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FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CURRICULUM SERVICES AUGUST 2003

ADAPTIVE / ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNERS EXPERIENCING BARRIERS TO LEARNING

1 INTRODUCTION

Education White Paper 6 makes it very clear that all learners need to be assessed within the same curriculum and assessment framework. Assessment has to be guided by the key premises that emerge from the constitution and other relevant policy documents.

It should be remembered that in the future all classes will be inclusive. Not only are there always learners experiencing barriers in every classroom, but in Outcomes Based Education, where learners progress in the main with their age cohort, learners will consequently be at many different levels. An inclusive approach to assessment will thus be the norm, not the exception.

2 IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The RNCS sets the same Learning Outcomes for all learners. This means that: schools have to organise teaching and learning in such a way that all learners can attain these outcomes, albeit at different levels.

Any barriers to the learning and development need to be identified and understood so that learning and assessment can appropriately be adapted, modified and supported.

No intervention should be based simply on traditional categories of disability or learning difficulty. For example, not all learners who are blind or deaf or learners with physical or intellectual disabilities experience the same barriers. Such learners may not experience any barriers to learning whatsoever.

Support should be seen as an integral part of the teaching and learning process in all schools. As assessment can never be seen as separate from this process, it is essential that support measures also focus on this.

Alternative methods of assessment are designed to equalise opportunities for all learners by addressing the barriers which they might be experiencing and not to give them any additional advantage. Therefore, they should enable all learners to give a true account of their knowledge and/or skills.

Barriers to learning and development could be:

Systemic, e.g. lack of basic and appropriate learning support materials, assistive devices, inadequate facilities at schools, overcrowded classrooms, language mismatches, etc.

Societal, e.g. severe poverty, late enrolment at school, etc.

Rooted in inappropriate pedagogy, insufficient support of educators, inappropriate and unfair assessment procedures, etc.

Could also emerge from disabilities (neurological, physical, sensory, cognitive, etc) that are located in the learner.

In most cases (if not all) the learning and development of a learner are hampered by a combination of two or more of the above types of barriers.

3 ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT

In order for educators to effectively address all barriers to learning there are several important aspects that need to be considered concerning assessment practices:

- * The concept, skill, or knowledge that is being assessed.
- * The level at which the learners is expected to be performing as well as the level at which the learner is actually performing.
- * The type of knowledge being assessed: reasoning, memory, or process.
- * Fair treatment of and non-discriminatory practices towards all learners, particularly those who experience barriers to learning.
- * Assessment practices should be aimed at increasing learning and participation and minimising exclusion.
- * Assessment approaches should demonstrate an attempt to minimise categorisation of learners.
- * Ranges of assessment should be used that allow all learners to display relevant skills.
- * Environmental influences such as poverty and trauma should be taken into account during the assessment process.

4 ADAPTIVE / ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

What are adaptive / alternative methods of assessment?

Alternative methods of assessment relate to any adaptation to the standard form of assessment or conditions relating to the assessment that are put in place to address barriers experienced by some learners during assessment processes.

The purpose of alternative assessment methods is to minimise the impact of a range of barriers upon the performance of the learner. Alternative assessment is simply to accommodate the **functional differences** of some learners.

It must be remembered that assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, adaptation of assessment relates also to how tasks and activities are planned and structured throughout the year so as to allow all learners to demonstrate the progress that they are making in a fair, reliable and transparent way.

4.1 Specific methods of alternative assessment

Different types of barriers will have to be addressed through different alternative and/or adaptive methods of assessment. A specific barrier might require more than one adaptation. Strategies to be applied will vary according to whether the barrier is long-standing, recently acquired, fluctuating, intermittent or temporary.

The following are recommended alternative and/or adaptive methods that could be applied in the assessment to address a range of barriers.

4.2 SENSORY BARRIERS

4.2.1 Visual Barriers

Visual impairment refers to a situation where certain eye conditions become a significant barrier to scholastic progress. In these cases ordinary print is problematic, even with the help of spectacles or contact lenses. However, it should be borne in mind that learners who experience visual barriers may need different types of adaptations.

The following are considered alternative methods of assessment:

Braille: Assessment tasks should be available in Braille. Candidates can respond in Braille or typing.

Enlarged and/or bolded text: Assessment tasks can be prepared manually or electronically and preferably on egg yellow paper.

Tape-aid: candidates who experience visual barriers and who cannot read Braille, should receive the assessment tasks on cassette.

- Candidates should receive the printed assessment task as well as the audio-cassette recording.
- Care should be taken that the reading tempo is suitable for the age of the candidate.
- Mark allocations and activity/question numbers must be read out clearly.
- Extension cables and adaptors must be provided in the assessment room.
- Headphones are permissible in order not to create a disturbance.
- If candidates type their responses, provision must be made for a computer or typewriter, possibly in a different venue to avoid a disturbance.
- Candidates should have a set of batteries in case of a power failure.

Dictaphone: The assessment task is read to the candidate, or he/she listens to a tape recorder or reads the task him/herself and records the answers on a Dictaphone. This assessment will have to be conducted in a separate venue.

Computer with voice synthesiser: Candidates are permitted to respond by typing. Here also provision must be made to eliminate the noise factor.

Additional Time: All candidates who experience visual barriers should receive additional time up to a maximum allocation of 30 minutes per hour if needed.

In all the above methods it is essential to limit illustrations, especially fine detail in the illustrations e.g. diagrams in Natural Sciences. In instances where drawing is required, candidates can be allowed to respond through description. In the case of such a question an alternative question can also additionally be set by the educator/examiner. It is advisable to read the task to the candidate to verify that the content and the print match.

4.2.2 Deafness and Hard of Hearing

Deafness and hard of hearing refers to a barrier related to hearing which can be measured on a continuum of intensity. The barrier manifests either as an inability, or a serious problem in acquiring a spoken/written language (including normal speech) through the usual auditory channels.

In the case of **deaf candidates**, their first language i.e. Sign Language is acquired naturally in a visual way. Any spoken/written language must therefore be considered a second language. It is important to realize that the language structure of a spoken/written language differs from the language structure of Sign Language. Therefore, these learners may experience difficulties in conveying knowledge by means of writing.

The following are considered alternative methods of assessment:

Sign Language Interpreter: The interpreter writes down the answers given in Sign Language. The interpreter is an expert in understanding and using Sign Language as well as the language in which the candidate responds to the assessment task.

Video recording: The tasks/questions are recorded on video by means of Sign Language and/or the spoken word (lip-reading). The video may be rewound. The candidate's responses in Sign Language are then recorded on video. A person who is conversant in Sign Language interprets the responses and writes them down. This person thus acts as an interpreter and scribe.

Additional Time: All Deaf candidates should receive additional time up to a maximum allocation of 30 minutes per hour if necessary.

In the case of **learners who are hard of hearing**, depending on the extent of hearing loss, communication is through hearing aids, lip reading and 'cued speech' (which aids lip reading). These learners may have an inability to access information delivered orally (e.g., assessment instructions or when clarifying assessment questions). These learners may have difficulty in English because it is a second language (in some cases a third language) or because of restricted auditory input of English (where deafness occurred prior to early language development).

4.5 Two Adaptive Methods of Assessment to address a range of barriers

Instructions could be provided in the following alternative ways:

- Facing learner and speaking clearly (if learner lip reads)
- Producing all instructions in writing
- Making a FM hearing system or induction loop available

Answering alternatives could be allowed through:

- additional time
- a dictionary or a thesaurus
- a personal computer with spelling and grammar checkers, dictionaries and thesauruses

The physical environment must also be prepared in terms of:

- access to power points for equipment
- adequate space for equipment or specific personnel

All these strategies may also require additional time

4.2.3 Deaf-blindness

This refers to a condition in which the combination of hearing and visual loss in learners cause such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that the intensity and nature of support needed by them, need to be determined on a case by case basis. Impairments of sight and hearing require thoughtful and unique education approaches in order to ensure that these learners have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

4.3 PHYSICAL BARRIERS

This refers to physical barriers due to impaired function in the hands, arms, legs, trunk and/or neck. The barrier may involve the inability to move the body parts (e.g. quadriplegia), the inability to co-ordinate movement (e.g. cerebral palsy) or a missing limb(s) through amputation (writing will be affected by conditions affecting muscle strength and mobility of the wrist, which consequently affect the learner's grip, tempo and neatness of writing), and an inability to speak or to express oneself by means of speech.

The following are considered alternative methods of assessment:

Computer/Typewriter: The use of a computer during assessment may be for the purpose of providing assessment tasks in a format that is accessible to the learner or, alternatively, to formulate and produce assessment responses. However, it is extremely important that precautionary measures should be taken to ensure that no software or special apparatus attached to the computer, that may be to the advantage of the candidate, is available during the assessment. The candidate should be familiar with the specific software/typewriter before the assessment.

Scribe: If possible, the Scribe and the learner should be familiar with each other, and the learner should not be expected to use several different Scribes during successive assessment. The Scribe and the learner should be given copies of these guidelines prior to the assessment. The Scribe should write the exact text as communicated by the learner - orally, through interpreted sign language, by finger spelling, or any other appropriate medium.

The Scribe should write no other text, nor go beyond the learner's communication.

The Scribe should not discuss any matters during the assessment with the learner unless it relates to the learner's communication of assessment answers (e.g., the scribe asks the learner to repeat a sentence).

The learner should be allowed additional time due to the extra demands (i.e., skills/tasks) for the learner in using this strategy.

Recording: Learners who do not have the physical ability to write or type must be allowed to record answers.

Additional Time: All learners who experience physical barriers should have the option of receiving additional time if needed and rest breaks if fatigue occurs. Additional time is also intended to compensate for the time taken up by physical adjustment and slowness in environment organisation, e.g.

Augmentative and alternative communication strategies:

The use of a speech generated device thus any form of text-to-speech device that will generate speech based on icons or words selected.

The use of word/icon prediction programs to facilitate the message formulation process of the learner

The use of graphic and gesture systems to supplement verbal interaction

4.4 LEARNING DISABILITY

This term refers to a range of barriers experienced in receiving, processing, expressing or retrieving information, any of which may affect the person's ability to function effectively in one or more areas (such as spelling, grammar, following directions, spatial relations, numbers).

The following are considered alternative methods of assessment:

4.4.1 Functional difficulty: accessing information which is in a written/print form

Questioning alternatives:

- reader (see guidelines below)
- oral by examiner
- audio taped questions/tasks
- personal computer with voice synthesiser
- additional time.

4.4.2 Functional difficulty: expressing own knowledge in a written form; particular difficulty with spelling and/or grammar

These difficulties may:

- Present themselves in various degrees;
- Be such that it is almost impossible to evaluate the learner's written work;
- Involve spelling which is so poor that it is impossible for the examiner to understand the work presented by the candidate;
- Express themselves in as far as the learner uses phonetic spelling (particularly in English), which however, can still be deciphered and should not be the only norm

Answering alternatives:

- Scribe (see guidelines above)
- Oral answers to the examiner
- Oral answers to audiotape or dictaphone
- Personal computer with spelling and grammar checkers, dictionaries, thesauruses
- Special equipment (i.e. Spell Master or Spell Check)
- Multiple choice and short answer questions in preference to long answer questions.
- Additional time

4.4.3 Functional difficulty: numbers and numerical concepts

Answering alternatives:

- Use of calculator or computer
- Oral answers to the examiner
- Additional time

4.4.4 Other considerations

Physical environment:

- access to power points for equipment
- adequate space for equipment and specific personnel.
- Separate assessment/ venue:
- if learner is easily distracted by the movement and noise of others
- due to noise when using equipment or specific personnel.

4.5.1 Amanuensis (scribe) is a method which could be used in most of the above mentioned instances:

Amanuensis refers to the practice where a person (scribe) reads the tasks/questions to the learner and writes down the learner's spoken words (responses) verbatim.

A scribe could be an educator or a departmental official, but does not have to be a member of staff of the centre concerned. Training of scribes is highly recommended.

It is advisable that transcribing should not take place in the assessment room among other learners. A separate, suitable room should be provided for each scribe. The scribe and the learner must each receive a copy of the assessment task. In the case of writing an external summative assessment, a continuous cassette recording of the assessment must be made. The recorder may only be switched off to turn or replace a cassette. These recordings must be kept until the results are known.

Criteria for eligibility:

A learner is considered for an amanuensis (scribe) when:

- His/her reading/writing ability prevents him/her from giving a true account of his/her knowledge and/or competence;
- He/she may not be in a position to write the paper/respond to the task due to the severity of a disability;
- Written expression (conveying knowledge by means of writing) is not possible;
- He/she experiences difficulty in reading/deciphering the answer.

4.5.2 Reading to a learner/group of learners

A reader can be used in most of the above-mentioned instances:

Procedures:

- The reader can read out the assessment task to one or more learners simultaneously. Both the reader and the learner(s) should have assessment tasks.
- The reader should preferably be a qualified teacher, but not necessarily from the same centre.
- The reader remains neutral and impartial when reading the assessment task. The learner has to finish the task within the allocated time.
- In learning programmes where speed is required and when the reading of the assessment task by the learner is too time-consuming, the paper may be read to the learner. This will require the reader to sit beside the learner throughout the assessment.

Criteria:

Reading to a learner/group of learners is done when:

- Reading problems are due to problems with the tempo at which reading takes place.
- Reading problems such as an inadequate reading rate are due to decoding and word recognition, which distort comprehension, as well as other disabilities or barriers that prevent a learner from reading according to his/her potential.

4.6 Other barriers

Any other barriers not mentioned above can be addressed in creative ways developed by educators with the assistance of the school as well as the district support teams.

PLEASE CONTACT 083298119 OR 4055077 IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES

DON'T FORGET TO PHONE 083298119 OR 4055077 FOR INFORMATION

