

# OBE INFO

FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CURRICULUM SERVICES FEBRUARY 2003

## FET NEWS

The implementation of the National FET curriculum has been postponed until 2006 for the following reasons:

➤ Too little time available for proper teacher training for implementation in 2004.

➤ Learning and teaching support material will not be in place.

➤ Teachers need retraining for new subjects such as Mathematics Literacy and Life Orientation and indeed more Mathematically oriented teachers need to be found in the system. This is not possible before 2004.

➤ Clarity needs to be achieved on difficult issues such as different pathways to achieve the FETC and how learners move between them; linking of school levels with NQF levels and links between schools and Higher Education in

## INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM TRENDS

### TO PASS OR TO FAIL - THAT IS THE QUESTION

As good South African educators, we are continually agonising about our 'pass requirements' - are our standards too high or too low? What percentage of our learners should pass and what percentage should fail? Generally we are having great difficulty in adjusting to 'progression' rather than passing or failing and the concept of a learner generally progressing with his or her age cohort and the parent having some say in the matter is foreign to us.

It is useful to look at curriculum trends in other parts of the world. In Denmark, a successful first world country, each municipality participates in the development of the curriculum for the schools in that municipality. Parents are consulted from the beginning. Tests and examinations are generally frowned upon and alternative assessment methods are used. Learners progress with their age cohort but obviously are often at different levels of development.

England, a country still strongly attached to testing and examinations, has a curriculum based on age not grades - for example a 5-14 curriculum, presuming that learners will always be with their age cohort. The purpose of the extensive testing is to analyse how successful the school is in producing quality education. If the results are poor, the school is blamed. In fact the results are published in league tables so that everyone can see how successful or unsuccessful the school is - but learners do not 'fail' as a result of indifferent tuition - they progress with their age cohort.

One of the basic principles of OBE is 'All learners will succeed'. We must remember this as OBE begins to take root in our society. However, 'success' does not mean the same to all learners. What constitutes success is as unique from learner to learner as the very uniqueness of the learners will allow. This is nothing new - twenty years ago in a grade 10 English class it was possible to have learners from 3 different grades (Higher, Standard and Lower), learners capable of distinctions, immigrants from Taiwan with very little knowledge of English at all, learners who spoke Portuguese or Greek at home and so on. The same diverse groups were also found in the Afrikaans class. What was expected from such heterogeneous groups had to be differentiated from one individual to the next. There were many levels of ability in one class, as there must be today in an OBE class with the further difficulty for the teacher of the principles of inclusion thrown into the mix.

If one truly wants all one's learners in the class to 'succeed' (with all its different individual implications) the only approach can be that of differentiated teaching, using a variety of teaching methods, taking all the different learning styles into account and treating every class as if it included at least three or four different grades in it.

# PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF TEACHING AT DIFFERENT LEVELS IN AN OBE CLASSROOM

Let us take an extreme example - in one Intermediate Grade 6 class the teacher must deal with mildly mentally handicapped learners who are scarcely beyond Grade R level, weak learners operating at about Grade 4 level and faster learners demonstrating at Grade 8 level. This illustration is based on the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R - 9.

The learning area is **Social Sciences** and the learning outcome is '**The learner will be able to use enquiry skills to investigate the past and present**'.

**Step One:** A set of questions designed to test whether the learner understands the concepts 'past' and 'present' and whether he / she is able to ask meaningful questions.

**Step Two:** Having established that learners have a wide range of abilities in this regard, divide them into groups.

**Step Three:** Prepare appropriate activities for the 4 or 5 levels represented in the class as follows:

Group 1 - Grade R level - Answers simple questions about stories of the past and retells stories with illustrations.

Group 2 - Grade 4 level - Records and organises information from a variety of sources given by the teacher, answers questions and constructs a collage of the information.

Group 3 - Grade 6 level - Selects and records information from a variety of sources identified independently and communicates what is required by structured, illustrated writing

Group 4 - Grade 8 level - Evaluates the sources, interprets graphs and statistics and gives own interpretation when presenting the answer.

The chosen activities should be supported by suitable support material. Two different approaches can be used - either the material is the same for all learners with different levels of skills expected from the different levels of learners, or different material can be used for enquiry, with the differentiation indicated by the movement from the known and familiar to the unknown (e.g. from local to national to international).

**Step Four:** Assess the different groups **according to the level at which they are operating**. It is important to note that in any class, a variety of levels will always be represented and these levels are indicated by

the assessment standards, which in our system are organised by grade. If a learner is performing at a level below that of the rest, the ideal will be to move the learner up a level by the end of the year.

Clearly if the varying levels of development of different learners is properly catered for throughout all the grades, keeping learners back a year in the same grade is not particularly helpful, as they may as well work on different levels with their age cohort so that social strains are not added to academic and learning problems.

**Step Five:** Once the summative assessment has been completed, the teacher should reflect on further strategies for learners to progress from one level to the next before detailed further planning takes place.

The approach above is what should take place in every OBE classroom. It is also an effective way of dealing with multi-grade classes in schools which have to deal with more than one grade in a class. This strategy could be used where there is a shortage of teachers in one of the new OBE learning areas, such as EMS or Technology.

In pursuit of achieving the Critical and Developmental Outcomes, the goal of all South Africans, the learner must learn not only to work within the group context but also as a problem-solving individual busy collecting, selecting and organisation information for learning. This should be borne in mind when setting up the groups as delineated above.

**If the different levels at which different learners operate are not taken into account, no Outcomes Based teaching can take place.**

## MORE ON RECORDING OF LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Recording of the achievements and progress of learners should be done for each task and for each Outcome. As assessment is seen as an integral part of teaching and learning, it also involves the identification of barriers and the planning to address these barriers. All recording instruments such as portfolios must include sections on the nature of support needed by each individual learner.

There are different methods of recording. It is often difficult to separate methods of recording from methods of evaluating (or marking) learners' performances.

The following are examples of different types of recording:

**Rating scales** are any marking system, where a symbol (such as an A or B) or a mark (such as 5/10 or 50%) is defined in detail. The detail is as important as the coded score. Traditional marking, assessment and evaluation use rating scales. However, they often did not have descriptive details. As a result it was not easy to get a good sense of learners' strengths and weaknesses in terms of intended outcomes. **Each level of the learner's achievement must be clearly defined.**

**Task lists** or **checklists** consist of discrete statements describing a learner's performance in a particular task. When a particular statement on the checklist can be observed as having been satisfied by a learner during a performance, the statement is ticked off. All the statements that have been ticked off the checklist, then describe a learner's performance.

**Rubrics:** These are particularly useful as they help to eliminate subjectivity as a result of a firm adherence to benchmarks and clearly defined standards. A rubric can be defined as follows:

- describes a continuum of performance quality that ranges from poor to excellent.
- consists of a set of criteria that defines a task in its entirety and by which a task (assignment, project, essay, oral presentation, research task, portfolio) will be judged, considering both the process and the outcomes.
- lists the criteria needed to perform a task and then describes exactly what constitutes acceptable performance for each element.
- describes excellent performance that exceeds the level of acceptable work and inadequate performance that does not yet meet the minimum level of performance.
- usually uses a grid or table format, but there are many different ways of creating a rubric.
- can be adapted to individual styles and needs.
- is analytical rather than quantitative, because the focus is on the analysis of the performance rather than giving a mark.
- gives learners information about their work and is therefore useful for peer and self-assessment.
- sets out the required standard for each of the elements of the task.

A learner does not 'fail' if falling short of the expected level or required level of achievement – he / she has to try again or improve those elements that are not yet acceptable. If this cannot be done, the learner cannot be credited as having achieved the standards.

**Follow these basic steps to design a rubric:**

- Decide what the task is and what kind of evidence of performance should be assessed.
- Together with the learners the teacher should decide on the criteria/elements of the task (the different parts of the performance to be assessed; knowledge and skills to be mastered; where personal opinions, values or insight should be expressed)
- Condense the most important ideas into a shorter list of clear main parts of the task (the performance criteria).
- Describe the different levels of performance (not achieved, partially achieved, achieved, achieved with merit, achieved with distinction).
- Describe firstly the benchmark – that level of performance that is the minimum for the performance to be acceptable; then describe the excellent performance and non-acceptable performance.
- Add the detail for each level of performance so that the learner will be able to understand what is expected.
- Check and verify the rubric – apply and test the criteria by going back to the original intentions of the task; also get other teachers to apply the rubric and get the same results.

**DON'T FORGET TO PHONE 083298119 OR 4055077 FOR INFORMATION**