings of assessment consistent across the three FET sites?

#### **1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the study was to explore how assessment was understood within the FET Band at the different vocational and general education levels (NQF levels 2-4). Given that national qualification and quality assurance frameworks have become key parts of most educational reform 'toolkits' in developing countries - as part of their search for systems that enhance the employability of their citizens (Allais 2011: 9) - the goal was to show how (if at all) assessment was understood and was connected across a variety of FET sites to enhance portability and compartment of education and training skills.

In contrast to a dual system like the German education and training system that focused on linking education to well regulated and protected occupations (Brockman 2010 as cited in Allais 2011: 6), systems in Anglo-Saxon liberal market countries tend to focus on issues of employability. This is what is mainly prevalent in South Africa and as described by Allais (2011: 6) are “markets of qualifications that enable individuals to enhance their employability through continuing vocational educational or certification of sets of competencies acquired either through work experience or modularised courses”.

A key focus of the study was thus to probe whether assessment within FET in South Africa in the current period reflected the key objectives of educational reform in the FET band since the late 1990s, and reflected the general principles and goals of justice and equity as propagated by the Department of Education (National Curriculum Statement, Grades 10-12 (General) 2003: 3).

## **1.6. RESEARCH METHODS**

### **1.6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Using a qualitative research design and an interpretive mode of enquiry, the thesis set out to explore understandings of assessment at various points of provision. An interpretive method of enquiry was employed because it encouraged the use of interviews with different institutional educators and trainers that had insights into how assessment within various communities was conceptualised and operationalized within the FET sector.

According to TerreBlanche & Durrheim (1999: 43) an inductive qualitative approach was justified when phenomena were studied as they “unfolded in real world situations, without manipulation, as interrelated wholes rather than split up into discreet predetermined variables”. Via the collection of various data through interviewing and document analysis, the study sought to connect and analyse these in relation to a variety of sources and reviews as well as policy documents. The goal was to ascertain, via open-ended interviews, how educators and trainers gave meaning to the issue of assessment.

As part of this focus the study tried to get a better understanding of the various concepts and factors that underpinned educational transformation in

South Africa and that contributed to the establishment of a new integrated national qualifications framework (NQF) in the late 1990s. Along with Merriman (1998: 5), I used the qualitative research approach as an umbrella concept that covered several forms of inquiry, and that could help to explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption as possible to the natural settings. The purpose of this paradigm was to provide a holistic view of social and programmatic events that would not normally be accessible or examinable.

### **1.6.2. RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND OUTLINE OF RESEARCH AREA**

Permission for this investigation was obtained from the various stakeholders, namely, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and the three respective research sites – namely one comprehensive school, one FET College, and a private training provider. The three research sites were each chosen from a bigger sample of 28 Focus Schools, 6 Further Education and Training Colleges, and a number of private occupational training providers, all within the Western Cape.

The Focus school sample from which one was chosen, included:

- Ten Arts and Culture Schools: Dance Studies, Design, Dramatic Arts, Music, Visual Arts),
- Eight Business, Commerce and Management Schools: Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Computer Application Technology,
- Ten Engineering and Technology schools: Electrical Technology, Civil Technology, Mechanical Technology, Engineering Graphics and Design.
- The available comprehensive schools in the region

The six FET Colleges from which one was selected, were:

- West Coast Further Education and Training College
- South Cape Further Education and Training College
- Boland Further Education and Training College
- False Bay Further Education and Training College

- Northlink Further Education and Training College
- College of Cape Town Further Education and Training College.

Private provider – willing providers were sourced in the northwest part of Western Cape area that were servicing the same kinds of learners as providers in the other subsystems– namely linked to a particular and common vocational subject.

All the FET Colleges offered the 12 National Certificate (Vocational) qualifications as noted below (further adding two more programmes - Education Development and Mechatronics – from 2009):

<b>PROGRAMMES 2007</b>	
• Civil Engineering and building Construction	• Civil Engineering and building Construction
• Electrical Infrastructure Construction	• Electrical Infrastructure Construction
• Engineering and Related Design	• Engineering and Related Design
• Finance, Economics and Accounting	• Finance, Economics and Accounting
• Hospitality	• Hospitality
• Information Technology and Computer Science	• Information Technology and Computer Science

The main thing that connected all the chosen research sites was their particular engineering focus: the Engineering and Technology (focus) school offered a vocational curriculum with an emphasis on Electrical Technology, the chosen FET College offered a vocational route that emphasised the Electrical Infrastructure Construction programme, and the private occupational provider offered electrical training.

In terms of other characteristics that defined some providers in the subsystems, all Focus Schools are located in what is termed previously disadvantaged communities. The chosen focus school was one of ten such Engineering and Technology learning facilities – that introduced in 2006 as part of the WCED 30 Focus Schools initiative and originally located in the

Metropole South Education District. The focus school program provided for learners of diverse cultures and backgrounds within disadvantaged communities.

When the actual research was conducted however it was found that the most appropriate school for the study, originally thought to be a Focus School, was actually defined as a Dinaledi school and part of the Khanyi Project of the WCED. This school was however identified as a Comprehensive School because it provided a number of different streams to its different working class learners. This included a normal academic stream with a big focus on mathematics and science education (Dinaledi), a 'focus school' stream that focused on technology and the training of learners in workshops, and a vocational stream that emphasised key vocational skills and learner attributes. The focus school and workshop component of the school was regarded as an effective and functional school program that had been developed over a long period and been tried and tested in relation to job market opportunities for the predominantly working class context of the school. In the study I thus focused on the focus school component within the comprehensive school context.

The chosen FET College site was situated east of Cape Town. The chosen facility comprised of an engineering department and was one of 5 learning sites of the chosen FET College. This facility was located closer to the countryside and was overseen by the Cape Winelands Education District Office. It too had a diverse student population of about 450 students. Ninety of these learners were enrolled for the Electrical Infrastructure Construction Programme.

In terms of the participants or interviewees in the study, these included 4 educators that taught fundamentals, core, and electives to Senior Certificate (NSC) learners at the focus school; 4 lecturers that taught fundamentals, core, and electives to NQF Level 4 learners enrolled for the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) at the FET college; and 2 education trainers at the occupational training institute.

Further participants in the study included:

- the manager / supervisor at the occupational training site- given his involvement in the assessment process at the centre,
- The Faculty head of the FET college site where the engineering program resided
- The assessment co-ordinator at the focus school (this was normally the deputy principal of the school).

The background of the different participants and the 3 educational sites that they inhabited is further outlined in Chapter 5.

### **1.7. DATA ANALYSIS**

Patton (1987: 144) explains that research analysis is that “process of bringing order to data, and organizing what there is into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units”. This process includes the initial ideas that the researcher develops with regard to analysis and interpretation at the start of and during the actual research activity.

In the study the aim of collecting data from different points of education provision was to get a nuanced and bifurcated view of what educators and trainers thought about and understood about assessment. While the first steps of data analysis needed to situate the collected information in relation to the particular site, later analysis sought to develop a more holistic summary of all the data collected at the three sites. In this regard, data was analysed according to some common themes and patterns, as identified when the study’s interview instruments were developed. These were then connected to other data sources used, with a narrative developed to present the overall argument that emerged.

### **1.8. LITERATURE REVIEW**

For the study I conducted an in-depth and fairly comprehensive literature search on issues of technical and vocational education and training reform and assessment. My goal was to identify information and viewpoints that were not only relevant to the study, but that could also assist during the actual research process. By exploring the various viewpoints in the literature, my goal was to extract key approaches and theories presented therein to inform my arguments and my analysis of the collected data. The literature review

provided me with different ways of theorizing with which to better understand the various conceptual and research problems that were encountered during the study.

### **1.9. ETHICS**

In terms of contributing to the study, all participants were assured that their contributions would be treated with the utmost confidentiality in line with Stellenbosch University's ethics procedures and regulations. As such each participant was allocated a pseudonym, as well as the institution he/she worked at, and the specific area in which the institution was located. All participants were further assured that none of the research findings would prove damaging or harmful to any of them. The necessary permissions were obtained from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), the principal and governing body of the focus school, the chief executive officer at the FET College and the campus site manager, and the manager of the occupational training centre. All participants were informed, both at the start and then during the study, that they could withdraw their participation at any time and that there would be no offence taken, penalties, or repercussions if they decided to do so.

All these steps were taken to ensure objectivity, confidentiality, and honesty throughout the research process.

### **1.10. SOME KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS**

The following key concepts were used in the study. I provide definitions for each term to encourage a starting understanding for later analysis and scrutiny.

#### *Vocational Education and Training (VET)*

Vocational education is seen as that form of provision that allows learners to 'hit the ground running' in a particular occupation. The focus is on making the school leaver productive for the workplace immediately. VET is viewed as developing craftsmanship, practical experience, and practical problem-solving. VET is provided at different levels of educational systems and in a variety of educational institutions.

### *Assessment*

Assessment is crucial to the process of educational selection. In this it aids diagnosis of learning difficulties, enables educators to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching, and gives pupils feedback on their learning and thereby hopefully improves it. In that sense, assessment is not just a way of ranking and rating the products of learning, but an integral part of the learning process itself and an important catalyst in effective learning and suitable teaching (Hargreaves 1990: 149).

According to the Department of Education in South Africa assessment is also “a process of collecting, synthesising, and interpreting information in ways that assist teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in making decisions about the progress of learners (DoE 2005: 5).

### *FET Band*

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) recognises three broad bands of education, namely: General Education and Training, Further Education and Training, and Higher Education and Training.

The Further Education and Training band is located between the General and Higher Education and Training, and alongside the world of work (Department of Education, 2003). The Further Education and Training Band is divided into three pathways, namely:

- The General pathway that is offered at schools and leads to an exit level qualification, while providing articulation with other learning pathways.
- The General Vocational pathway offered at FET colleges and specialised high schools and aimed at 16-18 year olds at NQF Levels 2-4. This is a career-focussed pathway that is meant to assist learners to make a career choice.
- The Trade, Occupational and Professional (TOP) pathway where learners have already made specific career choices. Learning takes place at a training site or a simulated workplace-learning site (college workshop) where the necessary skills and competencies

are taught according to the rules and regulations of the relevant professional body.

### *National Qualifications Framework*

A National Qualifications Framework (NQF) classifies qualifications according to a set of criteria that reflects the levels of learning achieved. Arranged in a hierarchy of standards (or demand) - starting with the lowest level of qualifications to the highest – the focus of the NQF is learners (and not institutions) and the different opportunities they have to gain a qualification.

The NQF is a set of principles and guidelines that is meant to facilitate the registration and capturing of learner achievement, with the main purpose being to give national recognition to those who have acquired certain skills and knowledge and in so doing ensuring an integrated education and training system that encourages lifelong learning (EDUCOR, 2007: 1).

### *Learnerships*

Learnerships are structured programmes of workplace learning that are integrated with formal learning components. Learnerships are paraprofessional and vocational education and training programmes that combine theory and practice and culminate in a qualification that is registered on the NQF (Department of Labour 2001: 1). A candidate that successfully completes a learnership will have a qualification that signals occupational competence that is recognised nationally.

These programmes are designed to take place over a year, and result in an NQF-registered qualification (Garraway 2005: 94).

### *Occupational Qualification*

“An occupational qualification represents the achievement of a planned combination of learning outcomes which is intended to provide qualifying learners with the applied competence to practice an occupation, to perform occupationally-related skills sets, and to provide a basis for further learning” (Department of Labour, 2008: 1).

### *Portability*

In a fast changing world, traditional qualifications were seen as barriers for those that wanted to progress to new qualifications and were thought to be cul-de-sacs. By including all qualifications in a single framework it was hoped that a process could be created whereby learners could move from one level to another and from one occupational field to another.

According to the Department of Education, 'portability' also refers to the extent to which parts of a qualification (subjects or unit standards) are transferable to another qualification in a different learning pathway of the same NQF band (DoE, 2003).

### **1.11. CHAPTER OUTLINE**

The study has been organised in the following manner:

- Chapter 1 focuses on providing an introduction and overview of the research project and its goals.
- Chapter 2 outlines the historical and policy background to the provision of vocational education and training in South Africa as a prelude to the discussion of skills development policies and processes after 1994. The value of the chapter lies in its discussion of macro developments and discourses that have influenced the ways in which educators think about assessment.
- Chapter 3 provides various models and viewpoints by which to understand assessment, and outlines the variety of challenges and dilemmas attached to the assessment process. A scan of the relevant literature is provided in both chapters 2 and 3 and is tied to the conceptual and theoretical arguments provided.
- Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research design used in the study, as well as the methods used to collect and analyse the data. Explanations of the sampling techniques and data collection methods are also provided, along with details of the validity and reliability of the study.
- Chapter 5 focuses on the discussions with educators and their views on assessment. The findings are presented according to the models

outlined earlier in the thesis.

- Chapter 6, the final chapter, summarises the research in the form of an analysis of findings and a drawing of conclusions. It also provides some views on key challenges for the FET Band and implications for assessment therein.

## **1.12. CONCLUSION**

This introductory chapter located the discussion of assessment in relation to a variety of issues and debates associated with education and training reform, and pointed to the examination (in the thesis) of important policy challenges facing educators and trainers working on the ground in the FET Band. My claim with regard to assessment in the FET band in South Africa was that it must be viewed as a political issue that reflects particular agendas, tensions, and power relations, and that resolving these tensions will ultimately determine whether vocational education and training provision can have the desired influence that policy seems to think it can.

The chapter outlined the key research problem, identified the main research questions, and described the overall aims and objectives that guided the study. The research design (detailed discussion in Chapter 4) was discussed briefly and a layout of the study provided.

The two main themes of the research were also briefly discussed, namely education policy reform and vocational education and training provision (detailed discussion in Chapter 2), and assessment (detailed discussion in Chapter 3). This is meant to help readers with some views with which to read the overall thesis.

In the next chapter I provide a background and context of vocational education and training provision, against which debates about assessment can be understood.

## CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN A CHANGING WORLD

### 2.1 Introduction

Education and training, theory and practice, the liberal and the vocational – these polarities have centuries of turbulent history, mounting as the concepts and the processes have become explicit elements in dealing with social and economic pressures and conflicts (Silver & Brennan, 1988: 3).

For more than a century an enduring staple of modern educational systems and schools across the globe has been the practice of dividing the curriculum into its academic and vocational aspects, and mainly treating vocational education and training as the provision for those seen to be ill-suited to academic education. For a long time the separation of the curriculum in this very basic way helped schools fulfill their social and cultural reproduction purpose in different contexts - as noted by Anyon (1988), Apple (1982); Ball (2004), Bourdieu (1990), and Ecclestone (1997).

In this time the vocational option was always more likely preferred for poor communities than affluent ones— and more often chosen for the children of the poor townships and the inner cities than those (children) from the suburbs. Many of those who lived in poor communities knew that schooling in itself held keys to social mobility and personal development, but their lack of voice, agency, and grasp of the different ways that education ‘worked’ as a system, prevented them from either contradicting the reproductive role of schools for their children or resisting the curricular pathways that were provided for their offspring (Silver 1983; Brown 1997).

Parents of children from more affluent communities, by contrast, had a bigger say in the curricula provided for their children and in almost all cases chose the academic focus (Ball 2004). As such, within the peculiar sociology of the curriculum, vocational knowledge became treated in schools over time - and in society at large - as low-status knowledge while academic knowledge was accorded high-status and privilege and dispensed to those deemed worthy of such status and provision. The aftermath of this type of apportioning of school knowledge became visible in the occupational hierarchy of the labour force, and shaped the class structure of the overall society in crucial ways over more than 100 years (Badroodien 2004).

Having noted the above, the provision of academic and vocational education/knowledge in various settings has always been entangled within deep philosophical debates about the nature of education, work, and society (Aristotle, Rousseau, Marx, and Dewey) in different societies and linked to complex historical developments and formulations.

Such provisions were also heavily influenced, as Emerson (cited in Kliebard, 1999: ix) noted as far back as 1841, by the belief that the different forms of education was inevitably tied to 'honourable' work and that "labour was God's education, that he can only be a sincere learner and become a master when he learns the secrets of labour, and thus by real cunning extorts from nature its sceptre". For Emerson (cited in Kliebard, 1999: ix), all routes to work (and its access points) were "paths to worldly and spiritual redemption".

As such, the provision of education and training at different access points has always been informed by a complex mix of historical, philosophical, religious, and developmental influences and debates, which has led in some cases to some quite toxic formulas being developed in some national settings, and in other cases produced many empowering educational policies. In Africa for example, the provision of academic and vocational education was closely tied to understandings of the role of indigenous communities within the colony, constructions of race, and what constituted civilization (and how to achieve this) within colonial settings (King 1971, 1983; Paterson 2004). This often led to the idea that basic education provision needed to be adapted in ways that took the circumstances and the needs of particular kinds of learners into account - such as that proposed for Africa by the Phelps Stokes Commission in the 1920s- and largely shaped the ways in which policies around vocational education and training unfolded in Africa.

In a more developed environment like the USA for example, the provision of education and training over time (and due to increased industrialisation) took on more functionalist forms where it (education and training) came to be instrumentally seen as "the result of experiences whereby we become more or less able to adjust ourselves to the demands of the particular form of society in which we live and work" (Prosser and Allen 1925: 3). By the 1920s this changing and 'tidy' approach to education and work was seen as fitting

more neatly with the overall concern amongst American citizens that education- as academic and humanistic learning – was not playing the expected constructive role in the building of a new society - as it had been envisioned (Kliebard 1999).

In the case of the USA, by coming to grips with challenging levels of social change American citizens in the 1920s ‘turned’ to “public schools for answers to the vexing problems (presented by) an urban, industrial society” (Kliebard 1999: x). Whereas in previous times children attended school for a few years to learn moral character, civic instruction, punctuality, hard work and application and then learnt how to work through working, manual training courses increasingly entered urban schools from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as American society’s expectations about education expanded. Kliebard (1999: x) notes that:

Manual training gave way to a fully-fledged movement for vocational education, which provided the basis for an all-embracing vocationalisation- the idea that every school subject had to justify itself by its occupational utility. Public understanding of the purposes of mass education would never be the same again.

In this chapter it is the above kind of development and process that I explore and attempt to outline in relation to South Africa, namely the historical and policy debates about the role of different forms of education and training provision and the increasing shift in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to include, foreground, and embrace technical and vocational education. In terms of the definitional terms that I use during the thesis, I hereafter only refer to vocational education and training (VET) in my discussions, as - following McGrath (2012) - I argue that technical education in the current set-up is no longer an accurate or apt description of any particular form of available provision.

The purpose of providing an outline and debate of VET provision in the chapter, focusing on South Africa, is to later be able to lodge the more focused discussion of assessment against an overall sociology of education as well as education and training (and curriculum) reform, and to show how macro developments and policy processes fundamentally framed and influenced the ways in which participants on the ground (when I interviewed

them) thought they were doing in their different vocational education spaces. In the chapter I begin with a short background to the vocationalisation of education before I explore the notion of vocationalism as a form of curriculum change. I then move on to discuss the overwhelming preoccupation that policy makers seem to have had with skills training and development over the past 20 years - into the current period.

## **2.2 The vocationalisation of education and the advent of vocationalism**

As noted above, across the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'the ability to work' has always been seen as perhaps the most critical component of the right of citizens to state acknowledgement, and for them to be given access to state education provision and work support. Westerhuis (2007: 25) notes in relation to the Netherlands that the period could be characterised as one where "productive labour" served as the only acceptable entitlement to "claims on citizenship".

In a fast changing and mostly highly industrialised world this emphasis on 'the ability to work' as the 'duty of citizens' developed into a key lens by which governments worldwide understood issues of overall economic development and how to make better use of their educational resources (Clarke and Winch, 2007: 2). As such, many states explored the provision of increased vocational education not only as important ways of bringing about and facilitating further socio-economic change, but also developing the kinds of skills and competencies desperately required within their constantly shifting terrains.

Thus, whatever it was thought schooling ought to do or achieve, the key characteristic of schooling over the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that it became more focused on serving as a training ground for the workplace and for providing the means for economic reward (Rizvi & Lingard 2010). Seen as a huge waste when learners didn't (or couldn't) use certain forms of schooling and knowledge, many argued also that what was more disturbing and needed in societies that were significantly unequal - or where citizens had historically not been given access to any form of quality education - was that learners in such situations had to somehow get quicker access to jobs and promising futures (especially if political promises attached to this were to be met).

For the USA, Kliebard (1999: 150) describes this period (with its focus on the ability to work) in relation to issues of development as part of the advent of vocationalism – an all-consuming educational ideal that firmly embedded itself over time within different levels of educational reform. According to Kantor & Tyack (1982) this educational ideal stemmed from the application of the ‘precepts and demands of business and industry’ to the curriculum as a whole.

In noting how the “supreme criterion of efficiency in curriculum matters had come to make key and fateful decisions as to each student’s eventual occupational and social role”, Kliebard (1999: 171) points to how vocationalism then led to “the curriculum being differentiated to meet the needs of diverse school populations”. He asserts that it was thought at the time that:

To do otherwise meant risking a dreadful waste. Algebra, literature, and history would be taught to large numbers of students who simply had no use for those subjects in terms of their adult functioning. Students were expected to adjust to the dictates of the new industrial society. Increasingly, however, the demands of the workplace and the well-being of society were being regarded as all of one piece. What had been the governing principles of vocational education were now being seen as the governing principles of all of education (Kliebard, 1999: 171)

This occurred to such an extent that “the newly dominant ideal did not simply affect the content of the curriculum but also was dramatically reflected in the ways in which a curriculum was to be fashioned” (Kliebard, 1999:150-152). It was a vision of society that asked key questions about what education was intended for and “led to the transformation of the curriculum in line with protocols and criteria of the workplace that invoked an array of new issues that were even more profound” (Kliebard, 1999: 120), especially with regard to how best to ‘get learners ready for adulthood’.

Vocationalism was also regarded as getting ‘the correct balance’ where “competent performance in a variety of adult social roles” was subject to things like “predictability, order, and scientific precision” - hallmarks of the modern factory and the protection of an orderly and smoothly running society: “A transformed curriculum had a vital role to play by training the next

generation directly in the efficient performance of the activities that define their social role” (Kliebard, 1999: 120).

With activities tied to citizenship, health, and leisure no longer regarded as important to the efficient running of the workplace or the need to get a job, it was argued that the academic subjects that learners studied had to be adapted to meet the demands of the labour market.

Furthermore, schooling had to be conceived and understood in terms of “raw material and finished products, gains and losses, inputs and outputs, productive and unproductive labour, elimination of waste, return on investment, precise production goals, and the bottom line” (Kliebard, 1999: 121).

In essence, vocationalism was about developing a broad societal vision that highlighted the demands and needs of the industrial workplace and in so doing ensure the occupational competence of individuals. It was a symbolic identification where it was felt that the main responsibility of schools to ordinary citizens “was to match individual capacities with ultimate social roles, for the differentiated training that would be required to perform successfully in those roles” (Kliebard, 1999: 163).

Having noted the above, it should be acknowledged that this approach and thinking to education did not go unchallenged. Many influential and prominent commentators like John Dewey argued that “it was a mistake to think that all education which cannot be justified upon the basis of a specific vocational value must either seek justification as a preparation for leisure or surrender its place in our schools” (citing Bagley, Kliebard 1999: 125).

Dewey for example argued that the aim of schooling in democracies “must be to keep youth under educative influence for a longer time rather than to induct them prematurely into the demands of the workplace. Industrial education should be about developing industrial intelligence rather than technical trade efficiency” (Dewey, 1914: 11-12).

Dewey further argued that no matter how well-intentioned it tried to be, any emphasis on vocationalism - by means of narrow trade training - would apply “the power of social predestination to deeply fallible men”. Dewey (1982)

pointed out that it was in any case neither “the purpose of education to decide for young people in advance what occupation they should follow or to project them into life’s work as soon as possible”, nor should the emphasis be on “adjusting individuals to the demands of the social order” (cited in Kliebard 1999: 163). He argued that an overemphasis on vocational education ultimately would lead ‘individuals into dead-end jobs’.

Notwithstanding the above concerns by people like Dewey, the growing attraction amongst policy makers and citizens to vocational education over the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century was very revealing about the favourable orientation to the ‘needs of industry’. This led to academic questions being sought as to what about vocational education over different periods made it remain so attractive? What was the allure of this form of provision that made policy makers continue to emphasise its utility for so long? Was it always about the potential and promise of jobs that seemed to be on offer?

Others question whether the focus on vocational education provision was simply a preference for a particular kind of socio-economic policy and model where the provision of vocational education symbolically provided a better promise for economic stability (Kantor & Tyack, 1982: 293)?

These are issues that continue to puzzle and confuse, and have led to lots of debate and deliberation amongst academics, researchers, and policy makers (McGrath 2011; Allais 2013). For the latter however, policy makers have continued to emphasise the link between education provision and work prospects - to the extent that current policy formulations remain preoccupied with skills training and development.

I argue that this has come about at the expense of longer, deeper, more academically-oriented knowledge formation. It is to this discussion and development that the chapter next turns.

### **2.3 Skills development and the reframing of the role of vocational education and training**

It is often argued that altered global social and economic conditions over the past 15 years have influenced how education is understood and the ways in

which education policies in different contexts have been reformulated. Smyers and Burbules (2006) caution however that this does not mean that actual ideas or theories about education have changed, but rather that clusters of practices, customs, and social relations have been transformed in ways that have changed the ways in which children interact with education provision in different contexts.

Indeed, while the provision of vocational education and training, for example, could probably be traced back to the beginnings of humanity itself - with knowledge, skills, and belief systems constantly being transmitted from one generation to the next (MacLean and Lai, 2011: 2) - at different times and in different contexts this change in practices is best reflected in the wide variety of terms that have been used to describe what is currently referred to and provided as vocational education and training (VET). These included apprenticeship training, industrial education, technical education, occupational training, vocational education, and career or technical education.

As a guardian of entry into the labour market, the provision of all of these forms of vocational education and training (VET) provisions acted as the filter that divided labour into different occupations (each with their own quality, skill and status) and the learners that filled those occupations according to the nature and form of their different societies and contexts. In this regard, VET offered different purposes and functions for different participants in the system. For the state, the aim of focusing on the development of VET was then mainly to improve the productive capacity of their different societies - where it was argued that increased investment in VET would yield more productive labour in their context. For the individual, the pursuance of VET was also about preparing for that person for working life and entering and progressing within the labour market. And for the employer, the focus on VET was regarded as a key means of skilling labour to meet the immediate and selfish needs of particular firms (Clarke & Winch 2007: 1).

These were huge conflicting interests and as a result the provision of VET invariably represented a compromise between roleplayers - with those with greatest power and sway often determining whose interests were best served within individual education and training systems.

In that regard, Smeyers and Burbules (2006) pinpoint certain practices and changes in customs that, they feel, have changed the ways in which learners have been raised and schooled globally in the recent past, and that has influenced the particular type of education provision that have been emphasised. They highlight the following:

- Globalisation and technological change
- Political change and the worldwide embrace of market capitalism
- An emerging consumer society that strongly emphasises values of individualism and personal prosperity above knowledge formation
- A culture of performativity that pervades schools, the workplace, and overall society
- Changing work conditions (such as casualisation) and work environments, and
- Harmonisation of qualification frameworks and skills development systems across national contexts (Smeyers and Burbules, 2006).

With regard to all of the above (some of which are discussed in more detail in sections below), depending on the particular national or local contexts, the main agenda has been to improve levels of education and training provision to bring about a closer and neater fit between education provision and the needs of the workplace - given that vocational education and training supposedly (in whatever its form) is primarily about preparing young people and adults for their working lives (Clarke & Winch 2007: 9).

#### **2.4. Globalisation and its influence on national contexts**

In Germany for example, when it became necessary at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for European countries to work closer together and to get familiar with each other's educational systems as a common labour market became an economic reality, the country (Germany) increasingly looked to build a closer connection between vocational education and training (VET) and human resources development (HRD) (Heidegger & Atwell, 2002: 224).

With knowledge and skill regarded as crucial to economic performance and survival in an increasingly competitive global economy, its education and training systems had to shoulder the responsibility of engendering both the

maximum diffusion of knowledge and skills in different economies and also meet the other diverse and general demands of their different communities (Green et al, cited in Oates et al 2002: 70). In such a situation, bearing in mind the focus of issues of employability, social inclusion, the happiness of individuals, and the stability of particular societies, a country like Germany opted to invest heavily in human resource development and the generation of knowledge workers (Rizvi & Lingard 2010). Similar approaches were then taken in other European countries, but obviously with different outcomes due to their particular and different contexts and historical forms of provision.

The above example serves to show that the establishment of education and training systems has always been high on the policy agendas of governments of most advanced and developing nations. This has not only been so because their citizens had rising aspirations for learning and qualifications - and thus governments had to devote more resources to meeting these demands - but also because economic and political conditions in national contexts have changed significantly with the expansion of globalisation and the swiftness of technological change. According to Campbell (2002), labour markets - and the skills required to service them - have been forever changed due to different patterns of consumer demand in a new world order – especially in relation to what he refers to as the 3 T's (namely, taste, trade, and technology).

Basically, policy makers and economists have argued that for economies to be effective in the globalised marketplace, greater focus needs to be placed on how to produce the required technologies and the human resources (knowledge workers) associated with that. They have claimed that the crucial generation of wealth within different countries is closely tied to these processes (Burns & Marshall 2006: 185).

Campbell (2002) explains that what this means is that when an excess supply in plant or machine operatives, or amongst workers in elementary or craft occupations emerged, then systems need to be in place to shift these workers to other jobs or to upskill them to remain relevant. He argues that such workers' skills need to be markedly improved if they are to benefit from the ongoing process of economic change and not be left behind as a result of the constant evolution of the labour market" (Campbell 2002:73). As Campbell

(2002:65) notes, “new times require new skills”. This idea is explored further in the next section.

But what the above also mainly points to, as Young & Gamble (2006: 1) remind us, is that in a globalised economic world that has encouraged and facilitated the easy movement of capital and the consequent flexibiisation of labour - and pressurised to develop systems of education and training that all constantly upgrade the skills and knowledge forms of their labour populaces - different countries have had to reform their systems according to their quite different levels of development and industrialisation and the different forms of provision historically developed within their national contexts.

While the flexibilisation of labour markets and education and training systems have been widely seen as necessary for countries to survive economically and to produce the kinds of saleable commodities that allow them to compete in the global marketplace, the various pressures noted above have played out quite differently within the very different contexts of highly industrialised countries and that of developing countries (Young & Gamble 2006: 1).

In South Africa, for example, the reform of the education and training system and skills training strategies has been heavily influenced and complicated by a number of apartheid legacies that have slowed down the extent to which any kind of rapid economic change and knowledge development can be made possible (Badroodien 2004).

Furthermore, in South Africa Allais (2006) notes that large numbers of young people are completing secondary education in an education and training system and labour market system historically designed for small numbers of largely middle- and upper-class students. And because of the considerable changes in the global economy as well as in the industrial organisation of South Africa to cope with this, large numbers of students are exiting school to join the unemployment line.

At the moment, according to Allais (2006), the purpose of education and training provision seems to be to

- Ensure that young people stay in school

- Provide secondary education for a far wider range of learners than the existing systems were designed for
- Prepare a much higher proportion of learners for higher education,
- Meet the (usually conflicting and always hard to establish) needs of the economy,
- And at least appear to be combating unemployment (Allais, 2006: 20).

In recent times, South African policy makers have thus tended to regard the vocational side of senior secondary education provision as an important way of resolving the unemployment challenge. As such they have focused on how to make more 'relevant' the education and training that is provided.

However, as Allais (2006) notes, one of the key obstacles in reforming senior secondary education in South Africa is the extent to which academic and vocational education remains divided and the confusion amongst policy makers and participants about what the appropriate relationship between vocational and general education should be. Currently, the most common understanding of vocational education provision is that it should 'first, keep less-gifted students out of higher education and off the streets; second, give learners access to an identified section of the labour market; and third, to provide employers with skilled workers and technicians' (Allais, 2006). [probably in that order].

There is little doubt - and it would be foolish to argue otherwise - that a focus on skills development in South Africa could substantially contribute to both the economic and social policy agendas of the country. It would help to develop economic performance by raising worker productivity (thus influencing their earnings), improving company (and other organisational) performance, and through making a positive input on the skills needed for improved local, regional and national economies. It could also meaningfully contribute to helping the socially excluded get access to education and better work opportunities.

However, a key challenge is how to reorganise the education and training system in ways that connect the world of education (curriculum) to the world of labour (employment) in meaningful and productive ways. And given the

history of education and training in South Africa over more than a century, this suggests that the current model in South Africa would need to be radically re-articulated and conceptualised if this were to happen. This challenge is further explained in the section on South Africa later on in the chapter.

In the next section I briefly discuss some of the historical and local dimensions of VET debates in South Africa. My goal is to highlight - against a historical background of provision in South Africa - how some 'older' trends have been repeated and re-interpreted within the current skills discourse.

## **2.5 A brief overview of the South African Education and Training (VET) landscape**

Historically, the South African education and training system prior to the establishment of a fully democratic government from 1994 has been described as a low skills training regime shaped largely by racial segmentation in the labour market and social discrimination in the education system and broader society (Kraak 2004; Chisholm 1992). Three developments contributed to the formulation of such a system, namely:

- A colonial legacy that approached education and training in ways that differentiated between learners and their access to education and training, and based this on definitions of race and assumed levels of civilisation. Policy explanations were thereafter developed and adopted that reinforced this;
- This approach (lasting more than 50 years) used education and training provision to intervene on behalf of the white (mostly rural) population and provide them with access to jobs and political legitimacy;
- At the same time this education and training system was linked to the emergence of social democratic and modernist traditions from as early as the 1920s that sought to introduce education and training provision for all in the interests of economic development - but without undermining established and hegemonic political configurations (Badroodien 2004: 23).

Against the background of this racially-formulated system, education and training provision expanded after 1960 in relation to a variety of political struggles, labour market requirements linked to economic modernization, and the collapse of influx control in the period late 1970s to early 1990s that pressurized the apartheid government to overhaul the education and training system.

Furthermore, from the late 1980s there was also a clear recognition that unlike the other many countries looking to secure its 'place' in the new global economy, South Africa started from a position of even greater isolation, with many structural problems in the economy, an astonishingly inefficient education and training system (with separate education departments for different racial groups as well as for the so-called independent homelands), and a situation where the low status and esteem of the vocational stream made it the 'last choice' option within education and training provision (Allais, 2006: 21).

These factors informed how the ANC-led government reformulated education and training provision in South Africa after 1994.

### *2.5.1 The colonial context of education and training pre-1994*

Behr (1984: 127) reminds us that debates about the relationship between education and work in South Africa has a very short history. He notes that it was only really from the 1880s in South Africa that there arose a need for artisans and technicians. And that before this South Africa had an almost exclusively pastoral economy. As such, from their beginning in the 1850s the vocations attached to industrialisation in South Africa were essentially regarded as working class manual work and were mainly reserved for the (coloured) working populations in the cities (while most of the skilled labour was imported from Europe). As Badroodien (2004: 23, citing Malherbe) observes:

For almost 50 years before 1900, bricklaying, plastering, painting, decorating, engine cleaning, shoemaking, tailoring, carpentry and masonry were in fact widely considered only fit for coloured men and overseas workers.

While the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir George Grey, initiated a variety of formal colonial schemes of industrial education during the second half of the 1800s it was the mission schools, particularly those of the Moravian Church, that were amongst the first schools to train carpenters, bricklayers, and painters at their various mission stations - situated at places like Genadendal, Elim, Mamre and some smaller towns in the Eastern Cape. These mission schools were primarily populated by non-white learners.

As Chisholm (1989) notes, it was only with the droughts and the severe economic depression of the 1890s that vocational education was thought of as a possible form of work preparation for white learners. These industrial schools were similarly church-driven, and it was the Dutch Reformed Church that initiated their establishment in the period 1895 to 1910. According to Behr (1984), these industrial and vocational schools were established for the indigent and neglected amongst white learners.

Historically, this period in vocational education provision in South Africa was deeply ironic and paradoxical. On the one hand vocational education was initially regarded as connecting working class non-white populations to work and labour. On the other its provision in the early part of the twentieth century was meant to 'save' the 'indigent and struggling' white populations from deterioration and self-destruction. Below I address these 2 issues separately, though they were complexly intertwined within colonial and racial discourses in that period.

#### 2.5.1.1 The legacy of learning to work

For non-white learners the focus on linking education and training to work was part of the colonial ideology of 'civilising' non-white learners in the latter half of the nineteenth century" (Kallaway as cited in Badroodien, 2004: 23). This was further reinforced in missionary schools in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when missionaries combined approaches to mental and manual labour to produce learners that suited their immediate environments (Morrow, Brown and Pulimani, 2004).

As Morrow et al (2004: 107) note "it was a norm for black students at school to do sewing, bricklaying, gardening and home economics for their alleged

benefit. This adulterated form of education with production was not put in place to benefit the whole society but rather to perpetuate a master-servant relationship”.

It was an approach however that was also framed by a desire to link African learners to the land; and was an idea that was ironically expanded on by ‘alternative education and work initiatives’ in the late 1970s (Morrow et al 2004: 108) and later by the exiled ANC in Tanzania (Morrow et al 2004; Govender 2011).

Within the ‘alternative initiatives’ the focus was on providing a different route for primary school leavers that could not be absorbed into the secondary school system. It was started by a South African exile, Patrick Van Rensburg, who started an education with production (EwP) commune in neighbouring Botswana. After having established Swaneng Hill School in Botswana in 1974, Van Rensburg proceeded to establish the Foundation for Education with Production (FEP) in Botswana in 1981 that focused on developing ‘brigades’ that could operate in impoverished rural areas. The focus was on teaching impoverished communities ways of reaching economic self-sufficiency. Through learning skills such as weaving, carpentry, building, horticulture and mechanics, Van Rensburg believed a larger number of learners could be given the tools to understand and control the political, economic and social forces determining their lives (Morrow, Brown and Pulimani, 2004: 108). This approach supposedly departed from what was regarded as an elitist form of colonial education, and also diverted from previous authoritarian methods of conventional schooling, to redefine the relationship between teachers and learners, and school and society.

It was a concept (EwP) that the ANC later tried to reproduce at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) - during the exile period. Dubbed an ‘integrated education and training’ approach it was “meant to underlie the entire educational approach of SOMAFCO” (Morrow et al 2004: 105). As Patrick Mtshaulana, a former teacher at SOMAFCO, notes:

What was clear was that the ANC favoured a broadly... less straight-jacketed approach to education so that you shouldn’t have academics on this one hand and stupid people on the other side. The idea was

that the education given to people must be all round, giving and recognizing the talents and capabilities of those that were not necessarily academics and yet enriching those that were not going to go academic by giving them access to practical things like electric workshops so that they should know more or less when they have a house what happens when a plug explodes (as cited in Morrow et al 2004: 108).

Govender (2011) however challenges this ANC commitment to a kind of progressive education-work approach and claims that the ANC quickly dismissed this approach when faced with questions of what a future education and training system in South Africa (and the relationship between the hand and the mind) should encompass. He argues that the ANC in that period formulated an approach invested in academic education provision, with vocational education seen as the 'next best' or 'last chance' form of education progression.

For this thesis however, what is important to note is that the discussion about the education and work relationship was part of a colonial legacy that was initially foisted on the African population as a religious idea of 'civilising through work', and then ironically later taken up by ANC (and other African country leaders) as an important way of resolving national conflicts and challenges that reflected centuries of toil and hardship.

#### 2.5.1.2 The racialisation of vocational education provision

It is similarly important to note that the provision of technical and vocational education in South Africa was always heavily racialised, and over a period of just less than 100 years defined the relationship between education and work in South Africa in quite stark ways.

Badroodien (2004, citing Chisholm) has observed how industrial education was used to socially rehabilitate the poor white youth of South Africa from the 1890s and how this was linked to the depressed economic conditions and poverty amongst large parts of the white populace in that period. He pointed to a *Cape Argus* article of 1892 that recorded the following:

What to do with our white boys promises to be as troublesome a question in this new country as in the outworn communities of the old world. It is not that the commercial and professional classes in towns find it difficult to place their sons satisfactorily in the way of attaining a position equal to that of their fathers. The difficulty extends to the sons

of working men and what is more serious for the future of the country, to the sons of the farming community (as noted in Badroodien 2004: 24)

According to Badroodien (2004) education and training provision from 1910 focused on getting white learners into school and keeping them there; especially a white working class in urban areas that needed to be stabilised and kept apart from a non-white population (that it was claimed would 'drag it down into self-destruction'). With an unprecedented increase in state funding - an equivalent of R3.5 million in 1910 compared to R18 million in 1930 - white learners were drawn into the school net to the extent that most white learners of school-going age were in school by the 1930s (Malherbe 1977: 156).

The education authorities at the time however were challenged by the suitability of the education they were providing, as most white learners were poor and seemed uninterested in their educational development. Malherbe (1977: 156) observed that:

People began to ask why so many of the adolescents that left school were unemployed and why so many of those that got work did not seem to give satisfaction.

This was also a period (1930s) where about 17% of the white population were deemed to be 'poor' and where moving from rural areas into the cities put them in direct competition with the non-white populaces for available jobs. For many of these immigrants doing unskilled work was seen as reducing them to the level of the non-white. Malherbe (1977: 162) noted that:

He had a white skin and would not, however poor he might be, drop to the level of the black man by doing that type of work in the employ of another person.

There was thus a big focus from the 1930s to give poor white learners in South Africa access to a form of vocational education that would provide them with the appropriate skills to secure 'acceptable work' (Chisholm 1989: 251). In the midst of rapid industrialisation and the reservation (for the white population in the cities) of all semi-skilled jobs and trades, the previous practice of reserving unskilled work for the non-white population was thus slowly reversed. This trend is identified in the work of Davies (1979) and Lewis (1984) on industrialisation and trade unions where they both show how

the union government intervened from 1922 to reallocate manual and semi-skilled positions to the poor white population entering the cities.

What this development required however was an identification of the different kinds of training that were needed, which then led to a variety of forms of technical, trade, and industrial education being introduced for white learners. And as part of this process the control of industrial and vocational education for white learners was transferred from that of the provinces to the Union Education Department, and led to the formation for the first time of a national system of technical and trade schools in South Africa.

One of the outcomes of this process was the development of a single departmental Trade School Certificate for all white learners that passed out at technical, trade, and industrial schools (Rickett 1971: 88). Subsequently, all vocational education courses were to last 3 years and included a preliminary technical certificate examination (1 year where learners passed fundamental subjects like the languages and trade theory) and a national trade school certificate examination (2 years where learners demonstrated their fluency in understanding the theory and showing through the practical work test that they could complete the tasks).

A further reform in vocational provisioning was the establishment of technical high schools alongside technical colleges. In provincial secondary schools vocational subjects were introduced into their curricula to focus more on 'training for work' (cited in Badroodien 2001: 212) and included pre-apprenticeship training that had an entrance qualification of a pass in standard VI. The curricula included a mixture of academic and vocational subjects (humanities, maths, science, art, mechanical drawing, and woodwork) to which were added trade training courses in metalwork, electrical work, fitting and turning, and carpentry.

Importantly, even within this emerging national system of technical and vocational education for white learners in the late 1920s and early 1930s, there remained a firm differentiation between white learners based on intelligence and ability. Technical high schools were provided for those of 'normal intelligence', trade schools were provided for those who struggled at

school, while industrial schools were introduced for learners deemed to be of 'inferior intelligence' (Rickett 1971: 90).

For the latter category, because it was mainly associated with 'an aura of charity' and 'social rehabilitation', they (industrial schools) continued to be dogged throughout their existence by the tag of an inferior intellectual ability (and poor-whiteism) best associated with the non-white population (Rickett 1971: 24).

With time however the Union Education Department was able to raise the status of technical and vocational education for white learners and by 1944 the majority of technical, trade, and industrial schools were viewed as providing equivalent levels of vocational education. Rickett (1971: 100) has noted that:

Technical colleges came to fall under the jurisdiction of the Union Education Department in 1923, and from 1927 technical colleges established as part of their institutions, technical high schools. These schools played an important role in raising the standards of vocational education since great emphasis was placed on general formative education but also as many as 20 hours out of the 36 hour school week devoted to workshop training. Technical high schools had more qualified teachers and were thus seen as more advanced than trade schools. By 1944 there were about 9 technical high schools. But the high levels of learning at the schools led to a raising of standards at trade schools as well and in 1944 all trade schools were renamed as technical high schools and included both sets of institutions under that name thenceforth.

The main reason why this equivalence was sought was that organised industry and emerging manufacturing industries in the early 1940s did not 'recognise' the training provided at industrial and trade schools, to the extent that only 53% of white learners that graduated from such institutions, according to Malherbe (1977: 712), worked in jobs that they were trained to work in.

And despite attempts by the Union Education Department to address the growing gulf between the availability of trained technical workers and the provision of technical and vocational education and training – with the demand spurred on by rapid industrial expansion associated with the Second World War – the stigma attached to this form of education - as that for 'poor

indigent whites of low intellect' - continued to constrain whatever reforms could be made.

It was only *after the socio-economic status of poor whites was transformed* in the period 1945 to the late 1960s that significant strides were made in raising the levels and standard of education and training provision for white learners at vocational institutions (Rickett 1971: 29).

One factor that helped this process and vocational institutional development until the 1970s was the reservation of the more privileged primary labour market for white skilled and semi-skilled workers and the forcing of African, coloured and Indian workers to only compete for permanent secondary labour market employment.

### *2.5.2 Economic modernisation and labour market change*

From the 1970s however a variety of labour market and economic factors pressurised the apartheid government to rethink their approach to technical and vocational education provision. These included substantial economic modernisation, the intensification of political and labour struggles over education and work, and the collapse of influx control in the period of the late 1970s to the 1990s (Kraak, as cited in Badroodien, 2005).

The implementation of mechanized technologies and mass production techniques in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s required ('demand') new forms of cheap, semi- skilled labour power that could not be met by the 'supply' of white learners in vocational institutions. By the 1970s the vast majority of white learners, to get access to skilled employment, were either attending university or the colleges for advanced technical education (later renamed technikons) (Chisholm 1992: 10, as cited in Badroodien 2004) Hence, the apartheid government conceded that a greater number of African workers needed to be given the opportunity to participate in vocational education provision, and through this be promoted from unskilled to semi-skilled operative positions.

According to Hindson (as cited in Badroodien 2005) by 1990 African semi-skilled workers exceeded 2 million and for the first time in South Africa's history superseded the 'unskilled African proletariat as the numerically

dominant stratum of the African working class'. Notably, already by this time the majority of employers were not committed to paying for this training, to the extent that the apartheid government 'became the strongest critic of the training record of South African employers during the reform period from 1980 onwards' (NTB & HSRC, as cited in Badroodien 2005). By this time, based on the recommendations of the De Lange, Riekert, and Wiehahn reports of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the apartheid state was fully committed to a political model that relied on the demands of industry and business to lead the way in terms of education and training reform (Kraak 2004: 60).

A key recommendation in this period was the streamlining and rationalisation of labour and training legislation and the establishment of bodies to suggest what kinds of changes could be made to technical and education and training provision (Kraak 2004: 48). One finding at the time was that the apprenticeship system that had for more than 40 years served the white working class so well, was no longer effective, efficient, or appropriate. There was also a belief that skills needed to be broadened given technological changes within industries and include the 'more cognitive elements' that new technologies seemed to require. Also that progression paths needed to be created across an array of education and training institutions for all levels of workers (Kraak 2004: 49).

By this time it was recognised that streamlining had to also take cognisance of "the large numbers of unemployed, the mass of illiterate and unnumerate workers not easily trainable, and the problem of the lost generation", something that private industries were not keen to oversee.

This prompted the push for a strong focus on state co-ordination of training after 1994 (Kraak 2004: 63).

### *2.5.3 Transforming an inefficient education and training system*

Akoojee, Gewer & McGrath (2005: 99) observed that the new government in 1994 was faced with a polarised and unbalanced educational and economic legacy that it needed to urgently address. They noted that:

South Africa's social, economic and political development pathways have been perversely shaped by policies that built divisions within the country and which advantaged whites both educationally and economically at the expense of other population groups. The attempt to build and maintain white power seriously distorted the economy, bringing about excessive capital intensiveness in high-skill enclaves alongside low-skill African labour, although the deliberate under-skilling of Africans proved untenable over time. Education and training resource were heavily biased towards furthering white progress, and the logic of apartheid required the wasteful multiplication of educational administrations and institutions that were racially segmented.

At the same time economic policy had shifted from a import-substitution, resource extraction economy to a more export-orientated industrial sector - with very limited success.

This led to, according to Akoojee et al (2005), a lack of focus and the underdevelopment of essential intermediate level skills in South Africa before 1994. Thus, after numerous policy shifts, the development of supporting legislation, and the reorganisation of the education and training environment during the period 1995 to 2000, the ANC government then set about addressing this lack of intermediate skills via a co-ordinated education and training platform. The subsequent White Paper (1998) noted that "a successful FET system would provide the vital intermediate to higher-level skills and competence that our country needs to chart its own course in the global competitive world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

In doing this, the previous system of 152 technical colleges and centres were transformed and reorganised in the early 2000s to become 50 multi-campus FET Colleges, while the vocational curriculum at the senior secondary phase of schooling was also completely revamped (although only fully from 2006).

Policies that were promulgated in the period 1995 to 2001 to achieve this included the *Further Education and Training Act of 1998*, the *Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998*, the *Skills Development Levies Act of 1999*, and the *National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) of 2001*. According to Kraak (as cited in Badroodien 2005), these new legislative frameworks sought to ensure 'greater coordination and planning (through new institutions at the national and sectoral levels), greater stakeholder consensus (through the National Skills Authority), and improved funding arrangements (skills levies)

that gave the state and its new funding bodies (SETAs) real leverage over the direction of training initiatives' (Kraak 2004). From these policy developments three core components were added to the make up of the new institutional framework of the education and training system. These included:

- A new institutional framework that included 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the National Skills Authority (NSA);
- A new mechanism of training called Learnerships that better linked education to training to work;
- A new funding regime called the levy-grant system that provided the needed funds to help initiate the new system of education and training (Akoojee et al 2005).

Importantly, a key reason for reformulating the sector at the time was also to set up a set of institutions that “offered knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that it was thought South African learners needed to have to serve as individuals and citizens, as lifelong learners, and as economically productive members of society” (White Paper 4, 1998).

As such, the emerging system focused also on providing differentiated delivery and access that offered a wide range of learning options to a diverse range of learners. It was suggested at the time that the FET (vocational) Band include learning programmes registered on the National Qualification Framework between Levels 2-4 (grades 10-12) within the schooling system, a National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programme between Levels 2-4 in the college system, and a learnership training programme that was unit-standard driven and rated at Levels 2-4 on the NQF. In the latter group learnerships could be part of FET college offerings as well as that of trade training private providers that operated outside of the formal education system.

Importantly, the development of this new system must be seen as based on key historical shifts in the provision of vocational education and training provision over more than 50 years. It was an attempt both to address key legacies that had come to signify the provision of technical and vocational education, and to engage with important changes that had occurred in its development from the 1970s onwards, with a greater focus on skills

development and the alignment of an array of institutional contexts to facilitate this.

Badroodien & Kallaway (2004) notes that it “was argued at the time that this kind of systemic reform would better nurture the kinds of knowledge and skills that were needed to link learners more effectively to the world of work”.

In the next section I return to the discussion of skills development and relate this to crucial education and training policy developments in South Africa after 1994.

## **2.6 The focus on skills development**

An important part of *White Paper 4* (1998) was its provision for the closer co-operation between the Labour and Education ministries in terms of sharing labour market information, career guidance through market training needs, building links between training and job placement, and sharing information on tracer studies of graduates. The White Paper asserted that when fully developed a new FET system would provide high-quality education and training within a differentiated system, and offer a wider range of learning options to a diverse range of learners consisting of school-going young people, out of school youth, young adults and the larger adult population. Crucially, the main purpose of developing such a system was to firmly tie education and training provision (at the various levels of personal, social, civic, and economic development) to the critical human resource needs of the country (WP4 1998: 5).

### **2.6.1 The launch of a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS)**

The launching of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) in 2001 was not only seen as an important vehicle to advance the skills development agenda in South Africa, but also a critical way of identifying, tracking, and measuring the levels of skills development in the country and charting the way forward on how to respond to this (Lundall 2003: 4).

In this regard, the Department of Labour acknowledged at the time that factors such as the lack of relevant schooling and the collapse of the youth labour market were critical social, economic, and educational problems that

faced South Africa, and that the state needed to develop a programme that addressed and remedied the identified skills shortages of the country.

The issue of responding to the absence of relevant schooling pathways and the collapse of the youth labour market was thus understood not as much a need to reformulate levels of technical and vocational education and knowledge, but as an essential skills development challenge.

According to South African President at that time, Thabo Mbeki, the issue of skills was seen as both a constraint to socio-economic delivery and a means to simultaneously address the need to compete in the global market and uplift those who lived in poverty and who lacked decent work. He argued that skills development could be an important catalyst between his 'two nations' – reflected in South Africa's uneven historical development – where the nation was part of the global-knowledge based and consumerist First World, and part of the poor and marginalised Third World (Mbeki as cited in Akoojee, Gewer and McGarth, 2005). He argued that South Africa needed to embark on a pathway that created a multi-skilled workforce that establish it as part of the global village and allowed it to respond to the continuous demands of the market as competencies and knowledge became obsolete and in need of replacement.

In setting out this vision, a clear role for vocational education and training was envisaged, where a reorganised FET College sector and new learnership programmes were seen as critical in reducing youth unemployment and upskilling the nation.

As such, much attention was also given to establishing of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the creation of a Skills Levies Act that would be responsible for the collection and transfer of levies from employers to SETAs to fund training. The goal was to reimburse employers for the costs incurred in training their staff from the fees collected from them (Burns & Marshall, 2004: 187).

In attaching the reform of education and training to a skills policy agenda the aim was to create universalised, basic, generic, and job-specific skills throughout the working population and provide and encourage more

continuous learning opportunities. As noted in the strategic objectives of the NSDS below, these characteristics were mainly conceptualised in narrow economic terms:

- Developing a culture of high quality life-long learning.
- Fostering skills development in the formal economy for productivity and employment growth.
- Stimulating and supporting skills development in small business.
- Promoting skills development for employability and sustainable livelihoods through social development initiatives.
- Assisting new entrance into employment (Lundall 2003: 2).

According to Macun (2000: 174) a consistent theme in South Africa's skills policies during the 1990s was the importance placed on education and training being demand-led. This emphasis on demand-led training was commonly interpreted to mean 'responding to employer needs' and hence ensuring 'training for employment'. It was also seen as reversing the poor human resource development approach of the previous apartheid regime and focusing on the need for basic and intermediate skills on which work-based learning could be established.

In this regard, the ANC-led government took the lead of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in developing a disaggregated approach to the principle of demand-led training, and developed policy guidelines that guided skills planning and training delivery in ways that seemed appropriate to economic and labour market developments (Macun 2000: 175).

The ILO identified a variety of sites that could potentially deliver the skills demanded by various spheres of society, which included:

- Pre-labour market (schooling + adult education + vocational education);
- Labour-market entry training (induction + apprenticeship + on the job training + institutional);

- Internal labour market training (retraining for performance + retraining for upgrading/mobility);
- Adjustment training (retraining for retrenchment + unemployment training);
- Flexibility training (institutional + multi-tasking vs. multi-skilling) (ILO cited in Macun 2000: 175).

According to Kraak and Hall (2000) it was the first two forms of training that were targeted in skills development programmes, with a particular focus on the 'pre-labour market training' that was mainly devoted to formal schooling that previously had weak links to the world of work and little incorporation of vocational education in the curriculum. This approach was adopted notwithstanding the caution by Gill, Fluitman and Dar (as cited in Macun 2000: 180) that:

Governments often expect their vocational education and training (VET) systems to perform feats that they would not expect from other systems such as general education. They have called upon VET systems to help unemployed young people and older workers get jobs, reduce the burden on higher education, to attract foreign investment, to ensure rapid growth of earnings and employment, to reduce the inequality of earnings between the rich and the poor, and so on. This list is disconcertingly long. These high expectations have resulted in heavy government involvement in VET, but the record has been disappointing.

Subsequently, a policy document was formulated that argued that:

The quality of our FET schooling phase and work and training must be responsive to the needs of the labour market and prepare learners for the challenges of the 21st century. The FET phase, which is between the compulsory school phase and higher education, must prepare learners to continue on to higher educational institutions or to contribute to the economy. The further education and training sector is a key pillar in the development of the human resources that are so important for the reconstruction and development of South Africa. This can be seen as an investment in human capital to ensure that we acquire the required skills to reconstruct and develop our society (Lolwana 2001: 9).

The document further argued that:

Qualifications are required that enable learners to embark upon a productive and responsible role in the workplace which is likely to be more specific in its range of competencies and to have less diversity in

its skills and knowledge as a ‘fit for purpose qualification’ - its breadth makes it a neat, ‘catch-all’ qualification (Lolwana 2001: 9).

### 2.6.2 The reorganisation of the vocational education and training sector

The main purpose of the qualification that was subsequently envisaged was to recognise learners that had the necessary skills and competence to enter places of work and to provide them with a basis for even further learning. This became known as a FET qualification.

In this regard the Senior Certificate (grade 12) was replaced with a Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) at the end of 2008 (Government Gazette 2003: 3), while at FET Colleges an outcomes-based education curriculum was introduced in 2007 with the implementation of 12 National

<i>Type of qualification/pathway</i>	<i>Nature of knowledge</i>
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Vocational Certificates (NCV) Level 2 (this replaced the N1-N3 curriculum).

The NCV programs were more occupational-inclined and were developed as a way of addressing the skill shortages of the country. The NCV program was a 130-credit qualification with an exit point at NQF Level 4, and was awarded and quality assured by Umalusi.

At the trade training private centres the focus was on getting learners to develop expertise in their fields and thus their progress was tracked through unit standards and focused on what learners needed for their particular occupations. Young (2006) refers to the above 3 categories as part of a tri-partite FET Band. This is further explained in the section below.

### 2.7 The development of a tri-partite FET band to support skills development

Young (2006) identifies three learning pathways tied to the FET band worldwide. They were:

- A general academic pathway
- A general vocational pathway
- An occupational and professional pathway

General academic	Discipline-based knowledge
General Vocational	Occupationally recontextualised disciplinary knowledge
Occupational	Knowledge implicit in performance at work

He notes that where introduced the 3 pathways did not necessarily bring new ideas, nor were the differences between each of them fixed or clearly defined. Rather the three pathways had their origins in processes of industrialization as they emerged differently across the world (as discussed earlier in the chapter) and were also key parts of 19<sup>th</sup> century debates on the division between academic and vocational education.

Where the three pathways differed however, according to Young (2006: 54), was in the knowledge base of their qualifications. This is best described in Table 3 below.

*TABLE 3: Knowledge base of qualifications*

Notably, Young (2006) reminds that the general (vocational) pathway was never really based on academic principles linked to general education, nor was it linked to apprenticeship or naturally lead to employment. Rather, it was a pathway in most countries that became over time an alternative to the academic route and as a way of providing opportunities to weaker students in the compulsory phase to ensure they got certificated.

### **2.7.1 General Academic Pathway**

In this pathway the curricula normally consisted of subjects that were derived from university-based disciplines adjusted to suit younger learners. This approach sought to emphasise the importance of preparing learners for higher education (HE). And where there were subjects that were not based on university disciplines, as in the case of technology, the subjects were invariably not taken up by a large number of learners (Young, 2006: 54).

The general academic pathway was offered at schools and the goal was that learners exited schools with a qualification that was fully articulated with other

learning pathways. The general academic pathway was characterised by the following factors, namely by

- Typical number of subjects taken
- Range of subjects
- Degree of student choice/ compulsion
- Nature of the core (Fundamentals in South Africa)
- Extent to which subjects were modularized; and
- A given structure of assessment (Young 2006).

### **2.7.2 General Vocational Pathway**

This pathway was a turning point within the dual purpose of a Further Education Training curriculum within schools. In contrast to general academic curricula, general vocational curricula were not formed directly by academic principles. While the principles of these disciplines were inevitably evident, the vocational curriculum tended to focus on recontextualisation and adopted a dualist approach to disciplinary knowledge.

For example, in the first stage it transformed the knowledge of disciplinary sciences and social sciences into applied sciences and technologies that considered the specific needs and demands of different types of services or manufacturers. In this stage it was normally members of professions such as engineers, medical personnel, and managers that made the adjustments/recontextualisation. In the second stage the pathway focused on pedagogic recontextualisation, namely what could be taught and to whom this would be taught. This included an aspect of selection, where ex-professionals that specialized in teaching were asked to make the selections.

What was distinctive about the vocational curriculum was that its subjects took into account the occupational sectors they related to, and not just the institutional context of the institution where it was provided. This was unlike general academic subjects where they were shaped by the institution of schooling.

Furthermore, within this pathway occupations and sectors had different requirements and durations. Not all occupations offered the same opportunities for progression or access to higher or professional qualifications.

As such, the general vocational pathway was offered mainly at FET colleges and specialized high schools (technical high schools) and was aimed at 16-18 year olds operating at NQF Levels 2-4. The pathway was career-focused and sought to assist and sift learners into particular occupational career choices.

### **2.7.3 Occupational Pathway / Occupational and Professional (TOP)**

The occupational pathway originated from the old apprentice system and state-led traineeships. In South Africa for example the learnership model of the 2000s was based on the traineeship model of the previous government (Young, 2006). Interestingly, both models were on the decline globally as a result of economic and technological change. Technological advances within capitalist industries had in recent times led to the retrenchment of craft occupations and developed a clear split between employees required for manual skills, and employees required for conceptual work.

What was different about this pathway was that the trade, occupational and professional (TOP) model allowed learners to make specific career choices. And learning took place at learning sites or simulated workplace-learning sites (college workshop/ private provider) where the necessary skills and competencies were taught according to guidelines provided by the relevant professional bodies.

### **2.7.4 Learnerships and apprenticeships**

As learnerships were a distinctive South African model, the section below focuses mainly on the South African context. The aim is to show the relationship of the apprenticeship model and learnerships to the above 3 pathways. I link this relationship to developments from 1994 where the apprenticeship system declined and ceased to exist, and was replaced by a learnership program that sought to link a wider variety of learners to different workplaces. Given the latter focus, learnerships only operated in the general vocational pathway and the occupational pathway.

In terms of its orientation apprenticeships and learnerships were about the build-up and transfer of skills, and as such these were historically over centuries transmitted from master to apprentice in a variety of ways – by demonstration, structured experimentation, or practice.

In South Africa however this transfer of skill had a very particular history that started with the artisans that were imported (mainly from Britain and Europe) to work on the gold and diamond mines in the 1880s. With these artisans came certain skills transfers as well as a number of occupational traditions. One of these was the formal apprenticeship contract that was signed between expert and novice (Potgieter 2003).

Given the history of education and training provision in the country these contracts were only ever signed with white learners and workers. According to Potgieter (2003) the apprenticeship system was thus associated with a number of practices and developments that needed to be transformed after 1994. These practices included

- The use of apprenticeships under apartheid as a tool to discriminate between workers based on race;
- The restriction of apprenticeships to specific trades that focused on certain skilled and disciplinary knowledge and was tied to the 'job reservation' policies of the past;
- The very narrow focus of apprenticeships on a narrow band of skills and an equally narrow and limited pathway;
- As apprenticeships were agreements between employees and employers, and employers and technical colleges there was no clear sense of quality assurance; and lastly
- The apprenticeship system in South Africa traditionally focused on the development of skills and knowledge in particular occupations and was not overly concerned with serving the human resource needs of the country (Potgieter 2003).

As a result of the above legacies, from the 1980s the system of apprenticeship was generally discouraged and discontinued.

In that respect the establishment of a learnership system that was practical-orientated was thereafter seen as a new paraprofessional and vocational education and training program that could stretch across the old artisan and professional divide and bring together the differences that separated them. It sought to combine both theory and practice across various workplaces so that learners could be trained not only in why things were done, but also how they were done (Department of Labour, as cited in Potgieter 2003).

Learnerships, according to Potgieter (2003: 170) could be described as:

- A work-based learning route to a qualification registered with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF);
- An integration of education and training, as well as theory and work experience;
- Containing a structured institutional learning and assessment component;
- Led to a whole qualification on any of the eight NQF levels and invariably terminated in a whole qualification;
- Covered all 25 economic sectors in South Africa;
- A program that specifically sought to support the investment being made in South Africa's available human resources.

And with regard to assessment practices around learnerships, see page 131 in the thesis below to get some sense of how one SETA (MERSETA) dealt with this challenge.

As noted above however it should be noted that the learnership program was initially established to achieve very specific agendas and was tied to a skills development discourse that sought to address the vast skills shortage needs of the country and concerns about unemployment and underemployment. While the program was tied to a formal qualification and linked to all levels of the NQF, one of the key problems of the learnership program was the absence of a clear link to particular forms of disciplinary knowledge and occupations.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Allais (2006) reminds that the reform of vocational education and training programmes in many countries across the world was historically designed to suit the needs of learners that were not coping academically and that included very little learning that actually prepared them for access to higher education. For example, in the South African context, the history of vocational education and training provision was designed in such a way that it was very difficult to really gain access to higher education. Which was why Minister of Further and Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, initiated a public discussion in 2009 on how to co-ordinate higher certificate, diploma and degree programmes with a National Certificate (Vocational) at NQF Level 4.

The goal of this initiative was to create opportunities for the development of highly skilled learners through a vocational route to higher education.

Young (as cited in Allais 2006) has noted however that many vocational subjects at college and school do not possess the disciplinary knowledge base that would give them access to higher education institutions or the insights that significantly expanded their horizons. For Young (as cited in Allais 2006) these learners were mostly provided with knowledge that trapped them in the worlds that they were already familiar with.

Allais (2006) argues that a key challenge for current education and training education reform was how to “improve vocational programmes by increasing the extent to which they offered learners opportunities to actually acquire meaningful disciplinary knowledge, alongside valid practical knowledge”.

She notes that a problem with the current outcomes-based qualification-driven approach was that it assumed that all knowledge was the same once it was mapped against outcome statements (Allais 2006: 30), and cautions that this has serious implications for the successful implementation of diversified vocational education offerings in the future. It is this argument that is taken up in chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis.

The value of the chapter is its discussion of key macro developments and policy processes that have framed and influenced the ways in which FET Participants on the ground think about they are doing in their different

vocational education spaces. A further highlight is the discussion of the overwhelming preoccupation that policy makers seem to have had with skills training and development over many decades.

### **2.9 Postscript: The Green Paper for Post school Education and Training**

Given my discussion of changes in South Africa's education and training system across the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was necessary once the study was virtually complete to also reflect on various recent changes in the system.

This was necessary as with the formation of the Department of Higher Education and Training in 2009 most of the descriptions of the newly-formed education and training system changed quite substantially, as captured in the Green Paper on Post-school Education and Training of 2012. My goal is not to amend those descriptions here but rather to reflect on some key changes.

The one key change was that with the establishment of the DHET all learning institutions offering post-school qualifications were brought together under one umbrella. These institutions included all higher education institutions, FET colleges, and adult education institutions (which previously were separately administered by the Department of Education (DoE), and the skills levy institutions hosted by the Department of Labour (DoL). In formalising and giving shape and direction to a new post-school sector, the Green Paper noted in 2012 that:

Despite the many advances and gains made since 1994, the education and training system continues to produce gender, class, racial and other inequalities with regard to access to educational opportunities and success. One of the greatest challenges facing the system is the large number of young people who face a very bleak future. Unless major changes are introduced. Equally important, the post-school system is not meeting the needs of the economy and society as a whole (DHET 2012: xii).

The aim of the Green Paper was to align the post-school education and training system with South Africa's overall development agenda, with links to various developments strategies such as the New Growth Path, the Industrial Policy Action Plan<sup>2</sup>, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010-2030, and South Africa's Ten-Year Innovation Plan. This would allow it to contribute, it was claimed, more effectively to the goal of inclusive

economic growth and development, and help fundamentally in reducing unemployment and poverty (DHET 2012: xiii).

The biggest challenge that the Green Paper highlighted however was the approximately 3 million young people between the ages of 18-24 who were not in education nor employed. The Green Paper predicted that not only did this provide a bleak future for the unemployed youth, but also threatened the social stability of South African society. Of particular concern was the educational levels of 18-24 year olds that had secondary education less than grade 10 and those that had grade 10 or higher but less than grade 12. A further category of concern was the grade 12 learners with NTC 111 with no exception. I provide below only three levels as extracted from table captured by Cloete et al (as cited in the Green Paper, 2012: 4) and also provide the total figures for all educational and age levels. Notably, these three categories make up 75% of the total number described – namely 2,098,048 youth out of the noted 2,812,471.

Education Level	AGE							TOTAL
	18	18	20	21	22	23	24	
Secondary education less than grade 10	51,192	59,643	73,194	79,050	83,367	81,502	80,649	508,597
Grade 10 /Std8 or higher but less than grade12	65,228	94,608	132,158	164,596	176,733	174,325	183,146	990,794
Grade12/ NTC111(no exemption)	47,447	65,190	89,292	99,797	100,711	96,139	100,080	598,657
<b>TOTAL</b>	241,056	305,333	393,441	455,434	474,501	464,119	478,587	2,812,471

*TABLE 4: Not employed, not in education 18-24 age cohort*

As such the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (GPSET) (2012) has a projected aim of achieving a participation rate of 60% of this group in college or other post-school institutions (such as community and training centres) by 2030. There are also further discussions on establishing Community and Education Training Centres (CETCs) as a way of addressing

the problem and needs of unemployed youths and adults in South Africa currently.

The DHET claims that for a truly integrated education system to be successful in South Africa, all institutional growth paths need to be aligned to the country's overall development agenda, with direct links made to various development strategies such as the New Growth Path, the Industrial Policy Action Plan 2, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010-2030, and South Africa's Ten-Year Innovation Plan (GPSET, 2012). The goal, claim the DHET, is to establish a post-school system that is equitable, accessible, and affordable to all sections of population. This includes free education and training for the poor. The motto that 'a skills revolution is the key route through which 'opportunities for all' is effectively delivered' (Campbell, 2002:65) seems to have become accepted as the fundamental reality of the South African context.

## CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT AND THE FET BAND

### 3.1 Introduction

In the chapter below I introduce discussions on assessment as both captured in the academic literature and explored in education and training processes and reforms in South Africa after 1994. I further locate these discussions in relation to the educational frameworks that were set up from 1994 to support these policy reform initiatives.

The thrust of the argument is that assessment, as tied to the introduction of a new curriculum in South Africa after 1994, has taken up a quite powerful role and function within the current system. But it has focused primarily on monitoring and measuring; roles and functions that fit in very neatly with the neo-liberal model of a 'lean, non-interventionist state in which the responsibility for the provision of services lies with the localities'. Benveniste (2002: 93) refers to this as when a education and training system has both a '*rational-functional*' rationale - where "assessment is a pathway to solutions for policy dilemmas" – and a '*symbolic*' rationale – where assessment is used to legitimate state action and only appear to be trying to evaluate academic performance.

At its best however, assessment can play an integral part of the whole learning process, and lead to effective teaching and learning. This it can do by assisting in the diagnosis of learning difficulties, enabling teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching, giving pupils feedback on their own learning and thereby improving their learning, and helping pupils become more aware of and responsible for their own learning (Weedon, Winter & Broadfoot, 2002). Indeed, while instruction in class may touch the minds of learners, it is important to realise that it is assessment that fundamentally touches their hearts (Reineke 1998). For it is '*assessment for learning*', according to Weedon et al (2002), that ultimately affect and shape lives of learners. And, in terms of shaping their attitude to learning, remain with them (learners) at the emotional level across their lives (Reineke 1998).

In the end, however, assessment is very much part of a bigger policy agenda, vision, and process and ultimately its activities provide particular meaning to

different stakeholders, teachers, parents, learners, and policy makers (Weedon et al 2002; Vandeyar and Killen 2007:102). More importantly, assessment is differently conceptualised for various education sectors, keeping in mind the stakeholders that inhabit that sector and the goal and purpose of provision in relation to the kind of learner being 'reproduced' in that sector. Weedon et al (2002) refer to the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of these different sectors as '*assessment of learning*'.

The chapter below outlines the variety of challenges and dilemmas attached to assessment against the background of the VET sector and in relation to the two models proposed above by Benveniste (2002) and Weedon et al (2002). The purpose of the overall outline is to sketch the landscape of assessment for further discussion in chapters 5 and 6.

### **3.2 Assessment as change agent in education and training provision**

The 1980s in South Africa was probably the period of most intense and far-reaching change in educational policy and practice. In and amongst the political and ideological reasons for the changes, where education policy reforms were probably most concentrated was around assessment. Hargreaves (1990: 99) notes that it would be "no exaggeration to say that the 1980s (onwards) could be characterised as the era of assessment-led education reform".

Without going into the reasons for this shift in educational focus, it can be safely argued that assessment from the 1980s, more than curriculum content or pedagogy, became regarded as the prime driver for educational change. Rust (2002: 145, citing Brown) observes that policy makers from that period quickly realised that "if you want to change student learning, then change the methods of assessment!" It was argued that learners had come to regard assessment as defining the 'actual curriculum' - or at least the curriculum that they needed to know in order to succeed in the contemporary world (Ramsden 1992). As such, from that time assessment more than any other process came to have the most powerful and wide-ranging set of roles and functions, and then effects, within the modern educational landscape (Hargreaves 1990).

Many argued that as education was aimed at creating enabling teaching and learning environments that engendered desired changes in learners – such as to be more knowledgeable, better skilled, or to develop positive attitudes and values - the main objective of teaching and learning needed to be able to better plan teaching events and to be better able to ascertain to what extent learners had acquired the intended competencies (Malan 2000).

On the one hand, according to Biggs (2001: 5), assessment was regarded as the most important component in the education system because “getting assessment wrong would lead to getting everything wrong”. Biggs (2001) noted that we “thus need to be clear about why we assess, what we assess, how we assess, and who is involved in the assessing”.

On the other hand, the period after the 1980s was also a time when there was a far bigger focus on trying to make education - and therefore assessment systems - as ‘unthreatening as possible’ - ‘not to mention fair’. Many argued that the assessment process and criteria needed to be as explicit and transparent to learners as possible” if the envisaged social and educational results were to be attained (Rust, 2002: 151). Beets & van Louw (2011) remind us that until this new focus emerged (particularly from the mid 1990s) the main experience that learners had of assessment was “something that was done to them, and not with them”. This practice, they argued, excluded learners from the assessment process and denied them a chance of becoming actively involved in their own learning. They argued that the outcome of the “assessment process itself should not add to the alienation of either the learner or the teacher in the education process, but rather create an environment in which the deep participation and recognition of all role-players were always strengthened” (Beets & van Louw 2011: 315).

Furthermore, O’Brien and Guiney (as cited in Beets and van Louw 2011: 314), asserted that in that period many policy makers and participants were returning to the epistemological orientation of the word ‘assessment’ - namely to the word derived from its Latin root “assidere” which meant “to sit beside”. This implied that both the learner and teacher needed to be actively involved in determining the gap between the learner’s actual and potential level of

performance, as well as planning the next steps to guide the further development of learners.

Assessment as a process and activity thus had a variety of different practice and support-based meanings to various stakeholders, teachers, parents, learners, community and politicians in the period after 1980.

Yet, even though there were many and also different viewpoints on the role and purpose of assessment, it was ironic that from the 1990s (into the present) assessment came to be mainly characterised and understood in relation to three main emphases, namely

- (1) How teachers measured their own as well as their colleagues competences;
- (2) How parents, politicians and communities judged the progress and success of educational institutions; and
- (3) How learners understood their achievements, and what was expected of them compared to their peers - as well as how they ensured they got the certification to reflect this.

In that regard, Hargreaves (1990: 144, citing Broadfoot) argues that assessment for all stakeholders in the period after the 1980s came to mainly attest for 'the levels of competence that were being developed', the kind of 'curriculum content' that was being organised to achieve this, and the maintenance of overall control over educational development and change (or its absence).

But perhaps most importantly, according to Hargreaves (1990), assessment became an instrument within education and training systems where a particular kind of competitive spirit and industry-focused logic within the educational process and its organisation was simulated, regulated, and encouraged.

### **3.3. Education and assessment as part of a larger global economic policy discussion**

The importance attached to assessment as discussed above must thus be seen in light of policy thinking where both the adherents and critics of globalization seemed to agree that education was undoubtedly the main route

to economic competitiveness. Spreen (as cited in Allais, 2003: 311) observes that “whatever their ideological stance most educational observers recognize a global trend that has moved education to the centre stage in ensuring economic survival and the growth of nation states”. Within this international view, the reorganisation of education and training systems (and their workings) were thus seen as needing to create routes within their policy infrastructures for the development of highly skilled, mobile workforces - which would presumably increase and stimulate international competitiveness.

Rizvi & Lingard (2010: 136) argue that the central purpose (of education) in this environment was “the production of the requisite quantity and quality of human capital within a given nation - human capital that was regarded as necessary to ensuring the international competitiveness of national economies (the boundaries of which, of course, melted into global economies)”.

This ‘economisation’ of education policy (Foley cited in Allais 2003) had two key implications for education systems. Firstly, the teachers who were traditionally seen ‘as servants of the state’ were thereby reconstituted as ‘servants of the global economy’ with a strong focus on developing uniform standards across different contexts. Secondly, given this preconceived pursuit of ‘world class standards’, curricula within individual countries had to be redesigned along the identified competency-based lines that were deemed necessary to promote flexible specialisation within workers (Foley as cited in Allais, 2003: 311).

According to Spring (2000: 25), because of this economisation of policy thinking, it was therefore not unusual in the policy environment to hear civil servants and policymakers casually explain the nature and purpose of policy and changes in practice with comments such as “we must think in business terms if we want world class systems” and “given that competences are generally defined by the skills and knowledge employees need to function effectively in the workplace, it is only logical that industry be the acknowledged setter of competency standards and what was needed” (Veal 2009: 2763).

What this suggested, observed Spring (2000), was that changes in policy and practices brought with them particular mindsets that shaped and defined what was being reconfigured. This influence of a 'language of business' led to thinking that focused on 'products' being produced in ways that adhered to a set of predetermined guidelines and approaches. With education being approached as a commodity, entire systems of practice were thus subtly reshaped by terminologies that substitute 'school principals' with 'managers', 'students' with 'consumers', and 'parents' with 'clients'. Furthermore, with changed management structures that were meant to 'empower learners', the 'deliverers' of the 'production process' were being tasked with satisfying the needs of their 'different clients' by creating an infrastructure that could be monitored and measured to ensure effectiveness.

As such, assessment systems within such education programs focused on monitoring and measuring, and achieving particular sets of 'products' and 'results' that reflected a form of economic thinking that embodied ideas of corporation and managerialism, competition and accountability (Kellaghan & Greaney, as cited in Benveniste, 2002: 92). Assessment systems in such a scenario "supported a lean, non-interventionist state model in which the responsibility for the provision of services was devolved to localities", and where stakeholders at local levels committed to partake in forms of market competition and consumer accountability (Benveniste 2002: 93).

Crucially, according to Spreen (cited in Allais 2003), the ways in which this type of systemic thinking (in relation to assessment) was formulated also ensured that even when some education systems and local bodies came up with different kinds of formulations to prevent their provisions from being overly mechanistic, these systems were nonetheless shaped and changed by the overall economic thinking and goals that drove their overall national policies.

For example, when Climaco (1992: 295) suggests that it was more useful to utilise the concept of 'performance' rather than focusing on 'results' as the main focus of assessment, he sought to identify and introduce an approach for educators and vocational education Participants that helped them to better fulfil their educative roles within institutions and not be preoccupied by results.

Climaco (1992: 295) claims that as a multi-faceted metaphor, the term 'performance' implied 'quality results' or a product of competence and meta-analytical awareness as a condition for improvement, and that the notion of performance could better accommodate the 'visibilities' and 'invisibilities' of action. As such, performance could be seen as a 'progressive activity' as expressed 'by the results of actions alongside the conditions and contingencies under which the actions took place' (Climaco 1992: 295).

However, the key problem with an approach like Climaco's was that being a multi-faceted metaphor the term performance was inevitably tied to the question 'performance for what', which was then informed by the particular needs of the overall system being developed. In this regard, learner results and performance within education systems were invariably part of broader political and economic questions; questions that educators and local Participants mostly didn't broach. Of even more concern to Pring (2000: 25) was that the thinking attached to the nature and needs of these broader global economic questions - whether educators agreed with them or not - shaped and changed educator activities and practices within educational systems; often into something that was entirely different to what educators originally intended or supported.

Following Benveniste (2002), I argue in the chapter below that to understand the role of assessment within the make-up of the current South African education and training system (and specifically the FET vocational band) one needs to identify and explain the kinds of 'politics and the nature of state-polity relations' that have led to the reconfiguring of the design, implementation, and practice of assessment systems in South Africa. In so doing I provide models provided by Benveniste (2002) and Weedon, Broadfoot (2002) to relate issues of assessment to state-polity interactions. I also outline the background to what I believe has made the current connection between state vision and education and training policy formulation (and frameworks) such a problematic one. As I later argue in chapter 6, in its current form the policy developments that have accompanied education and training reform will seriously limit the emergence of a meaningful and substantial education and training (VET) sector in South Africa.

### **3.4 Assessment – rational data collection or ritualistic ceremonial function?**

What makes the above debate a bit more complex is that the ‘enthusiasm for national assessment systems’ is *not* typically driven by the conscious need to monitor or control for the mere sake of the economy, but rather by a belief that quality education is an indispensable element in producing the high skilled labour needed for national development (Benveniste 2002: 91). It is further tied to a belief that in struggling to keep up with the demand for education, public schooling is being bogged down by organisational requirements and that assessment systems can be championed as key ways of helping public schools and other educational institutions to identify where the gaps in their local processes and facilities lie, and to assist them to succeed according to their individual responsibilities and challenges.

Hargreaves (1990: 149) asserts that while assessment is often viewed as crucial to the process of educational selection, “it needs to be recognized that it also serves other valuable, indeed indispensable educational purposes. At its best, assessment can aid diagnosis of learning difficulties, enable teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching, give pupils feedback on their own learning and then improve it, and (in the form of self-assessment) help pupils become more aware of and responsible for their own learning, discussing and negotiating it with their teachers where appropriate”.

In that sense, according to Hargreaves (1990: 149), assessment is not just a way of ranking and rating the products of learning, but “an integral part of the learning process itself”. As such, assessment can be not only a key catalyst for effective learning and suitable teaching, but also constitute ‘a rite of passage’ for learners to be afforded “fair treatment and given an impartial share of the benefits” (Gardner as cited in Beets and van Louw 2011: 306).

The question remains though, over and above validating the learning outcomes and assisting effective learning, how does one really understand the main role and purpose of assessment within the educational frameworks that have actually developed in the recent environment?

Benveniste (2002) offers a model that includes two key ideas with which to explore this question. These regard assessment as:

- A rational-functional instrument or rationale that assist educators, policy makers, and educational managers to identify inefficiencies in the educational delivery and to suggest ways of remedying this. Testing outcomes here serves as a device to scientifically collect objective data that can support rational decision making at both the classroom and policy levels. Objective information is thus seen as one of a variety of ways of supporting the education system to achieve quality, equity, and efficiency;
- A symbolic instrument or rationale that legitimises state action by embracing internationally accepted models of modernity. In this model, testing is a 'ritual activity' inspired by a need to align state practices to accepted global patterns of policy making, and for that purpose decouples schooling inputs from its outputs in policy discourses. This not only allows the state to commit itself to high-quality services and not accept liability for what is produced, but also reinforce the exercise of power by dominant interests in society (Benveniste 2002: 93).

I found the two rationales especially useful in engaging with the South African context and developments after 1994 with regard to the policies, frameworks, and institutional regimes that were established. Thus, in the sections below I discuss for example how the development of a *rational-functionalist* national qualifications framework in South Africa not only brought an emphasis on the definition and classification of a diverse range of skills and standards in the country, but also ascribed "various methods of classification against relevant levels of the new framework" (Veal 2009: 2766). I also note how the incoming NQF shifted the focus away from policy implementation to one that highlighted 'effective assessment' - where skills acquired were assessed in relation to competencies identified in the new framework and not according to how much learning had taken place. This quest and attainment of qualifications supposedly helped policy makers and educators to sort information into elements that they could understand (Veal 2009), but also functioned more to *symbolically* align the education and training system to global models of policy making (Benveniste 2002: 94).

### **3.5 Building a new assessment regime through qualification and outputs**

To discuss the policy processes that brought about a new assessment regime in South Africa after 1994, one needs however to first question what is understood as a qualification, a skill, or a competency. How were these valued both in relation to learning situations and to the economy, and did this 'value' differ according to them being skills or competencies? Also, how did we conceptually end up with this focus on competencies, skills, and qualifications?

According to UNESCO (1990) the demand for education and training that built up over a number of years worldwide created a scenario where there came a particular focus on issues of competencies, qualifications, and systems of recognition within different national arrangements. This was because in new economic environments individuals were considered to be employable only when they had a broad-based education and training with a particular set of portable skills. Furthermore, what this entailed for education and training systems was a need for multiple entry and exit points to allow learners to build up an array of skills over time. This was because the acquisition of skills was seen to be obligatory over their lifetimes, rather than an added bonus for their individual growth.

How then did one build up a set of skills? In the systemic move away from a focus on teacher performance and curriculum delivery (inputs) towards a student-centred acquisition of learning outcomes (outputs), it was the concept of 'competencies' in a newly developing education and training regime that became the most popular way of measuring outputs. It was argued that competencies focused on the outcome – on what learners could demonstrably do- rather than on what they may have learnt through time-based education and training. As such, different *competencies* could be brought together to signify a *set of skills* that then could be built into a *qualification* (a certification of skill) and provide evidence of learning (Veal 2009: 2763). Within this approach learner performance was not underpinned by knowledge, values, or attitudes, but by the practical competencies that they displayed. Competencies were linked to the content of the job as well as to the environments, they expressed themselves in action and in a specific context,

and they were revealed through procedures, strategies and outcomes (Colardyn 2009: 2779).

In terms of developing a way of organising this, modularisation became a formalised way of 'clustering' the outcomes of learning and training - with modules/units/units of competence making up (the breakdown of) a qualification and being able to be assessed in their own right as well as in relation to the larger whole (Stanwick 2003).

Veal (2009: 2764) offers four reasons why a 'practical value' and modularised form became attached to learning in this way:

1. It signalled to employers a positive relationship between learning and practice/work - so that they would financially commit to and support the newly developed system:
2. It highlighted the value of focusing on practice- especially given research done by Rideout et al (2006) that showed that where there was a close relationship of trust and agreement between education providers and employers, qualifications tended to be accorded greater overall value;
3. In a modularised and practical form competencies, skills, and qualification frameworks could be duplicated over a variety of contexts with mutual recognition systems of equivalence easily established, and skills and qualifications harmonised across regions; and
4. Outputs could be better measured against other similar outputs, regardless of where the learning or training was undertaken. This meant that outputs could be uncoupled from the provider and quality could be recognised and measured through sets of qualifications attained.

As such, qualifications came to mainly serve as the 'sorting mechanism' in global and regional economies, especially in contexts where it was not possible to personally understand the content and value of a given education and where the sources of that education was varied and plentiful. It provided a more direct valuation of educational effort and ability (as captured in sets of

competencies), as well as its possible value to a local labour market. And assessment in such a relationship provided the straightforward instrument for measuring outcomes and making clear to stakeholders the meaning of those measures (Veal 2009: 2766).

### **3.6 The reform of the education and training system in South Africa and the introduction of an NQF**

As noted in chapter 2 of this thesis, the reform of technical and vocational education and training systems (VET) across the world was not an isolated event. Rather, this process could be linked to broader worldwide trends in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to overhaul the public sector itself. As part of that process it was argued that the success of VET reforms across the world depended largely on the extent to which the component parts of the VET system succeeded and upon the ways in which the various components fitted together as a system.

This was made even more difficult in a sector (VET) that was perhaps the most complex of all sectors of education. Its complexity lay in VET invariably having a social purpose (in responding to the economic and social needs of societies) as well as a strong labour market focus. It thus often had to serve 'different masters'. The various components of VET also had quite diverse objectives, and frequently spanned a variety of sectors and methods of provision.

Thus, while the education and training system in the past consisted of quite discrete initiatives, in an environment where the public sector was being overhauled from the 1990s the main trend was to develop a VET system that integrated the various VET components, and co-ordinated its various functions and roles. That was because, as noted in the sections above, "the identification of competencies, the development of competency standards and the grouping of standards into qualifications, delivered as modules and assessed by independent assessors, (were thought to) generally work best within an environment of integrated reform and of 'joined-up' government (Veal 2009: 2768).

In terms of a scheme that was able to integrate the education and training system, the development of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) was then a particular kind of reform - that dated back to the final years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - in the TVET sector (Veal 2009).

Young (2009: 2867) notes that the intellectual roots of these national qualifications framework (NQF) pathways can be found in a competence approach to vocational education that suggested that all qualifications could be expressed in terms of outcomes without prescribing any specific learning pathway or programme. At its root this was based on the belief that employers were in the best position to identify training needs and to say what kinds of vocational qualifications were needed - and thus identify what should be allowed to define qualifications in terms of workplace performance outcomes. The ultimate objective of the development of a NQF approach therefore was to provide a mechanism for transferring the control of vocational education from providers to employers. Young (2009) argues that this was something to which an outcomes-based education and training system seemed to be 'peculiarly suited' to do.

In the sections below I therefore describe the introduction of an outcomes-based education and training system in South Africa after 1994 as a way of contextualising the introduction and formulation of a NQF; a system that ultimately shaped how assessment was understood and spread.

In that regard I provide briefly here a short description of an NQF.

A national qualifications framework is generally regarded as something that classified qualifications according to a set of criteria that reflected the levels of learning achieved. Arranged in a hierarchy of standards (or demand) - starting with the lowest level of qualifications to the highest - the establishment thereof required a complete shift from previous models. Instead of "placing specialist institutions at the centre of the system of education and training' there was a shift to one where the learner and his/her opportunities to gain a qualification lay at the centre". This shift from a qualifications *system* to a qualifications *framework* required a massive change where, covering as wide a range of sectors as possible as well as large a proportion of the population, a

commonality was created across different qualifications - with qualifications becoming specified according to standards, levels, and outcomes. An NQF was thus a form of a grid that covered all levels in all sectors or (work) fields (Young 2009: 2869).

The logic of the introduction of the NQF was thus a fairly simple one, namely that if VET was a form of education and training that aimed to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and competencies that could be effectively used in the labour market, then the development of a qualifications framework would shape the infrastructure of VET whenever they impacted on the skills and competencies produced by VET that were or could be used in the labour market. According to policymakers at the time, the introduction of qualifications frameworks brought (1) more transparency, (2) could be durable and provide stability for education and training systems, (3), provided consistency across the systems, (4) brought a level of confidence (for educators, parents, and employers) in the system, (5) allowed for a coherent statistical monitoring by qualification level, and (6) introduced a focus that was essentially based on learning outcomes (Coles & Werquin 2009: 442).

### **3.7. Outcomes-based education and the NQF**

Spady (as cited in DoE 2007: 95) describes outcomes-based education in the following way: '

Outcomes-based education means clearly focussing and organising everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experience. This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organising curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens.

In South Africa two developments and legacies informed the shift to a more learner-centred system of education and training after 1994.

On the one hand, the worldwide technological revolution of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century demanded education and training systems that could meet the demand of change and that envisaged a set of flexible learners with skills, knowledge and values that could adjust to multiple career changes (what Ball (1996) refers to as a 'flexible generalist'). The challenge to education and

training systems was how to produce *employable citizens*, where the focus was on how knowing and doing were achieved rather than on how it was gathered and saved. Blacker (as cited in Candy & Mathews 2003: 19) explained this as:

Because of the changes that are occurring in capitalism (such as moves towards the globalisation of markets and finance, new information and communication technologies, post-Keynesian governmental policies, and new approaches to strategy, management and organisation) rather than asking 'what sorts of knowledge are needed in contemporary capitalism and how may organisations harness them?' the question should rather be 'how are systems of knowing and doing changing, and what response would be appropriate?'

On the other hand, South Africa had an immediate systemic challenge in 1994 that required the overturning of the curriculum of an apartheid state (with particular systemic forms of bias and bigotry) and its replacement with a human rights-based education and training system that rationalised, consolidated, and changed the syllabi of some 19 previous internal education departments. This, it was argued, required a system that focused on learners and their 'outcomes', introduced new teaching strategies, did not simply prescribe the content of lessons as had been done in the past, and pulled together learning areas (or subjects) into an integrated knowledge system.

In overhauling both the content and the teaching of the old curriculum and bringing it in line with the values of a new national constitution, a new curriculum (Curriculum 2005) was thus launched in 1997 that was firmly grounded in outcomes-based (OBE) principles (OECD 2008: 79).

The new Department of Education noted in 1997 that:

The curriculum will begin to integrate education and training – incorporating a view of learning that rejects rigid divisions between academic and applied knowledge, theory and practice, and knowledge and skills. It will foster learning that encompasses a culture of human rights, multilingualism and multi-culturalism and a sensitivity to the values of reconciliation and nation building.

The introduction of an outcomes-based system is an historical imperative because it will force those awarding qualifications, recognising qualifications and employing graduates to focus on what it is that a learner knows and can do – as described in the standards -

rather than on where the learner did his or her studying (DoE 1997: 95).

The main goal in adopting an outcomes-based approach was therefore to better prepare learners to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills to function effectively in a multi-cultural democratic society, while democratising and opening up educational opportunities to those that had previously been excluded or held back. The first Minister of Education, Bengu, described this approach as one that moved from 'content' to one based on 'competence', with the aim to equip all learners with the knowledge, competencies and orientations needed for success after they left school or completed their training. "Its guiding vision is that of a thinking, competent future citizen" (DoE 1997). The Department of Education asserted that:

The South African government opted for outcomes-based education and the development of an NQF because it emphasized *applied competence* i.e. the ability to put into practice, in the relevant context, the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification. It did so, so it argued, because this is the main way in which South Africa can get access to the 'global village' (DoE, 2007: 96).

According to Berkhout (2004: 111), because it offered a useful alternative to the divided apartheid system, the idea of an integrated education and training system that brought together different forms of education and training - general education, vocational education, higher education, and the recognition of work experience - was readily accepted by all.

As such, a NQF was established in 1995 with the key mandate of developing a framework that offered a second chance to most of those that had been previously marginalised under apartheid. The aim of the establishment of the NQF was to assist the change process as propagated in the subsequent 'transformation' message of the *White Paper on Education and Training of 1995*.

As Granville (2004) notes, "while the development of qualification frameworks was an international phenomenon, there was something unique about the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in South Africa. It was the scale and ambition of the NQF rhetoric and its perceived centrality to the

reconstruction of society in the political and social context of a post-apartheid regime that marked the NQF out from other such initiatives around the world”.

### **3.8. Assessment and the NQF**

The NQF, established in terms of the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) Act of 1995, provided the platform for a new education and training system.

Moore (2000: 183) describes the NQF as the ‘primary policy engine’ for contemporary educational change as all qualifications had to be registered and aligned by the NQF, and before any qualification was conferred on learners, they had to demonstrate their competence in the learning outcomes as prescribed (SAQA 2000: 10). According to the SAQA Act the learning outcomes, with their associated assessment criteria, were referred to as standards that were used as ‘yardsticks’ against which learner performance was measured and on which decision on learner progression/promotion then rested (DoE 2007: 95).

Such a focus on outcomes and standards required a system that (to exist) did not need to any specific prior learning programme and thus had to be completely transparent – where learners knew exactly what learning outcomes they were required to demonstrate to achieve a qualification. This would allow, it was argued, for a qualification that was transportable (units of one qualification could be used for other qualifications) and that created qualifications that could be achieved by accumulation over time (credit accumulation and transfer) (Young 2009: 2871).

Young (2009) describes the main features of a NQF as an overarching framework that approached qualifications in ways that:

- Defined them according to a single set of criteria or a single definition of what constituted a qualification,
- Ranked them on a single hierarchy and expressed them as a single set of levels - each with its own level descriptors,
- Classified (especially in the case of vocational qualifications) them in terms of a complete set of occupational fields,

- Described them in terms of learning outcomes that were independent from the site, the form of provision, and the type of pedagogy and curriculum through which they may be achieved;
- Provided a set of benchmarks against which any learning could be assessed in terms of its potential contribution to a qualification, and
- Broke them down in terms of elements (unit standards) and ascribed to them a volume of notional hours that could be quantified for credit purposes. A learner then had to achieve a given number of credits to gain a qualification.

The main characteristics of such a system was that it was:

- Coherent – This entailed creating clear progression routes between qualifications in a national framework;
- Comprehensible – Making the choice of qualifications easier for learners and providing clearer information for those that used qualifications for selection purposes;
- Current- Making the outcomes of learning more relevant to local and national employment and to enable learners to develop skills that equipped them for changes of employment in the future; and
- Credible- Used forms of assessment that were valid and reliable, and were backed up by well-designed quality assurance (Hart 2009: 2881).

In the beginning, the NQF in South Africa consisted of 8 levels of qualifications, where level 1 encompassed general education and training (GET), levels 2-4 covered the further education and training (FET) band (with learners attaining either an academic or vocational qualification), and levels 5-8 in the higher education band. The NQF was later expanded to include 10 levels with a more detailed set of level descriptors (OECD 2008), as shown below:

<b>South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF)</b>	
Higher Education and Training	Levels 5-10

Further Education and Training			Levels 2-4
School:	FET College: National Certificate Vocational	Occupational Qualifications	
National Senior Certificate	National Certificate: Vocational Level4	Learnership Level 4	
<b>Fundamentals</b>	<b>Fundamentals</b>	<b>Fundamentals</b>	
Language 1	Language 1	Language and Communication	
Language 2		(40 credits of which 20 on NQF Level4 and 20 credits on NQF Level3 in a second South African Language)	
Life Orientation (Theory)	Life Orientation(P1 + P2) (Theory + Computer skills)	N/A	
Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy	Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy	Mathematical Literacy (16 Credits)	
<b>Core/ Elective</b>	<b>Core / Vocational</b>	<b>Core Component</b> Learner must demonstrate competence to the total of 54 credits	
Subject 1	Subject 1		
Subject 2	Subject 2		
Subject 3	Subject 3		
	<b>Elective</b>	<b>Elective</b>	
	Subject 4	Learners must complete a minimum of 20 credits from the specialisation unit standard .	
Credits 130	Credits 130	Credits 130	
General Education and Training			LEVEL 1

Table: SAQA (2001)

With regard to their purpose, qualifications *across the VET sector* were then separated into three components:

1. *General qualifications*, where the focus was on the general underpinning of knowledge, understanding, and skills. Here learners achieved given

standards that covered the necessary personal, interpersonal, and citizenship skills and the development of a general knowledge base. At the basic level these standards formed also the basis of much of school-based learning.

2. *Vocational qualifications*, where the focus was on work-readiness, and where learners achieved standards that showed they were prepared for immediate or later entry into the workplace. They built on the standards of general qualifications by applying an employment focus. They were mostly completed off-the-job and focused on raising knowledge and skill levels for those preparing to enter the workforce, or those planning to change their employment, or for those that were unemployed.
3. *Occupational qualifications*, where the focus was on job competence. These qualifications sought to recognise where learners achieved standards confirming that they were fully competent in employment. These qualifications had to be completed in on-the-job workplace conditions (apprenticeship) or in conditions which realistically could simulate those of the workplace (learnership). These qualifications were meant to prepare individuals to enter full employment, to train those entering employment, or improve or upgrade the skills if those already in employment (Hart 2009: 2885).

### **3.8.1. Assessing similarly across three different kinds of sites**

Interestingly, with reference to assessment, the introduction of a NQF embodied a *principle of similarity* that sought to introduce a common approach to assessment across all qualifications, or alternatively a set of criteria with which each specific assessment scheme had to comply (Young 2009: 2869). Whereas before 1994 in the (traditional) system no attempt was made to ensure equivalence across assessment, and learners were assessed differently through examinations/tests, time served, or the judgement of a master or employer, the introduction of a NQF in 1995 brought an important shift in how assessment was approached and understood.

This was linked to the National Protocol on Assessment for Schools (Grade R -12) where the DoE (2005: 27) noted for example that its main goal was to develop:

An assessment model that encourages integration of assessment into the teaching and development of learners through on-going feedback. It is a model of assessment that is used to determine the learner's achievement during the course of a grade or level, provide information that is used to support a learner's development and enable improvements to be made in the learning and teaching process".

Importantly, as part of the goals of outcomes-based education and training, assessment was also meant to enhance the basic principles of democracy, namely equity, equality, accountability, acceptance of diversity, and freedom. In this process mechanisms were necessary that created opportunities for learners to be part of the process, offering them access to the assessment criteria in a transparent way where they could question assessment results and even appeal should they disagree.

In the table below, I show how the principle of similarity has been applied in the FET Band sites that I visited, as well as the emphasis of assessment within an outcomes-based system on "the application and use of knowledge in real-life contexts". As a consequence of the assessment forms noted in the table, assessment first had to provide valid and reliable information on the achievements and competencies of learners, and then had to be developmental and formative (during the course of learning), supplying learners with feedback and guidance on their progress and performance.

<b>National Senior Certificate: School</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>National Certificate Vocational: FET College</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Further Education and Training Certificate: Electrical Engineering: Occupational/ Learnership</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Fundamentals</i>		<i>Fundamentals</i>		<i>Fundamentals</i>	
Language 1 (Home Language)	40%	Language 1	40%	Language and Communication	40 credits
Language 2 (First additional Language)	30%				
Life Orientation (Theory)	40%	Life Orientation (P1 + P2) (Theory + Computer skills)	40%	N/ A	
Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy	30%	Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy	30%	Mathematical Literacy	16 credits
<i>Core</i>	40% in one of three remaining and at least 30% in two subjects	<i>Core</i>	50%	<i>Core</i>	54 credits
		<i>Elective</i>	50%	<i>Elective</i>	20 credits
<b>CERTIFICATION</b>		<b>CERTIFICATION</b>		<b>CERTIFICATION</b>	
Pass six subjects.		Pass all 7 subjects.		Minimum of 130 credits required.	

In the diagram below, SAQA (2001) outlined in 2001 the various components and processes of what assessment meant in relation to outcomes based education and the NQF.

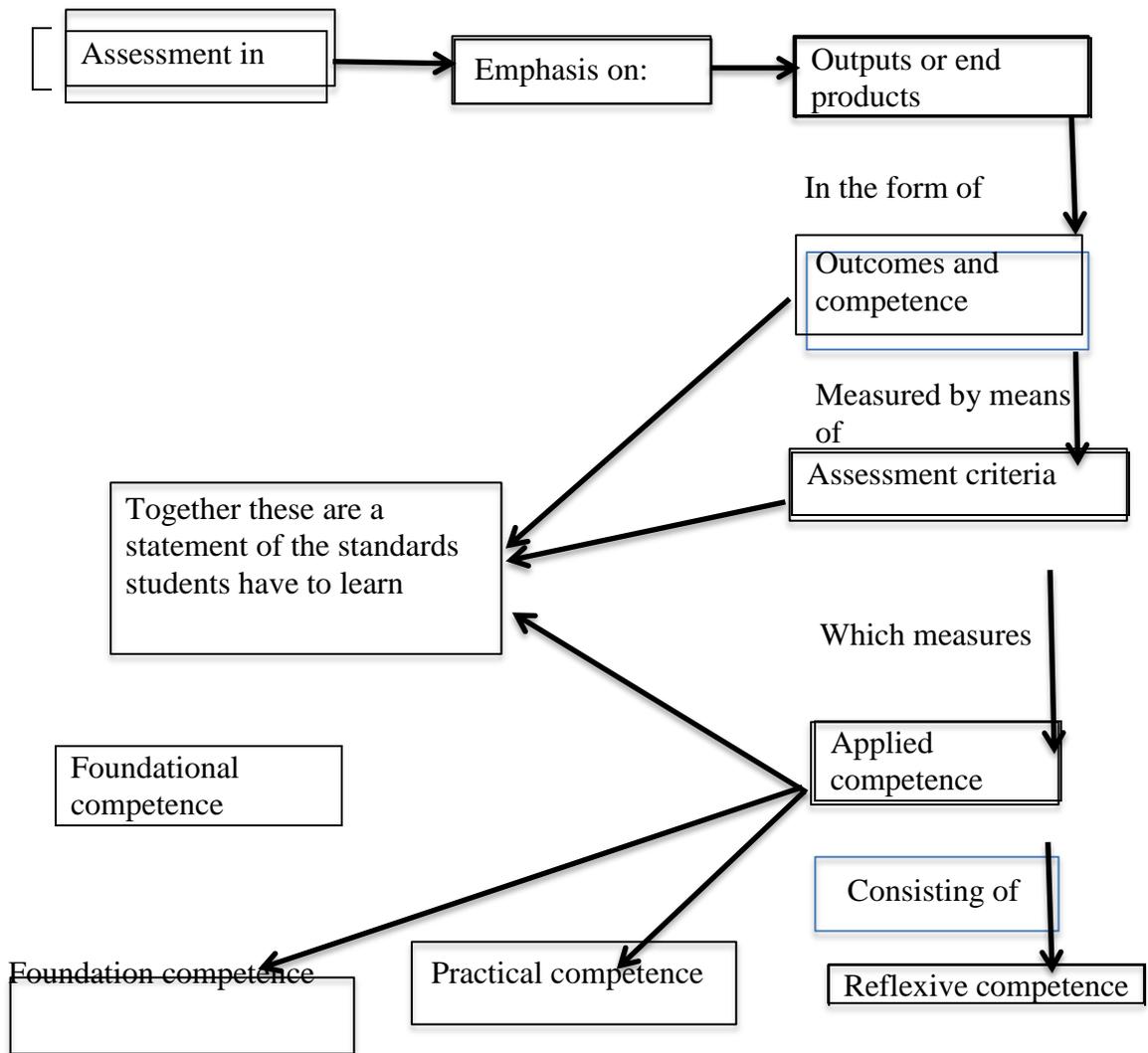


TABLE: Outcomes-based Education and Training Assessment (SAQA 2001: 20)

For the above to unfold programmatically, teachers became responsible for creating situations in their classrooms in which learners could learn but ultimately take responsibility for their own learning. Even in the workplace the focus was on entitlement and responsibility - and thus workplace learners became entitled to have union representatives present during their assessment sessions.

With regard to assessment practices within institutions, the purpose of assessment, according to Weeden et al (2002: 19), could be categorised according to four main classifications (though Weedon also cautions that these classifications mainly described the ways in which information arising from assessments were mainly used). The four classifications were:

1. *Diagnostic*: This indicated how the current performances of learners differed from their expected performance and then tried to identify what specific problems learners were experiencing. Assessment was thus there to identify the performance of learners at a given point.
2. *Formative*: This was when assessment was geared to help learners and resulted in actions that were successful in closing the gap between current and expected performance.
3. *Summative*: This was an assessment that was used to certify or record end-of-course performance or predict potential future attainment. This was an examination grade and was when learners were reviewed, their learning transferred into a measurement, and then certification.
4. *Evaluative*: This was when assessment information was used to judge the performance of schools or teachers and represented forms of league tables to assess and record how well teachers and institutions were performing.

Weedon et al (2002), and also Romer (2003), suggest from the above list that as both diagnostic and formative assessment were meant to be part of the dynamic process of teaching and learning, it constituted a model that they called 'assessment for learning'. On the other hand, with its focus on summing up and checking up what was learnt at the end of a particular stage of learning, and impacting directly on the learners' sense of success and failure, summative and evaluative assessment could be described as a model of 'assessment of learning'.

In that regard, Curriculum 2005 signalled a significant paradigm shift for South Africa after 1994, as it implied a move away from traditional 'assessment of learning' approaches (Grosser and Lombaard 2005: 43).

By removing and replacing traditional approaches to assessment (such as the paper and pen test), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of October 1995 introduced an assessment model that included open-ended questions, exhibits, demonstrations, projects, performance assessment, hands-on-experiments, computer simulations, and portfolios (Herman, as cited in Grosser & Lombaard, 2005: 42). According to the DoE (as cited in Grosser and Lombaard, 2005: 45), the aim of assessing learners according to

the outcomes-based education model was to initiate growth, development and support in order for learners to progress. This is aptly captured in the diagram below.

<b>PRACTICAL COMPETENCE</b>	<b>FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCE</b>	<b>REFLEXIVE COMPETENCE</b>
The demonstrated ability to perform a set of tasks and actions in authentic contexts (situations)	The demonstrated understanding of what we are doing and why we are doing it	The demonstrated ability to integrate our performances with our understanding so that we are able to adapt to changed circumstances and explain the reason behind these adaptations

*Table: SAQA (2001: 11)*

To achieve the intersection of these competences, the DoE suggested various methods of assessment, tools, and techniques that were to be performed on a continuous basis, and had to become an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Thereafter, as suggested by SAQA, assessment would entail a formative component and a summative component (in the form of final examinations), with the first component preparing learners for the second component, and the second component affording learners the opportunity to be promoted to the next educational level or level of competence.

### **3.8.2 Formative Assessment**

According to the DoE (2007: 5) and SAQA (2001: 26) formative assessment “monitors and supports teaching and learning and determines if a learner is ready for summative assessment”. This entailed assessment taking place during teaching and learning rather than after it, and by involving learners directly in their own learning, thereby increasing their confidence and motivation to learn (Willis, as cited in Grosser and Lombaard, 2005: 44). In so doing this placed the emphasis of assessment on learner progress and achievement rather than on failure and defeat (Stiggins et al, as cited in Grosser and Lombaard, 2005: 44).

This method of formative assessment became known as continuous assessment (CASS) - or Internal Continuous Assessment – and contributed to the accumulation of the year's marks of learners. As such it sought to enable feedback of a *formative* kind, thereby making learners aware of their strengths or weaknesses, and thus leading to the necessary adjustments being made to improve their performances.

It was suggested in the new approach that continuous assessments be internally set, and marked, and then later moderated at cluster gatherings - which allowed schools in a given district to partake in peer moderation.

### **3.8.3. The Portfolio of Evidence**

Within the education and training system in South Africa, continuous assessment involved learners basically completing a portfolio of evidence. This, according to SAQA (2001) was a collection of different types of evidence relating to the work that was being assessed, and included a variety of work samples that met the requirement of sufficiency and currency. As a joint venture between teacher and learner, the learner was assisted in the collection of evidence and compilation of the portfolio.

A portfolio of evidence was thus “a purposeful collection of the work of a learner that exhibited the learner's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas, and included learner participation in the selecting of contents, criteria for selection, and the criteria for judging merit and evidence of learner self-reflection (Martin-Kniep, as cited in Grosser and Lombaard, 2005: 44).

As the practical manifestation of continuous assessment of learner progress, it was argued that the portfolio of evidence nurtured higher-order thinking skills and a collaborative approach to assessment that enabled teachers and learners to interact in the teaching and learning, and the learning and assessment process.

The main attributes attached to portfolios of evidence were:

- They informed learners how well they were developing their skills, knowledge and dispositions, and what they needed to do to develop them further. This made them take charge of their own learning (Barootchi et al, as cited in (Grosser and Lombaard, 2005: 46).

- In giving feedback to portfolios teachers were able to reflect on whether their teaching, lesson planning, and assessment strategies / tools were effective.
- From a social and social democratic point of departure, the assessment of portfolios gave status to achievements outside the academic domain, and thus increased the independence, assertiveness, and critical judgement of learners, humanized the teacher-learner relationship; and gave learners a greater say in the curriculum “by deepening their involvement in the curriculum, heightening their critical awareness, and widening the existing definition of achievement” (Hargreaves 1990: 159).

#### 3.8.4. Summative Assessment

According to the DoE (2007: 5) summative assessment “was meant to give an overall picture of learner progress at a given time and needed to determine whether the learner was sufficiently competent to progress to the next level”. Summative assessment thus made a judgement about achievement and was carried out at the end of a programme of learning, when the learner was ready to be assessed (SAQA 2001: 26). This summative function envisaged for assessment was used to grade learners that were studying towards a particular qualification, and to distinguish between them for selection purposes. On declaration of competence, credit was then given, recorded and reported.

SAQA (2001: 26) distinguished between formative and summative assessment in the following way:

<b>Formative Assessment</b>	<b>Summative Assessment</b>
Designed to support the teaching and learning process.	At the end of a learning programme (qualification, unit standard, or part qualification).
Assist in the planning future learning	To determine whether the learner is competent or not yet competent.
Diagnose the learner’s strength and weaknesses	In knowledge and inputs-based systems, this usually occurs after a specified period of study, e.g. one year.

Provides feedback to the learner on his /her progress.	In OBET, learner-readiness determines when assessments will take place.
Helps to make decisions on the readiness of the learners to do a summative assessment.	Is carried out when the assessor and the learner agree that the learner is ready for assessment.
Is developmental in nature.	
Credits/ certificates are not awarded	

### 3.8.5. Quality Assurance

With the compilation of portfolios of evidence (PoE) and portfolios of assessments (PoA) - according to guidelines of educational authorities Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Department of Basic Education (DoBE), and the Sector Education Authority (Seta) - there was an expectation that a certain number of tasks or assessments had to have been completed at each level. These were then moderated at the various levels, namely internally, externally (provincial level), and at the national level.

According to SAQA (2001), “once skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values had been defined (by stakeholders), providers then had to deliver programmes against these. Quality assurance was then the technical process of evaluating the extent to which providers assisted learners in achieving them - in other words, quality assurance was underpinned by the idea of ‘production to standards’ (Allais 2011: 317).

In terms of roll-out of this approach however, as Allais (2011: 317) notes, in recent times those with the expertise (subject matter experts) in South Africa to conduct quality assurance were invariably not used. Instead, those with expertise in ‘quality assurance’ - who understood quality assurance systems – came to be mainly used to evaluate programme delivery. Allais (2011) asserts that this was in line with the overall centralised approach to assessment and the focus on formally building into the system ‘the principle of similarity’.

As the main purpose of quality assurance procedures was to improve the quality of educational practices and objectives, the following four sets of criteria were used, namely:

- *Effectiveness of teaching and learning*

During moderation the following was meant to be reviewed:

- Methods of teaching, learning and assessment
- Course documentation (assessment and subject guides)
- Appropriateness of teaching team
- Accommodation and specialist equipment
- Student feedback
- Student performance

- *Achievement of learners*

Success for learners was seen in terms of achievement in the reaching of their educational goals, or employment in a chosen career.

- *Relevance of programme*

The quality of programmes was linked to the relevance of a learning programme to its overall objective. This process consisted of reviewing whether a particular programme was suitable, and whether it met the demands of industry or the occupational sector for which it had been designed. Employers and direct stakeholders were meant to play an important part in this dimension.

- *Accessibility for learners*

As a provider of opportunities for both school leavers and adults by affording them a second or third chance often denied in other parts of the educational landscape, FET Band institutions were assessed and quality assured according to the extent to which they socially included different kinds of learners (Gray, Griffin & Nasta 2000), and whether they included this criteria in marketing procedures, recruitment and selection criteria.

### **3.9 Some key challenges that NQF has posed for assessment**

Having noted the above, it would seem that in its current form assessment has over-emphasised measurement and has focused on what was known and could be measured; often without questioning the ways in which it impacted

on the nature of learning itself. Citing Handy, Weedon et al (2002: 10) concluded that:

The first step had been to measure whatever could easily be measured. This was okay as far as it went. The second step was to disregard that which couldn't easily be measured or to give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This was random and misleading. The third step was to presume that what couldn't be measured easily really wasn't important. This was blindness. The fourth step was to say that what couldn't easily be measured really didn't exist. This was complete suicide (Handy, as cited in Weedon et al 2002: 10).

In this regard, Young (2009) concurs that in the current situation assessment has become little more than an instrument of management, and an activity of 'ticking boxes'. He notes that this has serious implications for the quality of the education and training provided and for the professional worlds of educators that are meant to advance and enhance such systems.

Young (2009) has also observed however that was not because of assessment, but rather due to the ways in which national qualification frameworks were established - and their intended purposes. Young (2009: 2918) notes that:

In introducing NQFs the difficulty is that the processes involved in an outcomes-based framework – such as standards setting – inevitably lose contact with the practices of those involved in teaching, training, selecting, and assessing. This poses real problems given that qualifications and their processes rely heavily on trust. The problem is that these qualifications and processes have been separated from the very practices in which trust would need to be based.

These issues are further elaborated and analysed in chapter 5 and in chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I provide an overview of the research design - including paradigm, methodology, and methods - employed during my study.

Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999:44) argue that the purpose of a research design is to develop “an explicit plan for action” for how to deal with three basic activities, namely sampling, data collection, and analysis. For them a research design is the chosen ‘strategic framework for action’ that serves as the main bridge between the research questions and the execution or implementation of the research. As they note:

Research designs are plans that guide the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999: 29).

Thereafter, it is the execution of the research design, or the “doing stage of research”, that is often referred to as “fieldwork”. This is “presumably to signify or indicate that you have left your study or the library and entered the field, whether it is a laboratory, a natural setting, an archive, or whatever is dictated by the research design” (Mouton 2001:98). Importantly, ‘fieldwork’ is led by the key decisions taken in the study (what paradigm to follow, what approach to choose, who to focus on, how to collect data, and what theories can assist in making sense of the collected data).

I discuss in the chapter the chosen research paradigm and approach as described by various researchers, and highlight why the study was situated in these particular genres. I also discuss the methods used to find and collect the data and the different ways in which the data was collected, such as from individuals or through document analysis. I further discuss how the data was analysed and how I came to highlight particular findings. I conclude with a discussion of the ethical challenges encountered during my study or ‘fieldwork’.

## **4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Mertens (2005) reminds that each study is informed by a particular paradigm, namely assumptions about a chosen world that provides the structure by which to understand 'that world'. This paradigm guides the process of enquiry and the selection of the appropriate research methods and methodologies.

Thus, as much as the study's findings is based on the views and understandings of the research participants, it is firmly influenced by the interpretation and translations of the researcher. Citing Dobson, Krauss (2005: 759) notes that:

The researcher's theoretical lens plays an important role in the choice of methods because of the underlying belief system of the researcher.

As systems of interrelated ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, paradigms are perspectives that provide the main rationale for pieces of research and commit researchers to particular methods of data collection, observation and interpretation (TerreBlanche & Durrheim 1999: 36). Carr & Kemnis (1986), cited in Merriam (1998: 4), provide three classifications of educational research orientations, namely positivist, interpretive, and critical research.

### **(a) Positivist Research**

This is when education or schooling is considered the main object, phenomenon or delivery system to be studied and where the knowledge gained through scientific and experimental research is considered to be objective and quantifiable. 'Reality' in this perspective is stable, observable and measurable.

### **(b) Interpretive Research**

In this paradigm, education is viewed as a process and school as a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained. According to Holstein and Gurbuim, (2005: 484) the interpretive paradigm assumes a constellation of products, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life.

### **(c) Critical Research**

In this paradigm education is considered to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation. Based on a Marxist philosophy, critical theory, and feminist theory, knowledge generated through this mode of research provides an ideological critique of power, privilege, and oppression in areas of educational practice.

Importantly, Niglas (2001) argues that research findings can be improved when paradigms - such as the positivist, interpretative, or the critical approaches - are not treated as exclusive from each other, and when shared views across these different paradigms are followed.

Nevertheless, for this study I mainly utilised the interpretive paradigm as I argued that it would give me better insight into the context of the Participants working in various spaces within the FET schooling Band. I felt that it would afford me the opportunity to engage with participants and to get them to share their professional experiences and understandings with me of how they were implementing and interpreting prescribed assessment policies.

I reasoned that using the interpretative approach would give 'voice' to a group of individuals - vocational education Participants – that were rarely heard or considered and through this would illuminate some complex issues and phenomena within the FET band. Sofaer (1999: 1101) argues that this allows researchers to then move toward explanation and "generate theories and test hypotheses".

By focusing on the how(s) and the what(s) of social reality, the interpretive paradigm thus allowed me to centre both on how Participants methodologically constructed their experiences and their worlds, and on the configuration of meaning and institutional life that informed and shaped their reality-constituting activities" (Holstein and Gurbuim 2005: 484).

#### **4.3 METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is defined as "the particular systematic practices followed to attain knowledge" (Kavanagh 2002: 732). The aim in choosing a methodology is to give and make *meaning* of what research participants say via a research approach that allowed particular insights about their worlds to emerge.

As such I chose in my study to employ a qualitative research design to explore my research focus on assessment at various points of educational provision within the FET sector. The focus was to gain a better understanding of the various concepts and factors linked to assessment that underpinned educational transformation in South Africa and that contributed to the establishment of an integrated Further Education and Training (FET) sector.

According to Merriman (1998: 5) qualitative research can be used as an umbrella concept that covers several forms of inquiry that help to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption to the natural settings. He notes that qualitative research designs are followed in cases where “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998:6). Although “exploratory, descriptive and explanatory goals can be achieved via either quantitative or qualitative research, qualitative research tends to be more commonly used to inductively explore phenomena, and provide ‘thick’ or ‘detailed’ descriptions of phenomena” (TerreBlanche & Durrheim 1999: 43).

Adopting a more holistic approach than quantitative research, the qualitative approach presumably shows phenomena as they “unfold in real world situations, without manipulation, as interrelated wholes rather than split up into discreet predetermined variables” (TerreBlanche & Durrheim 1999: 43). Qualitative research thus needs to be an “iterative process that requires a flexible, non-sequential approach” (TerreBlanche & Durrheim 1999: 31).

Marshall & Rossman (2006:550) note that “the many nuanced traditions of qualitative research can be categorized into those focusing on (a) individual lived experiences, (b) society and culture, or (c) language and communication”, and suggest how the different traditions should be approached and researched (as described in the table below).

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Main strategy</b>	<b>Focus of inquiry</b>
Individual lived experience	In-depth interviews	Individuals
Society and culture	Case study	Groups or organizations
Language and communication	Microanalysis or text analysis	Speech events and interactions

*Table: Marshall & Rossman 2006*

As they suggest, qualitative research is that effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there (Merriam 1998: 6). It is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future, but rather seeks to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting – and then in the analysis to be able to faithfully communicate a particular depth of understanding (Merriam 1998: 1).

I suggest in the thesis that a qualitative approach is a suitable method by which to interrogate how Participants - both as participants within a broader society and as individuals - negotiate their lived-in professional spaces and “make meaning as they go about their activities in the world” (Scott & Morrison, 2006: 131). The use of a qualitative methodology dovetailed with my desire to foreground the views of Participants as I made sense and meaning of their various interpretations and conceptualisations (of their individual experiences and professional worlds) (Cohen *et al*, 2001: 23).

As a qualitative researcher I was “interested in understanding the meaning people constructed, how they made sense of their worlds and the experiences they had in their various world”. My concern was to capture or directly connect with experiences that were ‘lived’, ‘felt’, or ‘undergone’ (Sherman and Webb, cited in Merriam 1998: 6).

#### **4.4. Research methods**

According to Silverman (2000: 77), the term 'method' refers to a specific research technique that best captures the desired information. In Greek, method (hodos) means 'a way'. Methods are thus the means/way whereby coherent and plausible inferences are collected that answer a study's research question.

Van Manen (1997: 1) points to a certain dialect between question and method; where the way certain questions are articulated highlights the research method that the researcher mainly identifies with. It is thus the questions themselves, and the way that the researcher understands the questions, that are the important starting points for all research projects - not the method as such".

For my study, given the questions I sought to explore and my decision to utilise the qualitative approach, I chose to use interviews, observation, and document analysis as the main methods whereby to collect data from the various research sites. My goal was to ascertain, via open-ended interviews, how participants gave meaning to assessment within their different spaces within the FET band.

In this regard the research sites within the FET band included learning organisations that provided education and training to learners between NQF Levels 2-4 as indicated on the differentiated National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that consists of three co-ordinated sub-frameworks, namely:

- (a) General and Further Education and Training;
- (b) Higher Education; and
- (c) Trades and Occupations (DoE 2008: 8)

For my study the unit of analysis was educational educators and trainers within the FET Band, namely, at a FET college, a focus school (high school), and a private occupational training provider that offered post-compulsory school learning.

After permission was obtained from the WCED to access institutions within the three respective research areas – namely FET schooling, FET Colleges, and workplace education providers, I identified and chose the specific research sites from a specific set of institutions (where I focused on identified participants).

The three research sites were each chosen from a bigger sample within the Western Cape that comprised of 28 Focus Schools, 6 Further Education and Training Colleges, and a number of private occupational training providers.

A. The initial Focus school sample from which one was chosen, included:

- Ten Arts and Culture Schools: Dance Studies, Design, Dramatic Arts, Music, Visual Arts),
- Eight Business, Commerce and Management Schools: Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Computer Application Technology,
- Ten Engineering and Technology schools: Electrical Technology, Civil Technology, Mechanical Technology, Engineering Graphics and Design.

However, given the decision to focus on the common element of electrical engineering, the focus school sample came mainly from the 10 engineering and technology schools. Then, when the actual research began it was found that the school chosen for the study was not a focus school per se. Rather, the school had a focus school stream and was actually defined as a comprehensive school and funded as part of the Dinaledi Khanyi School Project. In the end, it was decided to continue working with the school as it had an established history as a vocational education provider, which was very effective and very functional.

B. The six FET Colleges from which one was selected, were:

- West Coast Further Education and Training College
- South Cape Further Education and Training College
- Boland Further Education and Training College
- False Bay Further Education and Training College

- Northlink Further Education and Training College
- College of Cape Town Further Education and Training College.

Given my own access to one particular FET College, I chose to focus on this one college and then allowed the specific campus to be determined by the larger focus of the study.

C. Private providers – willing providers were sourced in the northwest part of Western Cape area that were servicing the same kinds of learners as providers in the other subsystems– namely linked to a particular and common vocational subject [I describe later on in the chapter some further characteristics of these different research sites].

As noted above, the main connector across the research sites was the particular engineering focus within the different sites: the Engineering and Technology (focus) school offered a vocational curriculum with an emphasis on Electrical Technology, the chosen FET College offered a vocational route that emphasised the Electrical Infrastructure Construction programme, and the private occupational provider offered electrical training.

## **4.5 Procedure**

### **4.5.1 Data collection / gathering methods**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006:97) qualitative research relies on four methods for gathering information, namely:

- (a) Participating in the setting,
- (b) Observing directly,
- (c) Interviewing in-depth, and
- (d) Analyzing documents and material culture.

For my study I chose to focus on semi-structured interviews and analyzing documents and materials (such as educational policy documents, Umalusi reports, and other relevant educational reports) to gather information. I felt that these data-gathering methods would give me a better understanding of assessment as understood within the three learning settings within the Western Cape.

#### **4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Marshall & Rossman (2006:101) note that interviewing is essentially “a conversation with purpose” where the researcher does not expect any predetermined responses. They note that this method is used to allow “the participants’ perspective on the phenomenon of interest to unfold as the participants view them (the emic perspective), and not as the researcher views them (the etic perspective)” (Marshall & Rossman 2006:101).

For the interviews I adopted a two-fold approach, namely supplying participants with the list of questions beforehand and asking them to familiarise themselves and then to write down some of their thoughts on the issues raised, and conducting semi-structured interviews with each of them using open-ended questions that allowed a broader discussion of key issues within the FET band with regard to assessment. My plan was to generate both written and oral responses from the interview questions that were explored, which would allow me room for deeper analysis.

All interviews were completed at times convenient to the participants. I personally conducted all the interviews and recorded all of them on a voice recorder. All of the interviews took between 45– 60 minutes to complete. I transcribed each of the interviews, manually coded them, and then analyzed the data obtained from the interviews. I coded the data because Tuckman (1994: 271) notes that when data is gathered it needs to be categorized into different themes first before it can be analysed. Tuckman (1994: 271) also observes that coding is a useful way of analyzing data that comes in words - such as that captured in interviews.

For the second method used in the study to collect data, namely analyzing policy documents, my goal here was to show how assessment was described and discussed within key policy documents and arenas and why this form of educational provision in the province was being targetted and given special attention within national and provincial policy debates. Denzin & Lincoln (2007: 583) note that the purpose of document analysis is to understand “the impact or consequences of policy, but additionally the processes of how

official law or policies are translated and interpreted, from the heights of inception down to the points of implementation, to the “street-level” realities”.

The aim of document analysis was thus to insert policy makers’ views on vocational education policies formulated at the national and provincial level (especially in relation to assessment) and to recount what they claimed to be happening at the local service (educational) sites. For the document analysis all policy documents relevant to assessment and vocational education at the three research sites were examined to get a comprehensive account of what policy makers and department officials sought to achieve for these sites.

The study also utilised insights from historical material and contemporary debates on vocational education internationally, in South Africa, and in the Western Cape. This was done to contextualize the circumstances and the problems being addressed that informed how assessment was understood and ‘lived’. I read widely on the complex historical, social, cultural and political context of the Western Cape to get an idea of some of the kinds of vocational education programs that were historically provided in the province.

Importantly, the questions that I explored across the three research sites were framed by the nature of their various settings, populations, and focus. In the section below I provide details of the research sites that shaped the kinds of questions chosen, followed, and explored.

#### **4.5.3 Setting / Educator Participants**

Marshall & Rossman (2006:61) posit that the selection of the setting, site, population, or phenomenon of interest is fundamental to the design of the project and serves as an important guide for the researcher. They note that when “focusing on specific settings (e.g. the Women’s Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts or a street gang in Cincinnati) these can be somewhat constraining and thus a study becomes defined by and intimately linked to such places, their populations, and the phenomena that define experiences”.

For the study, once the research sites were defined by the research question and the attached literature review, it was these above characteristics (site,

population, phenomena) that ultimately determined the chosen sampling strategy - that then needed to be purposeful but representative” (Marshall & Rossman 2006: 61). As such the 3 research sites each represented a facility within one of the three sub-sections of the FET band.

*A. Focus / Dinaledi/ Comprehensive school*

Tiger High School was located in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town and served learners mainly from one broad geographical area. A crucial dynamic of the facility was that it was located in an area that was established under apartheid for what was defined then as a coloured working class population. The facility offered general as well as vocational subjects in its National Senior Certificate programmes. The learner population came mainly from working class communities, though there also lives a good proportion of lower middle class families in the area. In terms of infrastructure the site was in a decent state of care and well maintained. The 5 participants interviewed at the school site consisted of two educators teaching vocational core and elective subjects, two educators teaching fundamentals, and one assessment co-ordinator.

*B. FET College*

Mostert Bay FET College is situated in the countryside of the Western Cape and consist of five sites/campuses of learning. For the study one campus was chosen in the north-east of the city. Since 2007 the site has offered National Certificate Vocational programmes (NCV) to about 450 learners that come from diverse (though mostly underprivileged) backgrounds and were representative of the various demographic populations of the Western Cape. The college and its various sites are generally well-maintained and resourced and continue to receive increased investment into the upgrading of its facilities. The 5 participants at this site comprised of two lecturers teaching vocational subjects, two teaching fundamentals, and one faculty head of engineering.

*C. Private training provider*

Halfway Occupational Training Centre was also situated in an area north-east of the city. The training centre specialized in workplace learning focusing on artisan training as well as learnerships that were unit standards-driven. The centre was very small but the majority of their staff (3 Participants) were interviewed for the study. One of the three participants was involved both with training at the centre as well as managing the overall facility.

#### **4.5.4 Data analysis**

Once the data was collected the subsequent analysis was framed by what Patton (1987: 144) describes as a “process of bringing order to data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units”. Given that my study sought to follow the interpretive approach, the analysis was captured in a narrative written form to not only provide a holistic view of the research undertaken but also to reflect my own interpretations and conceptualisations that emerged during the study.

Terre Blanche and Durheim (1999:47) also remind that the main purpose of data analysis is to ‘transform collected data into answering the research question’. As such the data needed to be broken up into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships (Rudolf Terri 2006: 1; Mouton 2001: 108).

A further aim of the analysis was to show the various constitutive elements of collected data by inspecting the relationships between concepts, constructs or variables, and to reflect patterns or trends that could be identified or isolated for future theorisation.

In the study I analysed data collected from participants at three different learning sites and thus the analysis had to take cognisance of the different dynamics and contexts of the individual sites.

I started the research interviews at the FET college campus. There was no particular reason for this other than convenience. I thereafter conducted interviews at the chosen school site, and later completed interviews at the training provider. In each of the settings I utilised the same questions, though I used different prompts and follow-up questions according to the views expressed.

Once interviews were transcribed, coded, and grouped according to the questions asked, a holistic analysis was done on all the data and a narrative developed. I used open-ended questions in each setting to get as much information and insights as possible. Once this was completed I transcribed the interviews according to the different settings and the kinds of questions asked. I then grouped together all the same questions across the 3 settings to get me a sense of what participants said about assessment and their experiences with assessment in their different settings. From the responses to the various questions I could then start coding and pulling together various conceptual and theoretical viewpoints.

I should note that participants were given many of the broader questions prior to the interviews as part of the information sheet outlining the study that they had agreed to participate in. This was also meant to create a more relaxed atmosphere for the interview. In the interviews I started off with these broad questions and then probed their responses with a series of sub-questions and follow-ups.

Once transcribed, coded, and analysed I then set about making sense of the data in relation to issues of policy directives and assessment strategies. I looked for patterns across the collected using the following pointers:

- Identify important examples and patterns
- Group key quotations and observations.

#### **4.6 The Ethics Process**

Ethical issues within educational research are fundamental to the research process and has to be strictly adhered to for the whole of the study - from start to finish, and also afterwards (Cohen et al, 2000: 123). As the subjects of research are normally human beings, following ethic processes help to avoid uncomfortable and harmful situations for participants and ensure that the interests of participants are protected at all times. Tuckman (1994: 13) notes that if research ethics are not adhered to, embarrassment, hurt or frightening consequences for participants could result. With regard to research ethics then, the main issues for the study were informed consent, privacy and

confidentiality, risks and discomforts, reciprocity, and the rights of participants to withdraw from the study.

In the latter regard Smith (2005: 96) points out that research ethics are inevitably “much more about institutional and professional regulations and codes of conduct than it is about the needs, aspirations, or the worldviews of marginalized and vulnerable communities or individuals”.

#### **4.6.1 Informed consent**

In terms of these ethical procedures in the study permission to conduct the research was obtained from Stellenbosch University, the Western Cape Education Department, and the principals/managers of the three research sites. Informed consent forms were also obtained from all of the 13 participants at the three sites. Research could only start once all the various documents and forms had been secured.

The aims and purpose of the study were explained to all the parties involved, and the participants were informed that the interviews were being recorded. Participants were constantly reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the project at any time if they felt uncomfortable with any aspect of the research. Fortunately, by the end of the study, none of the participants withdrew. Participants were also informed that their real names would not be used in the study and its analysis and would be replaced by pseudonyms (to protect their identities and any potential harm that may come to them or their institutions).

#### **4.6.2. Privacy and confidentiality**

In the study all interviews were taped and participants were assured that all conversations were strictly confidential. Steps were put in place to ensure that nobody in the study was identifiable. This was achieved by giving all participants different pseudonyms.

Participants were told that all interviews and collected information during sessions would be kept in a locked safe at my home and stored on my computer with password protection. Nobody would have access to any

information and even when I presented my work to my supervisor pseudonyms were always used.

Participants were also given copies of transcripts of their interviews which they had to check for mistakes and confirm it was what they said. They were then asked to sign off the interviews for subsequent use in the study. Once the thesis was complete and the degree awarded, it was promised that all recordings would be erased.

#### **4.6.3 Risks and discomforts**

Good academic approaches to research processes and data-collection are normally quite simple, namely to always pursue what is referred to as 'worthwhile enquiry'. The focus should always be to provide research that in some way served the interests of those involved, and to also publish the findings and conclusions reached as a result of research encounters (<http://www.ethiopia-ed.net/images/864405026.doc>). Having noted that, any enquiry presumed to be 'worthwhile' had consequences for the communities that it represented. This made any decisions on the supposed 'interests served' and required 'research findings' a daunting and intimidating responsibility.

As the biggest responsibility in a research project is to prevent participants from being harmed in any way by the research, I had to first ensure from the beginning that participants gave their full permission knowing what they are agreeing to. Alderson (2002) notes that in the process of gaining permission individuals get to "inwardly digest the information they are given and to weigh it up in light of their personal values and priorities to gradually gain the resolve to make and stand by a risky decision".

The main purpose of getting permission is to remind the participants that the researcher is responsible for protecting their privacy, making sure that they are not harmed in any way, and ensuring their anonymity. In the research I did not foresee any difficulties or problems with regard to harm coming to any of the participants. The questions were not developed or asked in ways that made any participants uncomfortable and participants were reminded that they may at all times choose not to answer a question. Also, although I was

an educator/manager attached to one of the research sites I ensured that I did not personally know any of the participants that were interviewed. Those that knew me or of me were constantly reminded that they should not in any way feel obligated to answer my questions and should feel free to withdraw their participation from the study at any time, should they so choose, that I appreciated their participation in the project, and that they could in no way be penalised for withdrawing should they choose to do so.

Secondly, I was confronted from the outset by one key challenge, namely that I had to capture and show the understandings and perceptions of participants (in relation to assessment) with regard to their particular contexts and sites, but also guard against any possible damage being done to the reputation of their particular educational institutions. For this I had to avoid mentioning any identifiable landmark or aspect of the sites throughout the thesis, yet knowing that keeping their identities anonymous weakened the value of the findings. I was also fully aware that a few singular characteristics might well make the identities of the research sites known to the reader.

Other than these however, potential risks and discomforts were addressed by ensuring issues of privacy and confidentiality at all times. This was mainly accomplished by providing pseudonyms for all participants interviewed in the study, as well as for the institutions they were attached to.

#### **4.6.4 Reciprocity**

Research is a deeply humbling experience as participants willingly and freely give up their time and energy to contribute to and better understand something beyond their everyday experience. Participants ask for no reward (nor were there any on offer) other than for the study to authentically convey their contributions and viewpoints.

In the early stages already of facilitating permission to gain access to the research sites, and to explain to potential participants the process and logic to be followed, I became immediately grateful for the clear co-operation and goodwill shown by participants.

While I (as researcher) endeavoured at all times to display sensitivity and cause the very least disruption to the institution, its programme, or the

professional times and lives of the participants, it goes without saying that I was deeply thankful for the contributions of all involved in the study. In the spirit of reciprocity, I consulted a variety of institutional documents to ensure that the information I provided on the institutions themselves were accurate and authentic. I also constantly returned to my participants to check on what had been said and to clarify viewpoints when there remained some confusion. Respect and appreciation was shown in the sharing of my findings with participants. As such, I tried to remain true to the ethical principle of reciprocity and found it fundamental to the research process.

#### **4.6.5 Payment**

Participants did not benefit in any way from the study, either in direct payment or in any other form or kind. Participants were quite happy to offer their time and views without prejudice, sometimes for hours at a time.

#### **4.6.6 Participation and withdrawal**

Participants were reminded throughout the study that they could choose to withdraw at any time, and also decide not to take part in the study. They were told that even once they had accepted my invitation to participate or even completed some interviews, that they could still decide to unconditionally withdraw and that no harm or consequence would occur if they did. They could also refuse to answer a question if they chose to do that.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The above chapter described the various issues linked to doing the research and writing up and analysing the collected data. I outlined the research design and the methods that were used to collect the data, and pointed to some of the ethical challenges that had to be overcome in the study. In the following chapters I focus on the findings that came from the interviews with participants and interpret and analyse what they meant for the project, linking this to the research questions.

## **CHAPTER 5: ASSESSMENT AND FET EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

As noted in the previous chapter I utilised the interpretive paradigm in the study, as I believed that it would give me better insight into the thinking and understandings of a variety of educators and trainers working within the FET Band, as well as their different contexts. My goal was to engage with the views of a group of vocational education teachers and trainers that taught learners within the electrical engineering programme across the three components of the FET Band, and get them to share their experiences and understandings when implementing and interpreting prescribed assessment policies. Hereafter I refer to the educators and trainers that partook in the study as 'participants' and have allocated each of them a number (i.e. participant 1).

In using this interpretive paradigm I centred both on how these participants methodologically reconstructed their experiences and their worlds, and on the particular "configurations of meaning and institutional life that informed and shaped their reality-constituting activities" (Holstein and Gurbuim 2005: 484).

As such this chapter adopts a more discursive tone where I focus on the viewpoints and explanations of assessment by participants within the FET Band. The aim is to show how participants (in electrical engineering program) responded to and thought through questions on assessment and how they structured their responses with respect to their different contexts. In the chapter I focus mainly on individual reflections about assessment and analyse in chapter 6 the viewpoints of the participants in relation to the overall literature.

In order to meaningful understand and interpret the various participant views (on assessment) I describe below a brief contextual setting of the sector, institutions, disciplinary areas, as well as the training expertise of participants across 3 sites in the FET Band. This will allow the reader to better understand the ways in which participants explained their thinking and their experiences in their different contexts.

## **5.2 Sector and institutional background to the Participants and their sector experience**

### *5.2.1 The FET Band setting*

All the participants that were interviewed in the study were employed within the Further Education and Training (FET) Band in South Africa. Referred to as the 'mixed' post-compulsory education and training sector (Raffe as cited in Steer et al, 2007: 175), this FET Band in South Africa consists of three main parts, namely (a) a school component, (b) a FET college component, and (c) a work-based learning (occupational training) component.

Crucially, as Akoojee and McGrath (2010) note, before 2009 in South Africa these components were administered by different directorates of the national education and labour departments and thus at its main legislative source the FET Band often experienced a variety of mixed messages and incoherence about the role and function of vocational education and training within the overall education and training system.

However, since 2009 there has been a concerted effort to develop a closer conceptual link between education and skills development (or training) - in line with the latest Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRDSA) devoted to halving unemployment and poverty figures by 2014. As Akoojee & McGrath (2010: 19) note, the HRDSA regards the adoption of a broader-based focus on developing skills and training initiatives across all industries and at all levels in the country - while also helping to align the supply of labour with the demands of the labour market - as crucial for the economic future of the country. The recent reconfiguration of the departments responsible for education and training was also seen as a direct response "to one of the key challenges identified in the post-1994, namely the persistent lack of articulation between the Departments of Education and Labour" (Bird & Heitmann as cited in Akoojee and McGrath, 2010:19).

As such the newly formed post-school Education and Training Ministry (DHET) was tasked from 2009 with overseeing Universities, Universities of Technology, and public and private FET Colleges - as well as the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) that previously resided under the Department of Labour.

These above institutions were expected to provide education and training to the different kinds of learners and ‘customers’ that populated the post-school sector; learners that can roughly be grouped into 6 categories, as outlined by Akoojee & McGrath (2010) with regard to their study of private FET providers in South Africa. Akoojee & McGrath (2010: 21) describe the different kinds of learner types in the following way (as noted in the table below):

<b>LEARNER TYPE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
1. Normal school learner	15-18 year old learners attending high school on fulltime basis, with an interest in a practical subject or with a practical-academic subject combination
2. Pre-employed	People that were never employed and want to access the formal labour market. Attendance/enrolment can be of fulltime or short-term basis.
3. Unemployed	Mature clients that were either never employed or were retrenched. They seek access either to the formal labour market or to self-employment
4. Business customers	These are ‘customers’ that focus on particular ‘products’ provided by providers on a short term/part-time basis
5. Employees	These are people sent by employers to improve their skills and abilities to enhance their productivity in current employment
6. Employed	These are employed and mature people who attend on short time or part-time basis. They seek to either develop further skills or abilities for promotional purposes, or seek to learn skills to move elsewhere to different working spaces, or they are non-employment driven and want to learn a skill for personal benefit.

In my study I interviewed participants that worked at sites that served learners in all of the categories above. On the one hand, the participants that worked at two types of sites operating within the jurisdiction of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), namely the FET Colleges and the private training providers, served 5 of the 6 types of learners.

This Further Education Training College was funded by the DHET and the work-based learning (occupational training) component was to varying degrees funded and overseen by the DHET (under the auspices of the Sector Education and Training Authorities - SETAs) – this depended on whether the training was offered and vetted by private providers or the college sector. Both

the FET College and the private training centre had to abide by respective rules and regulations stipulated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

On the other hand, the school component within the FET Band – where I interviewed 4 participants and that served one of the learner types in the table above at the grade 12 level – continues to follow a general curriculum with vocational subjects, and remains funded and overseen by the Department of Basic Education.

### *5.2.2 Institutional settings*

All participants that partook in the study were located at institutions in fairly close proximity (radius of 20kms) in the North Eastern part of the Western Cape.

Each of the 3 institutions where the 12 participants (in the study) worked, served communities from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, though given the nature of the education and training provision these communities were predominantly working class and vocationally-orientated in their employment. The majority of current learners would have been categorised under apartheid as coloured and African.

Then, the institutions where the 12 participants taught were significantly different in their orientation and make-up. I briefly describe these sites below. Notably, while the original intention was to interview 4 participants at each site, given the size of the College site I decided to interview 5 participants at the college campus, 3 at the training centre, and 4 participants at the school site (that taught grade 12s).

a) Tiger High School is categorised as a Dinaledi school within the current institutional make-up and thus has a strong mathematics and physical science orientation. The school was established in 1982 and had traditionally delivered good results and produced a variety of professionals such as engineers, doctors, lawyers, and even pilots (produced first female pilot employed at South African Airways). Given its location however and the working class nature of surrounding communities, the school also offered vocational subjects and had a number of well-equipped workshops on its

premises. As such the school comprised also a 'focus school' component and a vocational route component. This explained why the school was officially defined as a Comprehensive School (one providing for diverse streams).

In providing both academic and vocational streams to learners, the school produced learners that either went on to further study (university or college) or immediately entered the labour market. In both streams learners predominantly exited the school at grade 12.

In 2012 the school served roughly 1300 learners (700 males and 600 females) and had a staff compliment of about 38 educators. In my study I interviewed 4 educators that taught learners that studied in the subject 'electrical technology'.

b). The FET College chosen for the study (Mostert Bay College) was one of 6 FET Colleges in the Western Cape region. This college comprises of 5 campuses, which were each autonomous colleges before 1999. The college had 818 students in 2012, of which 486 were female and 332 were male, and had a professional staff compliment of 24 fulltime employees. Given the overriding focus on electrical engineering, the study focused on only one of the college's five campuses –where the engineering focus utilised 7 of the college's educator participants – 6 males and 1 female.

In terms of location, Mostert Bay campus is located in a semi-urban area that under apartheid served white learners. This meant that it was established in a fairly well established and residential area (designated for a white population under apartheid) and where there were a minority of immediately accessible 'non-white' residents. At the FET College learners could enrol for either pre- or post-grade 12 courses. These are all regarded as vocational and deemed as labour market readiness programmes. Notably, the National Certificate Vocational offered by the college is regarded as a NQF level 4 qualification and is also equivalent to grade 12. The NATED (Report 191) N4-N6 programs are regarded as post-matric courses.

c). The Halfway Training Centre that I visited in the study was established in 2008, is located in an industrial area, and is categorised as a 'for profit' training provider. The centre's 5 male trainers focus on training an annual

intake of roughly 120 individuals for employment in electrical engineering business enterprises. These (learner) individuals are either already employed within industries, or are individuals hoping to use the training to get employment in this sector. The training centre provides three types of training, namely pre-trade testing, apprenticeship and learnership training - which are all labour market readiness programmes.

In South Africa private training providers can be categorised according to three typologies, namely “non-profit providers” (NGO-type), “for profit providers” (business enterprise), or “in-house providers” (situated within companies). The training centre in the study provided training services to various companies and local authorities and most of the trainees were thus already employed. The trainees’ employers mostly paid for both their training and their transport and daily food.

### *5.2.3 Participant details*

For the study I interviewed 12 participants that were employed at the 3 different sites described above. Given that I began interviews at the college I individually refer to the college interviewees in the text as Participant 1 through to 5, the school participants as Participant 6 through to 9, and the training centre staff as Participant, 10, 11, and 12.

All the participants had teaching experience or work experience in industry of between 10 and 25 years, though at the training centre one of the participants was a new recruit and had only been ‘training’ for about 1 year. All but 3 of the participants in the study would have been categorised as coloured under apartheid and only one participant was female. The participants that were interviewed at the training centre were all ‘white’.

It was notable that the three participants at the training centre had much more work experience within industry than any of the other interviewed participants. Each of these three participants had worked on the goldmines or within state industries in Gauteng as apprentices and had developed their technical expertise there (with all of them qualified in electrical engineering and having passed their trade tests), while the majority of participants in the college and

school had acquired their expertise through the more formal academic university route.

At the school level, 2 of the participants were university graduates in education, one had graduated through the college route with N5 mechanical engineering, while the other served in the army for a long time before teaching at a college of skills in Gauteng and then securing employment teaching at the comprehensive school (vocational) in the study.

Lastly, at the college level, one of the participants started off at the campus as a student support educator and later transferred over to a formal lecturer position, two participants taught in life orientation and Afrikaans, one participant was faculty manager of engineering and oversaw engineering programs at the campus, while the last participant initially started out in the private sector as a technician and after successfully completing a trade test in electronics in 1998 switched to teaching in the college sector and is currently program manager in the electrical department.

From the above, and for a study at this level, it may seem that the sample used in the study may have been unrepresentative of the staff complements of the institutions; casting doubt on the legitimacy of the findings. However, given that the main focus of the study was on assessment, it was the professional and teaching expertise, the experience of teaching learners in the FET band, and the spread of subjects provided to learners in the FET Band that was deemed more important when the sample selection was made.

In that regard, the majority of the participants that were interviewed had at the minimum a teacher training qualification and further assessor and moderator certificates. Many also had a 'teach the trainer' certificate that was especially relevant for the FET College and Occupational Training centre settings. Most participants had a three-year post-grade 12 qualification, while one participant had a Masters degree in education. At least 4 of the participant sample taught subjects like Afrikaans and life orientation, but to learners pursuing vocational streams at school and college. At the FET College and also at the training centre most of the participants were also fully qualified artisans that had acquired their qualification via an apprenticeship and completed the Section

28 Trade Test. This gave them a particular insight into the kinds of ‘testing’ and evidence of skills ability needed in their settings.

In apprenticeships, as noted above for participants, apprentices were bound to a contract between employer and employee for a period of 3/4 years. During this time they received three months theoretical training at a college every year and for the rest of the time they were trained and mentored at the workplace by a fully qualified artisan. To qualify as electricians, each of them followed one of three routes, namely apprenticeship, a learnership, and section 28 trade assessment. To qualify for recognition and certification from the Electrical Contractors Association of South Africa and to qualify for formal trade testing, participants either took:

- Section 28 - : (Recognition of Prior Learning) RPL
  - Option 1
 

The candidates traceable working experience (minimum:6 years) with no formal qualifications give him/ her access to a trade test. However, the candidate is subjected to a pre-assessment to identify any possible gaps that may exist.
- Section 28 –
  - Option 2
 

Where the candidate had 4 years traceable and relevant practical experience in the electrical field and had a minimum of a N2 Electrical Trade Theory
- Section 13 ( Accelerated Artisan Training Programme) AATP
  - The candidate must complete his/hers Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT) at the *institution* of which the evidence must be kept in a logbook, and then complete approximately 18 months practical training on-site (*workplace*)

In the table below (as noted in chapter1) I provide the latest qualifying criteria for trade testing by the Merseta (2013) via section 28. I provide this to offer more clarity on the requirements to qualify for a trade test.

Categories	Criteria
A	Minimum four years (4) years relevant on the job practical

	experience within South Africa and N2 four subjects certificate or equivalent qualification including relevant trade theory. OR
B	Minimum (5) years relevant on the job practical experience within South Africa and N2 relevant trade theory or equivalent subject. OR
C	Minimum six (6) years relevant on the job practical experience within South Africa with no N2
D	Successful completion of MerSeta registered NQF Level 2, 3 and 4 trade related learnerships with minimum two (2) years, inclusive of institutional and workplace components OR
E	Former apprentices who have met the section 13 trade test requirements and their contract got rescinded before qualifying as an artisan.
F	Former apprentices under section 13 terminated before they could qualify for trade test, and either have proven eligibility for a Section 28 trade test based on acquired skills from the formal training part under Section 13, or have undergone additional approved training to meet the requirement.

Apprentices then had to register as an accredited person as qualified Electricians (construction) with the Department of Labour after completion of their wireman's licence, paper 1 and 2.

For this they needed to show proof of passing the trade test (either via an apprenticeship, Section 13 or Section 28). This needed to be complemented by evidence that they passed N3 with subjects Electrical Trade Theory, Mathematics, Engineering Science, and Industrial Electronics or Technical Drawing.

Finally, they had to show proof of having passed the National Installation Rules examination on SANS 10142-1 (with proof of competence in the Unit Standards as per the Department of Labour guidelines).

In more recent times electrical participants could also follow the learnership route where training consisted of 70% on site training and 30% at a training

centre (private provider) or at a FET college. In such instances they would build up unit standards until they achieved the whole qualification.

Finally, in terms of what subjects the 12 interviewed participants taught, these ranged from fundamental subjects like mathematics, life orientation and languages to core and elective subjects that differed from one setting to another. At the school, as well as at the college, the core subjects comprised of electrical subjects, while at the training centre (where the focus was mostly on building up credits towards a whole qualification) the focus was on what training each individual learner required. Furthermore, at the training centre participants also had to serve a variety of students that enrolled for pre-trade testing, or were doing a learnership, or were apprentices and thus needed practical training.

### **5.3 How participants understood assessment**

Keeping the above institutional settings and levels of expertise in mind, I outline in the text below what the above 12 participants had to say within their different sites about probably the most fundamental activity within their working lives: assessment. Most notable and evident in their responses was not only their different understandings and approaches to assessment, but also what they thought was the purpose of assessment in their various settings and how this was informed by their own personal histories and expertise. Many of the views also expressed quite profound insights into the function of education and training provision and the kinds of contributions that their institutions were meant to provide.

As such, in my descriptions below I have combined Benveniste's (2002) rational-functional and symbolic model with Weedon et al's (2002) 'learning for assessment' and 'learning of assessment' model (explored in chapter 3) to group the views of the 12 participants about the overall function of assessment in the education system into three distinct categories (see Earl 2003: 22-26), and also note that there was also a prevalence of a fourth overlapping category throughout. As will be argued in chapter 6 I combined the two models to (in a simplified way) emphasise the extent to which the politics around VET policies have created a new provision infrastructure that

has made it difficult for educational participants to operate or fulfil their educational function. The identified categories highlighted assessment as:

1. A way of creating new institutional environments that shifted governmental concern away from merely controlling resources and contents within education systems towards a focus on measuring and ensuring the actual outcomes achieved. Assessment was thus seen an instrument to monitor system reform or system management and was tied to discourses of performativity, efficiency, quality assurance, and accountability. With a rational/functional and technical motivation, this entailed systems being set up that identified for teachers and policy makers both the progress of the learners and key inefficiencies and absences within the education system. Within this model it was suggested that by embracing internationally accepted models of modernity, assessment could serve as a key “device for the scientific collection of objective data designed to support rational decision making at classroom and policy levels”. Assessment thus was a political instrument that ‘managed’ the relationship between government and education institutions (Benveniste 2001: 93; Hargreaves 1990: 149; Wilmot 2005: 72).
2. A way of finding out and measuring what learners knew in terms of preparation for the world of work, as well as for promotion and certification purposes to operate in that world (Shay 2008). This was also a way of grading learners within education where the standards of competence within that system were measured by the level of progress of participants, and where it could be ascertained whether people were proficient in necessary and identified skills (Winch & Dingell 2004: 16; Vandeyar and Killen 2007: 102; Dreyer 2008: 5);
3. A means by which to ensure that learners lived according to particular norms of society, one of which was to perform, compete, and excel in order to be rewarded (Grosser & Lombard 2005: 45; Brown 2004: 81).

I could have provided a fourth category that highlighted the value given to assessment systems that focused on motivating good learning practices, as well as improving the knowledge and skills of individual learners (Pring 2000: 14; Sutton in DoE 2008: 11; Dreyer 2008: 6; Earl 2003: 26). In that category it

would have been shown how learning transformed how people saw or valued things, how they understood and made sense of their experiences, and how they identified and solved their problems, assessment systems helped them clarify and simplify the kinds of learning necessary to do this (Pring 2000: 14). However, the problem with providing such a separate category was that in each of the (other) three categories participants spoke consistently about how learners also invariably benefitted from knowing more about their own competencies and that this always provided quite positive contributions towards the development of their individual communities, province, country, and economy. This seeming contradiction within participant views is further highlighted in the analysis section of chapter 6.

### *5.3.1. Assessment as a political function and action*

In the first category, Participant 3 spoke, for example, about education systems being part of larger global processes that were never fair or equal. He argued that in a world where the rich were intent on protecting their gains, global economic forces worked in ways where education systems had to ensure that only actions that contributed to the economy and economic growth were rewarded. He argued that this was achieved in two ways (one directly and the other indirectly). Firstly, the education and economic systems directly rewarded those that were shown to be progressing and excelling. Secondly, with the pressures to show 'value for money', struggling education systems indirectly placed unacceptable burdens on teachers and learners in classrooms that ensured that learners in such situations always failed. Participant 3 noted that:

There is broad consensus that assessment systems nowadays are designed to meet organisational aims and outcomes instead of professional outcomes. This is a form of subtle enslavement that global powers play out on local stakeholders that force them to partake in a process where they can't succeed.

When prompted to explain his assertions Participant 3 observed that when assessment systems undermined the confidence of teachers by placing expectations on them that they could not fulfil, providing shorter deadlines to achieve them in, making them teach larger classes, and reducing their resources and opportunities to intervene when learners were struggling, then

the obvious conclusion was that the intention was not to empower teachers or learners but rather to monitor and organise them for the thinking of the labour market. He argued that when education was regarded as a commodity to be bought and sold, then measuring systems mainly created 'markets' that identified for the 'consumers' the good and bad parts of that system, and did not actually bring about change within that system. It was "more of a gate-keeping exercise than anything else". As a result, argued Participant 3, assessment systems were more costly, less user-friendly, and deeply burdensome for educators in terms of the meaningless requirements that they had to complete daily. However, because there were no jobs available for learners when they left schools, colleges and training centres, such assessment processes continued to operate, he argued, because it identified the 'best' – that could be taken up in the labour market- and the 'worst'- that could be ignored.

This viewpoint corresponded with the argument of Benveniste (2002) who noted that the main value of assessment systems internationally was to sharply reflect the agendas and nature of dominant power relations within given contexts. He noted that:

The enthusiasm over national assessment is nurtured by the belief that quality education is an indispensable element for national development within a globalized economic environment that thrives on highly skilled labour. We live in a "knowledge economy" in which human capital has gained ascendancy over both labour and raw materials as a vehicle for increased productivity and economic growth. The ability of countries to attract foreign capital and remain competitive in the global marketplace is considered to pivot on their capacity to create a ready supply of highly qualified labour. Assessment is therefore part of a global culture that champions decentralisation, accountability, and market competition as engines of educational quality (Benveniste 2002: 90-91).

This was a sentiment that was also echoed by Participants 2 and 4 (though in a somewhat contrasting way), who argued that assessment mainly helped learners understand how they could contribute to the economy by both improving their qualities as workers and ensuring that they had the kinds of skills and competencies that would improve the economy. Participants 10 and 11 argued as well that good assessment systems in FET and training

institutions not only led to the development of well-trained artisans but also ensured their contribution to the creation of skills in the country and a more competent workforce. This, they felt, was the main purpose of the education system. “We add value to economic development when we use the expertise that we grow to compete on the global market” (Participant 11).

### *5.3.2. Assessment as a tool for measuring and grading*

However, most participants interviewed in the study spoke about assessment more as a tool to ascertain the level of performance or development of learners. Shay (2008) refers to this approach as merely wanting to know whether learners could reproduce the learning that they had received, and thereby improving teaching and learning practices. Participant 12 noted for example that the main aim of assessment in training centres was to practically find out whether learners had been properly prepared to complete the kinds of practical tasks that they would be expected to complete in their jobs.

This matched the definition of assessment provided by Beets & Van Louw (2011) that:

Assessment is an integral practice that informs interactions at the interface of teaching and learning. It is a process of collecting and interpreting information that is used to (1) inform learners and their parents about the progress they are making in attaining knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour in order to succeed, and (2) to inform those staff members that make crucial educational decisions about learners about the progress of their instructional, diagnostic, curricula planning, programme development, and placement and promotion processes (Beets & Van Louw 2012: 306, citing [http://www.education.ualberta.ca/educ/psych/crame/files/eng\\_prin.pdf](http://www.education.ualberta.ca/educ/psych/crame/files/eng_prin.pdf))

In this regard, Flew (cited in Winch & Dengell 2004: 15) has argued that because teaching and learning was, by its very nature, involved in intentionally trying to bring about mastery within learners of some piece of relevant knowledge, it made sense to want to know whether this process had worked. He noted that:

If someone is sincerely trying to learn something or trying to teach someone to learn something then they must, necessarily, be concerned whether, how far, and how well, that person was progressing. And they cannot claim to be concerned if they don't take steps to find out the answers to these questions (Flew 1976, as cited in Winch & Dungell 2004: 15)

The above definitions of assessment also corresponded with how the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) described assessment in 2012. According to the DHET 'real competence in any occupation' was when it was found that a person could apply and transfer learning at the workplace or across a variety of workplaces.

The most critical component of learning in artisan development therefore is actual workplace learning. During the latter stage, the learner will be afforded the opportunity to apply the occupational knowledge and practical learning gained during training and show competence. This competence referred to applied competence consisting of practical, foundational and reflexive abilities (DHET 2012: 9).

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) had defined assessment in 2001 in relation to such defined levels of competency. For them, a learner was considered competent or incompetent based on being assessed according to a particular set standard (SAQA 2001: 25). According to SAQA (2001: 23), learners needed to demonstrate the ability to perform a set of tasks and actions in authentic contexts (practical competence), demonstrate understanding of what they were doing and why they were doing it (foundational competence), as well as show the ability to integrate performance with understanding to be able to adapt to changed circumstances and also explain the reasons behind these adaptations (reflexive competence). In essence, assessment in such a scenario was focused on more than what learners could do, but also where learners were "required to demonstrate certain life skills that would not only enhance their learning, but also ensure that these skills were transferable to both their work and private lives" (SAQA 2001: 23).

A further view of assessment around the issue of measuring was that such a process enabled teachers and policy makers to predict future performance (Winch & Dingell 2004: 17). For the majority of interviewed participants the collecting of scientific data provided the means by which teachers could make decisions and where learners could make 'real choices' in life. Learners could thus intervene in their own personal development. Many argued that through 'measurement' learners got to understand and appreciate the value of

education, which they could use to determine their futures, and which then could also turn them into different people (Pring 2000: 14).

Participant 2 noted that:

Assessment is a kind of feedback for learners where the learner can see at the end of a term how good or how bad they did. As teacher you can also see how far they have come or what you must still do to help them further. Assessment in a learning institution thus informs people what to do and develops mature decisions.

Participant 8 also observed that:

Assessment gives learners an idea of what the future holds for them and can give them the confidence to know in which area or sector they want to channel their attention.

In this regard, measuring and grading learners was more than just 'knowing' but also finding out how to increase learner motivation and learning, and inform productive and effective teacher feedback (Vandeyar & Killan 2007). Learners also needed to be afforded the opportunity to generate their own descriptive feedback by comparing it to that of the teacher (Chappius & Stiggins as cited in Grosser and Lombaard, 2005: 45). As such, assessment became a tool to set goals, make learning decisions related to improvement, develop an understanding of what quality looks like, self-assess and communicate status, and then progress towards learning goals.

### *5.3.3 Assessment as a tool for shaping behaviour*

For participants in the study a further value of assessment was that it empowered parents (who were the consumers of education) to make choices, voice their discontent when they received inferior services, and thereby insist on better services and 'value' for their money. These participants regarded good assessment processes as not only enabling successful learners but also pointing out for parents of less successful learners how to intervene on behalf of their children. This served not only to inform the decisions of parents and learners but also get them to better understand their roles as 'consumers' and 'clients' and influence their behaviour in such relationships.

Participant 1 noted that assessment in colleges "gave value to everything that students did in the classroom. It counted for all the different things they

completed and then came to define what was acceptable and the kinds of standards needed for promotion. Assessment was thus the means by which particular standards became installed in their minds”.

Participant 3 further observed that as individuals “learners need to keep up with their peers and live according to the norms set by our society. As achievers get rewarded our learners have to be encouraged to perform, compete, and excel if they want their own place within a future society”.

According to most participants, learners thus benefitted from assessments through developing ‘healthy and mature habits’ and skills that disciplined their behaviour and their actions. “They learn how to deal with stress and pressure academically and they learn to become goal-oriented, to be able to study better, and to focus on what they want to do post-matric” (Participant 9).

This view of Participant 9 corresponded with the approach of Brown (2004: 81) who argued that assessment systems helped learners irrespective whether they actually listened and learnt in class, because “if they want a qualification they have to participate in the assessment processes we design and implement”.

In this categorisation the evaluation of student achievement was however not just a technical tool for diagnosis of conditions that afflicted different parts of the education sector, but it also gave pride and meaning to learners. “Once declared competent the self images of learners were boosted tremendously, and for those that until then had not had a future, for them they do their training and after their assessment they walk out of here with chests that want to explode” (Participant 12).

Participant 4 added one final insight to how assessment modified the practices and behaviour of teachers and learners. He noted that:

Assessment reveals the deficiencies in schooling systems and promotes the behaviour of our teachers by linking student outcomes to public accountability or performance incentive schemes – without these outcomes or schemes being seen as challenging state legitimacy.

In this regard, Benveniste (2002: 90) has argued that “the ability to command change puts the state in a privileged position as it gets them to control things while bearing limited responsibility over education processes and outcomes”.

In a contemporary environment where authority over what happens in education institutions has been devolved down to local bodies and institutions, assessment systems not only preserve some form of concentration of power for the state, but also shape the behaviour, attitudes, and approaches of all the various stakeholders when doing so by linking their actions to defined and predetermined activities and processes (Benveniste 2002: 90).

Notably, in each of the above categories there was a belief that assessment systems could motivate good learning practices and thereby improve the knowledge and skills of individual teachers and learners. There was a belief that learning transformed how people saw or valued things and how they identified and solved problems associated with their teaching and learning. Participant 2 for example firmly believed that assessment instruments led to “the development of the critical thinking ability of candidates” and resulted in them “always thinking about ways of doing things more effectively and efficiently”.

Another Participant (3) observed however that the problem with claiming that assessment led to ‘critical thinking’ was that such a view was often high-sounding and grand but in most cases ‘got lost’ when the “tedium of excessive planning and marking overwhelmed participants”.

#### **5.4. Putting assessment into practice**

Having gained some perspective of how the 12 participants at 3 institutions in the FET Band understood assessment, I then set about making sense of their explanations of how this shaped their practice.

Before I explain their various practices however, the views of Participant 3 with regard to assessment practices were quite revealing. He noted that:

Assessment nowadays requires lecturers to utilise holidays, weekends, and their leisure time for planning and marking. This hampers any creativity on their part, but also are an insult to their mutual capabilities - having mostly experienced more effective forms of assessment in the past. They can easily identify where the problems will lie in implementation and execution but their views are ignored. They know that there are too many frills and bells, and that learners don't benefit from that. They know it leads in the end to learners lacking the main skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic when they leave school. But the

teachers just have to carry on if they are to keep their professional jobs.

Participant 3 observed that what bothered teachers and trainers was not only the huge number of extra work that new assessment systems required but the complete lack of acknowledgement of their individual knowledge, capacities, and experience.

He argued that, according to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), for assessment to form an integral part of teaching and learning it needed to adhere to both formal and informal activities. While individual teachers and trainers could informally identify and implement ways of complementing their daily learning activities with assessment tasks and activities, this was rarely possible in the stressful environment of 'constant outcomes'. He noted that teachers and trainers thus mostly adhered to using (or took seriously) the formal Programme of Assessment that was recommended to monitor the progress of learners across different educational contexts (Department of Education 2008: 1; Task Team Final Report 2009: 29).

Based on what participants noted in their interviews, while they acknowledged that assessment operated quite differently in the school, college, and training centre environments, it can be safely argued that in all the settings the assessment process consisted mainly of two core components with two different intended purposes. Beets & Van Louw (2012: 308, citing the DoE 2008) identify the following two processes:

1. Final examinations that occur mostly at the end of the year or band, the purpose of which is summative and leads to grading, certification, and feedout. The most important of these examinations is probably the matriculation examination at the end of Grade 12, which is a high-stakes examination that acts as gate-keeper for higher education programmes and different vocational opportunities. Learner answers to these nationally set and moderated examination questions are scored against prescribed marking memoranda by external assessors that are intended to establish a form of fairness based on everyone being marked in the same way.
2. Continuous assessments (CASS) that track learners through a learning programme with the goal of integrating insights from the assessment into

teaching as well as the development of the learner through ongoing feedback. This is what is known as the formative purpose of assessment (supporting better teaching and learning). In South Africa CASS is used as a technical solution to teachers having to base their measurement of learners on one final matriculation examination at the end of schooling and thus have no opportunity to intervene timeously. Thus, although a lot of teacher and learner time is spent on CASS- even though the grade 12 final mark is made up of 25% continuous assessment and 75% from an externally set, marked and moderated matriculation examination- it was argued that CASS played a crucial role in assisting teachers fulfill their educative and professional role.

Participants noted that for both processes to work, assessment systems needed two main things. According to Ecclestone (as cited in Gray et al 2000), these consisted of the search for evidence and a standard or scale. While evidence could be gained from traditional examinations or projects executed in work-based settings, standards or scales took on particular forms that involved the measurement of learner progress.

These included finding out whether:

- (1) A person could add 2+2 together to make 4.

This evaluation of whether a student could do something based upon an explicit and absolute standard was referred to as *criterion referencing*;

- (2) how the person performed relative to the group and compared with other students.

Where the performance of an individual was judged in comparison to the standards of a reference group, this was known as *norm referencing*;

- (3) If that person could do the task better than he/she could before the start of the course or training programme.

This is where the performance and progress of individual learners was measured over a set period of time (Gray et al 2000).

In ascertaining the above, assessment procedures and practices needed to be governed by certain key principles, namely fairness, validity, reliability, and practicability that were applied fairly and ethically. According to SAQA (2001: 16), these principles within assessment processes were meant to “allay the concerns and anxieties of users of assessment results and assured learners, parents, employers, and learning institutions that the assessment results were credible and provided accurate information about the individual.

Thus, as can be noted above, assessment entailed a number of overlapping structures, processes, and principles that made the textured and layered structures that were used to assess learners quite difficult to set up, as they served different purposes in different settings. This point was particularly evident when participants reflected on the assessment systems they utilised at the 3 different sites.

#### *5.4.1. The challenges of assessment at the level of the Comprehensive School (vocational education provision)*

At Tiger High School participants assessed learners that to all intents and purposes were ‘ordinary learners’ at school. Learners that enrolled for a vocational education stream had 7 subjects like everyone else - except that the core subjects differed from those of learners in academic streams. For Participant 6 who taught electrical technology, for example, the learners he taught needed to show evidence of learning in his subject with the goal of exiting school at grade 12. For him, assessment was about letting his learners, like all other learners at school, know at the end of term “how good or bad they were” and for teachers to see what they still needed to do to help the learner further”. He noted however that because he taught a vocational subject, electrical technology, his learners needed to do much more practical work and show their progression “on the electrical boards themselves”.

So I have tests and examinations and I teach theory where they have to explain for instance all the waves and give me the difference between the component that they are measuring and how to determine breakdown. But my main focus is really on the practical. Electrical technology is actually a combination of 3 subjects combined with electrician work, electronics, and communication needing different skills. So I bring in different people to show learners how to fit a plug,

how to fit lights and a lamp. Their practical is about them showing us they can do the task.

He noted that learners in electrical technology (and other vocational subjects) got assessed in 3 ways, namely continuous assessment (CASS) that made up 25% of final mark, a practical assessment task (PAT) that counted 25%, and a final examination that counted 50% of final mark. The end of year examination consisted mainly of theory and understandings of technological processes.

Participant 6 noted that essentially for a learner to get the 30% needed to pass the subject electrical technology, they needed to get 120 out of 400 marks. This meant that if they received a combined 60% for their continuous assessment tasks and their PAT, then they already passed the subject (and did not really need to get more than 10-20% in the final exam).

As such, depending on how the goal of assessment was approached by the individual teacher and also the school in which he/she operated, the process of assessment of a vocational subject could follow a number of different routes at school level. For example, if the focus was on systemic performance and ensuring that teachers and institutions followed uniform and standardised practices that could be monitored and compared, then teachers seemingly focused on getting learners to pass and developed an assessment model for them to signal this. If the focus was on getting educators to adhere to common practices and approaches, then teachers only really needed to do was abide by the logic of what was being developed and rolled out, and stick to this. For these teachers assessment then became about their own performance being scrutinised and they mostly then simply stuck to the regulations and suggestions provided. Lastly, if the focus of assessment was to develop better practice and learn about what worked and did not work, as well as how to better improve the process in ways that advanced teaching and learning, then teachers quickly worked out that if they focused predominantly on teaching learners the practical dimensions of the vocational subject (which many believed was how it should be anyway), then learners both passed the subject and developed the skills necessary to operate in the discipline of electrical engineering (as technicians).

While the assessment system was being re-assessed by the Department of Basic Education with regard to vocational subjects at schools, the fact that the bulk of the assessments was always overseen by the vocational teachers and their subject heads and that the moderation done by heads of department, the circuit managers and WCED only really looked at a 10% sample, meant that the nature and level of vocational knowledge and vocational practice that was provided at the school level depended really on the expertise of the respective teachers and subject heads within the school setting.

Participant 6 noted that subject advisors visited his school every quarter to check whether the work was being done according to the rules and criteria laid down, and that these visits were complemented by internal and also external moderation – internally by heads of department, subject heads, and externally by colleagues in school cluster groupings. However, in the end, according to Participant 6, the responsibility to assess well and do what was best for learners “lay in my hands”:

My job is to make sure that learners know what the future holds for them and to help their development and give them the confidence to know what they are doing. I have to decide what works for them and the skills they need to have. If the learner knows this and this leads to them being able to study further then that learner will be helping economic development in the country.

According to Participant 7, who has taught technical drawing and mathematics in the past and currently teaches Engineering Graphics and Design, assessment followed the same pattern outlined by Participant 6 except that for him much of the assessment took place daily in the drawing rooms. This was where competence was sought. Based on his vast experience (8 years working in the private sector in the drawing office and extensive use of computer-aided drafting), and 15 years teaching at the college, for Participant 7 learners progressed and developed in his subject by constant repetition until a certain level of correctness and understanding became graphically communicated. Using grids, transparencies, and hardcopy drawings learners drew daily in class and at home – which was then assessed on a weekly basis and moderated by subject heads once a term. Without a subject advisor at the district or cluster level however, determining

what worked and how to further develop the subject was often left in his hands and that of the head of department at the school.

Participant 7 noted however that as long as the results of grade 12 influenced the ways in which schools like his operated, then assessment would always be utilised in ways that fitted into the challenges of the school and the action plan that it formulated for the district office. Participant 7 noted the following:

Schools are measured based on the pass rate of grade 12s. Here the district office needs results each term for the grade 12s. Included we must provide an action plan explaining the results and what we are doing to improve them and the strategies that will be employed to maintain a positive momentum. These strategies control our methodologies and our activities in other grades too in terms of quality assurance and planning our curriculum. As schools are measured by the success of its grade 12s the growth and development of the school depends on the results being good- it makes things easier. And if results are good it improves the marketability of the school and makes it easier to run as a business - as a way of attracting business partners.

Participant 7 noted that “in the face of all these other things I use an assessment tool that is not ascribed- that of deduction. And I deduce learner cognitive ability by the correctness of work completed. My challenge at the end of the day is that I have to decide what my learners need and the skills they need to have, but ensure that my methods fit into the format followed by the school”.

On the other hand, given that learners have other school subjects like English, Afrikaans, and life orientation that were part of overall school provisioning, participants that I interviewed that taught these subjects followed the assessment practices used by fellow teachers in these ‘fundamental subjects’ (as in the academic stream). The interviewed participants in life orientation and Afrikaans noted for example that they used the variety of assessment forms (oral, written, and practical) that were used at the school to measure learner progress. This included an approach to life orientation where there was no external moderation for the subject at school level.

Participant 8 noted that:

We test verbally, we do it in practical activities, and we do it by means of written exams. At the end of each term we conduct tests and also have tests throughout the year during class time. All assessments are

pre-moderated internally by peers and subject heads, and then externally by peers from schools in our WCED-determined cluster groups.

Compared to the pass mark (30%) in electrical technology and engineering graphics and design, in both life orientation and Afrikaans learners at Tiger High School had to achieve 40% to pass the subjects overall. Furthermore, for grade 12s doing Afrikaans as a subject the continuous assessments during the year counted for 25% while the year-end examination contributed 75% towards the final mark.

This contrasted to assessment used in life orientation where continuous assessments contributed 75% towards the final mark and the year-end internal examination counted 25%. In this subject learners wrote the year-end examination for life orientation in September each year and this got assessed internally, and for grade 12s, was moderated externally. Lastly, as the life orientation curriculum focused strongly on the application of knowledge the approach to assessment ironically was also quite 'practical' where learners showed the development of the life skills and values necessary for living in a democratic society through inquiry, experience, and performance.

As noted above, for the 4 participants that were interviewed at school level for the study each adopted very different approaches and methods with regard to assessment. These were influenced both by what they each regarded as the main purpose and function of assessment and by the nature and teaching requirements of the respective subjects they taught (allied to its position within different learning streams at the school- academic, technical, focus area). Within one institutional site in the FET Band alone the different approaches and attitudes of participants toward assessment provided the school with quite formidable challenges in terms of how it organised its vocational education offerings.

The table below indicates the reporting tool used by schools to give feedback to parents on the Programme of Assessment for all subjects.

<b>Rating code</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
7	Outstanding	80-100%

6	Meritorious	70-79%
5	Substantial	60-69%
4	Adequate	50-59%
3	Moderate	40-49%
2	Elementary	30-39%
1	Not achieved	0-29%

*Table: Scale of achievement for schools (DoE 2005: 6)*

#### 5.4.2. Assessment at the level of the FET College

At the Mostert Bay College campus three of the five participants taught vocational subjects, while one taught life orientation and the other maths literacy. As with the school setting the ratio of formative and summative assessments in the latter 2 subjects was 25:75. But unlike the school setting, life orientation at FET Colleges was a fundamental part of the curriculum, had a fully examinable computer studies component, and thus was externally examined (counting 75% of final mark) and moderated in the form of a final examination - like all other subjects.

For the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) learners were enrolled for 7 subjects that included three fundamental subjects – one language, life orientation, and maths/maths literacy – and four vocational subjects. The pass mark for maths literacy was 30% and for life orientation and the one language 40%, and for the rest of their subjects learners were required to achieve 50% to pass (DoE 2007: 11). This means that 2 different rating scales were used to assess learners in the different subjects, as noted in the tables below.

For the *fundamental* subjects that required a 30% or 40% pass, the following scale was used:

<b>Rating code</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
7	Outstanding	80-100%
6	Meritorious	70-79%
5	Substantial	60-69%
4	Adequate	50-59%
3	Moderate	40-49%
2	Elementary	30-39%
1	Not achieved	0-29%

*Table: Scale of achievement for Fundamental component (Doe 2007: 12)*

Whereas for the *vocational* component that required learners to achieve 50% to pass in each subject, a 1-5 rating scale was used:

<b>Rating code</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
5	Outstanding	80-100%
4	Meritorious	70-79%
3	Adequate	60-69%
2	Competent	50-59%
1	Not achieved	0-49%

*Table: Scale of achievement for Core component (Doe 2007: 12)*

It is important to note that originally in 2007 the Department of Education required learners in the NCV to pass by 70% in the vocational components, and thus used a 4-point scale. However, this was subsequently amended to a 5-point scale and the pass mark was adjusted to 50%.

In terms of assessment within different subjects, in the fundamental subjects (like maths/ maths literacy) the portfolio of evidence gathered over the year (ICASS) counted for 25% and had 7 formative tasks (with the final exam counting 75%), while in vocational subjects the portfolio of evidence of achievement gathered during the year included 7 continuous assessment tasks (25%) as well as an integrated summative assessment task (ISAT) that counted 25% (with the final examination counting 50%).

Compared to the school context, the ways in which these formative assessments were drafted at college level were also much more circumscribed in the number of tasks assessed and the scoring thereof. In each subject learners had to complete 7 formative assessments during the year. These included three theory tasks, 3 practical tasks, and one internal mock examination in September of each year. This mock exam resembled the final summative examination that each learner had to write at year-end, except that it was set and examined internally by campus lecturers.

As from 2010 the number of formative tasks that colleges were expected to complete became less prescribed and different subjects thereafter followed different formats with regard to tasks. In vocational subjects for example learners had to complete 5 tasks in 2012 while in fundamental subjects learners had to complete between 1-8 tasks. There remained however a strong focus on standardisation across college and campus settings where lecturers in the different subjects had to meet regularly and set examinable tasks that could be utilised in settings other than their own.

Participant 3 asserted here that the problem with standardisation was that it was “forced on all concerned and generally substituted for tried and tested teaching methods and assessment at local sites that were previously found to be quite effective”. He noted that:

All these multiple and simultaneous innovations impacts on lecturers who find them counterproductive - bringing meaningless paperwork - and creates expectations that cause them as teachers to lose confidence in what they are good at.

With regard to these tasks, Participant 1 noted that lecturers had always sought to ensure during the assessed tasks “that learners could respond to knowledge questions, analysis questions, as well as evaluation questions”.

For us (he noted) assessment tasks during the year was a way of gathering evidence of what a learner knows – whether our teaching was effective, how learners were responding, whether a learner had reached a certain level of competence, and whether a learner would be able to be promoted to the next level when they sat for the summative assessments.

Participant 3 observed in this regard that because these tasks were often set and moderated externally he personally chose to have a pre-assessment meeting with his learners informing them about what was expected of them and making them understand the gravity of the assessments they were undertaking. “The expectation of success”, he noted, “made us perhaps far more focused on issues of learner promotion to the next level, than on what learners actually knew”.

Participant 1 further observed that:

With shortened and tight deadlines, the changing profiles of our learners at campus, and the size of classes, it all boils down to us having to do more in less time and with much less resources. We now have to use our holidays, weekends, and leisure time to plan and mark. Can we really stay focused on the benefits that good assessment is supposed to bring?

This process of thinking about assessment was further complicated by the transient nature of the college context, especially with regard to vocational subjects, given that some learners were meant to move in and out of programs depending on work context challenges, learnerships, and job training. Though many felt that the approach where learners could use their

scores attained for their continuous assessment tasks (they were valid for one year) as well as the scores for the integrated summative assessment task (ISAT) (which were valid for 3 years) if they failed their end-of-the-year external final examination (which counted for 50% of their final mark), helped resolve this challenge.

Participants noted that a further problem with assessment tasks at college level was that it was more theory-based and did not sufficiently test learners' practical skills. Participant 5 questioned whether the application skills of learners were actually being tested when there was such a strong emphasis on "remembering and repeating textbook based information". He observed that:

Some learners perform well in theory-based tasks and some (very few) score well in both theory and practical. Most are there though for the practical and do well in these tasks. But when the focus is on theory, these learners are seriously disadvantaged.

Where is the acknowledgement of context? And what about their different ages? Yes, I understand learners must know and master the skill required. But lecturers don't think enough about who were being assessed and what would be the best way of finding out what they knew. Learners are all treated the same. We don't accommodate difference, especially learners that have some understanding of work.

Participant 4 concluded that:

But in the end, assessment is part of life wherever you go. If you want to be promoted or qualify for bonuses, you just can't escape assessment. We as lecturers can only hope that our systems of assessment and training will improve over time, that the more we work on these systems the better they will become and the more we will influence the critical ability of the learner. If we do this then we will improve, impact and maximise the benefits of learners for our economy. For it is when we do things more effectively, we reduce waste in the system and in the economy, and in doing this we enhance the development of the economy.

The above highlights the very different challenges and requirements at the FET college level with regard to assessment. While there was far greater standardisation across campus and college sites, other kinds of contextual and policy concerns invariably influence the ways in which lecturers approached and practiced assessment. Again, these approaches were influenced as much by what they regarded as the main (conceptual) purpose

and function of assessment as by the contextual challenges of their individual campus site and the subjects that they taught. Being one of the six campuses that made up the Mostert Bay College the particular approaches and attitudes of campus participants toward assessment and its processes organised in quite specific ways the level of vocational education that was on offer.

#### *5.4.3 Assessment at the Halfway (Occupational) Training Centre*

At the training centre setting the main purpose of assessment was to ascertain whether a learner was competent or not in the trade he/she was attached to. The approach was that tasks needed to be relevant, current, significant, authentic, and open, covering both specific outcomes and critical cross-field outcomes.

Focusing on the theoretical understanding and practical experience of learners, as well as the learning gained during the electrical engineering course at the centre, the purpose of assessment was to ascertain the knowledge and ability of learners to conduct certain tasks within and according to the trade they were training for. Assessment was thus primarily practically orientated and informed by the unit standards or modules that were being covered.

According to Participant 11 “the goal was to find out how much learners knew and understood in the electrical trade, and then to do a practical assessment of what learners could actually do. It’s a very sensible system that gets learners to the place where they eventually can do the trade test that then qualifies them”. Participant 10 explained the process in the following way:

The difference with focusing on competency-based assessments is that when a person walks out of the training centre they are actually qualified for the work they are trained to do. Here we don’t assess people to tell them what they don’t know. Rather we identify what they don’t know and ensure that they know this to be declared competent. Let me give you the example of ‘making a cup of tea’. In assessing out of 10 points we say the learner has to first focus putting on the kettle, put water in the kettle, getting the cup ready, with coffee, adding milk, adding sugar, and then giving it to you. The learner can pass the activity 95% and get a cum laude for leaving out the sugar (the learner can even leave out the water and get a cum laude). The point is that it is pointless in such a case to start from the beginning. Rather you train the person on what he/she left out – the water or the sugar – and so

you increase his/her competency. Learners then get 3 chances to correct any mistakes and they walk out of here knowing what is needed to complete a task in electrical engineering. For us there is only one test that learners must pass: they must be able to do the task/thing.

At the training centre there were two types of assessment. Firstly, 70% of assessment got done on-site (at work). This was when a facilitator and an assessor visited learners at their places of work and assessed their competence there. Secondly, learners were assessed after the completion of each unit standard at the training centre itself. In the latter they had to clearly demonstrate an understanding of theory and complete practical tasks. This accounted for 30% of their overall assessment.

Furthermore, there were two processes that were followed depending on whether the program followed was part of a learnership or an apprenticeship. With a learnership the above process was followed, whereas with an apprenticeship the person had to have a minimum N2 to enter the program and did the CBMT (a competency-based system) that took learners through modules 0-7. On completion of module 7 learners qualified to do their Section 13 apprenticeship trade test. The trade test was seen as a show of competence and only 'opened the door' to the field; it was but "a key to the door". Learners then had to choose a field within electrical engineering in which to specialise. In terms of assessment, the idea of completing unit standards was that once learners had completed a unit standard 'it was done forever'. Learners had to then simply demonstrate that "they were competent in all the modules in order to qualify. The trade test served as the final exam".

At the training centre the main issue also in terms of competence was based on issues of ability, responsibility and safety. Participant 12 noted that learners either 'could do something or couldn't do something'. He noted that there was a limit on how long it took for a learner to learn something as 'knowing what to do' had serious consequences: "if a learner went into the field and forgot what they were assessed on or forgot what he needed to do, then he could seriously injure himself and endanger the lives of others".

In terms of learning for a particular occupation, learners at the training centre were assessed according to two main components, namely occupational

knowledge and practical training. A third component was provided and completed at the worksite itself. This workplace learning brought the understandings of learners into focus and fruition.

It was this real-time based practical trade knowledge that, when accompanied by the occupational knowledge learning, was contextualized, applied, and simulated in the practical setting of the training centre (DHET, 2012: 8).

This way of doing things, it was argued at the training centre, ensured that learners and prospective artisans were adequately prepared for the workplace - following the progressive and sequential completion of the occupational knowledge and practical learning components – where it was shown that they had assimilated and mastered these components in order to proceed to the next level (DHET 2012).

Participant 10 noted that as a decentralised private trade training centre allied to Merseta, ESeta, L&G Seta, and Eskom, learners had to develop and retain a 'portfolio of evidence' (PoE) that was internally moderated and then externally moderated by a SETA moderator. He observed that they also "had a quality assessment process in place with the company". He felt that the current system worked because it ensured 'standards' that were relevant for the workplace. Participant 10 argued that:

Given the shortage of tradesmen, especially electricians in the electrical field, and with the new laws around electrical work, people cannot simply do electrical work anymore unless they are registered and qualified. This has left an even bigger gap in the market. So the more local people we train the better it is going to help our economy. Especially if we focus on making sure they are competent and can do the work. For job creation the minute a guy steps out there as a qualified electrician and starts his own business, he is going to employ people to work for him and start a chain reaction that makes our economy grow.

Participant 11 concluded that if artisans did not understand where their individual shortcomings were, "how could they relate to other people, improve their lives, and bring value to the qualified workers out there. If you have someone knowing how to work with and use equipment, obviously the quality of work out there will be higher". For the trainers at the training centre good and appropriately placed assessment played a crucial part in ensuring that the

right kind of vocational knowledge and practice was being developed in South Africa. According to Participant 12, “as trainers we know there are people watching us- for tests there are moderators and assessors- so the checks-and-balances are in place to ensure we train properly. Our challenge is to produce good artisans”.

#### 5.4.4 Assessment summarised

In the table below I roughly summarise how participants explained assessment in their different settings.

<b>College: NCV</b>	<b>School: NSC</b>	<b>Occupational training centre: Unit standards or Trade test certificate</b>
<b><i>Fundamentals</i></b> (Mathematics /One Language / Life Orientation)	<b><i>Fundamentals</i></b> (Mathematics / Two Language's / Life Orientation)	<b><i>Fundamentals</i></b> Language and Communication/ Mathematical Literacy (Numeracy)
Internal Continuous Assessment 25%	Continuous Assessment 25 %	Program of Assessment: 40 Credits: 20 credits at NQF Level 4 and 20 credits at NQF Level 3 in a second South African Language. Mathematical Literacy (numeracy) requires 16 credits <i>Total: 56 credits</i>
External Summative Assessment 75%	External Summative Assessment 75 %	Upon completion of each unit standard an internal summative assessment is conducted which forms part of the 30% of the internal assessments at the centre
<b><i>Vocational Subjects: Core Subjects &amp; Elective</i></b>	<b><i>Vocational Subjects: Core Subjects &amp; Elective</i></b>	<b><i>Vocational Core Component &amp; Elective Component</i></b>
Internal Continuous Assessment 25%	Internal Continuous Assessment 25%	Learners must demonstrate competence for the total of 54 credits in the core component, and 20 credits for the elective component from the particular unit standards <i>Total: 74 credits</i>

<p>Integrated Summative Assessment (ISAT) (25%)</p>	<p>Practical Assessment task (PAT) (25%)</p>	<p>Practical 70% of assessment is executed on-site (workplace component) and 30% at the training centre (institutional component) After completing the required on-site training, students qualify to be trade test.</p>
<p>External Summative Assessment (50%)</p>	<p>External Summative Assessment (50%)</p>	<p>A trade certificate will be issued upon successful completion of the practical assessment. It can be conducted by the SETA (trade test centres resorting under them), or through the Department of Labour.</p>
<p>For a student to be awarded the qualification all components (ICASS, ISAT, and the final external examination) must be completed and all subjects passed</p>	<p>For a student to be certificated they need to have passed 6 subjects (3 subjects with a minimum of 40% (which one must be a home language) and any other three (at minimum 30%)</p>	<p>Students require a minimum of 130 credits to be certificated (completed all unit standards) as prescribed per learnership</p>

From the inputs of the 12 participants assessment was generally treated as a means of measuring or estimating the value of teacher input and the extent of learner understanding (Dreyer 2008: 5). As noted assessment was understood and processed in various ways and could be linked to a variety of definitions in the literature. Nonetheless, however widely used in the different walks of institutional life, assessment was mainly used to describe the process of gathering and discussing information from diverse sources in order to develop a deeper understanding of what learners knew, understood, or could do with their knowledge as a result of their vocational experience.

That said, assessment ultimately was a human process that was conducted by human beings and was subject to human judgement. In that regard, assessment was a form of communication where learners communicated their

knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes, while participants communicated back their judgements about learner competence to learners and the stakeholders they were attached to (parents, learnerships, potential employers, and workplaces) (Sutton in DoE 2008: 11). But contrary to what happened in the past within the educational system where learners were judged through written tests and examinations and coached to know the 'answers to the questions', in these communications the focus was invariably to help learners improve their learning and to focus on individual learners and their specific pace of learning.

However, this approach to 'assessment as learning' was not without its limitations in a global context where assessment was part of a bigger educational results-driven discourse and monitoring system that was strongly framed by notions of performativity, efficiency, quality assurance, and accountability (Wilmot 2005: 72).

In the following chapter I analyse what we could understand from participant views on assessment in relation to the overall literature on vocational education provision, and its goals. When programme delivery depends on how well educational participants produce 'skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values' to a particular standard, it is seen as just 'bad and unsuccessful business' when learners don't perform according to defined curricula and criteria (Wholesale and Retail SETA as cited in Allais, 2003).

## **CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this last chapter I explore some of the implications of the combined model that I provided in Chapter 5 about what FET participants understood, and their attitudes towards assessment. The aim of the chapter is to show what the views of different educational participants on assessment (within the FET band at three educational settings within the Western Cape) tell us about current FET policy processes and educational change. I relate this to current debates within the literature about skills development policy reforms and intentions, and current VET challenges.

In the chapter I argue, using Young (2009) and Allais' (2012) critique of the NQF and based on interviews with 12 participants in the FET Band, that at both the sectorial and local levels participants/educators seem to experience assessment processes, criteria, and frameworks primarily as a form of jargon, and that they find it difficult to relate the new approaches and terms associated with the skills and knowledge to that which they are familiar and accustomed to. I argue that participants/educators seem to translate 'the jargon' into 'judgements of value' about learning and knowledge that lead to quite different approaches being followed and different outcomes being reached. I conclude that this scenario would be acceptable in terms of the different kinds of skills produced for different work settings, were the education and training infrastructure in South Africa not so preoccupied with achieving the *principle of similarity* across the FET Band.

### **6.2. Explanations of assessment in relation to education and training reform**

I start off the chapter with my main argument in the thesis, as noted by Benveniste (2002: 89), that assessment as a measurement of learner performance cannot be dealt with in isolation, and always needs to be explained as part of broader political and economic trends and developments. Assessment should be seen as part of an overall and standard 'education policy package' - sponsored by a variety of role-players that include multilateral organisations and international aid agencies –that at the global level has been aimed at elevating education and training systems in ways that

bring clear supposed returns for both individuals and societies in the form of the human capital that they generate (Fakier & Waghid 2004: 54; Christie 1997).

Benveniste (2002: 89) reminds us that assessment systems are important ways (in themselves) to prompt and reflect the agendas, tensions, and the nature of power relations between the political actors and conceptual standpoints within particular education and training systems.

For the South African context, in his chapter for an edited book called *Changing Class*, Johan Muller (2004: 221) expands on this argument on the complex relationship between the political and knowledge development in debates about assessment. In providing a quite sophisticated theoretical model to show the relationship between the systemic and the pedagogical, Muller (2004) asserts that in order to determine who and what position dominates a education and training policy agenda, one needs to figure out whether a 'dualist'/'monist' or decentraliser/centraliser position is preferred at different times.

Muller (2004: 221) explains this in the following way:

There are two principal axes of contestation in assessment and qualifications thinking. The first is between those who distinguish between different modes of knowledge, learning and qualification, and those who don't. For ease of reference I will call the former dualists and the latter monists. The second axis is between those for whom assessment is primarily for pedagogic purposes in the classroom, which I call decentralisers, and those for whom assessment as a signalling system for systemic performance is primary (centralisers). The first axis has mainly an individualising role, while the second axis has an aggregating purpose. When the pendulum swings too far in either direction on either axis, the system becomes deformed and produces aberrations.

This 'two axes of assessment policy' model above is useful in terms of highlighting the changing ebbs and flows of education and training policy over the past 20 years, and the institutional and pedagogical aspects of (and commitment to) assessment policy in relation to this.

For my study however I found that using the two axes was difficult to translate into a simple and clear explanation for the current context and for the argument of my thesis, as it required me to pinpoint the relation of each of the

individuals (research participants) in relation to both the systemic and pedagogical axes at the same time. I found that, when mapped, the two axes often did not account for key contradictions and overlapping in the views of participants on assessment.

As such (as illustrated in chapters 3 and 5), for my thesis I chose at various times to separately utilise Benveniste's (2002) model and Weedon et al's (2002) model. While similar to and captured within Muller's 'two axes', I found that the simple distinctions highlighted in the two models between the functional and the symbolic, and between 'assessment of' and 'assessment for' learning, helped me to better outline and describe my overall argument. They also helped in chapter 5 to arrange my explanation of how Participants spoke about and engaged with assessment. Similarly, the models proved helpful to my analysis of the various issues in this chapter.

In the sections below I first expand on some of the points raised in chapter 5 by analysing why and how different approaches to education and training and its assessment evolved after 1994, and then explore how they took on a particular form given the historical context of vocational education and training policy and provision in South Africa, as well as its overall meaning.

### **6.3 Education and training reform and the role of assessment therein**

How does an education and training system incorporate the ways in which a government envisions a new society and a different economic system? How does an education and training system deal with competing tensions – such as equity, access, transformation, knowledge and skills development, linking education to work? How does an education and training system include the vast diversity of stakeholders (and their interests) in the development of a new institutional infrastructure but keep everyone focused on identified national goals? And what role does assessment play within these various debates?

As noted in Chapter 2, the attempt to better link education and the development of society is not a new idea. For example, in the 1920s in the USA many educators expressed concerns that education- as academic and humanistic learning - did not have enough of a real and constructive role for learners in the building of a new society. According to their definition of

education and training, education was ‘the result of experiences whereby learners became more or less able to adjust themselves to the demands of the particular form of society in which they lived and worked’ (Prosser and Allen 1925: 3). As such, the ability to work, and the view that “only productive labour gave entitlement to citizenship”, became tied to issues of economic development and the ‘good’ use of human resources (Westerhuis 2007: 25; Clarke and Winch, 2007: 2).

Kliebard (1999) notes for the USA in the 1920s that this kind of vocationalism was about developing a broad social vision that focused on the needs of the industrial workplace but also ensured the occupational competence of individuals. It was addressed, notes Kliebard (1999: 120), through ‘a transformed curriculum’ that emphasised the training of new generations of learners through ‘the efficient performance of the activities that defined their social roles’. The ‘new curriculum’ included within it ‘the precepts and demands of business and industry’ as an all-consuming educational ideal, that then did not simply affect curriculum content but was also starkly reflected in the ways in which all forms of ‘curricula were to be subsequently fashioned’ (Kliebard 1999: 150-152).

As noted in chapter 2, this focus on ‘the correct balance’ between education and work stemmed from the belief that “competent performance in a variety of adult social roles” was subject to things like “predictability, order, and scientific precision” which were the *hallmark of the modern factory* - while also ensuring an orderly and smoothly running society (Kliebard 1999: 120). It was felt that the responsibility of schools to ordinary citizens “was to match individual capacities with ultimate social roles and for the differentiated training that would be required to perform successfully in those roles” (Kliebard 1999: 163).

My worry as an educator within the FET Band is that this image of the responsibility of vocational learners to develop their individual capacities to serve ‘the economy and the nation’ continues to dominate. I find it deeply ironical that while the above attitude towards education and training in the past supposedly ‘worked’ best within economies reliant on factory workers and a particular form of industry, that this approach to individual responsibility

and predictable behaviour and certain forms of knowledge is still preferred in the current so-called 'high skills' world. In a developing country like South Africa the focus on flexible labour and a knowledge-based economy has dire implications for its future, yet South Africa has continued to push for a very simple approach (based on basic competence) to skills development. Why has this been the case?

### *6.3.1 The focus on skills development as an intervention on behalf of equity?*

In chapter 2 I argued, citing Badroodien (2004) that in South Africa the idea that vocational education provision needed to focus mainly on the workplace, and be shaped by its goals, was influenced by a number of historical and political issues, that were established from the 1920s onwards. I highlight just 2 points below.

In the first place, Badroodien (2004) argues that the provision of technical and vocational education in South Africa in the early twentieth century was primarily focused on the working class white population and looked at ways on how to help them get immediate access to the labour market (as well as to instil in them the skills of work-preparedness and discipline). Thereafter, vocational education and training provision was expanded in ways that focused on 'rescuing' different kinds of working class, urban, poor (and indigent) learners in urban areas, to socialize and regulate them, and to ensure that they got the necessary skills and knowledge to survive and prosper in the cities (Badroodien 2002: 21). It was an approach that was very common in British colonies at that time. Clark & Winch (2007: 9) note that "in the Anglo-Saxon world, vocational education was often confined mainly to preparing young people and adults for working life, a process that was regarded to be of a more technical and practical nature".

From its early inception vocational education and training provision in South Africa had for a long time been concerned about, and associated with, 'outputs' and 'competences', assessment-led learning, and the development of performance indicators for different levels and for different kinds of workers - in direct contrast to liberal education provision that was generally associated

with 'judgement, management and critical enquiry' and the supposedly 'thinking learner'.

In the second place, as noted by Soudien (2010: 20), 20<sup>th</sup> century South African policy makers were invariably committed to a form of education and training that provided different kinds of school knowledge for different groups. How curricula were conceptualised, designed and delivered in different social settings - where "issues of race, class, gender, language, and religion were matters of serious public contention" – had been a powerful dynamic within the provision of education and training over a number of decades.

As such, in the recomposition of the education and training system and the curriculum after 1994, three important legacies had to be both acknowledged and get particular attention. These included the view of education and training provision as (a) *a political act* of providing equal education to all, although also 'rescuing' working class urban learners from 'failure' by providing them with 'appropriate skills' related to their probable working lives, (b) *an educational challenge* where a curriculum was provided that achieved this for a variety of locations, and (c) *a pedagogical focus* through which the goals of the reorganised curriculum could be achieved and delivered. I explore each of these challenges in the sections below.

*(a) Education and training provision as political intervention: the structural, the relational, and the symbolic*

The emergence of a skills development focus in South Africa after 1994 offers a useful background against which to view the education and training reforms that emerged thereafter.

Alongside the vast number of educational changes required in the early 1990s, the challenges of a serious skills deficit, severe poverty, increasing unemployment, and overall uneven development from 1994, put enormous pressure on the ANC-led government to pursue education and training policy formulations that often had quite different social and economic agendas (Akoojee 2012: 675).

On the one hand, the need to generate an economic environment that dealt directly with socio-political issues of poverty, inequality, and unemployment

meant that education and training reform from 1994 was closely coupled and fixed to debates on skills development. Allais (2012: 201, citing the works of McGrath 1996, McGrath 2004, Gamble 2004; Kraak 2004) notes in this regard that while the basic elements of skills development in South Africa had been well established under apartheid (low skills production, voluntarism on behalf of employers, artisan training for white men through state-owned enterprises, and a highly unequal public education system), the late apartheid state had tried to reform and transform the skills regime by moving the system away from its apartheid low skills origins towards a framework that was based more on free market regulation, a revived apprenticeship system, and a new institutional environment. This led, according to Kraak (2004, cited in Allais 2012), to the skills training system under late apartheid being slowly converted from a time-based training system to a competence-based one.

Allais (2013: 203) notes that while it was somewhat ironic that the newly elected democratic government after 1994 reintroduced this (same) approach to skills training, this continued focus on skills development was mainly due to concern about the high levels of skills shortages widely thought to be inhibiting economic growth, and thus socio-economic change.

Acknowledging this political post-apartheid attempt to link education and training, skills development, and industrial policy development over a sustained period, the Department of Trade and Industry noted as late as 2009 that:

The skills and education system forms a fundamental pillar for the success of any industrial policy. There is currently insufficient integration between industrial policy objectives and skills in the education system. There remains therefore a need for much closer alignment between industrial policy and skills and education development, particularly with regard to sector strategies (DTI 2009, as cited in Akoojee 2012: 677).

On the other hand, the equity imperative in South African society as a whole in 1994, and in education in particular, was throughout an important political consideration in every part of the policy agenda. In relation to overall national development, the reform of education and training from 1994 therefore had to address the historical legacy of poor education and training access at every

level, poor skills training programmes, low levels of knowledge development for most of the population, and unusually high poverty levels amongst the majority of the population (Akoojee 2012: 676). While many still linked this mainly to skills deficits and shortages in key areas of the economy, the main focus after 1994 was on how to develop an integrated education and training system (including the curriculum and certification systems) that unified the separate qualification opportunities offered by formal and non-formal provision under apartheid and provided equal levels of access and opportunity. This divide between formal and non-formal was seen as the main cause of unequal work opportunity in the workplace, a barrier that apartheid had created between mental and manual labour as part of its policy of separate development. It was felt that meaningful education and training reform needed to break down this barrier (Muller 2004: 223) and bring change for the majority of South African citizens.

Crucially, at this time of rapid education and industrial policy change in South Africa after 1994, a vast array of reforms were also being introduced in most countries across the world (1990s) as part of the reorganisation of secondary education and training systems according to changing social and economic conditions. Supposedly easier to bring about than straightforward economic structural change, the reform of education and training systems was seen as necessary to deal with the changing forms of work, and the economic need for workers with flexible skills and the ability to re-learn. A dominant view that also emerged in that period suggested that as work was no longer as much based on the divide between mental and manual labour (thus making the divide between academic and vocational education irrelevant), greater attention could be given to achieving equivalence within reformulated education and training systems (Allais 2003: 7).

It has been these four things – the needs for skills, issues of national equity, an emphasis on individual responsibility, and ‘equivalence’ in education and training provision – that became the main underlying (political) principles that informed the development of a new education and training and skills development system after 1994.

*(b) The educational challenge and the provision of 'relevant curricula'*

In chapter 3 I noted the arguments of a number of commentators that suggested that the above 4 things were already part of an overall political agenda that emerged from the early 1980s (Benveniste 2002). It was an agenda though that shifted the responsibility of education and training access (and success) onto learners themselves and forced individuals to take the responsibility and blame for not having the right skills - and therefore not the 'right' jobs. Many commentators argued that such a political agenda, by instilling the concept of competition and reward into education and training systems, was able to subtly shift the discussion away from questions of whether greater levels of education actually led to economic growth or could solve the large number of social and economic problems that are emerging (Foley 1994 and Green 1990 cited in Allais 2013; Young 2009).

The above position was also one that a number of research participants pointed out in chapter 5 of this thesis, namely that as the education and training system in South Africa is part of larger global economic processes that look after the interests of the privileged, it is unlikely to ever be fair or equal. Participant 3 argued that in a world where the focus was on the rich protecting their assets and interests, the main goal of the education and training system is to ensure that only actions that contributed to the economy and economic growth are deemed worthy of being rewarded. He noted that this practice is achieved on the one hand by directly rewarding those learners that are shown to be progressing and excelling.

On the other hand it also placed unbearable pressure on those that were struggling to learn by clearly showing them the consequences of failure. Participant 3 observed that this demonstrated how the idea of 'value for money' worked and how participants in education and training were constantly reminded that if they were going to succeed, they needed to play a leading role in their own progress. He asserted that, in the end, education provision is a political process in which struggling learners are forced to partake in a form of education that offers them little chance of success - what Benveniste (2002: 90) has described as public accountability or performance incentive schemes

changing the behaviour of educational actors by getting them to focus only on the outcomes that they generate.

This is a powerful and controversial assertion, which participant 3 defended by pointing to how education has come to be treated as a commodity that can be traded, bought, and sold on an open market for those in search of success. He suggested that I (as interviewer) should “listen to how educators generally describe the role of education and training in the current world”. In this regard, I was struck by the number of times other research participants in the study referred to the purpose of education and training as “helping learners understand how they can contribute to the economy by both improving their qualities as citizens and workers and ensuring that they had the kinds of skills and competencies that would improve that economy”.

Participants 10 and 11 noted for example that the only goal of learners in a FET environment is to become well-trained artisans that contribute directly to the creation of skills in the country and to the building up of a more competent workforce: “We add value to economic development when we use the expertise that we grow to compete on the global market” (Participant 11).

Benveniste (2002: 91) explains that when “you live in a knowledge economy in which human capital has gained ascendancy over both labour and raw materials as the main vehicle for increased productivity and economic growth, the ability of countries to attract foreign capital and remain competitive in the global marketplace pivots on their capacity to create a ready supply of highly qualified labour”. A key role of a government like South Africa’s in such a situation has been to create and support the local configuration of the education and training system that generates such a labour supply.

Benveniste (2002: 115) notes however that where this has occurred in neoliberal, financially constrained environments, it has inevitably necessitated a changed role for modern governments - where governments are no longer *providers of education services* but rather “guarantors of their quality” and “distributors of the application of equity”. This has required a shift from controlling the resources and content of education toward a focus on outcomes and academic performance, that has allowed governments to

continue to command some authority over education and training systems but take limited responsibility for fixing or resolving issues at the local level.

In the overall global set-up, where the idea of 'the state as provider' has been regarded as outdated, centralised, top-heavy, bureaucratised, inefficient, and insensitive to local variation and need (Benveniste 2002: 115), a modern government like South Africa's was challenged after 1994 to focus on 'consensus-building', 'information dissemination', 'evaluation', and 'the compensation of inequities'.

This then led to the overall role of government being to identify the education and training needs and challenges of provinces, localities, and districts across the country, and to support them to redress the areas where they are 'not doing well'.

*(c) How to achieve a pedagogical focus that achieve the goals of a reorganised curriculum*

In chapter 5, participant 3 noted that it is through partaking in educational practices like assessment that educational stakeholders have come to play important but complicit roles in propping up such an education and training system. According to him, the main purpose of an education and training system that only needed to focus on 'economic returns' instead of identifying ways of assisting and responding to the needs of different learners, has been to simply identify those learners that could make a contribution to the economy, and develop mechanisms that justified excluding the rest. He argued that educational processes like assessment are 'gate-keeping exercises' that focus on taking forward the welfare of the 'interested' and punishing those are 'disinterested'.

This is a view that many research participants in the study (whether advertently or inadvertently actually stating so) alluded to, namely that educational processes (one of which was assessment) is part of a global culture that champions individual responsibility, consumer accountability, and market competition as the main engines and vehicles for the production of educational quality within education and training systems (Benveniste 2002). And the main role of educational processes in such a situation is to develop

the necessary links and practices between the education and training system, the economy, and future work for learners.

As such, assessment in South Africa is meant to serve as the key process to achieve this - both through the development of the required technical and institutional instruments, and by representing a political commitment to a change process that embodies neoliberal principles while retaining a focus on achieving equity. According to Benveniste (2002: 116):

National assessments support governments in these tasks by focusing the attention of educational actors on student outcomes, supplying information on variations in the conditions of education that may suggest avenues for remediation purposes, and providing a framework to link performance to a reward system that steers educational services towards improvement. The enthusiasm over national assessment systems is grounded on their potential (1) to foster a more efficient use of resources, (2) to promote the constant improvement and to safeguard the fair distribution of good and services, and (3) to encourage regional autonomy.

In such a scenario the main purpose of assessment has been to produce testing outcomes that help shape policy making and classroom behaviour, while at the same time *symbolically* aligning state practices with accepted global models of policy making. This not only 'legitimizes' and 'ritualises' the actions decided upon by the state, but make it appear as if the neo-liberal state remains committed to principles of improvement, development, and equity.

This is important for a country like South Africa that has tried to remain firmly committed, in principle, to improving the opportunities of those previously marginalised under apartheid and to bringing about certain levels of social equity, but challenged by the need to drastically reduce state input into (and responsibility for) the overall education and training infrastructure. The test for the South African government for the past 20 years has been on how to develop an integrated education and training system (and educational processes and practices necessary for this) that deals with both approaches noted above.

Benveniste (2002: 94) asserts however that these two assessment 'acts' or positions - of data collection and symbolic justification - contain within them

challenging and opposing tensions. In the first (data collection) it is assumed that educational conditions have to be *coupled* to test results in order for data to be effectively used. The assessment data are thus assumed to be the key way of supporting the educational system in its drive toward greater quality, equity, and efficiency. For the second (symbolism), schooling inputs have to generally be *decoupled* from schooling outputs in order for testing results to be utilised for the overall state agenda - namely using data to highlight what kinds of goals and skills were needed for which job opportunities, and to highlight where things are not working in the system.

I argue in this chapter that it has been this opposing systemic tension within assessment processes - between *coupling* and *decoupling* - that has led to efforts to achieve equity, access, and transformation at the grassroots level within the education and training sector mostly failing. On the one hand, the state has committed itself since 1994 to playing an active role in using assessment data to inform fundamental change within the education and training system. On the other hand, given its focus on (high) skills development and firm commitment to decentralised authority, the state has had to oversee a system where a large number of different stakeholders were needed to make the new education and training infrastructure effective – in a context where the state played a minimalist role at the grassroots level. In the end, given the current political and economic environment of education and training reform, I claim that it has been this latter ‘mode of testing’ - the symbolic – that has been given greater power and authority over the development potential (or the classroom) of the data generated within assessment processes.

Within all of this the *pedagogical focus* of making education and training more learner-centred has been seriously challenged, undermined, or even lost. In the next part of the chapter I explore how the process and infrastructure of curriculum change and assessment has come to play a particular role within education and training reform and the development of a particular kind of FET setup in South Africa.

### *6.3.2 The NQF as reform to create parity*

Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, has noted that the provision of a variety of national curricula by 2011 was “the culmination of efforts over a period of seventeen years” to completely transform a curriculum that had been bequeathed by apartheid, and to build within it the core values and principles of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). These values were focused on establishing a democratic, socially just, and human rights-based society focused on the improvement of the quality of life of all its citizens (DBE: NCS, 2011)

And as Muller (2004: 221) observes, the most powerful policy levers within the education and training system at that time to ensure ‘learner movement’ and growth in the above regard, were those of qualifications and assessment. This was according to Muller (2004) because the kinds and types of qualifications in any given society - and the ways of assessing them - ultimately determined the level of inclusivity or exclusivity within that system, as well as the degree of ‘fit’ of learners with the labour market”.

As noted in chapter 3, it was on this basis that a national qualifications framework (NQF) was introduced in South Africa in 1995, with the main purpose being to change all learning programmes and curricula within the education and training system - at all levels and in all sectors. Supposedly designed by combined local stakeholder-based structures, the NQF was meant to replace all previously existing qualifications with a set of new outcomes-based qualifications and part qualifications (unit standards).

On the one hand, alongside the introduction of a skills development strategy (as noted in an earlier section) the NQF was introduced to ensure the development of a ‘demand-side enterprise training policy’ closely aligned to ‘appropriate supply-side measures’ (Allais 2013: 204). Together the NQF and the NSDS were meant to enable and support educational institutions to develop new and relevant qualifications geared towards the existing knowledge and skills of learners, and focused on linking this to appropriate job opportunities for them. This, it was suggested, responded directly to issues of access, equity, and equal opportunities.

This was linked to a belief that to give learners better opportunities and access to work, employers need to be more involved and their interests valued, and that employers are in the best position to identify the types of skills and training needed to relate qualifications to workplace performance outcomes. It was argued that once employers defined the competencies that were needed (and developed qualifications related to them), individuals could then choose learning outcomes from the qualifications framework that was provided and thereby enhance their 'employability'. The role of the state in such a situation was to regulate the different educational providers against the outcomes captured and prescribed in the qualifications.

Allais (2013: 204) notes in this regard that:

Employers and union representatives were involved in defining the learning outcomes required in their respective industries to ensure that the programmes provided by educational institutions were appropriate. The learning outcomes were captured in qualifications and unit standards and registered on the NQF. There were no prescribed curricula. All educational providers applied to quality assurance bodies to be accredited to offer or to assess specific qualifications and unit standards, and then developed their own curricula and assessments.

On the other hand, established to oversee an integrated education and training system, the NQF was introduced to put a stronger focus on learner competencies (learner-centredness), where qualifications were understood and expressed as a combination of (a set of) outcomes - without any specific learning pathway of programme being prescribed (Young 2009). The goal was to place learners (and the opportunities available to them) at the *centre* of the education and training system, and learning - and qualifications - at the outer levels as the means by which learners reached their employment destinations. As such, the NQF focused on how to identify learner competencies, provide a set of competency standards, and group these standards into sets of qualifications that could be delivered as modules and assessed according to new processes and criteria.

This was a massive shift, especially in terms of the generation of qualifications for as wide a range of industrial sectors as possible, and covering the different kinds of knowledge and skills across as large a proportion of the population as possible. In essence, for such a system to work it needed to create a high

level of commonality and similarity across qualifications, while also specifying for each qualification particular standards, levels, and learning outcomes. It also needed different sets of pedagogical skills, foci, and preoccupations within the system.

For the FET band in South Africa in particular, this provided a particular set of curriculum and assessment challenges, given that the focus of learning in the general schooling arena of the FET Band was on knowledge and understanding, in the general vocational arena on work-readiness and the attainment of particular standards, and in the occupational arena on job competence and preparation for full employment. Allais (2013: 212) notes that:

When the goal is for statements of learning outcomes to provide sufficient clarity to the range of possible users, and when policy requires that learning outcomes must be specified in such a way that these possible users will all interpret them similarly enough, over-specification becomes inevitable. The result is qualifications documents that are cumbersome and difficult to deal with.

I argue that this simultaneous focus on articulation, similarity, and employability in the FET Band on the one hand, and changing the pedagogical focus on educators and FET Band institutions to focus on and generate learner competencies on the other, has had a direct effect on how skills development has generally been understood. In attempting to entrench the principle of similarity within the education and training system, the danger that the NQF would establish a very narrow understanding of skills in South Africa has become a reality.

As such skills development has become mostly regarded as 'merely task-related activities'. Allais (2013) argues that in treating what was provided at schools, FET Colleges, and training centres as 'the same', the logical outcome has been that the developing system has focused on its regulatory, symbolic role rather than on its developmental role, namely concentrating on building up the kinds of vocational knowledge within the different institutions that could produce different kinds of learners for the labour market.

According to Allais (2013: 211), this view of competencies has not only been very different to the kind of artisanal knowledge and skills associated with

crafts, regulated occupations and professions, but in other international contexts has invariably led to skills development becoming very narrow and short-term. Also, in other contexts it has favoured the development of an economic environment that continued to focus on using cheap, unskilled labour and where employers were keen to rather train staff on the job than in educational institutions. Lastly, by positioning the reform of education and training so closely to the needs of employers, Allais (2013) contends that such a limited view of qualifications and the competencies generated from this were in other contexts mostly geared towards resolving economic concerns, and treated unemployment as a learning problem that should be solved by learners themselves (in the learning pathways they chose).

The main appeal of a kind of national framework where 'a market of qualifications' was regulated and where employers were given more power over what was taught in vocational education was thus that (1) the state did not have to pay as much attention to building and improving the institutions that provided education and training (nor on the level of knowledge production provided). Also, in a situation where the state did not have a viable economic policy to provide employment to all its citizens, such a framework encouraged (2) a focus on individual employability rather than providing learners with a knowledge base that was tied to particular occupations (Allais 2013: 209).

It is in this way that the establishment and purpose of the NQF in South Africa should be viewed, and the role of assessment in relation thereto understood. In the following sections I explore why assessment has become more of a regulatory mechanism in FET Band institutions (assessment of learning) than an instrument of change and further development (assessment for learning).

#### **6.4. Assessment and Learning**

Reineke (1998) has noted that in terms of emotionally shaping the attitudes of learners towards learning across their lives, it was their assessment in relation to projected outcomes that had the potential to fundamentally shape or totally destroy their futures as learners. As an instrument that could at its best lead to effective teaching and learning situations - where teachers were able to identify specific needs, strengths and weaknesses of learners and give them

positive feedback and support - assessment was regarded as the main driver, and having the most wide-ranging influence, in the entire learning process (Hargreaves 1990).

It was noted in chapter 3 that after 1995 it was this approach to assessment in South Africa that was generally encouraged (DoE 2005), namely the provision of feedback to learners that was useful and served to support their further development (an assessment for learning).

However, it was argued that the collection of valid and reliable information on teaching and learning processes and on the individual achievements and competencies of different learners (assessment of learning) was also a critical instrument in giving formative and continuous feedback and guidance to learners. Unlike the previous system under apartheid where diagnostic assessment served to penalise and punish, it was expected after 1994 that the tracking and measurement of learners (in a context where the goal was formative) would lead to improved education and training provision and more effective curriculum delivery.

Participant 1 observed that after 1994 lecturers had become more focused on assessment processes that asked that knowledge questions, analysis questions, as well as evaluation questions.

For us assessment tasks during the year was a way of gathering evidence of what a learner knows – whether our teaching was effective, how learners were responding, whether a learner had reached a certain level of competence, and whether a learner would be able to be promoted to the next level when they sat for the summative assessments.

The focus on continuous assessment within the reformed education and training system after 1996 was thus geared towards increasing learners' confidence and motivation to learn and to empower them to develop the kinds of skills and understandings that would connect them to viable employment opportunities.

This approach to assessment in South Africa was embedded within the establishment of outcomes-based education and the establishment of a national qualifications framework. It was meant to be part of an overall infrastructure that sought to completely reorganise the ways in which learners

had previously accessed and experienced the education and training sector in South Africa.

Various participants observed in chapter 5 that for them the main purpose of assessment was to give learners feedback where they could see 'how good or how bad they were', thereby helping them make mature decisions about their futures. They believed that it helped learners to set achievable goals, gain confidence in their abilities, make decisions about improving their development, increased their motivation to succeed, learn how to cope with pressure and academic stress, and come to understand what 'standards' they needed to reach in order to succeed. Many argued that good learning transformed how learners saw or valued things, and assessment helped them think about (through its practice) how to use this information effectively and efficiently. Participant 6 noted for example that my job is to "make sure learners know what the future holds for them and to give them confidence in what they are doing".

In the end, according to a National Task Team in 2009, good assessment allowed educators to measure learner progress and diagnosed their lack of progress in order to facilitate remedial intervention in teaching, and also provided crucial feedback to learners and parents about their academic progress (Task Team Final Report 2009: 29).

But in providing this, different forms of assessment were used within the education and training system. For learners 'continuous assessment' helped learners to develop capacities over the year through formal tests, and a variety of projects and assignments that constituted their year mark. This supposedly helped them apply the knowledge that they learnt in more productive and relevant ways, but also helped educators find out where their main weaknesses were.

On the other hand, 'systemic assessment' within the education and training system provided government (and society in general) with an opportunity to measure the quality of the system, to assess the consistency of standards at school and national levels, and to hold schools and teachers accountable for student learning. It also provided signals to employers and higher education

institutions about what knowledge future students or potential employees had acquired: “the most standardised and regular form of systemic testing in South Africa has been the National Senior Certificate (previously ‘Matric’) examinations” (Task Team Final Report 2009: 29)

I argue that the latter assessment processes has been given greater priority in the current education and training system and that this has had particular implications for learner-centred continuous assessment processes in the FET Band. I conclude the chapter with some key developments that I believe will need to be resolved if reforms in the South African education and training system (and particularly in the FET Band) is to have any chance of success.

## **6.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The problem with summative assessment in the past was that it was seen as a snapshot judgment that recorded only what learners could do at any one particular time. It was focused on providing information on learners that could be used to determine how learners moved through an education and training system that provided clear pathways according to the achievements that were made.

Formative assessment was preferred after 1994 in South Africa because it offered the possibility to develop learners in other important ways; especially with regard to learner behaviour and in making them believe that ‘they could succeed’. It was about helping and promoting learners to make significant formative gains in learning through constant support and intervention.

However, Weedon et al (2002: 28) provide four examples of what formative assessment approaches need to watch out for, and respond to. They argue that the focus on formative assessment is tied to the complex ways in which learning, teaching, assessment, and motivation became interlinked from the 1990s.

Firstly, they warn that for formative assessment to work, educators needed to clarify for themselves what it was that they hoped to achieve through formative assessment, and to decide how they would make changes in their practice to help learners engage in their own learning. Educators thus needed

to always be actively engaged in developing processes that were tied to what they sought to achieve and how they would do this.

Secondly, for formative assessment to be successful educators needed to be committed to their practice, knowing that it was their expectations and their belief and encouragement that would have the biggest influence on learner motivation and learning. Educators thus had to develop strategies and attitudes about their practice that focused on how they (as educators) could have a positive influence on learners.

Thirdly, as formative assessment was very time-consuming educators needed to develop classroom strategies that introduced ways of sharing objectives and ways of evaluating (self assessment). This required a changed situation in the classroom that allowed the educator to spend more time marking and feeding back while ensuring the learning still took place. This required for different learning conditions in the classroom.

Fourthly, for formative assessment to play its role, educators needed to be able to collect and interpret data and develop strategies on how to improve the progress of individual learners using this data. Formative assessment was thus only useful if both educators and learners used the information that was collected in the actual learning process.

This provided formidable challenges for classroom practices within the education and training system. It provided even more concerns for environments that were completely different, and served different constituencies, in the FET Band.

A further key problem for the education and training system was that the attraction of summative assessment remained, although it was used in a very different part of the education and training system and fulfilled a different function. Weedon et al (2002) note that policy makers continued to rely on summative assessment as a key mechanism of accountability. A further problem was that the use of these assessments was often seen as having a positive effect on the understandings of educators, on the expectations of learners and how they located themselves in relation to standards and

required abilities, and on schools knowing their roles in providing for and supporting learners.

For the new assessment regime to be effective and successful within education and training provision, particularly in the FET Band, I believe that teaching and learning practices will need to be radically revamped. This starts off with the kinds of curricula that are currently being provided.

Using the views expressed by Biemans, Wesselink, Gulikers, Schaafsma, Verstegen & Mulder (2009: 270) I argue in the points below that if the continued focus is to be on competencies and learner-centredness and formative assessment, then current curricula, assessment, and other teaching and learning practices in South Africa will need to be redesigned in ways that are clear and unambiguous. This would require significant funding, reorganisation, and getting educators better involved in the current system.

One, a key problem for the FET Band presently has been that the current NQF environment has tended to encourage standardisation, whereas the power of competence-based education actually lies in it being embedded in the contexts in which it is provided. The problem with the NQF approach has been that the more you abstract things from actual practice the less applicable it becomes for learners in their training. This suggests that the focus is tied more to overall bureaucratic and systemic functions. A further problem is that such a process reduces innovative development and learning and will influence the kinds of (flexible, problem-solving) skills developed at different sites and institutions. I argue that more attention needs to be paid to the learning provided in different contexts and to identify what are the different needs and challenges associated with different forms of learning.

In this regard participant 3 observed that the problem with standardisation was that it was 'forced' on all the sites, and then substituted teaching methods and assessment at individual sites that were tried and tested and that had been found to previously be quite effective. Participant 5 further questioned whether the application skills of learners were actually being tested in a situation where there was a strong emphasis on "remembering and repeating textbook based information". He observed that:

Some learners perform well in theory-based tasks and some (very few) score well in both theory and practical. Most are there though for the practical and do well in these tasks. But when the focus is on theory, these learners are seriously disadvantaged.

Where is the acknowledgement of context? And what about their different ages? Yes, I understand learners must know and master the skill required. But lecturers don't think enough about who were being assessed and what would be the best way of finding out what they knew. Learners are all treated the same. We don't accommodate difference, especially learners that have some understanding of work.

Two, as noted in earlier chapters, in the current FET Band formulation there remains a clear distinction between learning in school, learning in FET Colleges, and learning in the workplace. But as noted in those chapters I demonstrated that it is really difficult to integrate learning across these three sites in the current set-up. I argue that instead of trying to integrate the learning and assessment associated with the three sites, that a different approach is needed that creates continuity in the pathways that learners choose but that allows learners to learn different things at different times and places. This would allow for a greater focus on how best to develop and improve teaching and learning at different learning sites and less focus on standardising and articulating learning with other sites.

Three, a key challenge for all parts of the FET Band currently has been how to translate competence-oriented goals into actual learning activities. This has needed lots of planning and discussion amongst educators on how to work in multi-disciplinary teams to design and implement new competence-oriented learning activities to support both learning in school and learning in the workplace. Educators need to understand both contexts and be able to construct learning activities that are relevant to both contexts and the learning needs of those that enrol there. Participant 10 explained in relation to the private training centre context, for example, that:

The difference with focusing on competency-based assessments is that when a person walks out of the training centre they are actually qualified for the work they are trained to do. Here we don't assess people to tell them what they don't know. Rather we identify what they don't know and ensure that they know this to be declared competent. Let me give you the example of 'making a cup of tea'. In assessing out of 10 points we say the learner has to first focus putting on the kettle,

put water in the kettle, getting the cup ready, with coffee, adding milk, adding sugar, and then giving it to you. The learner can pass the activity 95% and get a cum laude for leaving out the sugar (the learner can even leave out the water and get a cum laude). The point is that it is pointless in such a case to start from the beginning. Rather you train the person on what he/she left out – the water or the sugar – and so you increase his/her competency. Learners then get 3 chances to correct any mistakes and they walk out of here knowing what is needed to complete a task in electrical engineering. For us there is only one test that learners must pass: they must be able to do the task/thing.

Four, as competence-based assessment needs a set of outcomes to be specified for assessors, learners, and others to make reasonably objective judgements, a whole new set of instruments and criteria is required. However, the development of these instruments is quite a labour-intensive and time-consuming exercise and will need stakeholders to engage in structured observation rather than classroom examination. Whether the current set-up is willing to invest in such activities will determine how effective and productive the process of assessment can be.

This was particularly difficult in an environment where educators struggled already with their increasing responsibilities. Participant 1 noted for example that:

With shortened and tight deadlines, the changing profiles of our learners at campus, and the size of classes, it all boils down to us having to do more in less time and with much less resources. We now have to use our holidays, weekends, and leisure time to plan and mark. Can we really stay focused on the benefits that good assessment is supposed to bring?

Finally, within the current set-up there will need to be a far bigger focus on how to utilise formative assessment to help learners take greater responsibility in their own learning, in an environment where educators have to balance their coaching/supportive duties with building up for themselves the kinds of knowledge and skills associated with their different sets of expertise that they need to transfer to learners.

In the end, as Vandeyar and Killen (2007: 101) note, 'curriculum designed on the finest of principles and with the very best of intentions will offer little change to what goes on in the classroom if assessment procedures remain the same'. They observe that although key policy changes focused on

redressing past injustices in educational provision were sought after 1994, that these have not automatically resulted in major changes at classroom level - as many educators have continued to use assessment approaches and thinking that they used under the previous system.

## **6.6 SUMMING UP**

The aim of this chapter has been to show how different views and approaches to assessment has created a situation in the FET Band in South Africa where educators and trainers have struggled to fulfil their roles in relation to how the education and training framework has unfolded, and struggled to relate this to the skills and knowledge with which they are familiar and accustomed to. I argued that at both the sector and local site level, educators and trainers have thus treated assessment criteria and frameworks as a form of jargon, and have often translated 'this jargon' into 'judgements of value' about learning and knowledge in their different sites of delivery. This has led to quite different approaches being followed and quite different outcomes being reached at the different sites. As I noted above, this would be quite acceptable - even preferred - were the NQF framework currently not as focused on ensuring its 'principle of similarity' across the FET Band.

As a way of reducing inequality, recognising the abilities of all learners, and creating a framework that promotes the development of skills in South Africa, it is one of the greater ironies of policy making that the focus on portable and transparent qualifications - based on choice - may have created an environment where what learners 'choose' to take up in the available competency-based programmes actually takes them nowhere. This is because the current education and training environment remains primarily geared to producing particular kinds of learners with particular kinds of skills and competencies for the economy. In a framework where education and training policy demands a 'particular kind of learner', where the NQF pushes for 'standardisation', where the curriculum focuses on 'learner-centredness', and where assessment privileges the 'formative', it is perhaps little surprise that current developments within the FET Band is playing out in the chaotic and rhetorical (policy) way that it is.

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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX 1: STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY ETHICS CLEARANCE



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

18 November 2010

Tel.: 021 - 808-9183  
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Mr A Arnold  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
University of Stellenbosch  
**STELLENBOSCH**  
7602

**Reference: 402/2010**

Mr A Arnold

#### APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE

With regards to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *A comparison of the implementation of further education assessment policy in school and the workplace*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher/s remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal;
2. The researcher/s stay within the boundaries of applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, and applicable standards of scientific rigor that are followed within this field of study and that
3. Any substantive changes to this research project should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee with a view to obtain ethical clearance for it.
4. The researcher/s implements the suggestions made by the mentioned by the Research Ethics Committee (Human Research) in order to reduce any ethical risks which may arise during the research.

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards





**MR SF ENGELBRECHT**  
Secretary: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Non-Health)







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4. How do you distinguish between the level of cognitive ability (difficulty) for the learners in your assessments? ( Name different categories)

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5. What is the minimum promotion requirements for a learner/student to obtain a level 4/ grade 12 exit certificate?

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6. What is the ratio between the Internal Assessment and External Assessments in terms of percentage?

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8.3 with regard to the future of the student?

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8.4 in the community?

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8.5 economic development?

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