"They're learning, I'm learning, everybody is learning."

The design and use of a questionnaire to deepen an appreciation of the role of formative assessment in primary teaching

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate

Simon James Brown

This dissertation has been submitted under the approval of my supervisor:

Signed by candidate

.....

Associate Professor Rob Siebörger

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ABSTRACT

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Researchers and practitioners are increasingly recognizing the contribution that formative assessment can make to learning. It is largely based on Black & Wiliam's (1998) meta-analysis, which provided evidence that strengthening the practice of formative assessment raised standards and produced significant learning gains. Whether strategies are carried through into classrooms is, however, less certain.

In trying to establish how teachers' use assessment for learning, researchers have drawn on findings from questionnaires or interviews and/or classroom observations but, have usually only been able to describe what teachers *say they do*. With this problem in mind, the researcher set out to design a questionnaire that would allow them to demonstrate and comment on their current assessment practice. Implicit in this was also a desire to help teachers grow professionally.

The sample involved in the development of the questionnaire included six primary schools, fifteen Grade 6 teachers and two professional development teacher educators. During stage one, interviews were carried out with five teachers to familiarise the researcher with common approaches to assessment in schools. Findings enabled the categorisation of ways that assessment is carried out and perceived and, recognised the need to provide teachers with an opportunity to clarify the relevant concepts for themselves. What emerged was a need for some professional development and as a result, the focus grew to explore ways of informing teachers about using formative assessment for learning.

A questionnaire was then constructed and piloted (stage two). Feedback from teachers revealed that the questions had made them consider their own practice and realise the potential of using assessment formatively. It also helped to confirm questions, identify limitations and aid the re-design.

The testing stage (stage three) helped to interpret findings, inform decisions, consider effectiveness and where required, justify formative recommendations for the next design.

Finally, during stage four, two specialists evaluated the questionnaire. Their feedback served to validate and strengthen the design and establish credibility and confidence in the instrument. They were also able to advise further lines of inquiry and opportunities for extending the research.

Key Words: assessment, formative, summative, teaching, learning, questionnaire, interviews, marking, feedback, questioning, self- and peer-assessment.

ACRONYMS

ARG	Assessment Reform Group
AS(s)	Assessment Standards
BERA	British Educational Research Association
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CASS	Continuous Assessment
DES	Department for Education; and Science: previous name of government ministry for England.
DfES	Department for Education and Skills: current name of government ministry for England.
DOE	Department of Education. The national department, Pretoria.
EMDC	Educational Management and Development Centre
INSET	In-service Education and Training
KMOFAP	King's, Medway, Oxfordshire, Formative Assessment Project
LEA	Local Education Authority
LO(s)	Learning Outcomes
NC	National Curriculum (England and Wales)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework (South Africa)
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education: government agency responsible for regular inspections of all publicly funded schools in England
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England and Wales)
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement (South Africa)
SAT(s)	Standardised Assessment Tasks
TGAT	Task Group on Assessment and Testing
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Assessment is a prominent and much debated issue in education. Continual changes to assessment requirements at primary level have affected teachers' practice; increasing demands and leaving many uncertain about what exactly is expected of them.

Traditionally school assessment has as its main purposes selecting and certifying the achievement of individuals and providing information about the quality of education so schools can be held more accountable. This is referred to as its summative role (Sadler, 1989) and it could be argued that this function dominates most teachers' view of assessment.

The nineties witnessed the emergence of a shift in the theory of assessing student achievement and performance. Such a move has been justified on educational grounds whereby assessment strategies can be used to deepen learning and raise the overall level of achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Within this context, the central issue is learning itself; using assessment formatively to promote learning, to motivate and to assist learners to achieve more (Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

Whilst most assessment is both summative *'of'* and formative *'for'* learning it is argued that high quality formative assessment is still relatively rare in classrooms as teachers do not know how to engage in such assessment.

1.2 Focus and context of the study

Prior to the introduction of Outcomes-based Education (OBE) and a new assessment framework, most schools adopted an approach to assessment and learning that placed a strong emphasis on the accumulation of facts. Assessment tasks, normally in the form of written examinations, were single occasion and single attribute in nature. Learners were assessed individually within a system that was largely summative, norm-referenced and judgemental (DOE, 1997: 3). The introduction of Curriculum 2005 (C2005), in 1998, provided an outcomes-based framework for schools in which the most obvious change in assessment was a move away from a recall of content to the demonstration of outcomes. It placed a strong emphasis on a continuous model of assessment (CASS) that encompassed observations, self-assessment, peer-assessment, portfolio-assessment and performance-based assessments where the learner is assessed performing a given task. Its function being to support learner development and to feedback into teaching and learning "...so that the positive achievements of the learner can be recognised and discussed and appropriate next steps may be planned" (DOE, 1998: 11).

Thus, assessment policy has become a formative, criterion-referenced system (see Cockburn, 1997; Pahad, 1997; Le Grange & Reddy, 1998; Combrinck, 2003; Vandeyar & Killen, 2003).

The revised national curriculum statement (RNCS) released in May 2002, focused on assessment for learning; "the main purpose of assessing learners is to enhance the individual growth and development, to monitor the progress of learners and to facilitate their learning" (DOE, 2002: 96) (Note: The section on assessment is generic to all learning area documents of the RNCS). Similarly, Pahad (1997: 46) writes; "The main use of the information from all assessment tasks should be formative and developmental to help the learner and the teacher". This importance placed on the formative role of assessment and on its integration with teaching and learning serves as a basis for this research.

These statements emphasise the implicit value of formative assessment as a strategy for fostering learning and improving teaching programmes in South Africa and suggests that summative assessment alone is not adequate to deal with the complexities of learning. Whether this will be carried through into the classroom is less sure. There appears to be considerable confusion amongst teachers about the nature and purpose of assessment and between the demands on teachers to produce 'good' results (in both internal assessments and external examinations), and their own professional judgement which asks teachers to spend more time with students, monitoring their progress in order for them to develop. In the face of these pressures, it could be argued that teachers' understanding is unclear and the practical realization of formative assessment is difficult.

1.3 Research question

Attention has been given to describing what teachers perceive their assessment practice to be (see Neesom, 2000; Torrance & Pryor, 1998), but it has typically been restricted to what teachers report that they do. The problem that arises is it that is very difficult to be sure that they actually assess in the way that they say they assess. Little consideration has been paid to designing research instruments that would allow teachers to demonstrate, comment and reflect on their current practice.

The research question for the study is, thus: 'How can a questionnaire be developed that will enable primary teachers to demonstrate and comment on their current assessment practice, in order both to identify and promote formative assessment?' [I.e. to deepen an appreciation of formative assessment.] Evidence of surveys of teacher practice (see Black & Wiliam, 1998) shows that formative assessment is not at present a strong feature of classroom work. It follows that to establish formative assessment practices requires amongst other things a willingness to change. With this

in mind, the research study aimed to design and use a questionnaire which provided not only an insight on current practice but also served a formative function for teachers: presenting examples of how assessment for learning could be incorporated more effectively into the primary classroom.

1.4 Clarification of terms

It is not the assessment itself that is formative or summative but the way that the information derived from it is used.

Figure 1.1: Clarifying the formative/summative distinction

Formative assessment - 'assessment *for* learning': Is assessment that is part of the process of teaching and learning. Information gathered is used to enhance learning. It results in actions that are successful in closing the gap between current and expected performance (see Clarke, 2001: 2; Aitken, 2000: 15).

Summative assessment - 'assessment *of* learning': Is the process of summing-up or checking what has been learned at the end of a particular stage of learning. Its purpose is to measure and communicate performance for purposes of certification, transfer and/or accountability (see Weeden *et al.* 2002: 13).

1.5 Summary

In this introductory chapter, the purpose of the research has been presented, its origin, context, importance and background stated, the research problem has been clarified and, the methodological plan outlined.

In the next chapter the relevant literature on formative assessment and its implications for this study will be reviewed.

1.6 Overview of the dissertation

The remaining chapters are arranged as follows:

Chapter 2 defines formative assessment and explores the theoretical and practical bases of classroom formative assessment literature.

Chapter 3 explains theoretical frameworks for formative assessment and advances a conceptualisation of formative assessment. It also describes the research design and methodology chosen to explore, develop and refine a questionnaire.

Chapter 4 provides an account of the first stage interviews and an analysis of the information gathered. It then outlines the process of question design and development.

In **Chapters 5 and 6** the questionnaire is piloted and tested. Responses to the first and second drafts are discussed and where necessary changes are made.

Chapter 7 contains an evaluation of the questionnaire, which draws on the perspectives of two professional development teacher educators.

Chapter 8 draws conclusions, implications and makes recommendations for future research in this area.

CHAPTER 2: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING: A REVIEW

2.1 Formative and summative uses of assessment

The assessment of educational attainment serves a variety of functions. Assessment with a summative role tends to focus on results which are used to monitor standards, compare achievement and provide information with which teachers, educational administrators and politicians can be held accountable. For individual students it provides a method of sorting and classifying themselves, enabling prospective employers and providers of education and training to identify and select individuals (see Scriven, 1967; Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971). Within schools, summative assessment is used to determine a student's progress through a curriculum as well as to report on the students' achievement. Despite these uses, educational assessments can also be used to support learning and provide feedback to learners on what they need to improve however; it is only recently that it has become an explicit focus for attention. It is clear that the potential of this formative role has fuelled a growing body of interest among teachers and both policy makers but, there is still much confusion about what constitutes formative assessment and how it may be best conducted (Weeden, Winter & Broadfoot, 2002).

2.2 Formative assessment - towards a definition

Etymology and common usage associate the adjective *formative* with forming or moulding something, usually to achieve a desired end (see Sadler, 1989). In a publication for teachers, Black *et al.* (2002: i) define formative assessment as; "...any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning".

Cowie and Bell (1999) distinguish between two types of formative assessment, namely 'planned' and 'interactive'. They suggest that planned formative assessment is used to improve teaching and learning. Information is elicited through the task or activity set, this information is interpreted and the teacher and/or learner acts on this with reference to the learning area, the learner's previous performance and how the learner and teacher propose to take learning forward. Interactive formative assessment takes place during teacher, learner interaction and involves the teacher noticing, recognising and responding immediately to learner thinking. It is ongoing and can occur at anytime.

> An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs (Black *et al.* 2003a: 3).

In short, formative assessment involves teachers and learners acting so as to improve teaching and learning. It is the day to day ongoing assessment that forms part of the repertoire of teaching strategies by encouraging learning from the past to inform the future and enabling the learners to grow (Black *et al.* 2003a,b). Assessment becomes formative in nature only when either the student or teacher uses that information to inform teaching and/or to influence learning. Therefore, data from summative assessment can be used in formative ways.

The following extract from the Task Group on Assessment and Testing – TGAT Report (DES, 1988) makes explicit the link between assessment and learning and emphasises the role of the teacher.

> Promoting children's learning is a principal aim of schools. Assessment lies at the heart of this process. It can provide a framework in which educational objectives may be set, and pupils' progress charted and expressed. It can yield a basis for planning the next educational steps in response to children's needs. By facilitating dialogue between teachers, it can enhance professional skills and help the school as a whole to strengthen learning across the curriculum and throughout its age range (DES, 1988: paras 3-4).

2.3 The research evidence

Over the last 18 years, there have been three major reviews of the contribution that formative assessment can make to learning and raising standards of achievement (Natriello, 1987; Crooks, 1988; Black & Wiliam, 1998). The findings from these studies are that improving the quality of teachers' formative assessment has a substantial effect on the achievement of students.

Much of the current thinking around the issue of formative assessment comes from research carried out by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam of King's College, London and the Assessment Reform Group (ARG). They published a short précis of their findings in the influential pamphlet *'Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through classroom assessment'* in 1998. Work from their subsequent publications, which aims to develop the practical implementation of their ideas, is widely quoted and some of the results have been incorporated into government and state initiatives around the world.

Although formative assessment has always been part of the learning process, for instance in the comments teachers have made on pupils' work, its obvious neglect by teachers seems to stem from the fact that they are more concerned with teaching; assuming learning is what learners do.

> It is as if the pupil has no role at all and indeed as if assessment can be carried out without having an impact on the pupil – the assessment procedure produces results (information) but has no impact on the learning process in and of itself (Torrance & Pryor, 1998: 12).

As debates begin to shift the focus back onto learning itself, and argue that assessment for learning must be conceived as a core part of the teaching and learning process,

sadly, teachers appear to be struggling to act upon this message as yet. "Overall, teachers seem to be trapped in 'no-mans land', between their commitment to formative assessment and the different, often contradictory, demands [of the system]" (Black *et al.* 2003b: 14).

Black & Wiliam (1998) offer recommendations for changing this state of affairs. In their analysis of the research evidence they demonstrate the positive impact of formative assessment on learning gains in studies ranging from 5 year olds to university students and across several different countries. However, their study also recognises that the relationship between research findings and classroom practice is less certain; "...the published research could not provide the recipes for improvement...and lacked the detail that would enable teachers to implement the practice in classrooms" (Black *et al*, 2003b: 1).

Can this be resolved? This is the question that the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) addresses in its 1999 pamphlet *Assessment for Learning: Beyond the Black Box*. However, its valuable suggestions and proposals are very much at a policy level and fail to give teachers recommendations for using assessment for learning in their practice. Accordingly Black and Wiliam set out to evaluate and illustrate formative assessment methods in secondary schools in England as part of the Kings, Medway, Oxfordshire, Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP). *Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom* (Black *et al.* 2002) and *Assessment for learning* (Black *et al.* 2003c) provide exemplification of the strategies needed to develop successful conditions for assessing formatively in the classroom.

Stemming from this, the Assessment Reform Group (2002) outlines ten principles of formative assessment for learning to inform practice (see Table 2.1).

***Table 2.1**: Principles of formative assessment*

• Is part of effective planning of teaching and learning;
• Focuses on how students learn, including both the 'how' and 'what' of learning;
• Is central to everyday classroom practice;
• Is a key professional skill which needs to be nurtured through initial and continuing professional development;
• Is sensitive and constructive in that comments focus on the work not on the person;
• Fosters motivation by emphasizing progress and achievement rather than failure;
• Promotes understanding of goals and criteria so that learners understand what they are trying to achieve;
• Helps learners know how to improve through clear and informative guidance;
• Develops the capacity for self-assessment so that learners can become more independent and reflective;
• Enables all learners to achieve their best and have their achievements recognised.

Effective implementation of such principles is by no means a straightforward task and it could be argued that practitioners would be 'hard-pressed' to achieve all of these. Of course, it is not always necessary or even possible to follow these principles in a formal way when teaching. In the usual give-and-take of classroom life, such opportunities will often arise unexpectedly. Therefore, perhaps the challenge for classroom teachers becomes one of recognizing these opportunities and taking full advantage of them. The challenge for the system becomes one of providing teachers, and students with the structures and necessary support to do so (Atkin, Black & Coffey, 2001).

Education systems around the world have seen a proliferation of innovations over the past decade, including school-based management, teacher appraisal and quality assurance procedures. These and many other changes are no doubt intrinsically appealing and have promising potential for improving education. In most cases however, there is little firm evidence that such approaches have improved or will improve pupil learning.

So, one might ask, what if anything is different about formative assessment. On the surface, it would appear very little. What emerges from research into formative assessment in many countries (Crooks, 1988; Senk *et al.* 1997; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Wylie, 1999; Boyle, 2000; Lambert & Lines, 2000; Kotze, 2002; Grima & Chetcuti, 2003) is that the practice is weak which is not surprising really when you think that external and standardized testing which is predominately summative and often with high stakes attached, is over emphasised. Combined with public evaluation through league tables, school inspections, performance related pay and many other demands on teachers one can understand why there has "been some lip service but little real attention to strengthening teachers' formative, classroom assessment capabilities" (Winter, 1999: 2).

2.4 Implications for practice

If assessment is to be of real use to learning, then the learner must be involved in the process as well as the product (Taras, 2002). Continuous assessment and administering marks or grades does not constitute formative assessment neither does a test at the end of a piece of learning. For assessment to be of maximum value, learners must be actively involved in feedback, allowing them to correct conceptual errors and encouraging teachers to modify activities in light of their effectiveness. Since their initial review, Black *et al.* (2003a,b,c) have undertaken development work to determine how formative assessment could be incorporated more effectively into professional practice. The following sections outline some of the outcomes of these developments.

2.4.1 Feedback

Feedback as part of formative assessment helps learners become aware of any gaps that exist between their desired goal and the current knowledge, understanding, or skills and guides them through actions necessary to obtain the goal (Ramaprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1989). The most helpful type of feedback provides specific comments about errors, suggestions for improvement and encourages students to focus their attention thoughtfully on the task rather than on simply getting the answers right (Elawar & Corno, 1985; Bangert-Drowns, Kulick & Morgan, 1991). As feedback can have negative results (see Kluger & DeNisi, 1996) it should also be task involving rather than ego involving (see Butler, 1988; James, 1998). Feedback that emphasizes learning goals leads to greater learning gains than that which emphasizes self-esteem (see Dweck 1986; Ames, 1992).

> Feedback can be the vital link between the teacher's assessment of a child and the action following that assessment which then has a formative effect on the child's learning (Hargreaves, McCallum & Gipps, 2000: 21).

Feedback both written and oral is deemed to be the central theme (Clarke, 2003) or critical component (Black *et al*, 2003a) of formative assessment. Clarke (2001) argues that when using assessment for learning strategies, teachers need to move away from giving marks or grades with comments that may not be related to the learning intention of the task (e.g. 'try harder' or 'explain more') and move towards giving feedback to help the pupil improve in a specific activity. This will help to close the learning gap and move learners forward in their understanding.

Black & Wiliam (1998) highlighted the negative influences of traditional forms of feedback in schools and showed there is room for improvement. They use the concept of a 'gap' articulated by Ramaprasad (1983) and Sadler (1989), and state that to be effective, assessment for learning requires that learners firstly, need to see a gap between what they want to achieve and their present ability to achieve that; and, secondly, learners try to close the gap in attempting to reach a desired goal. Sadler (1989) suggests students also need help in prior assessment of existing knowledge and competence then, in class, they need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement and at various stages of the course they need chances to reflect on what they have learnt, what they still have to learn, and how to assess themselves.

The 'LEARN' project (Weeden *et al.* 2000) interviewed 300 pupils in primary and secondary schools and found that with regards to feedback, students were often confused by effort and attainment grades, preferred timely feedback delivered orally, found constructive criticism more beneficial and often were unable to use the feedback for further learning.

From these studies it appears that the student must be an active participant in the assessment and the teacher should use less feedback for evaluative purposes and more formative feedback to guide the process of learning. Thus, creating a partnership where teachers and learners are responsible for their 'performance' and monitor their learning (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996).

> Formative assessment implies and necessitates a partnership and a symbiotic relationship which works in a two-way system since it does not count as formative feedback unless the student has understood what the purpose of the assessment was, how it was judged, and how they can use their shortfalls in the future (Taras, 2002: 506).

2.4.2 Questioning

Besides using feedback, Black and Wiliam (1998) encourage teachers to use questioning and classroom discussion as an opportunity to increase their students' knowledge and improve understanding. Teachers can use questions to find out what pupils know, understand and can do. They might also analyse pupils' responses to find out what specific misconceptions need addressing as well as using pupils' questions to assess understanding. Some questions are better than others at providing teachers with assessment opportunities. Changing the way questions are phrased and allowing students more thinking time can both improve learning (Clarke, 2001). Black *et al.* (2002, 2003c) suggest if teachers use a judicious mix of 'open' and 'closed' questions, the impact on learning can be very positive. Similarly, teachers who set a brisk pace for questioning and ensure that all the class has an opportunity to be involved, tend to maintain a high level of interest and attention.

Reflecting on school based research in England, Torrance and Pryor (1998) maintain that if teachers ask a genuine question then they will get a genuine answer or a more detailed elicitation, rather than a guess at what the teacher wants to hear. This, "provides insight into their current state of understanding, but is also potentially useful in stimulating further learning" (Torrance & Pryor, 1998: 129).

Teachers use of questioning is often very variable, and ranges from practice where questions are being thoughtfully planned and subsequently used to encourage and advance learners' thinking, to teaching which employs questions ineffectively, often for exclusively instructional or administrative purposes or to reprimand a child. Therefore good questioning is beneficial for both learners and teachers alike. Where learners are given time to think and process the answer to a question, the responses tend to be better and learning moves on. When teachers take time to listen carefully to responses, the information can help them to build on what they have heard and adjust teaching and planning as a result.

2.4.3 Self- and peer-assessment

Learners can also play an important role in formative assessment through self- and peer-assessment. Research has shown that pupils will achieve more if they are fully engaged in their own learning process (see Covington, 1992; Darling-Hammond *et al.* 1995; Boud, 1997; Platt, 1997; White & Frederiksen, 1998). This means that if pupils know what they need to learn and why, actively assess their understanding, the gaps in their knowledge and the areas they need to improve; then they will achieve more than just sitting passively in a classroom completing tasks with no real comprehension of the learning intention and its importance. In the words of Klenowski (1996: 2), "When students are engaged in evaluating their own work, they are thinking about what they have learnt and how they learn."

They are also more likely to take responsibility for the learning process, which encourages a 'deep' (students try to turn other people's ideas into their own personalised structure of knowledge), as opposed to 'surface' (students simply 'scrape the surface' of the material being studied without carrying out any deep processing) approach to learning (see Biggs 1987, 1999; Entwistle, 1998).

The characteristics of self-assessment include: evaluation against identified and known criteria; and a process of ascribing a value to the teaching and learning experience (usually verbal or written) (Clarke, 2001). In essence it requires a judgement of one's performance and the identification of ways to improve one's learning. It allows the pupils to realise their own learning needs and provides the teacher with more assessment information – the learner's perspective.

Self-assessment is an important tool for teachers. Once pupils understand how to assess their current knowledge and the gaps in it, they will have a clearer idea of how they can help themselves progress (Black, 1998; Siebörger & Macintosh, 1998). With the aid of teachers, pupils can set targets relating to specific goals and guide their own learning. Klenowski (1996) found that it was possible for pupils to develop more confidence and increase motivational levels as they begin to take control over their learning. Similarly, Levine (2002: 201) gives examples of lots of students who "barely seem aware of how they're doing or how they've done." He advocates that students are encouraged to self-monitor and become more conscious and systematic in their learning activities. Participating in assessment can provide students with opportunities to reflect on what they are learning in order to make coherent connections within and between subject matters (Wiggins, 1998).

Black *et al.* (2003a,b,c) claim that peer-assessment can be an important complement to self-assessment. Peer-assessment is valuable because pupils can clarify their own ideas and understanding of both the learning intention and the assessment. The

dialogue will be natural between peers and by taking the role of the teacher, they suggest that pupils may accept and take more seriously criticism from a peer rather than a teacher. In practice, observation also found that during peer-assessment activities teachers were released from direct contact and could listen to, reflect and intervene on what was happening. Pupils also seemed less restricted as they interrupted one another in ways that perhaps they would not have done to teachers.

2.4.4 Summary

These techniques all support a more general argument that improved formative assessment can lead to changes, which help pupils, become more effective learners. To date, the extent to which formative assessment practices have been developed in the classroom is not significant. Yet the studies suggest there is real potential for raising standards of learning and developing teachers' professionalism through the use of formative assessment.

Having traced out these approaches, it is important to note that other strategies and principles exist for using assessment as a tool to support and facilitate learning. Such complementary mechanisms include; sharing learning goals (see Clarke, 1998, 2001); marking and record keeping (see Sutton, 1995; Siebörger & Macintosh, 1998; Clarke, 2003); using examples of assessed work (see James, 1998; Hall & Burke, 2003); raising motivation and self-esteem (see Black, 1998; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Clarke, 2001); target setting (see Clarke, 1998; Elliot, 2001); using journals and portfolios (see Sutton, 1995; Klenowski, 1996; Carbery, 1999); parental roles (see Filer & Pollard, 2000) and prior expectations/knowledge (presage) (see Biggs, 1987; Meyer, 1998).

2.5 Teachers' perceptions of formative assessment

A recent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) survey in England, on formative assessment revealed that teachers are aware of the benefits of effective formative assessment (see Neesom, 2000). They recognise the importance of having whole-school policies that encourage an assessment dialogue between teachers and learners and identify good practice. For teachers, formative assessment can provide valuable feedback and 'feed forward' for effective planning and classroom intervention. For pupils formative assessment skills are crucial for helping them take charge of their own learning development. Furthermore, the survey indicates teachers are confused about the differences between formative and summative assessment and reveals that teachers perceive the emphasis on summative assessment encourages them to focus on performance and devalues their formative assessment practices. For some teachers, formative assessment is seen as 'something extra' because it is not seen as integral to teaching and learning.

Aitken (2000), questioned 20 secondary teachers in New Zealand about their use of formative assessment as a classroom strategy. He states that the teachers involved in the study showed a good theoretical understanding of the main distinctions between, and different uses of formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment was seen as a 'user-friendly' way of linking teaching and learning, which encouraged students' involvement. Summative assessment was recognised as the measuring of achievement usually at the end of a task. Yet, despite many teachers' perception of the value of formative assessment, the reality of recording and reporting student achievement in summative terms confused them and meant they found it difficult to spend sufficient time on formative assessment. This discomfort was also noted amongst teachers in the UK and Ghana (see Pryor & Akwesi, 1998).

Another study in Hong Kong (Carless, 2002) found that teachers tend to think of formative as during the term and summative at the end of term or year. As Sadler (1989) argues this is only part of the story as "the primary distinction between formative and summative assessment relates to purpose and effect, not to timing" (p.120).

It would appear that the boundary between the formative and summative uses of assessment is not always clear-cut. Teachers face difficulty in reconciling these two complex educational processes and "confusion in teachers' minds between these roles can impede the improvement of practice" (Black & Wiliam, 1998: 148).

2.6 Conclusion

The preceding review shows that formative assessment can aid learning. The arguments are strong and offer powerful reasons to change assessment assumptions and procedures in the classroom. Research suggests that formative assessment is relatively rare. The implications of using it go far beyond the fine-tuning of current assessment strategies or the simple replacement of one assessment scheme by another. Formative assessment can occur regularly in lessons and it can involve different ways of encouraging students to express what they are thinking and different methods of acting on such information. It follows, then, that the implementation calls for changes in teachers' beliefs, values and perceptions of their classroom practice.

In trying to clarify the concept of formative assessment, it is apparent that the phrases 'assessment for learning' and 'formative assessment' are often used interchangeably. Any assessment could have the potential to be used *for* learning provided it is designed for that purpose.

The next chapter reviews the theoretical basis for formative assessment and provides a conceptual and methodological framework for the present research.

CHAPTER 3: A CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a theoretical framework for the conceptualisation of what counts as formative assessment and attempts to explain how assessment for learning once translated into practice can deepen and improve the quality of teaching and learning. The chapter also presents the research methodology employed in this study describing the method used to develop and refine an instrument to investigate teachers' perceptions of formative assessment and to establish to what extent teachers use assessment formatively.

3.2 Contrasting models of learning

At a theoretical level, formative assessment is not particularly well developed. It would appear that formative assessment as a practice is implicitly grounded in psychological theory. Torrance & Pryor (1998) use Sadler's (1989) distinction between Behaviourist and Constructivist perspectives on learning. The Behaviourist thinks of learning in terms of mastery, of breaking down knowledge into parts to be mastered before 'moving on' and through testing at a particular point in time what students know. Providing feedback to the learner about performance can also form a part of this view and such an approach resonates with the graded, linear organisation of national curriculum frameworks in many countries.

Constructivists see learning as an active engagement rather than learning and moving on. The constructivist influence upon formative assessment assumes learning needs to be mediated or facilitated by the teacher, who assists the pupil to engage, interact and construct learning within social relationships. A constructivist view of learning implies a dynamic, active process of building meaning for oneself. It follows then that formative assessment must be skilfully directed to explore existing knowledge, to reveal important aspects of understanding and then be developed to challenge learners' ideas (Badders, 2000; Lambert & Lines, 2000).

However, such clear distinctions between approaches to formative assessment are perhaps too broad "because in many instances both perspectives come into play and impact on each other" (Nakabugo, 2003: 19).

Many theories have been proposed as guides to improving learning, several offer models of improving learning through assessment but very few provide practical implications. Of those that do, most emphasise the community and social aspects of learning (see Gipps 1994 and Torrance & Pryor, 1998 for more detailed summaries). Here, learning is not viewed as solely an individual activity. For example, teachers and pupils develop shared understandings of standards for quality work and certain

kinds of feedback extend and deepen these understandings. In Piaget's work (cited in McNaughton, 1990) the very act of assessment combined with the genuine relationship that can develop between the student and teacher has been shown to have educative effects in regard to developing understanding. Torrance and Pryor (1998, 2001) suggest that whilst convergent assessment (which aims to discover whether the learner knows, understands or can do a pre-determined thing) is summative and therefore judgemental, divergent assessment (which aims to discover what the learner knows, understands or can do) lends itself to formative assessment. In their view, divergent teacher assessment provides more opportunity for the teacher to teach in Vygotsky's (1978) 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD). The model developed by Vygotsky is based on the idea that through structured learning activities, teachers and more able peers can assist students, to learn in the conceptual zone just beyond what they can reach alone. This potential gain in development was termed ZPD, the related intention being that the teacher's role is to provide 'scaffolding' for learning through an interactive process. This involves structuring formative tasks through modelling, questioning and feedback. It occurs as the teacher, either as a co-participant or as a bystander, observes how learners are tackling particular tasks and then attempts to intervene in a manner that is both responsive to the learners' needs and intended to assist them to achieve (Wells, 1996; Allal & Pelgrims Ducrey, 2000).

On the basis of ZPD, Sadler (1989) explains how learners need to know; where they are, where they are going and how to get there. The conditions for this improvement in learning is that the student comes to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher and is able to monitor continuously the quality of what is being produced. In more explicit terms;

> ...the learner has to (a) possess a concept of the standard (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for, (b) compare the actual (or current) level of performance with the standard, and (c) engage in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap (Sadler, 1989: 121).
>
> ...it leads to students recognising the (learning) gap and closing it...it is forward looking... (Harlen, 1998, cited in Online Workshop 1, Slide 24, Ministry of Ed. Wellington, NZ).

'Self-regulated' learning, self-evaluation and self-assessment also play important parts of the formative process (see Klenowski, 1996). Similarly, social theories of learning through conversation and dialogue contribute to formative assessment, which incorporates peer-assessment and collegial approaches to learning (see Gipps, 1994).

Vygotsky's theory of learning, particularly his notion of ZPD, and Torrance & Pryor's models of convergent and divergent assessment are influential to this conceptualisation of formative assessment. According to these views learning is an interactive and social process. The role of teachers within this is to provide a structured and supportive learning environment, which enables learners to perform at

higher levels and eventually to operate independently. Clearly, the introduction of formative assessment requires significant changes to take place in the thinking and practices of many teachers, and a redefining of their roles and of the relationships between them and their learners. Such theoretical perspectives may help build this.

What follows is an account of the research method used to explore, develop and refine a questionnaire to deepen an appreciation of the role of formative assessment.

3.3 Situating the research

A descriptive, qualitative study of the practices of fifteen primary school teachers and two professional development teacher educators was used to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions and current formative assessment practice.

Both questionnaires and interviews were the research methods combined to achieve this.

> Ultimately, the selection of a particular technique and its realization in the empirical setting are the result of an interaction between the possibilities offered (and denied) by a particular form of data collection and the theoretical framework within which the research is conceived (Brown & Dowling, 1998: 78).

Since the study is limited to an understanding and a description of a relatively few teachers' perceptions of formative assessment in Cape Town primary schools, it fits within a dialogical approach (see Brown & Dowling, 1998: 83) predominately using qualitative techniques with an assumption that the design could have quantitative possibilities in the future.

3.4 Research design

In effect, the research followed the pattern of action research cycles using qualitative methods, with data gathered through audio-taped interviews and questionnaire responses. Action research is a form of enquiry, conducted in a methodical fashion. The results are carefully monitored and presented. Using Cohen, Manion & Morrison's (2001) outline of the main characteristics of action research, the study was applied to an immediate situation, it identified a problem (the research question), an initial questionnaire was designed to research the problem, the usefulness of the instrument was constantly monitored and the resulting feedback was translated into modifications and directional changes so as to enable the researcher to develop a questionnaire that identified instances of formative assessment and promoted it among its subjects.

The approach was akin to generative action research. For each of the four stages in this design (see Table 3.1), there were a spiral of steps, which involved planning, acting, reflecting and re-planning (see McNiff, 1992). Hitchcock & Hughes, (1995: 29) describe action research as a cyclical process "involving stages of action and

research followed by action." In this design a formative method was adopted whilst maintaining a systematic, disciplined enquiry.

Although questionnaires are often thought of as mainly applicable to large samples, they may also be used in more localised, intimate settings (see Walker, 1990). In this study, latter versions of the questionnaire took into account experiences with the previous version. Responses of the teachers led to adjustments and as a result of the feedback loop, the final questionnaire was more complex and detailed. Interestingly, this approach is the reverse of what is usually associated with the development of large-scale questionnaires, which as they are tested tend to become shorter and simpler (Oppenheim, 1992). Despite many of the standard texts on questionnaire design offering appropriate advice, most are pitched at a level of precision that is relatively inappropriate for a small-scale study like this. The intention here was quite different from, say, a multiple-choice questionnaire designed for mail distribution. Open questions were desired which did not simply secure answers for later analysis but also began a line of thought and action. The questionnaire was, therefore, designed to draw teachers into the work of developing and interpreting it. Their responses providing evidence of teachers' ability to complete the questionnaire and highlighting what their formative assessment practices were.

Both methods of data collection (questionnaires and interviews) have their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, using more than one method could help to minimise bias. However, as this research is more concerned with the designing of a procedure rather than the end product, it could also contribute to the understanding of why certain questions work and others are less successful. In fact, it is very useful to combine more than one method for the better results and validity of research findings (see Mouton, 1996).

3.5 Selection of sample

The research was conducted in six primary schools during the second and third terms of the 2004 academic year. The schools were purposefully selected for convenience and their similar characteristics. The sample was paired to make three groups and whilst not representative of the total population, it was somewhat illustrative of geographic area, as all the schools are located in the Educational Management and Development Centre (EMDC) South area of Cape Town, Western Cape.

With approval from the WCED, principals of each school and the teachers involved, Grade 6 teachers were interviewed after completing the questionnaire. Agreement was also obtained to interview two professional development teacher educators (see Appendices D, E and I, for examples of permission letters).

3.6 Data collection techniques and methods of analysis

The research consisted of four stages:

***Table 3.1**: Stages of research*

Stage 1: Questionnaire design	→	First draft	(2 co-ed schools, 5 teachers)
Stage 2: Piloting questionnaire	→	Second draft	(2 schools: 1 co-ed/1 girls, 5 teachers)
Stage 3: Testing questionnaire	→	Third draft	(2 schools: 1 co ed/1 boys, 5 teachers)
Stage 4: Evaluating questionnaire	→	Final version	(2 prof. development teacher educators)

The first stage was planned to explore current classroom assessment practices. Two schools and five teachers from Grade 6 were to be used for this information gathering exercise. A set of questions (see Appendix F) was composed and each teacher would be interviewed in a semi-structured way, during which the conversation would be allowed to flow in a guided but not too structured manner. The aim being to relax and allow the interviewees to share their perceptions and explain the assessment practices they use.

This preliminary study would provide the opportunity to grapple with some of the methodological complexities of designing a questionnaire to research formative assessment practices. It would also help to identify teachers' perceptions of formative assessment, what they understand by the terms, how they provide feedback to learners, and how they use the collected assessment information. A classification of their perceptions of formative assessment is anticipated.

Stage two would pilot the first draft of the questionnaire with five teachers from two further schools. It aimed to gain a picture of the background of the teachers; gain an idea of how much formative assessment happens in the classroom; gain an indication of the intended purposes of assessment and explore how best to define assessment principles and practice in order to encourage a better understanding for future developments.

Results from this phase of the research would be used to analyse the questions. A post-questionnaire interview administered to the teachers from the pilot group who completed the questionnaire would aim to explore teachers' perceptions about formative assessment (with reference to questionnaire), the barriers to formative assessment, and what they perceive as valuable. It would also provide a means of giving feedback on the questionnaire, identifying limitations and aiding re-design. Teachers' responses to the post-questionnaire interview would be used to help substantiate questions included as well as identify any pitfalls in its design.

This would enable a review of the research objectives, the intended function of the questionnaire within it and serve to validate and strengthen the questionnaire.

Stage three planned to test the second draft with a further five teachers from two more schools. During this stage, follow-up interviews would be conducted; using the feedback to confirm questions included in the questionnaire and highlighting any areas that needed re-designing. Here, it was intended that the feedback and self-reflection would sensitize the researcher to the dialectical relationship between perceptions and uses of formative assessment, whilst assisting with the next version of the questionnaire.

A final evaluation of the questionnaire was intended in stage four of the research process. This would include gaining perspectives on the third draft from two professional development teacher educators. Based upon teacher responses and feedback to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview schedule would be designed and administered (see Appendix M) to explore the issues of researching formative assessment and to gain responses to questions, which might reveal perceptions, attitudes and further lines of inquiry for the research. The interviews would be in-depth discussions that involve asking questions, listening, expressing interest, encouraging elaboration and recording what was said on audio-tape. Feedback would be used to validate, strengthen and assist with the final version of the questionnaire.

The next three chapters describe the stages of the research design. Each discusses the construction, revision and refinement of the questionnaire as drafts were composed, tried out, improved and then tried out again. Chapter five outlines the pilot stage; chapter six the testing procedure and chapter seven describes the evaluation stage.

CHAPTER 4: THE DESIGN OF A QUESTIONNAIRE

4.1 Introduction

In order to explore the aspects of assessment in the Grade 6 primary classroom, categorisation of issues stemming from the initial interviews needed to occur to develop an organising framework for the research. This served as a basis on which to begin designing the questionnaire.

Five teachers, who worked in two primary schools, were interviewed about the ways in which they assess and about their perceptions of assessment in the classroom. Teachers were also asked about their understanding of feedback. They had classroom experience ranging from a first year teacher to a teacher with 9 years experience. It was assumed that their responses to these questions would give an indication of how teachers understand and use assessment generally and what their appreciation of the formative aspects of assessment might be. Pseudonyms have been given to all teachers.

4.2 Assessment: teachers' classroom practice

All the teachers interviewed claimed to be using assessment in their classrooms. An analysis of their responses revealed 13 ways in which they said they were carrying out assessment. Some of the teachers also mentioned a particular time when assessment took place e.g. weekly and monthly tests.

Table 4.1: *Forms of assessment reported by teachers*

Rubrics	Investigations and Projects
Giving marks	Tests (weekly, monthly, end-of-term)
Exams (end-of-term, yearly)	Homework
Reports	Peer-assessment
Group work	Class work
Self-assessment	Oral questions

This provided a breakdown of their current practice, but the list does not contain methods of assessment only. For instance, it can be argued that rubrics, reports, group work, homework and class work are not assessment techniques. It was evident that the practices were similar in both schools, although they did vary slightly and the number of ways in which assessment was being used differed from teacher to teacher.

According to the teachers, standardised tests are widely used and were the formal forms of assessment that could improve student's performance or make them work harder (see Appendix G). When asked to explain some of the ways they assessed, Vicky said; "Tests are a big deal!" (8.6.2004) and Sam reported that;

> Weekly tests [are administered] in different learning areas. A time table is given for the term, they are sat under test conditions and marked by the teacher…you have got to be able to acquire knowledge and represent it again (Sam, 8.6.2004).

Vicky and Gordon made reference to different types and weightings of assessment in geography and science, which led to an overall summative percentage and/or code. These examples suggested that they did not rely exclusively on end of term or end-of-year tests or exams and indicated that their current practice included multiple forms of assessment. This was in accordance with the WCED guidelines and as Gordon indicated; "This year the government has come up with [assessment] weightings in each subject area...from this an overall summative percentage is given" (9.6.2004).

One teacher who was newly qualified suggested that the purpose of assessment should include a number of aspects, like skills, attitudes and creative work. Her voice for de-emphasis of tests was strong;

> I think schools need to move away from marks, (there is such a big impact on marks) and do assessment in other ways, do a lot more standardized projects and group work with peer and self-assessment which does actually have an impact on end-of-term reports (Sarah, 8.9.2004).

Probing to find out more about these perceptions revealed they had developed through the OBE training she had received.

When asked about 'less formal' assessment, teachers revealed a mix of responses (see Appendix G). The terms self, peer, group and observation were used but, because these activities were intuitive and unrecorded they went largely unexamined and undervalued. Teachers felt that there was scope for these approaches to assessment but, there was also an indication that the teachers' were unsure about the relative value of these ways of assessing and whether they could trust the methods. Steven answered; "You mean peer assessment and those kinds of things. I generally use these in subjects that don't count in their exams and reports" (7.6.2004).

From the teachers' comments, it was clear that formalised testing had a very strong influence over the teaching, learning and assessment in Grade 6 and although teachers did adopt a range of formative practices, they were less frequently employed.

4.3 Perceptions of formative assessment

All teachers revealed some understanding of the terms formative and summative by providing a definition, although Gordon asked; "What do you mean by formative?" and two others (Vicky and Sarah), despite being able to articulate their understanding, confused their definitions.

Summative assessment was viewed as testing and using marks to indicate where learners were academically.

Formative assessment was seen as "ongoing assessment of where they are and how to assist them" (Jenny, 7.6.2004), which included giving marks under less formal

conditions and using these to indicate where learners are and what they need to do in order to improve or progress.

One of the teachers who had confused her definitions, stated she used formative assessment "less as it doesn't count or play a role in reports" (Sam, 8.6.2004) and another said using assessment formatively,

> ...was a very nice humanist idea, meaning that all children will want to improve themselves and take any bit of assessment to work with but, it doesn't really happen like that (Steven, 7.6.2004).

The same teacher commented "group work lends itself to this".

Jayne referred to the use of rubrics as a basis for formative approaches and indicated she used support staff to assist with her formative assessment, as classes were too big for individual feedback.

It was not only class size which is a factor influencing teachers' commitment to the use of formative assessment. Teachers also mentioned that there were time constraints, particularly as school timetabling in most learning areas permits contact for only (approximately) one hour a week that impinges on teachers' willingness to spend time using assessment formatively. Curriculum demands also imposed time constraints on teachers who often followed a tight teaching schedule and had limited resources in class other than textbooks; all of which precluded using formative assessment in the classroom.

4.4 Perceptions of feedback

All the teachers responded that feedback they provided was typically given through marking books, rubrics and giving written and/or oral comments. In most cases children were expected either to call out results in class or if they had a low mark, go up to the teacher to provide their result (see Appendix G).

Comments written in learners' book were mainly effort related. Sarah and Gordon said that they generally did not write comments unless someone had done really well or badly. Vicky complained that learners never look at them and went on to say that "comments written in books are a waste of time" (Vicky, 8.9.2004).

Sarah and Gordon also explained that whilst marking, if common mistakes or themes became apparent to them, they would feed this back to the whole class next lesson and if necessary teach the area again.

The view that it would require a change or shift in the teacher's conceptual understanding of the assessment process was touched upon by one teacher when referring to formative practice; "I think we don't use it because it is not part of our

learning system, it's the way we've been brought up I guess. If you don't learn it, that's your fault...tough luck" (Gordon, 9.6.2004).

These teachers appeared to believe that pupils learnt by being told in class and that tests are the best way to tell how much their pupils understood. Their role was either to help students' gain knowledge or to correct students' misconceptions through feedback.

Teachers indicated that their pupils were more concerned with marks and responded to feedback that motivates extrinsically. This echoed Kotze's, (2002: 77) findings that learners in South Africa believe knowledge is rigid and prefer summative assessment.

School tests were seen as a powerful tool, which 'regulated' the learning process. Marks were judged to be a more convenient way of commenting on success as they were easy to understand and useful for ranking purposes. All the teachers felt that parents were more concerned with marks and percentages and found the rating system frustrating and difficult to comprehend.

4.5 Question development

From the literature survey and the teacher interviews the following 5 categories; *Marking, Feedback, Questioning, Self- and peer-assessment and Sharing learning intentions* were selected to form the basis of a questionnaire. It was felt that further exploration of these areas would provide information on the perceived use and value of such techniques, help establish what is currently happening in the Grade 6 classroom and might initiate some personal reflection for the respondents. Two further categories; *Purpose and use of assessment and Organizing and conducting assessment* were included to gain an insight into the present understanding teachers have of the formative use of assessment strategies.

The researcher felt it would be appropriate to consider designing a questionnaire that could enhance their knowledge and understanding of formative assessment; thus assisting them to overcome the evident confusion about how formative assessment could profitably be used in their contexts. With some careful preparation, questions would be created to imbue teachers to consider their own practice and recognise the potential of using assessment formatively to raise student learning and achievement.

As Black & Wiliam (1998) point out, research that simply interrogates existing practice can probably do little more than confirm the rather discouraging findings of previous research. To be productive therefore, the research study would need to examine actual practices and aim to be diagnostic, revealing possibilities for using assessment formatively.

In moving towards the design of a questionnaire, what needed to be avoided was providing a summary of current educational thinking that steered teachers' answers towards satisfying the research agenda only. This meant avoiding explicit acknowledgement of the role of formative assessment in the instrument yet, still challenging perceptions and exploring what formative assessment 'looked like' by getting them to consider examples of effective strategies. It also needed to take account of individual definitions. For example, assessment in maths meant 'testing' and what was termed formative is in fact just another form of summative or terminal assessment. Self-assessment meant allowing pupils to mark their own tests and to track their progress but, does not actually provide freedom for them to get involved in their own learning.

The interviews enabled the identification and categorisation of ways that formative assessment were perceived and used by Grade 6 primary school teachers and recognised the need to provide teachers with an opportunity to clarify the relevant concepts for themselves.

Bearing in mind Cohen, Manion & Morrison's (2001) advice to avoid leading questions, avoid high brow questions; avoid complex questions; avoid irritating questions or instructions; avoid questions that use negatives and double negatives" (248-250), it was decided that the most appropriate type of questions to use would be open in nature and designed to engage the participants interest, encouraging interaction, co-operation, and eliciting honest answers. Open-ended questions would make comparisons between respondents more difficult but they were more likely to provide responses, which 'shed light' on the issues surrounding the perceptions and use of formative assessment in primary teaching.

4.6 Questionnaire design

The design of a questionnaire with a series of questions, statements and items that allowed the respondents to answer, respond and comment in a way that he or she thought best was desired. It was hoped that it might have future potential for larger samples as well as more specific case studies though the structure would need some modification for a large-scale survey.

It was judged that a questionnaire would be an effective method of gathering feedback on and ascertaining attitudes towards formative assessment practice. Furthermore, it was hoped that the design of the questionnaire would be such that on completion, teachers would evaluate their responses and therefore reflect on their own practice. Having decided upon and specified these primary objectives of the questionnaire, what follows is the identification and itemizing of the categories.

Teachers were guaranteed anonymity and non-traceability and the questionnaire was designed to be administered without the presence of the researcher.

The completion time of the questionnaire needed to be considered. In general, answering open-ended questions takes much longer than for example circling a number on a rating scale. Teachers are under time constraints so; the design needed to take this into account. Similarly, the design assumed that respondents would have time to articulate their thoughts and commit them to paper. Piloting and testing and would enable such concerns to be minimised and to check any practical implications.

The appearance of the questionnaire was also important; it must not look as if completion would be an onerous task, nor that that it would take a long time (Brown & Dowling, 1998). Attention also has to be paid to the ordering of questions, the division of the questionnaire into sections and the format. Verma & Mallick (1999) suggest a number of guiding principles including; making the questionnaire look attractive, organizing the layout logically, using bold type for instructions and using examples to demonstrate how to complete items.

It would be useful for respondents to be introduced to the purposes of each section so that they become involved and maybe identify with them. However, it was important that this did not prompt respondents to provide what may be perceived as 'correct' answers. Whether it would be important to define the words 'assessment', 'formative' and 'summative' was problematic. It appeared on close scrutiny of interview responses that the teachers initially thought of tests, marking and using rubrics when reflecting on their assessment practice. It would seem that there is general agreement on what constitutes assessment and that any definitions in the instrument may influence the results. The teachers' definitions given during the initial interviews, indicated understanding but some were confused. Therefore, it was felt that to provide definitions could lead to further complication as teachers might start to grapple with their understanding, which could potentially influence responses.

To gain a picture of the teachers' background, two introductory questions were used:

Figure 4.1: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Questions 1 & 2*

It would be useful to know the following information about you:
Please indicate your gender M F
How many years have you been teaching? ____

4.6.1 Marking

The effort that many teachers devote to marking learners work may be miss-directed. A numerical mark does not tell the learner how to improve his/her work, so an opportunity to enhance learning is lost (Black *et al.* 2003a,b,c). A prominent feature of the first stage was the discussions about the nature of marking. Teachers reported that numerical marks were given regularly and despite feeling their written comments were valuable, most felt that a comment was not effective as the learners rarely paid attention to them.

The respondents would be asked to mark English writing to enable the researcher to see if formative assessment strategies are typically being used. It was hoped that such an interactive method would capture the interest of the respondents and perhaps reveal to them how assessment of learners work can not only provide a summative judgement but can also help them to progress (Clarke, 2001).

The following question was constructed to probe teachers' marking practice:

Figure 4.2: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 3*

Marking

Marking has the potential to be a useful diagnostic record of achievement yet, research has shown that marking is often directly responsible for regression in many learners.

Please could you read the following passage written during an English lesson by a Grade 6 learner and mark it as you would normally in the time you have available. Please be honest and mark this as if it was one of 25, <u>not</u> a special case.

Learning aims - In setting this written task, the learners are to write a passage in which they try and establish a 'problem' and create contrasts between characters.

The wind howled visiously while the two children with eyes that glittered with anger, waited impatiently for the killer Kyle looked across the road and saw a fire burning warmly.

"You don't think he's backing out do you?" asked Kyle. The watch beeped 9.00pm

"He is supposed to be here by now!" shouted Tasneem.

Something jarred and caught Kyle's attention a dark figure's shadow skimmed across the cold, white walls. Kyle could here his rythmatic footsteps...

Source: (Clarke, 2001: 63)

This activity could possibly be supplemented by the following question:

In what ways do you think marking could/should offer guidance on how work can be improved?

Research shows that feedback needs to be about the learning intention, indicating success and improvement needs. Butler (1988) carried out a controlled study using

three different ways of feedback to learners marks, comments and a combination of marks and comments. The latter being the method most widely adopted. The study showed that the learning gains were greatest for the group given comments only. Some teachers interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with comments citing the fact that learners rarely read them or paid attention to them. Comments that indicate neither what has been achieved nor what steps to take next are to be classified as non-formative. Comments on presentation also fit into this category. Examples might include blanket praise such as 'Good' or 'Well done' and evaluations added to complete work like 'Title' and 'Check spelling'. The provision of a mark does not tell a student how to improve work and would also be viewed as non-formative.

Comments which communicate to the learner about what has been achieved and what they need to work on are formative. Clarke (2001) refers to 'closing the gap' prompts, which include reminding what could be improved, scaffolding or providing some support and using examples, which give the learner a choice. The following are examples of how this passage could be marked formatively; 'Problem achieved, could you contrast the children's personalities more?' 'Can you think what Kyle would do if Tasneem?' 'Could you have inserted a contrast – Tasneem shouted, Kyle _____? How could Kyle have asked? E.g. fearfully, apprehensively', 'quietly'. The teacher might also highlight the problem and contrasts ('The wind howled viciously' 'saw a fire burning warmly'; 'skimmed' – 'jarred') for the learner thereby reinforcing the learning intention has been achieved.

4.6.2 Feedback

In simple terms feedback contributes to learning if pupils are helped to act upon it. Black & Wiliam (1998) make clear that the core of formative assessment lies in the sequence of two actions. Firstly, the perception by the learner of a gap between a desired goal and his or her present state by means of assessment and feedback and, secondly action taken by the learner to close the gap in order to attain the desired goal. Feedback can be oral or written and research studies have shown it is most useful when it focuses on the learning intention. However, research (see Harlen, 1998; Weeden *et al.* 2000; Clarke, 2001; Black *et al.* 2002) also shows that most teachers give feedback to children about effort, quantity and presentation instead of the leaning intention. This was the case with the five teachers, who were also influenced by parents' expectations of summative and comparative information.

The following scenarios were developed to allow the teachers' perceptions to become evident, and at the same time enable them to begin thinking or questioning their current feedback strategies.

Figure 4.3: Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 4

Feedback

Feedback can be seen as the central theme of assessment, yet it is often used ineffectively. Feedback can be from teacher to child, group or class, from child to teacher or other children, in oral, written and other more subtle forms.

The class has been busy completing a Maths worksheet on percentages. You choose a volunteer to explain on the board how they arrived at their answer to the following question:

Mzwandile wishes to buy a pair of Levi jeans which cost R260. He notices there is a 5% discount. How much will he have to pay?

The child writes on the board:

$$100\% = R260 \quad 10\% = R26 \quad 5\% = R13 \rightarrow R260 + R13 = \underline{R273}$$

After the volunteer has completed their working on the board, you notice that the answer is incorrect. Please explain what you think you would *usually* do next.

The strategy assumes that the teacher would intervene in some way. For example, the teacher might ask the volunteer to now explain the answer and/or ask the rest of the class to discuss the answer in pairs. By focusing on the method rather than on accepting the answer and moving on, an opportunity for learning could be created. The teacher might simply repeat back the answer in a neutral tone, thereby handing it back to the learners. 'So it's 273 Rand'. The child or class may look at this answer again and spot the error.

If the habitual reaction of the teacher is to correct and provide the answer, learners may not try to think of a response or have time to consider it. This can limit rather than extend students understanding and can be taken as a non-formative action. It was hoped that responses to this question would provide an indication of whether mistakes such as this one, are used formatively to enhance learning. Discussions with respondents after completion would also help to confirm if such gains are recognized.

Figure 4.4: Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 5

You have been carefully marking the class's geography assignments after school and notice that at least half the learners have failed to include a key with their map.

What would you *usually* do about this?

Teachers might use a variety of strategies to deal with this scenario. They might comment in learners' books, give oral feedback to individuals or to the class. The whole class could be addressed at the beginning of the next lesson. Hall & Burke (2003) suggest using a framework or model to help them understand what it is they need to know. For instance, a strategy that draws attention to points in map work over which they should take particular care and helps them understand the importance of

including a key by providing a kind of supporting framework or scaffolding could be taken as an effective formative assessment. Similarly, an example could be used to display the correct technique and highlight the difference; this could be taken from a textbook or from a learner's book, which would serve as a way of modelling quality.

Figure 4.5: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 6*

You identify a number of objectives for a lesson and make these clear to the learners.

In the closing activity, learners are asked to indicate how well they have understood the lesson by using a 'traffic robot' system or by drawing 'faces'.

Level of Understanding	Traffic Robot	Face
Good understanding	Green	
Not sure	Yellow (Amber)	
Don't understand at all	Red	

Source: (Wiliam, 2000: 21)

Do you think this would provide useful feedback to the teacher? Please explain your answer.

Marking their own or another learner's work can enrich students' learning. Using traffic light icons serve to communicate learners' confidence in their work. For the teacher such a system can serve to highlight areas of the lesson that would be worth re-visiting with the whole class as well as providing information about which individuals would benefit from support. For example, the teacher could pair up green and amber learners to deal with problems together while the learners displaying red can be helped by the teacher in a group or individually. Because the response is immediate and focuses on improving learning rather than comparing, learners begin to realise that revealing their problem is beneficial.

Responses to this question would hopefully reveal whether teachers believe that self-assessment can make a contribution to the development of learning. Negative comments were likely to suggest that the teachers don't put self-assessment into practice in their own classrooms although; it would be difficult to make any further assumptions based on the answers. It was hoped that this would also be illustrative of the principles and might encourage teachers to incorporate such a strategy. These two additional questions would also be used to further investigate teachers' perceptions of using feedback for learning.

Figure 4.6: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Questions 7 & 8*

Do teachers have time to provide feedback (spoken/written), which goes beyond just correcting the mistakes? Please explain your answer.

Do you believe that in general, children ignore teachers' written comments? If yes, can you suggest why?

The next question was included as an example of an assessment task the results of which could be used for different purposes. It provided an opportunity for the respondent to outline how they might use this assessment to improve learning, thereby providing an indication of whether the teacher can identify the potential for using formative assessment and making it work.

Figure 4.7: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 9*

Sum Writing Assessment Task

Learning Aim: to understand and use the mathematical signs +, -, ×, ÷

Assessment: to find out which mathematical symbols the learner understands and can use

The teacher uses the following instructions:

1. *Write up the signs* +, -, ×, ÷;
2. *Challenge the learners to write 10 different sums, using as many of the signs as they know how to use;*
3. *Show them one example using a sign they all know;*
4. *Check they understand what to do;*
5. *When they have finished, ask them to answer their own sums or another child's sums.*

Source: (Hargreaves, 2001: 5 - Developed in conjunction with a team of education advisors in South Africa for assessment tasks to be used nationally with Grade 3).

Does this assessment task have potential for improving learning in the classroom or is it a waste of time? Please explain your answer.

This was a relatively simple open-ended task, which can be both formative and summative. The teacher could note which learning process each child used to achieve the final outcomes and also record what the final outcomes are. The task had potential for learning as it allowed the child to keep a focused check on the achievement of goals. Due to its open-ended nature it provided information about everything a pupil could do, even if what he or she demonstrated was not what the teacher expected. It catered for different abilities and allowed the teacher time to observe how children approach this task, what errors were being made, what is difficult and what facilitates progress. The tasks did not depend on the teacher's constant guidance and the learners could work independently, in pairs or in groups. It was hoped that results to this question would reveal how teachers perceive assessment could take place and whether this had a formative function.

Ideas might include the teacher and/or learners' assessing which signs are understood, how often they are used appropriately, what has helped the learner and what the next appropriate steps might be.

4.6.3 Questioning

Teachers can use questioning and classroom discussion as an opportunity to increase their students' knowledge and improve understanding however; many teachers do not plan and conduct classroom dialogue in ways that might help children to learn (Black *et al.* 2003c).

Whilst the teachers interviewed in this study acknowledged that they used questioning to assess informally, their limited references to this method seemed to suggest that it was not recognised as a significant part of teaching. As a result the researcher felt it would be beneficial to explore if this type of questioning is part of the interactive dynamic of the Grade 6 classroom. The following section of the design was an attempt to understand the different functions of classroom questions and would hopefully provide an indication of routine practice.

***Figure 4.8**: Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 10*

Questioning

Teachers ask children many questions some of which are closed and require a correct response and others which are open, inviting a range of responses.

The following are examples of closed and open questions that could be used in a grade 6 mathematics lesson:

Closed questions	Open questions
What is 4 x 4?	How many ways can you make 16?
A packet of skittles costs R2.75. A chomp bar costs R2.15. What do they cost together?	A packet of skittles and a chomp bar cost R5.00 altogether. What could each sweet cost?

If a teacher seldom uses open questions, what do you think will be lost in terms of assessment?

Open questions give more children a chance to respond and they often provide a greater challenge for able pupils, who can be asked to think of alternative answers or to try and discover all the different possibilities. Simple, closed questions might encourage recall rather than thinking and limit the formative potential a question might have to promote thinking and discussion. It would be interesting to see whether the idea of using open questions to assess, encourages positive responses and whether the teachers recognise what could be potentially lost from using them infrequently. Responses that suggest this could lead to richer discourse, as they generate information from which to judge the correct understanding of their students would show an awareness of possible learning gains. Similarly in indicating what would be lost in terms of assessment, teachers might recognise that this formative assessment evidence could also be used to plan the next steps in learning and direct the content and pace of lessons.

4.6.4 Self- and peer-assessment

Children can only achieve a learning goal if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do in order to reach it. Therefore, self- and peer-assessment are seen as essential to learning (Sadler, 1989). If pupils are to learn, they need to identify any gaps between their actual and optimal performance. This is something that has to be done by the pupils and cannot be done for them by the teacher, although the teacher can facilitate the pupil's understanding of what needs to be done next. Self-reflection and self-assessment that is linked to the learning intentions improves progress, persistence and motivation (Black & William, 1998). It also opens doors for teachers into learners' minds (Clarke, 2001). Findings from the first stage interviews suggested that both self-assessment and peer-assessment were used in the classroom but, their contributions to the development of pupils' learning were less clear. The teachers who used it still felt a need to control or guide the process and although they were aware of its use, they relied on their own judgements rather than the childrens'. The types of self-assessment and peer-assessment reported were mainly marking processes. Resulting from this, the procedure would include a section designed to collect information on the thoughts and feelings of using such techniques and whether some learning action follows the outcomes of these formative practices. The Likert scale was chosen, as it is the most straightforward way for measuring attitudes (see Brown & Dowling, 1998; Oppenheim, 1992).

***Figure 4.9**: Questionnaire 1 - Design of Questions 11, 12 & 13*

Please circle the number that most closely matches your opinion of the following strategies:

1 = very valuable
2 = valuable
3 = no strong view
4 = of little value
5 = of no value

Setting up tasks designed to enable learners to assess themselves	**1 2 3 4 5**
Getting a learner to help another learner	**1 2 3 4 5**
Getting learners to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome	**1 2 3 4 5**
Combining teacher marking with self-marking.	**1 2 3 4 5**
Getting learners to suggest ways something can be improved	**1 2 3 4 5**
Getting learners to review their own work and record their progress	**1 2 3 4 5**
Asking learners to develop their own marking criteria	**1 2 3 4 5**
Providing time for learners to reflect and talk about their learning	**1 2 3 4 5**
Providing opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another	**1 2 3 4 5**

Students often have little idea of how good their work is: *"I don't know how good it is until it's been marked"*. Do you ever allow learners to assess their own work? Please explain and provide an example if you can.

Do you think learners in your class do/can benefit from greater involvement in peer-assessment? Please explain.

The greater the involvement of learners in the formative process of self- and peer-assessment, the better the levels of performance as learners develop skills to manage their own learning (Conner, 1991). Responses to these questions would indicate whether teachers encourage a shared responsibility for learning with students and establish what teachers' rate as valuable. They should also highlight if self- and peer-assessment are apparent in the classroom as identified in the interviews and if it goes beyond the marking process. The strategies were ways to promote learning and used formatively, could all be rated valuable.

It was hoped that this exercise would make teachers consider the value of self- and peer-assessment, where learners take control and assume ownership of their learning and teachers use it as a communication process to discover ways of improving learning. If the results move teachers to discuss or even experiment with these techniques in the classroom, the researcher would be pleased with such outcomes.

It was further hoped that the evaluative ratings would combine a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis. Despite the limitations, the results from the questions should afford the researcher the freedom to combine measurement with opinion about the formative use of self- and peer-assessment activities.

4.6.5 Purpose and use of assessment

This next section was designed to examine the purposes for which assessment is used, what information is recorded and how often each assessment is used for a variety of strategies. With the assumption that greater use could be made of assessment as a tool to inform teaching and learning, it was hoped that these questions would hopefully outline whether current summative assessments are also analysed for formative purposes. They have been adapted from Dunn, Strafford & Marston's (2003: 137-142) study into current assessment practices in maths and English for the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). Their questionnaire was designed for teachers in Years 5, 7 and 9. It included a section on how teachers assess in these subjects and listed types of strategies and tools from which teachers were asked to show how frequently they administered them, what information was recorded and the purposes for which they used the assessment tool and strategy. They justified their research on the premise that there had been a number of recent initiatives in

assessment in New Zealand, suggesting their results could be used to establish base-line data, which could be used to track changes in classroom practices. By getting a better understanding of what was actually happening in the classroom, they claimed that teachers' concerns and priorities would be better identified for schools, teachers, and policy makers.

Figure 4.10: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 14*

Purpose and Use of Assessment

Please complete the following table as far as you can.

The table includes some school assessment strategies that might be used in the classroom. Please indicate which ones you use by writing the number/s for the marking information, its purpose and rate how often it is used. You can select more than one category if required.

If you do not use one or more of these particular strategies, leave the relevant section blank.

STRATEGIES	MARKING INFORMATION	PURPOSES	USED
Teacher and/or school developed strategies and tools.	1 = nothing 2 = mark or percent 3 = code or symbol 4 = written comment	1 = teaching & learning 2 = student/parent/teacher 3 = monitoring progress 4 = school/external agencies	1 = little 2 = sometimes 3 = frequently 4 = often
EXAMPLE:			
Assignments	2 (mark or percent) 3 (code or symbol)	2 (student/parent/teacher) 3 (monitoring progress)	4 (often)
1. Assignments or homework			
2. Checklists			
3. Exams			
4. Tests			
5. Portfolios			
6. Peer-assessment			
7. Self-assessment			
8. Observation			
9. Other types (please specify)			

It was expected that the results would indicate the most commonly nominated type of information recorded, which, based on evidence from the interviews is likely to be a raw score or percent and codes or ratings. It would also establish the most frequently used strategies and tools and, for what or whom they provide information for. Results could be summarised and any trends established for instance, whether the most frequent use of assessment information was for purposes within the classroom or for external agencies. It is important to be aware that individual teachers would have their own definitions of terms such as 'observation', 'conferencing' and 'portfolios'.

Whilst these definitions have elements of commonality, the same term does not necessarily equate to the same process of use for all teachers.

4.6.6 Organizing and conducting assessment

On the whole, teachers' perceived assessment as a formal activity designed to produce summative measures of performance and, assessment carried out by the teacher was part of this process. Teachers felt the need to produce evidence, which can be formalized, recorded and reported. However, such perceptions did not necessarily account for all assessment practice and during the interviews occasional references were made to using classroom assessment strategies with a more diagnostic and formative orientation. Therefore, the following question was designed to try and present an overview of the level of classroom organization and the actual conduct of assessment.

Figure 4.11: *Questionnaire 1 - Design of Question 15*

Assessment in a Grade 6 primary classroom

Please read the following four statements made by teachers:

1. "I tend to work very much in groups…and focus on one group at a time which gives me a good opportunity to assess each child."

2. "Assessment for me is, watching the children and listening to them."

3. "I ask questions and then I can see how they are doing."

4. "I will test them and do a formal assessment to see how they are doing."

Which of these statements most closely resembles what you do at the moment? Please explain why you think so.

Responses to the above question would provide a description of what the teachers actually perceive they do and if they would rather use a different strategy. As the four comments are all possible ways that might be drawn upon to carry out formative assessment, the focus then, was not so much on discovering if formative assessment is used but, on identifying the process of assessment. The results would provide a summary and show common traits or disparities in current practice. The comments might also alert the responder to different possibilities in the classroom context, which could be potentially useful in the accomplishment of formative assessment.

At the end of the questionnaire an expression of thanks would be given to teachers co-operating in the study by completing it.

Thank you for giving time to complete the questionnaire

4.7 Personal involvement

With a growing interest in exploring formative assessment, understanding what it involves and reflecting on what it has meant, the selection of questions can be inextricably linked to the researcher's own personality and experiences. Through the process of reviewing literature, reading sources of evidence and accounts from other teachers, the researcher developed a greater awareness of the implications of using assessment formatively in teaching. In reflecting on some of these broader issues raised by personal experiences, the formulation, design and selection of questions for the procedure resonated with the researcher's practice. This element of personal involvement helped to develop thought and clarity in choosing practical examples and formulating questions.

4.8 Conclusion

In trying to deepen an appreciation of formative classroom assessment, the categories, questions and examples in this questionnaire were selected to summarise views and help organize responses (see Appendix A). They were also an attempt to provoke thought and discussion amongst teachers, which might possibly lead to changes in practice or even the development of new strategies.

CHAPTER 5: PILOTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

5.1 Introduction

The process outlined in this stage of the research, is a pilot for the questionnaire construction. The five teachers (1 male, 4 females) involved were all Grade 6 primary school teachers with between 4 and 11 years experience. They were each asked to complete the questionnaire (see Appendix A) and in a follow-up interview to answer questions and make comments about it. Their feedback was used to reveal problems, ambiguities and increase its practicability.

A careful study of their answers to the questions was made to identify commonly misunderstood or non-completed items, unexpected responses and consider where preconceptions were incorrect.

A follow-up interview schedule was designed as an investigation instrument (see Appendix H). Questions were scheduled and put to the teachers after they had completed the questionnaire in order to collect contextual information and explore the questionnaire from the perspective of the teacher.

The following sections attempt to outline the feedback by considering answers to the questions and responses given during the interviews.

5.2 Procedural matters and general comments

In order to check the time taken to complete the questionnaire, respondents were asked to comment on how long it took them. They all said that it had taken them between twenty and thirty minutes and the general feeling was that this was an acceptable length of time. Jane commented on how the provision of an approximate completion time (30 minutes) in the letter accompanying the questionnaire (see Appendix E) had helped to put her at ease.

The general appearance and layout of the questionnaire met with approval. The respondents found it straightforward and commented that the sections flowed well. There were further positive comments from teachers about the variety of different assessment strategies, which had made them think about their own practice (see Appendix I).

> It was interesting to see the different areas of assessment and seeing that this is something that could be done in class. I was questioning and reminding myself what I am doing at present, what is my automatic behaviour, I was having to stop and think (Andrea, 27.8.04).

The range of learning areas covered in the questionnaire was also seen as a good feature. This was something that had not been previously considered but, on reflection it should have formed part of the original design. It was fortunate to have included examples from different learning areas, albeit unintentionally.

In order to try to make the questionnaire more professional and attractive, the following changes were made after the interviews. An opening page was included (see Appendix B) which outlines the purpose of the study, provides assurances of anonymity and intends to give a straightforward introduction.

Figure 5.1: *Questionnaire 2 - The front page statement*

> This questionnaire is part of a research project being undertaken for a Masters dissertation. The purpose is to design a procedure to find out more about what teachers think about assessment and how they go about it. By completing this questionnaire you will not only be providing useful information on current practice but also giving valuable insights into the procedure itself.
>
> The questionnaire is completed anonymously and individual schools will not be identifiable in any way.
>
> Your views and comments are **very** important to this project.

Underneath this was a colour copy of a picture displaying some smiling learners, which came from the Education Forum Africa Fifth Edition (2001: 130). It was felt this might be appealing and less threatening to respondents particularly as one teacher mentioned that he had a 'bogged down' feeling when he saw the first page of the questionnaire! It was hoped that these additions would make the questionnaire look attractive and interesting and help to clarify its overall purpose.

The opening questions proved to be an easy introduction to the questionnaire and provided some background information on the teachers. A further question would need to be added to ask the teachers to record how many learners they have in their class. This was discussed in the interview with Jane, where it was felt that in relation to *Question 7*, the respondent's answer could be influenced by the number of learners in his or her class.

As a result, the first question was split into three sections, which were designed to provide details about the respondent. The additional question (**1c.**) asked how many learners are in their class and is included to give a situational context that might have a bearing on their answers. By incorporating these areas into one section, it also kept an overall total of fifteen questions, which seemed a manageable and rounded number to complete.

Figure 5.2: *Questionnaire 2 - Design of Question 1*

> **1. It would be useful to know the following information about you:**
>
> **a. Please indicate your gender:** **M** **F**
>
> **b. How many years have you been teaching?** _____
>
> **c. How many learners do you have in your class?** _____

5.3 Marking (*Question 3*)

Questionnaire responses

The third question on marking captured the interest of the teachers and succeeded in so far that it was realistic and brought the teachers straight into the classroom situation requiring them to think about their own practice. Alison and Brandon found it difficult to mark against the learning intention because they were unsure about the meaning and as a result, both decided not to attempt the question. This issue was echoed in the interviews as well although the remaining three teachers did complete the question and explained how it had made them think about their marking. A general written comment was expected and interestingly all but one teacher had written something positive. However, none had included a 'closing the gap' remark. Clarke (2001) mentions that the natural impulse of a teacher is to praise children for their efforts and she points out that the language of praise can have varying effects on children's self-esteem and ability to be self-evaluative and independent. She suggests that encouragement strategies are more appropriate for a learning culture.

Stemming from the initial interviews with teachers, the preconception was that there would be a numerical mark, grade or code given to this passage. All the teachers who marked this passage highlighted both punctuation and spelling mistakes. Feroza used a red pen and corrected all the errors, the others just emphasized a few and supported this decision with the feeling that it was better for the learner to have a some but not all mistakes pointed out, which can often be demotivating for the child. During the interviews Brandon and Jane inferred that when looking at the focus of using 'contrasts and establishing a problem', the misspelling seemed rather trivial but, they had felt obliged to point out some of the mistakes. Underlining and circling spelling errors and mistakes was the method adopted by all respondents.

The following comments communicated what had been achieved and gave specific praise but, did not offer guidance on what the learner needed to do to improve:

> Wonderful use of figurative language, you really made me feel like I was standing there in the cold. I could feel the tension (Kate).
>
> Good! You have used some great descriptive words (Jane).

If the main purpose of the marking feedback is to give information to children about how well they did against the learning intention then the comments obtained during the pilot would suggest that this was not part of their practice.

With the necessary adjustments, particularly to the aims and objectives, this question would remain in the procedure. Not only was it seen to be realistic, making the teachers think about their own marking practice, it also gave an opportunity to gain an insight into the current type of marking and whether the process helped learners

understand what they had achieved and what they needed to do next. With an additional question: *'After marking the passage, how would you give feedback to the learner?'* the provision of feedback could also be determined.

Interview responses

Three teachers found *Question 3* difficult to understand and although they acknowledged the learning outcome, they needed greater clarity on what to mark. Feroza found that she had to come back to the question, as she felt uneasy on first reading through it. She attributed this to a lack of English teaching experience, asked for elucidation on the learning aim and said that it would have been easier with a rubric. Brandon felt that the question had put him off a bit and attributed this to the fact that the criteria were unclear.

> I couldn't really answer [*Question 3*] because I don't know the criteria for this essay. I wouldn't know if it was for grammar or quality of story…I started putting in all the punctuation, but then I thought is this actually the criteria? I felt this was a good story and became unsure how to mark it. (Brandon 31.8.04).

Similarly, Andrea stated that she needed to know what the assessment was actually looking for and suggested that the aim of 'contrasts' could be interpreted in different ways. For instance, the aim could be to use contrasting adjectives or descriptive words. As a result she did not attempt to mark the passage and wrote "I would have drawn up a rubric before giving the task. What were you requiring besides establishing a problem and creating contrasts?" She suggested later in the interview that the question could include assessment standards. This is worthy of consideration, trying to bring the learning aims and assessment standards more in line with current policy and practice. Making the aims of the assessment more detailed and linking them to the objectives. The example used originated from Shirley Clarke's (2001: 63) work on formative assessment in British primary schools and although it was adapted for a South African context, it did not take into account or make reference to the RNCS for English.

When asked which questions had made them think about their own assessment practice, there were some detailed responses given. The answers and ensuing discussions about *Question 3* formed a significant part of each interview not only in terms of time but, also in richness of feedback.

> The first one [*Question 3*] especially because I know that for myself some teachers would have loved to tear this apart, putting all sorts of red pen over it and punctuation mistakes and miss the whole point of what the kid is trying to say…it made me think and reaffirm what my belief is (Kate, 25.8.04).

Andrea pointed out that she always marked in pencil so the learner could go back over their work, making corrections and then erasing her markings which indicated the use of a formative strategy as the learner is given time to read and act on her feedback.

Kate, felt it was more important that the learners were able to express themselves than focus on the punctuation and spellings. She referred to the learning aim of the task and trying to mark with that in mind and suggested that this was not necessarily the way her colleagues would work. She went on to say that in a recent English moderation meeting she had been criticized for not focusing enough on 'correct' grammar. In further discussion on how marking can lead to regression and demotivation in learners, she explained in reference to *Question 3*, "it sparks something in you to remember that when you are marking" and, "it's a good opening question, it certainly makes you think about the importance of bringing up the positives in your comment first so they feel that what they have done is acceptable and [they] are able to accept your criticism and suggested improvements" (Kate, 25.8.04).

When respondents were encouraged to consider if there were any questions that they had expected to be asked and that were not included, Kate, Jane and Feroza were surprised that there was not something about rubrics and teasing out specific outcomes. They expected to know what it was that they should be looking for when marking. Interestingly, this links again to the research about knowing and sharing learning intentions and, the purpose of success criteria or 'what we are looking for' to make learners absolutely sure about what is in the teacher's mind as the criteria for judging their performance. Their comments suggested that these teachers are already aware of the potential of focusing on learning intentions and evaluating against them. Such formative assessment practice refers back to *Question 3* in which the learning aim appeared too vague, causing misunderstanding on what was to be assessed. This was reinforced by the Feroza's comment; "In *Question 3,* I had to make my own assumptions. It would have been much better if it had a rubric" (31.8.04).

Amendments and changes

The question on marking, previously *Question 3*, became *Question 2* and was provided with greater detail on learning aims and assessment standards. These were taken from the RNCS Grades R-9 (Schools) Policy for Languages, English – Home Language (2002). The assessment standards come from the Intermediate Phase and were Grade 6 specific. In trying to present them in an accessible way, they were linked to the relevant learning outcomes and integrated into the learning activity.

Figure 5.3: *Questionnaire 2 - Amendments to Question 2*

Learning Area:	Languages - English – Home Language
Learning Outcomes:	LO: 4 Writing; LO: 6 Language Structure and Use
Form of Assessment:	Creative Writing - the learner writes a creative passage
Assessment Standards:	· Clear topic sentence includes relevant information to develop a coherent paragraph; · Introduces characters; · Establishes a problem; · Applies knowledge of language to create contrasts at word and sentence level.

In order to probe further, a further question was designed for the next stage;

After marking the passage, how would you give feedback to the learner?

Here, it was expected that respondents would consider the situation and outline the process of how they provide feedback to learners. Evidence of verbal feedback and marking being used to help learners improve and progress would indicate the central role for assessment in promoting learning. As the most likely form of feedback would be written there would inevitably be a time lapse before learners could respond to it. Of interest then would be how the feedback is given, what it includes and whether time is made available for learners to act upon it. The use of praise was apparent from the responses however; both praise and feedback were general and were unlikely to have made a difference to learning, understanding and securing improvement. Congratulating learners is important, but sharing with them why the work is praiseworthy is important too. Marking and feedback that asks for corrections or spellings to be done or for the passage to be re-written would have little impact on learning and these requests are probably seldom attended to. However, if responses suggested that time would be set-aside in the next lesson to read the marking comments, act upon them, or follow up ideas this could be interpreted as a formative use of assessment.

In combination with marking the passage (*Question 2*), it was hoped that the responses to *Question 3*, would indicate whether formative assessment is a regular feature of classroom activity.

5.4 Feedback (*Questions 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8*)

Questionnaire responses

In the feedback section, three scenarios *(Questions 4, 5 & 6)* were presented to the teachers. *Question 4* asked the teacher to explain what he/she would usually do when a child had completed a maths sum incorrectly on the board by making an error at the end of the process. It was assumed that the teacher would intervene in some way and that the practical strategy used should indicate any formative elements. Jane said she would praise the learner for 'working so systematically' but would point out the mistake and correct it. Brandon proposed he would commend the effort before leading a discussion on the meaning of the word 'discount'. Feroza suggested she would demonstrate the correct method on the board and get the learners to use a calculator to reinforce the answer, assuming they all possessed one. This could limit understanding and might encourage the rest of the class not to think for themselves or give time to respond because the teacher always explains the right answer. Kate answered the question in two parts, by saying she would either ask the class to say whether or not

they agree and get them to explain or, that she would go through what was done on the board with the whole class pointing out all the things that were right, then highlight the fact that the price was more, even though there was a discount and finally ask if they can find the mistake. Similarly Andrea suggested they would focus on the process asking the individual, class or both to look for the error. By suggesting there was an error could limit the learning somewhat, although by not identifying it is more likely to develop an opportunity for learning.

The second scenario (*Question 5*), prompted teachers to explain what they would do if they found whilst marking the class's geography assignments that at least half of the learners had failed to include a key with their map. Andrea and Feroza explained that they would question themselves and evaluate how they had taught the lesson before going over the concept again and re-testing at a later stage. The other respondents wrote that they would give the assignments back to the learners, stressing the importance of using a key and then give the some time to complete the task. The answers suggest that they would draw attention to the issue explaining the importance of using a key and then allow the children to make an improvement. Therefore, this could be seen as a formative stage of the assessment process. Unexpectedly, none of the teachers said that they would provide a framework, checklist or use exemplars to display the correct technique. The inclusion of these formative strategies had been anticipated.

Question 6, proved to be a useful scenario, encouraging teachers to consider the systems as ways of developing learners' self-assessment skills by forcing them to reflect on what she or he had been learning. In responding to this question, all the teachers felt that it would provide useful feedback to the teacher. They reasoned this by explaining that it was a non-threatening, simple way for the learners to express themselves, it provides the teacher with clear information on what the learners are unsure about or do not understand and allows the teacher to revisit objectives and help them. These responses reveal that the five teachers believe that learners can take responsibility for their learning, indicating that assessment for learning should involve learners in assessing their own work.

These three questions encouraged the teacher to explain what they would usually do; providing information on the strategy employed, whether it was effective for learning and creating an opportunity for teachers to think about their own classroom practice. Therefore, no changes were made to the scenarios.

Two further questions were asked in this section to investigate teachers' perceptions of using feedback for learning. *Question 7*, asked teachers to consider whether they had time to provide feedback, which goes beyond correcting the mistakes. The feeling

was that although this was very important, there was often only enough time for a general comment which encouraged getting answers right but, perhaps missed the opportunity to get students to think about the task and improve their work. However, one teacher wrote, "One must make time. This form of feedback is very important. The students can then improve". Andrea added that "I often use spoken [feedback] which is much quicker and by interacting with them one can hear their point of view/reasoning" (Andrea, 27.8.04). This can be seen as an assessment for learning strategy, to provide immediate feedback, which helps the learner improve in a specific activity.

In *Question 8*, teachers were asked if they felt children ignore teachers' written comments and to explain their answer. One teacher said, "...Yes, because they don't take time to go back and see what was written (Andrea, 27.8.04). It would be useful to know here, whether time is provided for them to do this. The other teachers all disagreed and felt that learners generally did take note of their written comments. Positive comments were regularly used whilst negative comments were avoided. This suggests that feedback generally emphasizes self-esteem; "I think that sometimes they can continue to make the same mistakes and ignore any negative comments. Positive comments are never ignored" (Jane, 25.7.04).

Constructive feedback including both written and spoken is certainly used and valued by the teachers. Their comments suggest that feedback helps the learners understand what they have achieved and tries to involve them in the learning process. What is less clear is whether teachers give comments about the learning intention, which are accessible for the learner and help them to improve, and, whether learners have the chance to make an improvement on the same piece of work. However, in combination with other questions clarity of these issues is likely and so both questions will remain unchanged for the next stage.

Interview responses

All of the teachers explained how the feedback scenarios, (*Questions 4, 5 and 6*) were interesting and realistic.

Question 4 made all but Kate, think about their own practice and consider how they would usually deal with this situation. The importance of not damaging self-esteem and turning this situation into a learning opportunity was also discussed. *Question 5* provoked self-reflection; "...for me, I need to think about my teaching or instruction here. I don't think I would have marked them down; drawing attention to it would be of more benefit to the learners (Andrea, 27.8.04). Similarly, Jane questioned "... do I hand them back, so the learners can understand why it should be included and so the assessment can be much more accurate?" (25.8.04).

These comments suggest using the assessment information formatively to enhance learning and to enable a better summative mark to be achieved by each learner. The question also caused reflective practice amongst the teachers, who found that they could easily relate to this scenario. They described similar situations where they had returned work to learners, and helped them to understand, acknowledge and correct mistakes before handing the work in again. This could be interpreted as a formative action, assessing the current achievement and indicating what the next steps in the learning trajectory should be.

Further discussion prompted Brandon to say, "Sometimes as a teacher, this whole marking concept becomes the most important, valuable, nearly sacred thing and we overlook the point which is about actually learning" (31.8.04).

Jane, and Kate explained that when they first looked at the sixth question, they initially questioned whether it would be beneficial to use 'traffic robots' or 'faces' but, then decided it was. It was suggested particularly useful for the less able learners as it provided assessment information in such an unthreatening way. Andrea, who was more reluctant to use the system to get assessment information, suggested that it would provide an opportunity of using learners to help one another, a buddy system, which could be very effective. Both of the points raised here, would indicate a potential awareness of using assessment formatively and link to the intention of the question to reveal whether teachers believe that that these systems have the potential to make a contribution to the development of learning. It was also hoped that this might encourage teachers to incorporate such a strategy and the following response was encouraging; "I thought it was quite useful; it could give me a good understanding and is simple. I would use them, I don't, but I could use these systems" (Brandon, 31.8.04).

Andrea mentioned that although *Question 7* was about whether teachers have time to provide feedback (spoken/written), it had reminded her that spoken feedback was often far more beneficial for learners because of its immediate nature. This comment is interesting as it confirms the research findings (see Weeden *et al.* 2000: 4-5) that both teachers and students preferred prompt oral feedback and discussion and felt that this helped to improve performance.

Jane felt that *Question 7* could be more informative if it provided an opportunity for the teacher to comment on the position they are in first. She commented that a teacher with thirty learners in a class may well respond quite differently to a one that has seventy learners in the class. Such a suggestion was helpful and as a result the opening, introductory questions at the beginning of the questionnaire have been changed to incorporate this in the second draft.

Amendments and changes

As a consequence of the questionnaire and interview responses, the feedback section, which includes *Question 4 – 8*, remained unchanged.

5.5 Questioning (*Question 10*)

Questionnaire responses

The questioning section explored open and closed questions through examples. The respondents were then asked to explain what would be lost in terms of assessment if a teacher seldom used open questions. The fact they encouraged children to think beyond the literal was clear in the responses, which included, 'creative', 'critical and lateral thinking', 'problem solving' and 'expanding knowledge of basic concepts'. Whether this could be used to plan the next steps in learning is less sure and the responses shed no light on this, however, they indicate that open questioning is seen as an important way to elicit understanding in class. Such comments suggested that open questions are perceived to be a valuable source of assessment opportunities, which support learning and encourage higher order thinking. This therefore justifies its inclusion in the procedure.

Interview responses

The use of question techniques to enhance learning (*Question 10*) made Feroza consider the potential of using 'open' questions. She said, "I don't think I use open questions enough" (31.8.04). The other teachers referred to this reflective process and explained that it had reminded them of the value of using open questions as a way of assisting children's understanding and thinking.

Amendments and changes

The word 'requiring' was changed to 'inviting' in the opening sentence.

5.6 Self- and peer-assessment (*Questions 11, 12 & 13*)

Questionnaire responses

Question 11, enabled teachers to indicate the value they placed on using self- and peer-assessment. Kate and Andrea saw all of the strategies as 'very valuable'. Amongst the other three teacher's responses, six of the nine strategies were seen as a 'valuable', three strategies (*Getting a learner to help another learner, combining teacher marking with self-marking, and asking learners to develop their own marking criteria*) were circled 'no strong view'. Only one strategy (*Providing an opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another*) was thought to be of 'little value'. The question enables ratings and opinions about the formative use of self- and peer-assessment to be explored and measured, which might

be useful in a quantitative analysis. All the strategies could be rated as valuable in terms of formative techniques to enhance learning, and the responses implied that teachers encouraged learners to take responsibility for their learning in these ways.

Table 5.1: *Analysis of self- and peer-assessment strategies (Question 9)*

Self- and Peer-Assessment Strategies:	**Responses:**
A. Setting up tasks designed to enable learners to assess themselves	**1, 1, 1, 2, 2**
B. Getting a learner to help another learner	**1, 1, 1, 2, 3**
C. Getting learners to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome	**1, 1, 1, 2, 2**
D. Combining teacher marking with self-marking.	**1, 1, 1, 2, 3**
E. Getting learners to suggest ways something can be improved	**1, 1, 1, 1, 1**
F. Getting learners to review their own work and record their progress	**1, 1, 1, 1, 2**
G. Asking learners to develop their own marking criteria	**1, 1, 2, 2, 3**
H. Providing time for learners to reflect and talk about their learning	**1, 1, 1, 1,1**
I. Providing opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another	**1, 1, 1, 2, 4**

1 = very valuable 2 = valuable 3 = no strong view 4 = of little value 5 = of no value

In order to improve the analysis of this question, the next draft included letters to signify the different strategies, which will hopefully make it easier to reference and avoid having to duplicate the sentences in discussion (see Table 5.1). Current thinking about learning acknowledges that learners must ultimately be responsible for their learning since no one else can do it for them (ARG, 2002). It is clear that the teachers perceive self- and peer-assessment for learning as valuable, involving learners, so as to provide them with information about how well they are doing and guide their future efforts. The evaluative responses are useful to this study as they afford a fusion of measurement and opinion on these formative assessment strategies. Therefore, it seems worth keeping this question in the procedure; it would be more informative in a larger survey as it could generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical analysis and could enable comparisons to be made.

To supplement this question, two further questions were asked. *Question 12* asked if self-assessment was used in class and *Question 13* inquired about the benefits of peer-assessment. The replies were all positive and showed how valuable these assessment tools are perceived to be. One teacher wrote, "...I think it is important for them to think about how they are doing, understanding, as opposed to just doing the work and not caring if they are understanding or even getting the right answers" (Kate).

Teachers also reported increased insight into children's learning and improved self-esteem.

Peer-assessment enabled them to learn from each other and identify their own mistakes. The concerns with this method were marking subjectively according to personal relationships and the occasional damaging effects it could have on confidence.

> Pros and cons with this one. It depends on levels of maturity in class. Can be used in combination with teacher marking as some children may feel inclined to inflate a friend's marks or be scared perhaps of being bullied if a too low mark is given (Feroza, 31.8.04).

However, solutions were offered in discussion; it was felt that reliability could be gained with training and practice whilst, natural improvement tends to occur with greater maturity and age. Although such benefits could be argued against, the enthusiastic responses reveal that these formative assessment strategies are an important part of the learning process and vindicate the inclusion of both questions as a part of a method to research teachers' perceptions and deepen appreciation.

Interview responses

Question 12 and *13* prompted Kate to say that she did a lot of self-marking but far less peer-marking. She felt that she could do more peer marking and started to suggest ways to overcome the obstacles of using this strategy in class:

> I know that I could do more however, not everyone is able to assess objectively. Often at the age they are, I've seen kids battle to get past the superficial of whose work they are actually marking. There are ways around it though, you could give them work and not let them see whose name it was. I think with a bit of training they could do this better (Kate 25.8.04).

She admitted to 'shying away' from using peer-assessment and that these questions made her think that she didn't do it enough. Her suggestions as to how to include these strategies in class certainly resonate with the research of Black & Wiliam, (1998) and Clarke, (2003), who show that significant progress can be made by children who have been trained to be self-evaluative and to carry out peer-assessment.

Of interest, was Feroza's comment that the questions on self- and peer-assessment (*11, 12 & 13*) had made her curious to try the techniques out, particularly as she did not use them very often. She explained how she had recently initiated peer-assessment in a food-garden project for science; "It worked well and could be linked to self-assessment, they underestimated themselves which I found interesting" (Feroza, 31.8.04). This echoes the results from research which claim that peer-assessment can be an important complement to self-assessment and is valuable because learners understanding of the learning intention and the assessment becomes clearer (Black *et al.* 2003c: 50).

> When you set up peer assessment, the learners can see that other learners are also experiencing problems, they don't feel that they are on their own and so become less anxious. Also they tend to learn from each other because they speak the same language; they are more comfortable, more relaxed, it's not the teacher talking (Brandon, 31.8.04).

This comment from Brandon made during a discussion on *Question 13*, also relates to the findings of Black *et al.* (2003a,b,c). They found that the interchange in peer discussions about assessment was in a language that learners themselves would naturally use. Such communication could easily convey the meaning and value of the exercise to others who were struggling and often learners were more accepting, from one another, of constructive criticism.

Amendments and changes

The self- and peer-assessment questions remain unchanged.

5.7 Purpose and use of assessment (*Questions 14 & 15*)

Questionnaire responses

Despite some confusion about the purposes in *Question 14*, the respondents were all able to complete the table to disclose the type of information recorded, the purposes and frequency of assessments used. Apart from 'exams' and 'checklists', which were left blank by four teachers, all the strategies were used. The most common form of marking information consistent across all five teachers, was either a 'code or symbol' or 'mark or percent', followed by a 'written comment'. Black *et al.* (2002) argue that marks or grades by themselves are of very limited use as feedback for student learning. Data collected, would seem to indicate that on some occasions, teachers also record written comments. However, a direct relationship between the type of data most often recorded and the type of feedback most often given cannot be assumed. The predominance of using 'codes or symbols' was expected and in line with Education Department recommendations, contributing to the teacher's professional judgement in the overall assessment of the students and to recording of progress in school documents such as reports.

The high reported frequencies of using strategies for 'monitoring progress' and providing information to 'students, parents and teachers', could reinforce that teachers found communication between student and teacher as an important component of the learning process, which in turn could indicate that there was a relatively strong perceived culture of formative assessment at the classroom level. This is speculative, though, and not helped by the fact that Kate and Andrea were confused by the 'purposes' section (see Appendix I). Also, few of the strategies were used to provide information for teaching and learning which might question the value placed on formative assessment as the information is not feeding back into the teaching and learning process. It would appear assessment information is used for purposes within

the classroom rather than for providing information to those outside of the classroom. To help confirm this, 'parent' would need to be removed and 'school/external agencies' changed to read 'school management/external agencies' in the next draft.

There was little consistency between the respondents in terms of strategies chosen for frequency of use. It was expected that 'tests' and 'exams' would be used less frequently whereas 'observation' would have been used 'often' however, 'tests' were most commonly reported as being used 'frequently' or 'often', whist 'portfolios' and 'peer assessment' averaged 'little' use. This variety in the number of times teachers utilise strategies is not particularly helpful in terms of identifying formative practice but, it can be seen for example that if self-assessment is claimed to be used on average, 'frequently' this, might indicate a formative intent.

The question proved quite difficult to analyse although, it was felt that it still warranted its place in the questionnaire. The information can be used in isolation or combined and with more data, results could be summarised to provide trends in current assessment practice.

The final question (*Question 15*), was included to try and present an overview of the organisation and conduct of assessment in the classroom. Results varied from teacher to teacher. Feroza and Jane stated that multifarious tasks and subjects require different forms of assessment and that they tried to use all four methods at various times for different purposes. A perfectly reasonable answer which could be linked to the comment made by Andrea, who wrote that the third and fourth statements most closely resembled what she was currently doing at the moment but, "...that we are being trained in assessment all the time and therefore it keeps changing and so do the methods" (Andrea, 27.8.04). Brandon chose the second statement, which was 'fair and honest' and gave him the opportunity to see how the learners work. Kate chose a combination of the second and third statements and explained,

> I get a feel for how they are doing through interaction with them during lessons and seeing how they handle the tasks given to them. I use many different opportunities to assess them (both formally and informally) using predominately codes (Kate, 25.8.04).

There is little to deduce from these answers other than they all are possible ways to carry out assessment in the classroom. As it stood, perhaps the question was unlikely to provide evidence on whether these methods of assessment are used formatively but this was not the focus. The aim was to close with a relatively easy question that might exhibit the process of assessment currently used and possibly get the responder to become more mindful about his or her own practice. This latter expectation seems to have been rather ambitious in light of the teachers' responses to this question. However, the question remains for the next testing stage.

Interview responses

All five teachers found some difficulty with *Question 14*. The degree of difficulty seemed to vary with the common misunderstanding being the 'purposes' section. The 'student/parent/teacher' choice was too broad and the respondents were not sure if it had to be for all three or could be for an individual party. Suggestions to improve this included separating all three or just changing it to 'student and/or teacher'. Jane commented that exams were not used in Grade 6 whilst Kate and Feroza questioned whether checklists were the same as rubrics. The possibility of individuals interpreting strategies differently and also the confusion over purposes had been considered. These areas will need to be refined to make them clearer to respondents.

Amendments and changes

On the table in *Question 14*, the example displayed under 'marking information' was altered to read 'mark or percent' instead of just 'percent'.

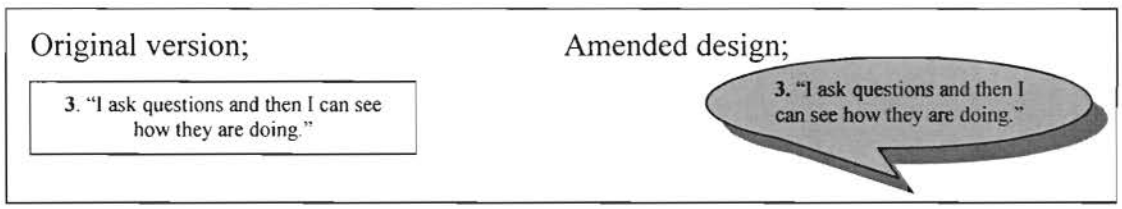
Question 15 was amended to include 'Please' at the start and the word 'resembles' was replaced with 'resemble' to allow for more than one choice.

5.8 Further changes to questionnaire

The sum writing assessment task (*Question 9*) was not as successful as hoped. The questionnaire answers and responses from the interviews pointed out that the task needed to have more specific assessment aims and challenging learning aims. As a result, it was seen as a 'waste of time' by Andrea and 'inappropriate' by Jane. Comments included that it didn't assess the level at which the learners were performing and that the method might allow the child to do the incorrect operation over and over without knowing that they were wrong. Kate and Brandon did like its open-ended nature and that it provided opportunity to help learning through peer- and self-assessment which indicated that they recognised the formative potential of using this task. Overall, the question failed to provide detailed responses that indicate the teachers' perception of using this assessment task formatively. The reason for this seemed to be a lack of clarity in the aims and the fact that it was seen to be inappropriate and too basic for a Grade 6 learner. Jane and Andrea also explained they felt the learning and assessment aims needed more focus. They suggested that this task was too basic for Grade 6 level and had potential to be more challenging and expansive. On reflection, this was not unexpected, as the task had been designed for Grade 3 learners. It was taken from Hargreaves's (2001: 5) work in South Africa on creating assessment tasks for use in national Grade 3 tests. If this question was to remain in the questionnaire, it would need to be modified however, in light of the respondents' feedback, it was omitted.

Question 13, which was previously the last question, was moved forward. This is purely for functional reasons as it fits onto the page better, making it look less cluttered. The change in design, using speech 'bubbles' instead of text boxes was purely aesthetical and it was hoped the result would be more appealing to respondents.

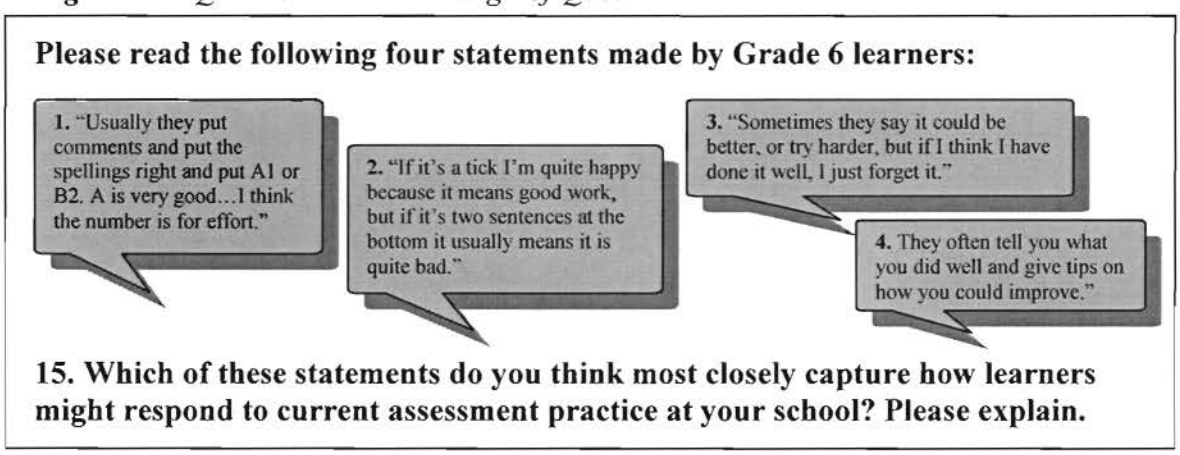
Figure 5.4: *Questionnaire 2 - Amendments to Question 13*



Question 14, which asked respondents to complete a table on the purposes and use of assessment stayed in the same position on the questionnaire and had only a few minor adjustments which have been covered in the previous section.

The last question (*Question 15*) was a new addition, designed to try and present an overview of the level of classroom organization and the actual conduct of assessment. This question was originally planned for the first design but was rejected because it might put the teacher on the spot, and be interpreted as too personal or threatening. However, the question was modified to make it less personal and to hopefully engage respondents' interest. The comments were an attempt to try and summarise the kind of relationship teachers could create with their learners resulting from thought and action. They included learners' feelings on marking, probably the most time-consuming activity teachers undertake and one of the most central elements of the teacher-learner relationship. There are two reasons why this question was placed at the end. Firstly, on advice that potentially sensitive questions are better later in the questionnaire to avoid creating a mental set in the mind of respondents (see Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001: 256) and secondly because an interesting yet, not too taxing question was desired to conclude the questionnaire.

Figure 5.5: *Questionnaire 2 - Design of Question 15*



Assessment will always have an impact on learners. Of interest here is how the teachers' perceive learners might respond to marking at their school and whether there is a particular comment that is more regularly selected. Although the learners' comments are appreciative of marking, evidence of them directing it to their learning is scant. The fourth comment potentially indicates the practice of using formative feedback through marking and its selection as a preferred statement would indicate a positive perception of using formative assessment. The second comment could be a little ambiguous as the teacher might be making a formative written comment whilst the learner perceives this as bad, again references to this would indicate an awareness of using assessment formatively by the respondent. Where marking is focused on the technicalities of writing or the quality of presentation and effort, this acknowledges work has been seen but, is less likely to help learners improve.

5.9 Conclusion

Before completing the interview, each teacher was asked whether the questionnaire provided an opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice. They all gave affirmative answers and added that the good balance of questions made them reflect on their own assessment techniques and re-evaluate the ways in which they assess (see Appendix I). Andrea stated that; "It is food for thought; it questions what they do and could provide data on what is happening (27.8.04), whilst Feroza explained, "It helped me…this questionnaire got me thinking about the varying forms and uses of assessment" (31.8.04).

CHAPTER 6: TESTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

6.1 Introduction

This stage of the research aimed to test the questionnaire with a further five teachers (3 male, 2 female). The teachers with between 2 – 21 years experience were asked to complete the questionnaire, after which a follow-up interview was conducted to enable respondents to reflect on how they interpreted the questions. To maintain consistency, the interview questions used in the pilot were repeated during this stage (see Appendix J). These questions were specifically designed to draw out an understanding of what the respondents felt about the questionnaire and to explore their perception of formative assessment.

The proceeding sections analyse the teachers' responses to the questionnaire (found in Appendix B) as well as their feedback on it. Changes to the questionnaire were made in light of the information gathered during this stage of the research.

6.2 Procedural matters and general comments

Respondents were asked to estimate how long it had taken them to complete the questionnaire. One respondent explained she had taken about one hour to complete it and found "it was a bit of a bind, particularly at the end of term when we have so many other things to do" (Susan, 17.9.04). The other four teachers ranged from 20-45 minutes which was seen as an acceptable amount of time. Despite Barry feeling pushed for time he felt it added value to the teacher and suggested. "...its irrespective of length and it is more specifically on the content that we need to be aware and I enjoyed it to the extent that it made me think more about assessment that previously I hadn't explored – so it was informative for me – so from that angle I think it has more value than you can put a time limit on" (Barry, 23.9.04). Similarly, during Michael's answer he mentioned that the questions were good and did not think that it was a case of being too long or too short. When asked why he felt this, he responded, "Because it had me thinking, I'm so often pressed for time in this profession, to actually think and consider reasons, you know, and actually do it [assessment] it's like clockwork and often you don't see the individual needs because you have got so much to do" (Michael, 17.9.04).

All five teachers responded positively to the general appearance and layout of the questionnaire.

Mark's response was; "I think it is a great questionnaire. It is a very interesting questionnaire. It went well...Why are there only girls on the front cover?" (Mark, 11.10.04). In light of his question, a different picture was chosen which depicts happy smiling faces of a group of learners who represent both genders and different races.

races. The source of this picture is from the front cover of the book entitled 'The story of my life. South Africa seen through the eyes of its children' Lans, (2002).

In order to give the respondents some more space for writing their answers, the page margins have been extended slightly to create an increase in the amount of blank lines available for the relevant questions.

Question 1 proved straightforward and provides a picture of the background of the teachers who responded. Questions were asked about gender, years teaching and in addition to the first draft, the number of learners in their class. These items were easily answered and were used as opening questions to build up the respondents' confidence. This information could also be used in the analysis stage, particularly if a large number of teachers complete the questionnaire.

6.3 Marking (*Questions 2 & 3*)

Questionnaire responses

As found in the pilot, the question on marking was practical and relevant. Only Louise marked the passage against assessment standards by assigning a mark out of 10 for each one. Susan and Michael included their own rubric, giving numerical marks for spelling, language and content. No written comments were made either, although there seems to be some element of teacher remark in the responses to *Question 3*. Praise is evident in all cases; 'some good descriptions', 'good', 'a good piece of writing, well done!' All but one of the teachers marked in red pen and used this to identify grammatical errors and spelling mistakes by underlining and/or correcting.

In their responses to *Question 3*, Mark and Barry touched upon the issue of what should be marked and the value of comments in promoting learning rather than marks or grades which can hinder learning. The fact that these teachers tried to use marking to focus on learning suggests that attempts are made to use marking formatively as well as to collect summative information. For example, Mark suggested that after the activity a summary of the common errors would be drafted and discussed with the learners in the next lesson so that they have an idea of what to improve. Despite this awareness, it would appear for these five respondents that current marking practice is unfocused, with regards to learning outcomes LO(s) and assessment standards AS(s) which consequently impacts on feedback to learners. The marking examples show a summative function rather than marking for formative purposes that can be used to inform future work.

Interview responses

When asked to identify questions, which they found difficult, two teachers referred to *Question 3*. Louise had misinterpreted the question assuming that it was to be marked

out of 30, however, when questioned, she re-read the question, realised her misconception and suggested it was ambiguous. Barry felt that it was difficult to assess a piece of work "blind" and that normally in class he would have "thought it through in the context, in the theme we have been working and engaging with" (23.9.04). This suggests an understanding and awareness of the purpose of assessment. Despite these two comments, the lack of specific references to this question indicates that the issues highlighted during the pilot have hopefully been resolved.

In general, Susan found that the questions had helped her to confirm what she was doing already. With regards to *Questions 2 & 3*, she recognised that despite the spelling mistakes, the work was good and explained how she often asked learners to read out their work or she would read some work out without telling the class whose it was. Facilitating discussions from this resulted in an enjoyable and useful way of providing feedback and enabling errors to be identified.

Before explaining his thoughts on *Questions 2 & 3*, Mark said:

> These are questions that should be addressed and it has really made me aware of where I could be improving in certain areas of my own teaching so I think the questions are spot on. I think the questions were quality questions. I think these questions were all relevant (11.10.04).

With regard to this marking section he explained how he would normally mark every single sentence and write in the answers as well as providing a general comment. He also claimed that he would give a general summary of common errors in the next lesson. Interestingly, in his response he started to question why the learners don't act upon his marking feedback and even suggested strategies that he might use in the future; "What I could do to boost confidence a little bit is to allow them to write a passage in rough which I would go through with them, and then they would have the opportunity to re-write it again in neat" (Mark, 11.10.04).

This personal reflection and recognition of the potential of using assessment formatively to help the learner showed that at least for this teacher, the question had stirred and developed a professional awareness of marking formatively to enhance learning.

Similarly in discussing *Questions 2 & 3*, Michael explained that "70% of the time I'm just window dressing some of the books" (17.9.04). He felt despondent with his current marking practice and felt that there was more he could be doing to help learners.

Amendments and changes

As a result of Louise's misinterpretation the last sentence of the question was changed from 'Please be honest and mark this as if it was one out of 30, *not* a special case' to

'Please be honest and mark this as if it was one of a class of 30, *not* a special case'. Hopefully this would make it clearer to the respondent.

The preconceived ideas for answers to *Question 3* (see section 4.6.1) were incorrect as respondents tended to just write and substantiate what their written comment to marking the passage (*Question 2*) would have been. It was felt that this prompted them to think they should be giving feedback. For these reasons, the question was changed to read:

Figure 6.1: *Questionnaire 3 - Amendments to Question 3*

3. After marking all 30 passages and returning them to the class, do you have any particular way in which you follow up the learners' work? Please explain.

It was hoped that this would not lead respondents, yet it should enable them to articulate the usual process of giving feedback after returning work to the class and as a result, highlight any routine formative practice.

6.4 Feedback (*Questions 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8*)

Questionnaire responses

Detailed responses were written for the feedback scenarios (*Questions 4, 5 & 6*). The teachers tackled *Question 4*, involving a maths misconception differently. Susan said she would explain what had been done wrong or get the class to find the mistake. Similarly, Michael felt that he would tell the learner that most of his working was correct and that he had made a mistake in the final step of the calculation. By acknowledging the mistake but not identifying it, could lead the child to effective learning. However, perhaps the immediate recognition of the error could limit this opportunity. By focusing on the positive, Michael, Barry and Mark explained how the calculation could be broken down and fellow pupils could be used to support the learner. The learner's self-confidence becomes a factor in this strategy. The use of positive feedback initially should serve to keep the learner motivated. By recognising what the learner had achieved first and then implementing steps to take them forward will be more beneficial than merely giving praise which does not necessarily improve performance. A whole class discussion on the misinterpretation of the word 'discount' was put forward by Mark as well as breaking up the question into little sections. This kind of feedback can be termed formative as it provides steps to improve and encourages the learner to take those steps. Barry said that he would usually ask the class if they agreed and importantly noted he does this whether the answer is right or wrong. This would be followed by an analysis of the method. As assumed, the use of a neutral tone when asking for class agreement encourages the learners to be involved and not just recipients of the teacher's correction.

Question 5, which presented a scenario where learners on completing their geography assignment, had failed to include a key with their map, caused Mark, Susan and Louise to question their own instruction. Discussing the problem and giving the learners another chance to complete before marking was another strategy offered by Mark and shows formative intent. Both Mark and Michael felt strongly that they would have provided the relevant instruction so, if the learners had failed to include a key with their map, they would have been marked down. In order to avoid this disagreement factor, the question was amended slightly to incorporate the point that a rubric had been provided by the teacher. With this in mind, it would be interesting to know if these teachers would still consider penalising or whether they might return the work before grading/marking allowing the learners who had failed to include a key to still do so. This should motivate them, potentially raising their mark, helping them to understand and improve their map skills.

Susan, Mark and Barry agreed that the scenario presented in *Question 6* would be a useful way of indicating who in the class needed some extra attention. By placing the learners input into the assessment process, they are emphasising its contribution to learning. It was seen as non-threatening, straightforward and enjoyable for the learners. Their responses reveal that learners can use self-assessment to help them think about their own learning and understand it better. Susan touched on a disparity between what is understood and what is not, and her concerns echo the research findings that teachers need to train learners to use self-assessment effectively. Michael referred to the 'not sure' statement in his answer as a little negative and ambiguous.

Barry's comments on these strategies were quite negative. He felt that he would gauge their understanding by asking questions and expressed that this was more a process of teacher evaluation rather than self-assessment; "I think this process of evaluating the teacher is unprofessional and causes the child to lack respect" (Barry, 23.9.04). Harris & Bell (1986) suggest that there are aspects of learners work which teachers could expect them to know more about – how hard they worked, what they were trying to achieve. Perhaps their views could remove some of this challenge to the teacher's role as expressed by Barry. Collaborative assessment could also allow teachers to work with learners on increasing their responsibility and independence so they are more able to understand their own learning and reflect on its quality.

When asked to consider whether they had time to provide feedback, which goes beyond correcting the mistakes, four of the five respondents said 'no' citing work pressure as the reason. However, Louise and Barry felt that this was not good enough and aimed to provide more time for effective feedback. Mark was the only teacher to

agree with the question and wrote; "Teaching goes beyond just correcting mistakes. You are constantly giving feedback...if you don't have time, find time!" (11.10.04).

It seems doubtful whether immediate, regular verbal feedback is given and considering the negative responses whether time is made for feedback to be followed up in some way although this cannot be assumed from the responses.

The next question (*Question 8*) asked teachers if they felt that in general, children ignore teachers' written comments. Barry, Michael and Louise said 'yes' because the learners had no sense of pride or ownership for their work; they received too much written feedback and because the teachers never refer back to these evaluations when instructing a similar task. Susan and Mark suggested that positive comments were never ignored and that there was a tendency to concentrate on the negative. These findings are rather mixed and it is unclear whether written comments are used formatively to help pupils learn. The reasons offered for learners' ignorance could be attributed to the fact that the written comment is harmful to future performance (see Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Negative comments may impact on self-esteem and motivation, causing learners to direct their attention away from the task feedback. However, these issues are not explicated in their answers. The one positive response from Mark indicated that giving effective written feedback is perceived as an important way in which a teacher can focus on the specific needs of a learner and should be designed so that it stimulates a thoughtful response, building upon previous learning. In terms of formative assessment, perhaps the message here is that there needs to be a much more careful reflection on the way in which teachers respond to children through written comments and support them in their learning.

Interview responses

Michael felt *Question 4* was 'ambiguous' because he wasn't sure if it was referring to him correcting or what his correction might be. However, in trying to discover what the teacher would 'usually' do next, it is important not to refer to any particular action within the question. If the usual action is to immediately correct, then it suggests a non-formative action, whereas focussing on the method in trying to identify error, could create an opportunity for learning.

Mark felt that *Question 5* was a "bit strange". He said that if he had given the assignment, certain expectations would have been written down so, the children would know exactly what to include. He also mentioned that he would have gone through the assignment with the learners. The issue of this scenario being unrealistic had not occurred before but the feedback and responses from the pilot indicated some formative strategies for this situation as well as a need for self-evaluation, so the question would remain unchanged. However, it did seem worth refining the question

to state that learners had been provided with a written rubric, which stated that a key was required. It was likely, then, that this would avoid the reference to reflective practice and allow respondents' answers to focus more on strategies to overcome the problem. Hence, it would be a clearer way of identifying possible formative ways of handling this issue.

Question 7 caused Barry to feel 'a bit negative'. In wanting to provide immediate feedback to better the learners' performance, he felt time was an issue and that written comments were often not valued. He also thought that the learners' attitude was an important part of the feedback process. On reflection, his negativity to the question could be interpreted as a desire to make better formative use of his feedback provision. Although this interpretation might be incorrect, his following comment would suggest a formative ideal;

> I think assessment needs to be something that is happening concurrently, all the time and it needs to be within a time-frame so feedback is beneficial. If learners come to you for support and you give feedback straightaway and they are happy, comfortable and confident with that, they can work with it. Whereas a written comment later in which you spend copious amounts of time writing sentences, trying to help and its just look at it, put it down, there is no sense of ownership and for a teacher it is demoralising (Barry, 23.9.04).

Mark did not agree with *Question 8* and explained that children liked to read what the teacher had written as long as the comment was positive. When prompted with a further question, (Do they act upon it?), he suggested they did but, there was constant need to reinforce as they were unable to concentrate for a long period of time at this age. Such disagreement indicates that the question helps to interrogate his perception of the formative use and value of feedback through written comments.

There were a number of positive responses from teachers when asked if questions made them think about their own assessment practice. Their answers resemble those found in the pilot and suggest that the questionnaire is likely to provide a better understanding of formative assessment and give examples of how to engage with it in the primary classroom.

Question 4 was seen as quite realistic and interesting by Susan and Mark who commented that it made them think about the process and how they would use this situation as a learning opportunity for the child and class.

Question 5 caused Michael to consider what he would do. His description that he would use a rubric, which stated that a key was an important part of a map, and give the learners a chance to complete the map before submitting the assignment, suggests a formative alternative to the 'right/wrong' response. Barry went one stage further by explaining how this was important formative feedback for himself as it would allow

him to see the thought process through the learners' eyes, which would help him improve his instruction for the future.

The assessment strategies portrayed in *Question 6* made the respondents think that these would be useful ways of getting assessment feedback from the learners particularly in combination with other types of assessment (see Appendix K). Reflecting on the question, Mark explicated; "...it reaffirms to me how important feedback is. Children love and need that communication all the time" (11.10.04).

For Michael, *Question 7* confirmed his feeling that there was a need to address the amount of time given for feedback to learners. It made him think that this was something he would like to work on in class, aiming for a better balance.

Amendments and changes

Michael put forward an interesting comment about *Question 6*, which referred to feedback strategies. He felt 'not sure' in the level of understanding section could be perceived as negative and suggested 'partial understanding' would be better. He pointed out that if you are asking the learners to show that they don't have full understanding, 'not sure' often means that you don't understand something. This was a valid proposal for change and furthermore, the learners might opt for 'not sure' because it is in the middle and perceived better than 'Don't understand at all', yet it still indicated that they don't have understanding. The self-assessment strategy displayed in *Question 6* originated from the work of Hopkins (1985) and was later adapted by Wiliam, (2000: 21) as examples of putting formative assessment into practice. The learners are asked to decide upon their level of understanding and have three choices – 'good, 'not sure' and 'don't understand at all'. As a result of Michael's proposal, the learners' second choice was changed from 'not sure' to 'some understanding'.

A further section was added to *Question 5* reinforcing the fact that the teacher had provided clear instructions to the learners. It was hoped that this would enable the respondents to focus their answers in the scenario to what they would usually do and not to a reflection on their own instruction as most did during the testing stage. The question was amended to:

***Figure 6.2:** Questionnaire 3 - Amendments to Question 5*

You have been carefully marking the class's geography assignments after school and notice that despite your instructions to them, at least half the learners have failed to include a key with their map.

6.5 Self- and peer-assessment (*Questions 9, 10 & 11*)

Questionnaire responses

Question 9 was designed to explore teachers' thoughts on and attitudes towards self- and peer-assessment. On a one-five scale, they were required to select the degree of value they placed on nine strategies. Unlike findings from the pilot, no teacher found all the strategies to be 'very valuable'. In order to analyse more effectively, it was decided during the previous stage that each strategy should be assigned a letter so reference would be easier and so that averages can be worked out. As indicated in the design and pilot study, all these strategies could be rated as valuable in terms of their formative capabilities. Results from testing stage are as follows:

Table 6.1: *Analysis of self- and peer-assessment strategies (Question 9)*

Self- and Peer-Assessment Strategies:	Responses:
A. Setting up tasks designed to enable learners to assess themselves	**1, 2, 2, 2, 3**
B. Getting a learner to help another learner	**1, 1, 1, 2, 4**
C. Getting learners to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome	**1, 2, 2, 3, 4**
D. Combining teacher marking with self-marking.	**1, 2, 2, 3, 4**
E. Getting learners to suggest ways something can be improved	**1, 1, 1, 2, 2**
F. Getting learners to review their own work and record their progress	**1, 2, 2, 2, 2**
G. Asking learners to develop their own marking criteria	**1, 2, 2, 3, 3**
H. Providing time for learners to reflect and talk about their learning	**1, 2, 2, 2, 2**
I. Providing opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another	**2, 2, 2, 2, 4**

1 = very valuable 2 = valuable 3 = no strong view 4 = of little value 5 = of no value

The strategies were seen as valuable, which points to an awareness of the benefits of developing and using self-and peer-assessment to improve learning and raise performance. Strategies B & E were seen to be 'very valuable' by Susan, Mark and Michael. All the others were judged 'very valuable' by one of the five respondents apart from 1. Strategies B, C, D & I were assessed of 'little value' by Barry but, none of the strategies were viewed to be 'of no value'.

Respondents were then asked if they ever allowed learners to assess their own work and to provide an example if they could (*Question 10*). The replies were all positive;

> Yes. Pupils love assessing their own work. It is mainly an activity where there are correct and incorrect answers. It is also a learning experience, because the pupils can see where they have made mistakes and they can correct them (Mark, 11.10.04)

Examples included mathematics worksheets and creative writing and indicate that learners are involved in their own learning. Therefore, such self-assessment can be linked to assessment for learning since the assessment is used as a process for improving learning. The references to learners' lacking responsibility, problems of laziness and dishonesty are not uncommon and much of the research literature suggests that accepting responsibility for learning can be difficult for some children, particularly when they feel others are judging their success and controlling their progress. One of Black & Wiliam's (1998) recommendations was: "For formative assessment to be productive, pupils should be trained in self-assessment so they can understand the main purpose of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve" (p.10).

In *Question 11*, teachers were asked to comment on whether they perceived greater use of peer-assessment to be beneficial. Four of the replies were positive and suggested that learners' direct involvement encourages responsibility and motivates them to improve. They learn from each other and are able to accept criticism and as one teacher succinctly wrote; "...the pupils feel part of the teaching/learning process" (Mark, 11.10.04).

Barry expressed concern with peer-assessment and did not use it often stating; "Learners are more geared to accepting correction from the teacher than from their peers". As part of the KMOFAP, Black *et al.* (2003c) discovered that initial attempts of peer-assessment were unsuccessful. The teachers saw that the source of the problem was that the learners' lacked the necessary skills both to judge specific problems in understanding and to set realistic targets to remedy problems as they expected the teacher to do this. However, where training was provided, students began to judge their own and others more effectively and start to take action to improve. These comments indicated that peer-assessment is perceived valuable for several reasons. One is the prospect of improving the motivation of students to work more carefully, a second is the personal and social development as pupils learn to communicate with their peers in non-judgemental ways and thirdly the shared understanding of learning can help pupils develop through seeing other ways of looking at a problem.

Interview responses

The questions on self-and peer-assessment (*Questions 9, 10 & 11*) made Mark, Susan and Michael think the techniques were worthwhile, confirming the value they placed on them. Susan explained further that she had recently started to involve parents in the assessment process, which had worked well. She said, "It's quite interesting; I got some really nice feedback from them. It can be done (17.9.04).

Mark explained that these questions had encouraged him to try self-assessment in a Geography assignment. He was amazed at the response particularly how accurate the learners were in their assessment of work. He also felt that peer-assessment could be more interesting for the learners as it created "constant communication" between them.

Susan felt *Question 10* should be changed because she didn't agree with the statement. However, this is not a reason to change the format and in fact, her disagreement, providing she articulates this in her answer, shows her disbelief that students are unaware of how their work is progressing and how it may be improved. Her negative response indicated a positive expectation that self-assessment involving the learners was part of the assessment process in class.

Amendments and changes

In *Question 9*, the word 'nine' was added to the opening sentence, making it clear that there are nine strategies to be considered.

In the second example of an open question (*Question 12*) a word was changed. Instead of 'sweet' it now reads 'item'.

Before *Question 9*, some outline information on self- and peer-assessment is to be provided for the teacher. The fact that this was not already included was an oversight and the following sentences (see Figure 6.3) are now in keeping with the other sections on marking, feedback and questioning.

***Figure 6.3:** Questionnaire 3 - The self-and peer-assessment statement*

Research suggests that self-and peer-assessment strategies have great potential for raising performance, helping learners to think about their learning and understand it better. However, there is little evidence of it being used to support learning in schools.

This additional statement provides respondents with a brief introduction to the use of self- and peer-assessment in schools and hopefully encourages them to consider the benefits of these formative techniques.

6.6 Questioning (*Question 12*)

Questionnaire responses

There is considerable research evidence that teachers limit questions to recall. Respondents' perceptions of the limitations of not using open, extended questions were asked in *Question 12*. All of the teachers felt that creativity and lateral thinking would be lost in terms of assessment, if seldom use of open questions were made. Mark had a clear idea about open questions, which he felt were "very important because they open the door to many avenues of learning" (11.10.04).

One of the advantages of questioning is that it is immediate, interactive and can be used for both formative and summative purposes. The responses show that these teachers recognise that using open questions are an important part of their assessment practice enabling them to explore the development of learners' thinking.

Interview responses

In responding to *Question 12*, Mark (11.10.04) stated it was an "excellent" question and Louise suggested it was "very good". Louise also felt that it was "...a great way of asking the same question and it makes kids use their brains instead of just rote learning and spitting out an answer, which is really valuable" (23.9.04).

Their responses suggested an awareness of using open-questioning for formative purposes. Their desire to develop and extended questioning sequences to enable learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding echoes the research evidence that using questions effectively is a skill that need practice (see Black & Wiliam, 1999; Clarke, 2003).

The informative responses and positive feedback means that the question is to remain unchanged in the third draft.

6.7 Assessment in a the primary classroom (*Question 13*)

Question 13 provided four summary statements of how assessment was carried out in the classroom. Teachers were asked to select a statement or statements that most closely resembled their current practice and explain why. The responses were quite varied. Susan and Mark selected statement 2 and explained that listening to learners interact provided them with good indication levels of understanding. Louise and Michael chose statement 4, assessing formally, to be most realistic. Reasons given were due to the amount of content needed to be covered in lessons and that the other statements were too vague. Barry selected statement 3, using questions because they were direct, demanding an immediate response and therefore providing a quick assessment of their understanding. This question paints a somewhat limited picture of the reality of assessment as conducted by Grade 6 teachers. The fact that these two teachers use tests and formal assessments may point towards a more summative mechanism where learners are dependent on teachers who control and direct class activity. However, it cannot be deduced that this assessment information is not used to support learning. The other comments and explanations suggest that learning is viewed as an interactive relationship and that assessment is used to promote this.

During the follow-up interviews none of the respondents made reference to this question. Therefore, no amendments or changes were made before the third draft of the questionnaire was evaluated.

6.8 Purpose and use of assessment (*Questions 14 & 15*)

Questionnaire responses

The completion of the table was found to be straightforward however, there was confusion with the 'purposes' section. The assessment strategies were used by all of the teachers and the most common form of marking information was a 'code or symbol' followed by 'written comments'. This was expected and is in line with research (see Kotze, 2002) that reports the use of codes or grading functions predominates. The fact that these codes were combined with written comments implies that the comment is only supplementary to the 'more important' code or symbol. As Butler (1998) discovered, students rarely read comments, preferring to compare marks with peers as their first reaction on getting work back. She also found that often the comments are brief and/or not specific and that the same written comment frequently recurs in learners' books implying that the learners do not take note or act upon the comments.

The most common purpose of assessment was for 'monitoring progress' followed by 'teaching and learning' and then for the 'learner and/or teacher'. Assignments, rubrics and tests were used 'often', the remaining strategies were used 'frequently' apart from self-assessment and portfolios which were used 'sometimes'.

Table 6.2: *Analysis of purpose and use of assessment (Question 14)*

STRATEGIES **Teacher and/or school developed strategies.**	**MARKING INFORMATION** **1 = nothing** **2 = mark or percent** **3 = code or symbol** **4 = written comment**	**PURPOSES** **1 = teaching and learning** **2 = learner and/or teacher** **3 = monitoring progress** **4 = school management and/or external agencies**	**USED** **1 = little** **2 = sometimes** **3 = frequently** **4 = often**
	Responses:	**Responses:**	**Responses:**
1. Assignments or homework	2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4	1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3	2, 3, 4, 4, 4
2. Rubrics	2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4	2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4	3, 4, 4, 4, 4
3. Tests	2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 4	1, 3, 3, 3, 3	3, 3, 4, 4, 4
4. Portfolios	1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4	1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4	1, 1, 3, 3, 3
5. Self-assessment	2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4	1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3	2, 2, 2, 3, 3
6. Peer-assessment	2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4	1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3	1, 2, 2, 3, 3
7. Observation	3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4	1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3	2, 3, 3, 3, 4

The last question (*Question 15*) was included because it was felt it would be interesting to find out how teachers' perceive learners might respond to their marking. It was also an easy finishing question, enabling the number of questions to be kept to a round fifteen. All the respondents selected statement 4, which was expected. However, their explanations were interesting. Michael, Mark and Susan mentioned

that learners like positive feedback, comments and suggestions, which encouraged them to do their best. Louise explained that giving a symbol e.g. 2 was not a label for a group but an indicator of what had been achieved for that piece of work and what was needed for the next assessment. Michael chose statement 3 and felt that pupils should respond by looking to improve although he suggested that many result to forgetting it concluding that much is based on the learners' attitude.

It appears that these teachers perceived that assessment supported learning although their explanations talked more about the use of comments to improve pupil motivation rather than to improve understanding. These positive psychological benefits that can occur from assessment are an important part of formative practice but as Black & Wiliam (1998) argue, for assessment to support learning, it must be conceived as a core part of the teaching and learning process. Learners and teachers need to be able and willing to use the assessment data to determine the next steps. From these responses, there is clear intent and commitment to the concept of formative assessment and using feedback to serve learning but what is less sure is whether this is carried through into classroom practice.

Interview responses

Similar to the feedback gained during the pilot study, *Question 14* was cause for some confusion particularly regarding the 'Purposes' section (see Appendix K).

Apart from the difficulty interpreting the question, a further issue is whether at the time of selecting an assessment strategy they actually know for what purpose they are using it. These factors need to be teased out further and perhaps an opportunity needs to be created within the question to explore whether they carry an awareness of the purpose of assessment. This could be achieved by making the purposes section more straightforward and including an additional section on awareness or by streamlining the amount of strategies and providing examples for each one. This question still rests uneasily and needs to be re-evaluated.

As discovered in the pilot, none of the respondents felt that there were any questions in which they could have written more detailed responses for or would have liked to add further comments to.

In concluding her answer about questions which had made her think, *Question 15* prompted Susan to say she had actually read the four statements to the learners in her class; "It was interesting to discuss the different perceptions with the learners. They prefer comment four; they said they like rubrics, written comments, positive feedback and suggestions" (17.9.04).

The way students feel about themselves as learners has been identified as fundamental to the process of maximising achievement and making progress (Black & Wiliam, 1998). As Sandy discovered, the learners understood strategies for making progress, the role of the teacher and their own behaviour. This is in line with research findings (see Black *et al.* 2003; Clarke 2001), which suggest that children should be viewed as critical learners with complex learning perceptions.

Amendments and changes

Question 14 was altered and simplified to avoid any misconceptions.

Figure 6.4: *Questionnaire 3 - Amendments to Question 14*

14. Please complete the following table as far as you can.

The table includes eight school assessment strategies. Please indicate which ones you use by selecting either the number or numbers for the marking information, its purpose and rate how often the strategy is used in the classroom.

If you do not use one or more of these strategies, leave the relevant section blank.

The 'purposes' section was changed again. This was to try and make it more explicit to teachers so there would be little room for misinterpretation.

Figure 6.5: *Questionnaire 3 - Amendments to Question 14*

Original Version:	Amended Version:
PURPOSES	PURPOSES
1 = teaching & learning	1 = to inform my teaching and planning
2 = learner and/or teacher	2 = to improve students learning
3 = monitoring progress	3 = to monitor students progress
4 = school management and/or external agencies	4 = to provide information for mark schedules and school reports

The assessment strategies (see Appendix C, Questionnaire 3 - Question 14) were labelled alphabetically instead of numerically to avoid any confusion between the numbers (1-4) assigned for the three sections 'marking information', 'purposes' and 'used'. Similarly, the 'assignments or homework' strategies were separated and the font of the example was also changed to make it stand out more.

Learner's statement (1) of the last question (*Question 15*) was changed. 'I think' was removed which could potentially be perceived as negative and therefore decrease its standing amongst the other three statement choices.

6.9 Conclusion

Each teacher was asked if there were any assessment areas or questions about assessment that they had expected to be asked and were not included. Mark and Louise stated 'no'; whilst Susan mentioned 'time' in referring to the fact that there

was not enough time to carry out effective assessment. Barry answered; "I expected like a whole run down of what it is, what you should be doing. Are you doing this, are you not doing that? It wasn't prescriptive which is nice" (23.9.04). The following comment is especially pleasing as it indicates that the questionnaire has the potential to be a useful professional development tool.

> I was surprised, I expected it just to be another pointless opinions questionnaire regarding the way assessment is at the moment but you gave practical examples and made us back it up, by asking us to explain this is how we do what we do. This was the surprise package that we were actually getting down to doing it and explaining it rather than just saying what we do. It wasn't just past tense, it was current, right now, do it now, it was very interesting (Michael, 17.9.04).

The final question put to the respondents during the follow-up interview was whether the questionnaire provides an opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice. All respondents said 'yes' explaining how it had made them think more deeply about their assessment practice. Susan felt this influence; "Yes, it was a positive building experience. Assessment can be a real pleasure like this" (17.9.04).

CHAPTER 7: EVALUATING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

7.1 Meta-perspective

This final stage of the research attempted to provide an evaluation of the questionnaire (see Appendix C) by drawing on the meta-perspectives of two professional development teacher educators.

The meta-perspectives provided an awareness, which facilitated understanding the research design through the teacher educators' perceptions and experiences. Their perspectives involved reflection of their own similar research endeavours and dissemination of knowledge about how this aspect of educational research could be used in the practical setting.

Both were male, had taught in high schools (Mitch - science; Harold - mathematics,) and were now involved in teacher training, in-service training, educational research and school development. It was felt that by having two perspectives they would build on and provide greater insight. Note, pseudonyms have been used.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to obtain an elaboration on important points arising from of the questionnaire. It also enabled a critical review of the design and a discussion on the potential use of the questionnaire. The interviews had a number of questions to answer (see Appendix M) but their order was not fixed. They were designed to try and understand how they perceived the research, to lead to a useful conceptualization and to provide further details on building the instrument. The researcher's role was kept to a minimum to avoid leading the respondents however; further questions did develop as a result of the conversations that took place. The questions were open-ended so that the teacher educators could answer with as much or as little information as he chose. Both interviews were recorded.

Next, the major insights, which emerged from these interviews, are considered.

7.2 Overall impressions

Their overall impression was congruent. They both felt that the questionnaire was 'good' (Mitch), 'very good' (Harold) and commented positively on the variety of question format, the range of examples and on the presentation. They suggested that its clear explanations and attractiveness would encourage the respondent to complete.

Mitch (26.11.04) explained that "the whole idea of a questionnaire having some form of professional development" was interesting and discussed ways of taking this notion further. Similarly Harold felt, "if your questionnaire can contribute to people's reflection which it seems to be able to do, then the research has served the respondent

and the researcher." He went on to say, "I think you have got something, a spin-off that is worthwhile" (7.12.09).

7.3 Questionnaire design

In reference to the length of time required for completion, Mitch's initial reaction was that it was "quite long" with a lot of open-ended questions. Yet, he felt in terms of what was trying to be achieved, it was difficult to think of an alternative method. Harold felt from his experiences that you needed to look beyond this issue of time constraints explaining that if teachers are "engaged and interested they will complete it quite happily but, they complete dismissively when not" (7.12.04). This echoes Oppenheim, (1992) and Tall's, (2000) advice that the responders need to be committed and interested or captive.

Neither of the two suggested changing the questionnaire format, content nor adding anything to it. However, both did feel that the 'gaps' for writing answers should be enlarged. After consideration, it seemed unnecessary to increase the spacing, particularly as only one of the ten teachers involved in the pilot or testing stages made reference to this.

The question type debate of open versus closed was touched upon. There were two principle arguments for using predominately open-ended questions in this questionnaire. Firstly, that closed questions constructed in a priori way may fail to provide an appropriate set of alternatives, secondly that the respondents are apt to be influenced by the closed alternatives given and therefore a more valid response is obtained if they produce answers themselves. In discussing *Question 3*, Mitch mentioned that unless the 'twenty' possible answers to the question were known and put into a 'yes', 'no', 'maybe' likert-scale; then an open answer was needed to describe it. Much of the discussion in textbooks (see Schuman & Presser, 1996) suggests that questionnaire design should begin with open questions in pilot work, and then uses the resulting responses as a basis for developing a meaningful set of closed alternatives. However, this only indicates a preliminary advantage of using open questions; as Mitch suggests "...this is much more reflexive and process orientated because your open-ended questionnaire is allowing for that" (26.11.04). He felt this would be lost if you took the responses from each question and turned them into a set of choices in a closed questionnaire. Likewise, Harold felt that the questionnaire clearly provided evidence through open questions, examples and scenarios, permitting the respondent to express feelings, ideas and reactions without being limited to preset categories.

Whether the resulting responses from the pilot and testing stages could serve as a basis for developing a meaningful set of closed alternatives is something that has not

been considered, partly due to the size and nature of this dissertation and the fact that it was assumed that the benefit of open questions be inherent in the form and unlikely to be provided through a set of closed alternatives. To develop a set of meaningful alternatives would be too large or complex to present to teachers and elimination of open questions from this research would be detrimental. However, this might form an interesting further study, trying to close the responses, testing on a larger scale, coding, analysing and perhaps an experimental comparison.

7.4 Usefulness and potential

Both Harold and Mitch felt that the large majority of teachers come from a culture of using summative and terminal assessments and not using assessment that is formative in nature; "What we have to find is a way of helping teachers to reflect on their practice that causes them to change" (Harold, 7.12.04). Despite the Education Department's attempts to encourage assessment practice that is formative and supportive, Harold felt that as yet, "teachers haven't understood the power of assessment as a formative tool...that supports learning" (7.12.04). The fact that they don't know and are not well practised in using assessment as a formative tool echoes the research findings of Black *et al.* (2003a,b,c). Similarly Harold's reference to the transition of summative assessment at the end of the year to summative assessment throughout the year suggests that teachers are accustomed to using continuous assessment summatively. This echoes Pahad's (1997) findings that there was a general tendency in South Africa to emphasise the summative use of continuous assessment at the expense of the formative use.

In principle, both teacher educators saw the merits and potential of designing a questionnaire to research teachers' perceptions of formative assessment and to encourage an understanding of formative assessment practices and processes. Whether a questionnaire could be used to achieve this formed an interesting discussion and the next sections try to unpack their thoughts on the usefulness and limitations of the design.

The potential of the questionnaire to 'open-up' and bring to light what teachers think about assessment at the moment was recognised by both Mitch and Harold who also noted the value of using examples of formative assessment implementation in the design. As Black and Wiliam (1998) expressed, "teachers will not take up attractive sounding ideas, albeit based on extensive research, if these are presented as general principles which leave entirely to them the task of translating them into everyday practice" (p.15). This recognition that the questionnaire design allows for personal reflection on and evaluation of practice, affirms the implicit hope that it places the teachers as participants in the learning process and not as passive consumers. Much of

the literature around questionnaires suggests they suffer from user unfriendliness and the recognition that this questionnaire appears to be relevant to the responder was encouraging.

Their interest and enthusiasm in the questionnaire having some form of professional development was not surprising considering their roles in in-service teacher training. In discussion Mitch considered the possible differences in question responses between self-completion, focus group discussion or a mixture of conversation and writing. He suggested that interview/discussions "tend to pull in the edges" so that you get a convergence of responses whereas the open-ended questionnaire is more likely to pick up the possible divergences.

The potential use of the questionnaire within a workshop or course on assessment was aired by both of them. Mitch believed that there was potential "...to run a workshop ...where the questionnaire as it is developed now, forms part of the process..." (26.11.04).

They talked of using the questionnaire as a pre-event getting teachers to write down their initial responses then carrying out a discussion which presents a theoretical framework and concluding with a post questionnaire/reflection which "gets you closer to a conception of the way in which assessment is perceived and used" (Mitch, 26.11.04). It would also provide "a sense of what you have achieved in terms of your assessment training" (Harold, 7.12.04) and an idea of their "learning process" (Mitch, 26.11.04). The notion of modelling within this workshop; demonstrating to the teachers what doing means in practice, was also referred to enthusiastically. Certainly they seemed to agree that this could be potentially used to find out about teachers assessment practice and to benefit teachers' professional development when "incorporated into a programme to achieve this" (Mitch, 26.11.04).

7.5 Limitations and problems

As Mitch mentioned the questionnaire does take time to complete and analysing responses is also time consuming. However although the questions do demand effort from the respondents, they are relevant to the study and the responder and seem likely to elicit detailed responses.

During the interviews reference was made to teachers' confusion of assessment terms and an explanation on the decision to avoid definitions was given by the researcher. Both Mitch and Harold recalled similar experiences during their research and suggested that teachers are now caught between different ways of using the same terminology. This was seen as problematic to a questionnaire on assessment particularly where strategies are "understood as vocabulary but not so well understood

as a tool" (Harold, 7.12.04). With reference to *Question 14*, the confusion with the 'purposes' section highlights this point; "...the action that assessment will improve students' learning is I am sure an unusual concept and you see that is why they would struggle because it would seem so foreign" (Harold, 7.12.04)

Clarification is undoubtedly important because as Black *et al.* (2003c) suggest, any "claimed advantages only apply to authentic interpretations" (p.122). To counter this, the first stage interviews helped to recognise inconsistencies in the assessment rhetoric and the possibility of individual interpretation during the design stage was acknowledged (see sections 4.5 & 4.6).

Mitch questioned whether the questionnaire was the right "framework in which to ask and answer questions about assessment" and whether conversational/interview processes would be better suited as they are "interactive processes" and questionnaires are not (Mitch, 26.11.04). In spite of this being contradicted later in the interview, this was an interesting point; questionnaires are often seen as inflexible, making it difficult to 'interrogate' the respondent (see Tall, 00). However, part of the objective in designing this questionnaire was to maximise the interest and usefulness for subjects answering and to obtain accurate information of teachers' perceptions. In order to achieve this, much thought was given to the type of questions, the order they were asked in, and the general layout of the questionnaire. An analysis of question responses and teachers' comments during the follow-up interviews were used to improve the questionnaire and make it more appealing to recipients. This combination approach allowed depth to be achieved by providing opportunity for the teachers to think about and expand their responses. As Walker (1990) writes, a useful and flexible questionnaire was designed, "which takes the form of written conversations; a form of structured correspondence if you like" (p. 108).

Whilst looking at possible responses to *Question 9*, Harold felt that "no matter how hard they had participated, I think the research subject is sometimes at pains to please the researcher" (7.12.04). He suggested that this was often compounded when the situation was "low stakes" and as a consequence the research would need to "filter" the results. This is certainly a limitation of this closed value type question; so is the teacher putting themselves in a perceived favourable sight? The researcher feels confident that during the follow-up interviews any mistruths would have been identified and conversely, if the questionnaire is completed anonymously, without the researcher knowing the respondent, then there would be little to gain from this. Also, (*Question 9*) was included as an introduction to self-and peer-assessment, its main function being to serve as a preparatory exercise for the following open questions where responses should reduce the overall effect of Harold's concern.

In trying to develop awareness through this questionnaire of the potential of formative assessment in the normal professional practice of teachers, Harold felt it would be interesting to explore the advantages of such a venture by "watching those teachers at work in their classrooms" (7.12.04). He explained that follow up with classroom observation could determine the influence of the questionnaire and whether the responses about practice are a reality in the classroom. As this study is limited to the designing of a method, it did not attempt to observe how teachers used assessment formatively however, this could be a beneficial way of establishing the potential of the questionnaire. Perhaps an area for future research could be designing a classroom observation schedule to capture such information.

It seems fair that if teachers were expected to change their practice then learners would need to change their role in the classroom. As Harold put, "...learners have not been approached, taught, conditioned into seeing assessment as a formative experience" (7.12.04). Black *et al.* (2003c) explain, students had to change from "passive recipients of the knowledge offered by the teacher to active learners" who could "take responsibility for and manage their own learning" (p.97). As questionnaires are traditionally viewed as the province of researchers, using them for consulting learners' perceptions of formative assessment practice would be interesting; perhaps using them as a data source, active respondents or even in the design and processing of a questionnaire. More research in this area would be useful and as it was beyond the scope of this dissertation, the role of students as learners and the role of teachers in developing students' capacity to learn would be an issue worthy of further exploration.

In terms of the questionnaire being used on a larger scale and its quantitative possibilities, neither Mitch nor Harold elaborated on this. It was felt that Mitch implicitly questioned whether such a complex phenomenon could be captured in a questionnaire and threw doubt upon its reliability. Certainly it takes effort to fill in this questionnaire, which could put teachers off and cause return rate problems. The 'lie factor' where teachers answer questions in a way they perceive to be desired or expected by the researcher has been discussed earlier. At least with this type of questionnaire it is immediately apparent how much effort the responder has put in. This helps reliability and as there are a number of questions within each section; they potentially give more consistent results and help to reduce any bias. The researcher was satisfied that this method would be an effective approach to investigate teachers' perceptions of formative assessment. Youngman (1982) believes that the standard concept of reliability has limited relevance to questionnaire design. It could be argued that reliability was slightly more accessible in this study as all respondents were interviewed personally after completion and occasionally the responses were

discussed and matched to questionnaire answers. Quantitative evidence was not the most important outcome of this design, nevertheless it could be an important component of further research providing firmer evidence of the potential of this questionnaire to capture perceptions and lead to improvements in formative assessment practice.

7.6 Conclusion

In this stage of the research study an evaluation of the questionnaire design was undertaken. The meta-perspectives helped to take an overview stance, providing a realistic appraisal of the questionnaire and facilitating a more accurate understanding of carrying out research in this area. They have included reflection on research endeavours and dissemination of knowledge about how this aspect of educational assessment research and training can best be combined to become practical in the primary classroom setting.

The final chapter presents the conclusions and explores some of the implications and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Reviewing the research

The first stage of the research was to investigate teachers' perceptions of formative assessment and discover how it was used in the classroom situation. Findings from the initial interviews revealed that although teachers supported using assessment formatively, there was little room for implementing formative approaches in the classroom. Teachers had responsibilities for summative assessment, to inform their teaching and for reporting learners' progress and within this context it appeared that their understanding of formative work was confused and inhibited.

In light of this, the questionnaire was designed to attempt to gather information about the ways in which teachers used formative assessment and to enable them to develop their practice. Questions and scenarios were carefully constructed to suggest strategies and techniques that teachers could discuss, reflect on and try out. Thus, the focus of the research widened to incorporate a form of professional development.

8.2 Deepening an appreciation

"They're learning, I'm learning, everybody is learning", Susan said (17.9.04). It was found that the questionnaire did have considerable potential to establish what teachers practice was and to deepen teachers' appreciation of the role of formative assessment. As Brandon encapsulated, "Every question made me think about what I am doing and re-evaluate some of the ways I assess" (31.8.04).

The rest of this section summarises these findings and attempts to explain how teachers' moved forward with their understanding and development.

8.2.1 Marking

Marking figured significantly in teachers' practice and has considerable potential for developing students' thinking and learning. Responses to the questionnaire indicated that teachers' marking focused on correcting spelling, judging presentation, giving comments of praise and assigning an overall summative mark. Very few of the marking examples focused on the LO(s) and AS(s), nor did they provide strategies to help learners understand what they had achieved and what they needed to do next.

In aiming to deepen an understanding of the potential for greater learning through marking students' written work, the personal reflection displayed by some teachers may be a starting point for improvement. Learners need to be more "...interested in the remark not the mark" (Vicky, 7.6.04). This is true, as long as outcomes are clear and achievable, enabling the marker to comment on these criteria and concentrate on the next steps in learning. Linking marking with formative assessment, as this

questionnaire has tried to do, implied the development of some demanding skills on the part of teachers yet, there were positive signs that it has the potential for encouraging and supporting teachers to practice formative marking.

8.2.2 Feedback

Effective feedback helps students understand the quality of their work and what they need to do to improve. The questionnaire used scenarios to gain information on current practice and assist teachers in identifying potentially effective feedback opportunities. The detailed responses, suggested that formative feedback was valued and demonstrated a number of ways in which teachers gave feedback although, arguably not all these could be used to develop learning. Teachers acknowledged that timely feedback, which gives learners advice on how to improve, was most helpful; "...it should be immediate and cause thinking to take place" (Andrea, 27.8.04). They also commented that the strategies in the questionnaire illustrated future possibilities for delivering feedback that promotes learning and encourages them to use assessment in a formative way; "...it is important feedback for me" (Barry, 23.9.04).

8.2.3 Self- and peer-assessment

Teachers were aware of the perceived benefits of self- and peer-assessment despite some being uncertain how to use it. The role of peers in assessing was encouraged but not without caution; "I am reluctant to use something like this" (Andrea, 27.8.04). Teachers recognised the necessity for training learners to evaluate their work so that when involved in assessment they were clear about how their learning can be improved. The strategies were found to be useful by the teachers and seen as a step towards learners understanding their own progress and being able to move their learning forward. "It gets them thinking about what helps them learn, what they would like to achieve and how to overcome difficulties" (Feroza, 31.8.04).

In provoking discussion on how these ideas might affect current classrooms and reaffirming why such techniques are used, the questionnaire pointed the way to appreciation and action in suggesting activities that teachers can consider to equip learners with the skills for taking the next steps in their learning. As Louise found; "The assessment ideas would be a good way to...help them understand where they are, so they know what they have got to do to get where they should be" (23.10.04).

8.2.4 Questioning

Questions are one of the most frequently used teaching methods and the form of questioning is especially important for assessment. Answers are only as good as the questions asked, so thoughtful answers require well-framed questions. The teachers involved in this study perceived open questioning as an opportunity to increase

learners' knowledge and improve understanding; "Using open questions reminded me that they can extend all ranges of ability" (Feroza, 31.8.04). They identified the technique as desirable; using fewer, better quality questions to develop learners' thinking skills. As a result of the questionnaire some teachers examined their own questioning in the classroom and had begun to notice that open questioning had been neglected; "It made me think I need to include open questions in my lessons a lot more" (Louise, 23.9.04), an encouraging indication that the question provoked reflection which might inform future formative practice.

8.2.5 Purpose and use of assessment

In order to obtain an overview of current assessment practice respondents were asked to indicate the purpose of various assessment strategies and how frequently they were used. Marking information was generally in the form of a summative code or percentage whilst the most frequent purpose was for monitoring progress. Teachers clearly needed to use assessment as a basis for reporting, but the formative role of facilitating learning was less obvious. It seemed that their immediate assessment demands meant that using assessment formatively was being overlooked. Yet, Kate was positive about the effects of the questionnaire: "...these kind of practices could complement the need to succeed in tests with the need to understand work" (25.8.04).

Overall, the feedback on the questionnaire gives rise to considerable optimism for providing information on current practice and improving teachers' formative assessment. It is auspicious that the questions designed and used in the instrument were initiated by teachers in response to their reflection on current practice as well as being informed by ideas about formative assessment for learning within the research literature. There is clearly an understanding of the importance and educational potential of formative assessment and, it is apparent that the questionnaire has a role to play in facilitating teachers' learning and development of these methods. Michael's closing response supports such a view when he explained that; "Assessment needs to move towards the process rather than just focusing on the product and the questionnaire serves to reinforce this, using assessment in different ways to support learning" (17.9.04).

8.3 Future use for the questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix C) has a role to play in exploring, supporting and strengthening student teachers', in-service teachers' and teacher educators' formative assessment practice. Whilst asserting the importance of assessment for learning it encourages reflection and "opens [respondents'] eyes to options and various tools that can be used" (Barry, 23.9.04).

Its future use might include a strategy within pre-service and as part of a teacher training initiative, in which formative techniques are taught, learned and modelled so that trainees encounter the principles as something they experience. It might also be employed in the school context (INSET), guiding teachers in the exploration and understanding of formative assessment, so they can start to develop the skills. Similarly, it might form "part of the process...in an assessment workshop" (Mitch, 26.11.04) where teachers complete the questionnaire at the start of the course so "it acts as a catalyst to get them thinking" about how to use the ideas (Harold, 7.12.04).

The questionnaire points the way to action; its future application needs to be within a framework that supports teachers and schools with assessing in a way that directly informs and strengthens learning.

8.4 Limitations

Given the number of respondents and the methodology employed, the outcomes cannot be generalized to all teachers and to all schools. The questionnaire responses and feedback gained was unique and not necessarily representative of other teachers. Within the design, it was assumed that the selected categories were the most appropriate to the research. Categories can be restrictive however.

The study had certain inherent potential pitfalls. As the researcher was the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of the questionnaire responses and interviews, there was the possibility of researcher bias. By working through the four research stages, the generative feedback enabled adjustments to be made which helped to minimise this concern. It could also be claimed that the research lacked a clear theoretical basis however, as Black *et al.* (2003c: 120) argue, "...the main approach was pragmatic in recommending a set of practices that were justified on empirical grounds and by a variety of theoretical principles".

8.5 Recommendations for future research

There is a need to research and disseminate practical approaches to help teachers improve their formative assessment skills. This could help to ensure better teaching, better learning, and, in turn higher standards of attainment.

Some appealing and potentially useful areas for future research suggested by this study include examining whether teachers' perception of the value of formative assessment actually extends to practice (classroom-based research); continuing professional course development in relation to formative assessment; the implementation of formative practices in teacher training; investigating learners' perceptions and experiences of formative assessment practice in schools; developing effective strategies for using formative approaches to summative assessments;

exploring subject specific dimensions of using formative assessment and, increasing the role and awareness of parents in supporting assessment for learning.

8.6 Recommendations for policy

If teachers are going to engage with the demands of formative assessment then certain conditions need to be met. Teachers need to be clear about the aims of formative assessment strategies and they have to perceive the changes as potentially beneficial. They also need to have models of what the strategies actually look like in practice, preferably along with examples already in use in primary classrooms.

There is no simple way to improve teachers' formative assessment practice; the DOE (1998: 9-10) suggests, "...improved expertise among educators in designing, developing and using appropriate assessment instruments, must be given priority". Policy can be used as a tool for change but it must not underestimate the complexity.

What is important is that they recognize the way in which individual teachers can translate and incorporate practices into their own patterns of classroom working. Creating a scope for networking and sharing ideas, whilst giving training and guidance which encourages teachers to pursue the possibilities suggested by the research, would be a move in the right direction. Therefore, perhaps this questionnaire should be seen more as a starting point than an end point.

8.7 Epilogue

Impressed by the evidence put forward in the research literature and coursework which formed part of this degree, I was encouraged to examine my own assessment practice and reflect on it professionally as Black *et al.* (2003c: 80) state; "Implementing assessment for learning requires personal change".

For me, the stimulus for change has been formative classroom techniques such as those illustrated in the questionnaire, which have directed my teaching to assist students' learning. My marking has become more focused, I utilise questioning to raise learners' understanding and I try to incorporate opportunities for self-and peer-assessment into lessons and learning programmes.

From my involvement in this study, I have changed my views about learning, my professional priorities and my expectations of learners. Talking to other teachers about good formative practice, sharing ideas, reading and reflecting on educational research and acting on it, have all contributed to a personal awareness that the development and dissemination of formative assessment is worthwhile.

The questionnaire designed in this study will have succeeded if it helps teachers to interrogate and modify their own assessment practices in a similar way.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

School of Education

ASSESSMENT IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

1. Please indicate your gender: M F

2. How many years have you been teaching? _____

MARKING

Marking has the potential to be a useful diagnostic record of achievement yet, research has shown that marking is often directly responsible for regression in many learners.

3. Please could you read the following passage written during an English lesson by a Grade 6 learner and mark it as you would normally in the time you have available. Please be honest and mark this as if it was one of 25, *not* a special case.

Learning aims: In setting this written task, learners were asked to write a passage in which they try to establish a 'problem' and create contrasts between characters

The wind howled visiously while the two children with eyes that glittered with anger, waited impatiently for the killer Kyle looked across the road and saw a fire burning warmly. "you dont think hes backing out do you?" asked Kyle. The watch beeped 9.00pm "He is supposed to be here by now!" shouted Yasneem.

Something jarred and caught Kyles ~~age~~ attention a dark figures shadow skimmed across the cold white walls. Kyle could here his rythmatic footsteps, . . .

FEEDBACK

Feedback can be seen as the central theme of assessment, yet it is often used ineffectively. Feedback can be from teacher to child, group or class, from child to teacher or other children, in oral, written and other more subtle forms.

For the following three scenarios, please read through each one and answer the question.

Scenario 1:

The class has been busy completing a Maths worksheet on percentages. You choose a volunteer to explain on the board how they arrived at their answer to the following question:

Mzwandile wishes to buy a pair of Levi jeans that cost R260. He notices there is a 5% discount. How much will he have to pay?

The child writes on the board:

$$100\% = R260 \quad 10\% = R26 \quad 5\% = R13 \rightarrow R260 + R13 = \underline{R273}$$

After the volunteer has completed their working on the board, you notice that the answer is incorrect.

4. Please explain what you think you would *usually* do next.

Scenario 2:

You have been carefully marking the class's geography assignments after school and notice that at least half the learners have failed to include a key with their map.

5. What would you *usually* do about this?

Scenario 3:

You identify a number of objectives for a lesson and make these clear to the learners.

In the closing activity, learners are asked to indicate how well they have understood the lesson by using a 'traffic robot' system or by drawing 'faces'.

Level of Understanding	Traffic Robot	Face
Good understanding	Green	
Some understanding	Yellow	
Don't understand at all	Red	

6. Do you think this would provide useful feedback to the teacher? Please explain your answer.

7. Do teachers have time to provide feedback (spoken/written), which goes beyond just correcting the mistakes? Please explain your answer.

8. Do you believe that in general, children ignore teachers' written comments? Can you suggest why?

SUM WRITING ASSESSMENT TASK

Learning Aim: to understand and use the mathematical signs +, -, ×, ÷

Assessment Aim: to find out which mathematical symbols the learner understands and can use

The teacher uses the following instructions:

6. *Write up the signs +, -, ×, ÷;*
7. *Challenge the learners to write 10 different sums, using as many of the signs as they know how to use;*
8. *Show them one example using a sign they all know;*
9. *Check they understand what to do;*
10. *When they have finished, ask them to answer their own sums or another child's sums*

9. Does this assessment task have potential for improving learning in the classroom or is it a waste of time? Please explain your answer.

QUESTIONING

Teachers ask children many questions some of which are closed and require a correct response and others which are open, inviting a range of responses.

The following are examples of closed and open questions that could be used in a grade 6 mathematics lesson:

Closed questions	Open questions
What is 4 x 4?	How many ways can you make 16?
A packet of skittles costs R2.75. A chomp bar costs R2.15. What do they cost together?	A packet of skittles and a chomp bar cost R5.00 altogether. What could each sweet cost?

10. If a teacher seldom uses open questions, what do you think will be lost in terms of assessment?

SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT

11. Please circle the number that most closely matches your opinion of the following strategies:

1 = very valuable
2 = valuable
3 = no strong view
4 = of little value
5 = of no value

Setting up tasks designed to enable learners to assess themselves	1 2 3 4 5
Getting a learner to help another learner	1 2 3 4 5
Getting learners to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome	1 2 3 4 5
Combining teacher marking with self-marking.	1 2 3 4 5
Getting learners to suggest ways something can be improved	1 2 3 4 5
Getting learners to review their own work and record their progress	1 2 3 4 5
Asking learners to develop their own marking criteria	1 2 3 4 5
Providing time for learners to reflect and talk about their learning	1 2 3 4 5
Providing opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another	1 2 3 4 5

12. Students often have little idea of how good their work is: *" I don't know how good it is until it's been marked"*. Do you ever allow learners to assess their own work? Please explain and provide an example if you can.

13. Do you think learners in your class do/can benefit from greater involvement in peer-assessment? Please explain.

PURPOSE AND USE OF ASSESSMENT

14. Please complete the following table as far as you can.

The table includes some school assessment strategies that might be used in the classroom. Please indicate which ones you use by writing the number/s for the marking information, its purpose and rate how often it is used. You can select more than one category if required.

If you do not use one or more of these particular strategies, leave the relevant section blank.

STRATEGIES Teacher and/or school developed strategies and tools.	MARKING INFORMATION 1 = nothing 2 = mark or percent 3 = code or symbol 4 = written comment	PURPOSES 1 = teaching & learning 2 = student/parent/teacher 3 = monitoring progress 4 = school/external agencies	USED 1 = little 2 = sometimes 3 = frequently 4 = often
EXAMPLE: Assignments	2 (mark or percent) 3 (code or symbol)	2 (student/parent/teacher) 3 (monitoring progress)	4 (often)
1. Assignments or homework			
2. Checklists			
3. Exams			
4. Tests			
5. Portfolios			
6. Peer-assessment			
7. Self-assessment			
8. Observation			
9. Other types (please specify)			

ASSESSMENT IN A GRADE 6 PRIMARY CLASSROOM

Please read the following four statements made by teachers:

1. "I tend to work very much in groups...and focus on one group at a time which gives me a good opportunity to assess each child."

2. "Assessment for me is, watching the children and listening to them."

3. "I ask questions and then I can see how they are doing."

4. "I will test them and do a formal assessment to see how they are doing."

15. Which of these statements most closely resembles what you do at the moment? Please explain why you think so.

Thank you for giving time to complete the questionnaire

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

School of Education

ASSESSMENT IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM 2004/2005

This questionnaire is part of a research project being undertaken for a Masters dissertation. The purpose is to design an instrument to find out what teachers think about assessment, how they administer it and how they use assessment strategies. By completing this questionnaire you will not only be providing useful information on current practice but also giving valuable insights into the procedure itself.

The questionnaire is completed anonymously and individual schools will not be identifiable in any way.

Your views and comments are **very** important to this project.

1. It would be useful to know the following information about you:

a. Please indicate your gender: **M** **F**

b. How many years have you been teaching? _____

c. How many learners do you have in your class? _____

MARKING

Marking has the potential to be a useful diagnostic record of achievement yet; research has shown that it is often directly responsible for regression in many learners.

2. Please could you read the following passage written during an English lesson by a Grade 6 learner and mark it as you would normally in the time you have available. Please be honest and mark this as if it was one of 30, *not* a special case.

Learning Area:	Languages - English – Home Language
Learning Outcomes:	LO: 4 Writing; LO: 6 Language Structure and Use
Form of Assessment:	Creative Writing - the learner writes a creative passage
Assessment Standards:	· Clear topic sentence includes relevant information to develop a coherent paragraph; · Introduces characters; · Establishes a problem; · Applies knowledge of language to create contrasts at word and sentence level.

The wind howled visiously while the two children with eyes that glittered with anger, waited impatiently for the killer Kyle looked aross the road and saw a fire burning warmly. "you dont think he's backing out do you?" asked Kyle. The watch beeped 9.00pm "He is supposed to be here by now!" shouted Tasneem.

Something jarred and caught Kyles ~~eye~~ attention a dark figures shadow skimmed aross the cold white walls. Kyle could here his rythmatic footsteps, . . .

3. After marking the passage, how would you give feedback to the learner?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

FEEDBACK

Feedback can be seen as the central theme of assessment, yet it is often used ineffectively. Feedback can be from teacher to child, group or class, from child to teacher or other children, in oral, written and other more subtle forms.

For the following three scenarios, please read each one and then answer the question.

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The child writes on the board:

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After the volunteer has completed their working on the board, you notice that the answer is incorrect.

4. Please explain what you think you would *usually* do next.

Scenario 2:

You have been carefully marking the class's geography assignments after school and notice that at least half the learners have failed to include a key with their map.

5. What would you *usually* do about this?

Scenario 3:

You identify a number of objectives for a lesson and make these clear to the learners.

In the closing activity, learners are asked to indicate how well they have understood the lesson by using a 'traffic robot' system or by drawing 'faces'.

Level of Understanding	Traffic Robot	Face
Good understanding	**Green**	
Some understanding	**Yellow**	
Don't understand at all	**Red**	

6. Do you think this would provide useful feedback to the teacher? Please explain your answer.

7. Do teachers have time to provide feedback (spoken/written), which goes beyond just correcting the mistakes? Please explain your answer.

8. Do you believe that in general, children ignore teachers' written comments? Can you suggest why?

SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT

9. Please circle the number that most closely matches your opinion of the following strategies:

1 = very valuable
2 = valuable
3 = no strong view
4 = of little value
5 = of no value

A. Setting up tasks designed to enable learners to assess themselves	1 2 3 4 5
B. Getting a learner to help another learner	1 2 3 4 5
C. Getting learners to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome	1 2 3 4 5
D. Combining teacher marking with self-marking.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Getting learners to suggest ways something can be improved	1 2 3 4 5
F. Getting learners to review their own work and record their progress	1 2 3 4 5
G. Asking learners to develop their own marking criteria	1 2 3 4 5
H. Providing time for learners to reflect and talk about their learning	1 2 3 4 5
I. Providing opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another	1 2 3 4 5

10. Students often have little idea of how good their work is: *"I don't know how good it is until it's been marked"*. Do you ever allow learners to assess their own work? Please explain and provide an example if you can.

11. Do you think learners in your class do/can benefit from greater involvement in peer-assessment? Please explain.

QUESTIONING

Teachers ask children many questions, some of which are closed and require a correct response and others that are open, inviting a range of responses.

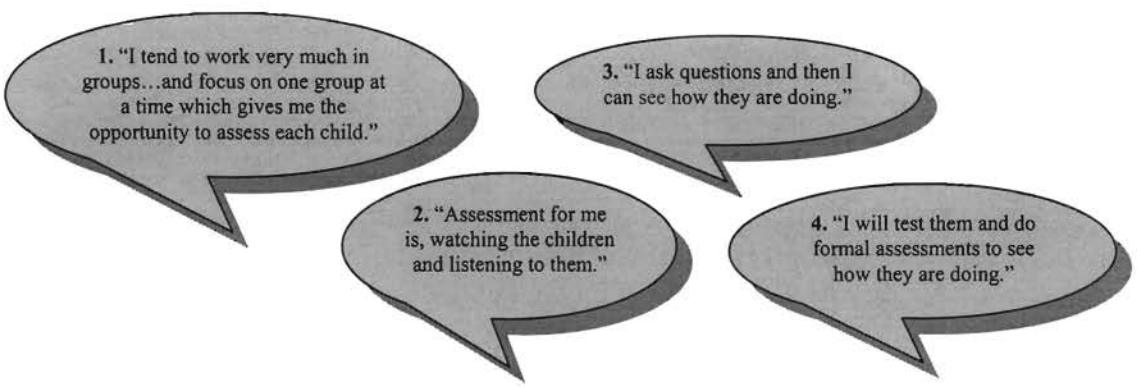
The following are examples of closed and open questions that could be used in a grade 6 mathematics lesson:

Closed questions	Open questions
What is 4 x 4?	How many ways can you make 16?
A packet of skittles costs R2.75. A chomp bar costs R2.15. What do they cost together?	A packet of skittles and a chomp bar cost R5.00 altogether. What could each sweet cost?

12. If a teacher seldom uses open questions, what do you think will be lost in terms of assessment?

ASSESSMENT IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

Please read the following four statements made by Grade 6 teachers:



13. Which of these statements most closely resemble what you do at the moment? Please explain why you think so.

PURPOSE AND USE OF ASSESSMENT

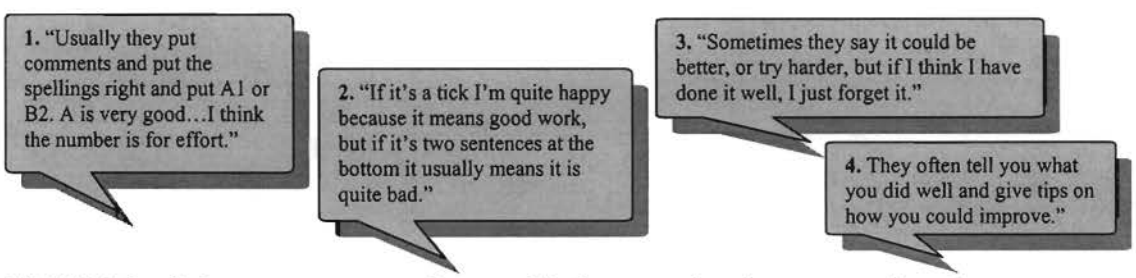
14. Please complete the following table as far as you can.

The table includes some school assessment strategies that might be used in the classroom. Please indicate which ones you use by writing the number/s for the marking information, its purpose and rate how often it is used. You can select more than one category if required.

If you do not use one or more of these particular strategies, leave the relevant section blank.

STRATEGIES Teacher and/or school developed strategies and tools.	MARKING INFORMATION 1 = nothing 2 = mark or percent 3 = code or symbol 4 = written comment	PURPOSES 1 = teaching & learning 2 = learner and/or teacher 3 = monitoring progress 4 = school management and/or external agencies	USED 1 = little 2 = sometimes 3 = frequently 4 = often
EXAMPLE: *Assignments*	*2 (mark or percent)* *4 (written comment)*	*2 (learner and/or teacher)* *3 (monitoring progress)*	*4 (often)*
1. Assignments or homework			
2. Rubrics			
4. Tests			
5. Portfolios			
6. Self-assessment			
7. Peer-assessment			
8. Observation			
9. Other types (please specify)			

Please read the following four statements made by Grade 6 learners:



15. Which of these statements do you think most closely capture how learners might respond to current assessment practice at your school? Please explain.

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THANK YOU FOR GIVING TIME TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

School of Education

ASSESSMENT IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM 2004/2005

This questionnaire is part of a research project being undertaken for a Masters dissertation. The purpose is to design an instrument to find out what teachers think about assessment, how they administer it and how they use assessment strategies. By completing this questionnaire you will not only be providing useful information on current practice but also giving valuable insights into the procedure itself.

The questionnaire is completed anonymously and individual schools will not be identifiable in any way.

Your views and comments are **very** important to this project.

1. It would be useful to know the following information about you:

a. Please indicate your gender: **M F**
b. How many years have you been teaching? _____
c. How many learners do you have in your class? _____

MARKING

Marking has the potential to be a useful diagnostic record of achievement, yet research has shown that it is often directly responsible for regression in many learners.

2. Please read the following passage written by a Grade 6 learner during an English lesson and mark it as you would normally in the time you have available. Please be honest and mark this as if it was one of a class of 30, *not* a special case.

Learning Area:	Languages - English Home Language
Learning Outcomes:	LO: 4 Writing; LO: 6 Language Structure and Use
Form of Assessment:	Creative Writing - the learner writes a creative passage
Assessment Standards:	· Clear topic sentence includes relevant information to develop a coherent paragraph; · Introduces characters; · Establishes a problem; · Applies knowledge of language to create contrasts at word and sentence level.

The wind howled visiously while the two children with eyes that glittered with anger, waited impatiently for the killer Kyle looked across the road and saw a fire burning warmly. "you dont think hes backing out do you?" asked Kyle. The watch beeped 9.00pm "He is supposed to be here by now!" shouted tasneem.

Something jarred and caught Kyles ~~eye~~ attention a dark figures shadow skimmed aross the cold white walls, Kyle could here his rythmatic footsteps, . . .

3. After marking all 30 passages and returning them to the class, do you have any particular way in which you follow up the learners' work? Please explain.

_____
_____
_____
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FEEDBACK

Feedback can be seen as the central theme of assessment, yet it is often used ineffectively. Feedback can be from teacher to child, group or class, from child to teacher or other children, in oral, written and other more subtle forms.

For the following three scenarios, please read each one and then answer the question.

4. ***Scenario 1:***

The class has been busy completing a Maths worksheet on percentages. You choose a volunteer to explain on the board how they arrived at their answer to the following question:

Mzwandile wishes to buy a pair of Levi jeans that cost R260. He notices there is a 5% discount in the sale. Work out how much he will have to pay for the jeans?

The child writes on the board:

$$100\% = R260 \quad 10\% = R26 \quad 5\% = R13 \rightarrow R260 + R13 = \underline{R273}$$

After the volunteer has completed their working on the board, you notice that the answer is incorrect.

Please explain what you think you would *usually* do next.

5. ***Scenario 2:***

You have been carefully marking the class's geography assignments after school and notice that despite your instructions to them, at least half the learners have failed to include a key with their map.

What would you *usually* do about this?

6. *Scenario 3:*

You identify a number of objectives for a lesson and make these clear to the learners.

In the closing activity, learners are asked to indicate how well they have understood the lesson by using a 'traffic robot' system or by drawing 'faces'.

Level of Understanding	Traffic Robot	Face
Good understanding	Green	
Some understanding	Yellow	
Don't understand at all	Red	

Do you think this would provide useful feedback to the teacher? Please explain your answer.

7. Do teachers have time to provide feedback (spoken/written), which goes beyond just correcting the mistakes? Please explain your answer.

8. Do you believe that in general, children ignore teachers' written comments? Can you suggest why?

SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT

Research suggests that self-and peer-assessment strategies have great potential for raising performance, helping learners to think about their learning and understand it better. However, there is little evidence of it being used to support learning in schools.

9. Please circle the number that most closely matches your opinion of the following nine strategies:

1 = very valuable
2 = valuable
3 = no strong view
4 = of little value
5 = of no value

A. Setting up tasks designed to enable learners to assess themselves	1 2 3 4 5
B. Getting a learner to help another learner	1 2 3 4 5
C. Getting learners to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome	1 2 3 4 5
D. Combining teacher marking with self-marking.	1 2 3 4 5
E. Getting learners to suggest ways something can be improved	1 2 3 4 5
F. Getting learners to review their own work and record their progress	1 2 3 4 5
G. Asking learners to develop their own marking criteria	1 2 3 4 5
H. Providing time for learners to reflect and talk about their learning	1 2 3 4 5
I. Providing opportunity for learners to assess one another's work and give feedback to one another	1 2 3 4 5

10. Students often have little idea of how good their work is: *"I don't know how good it is until it's been marked"*. Do you ever allow learners to assess their own work? Please explain and provide an example if you can.

11. Do you think learners in your class do/can benefit from greater involvement in peer-assessment? Please explain.

QUESTIONING

Teachers ask children many questions, some of which are closed and require a correct response and others that are open, inviting a range of responses. However, there is considerable research evidence that teachers tend to limit questions to factual recall.

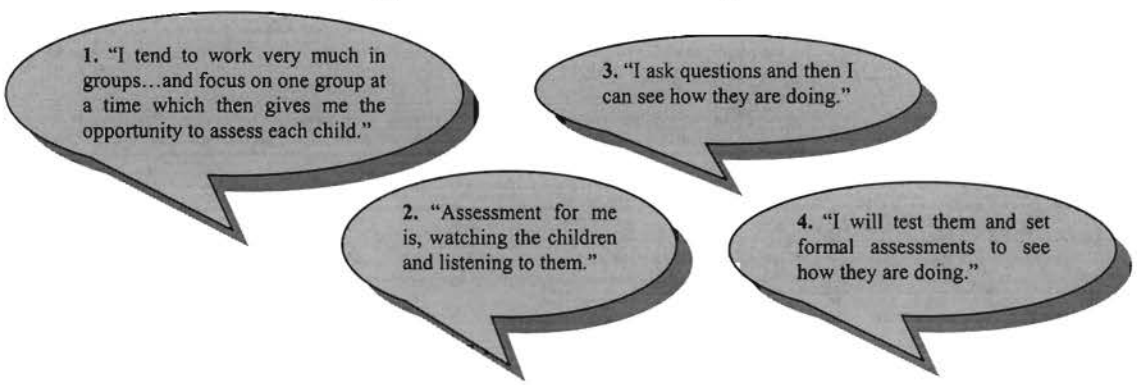
The following are examples of closed and open questions that could be used in a grade 6 mathematics lesson:

Closed questions	Open questions
What is 4 x 4?	How many ways can you make 16?
A packet of skittles costs R2.75. A chomp bar costs R2.15. What do they cost together?	A packet of skittles and a chomp bar cost R5.00 altogether. What could each item cost?

12. If a teacher seldom uses open questions, what do you think will be lost in terms of assessment?

ASSESSMENT IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

13. Please read the following four statements made by Grade 6 teachers:



Which of these statements most closely resemble what you do at the moment? Please explain why you think so.

PURPOSE AND USE OF ASSESSMENT

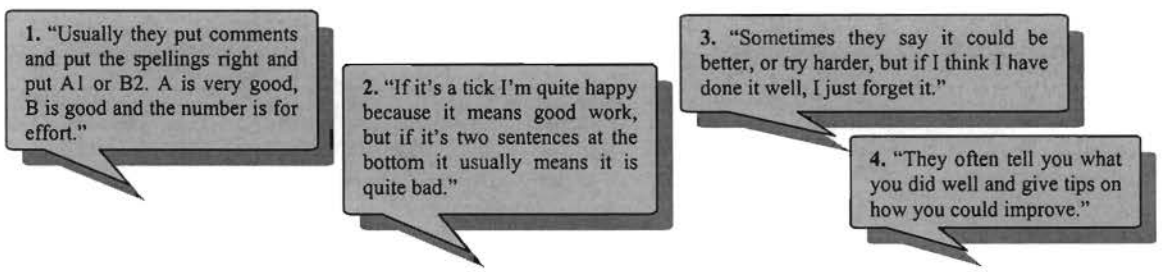
14. Please complete the following table as far as you can.

The table includes eight school assessment strategies. Please indicate which ones you use by selecting either the number or numbers for the marking information, its purpose and rate how often the strategy is used in the classroom.

If you do not use one or more of these strategies, leave the relevant section blank.

STRATEGIES **Teacher and/or school developed strategies.**	**MARKING INFORMATION** **1 = nothing** **2 = mark or percent** **3 = code or symbol** **4 = written comment**	**PURPOSES** **1 = to inform my teaching and planning** **2 = to improve students learning** **3 = to monitor students progress** **4 = to provide information for mark schedules and school reports**	**USED** **1 = little** **2 = sometimes** **3 = frequently** **4 = often**
EXAMPLE: **Assignments**	2 (mark or percent) 4 (written comment)	2 (to improve students learning) 3 (to monitor students progress)	4 (often)
A. Assignments			
B. Homework			
C. Rubrics			
D. Tests			
E. Portfolios			
F. Self-assessment			
G. Peer-assessment			
H. Observation			
I. Other types (please specify)			

15. Please read the following four statements made by Grade 6 learners:



Which of these statements do you think most closely capture how learners might respond to current assessment practice at your school? Please explain.

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THANK YOU FOR GIVING TIME TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

School of Education

1 Reform Road
Rondebosch
7700

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E-mail: sibrown_uk@hotmail.com

6th September 2004

Dear

I am writing to ask for your permission to carry out some research with three Grade 6 teachers at the school. The purpose is to familiarise myself with common approaches to assessment practices in primary schools; an area which I am researching for my Masters dissertation at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

This stage of my study concentrates on testing an instrument to find out how teachers in general might understand and use formative assessment in the primary classroom. I would like teachers to complete a questionnaire and then take part in an interview, which will serve as a means of giving feedback on the questionnaire, identifying limitations and aiding re-design. The interviews should not take very long and would take place at both the schools and teachers convenience. If possible, I would like to complete these interviews by **Friday 17th September** and enclose a letter for the teachers providing them with a general outline and asking them for a suitable time. A copy of the questionnaire is also attached.

On completion of my dissertation, I will be more than happy to provide you with a summary of the most important findings and a copy of my proposed procedure.

The Education Department (WCED) has granted me permission to conduct research at departmental institutions and I have attached a copy of the written approval. Under the conventions of the department and UCT, the publication of my results shall ensure anonymity so that neither the school nor participant teachers can be identified.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Simon Brown

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School of Education

1 Reform Road
Rondebosch
7700

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C: (072) 108 6165
Email: sibrown_uk@hotmail.com

6th September 2004

Dear Grade 6 Teacher

I am writing to ask for your participation in some research. This will involve you completing a questionnaire and with your permission, a follow-up interview. The purpose is to find out more about what teachers think about assessment and how they go about it; an area which I am researching for my Masters dissertation at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

As a teacher myself, I can appreciate that this will be an intrusion on your undoubtedly hectic professional life, particularly at this stage of the term. However, your views and comments are very important to this project and to the successful outcome of two years personal study! This stage of my research concentrates on testing a procedure to find out how teachers in general understand and use assessment in the primary school. I would be grateful if you could complete the attached questionnaire (*completion takes approximately 30 minutes*) and then bring this to the interview, which would take place at your convenience. By completing this questionnaire you will not only be providing useful information on current practice but also giving valuable insights into the procedure itself. Furthermore, there will be opportunities to suggest directions and give guidance about how best to explore and support assessment in the classroom.

It would be very helpful for my research if the interview could be completed by **Friday 17th September**. I am available most days and would appreciate it if you could leave some dates and suitable times at the office and I will then confirm an appointment, alternatively you could always ring, email or send me a text message.

Under the conventions of the WCED and UCT, the publication of my results shall ensure anonymity so that neither the school nor participant teachers can be identified.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Simon Brown

Stage 1: Interview schedule

Interview:

Grade 6 primary school class teachers (qualitative – semi-structured).

Purpose:

Provide information about the assessment/s used with learners.
(Discover what assessment is going on and how it is used - 'reality before research').

Planning:

Start by thanking the interviewee for volunteering.
Assure confidentiality and anonymity.
Get agreement on how interview will be recorded – taped. Using it as my note-pad.
Explain that all tapes will be destroyed on completion of study.
Explain that they are not obliged to answer if they don't want to.
Develop rapport; give brief personal background and purpose of study.
Reasonably well dressed – assume an average teacher.

Schedule:

1. For how many years have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at this school?
3. What is your position/level of responsibility in this school?
4. Can you tell me about some of the ways in which you assess?
5. Are there less formal ways in which you assess learners?
6. Are you familiar with the terms formative and summative assessment?
   (If not, explain and discuss)
7. With regards to the way you assess do you think you use it for formative purposes? If yes, please explain.
8. Feedback plays a very important role in formative assessment; in what ways do you provide feedback to the learners?
9. How are the results of your assessment used?
   (By you, by the school, by parents?)
10. Are there any assessment you are required to use, but if given the choice would not? If yes, please explain source of requirement.
11. How do you feel about the overall amount of assessment you do?
12. Do you think other teachers' do this? / Does this apply to your colleagues?

Stage 1: Interview transcription samples

2 schools - Grade 6 teachers: 2 males & 3 females
Edited transcription from audio-recordings 7th, 8th & 9th June 2004

For how many years have you been teaching?

School 1		← School 2 →		
Steve	**Jenny**	**Vicky**	**Sarah**	**Gordon**
9 years	6 years	4 years	1st year	8 years

How long have you been teaching at this school?

School 1		← School 2 →		
Steve	**Jenny**	**Vicky**	**Sarah**	**Gordon**
3 years	4 years	4 years	1st year	3 years

What is your position/level of responsibility in this school?

School 1		← School 2 →		
Steve	**Jenny**	**Vicky**	**Sarah**	**Gordon**
Head of Grade Maths Geography/History	English	Head of Grade English	EMS	Maths Science

Can you tell me about some of the ways in which you assess?

School 1:
Steve - Depends on learning area. Rubrics, investigations and marks. Teachers pick certain things to assess. When I assess I don't want the learners to know what is being assessed. Use rubrics which go into the learners books. Maths dominates with summative marks out of 100 for outcomes 1-5. We are learning a system. It is very new to us. I prefer different assessment for each learning area. Parents want mark. Standardised assessment depends on time. Maths and English has lots of time and assessment. Test weeks Grade 4-7, Grade 7 have exams as well (no difference just preparation for high school).

Jenny - Formal testing, rubrics, OBE. I explain it beforehand on board or give them copies (which they tend to lose). Marks. I give impression marks as well. I used to mark laboriously but, they never go back and look at it, they just check comment and mark, so I am more disciplined about not doing it. It helps to go over work again with corrections, so you can hear and see how it is supposed to sound e.g. in English I used to get friends to read critically and try to polish it up. It doesn't work. They often haven't even read it themselves so I don't do it. I discuss my marks with learners and get them to write rubrics in homework book.

School 2:
Vicky - Reports. 1st term –behavioural settling into Grade. Then 3 terms of 3 academic cycles. Better than trying to break neck to get enough assessment marks by April for mid-year reports. Marks out of 20. Standardised tests which all classes do at the same time, a test timetable is given at the beginning of each term. For example, in English we do language comprehensions which are not isolated tests. Essentially with this whole OBE we shouldn't even be marking like this anymore (out of a total), we

should in our minds be thinking of codes. We use 5 codes (1-5) essentially you can (shouldn't be) equate it to a % (e.g. 1 = 0-20%). Reports now reflect codes. This is the first year we are fully OBE. Maths marks are formal and standardised e.g. out of 100 fractions (50) and computation (50) + mental maths all combined to get overall % so 40% = code 3 and 60% = code 4.
Coding is bringing the level down to the lowest common denominator. That is the purpose; nobody will never not make it. In order to keep a child back they have to get 1's and 2's and it's almost impossible to get a 1. Misleading for parents and child. No guidelines, its wishy-washy skills related, so vague. They are lowering standards as everybody has umpteen chances, it is not life realistic. You have got to be able to acquire knowledge and represent it again. I feel it is important to have both codes and %'s, parents want to see how their child is doing in relation to rest of class. You can't see this with codes. Before you got a grade aggregate. Competition it's a natural sort of thing are you above/average/below? Marks and codes is my preference.
Parents need to sign all the tests, similar in all learning areas. Range of assessment used e.g. Geography - test on map-work, project, and oral. We try to spread assessment out with different types and weightings, not just formal tests. Children don't really know what is in tests. After the test we go through redo what they got incorrect – otherwise danger of teaching to the test. You should actually test to teach. No one is going to learn anything if you don't go over it again.

Sarah - Weekly tests in different learning areas. Timetable for term. Sat under test conditions and marked by teacher. What happens afterwards? – go through tests look for mistakes and do corrections. Learners call out marks or come up. Reports with results and general comment. 1st term - progress 2nd- 4th term - academic report with codes 1-5 which works out as 20% blocks. Not meant to be like that, supposed to give a code straight out. My decisions come from a rubric which is in marks because it is easy to do it numerically and then convert to codes. My training was to use codes but, %'s allow you to see where the child is. I don't think the child is bothered about codes or %'s but parents find it difficult and want to know where their child is in relation to the class average.

Gordon - Assessment at this school is twisted and bent to what we like. Assessment in Maths and Science was a free-for-all last year; we kind of just threw it all together for a final mark which didn't matter because parents didn't see the breakdown, only the %. This year the Govt. has come up with weightings in each subject area. E.g. in Science there are 3 learning areas: investigations (experiments with rubrics, criteria which children are aware of) 30%, knowledge (formal standardised written tests) 40% Integrated Science & environment 30%. From this an overall summative % is given.

Are there less formal ways in which you assess learners?

School 1:
Steve - You mean peer assessment and those kinds of things. I generally use these in subjects that don't count in their exams and reports e.g. EMS We do experiment with them and we are still finding out if we really trust them. I use group work and get them to give a formative mark (1-5) e.g. who is the leader?

Jenny - Observing. Group work. Taking in books once a fortnight to check. I give a book mark. OBE stuff is not test related at all. Huge gap between test level and normal level. If you don't announce that you are going to take in books often the standard is less. I use it for monitoring. Have to attach stakes to get better work.
Rating system – Govt. Ed. Dept. 1-4. There are 10,000 different ways to assess but, not now, it is just going to be 1-4. I take mark and convert it to rating. Not supposed to equate % to ratings. Inadequate way. Something out of 12 marks e.g. 6 out of 12 might mean only a 2 on rating scale. As we become more confident with OBE there will be less equating.

School 2:
Vicky - Less formal you mean in your mind e.g. oral. Don't really assess informally maybe in reading.
[*Prompt*] Self and peer assessment especially with projects e.g. History - explorers make a board game. Each group assesses another group by playing the game. A 1-5 rubric is provided by teacher (attractive, rules, fun, and questions). All the peer assessments are then given in and the teacher will take an average. It is incredibly interesting; they are always really hard on each other.
Peer assessment is a good indicator when you can use it but, you need to give them a rubric to guide them.

Sarah - Self assessment e.g. Maths, spelling or vocabulary. Marking their friends work – peer assessment. I give the answers and they mark. Or in group work, they assess each others contribution by giving a verbal comment e.g. I think it is nice because of this.

Gordon - [*Prompt*] Self assessment, I think there is a school of thought that they should but, the marks they give aren't accurate, it still works on a buddy-buddy system at this age (if a friend then 80% if an arch-enemy they fail them). I don't trust them at this age and prefer formal tests.

Are you familiar with the terms formative and summative assessment?
(If not, explain and discuss)
&
With regards to the way you assess do you think you use it for formative purposes? If yes, please explain.

School 1:
Steve - I have my own interpretation.
Formative is a mark to tell us where they are weak or strong and tells themselves what to work on. It tests whether he has got the skills. EMS and group work lend itself to formative. Formative is a very nice humanist idea that all children will want to improve themselves and take any bit of assessment to work with – doesn't really happen like that. The majority of my time is motivating to learn which is not really picked up in assessment. Only by the top-third, they might change their learning from 75-78% they are able to push themselves. In order for the bottom half to move from 40-60% they must learn it. They are more interested in getting it finished.
Summative is testing lots of things. Overall it tests how hard they are working and can be used as a way of linking ratings to %. It tests what he is producing by using tests and assignments. Maths lends itself to it with weekly tables tests.
They don't know what is being assessed e.g. certain homework sheets count although we kind of tell them though.
I keep a running total of their tests results in mark book. Weak ones come out for individual help and go to extra lessons; sometimes I insist that they attend extra lessons. There is a lot of pressure on kids. Skills are easier to assess than just knowledge.
Some teachers work better with certain groups e.g. less able. It depends on relationship.

Jenny - Formative is an ongoing assessment of where they are and how to assist them. Using rubrics and support staff because classes are too big to give individual feedback.
Summative is more the mark. A test, series of results. Greatest ally are parents in helping performance [*extrinsic rewards*].
You know which children are never going to achieve a good mark, also know underachievers, no record of this, it is ongoing. In OBE exams are only meant to

count for 30%. In English tests we have 190 marks and make it out of 100% this is decided upon by bookmarks, projects, tests etc.

School 2:
Vicky - Formative is reports and codes, ongoing assessment and formal tests. Summative is more an indicator of where they are academically, marks out of 10. It's more holistic.

Sarah - Formative is formal testing, written testing, very much marks.
Summative is more observation, assessing progression, class-work. Giving marks under less formal conditions. I do this less, it doesn't count, marks don't play a role, doesn't come into their reports. [*Confusion in definition discussed and explained*].

Gordon - Summative already understood and discussed previously.
What do you mean by formative? After explanation – ok, I must be honest; I don't think we practice that at this school. Perhaps in Maths you can identify with it and through assessment, use that to bring up to speed. But in content based subjects very rarely do we go back over an area that they are struggling with. We just keep going, we've got a year plan and they've got to finish it. I guess we don't go back because it is a culture not to. Formative assessment is less used to be quite honest, I'm not sure it is even thought about besides Maths. It's actually never been brought up before. I think we don't use it because it is not part of our learning system, it's the way we have been brought up I guess. If you don't learn it that's your fault…tough luck.

Feedback plays a very important role in formative assessment; in what ways do you provide feedback to the learners?

School 1:
Steve - Tends to be through rubrics which help with that. My colleagues don't have a clue what is going on. OBE introduced the idea of formative so it is official now. I give written comments; it depends on rubric if it is more detailed. There has been so much introduced in last 10 years. There is no guidance which leads to confusion, I do the best I can and they [*colleagues*] just follow me. Children don't pay enough attention to rubrics.

Jenny - Children call out results next lesson, children with low marks come out one at a time. Not enough time to see everyone. Do pupils assess themselves? Don't have much faith in that. Learners are favourable to peers and themselves. Sometimes I use self, peer and teacher assessment, put in a line (teacher assessment is the one that counts though!). Feedback is given through marking books, through rubric, class feedback and comments (mainly on effort) e.g. 'reads like a story more than a report', 'excellent descriptions', 'I can't read this', 'this is an insult to your intelligence and mine'. Incredibly labour intensive for a teacher. Tests where there are common mistakes are put into next test, so I can look at this again, it feedbacks to me. The rating scale is pretty much determined by the end of term 1. It is too broad and vague. No guidelines.

School 2:
Vicky - Feedback through marking books, I chat to them. Comments written in books are a waste of time. So many are incredibly careless, don't check e.g. spellings, they never look at it. They are more concerned with marks. It's going to be an incredible shift [*referring to codes*]. Where is the incentive to real achievers? There is no way to stand out.
I remember when I was at school my teacher would say you must be more interested in the remark not the mark. What the teacher says is going to be more useful than the mark. It's so true, that is the mindset that we are going to look to.

I retest orally but, there is no second chance. Pupils are all very aware of their marks. They call out their marks but, if they have done badly they come up to tell me. Tests are a big deal.

Sarah - Feedback to each other in oral work. They take it very personally though. Teacher feedback is easier for them. I give rubrics which they paste in their books. Verbal information is provided on how to improve. Immediate feedback for oral – they definitely like it much more. Written work doesn't get as much feedback. I'll write a comment if something stands out e.g. they haven't used paragraphs. I don't speak to them otherwise. If there is something that everyone is doing then I feedback to the class. Common themes that occur from my marking I then teach in lessons. I'm still learning I use my marks a lot to see that I have taught it properly.

Gordon - We go through tests and answers and show them where they may have gone wrong but, certainly we don't go back and re-teach the area. We used to re-test in the past but, now the whole Ed. System has changed we don't, we just teach a section, do the test, get our marks and never go back to it. Whereas when I was at school you would do term 1's work and get tested, then in term 2 you would get tested on term 1's and term 2's work so you are forever going back to things that you did in the beginning and that has certainly been done away with as times gone.
My theory is that kids are soft today; everything has been given to them on a plate, really the amount of work they have to learn is minimal compared to the amount that I had to learn when I was at school.
This national change to ratings I think is crazy. There would be some merit to it if the codes were done in a better way. To place someone with 51% and 69% in the same code is insane. From the teacher, parent and child point of view they need to know more or less where they are. We used to have A, B, C, D & F - each letter was about a 10% barrier. I think that it is far more accurate than a 20% barrier which can mislead. The kids are clueless with these codes; they don't know what they have got. If I'm given 60% for a code 4, I would want to know how many more % I need to get to the next code. Where is the room for improvement and where can they change to do better? I'm not dead against the code system maybe 1-8 would be better it needs something more accurate.

How are the results of your assessment used?
(By you, by the school, by parents?)

School 1:
Steve - Parents are taking a while to settle down to not getting %'s. 1st report is a self evaluation – formative. It creates discussion e.g. why do you think that is? The 2nd, 3rd & 4th reports are three cycles and % are given for learning areas and ratings for each outcome which are linked to indicators Achieved (3) means we are happy. The push by Ed. Dept is to get rid of % and just have indicators. Parents sign and return form three times a year. We discuss assessment in academic planning meetings and weekly grade meetings. We also do some moderation work.

Jenny - Not just ratings but still use %'s for mark because it is more formative as to where they are. Moved away from class average, competing against yourself is better than against others. Parents are more concerned with %'s and are frustrated with rating system. They are getting better now having had 3 years of it. We see parents of learners getting 1's and 2's, which indicates a possible need to repeat the year.
1st term – self assessment report goal setting, behaviour (often distorted)
2nd, 3rd & 4th term - reports, 3 cycles for parents copy goes in personal file for next teacher.
Grade 6 report is very important – used by high schools.

Transfer document from grade to grade.
Weekly meetings give colleagues feedback about areas to improve.

School 2:
Vicky - Schools use test results and transfer the information from grade to grade. I don't really use that. I don't look at last years stuff. Pupils also have a portfolio in which they put a piece of work from every year. Mr. B (Principal) gets class teachers schedules which are submitted to Dept.

Sarah - I use assessments to help them improve. I use little tests along the way which they mark themselves. I also do extra lessons if they struggle in tests, we kind of teach to tests rather than testing to teach.

Gordon - At the end of the day we are responsible to parents. I'm going to give % rather than codes because it means more. They deserve to know, they are paying fees, and they don't want to be thrown into this pot of codes. Do the children know their codes? I'm actually not sure, there is a summary in their reports but, they get marks back in class, not a code, class-work and tests are mark driven, reports are code driven this leads to confusion. Maybe we should change our mindset and not use %'s.
I record marks on excel, which is made up of numerical marks. I generally don't write comments, only if it deserves a comment if somebody does really well or badly, with an explanation why they have done badly and making relevant points. Nothing long and laborious. The average kid just looks at the mark and skips the comment. Effort is assessed through rubrics so, they are rewarded for that.
At the end of the day we are trying to create a holistic student and giving them different assessments in learning areas benefits everybody.

Are there any assessment you are required to use, but if given the choice would not? If yes, please explain source of requirement.

School 1:
Steve - Prefer combination

Jenny - No

School 2:
Vicky - English and Afrikaans viewing and listening assessments because they are so subjective.

Sarah - Unfortunately a lot of kids struggle under test conditions, they 'bomb out in tests'. I think their should be different ways of assessing under different conditions.

Gordon - Coding system.

How do you feel about the overall amount of assessment you do?

School 1:
Steve - Not sure what Dept. is going to require next. We need time to settle down. Once things are set up then we can assess more.

Jenny - About right. English is heavy with 6 LO(s). You are constantly gathering marks unto yourself like a squirrel for the next report.

School 2:
Vicky - There is a lot more now. When I was at school there were just tests but, now we assess listening, viewing and reading skills. Assessment is a lot more time consuming as there are 6 LO(s) for every subject which doesn't allow time to focus on what we really want to. We'll plough on until someone realises it doesn't work. I think they are going to be building a hugely unskilled workforce, people who are not going to be able to do anything for themselves and won't have the brains to be able to do so. This is because of the OBE system and coding.
Why has it been tried in so many countries and never been successful. It's great in theory, measuring skills rather than content but, not so great in practice.

Sarah - I think schools need to move away from marks, (there is such a big impact on marks) and do assessment in other ways, do a lot more standardized projects and group work with peer and self assessment which does actually have an impact on end of term reports. I would like to see them do more creative work.
Learners need a mark or code at the end of term for them to see how they are getting on it, it motivates them.

Gordon - A lot more assessment is going on from when I first started teaching. I'm not complaining. Perhaps it is good for the kids to have more and get an average. We try to do at least 2 assessments for each learning area to get a balance. Some kids perform under pressure rather than consistently. Although I do think it is harder to achieve in learning areas than it used to be, you can't just do well in one exam now, you have to do 6/7 different things which makes it harder to maintain consistency and means more assessment all round.

Stage 2: Piloting the questionnaire interview schedule

Interview:

Grade 6 primary school class teachers (qualitative – semi-structured).

Purpose:

Provide feedback and information about the questionnaire.

Planning:

Start by thanking the interviewee for volunteering.
Assure confidentiality and anonymity.
Get agreement on how interview will be recorded - taped. Using it as my note-pad.
Explain that all tapes will be destroyed on completion of study.
Explain that they are not obliged to answer if they don't want to.
Develop rapport; give brief personal background and purpose of study.
Reasonably well dressed – assume an average teacher.

Schedule:

1. Approximately how long did it take you to complete the questionnaire? (Did you find it too long, too short or about right?)

2. What are your thoughts on the appearance of the questionnaire?

3. What are your thoughts on layout, sectionalizing and ordering of questions?

4. Were there any questions that you found difficult to understand? (Were any questions ambiguous, loaded, too sensitive or threatening?)

5. Are there any questions where you felt you could have written more detailed answers or would have liked to add further comments?

6. Which of these questions make you think about your own assessment practice?

7. Is there anything about the questionnaire that you feel should be changed?

8. Are there any assessment areas or questions about assessment that you expected to be asked and were not included? (Should they be included?)

9. Do you think that the questionnaire provides an opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice?

10. What have you learned from completing the questionnaire and discussing it with me?

Stage 2: Piloting the procedure interview transcription samples

2 schools - Grade 6 teachers: 1 male & 4 females
Edited transcription from audio-recordings 25th, 27th & 31st August 2004

Approximately how long did it take you to complete the questionnaire? (Did you find it too long, too short or about right?)

School 1:
Kate - Not long. It was straightforward and simple. I did it in two different sessions. It wasn't too long. About right. You could have asked more but then in would have taken more time and time is precious in teaching.

Jane - I did it in little bits, but in total no more than 20 minutes. I think it was about right, an acceptable length. What didn't put me off was the 30 minute time approximation in the letter.

School 2:
Andrea - It took over half an hour. It was ok.

Feroza - A bit longer than 20 minutes.

Brandon - About 20 minutes maybe a bit less.

What are your thoughts on the appearance of the questionnaire? & What are your thoughts on layout, sectionalizing and ordering of questions?

School 1:
Kate - Straightforward, it was fine. Not put off by 6 pages. There is enough space to comment.

Jane - Posed some very interesting questions. I like the layout and the third question as it puts you straight into the classroom context. I enjoyed doing it. It was nicely laid out with a lot of variety. You have asked us to look at lots of different areas which we maybe don't think about. The sections flowed well.

School 2:
Andrea - The layout is fine. Good examples chosen. It was a nice spread, looking at different learning areas. It was interesting to see the different areas of assessment and seeing that this is something that could be done in class. I was questioning and reminding myself what I am doing at present, what is my automatic behaviour, I was having to stop and think.

Feroza - It was easy to answer, logical, self-explanatory and the wording was concise.

Brandon - Fine, quite good. The first page put me off a bit, I got a bit of a bogged down feeling with the marking question but, the others were fine. Overall it was very good; it made me reflect on what I am doing in terms of assessment.

Were there any questions that you found difficult to understand?
(Were any questions ambiguous, loaded, too sensitive or threatening?)

School 1:
Kate - *Question 14*, 'student/parent/teacher' I wasn't sure of the purpose, was it for all three or individuals. I didn't know what you meant here. The rest of the question was pretty straightforward. Could change the purpose to 'for the teacher' or if they could be separate it would be easier but, space is a problem.
The question at the end, *Question15*. I wasn't definitely one of those. I was a mixture but, the space afterwards allowed me to write this.

Jane - I didn't think that the maths one, *Question 9*, with the different signs was appropriate. Perhaps the aim could be try and create the most challenging examples that you can give me to try and challenge your peers with ten sums.
Question 14, we only do exams in Grade 7. *Question 7*, this could depend on the task but, it is important to feedback. I certainly try to but, I have only 30 learners, perhaps if I had 70 I would feel differently.

School 2:
Andrea - *Question 3*, I found it difficult to understand. I could see that you had an outcome for this but, for me, I would have marked it with greater clarity. Am I looking for grammar, language structure, coherent paragraph, punctuation? Am I looking for only one or two specific things? This one looks for contrasts but, are you looking for the use of adjectives, how well they have described things and then I would be able to mark it from these. I would normally give a code, mark in pencil and write 'Well done, you have got to grips with…' it is less offensive.
Question 6, I think the 'traffic robots', 'smiley faces' can be used as a checklist but, I am very reluctant to use something like this to try and get assessment from. I do it more for interest's sake – How do you feel? Difficult to deal with those that don't understand in a class of 35/36+. How do I make time for those ones to get it? [*Prompt*] Perhaps using learners to help one another, a 'buddy system', it is something that I do use and can be very effective.
Question 9, I would have rather given them an expanded version and done it the other way around. *Question 14*, I was a little confused with 'purposes'.

Feroza - *Question 3*, I am not really an English teacher. I had to come back to it. It would have been easier with a rubric with clear criteria and outcomes, with marks for content. *Question 14*, I was not really sure what you meant by checklists.

Brandon - I wasn't really comfortable with *Question 3*. I couldn't really answer because the criteria for an essay, I wouldn't know – was it for grammar or quality of story. I started putting in all the punctuation but then I thought is this actually the criteria? Then I thought this is a good story, so I was a bit unsure how to mark it. I am far removed from English teaching in terms of marking policy.

Are there any questions where you felt you could have written more detailed answers or would have liked to add further comments?

Schools 1 & 2:
All respondents - 'No'.

Which of these questions make you think about your own assessment practice?

Kate - The first one especially (*Question 3*) because I know for myself that some teachers would have seen this and loved to tear it apart putting all sorts of red pen over it and punctuation mistakes and miss the whole point of what the kid is trying to say. So, it just affirms my kind of teaching. That's not what it is all about, you have said there what the focus of the task was, so if the focus was looking at punctuation I would go wild with my red pen. It made me think and reaffirm what my belief is. I had a comment recently in English moderation suggesting that I didn't focus enough on punctuation and spellings. It also depends on personality of teacher. It made me think that it is more important that they are expressing themselves, than that they are doing it in the 'perfect' way. The use of language in this example is absolutely fantastic, I wish my Grade 6 would write like this and if they did, I would be thrilled because of the language used but, you know we so easily dampen their spirits. I think you did mention it in this question [*Prompt regression in learners from marking – Did this influence the way you marked it?*] I know it does though, it sparks something in you to remember that when you are marking. Putting that in there did make me think. It is a good opening question, it certainly makes you think. I have been doing some reading about this area and the importance of bringing up the positives in your comment, so instead of always pulling it apart bring up the positive first so they feel that what they have done is acceptable and are able to accept the criticism whereas if you come to the criticism first they don't hear what you have to say.
Question 12 &13, self- and peer-assessment. I just know for myself that I do a lot of self-marking. Peer marking I don't do as much and I know that I could do more. However, not everyone is able to assess objectively. Often at the age they are, I've seen the popular kids saying it is fantastic and battle to get past the superficial of whose work they are actually marking. There are ways around it though, you could give them work and not let them see whose name it was also I think with a bit of training and age and maturity. There are some kids who can do it and others who can't. It made me think that I don't do it often enough. I shy away from it. In Question 11, I think they are all fantastic but, I don't necessarily do them all. I think that teachers are moving away from the way I was taught, the old education system. I think it is harder to change for the older teachers. I certainly think there is value in it. Being interested in the child not just the mark, there is a lot of scope for that. I don't do it but, I could. It gets them thinking about what helps them learn, what they would like to achieve and how to overcome difficulties. As an English teacher my focus is on expressing yourself and communicating, I'm not so good at all the accurate grammar and stuff.
I loved the 'smiley face' thing (*Question 6*). It is less threatening. Although I think that they are still very reliant on what the teacher says. They still need that affirmation from the teacher they haven't got confidence in themselves. I think it is not being used enough. I like the idea that if they ask how they are doing my immediate reply is how do you think you are doing?
Question 8, we are slowly moving away form marks and using codes. I think the kids are ok with comments only. They are slowly getting used to it. Makes me focus more on what they can and can't do and they feel better about themselves. It certainly motivates the lower ability kids but, I find it harder to keep the top achievers motivated. These kind of practices could help balance the need to succeed in tests with the need to understand work, I like it, it's more focused on what you can do, not what is my mark going to be.

Jane - *Questions 4, 5 & 6.* The scenarios were quite interesting. You have to say to yourself, 'ok, what do I usually do'. Particularly the one about geography assignments *Question 5*, do I waste another hour marking and everyone scores lower than they are actually capable of, or do I hand them back so the assessment can be much more accurate. It also makes me think of how our assessment focus is changing. In the last few years, we try to do so much more positive, try and find good and not alter the child's work too much. Think of the bigger picture. Try to find good before commenting on what could be improved.
Question 4 was very interesting and realistic. Made me think about being careful of a child's self-esteem and how you deal with it. It also made me consider how I would usually deal with it. I would want to start of positively and then point out that a discount should have paid less. It is situation dependent.
Question 6, made me think that I don't use this as much as I probably should. When I looked at that, I first thought would it be beneficial and then I thought yes, particularly for strugglers, because it is such an unthreatening way. I think this could be a great system and I need to use it more often.
Question 3, makes me think how my marking has changed, it is very different compared to five years ago, when there was a lot more focus on is the language all correct, is the spelling all correct and very often the content is overlooked. I thought the example you had give us was outstanding, my students could learn from this. [*Prompt – Explain how you marked it?*] Obviously, I had a look at the grammar but the way the child is expressing themselves is so good, lots of description. In the past, this passage would have been marked a lot lower than it would be now because the fundamental basics might not be all there. I marked this passage with your learning intention in mind. Normally, I try to give rubrics before they even start for instance these are the areas that I'm going to be looking for, I mention those areas that I am going to assess and set clear guidelines. In the past we always gave a mark e.g. 25 out of 30, I decided not to record marks in child's book. I kept a record; I would know the breakdown as to the mark so I can clearly comment. The comment should always be positive. As a teacher you have to give a mark according to the criteria. I prefer comments. I found you asked a very interesting question (*Question 8*) about whether children ignore written comments. I think they find spelling and grammar corrections irrelevant and even though we do that, I don't think they find it of benefit. They don't really pay attention to my corrections.

School 2:
Andrea - Scenarios (*Question 4, 5 & 6*). These are things that happen often in class and they really made me think about what I usually do. Question 5 for me, I needed to think about my teaching or 'instruction'; I don't think that I would have marked them down. Drawing attention to it would be of more benefit to learners.
Question 7 reminded me that spoken feedback is far more beneficial. It should be immediate and cause thinking to take place.

Feroza - I enjoyed the scenarios (*Question 4, 5 & 6*). Especially *Question 5*, it made me think about my own assessment practices and how I should be assessing myself as part of the learning process.
Question 7 made me think and consider the importance of giving feedback but it does depend on class size.

Question 9 was useful as it involved the children in their learning, they take responsibility. It is a great idea but a little basic for this level. It's about not being in the teacher centred learning sphere all the time.
Using open questions (*Question 10*) reminded me that they can extend all ranges of ability. I don't think that I use open questions enough.

Brandon - Every question made me think about my current assessment practice. *Questions 4, 5 & 6* the scenarios. *Question 4*, quite an open, realistic question, it is good. My natural response would be to first try and decipher the question for them, the concept of discount, what does it mean. *Question 5*, it made me think about an instance, recently where all the learners had failed to include references and I decided to give them all back, let them acknowledge the mistake and correct it, so I could them mark again. Sometimes as teachers, this whole marking concept becomes the most important, valuable, nearly sacred thing and we overlook the point which is about actually learning. *Question 6*, I thought was quite useful. It could give me a good understanding and is simple. A fair idea, I would use it, I don't but, I could use these systems.
Question 12, I very rarely do this. It made me think I should be. I lack trust in their responsibility - Grade 6 issue with age and maturity.
Question 13, when you set up peer assessment, the learners can see that the other learners are also experiencing problems, they don't feel that they are on there own and so become less anxious. Also they tend to learn from each other because they speak the same language; they are more comfortable, more relaxed, it's not the teacher talking. They can become brutally honest. It's easier for them to say negative things as well as positive. Very rarely do they take it personally.
Question 15, this is the way I assess [*Statement 2*] sometimes I doubt whether I am doing it properly but the fact is I'm always in the class watching them and assisting them so I know exactly their strengths and weaknesses and what they are struggling with. I made me feel comfortable with myself and the way I am assessing.

Is there anything about the questionnaire that you feel should be changed?

School 1:
Kate - No not really. **Jane** - No its fine.

School 2:
Andrea - No. **Feroza** - No, I don't think so. **Brandon** - No, it is quite fine.

Are there any assessment areas or questions about assessment that you expected to be asked and were not included? (Should they be included?)

School 1:
Kate - None of the forms of marking or strategies was a rubric. You mentioned checklists but not rubrics which I use more. Maybe include something to do with marks where we actually have to assign marks, but I don't know if that is what you are trying to do. Perhaps it would make sense not to include as assessment is trying to move away from marks. Maybe a little more on the aims of assessment and linking them to objectives.

Jane - When I think of assessment, straight away I think rubrics. I was surprised that there wasn't something about rubrics and informing the class before a task. Because there are so many outcomes we need to look at and specifics that we need to know whether the child has mastered it or not. So if the task is very broad they need to know this is what I am looking at.
Perhaps *Question 3* could include assessment standards to bring it up to speed.

School 2:
Andrea - You don't include OBE and that is very much on teachers' minds at the moment. What are the skills and knowledge that I want to impart her, how am I going to assess it, now let's see what the context and content is.

Feroza - I expected something on self- and peer-assessment. I would have thought something about rubrics would have been in. It provides useful feedback and references for the child and teacher. In *Question 3*, I had to make my own assumptions, it would have been much better if it had a rubric.

Brandon - No, I don't think so.

Do you think that the questionnaire provides an opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice?

School 1:
Kate - Yes, having to explain makes you think about it. Good balance between open and closed.

Jane - Yes, I think so.

School 2:
Andrea - I think it would make them think. It is food for thought; it questions what they do and could provide data on what is happening. It must be interesting to look at different methods; it must vary from school to school and teacher to teacher.

Feroza - It helped me, I do try to keep up to date with what is happening in education but I found that this questionnaire got me thinking about the varying forms and uses of assessment. I have also realised that I can use assessment to motivate children, I think there should be more emphasis on this in my teaching.

Brandon - Every question made me think about what I am doing and then re-evaluate some of the ways I assess.

What have you learned from completing the questionnaire and discussing it with me?

[*It was felt that this summary question was not needed in the follow-up interviews*].

Stage 3: Testing the questionnaire interview schedule

Interview:

Grade 6 primary school class teachers (qualitative – semi-structured).

Purpose:

Provide feedback and information about the questionnaire.

Planning:

Start by thanking the interviewee for volunteering.
Assure confidentiality and anonymity.
Get agreement on how interview will be recorded – taped. Using it as my note-pad.
Explain that all tapes will be destroyed on completion of study.
Explain that they are not obliged to answer if they don't want to.
Develop rapport; give brief personal background and purpose of study.
Reasonably well dressed – assume an average teacher.

Schedule:

1. Approximately how long did it take you to complete the questionnaire? (Did you find it too long, too short or about right?)

2. What are your thoughts on the appearance of the questionnaire?

3. What are your thoughts on layout, sectionalizing and ordering of questions?

4. Were there any questions that you found difficult to understand? (Were any questions ambiguous, loaded, too sensitive or threatening?)

5. Are there any questions where you felt you could have written more detailed answers or would have liked to add further comments?

6. Which of these questions make you think about your own assessment practice?

7. Is there anything about the questionnaire that you feel should be changed?

8. Are there any assessment areas or questions about assessment that you expected to be asked and were not included? (Should they be included?)

9. Do you think that the questionnaire provides an opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice?

10. What have you learned from completing the questionnaire and discussing it with me?

Stage 3: Testing the procedure interview transcription samples

2 schools - Grade 6 teachers: 3 males & 2 females
Edited transcription from audio-recordings 17th, 23rd September; 11th October 2004

Approximately how long did it take you to complete the questionnaire? (Did you find it too long, too short or about right?)

School 1:
Michael - Twenty, twenty-five minutes although I could have happily spent a good 45 minutes on it.

Susan - About one hour. It was a bit of a bind particularly at the end of term when we have so many other things to do.

Mark - It didn't take very long at all. It took about 20 minutes.

School 2:
Louise - About 45 minutes. I tried to be quite thorough about the whole thing so maybe it took a bit longer. There weren't any repetitions either, so it covered everything well. I don't see how it could be shortened. It is very good.

Barry - 40 minutes. It depends how much thought you really give it. A lot of teachers are pushed for time, initially when this came around, I was quite stressed, yes, but in the same light if you were to find a number of teachers who were keen to do something like this – to get some kind of feedback quite frankly there were a lot of things that came up that I hadn't actually thought of and I thinks it adds value to the teacher. So its irrespective of length and it is more specifically on the content that we need to be aware and I enjoyed it to the extent that it made me think more about assessment that previously I hadn't explored – so it was informative for me – so from that angle I think it has more value than you could put a time limit on.

What are your thoughts on the appearance of the questionnaire? &
What are your thoughts on layout, sectionalizing and ordering of questions?

School 1:
Michael - I think it's perfect. I don't think it's a case of being too long or too short, I think your questions are good. [*Prompt – Why?*] Because it had me thinking, I'm so often pressed for time in this profession, to actually think and consider reasons, you know, and actually do it [assessment] it's like clockwork and often you don't see the individual needs because you've got so much to do. You just thrash out the answers and move on to the next one. I think we do too much work and too little reflection on assessment.
It's easy to follow, it's quite professional. The layout is good you can see that you have got good computer knowledge and it enhances the whole style of the questionnaire. It's not just a piece of paper, its creative, a good use of colour.

Susan - Fine.

Mark - I think it is a great questionnaire. It is a very interesting questionnaire. It went well. There is a lot of writing to do and I think that might put some teachers off. Why are there only girls on the front cover?

School 2:
Louise - Yes, very professional.

Barry - Very happy, I thought you gave great content, I thought the examples were clearly laid out.

Were there any questions that you found difficult to understand?
(Were any questions ambiguous, loaded, too sensitive or threatening?)

School 1:
Michael - *Question 4*, I wasn't to sure when you asked what you would usually do next, I wasn't sure if you were referring to me in correcting or if you were asking what my correction might be. I felt it was a bit ambiguous.
Question 14, I was confused with the middle part, where you state purpose. The other sections were easy.

Susan - *Question 14*, I wasn't quite sure if you wanted me to put this [*marking information; purpose; used*] for each strategy [*this was confirmed*] and *Question 9 c.* It depends on your grouping, if you have got disruptive children or sort of bright ones in one group and weaker ones in another, a lot of it depends on how you group the children.

Mark - I didn't agree with *Question 8.* Children like to read what you have written as long as it is positive. [*Prompt – Do they act upon it?*] Yes, but you have to reinforce all the time. Their ability to concentrate for a long period of time, they tend to switch off after a while.
Question 5, Scenario 2, I found it strange, if you give an assignment the children have certain expectations that are written down, so the children know exactly what they have to do. I would have gone through the assignment with them. So if they left a key out it is their own fault, I would penalise them.
Question 14 is also open to many types of interpretation. It was quite difficult in the sense that we are still in the learning phase of assessment with the RNCS. A good question but at this point I think many of us would find it difficult to fill in because we are still changing the curriculum.

School 2:
Louise - Just one thing with this marking question [*Question 3*] and how I would mark it, we are obviously putting on the 4 point scale with the new curriculum, so I had to change it to suit the question, whereas you asked it out of 30 [*Prompt – Sorry, did you say I had asked for it to be out of 30? - She re-read the question*] Oh, I saw it as out of 30, a mark out of 30, its ambiguous then!
Question 14, I had to think about it quite a bit before I understood what to do. I wasn't sure if the purposes were for the marking or the assessment strategy. I had to think about it first but, I got it in the end.

Barry - *Question 3*, it is always difficult just marking and giving feedback on an example, whereas in class probably we have thought it through in the context, in the theme we have been working and engaging with. So, for the teacher to assess something that is almost blind, just coming out of nowhere, we don't know the context, we don't know all those things, so it is hypothetical, I know the assessment standards, it is incredibly difficult to mark something that you haven't set because you are not fully aware of the expectation, I mean you can read the assessment standards but, it is always difficult unless you have got a feel for it. It is not always clear cut with assessment standards; sometimes I have to go with my gut feeling.
I think assessment needs to be something that is happening concurrently, all the time and it needs to be within a time-frame so feedback is beneficial. If learners come to you for support and you give feedback straightaway and they are happy, comfortable and confident with that, they can work with it. Whereas a written comment later in which you spend copious amounts of time writing sentences, trying to help and its just look at it, put it down, there is no sense of ownership and for a teacher it is demoralising. *Question 7* made me feel a bit negative. I think the learner's attitude plays an important role.

Are there any questions where you felt you could have written more detailed answers or would have liked to add further comments?

School 1 & 2:
All respondents - 'No'.

Which of these questions make you think about your own assessment practice?

Michael - *Question 2 & 3*, I find that the kids don't respond to my marking - not at all. To be honest with you, I think 70% of the time I'm just window dressing some of the books. You know, I believe in my heart that a kid is not really going to go back and look at spelling corrections or where I've underlined, they just pack it away. I don't think it is going to change and it is such a drain there is so much more that I could be doing with learners rather than investing all my time in marking.
Question 5 was quite interesting. I did have to think. I said that I would have given the guys a rubric which stated that a key was an important part. If it was a scenario where they weren't informed that they had to have a key even though it goes without saying that a key should be connected to a map and half the class make a mistake, I would consider letting them do it again and I'd look at it again.
Question 7 confirmed to me that the balance is wrong. It reminds me of the importance of feedback but there is not enough time. It's something that I need to try and correct.
Question 11, it made me think that it is worthwhile. I do it, but it can be an administrative nightmare, a difficult process

Susan - I'm doing a lot of this already, so it helps confirm what I am doing. We give rubrics before they do it. I think it is important that you don't just throw assessment at them. We do a lot of group assessment and they actually enjoy it. I encourage them to do it. I encourage them to do it in a positive way; they have to give a suggestion of how it could be improved. Most of the kids are quite comfortable with it. You do get the odd child who doesn't like somebody and marks them down but, then I go over it with them.

Question 2 & 3, I liked this. I broke it down into language because that was what you wanted to test mostly. I also did spelling and content. [*Reads answer*] Take away the spelling mistakes and this is actually quite good. [*Prompt -- Do they usually act upon your feedback?*] Yes, they do although they rarely use dictionaries to go over their spelling. I often get them to read out their work or I read some work out without telling them whose it is and then I give my comments and tell them to give me others. They always start talking about it and enjoy it, especially as they don't know who wrote it. I sometimes ask if they agree with the mark that I have given and they are very into it.
Question 4 & 6, the scenarios. This often happens in class, *Question 4* - it is quite realistic. I would say that there is a mistake here and ask what is it? They would then talk it though and he would get the chance to correct it immediately following the class discussion. I would say this is a wonderful shop because when you get a discount, you actually pay more! Humour works, then he would have the last word.
Question 6, yes, I do use this [reads answer]. It made me think that it works more effectively with other types of assessment feedback.
The questions on self-and peer-assessment (*Questions 9-11*) we are doing a lot already. I also thought of how I get the parents involved. I asked parents to assess their child making sugar-glass. I provided a rubric like, could they do it on their own? Did they learn anything from this? It's quite interesting; I got some really nice feedback from them. It can be done. The learners thought it was quite cool. A lot of the mums said it was fantastic; they were so excited about it.
Question 15, I actually read these comments to the boys. It was interesting to discuss the different perceptions with the learners. They prefer comment 4; they said they like rubrics, written comments, positive feedback and suggestions. I actually asked the boys if they liked having a breakdown of marks and if they liked it when I gave a tick or ticks for good points, they said yes. They also liked things to be written.

Mark - These are questions that should be addressed and it has really made me aware of where I could be improving in certain areas of my own teaching so I think the questions are spot on. I think the questions were quality questions. I think these questions were all relevant.
Question 3, I personally would have marked every single sentence and write in the answers for the children and I know for a fact that the children don't look at it. At the bottom I would write a general comment and highlight the blatant mistakes. I would also give a general summary in the next lesson of common errors. This question made me think about why they don't pay attention to my marking feedback. I think it is because it is a sense of failure. It is a bit demoralising. What I could do to boost confidence a little bit is allow them to write the passage in rough which I would go through with them, and then they would have the opportunity to re-write it again in neat.
Question 4, I'm not a maths teacher but when I thought about it. I could sit down and work out the process. It was very interesting.
Question 6 on feedback; it reaffirms to me how important feedback is. Children love and need that communication all the time. These faces I'm not sure that I like them so much but, the kids would love them and I think they could be useful.
Questions 9-11 on self-assessment, I tried it in a Geography assignment recently. I gave them all a rubric for the activity and they had to assess each child and you won't believe how accurate these children were. They love it and if something is wrong, it is wrong, they are harsh and at this age it's all about fairness.

Question 11, they benefit and learn through it. Peer- assessment it seems more interesting than self-assessment because it is a totally different situation because you will find that he will be sitting next to his friend and marking his friend's work, so there is a constant communication between the two of them and comparing.
Question 12, this is an excellent question. It is so true. We had a test recently where we decided to ask open-ended questions and the learner in the top bracket found it extremely difficult because they are used to learning facts and producing facts and the weaker child who can't remember all the facts scored higher. I think it is very important that children come into contact with these types of questions.

School 2:
Louise - I found that the self-assessment ideas, *Questions 6 & 9*, would be a good way of introducing the 1-4 scale, getting them to assess themselves against the assessment standards and then perhaps doing a mini-test to help them understand where they are so they know what they have to do to get where they should be. These exercises were very good for me.
Question 12, open and closed questions. This was very good. It is a great way of asking the same question and it makes kids use their brains instead of just rote learning and spitting out an answer, which is really valuable. It made me think that I need to include open questions in my lessons a lot more.

Barry - What I liked were the scenarios especially *Question 6*, with the faces. It's not really a form of assessment but a great indicator as to whether they have understood or not, it's also nice because it is non-threatening. It made me think that I make assumptions about where they are and that is not always a good indicator. I think this a good indicator and I enjoyed *Scenario 3*.
Question 5, Scenario 5. I found that you normally set work with an intention and often when I mark, it re-defines for me what my goal was, so sometimes I'll be going through the assignment and I'll see the train of thought that the children are going through and I suddenly get a picture that maybe I could have worded the assignment better which therefore improves my ability next time round. I found the scenario made me think what a valuable tool this is. Not so much just with marking but understanding what you are marking. It is important feedback for me.

Is there anything about the questionnaire that you feel should be changed?

School 1:
Michael - *Question 6*, 'Not Sure'. I felt it was a bit negative. Maybe partial understanding would be better. 'Not sure' seems to my mind that they don't understand. I think you are trying to say they don't have full understanding.

Susan - I think this one (*Question 10*). I don't agree with it.

Mark - No.

School 2:
Louise - No.

Barry - No, I couldn't think of anything.

Are there any assessment areas or questions about assessment that you expected to be asked and were not included? (Should they be included?)

School 1:
Michael - I was surprised, I expected it just to be another pointless opinions questionnaire regarding the way assessment is at the moment but you gave practical examples and made us back it up, by asking us to explain this is how we do what we do. This was the surprise package that we were actually getting down to doing it and explaining it rather than just saying what we do. It wasn't just past tense, it was current, right now, do it now, it was very interesting.

Susan - You mentioned nothing on 'time' and for me this is a real negative about assessment.

Mark - No.

School 2:
Louise - No.

Barry - I expected like a whole run down of what it is, what you should be doing. Are you doing this, are you not doing that? It wasn't prescriptive which is nice.

Do you think that the questionnaire provides an opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice?

School 1:
Michael - Yes, I think you have covered all the angles. Assessment is moving towards the process rather than just focusing on the product and this questionnaire serves to reinforce this, using assessment in different ways to support learning.

Susan - Yes, it was a positive building experience. Assessment can be a real pleasure like this. Their learning, I'm learning, everybody is learning.

Mark - Yes, I do.

School 2:
Louise - Yes, it was good to think more deeply about it. It assesses yourself. I liked it.

Barry - I think to a certain extent it gives advice on how to go about assessing in a different way and it opens my eyes to options and various tools that you can use and it turned out to be something completely different. It was more looking at assessment and engaging in the whole thing and deciding what is the actual purpose of it and value of it. I hadn't really answered these questions before; it was something I hadn't anticipated.

What have you learned from completing the questionnaire and discussing it with me?

[*This question was not asked*].

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10th November 2004

Dear

I am an international student currently researching for my Masters thesis at UCT.

In trying to establish how teachers' use assessment *for* learning, researchers have drawn on findings from questionnaires or interviews and/or classroom observations but, have only been able to describe what teachers *say they do*. With this in mind, I set out to design a questionnaire that would allow them to demonstrate and comment on their current assessment practice. Implicit in this is also a desire to help them grow professionally.

I have been advised to contact you by Rob Siebörger because of your experience in working with teachers in in-service education. Having completed a pilot, follow-up interviews and a further test of the procedure, I am seeking a meta-perspective/expert opinion, which would help confirm the direction of my research. I am writing therefore to ask if you would look through the attached questionnaire and then take part in a short interview, which will serve as a means of giving feedback, identifying limitations and assisting me to compile the final version of the questionnaire. The interview should not take very long and would take place at your convenience.

I can appreciate that this will be an intrusion on your undoubtedly busy professional life however, your views and comments are very important to this project and to the successful outcome of two years personal study! I would really appreciate your assistance and value your insights into the procedure along with your guidance and direction about how best to explore and support assessment in the classroom.

I am available most days and will give you a call towards the end of next week; alternatively you can ring, email or send me a text message.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Simon Brown

Stage 4: Evaluating the questionnaire interview schedule

Interview:

Professional development teacher educators (qualitative – semi-structured).

Purpose:

Provide feedback and information about the questionnaire.

Planning:

Start by thanking the interviewee.
Discuss confidentiality and anonymity.
Get agreement on how interview will be recorded -- taped. Using it as my note-pad.
Explain that all tapes will be destroyed on completion of study.
Develop rapport; give brief personal background and purpose of study.
Reasonably well dressed -- assume an average teacher.

Schedule:

1. The questionnaire completion time has varied from 20 – 45 minutes.
   Do you think this is too long, too short or about the right length of time?

2. What are your thoughts on the appearance of the questionnaire?

3. What are your thoughts on layout, sectionalizing and ordering of questions?

4. Is there anything about the questionnaire that you feel should be changed?

5. Is there anything that you feel should be added to the questionnaire?

6. Do you think that the questionnaire provides sufficient opportunity for teachers to display/explain their current practice?

7. Would you use this as an instrument when running an in-service (INSET) course for teachers on assessment? How?

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