

SATeacher Newsletter

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Review of the Implementation of the NCS

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The minister of Basic Education, Minister Motshekga, issued a media statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Education, held in Sandton on 2 October 2009.

With all the speculations about the possible changes to the NCS and the Education System, we decided to attend this media briefing in order to inform our members first hand.

In this newsletter we will summarise the main recommendations and the implications for our members.

[Download Media Statement](http://www.sateacher.co.za) and [Report of the Task Team](http://www.sateacher.co.za) from <http://www.sateacher.co.za>

Coming from the media briefing, we were as excited as children on the last day of school before the holidays. At last **Teachers can focus on TEACHING** - the reason we all became teachers in the first place.

This does not mean that we are losing the great vision and intentions of our curriculum, nor that there will be radical overnight changes in the curriculum - it simply means that the focus will now shift from the **process** to the **results**. To quote the minister: "... (the task team)... propose changes which will **create more time for learning and teaching** in the curriculum ...".

The following are some of the key recommendations of the independent Task Team appointed by the minister:

- The need to reduce the amount of administrative work for teachers, which results from the planning and assessment requirements of the NCS.
- The discontinuation of learner portfolios.
- Reducing the number of learning programmes (subjects) in the intermediate phase (Grade 4 to 6) from eight to six.
- Giving priority to English as a first additional language.
- The reassertion of the importance of textbooks and their use in the curriculum.
- Targeted curriculum training for teachers.
- Developing a coherent, clear and simple five year plan to improve the understanding of the NCS in the system.



We will now discuss each of these recommendations.



The need to reduce the amount of administrative work for teachers, which results from the planning and assessment requirements of the NCS.

As we all know, more than 80% of an Educator's time is currently spent on administration resulting from the planning requirements. This report, that has now been accepted by the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), intends to change this situation by reducing the amount of administrative work for teachers.

This is 100% in line with the SATeacher philosophy that "Teachers must focus on Teaching". Why should you be able to create a cake recipe in order to bake a delicious cake?

The three phases of planning are still essential, but it is not necessary that every school or teacher is involved with the

design phase. As covered in our NCS training, the three phases planning should all be focused on the **process** and NOT on the **documents**.

In the first place, the purpose of the **Learning Programme** (or Subject Framework, and it is called in FET) is ONLY to determine **'WHAT to teach'**. Secondly, the **Work Schedule** (that will "replace the Learning Programme" once it is completed) needs to determine **'HOW to teach'**. This is the teaching recipe that is based on the NCS and that can be generic for all schools and teachers.

The third phase, the **Lesson Plan**, is the "**baking of the cake**". This is where teachers will adapt the WHAT and HOW to suit the special needs of their learners. Teachers must focus on the special needs of every learner and use the teaching methodology to extend the opportunity for every learner in order to develop his/her full potential.

We have updated our NCS Resource pack for 2010. Members can download the resources directly from the website. (Refer to the link below). We have also launched the new NCS eResource to help Principals, HODs and Teachers to become strategic planners, rather than administrators. We are looking forward to taking education to the next level. [For more information on the eResource you can go to our website at www.sateacher.co.za.](http://www.sateacher.co.za)

The discontinuation of learner portfolios.

Does this mean continuous assessment is going to disappear?
Definitely NOT!

Assessment is the heart of OBE, and OBE is still the best method of teaching. It was used more than 40 years ago during the "old" education system and is still used internationally with great success for corporate development. It was just never called 'OBE'.

During the media briefing, we realised that most reporters are still confusing 'OBE' with 'NCS'. As we all know, 'NCS' refers to the policy and 'OBE' refers to a teaching method.

The NCS indicate the content that we teach our learners that in turn consists of the **Skills, Knowledge, Values and Attitudes** (SKAV) that we want every South African citizen to acquire. SKAV are grouped together in assessment standards and learning outcomes. Learning outcomes represent the minimum level of competency we want learners to achieve at a certain time in their development.

The content **must be dynamic**, because we live in a dynamic global environment. The content should be reviewed on a regular basis. For example: we cannot go on teaching our learners the old DOS computer system, while the rest of the world is using computer operating systems like Windows.

OBE (as far as teaching is concerned) is the method of teaching, that has proven itself over decades in the previous education system and is still used internationally, as mentioned above.

OBE involves a process of Planning, Teaching, Assessment and Re-planning. It stands in a special relationship with the NCS only because the NCS (SKAV and Assessment Standards) were designed in a format to specifically accommodate this teaching method to the benefit of our learners.

Consider this example:

According to the NCS learners must "Count to at least 100 everyday objects reliably".
(Mathematics Grade 2 - Learning Outcome 1, Assessment Standard 1)

Implementing this requirement while using the OBE method should look like this:

Step 1. Planning:

- Identify the SKAV I want to teach my learners.
 - Skill (What must the learner be able to do?) - **count**
 - Knowledge (What must the learner do it with?) - number range up to **100**
 - Attitude (Describes the skill - How must the learner count?) - **reliably**
 - Value (Describes the knowledge - in this case Maths as a subject) - learner must **enjoy** Mathematics and understand that it is **important**.
- Now I have to divide the outcome into logical building blocks (progression), e.g.
 - Lesson 1 - teach my learners to count to 10 (revision Grade R assessment standard)



- Lesson 2 - teach my learners to count to 34 ((revision Grade 1 assessment standard)
- Lesson 3 - teach my learners to count to 50
- and so on....
- Once I know the "outcome" for each lesson, I can determine the **how** and the **resources** needed. (methodology and resources), e.g. Working in pairs using the empty number line method. I can also plan how I will know that the learners have achieved the required level of competency - assessment method.

Step 2. **Teaching:**

- Now I can teach by implementing a clear plan with a defined objection (outcome).

Step 3. **Assessment:**

- During or after the intervention I need to evaluate (assess) whether I have reached my defined outcome.
- This can be done formally or informally.
- Assume that I have established that the learners still struggle to count to 10 - Lesson 1. How can I carry on with my initial plan? (Lesson 2 - counting to 34) I need to re-plan.

Step 4. **Re-plan**

- I need to change my plan and "re-teach" Lesson 1 by changing my teaching method or by adding more resources (concrete level).
- There is no sense in moving on to the next level - if learners do not understand level 1, they will never understand level 2.

This is what makes OBE so learner centered and why it still remains the best method of teaching.

Learner Portfolios are the evidence collected by the teacher to "prove" that the learner had reached a certain level of competency, or not. This must still happen, but the method of storing this evidence will change (with immediate effect) and teachers can now use the existing class work activities as evidence, instead of compiling time consuming portfolios.

Reducing the number of learning programmes (subjects) in the intermediate phase (Grade 4 to 6) from eight to six.

The report wrongly states that the Foundation Phase only has three Learning Areas. (Refer to the executive summary of the Report of the Task Team, page 9 point 6).

The Foundation Phase covers **all eight Learning Areas**, but by using Languages, Mathematics and Life Orientation as the back bone Learning Areas, we integrate the Assessment Standards of all the other Learning Areas into Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills, now called Learning Programmes.



The reality is that we do not assess the other Learning Areas and most schools only teach the three back bone Learning Areas, which causes a gap between Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase. This is further aggravated by the fact that the Foundation for Learning Campaign documents only focus on Languages and Mathematics.

In our opinion the Foundation for Learning Campaign documents are veering in the right direction, but they still need to be revised to make clear links between milestones and assessment standards. (More about this in our next newsletter and articles on our website.) During the media briefing, SATeacher specifically asked how this report will effect the Foundation for Learning Campaign? The deputy minister then ensured us that the **"Foundation for Learning Campaign is here to stay"** and that it will be extended as part of the strategy to give Teachers more specific guidance and assistance with the

planning process. The Foundation for Learning Campaign will remain one of the ways to get Teachers to focus on teaching.

As mentioned, the NCS comprise Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes and Values (SKAV) and the content must remain dynamic. The SKAV taught in different Learning Outcomes often overlap. These could be integrated into fewer Learning Programmes. This is how it should be done in Foundation Phase. The recommendation by Task Team is to have 6 Learning Programmes, which include two languages. This will result in the elimination of duplications, but it is still important that all the "other learning areas" are still assessed. Integration and assessment of Learning Areas in the Foundation Phase also need to be revisited to include all other Learning Areas to further close the gap between the phases.

In the Senior Phase the Learning Programmes could be further expanded to cover all eight Learning Areas separately, and then to cover seven (or eight) subjects in FET.

We must not perceive this as a reduction in quality of the curriculum content, but rather a further implementation of the **progression principle** that is making our curriculum so great.

Learners will progress in a more logical manner. However, we will then still need to close the gap between FET and Universities.

Giving priority to English as a first additional language.

From the media briefing it is clear that there is still a misunderstanding between Home Language, First Additional and Second Additional Language among the reporters.

Let us not fool ourselves - English is a global academic language and if we want to compete globally, like we should and are capable of doing - **code switching is unavoidable**.

The only challenge we have, is to find the best way and time to implement code switching. Should it be before or after Foundation Phase, or should we wait until after FET? This matter still needs a lot of research and debate.



Let us not re-invent the wheel! We already have a **great English First Additional Language Curriculum** from Grade R to Grade 3. Let us start using it to the best interest of our learners.

Perhaps all public schools should **only** offer English as Language of Learning and Teaching. What do you think? This is definitely a topic close to the hearts of all South Africans and one that we will explore in future newsletters. Let us not open that can of worms too wide right now.

The reassertion of the importance of textbooks and their use in the curriculum.

The report states that "The proper and comprehensive use of textbooks was discouraged and undermined by C2005, and teachers were encouraged to produce their own materials." (Refer to executive summary of the Report of the Task Team, page 9 point 7).

What a shocking statement that cannot be further from the truth. Reading this lets SA Teacher question the validity of the independent Task Team, but let's not lose the baby with the bath water.

This is definitely a perception supported (and even created) by some uninformed officials on district and national level.

In using the OBE as teaching method, all resources, including textbooks, are of the greatest importance. Singapore, a country that gets consistent good ratings in the Trends in Maths and Science Study (TIMSS), proved that one reason for their good performance is that their learners have access to good resources, both at school and at home.

The fact is that resources should follow teaching and teaching should not follow the textbooks.

Teachers should first decide **what and how** to teach and then decide on the most appropriate resources to use - this could be a textbook, or not. For example: How do you teach '**making** three dimensional objects', or '**building** a water purification system' from a textbook?



The danger of textbooks are that they very often only focus on knowledge and that teachers then get trapped in the old "memorisation culture" of the previous education system.

We are in the business of developing citizens for South Africa. Teaching only knowledge (and skills) without attitudes and values will only create highly knowledgeable and highly skilled criminals. Attitudes and values are very difficult to teach from a textbook.

Changing the resource plays a role in creating expanded opportunities ... that will help every learner to develop to his/her full potential.

We believe that if teachers are relieved from their unnecessary administrative burdens and can focus on teaching, they will have enough time to creatively create and use resources - and even use waste materials in the process. (In our Numeracy workshops we teach every Assessment Standard in Foundation Phase, Grade R to 3 with resources without buying a single thing - it can be done!)



Targeted curriculum training for teachers.

The concept of the NCS is only so **difficult, because it is so simple !**

The NCS represent one of the best developed curriculums in the world - and that is not only our opinion, but also the opinion of some of the international colleagues we have contact with.

The problem does not lie with the NCS, but rather with the process of implementation - as acknowledged by the Report. It is like owning a high performance sports car, but filling the tank with paraffin and then blaming the car for not performing.



Having interacted with more than 20 000 teachers over the last 5 years and having trained many curriculum advisors, it is clear to SA Teacher that the NCS and the planning process are both still misunderstood by most teachers and curriculum advisors.

The power of the curriculum lies in the design logic. To unleash this power teachers need to understand the logic and the planning process.

We simply cannot keep up with the demand for workshop training and are therefore compiling the **NCS eLearning Course covering the Three Phases of Planning**. This course will be made available free of charge to all our members early in 2010. (More about this course in future newsletters.)

Developing a coherent, clear and simple five year plan to improve the understanding of the NCS in the system.

If you read this recommendation in the Report, you will note that the Media Statement leaves out (assumingly by oversight and not intentionally) the following very important sentence: **"Offering support to teachers and the improvement of learner performance must be ... central themes (of the five year plan)."**

The essence of what we do is to **improve learner performance**, because developing citizens for South Africa is the sole reason for our existence.

In corporate business the equivalent of Learner Performance as called the **strategic path**. Every part of the programme must be **measured and questioned against** Learner Performance. If anything we do does not improve Learner Performance, **we must stop doing it immediately!**

That is why systemic evaluation is so important. Systemic evaluation can be seen as our performance appraisal - if performance does not improve, it means all our effort was a waste of time.

In visiting hundreds of schools every year, we make a point to ask the Principals or HODs of every school what their literacy and numeracy levels are. We have yet to find a school that can tell actually us. It is like going on a journey, but you are not sure where you are or indeed where you are going, but you have decided to take a certain route and will see if you like the place where you end up.

Our education system has become too focussed on process and administration rather than on **results**. Our school leaders (in general) are *administrators* and they should rather be *strategic managers*.



We have indeed found that the common factor in all performing schools is a *management* (i.e. the principal, HOD or management body) *with a vision*.

In the American campaign, "No child left behind", they identified *leadership* as the main reason for schools not performing. In this campaign 30 000 underperforming schools were identified in America. (This is more than all the schools in the total SA school system.) The campaign intends to get these schools on par by 2014. They have adopted a policy that either 'the leadership must change' or they will 'change the leadership'. Perhaps we can learn something from them (after all).

SATeacher has found that one reason why principals shy away from "managing" learner performance is that they do not have the tools to do so. They have tools to manage finance (like budgets and financial reports), but no tools to plan, implement and manage learner performance.

Very often schools show a 100% pass rate in the lower grades, but when one compares this with the systemic evaluation the learners are only 30% literate and/or numerate. This simply indicates delayed problems.

It also clearly indicates that the school's assessment policy and its ability to assess are not working. The policy in some provinces to pass learners by default, instead of having to prove that they can be promoted, does not help the situation either.

For this reason we have spent the past three years in developing the **NCS eResource - taking education to the next level**.

With the **NCS eResource** schools will be able to manage learner performance by making sure that their strategic plan is implemented and that it is indeed delivering the required results. This means not only 'doing things right', but 'doing the right things'. What is the sense of running at full speed in the wrong direction?

Schools are welcome to contact us for a no-commitment demonstration at your school.

For more information please visit our website at www.sateacher.co.za

In conclusion - it seems that we finally have a minister that is willing to listen and is willing to make changes. This excites us and we are looking forward to the results.

Our objectives:
"Put the teacher back into the classroom".
Teachers must focus on teaching

If you need more information please do not hesitate contacting us
or forward your comments on this article by email to info@sateacher.co.za



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