

SUMMARY: Suggestions for Continuing the Process, ECZ
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SUMMARY: *suggestions for continuing the process*

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION – February 27, 2004

Dr. Jane G. Schubert (AIR) and Dr. Paul Williams (AIR) prepared the summary below at the conclusion of the Work Group meeting on Continuous Assessment – 24 & 25 February 2004. Participants from Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ); Standards and Curriculum, including Curriculum Development Centre (CDC; and Teacher Education Department (TED) participated. A list of participants is attached.

This summary reflects the dialogue of the meeting and the lessons learned as stated by the participants at the conclusion of the meeting. At the request of the participants, we have suggested next steps that include comments and observations based on our experiences in other education environments.

As agreed at the conclusion of the Work Group meeting, a copy of this final document will be circulated by ECZ to each of the participants as the basis for discussions in preparing the proposal for continuing this Continuous Assessment initiative.

This document may be used as a basis for producing a concrete proposal to focus on implementing CA into the assessment system in Zambia. They are not rank ordered and the priorities may be established in the forthcoming proposal.

Major Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

- The participants recognized the critical need to create a plan for the design and implementation of a Continuous Assessment (CA) model.
- The participants recognized that assessment is a holistic process that includes both internal and external assessments.
- The participants agreed on the need for a working definition of Continuous Assessment, presented below

Continuous assessment is an ongoing, diagnostic, classroom-based process that uses a variety of assessment tools to measure learner performance.

The purposes for adopting a Continuous Assessment approach include:

- 1. improve teachers' capacity to identify what learners know, understand and can do;*
 - 2. improve teachers' instructional practice;*
 - 3. provide quick and user-friendly feedback to stakeholders;*
 - 4. target opportunities to promote learning, thus reducing learner anxiety associated with exams.*
- The participants agreed on a common vision for a holistic assessment system that contains content, grades, and target year for full implementation, presented below

The vision of constructing a holistic assessment system, using both school-based assessments (internal) and externally-based assessments (exams) will cover grades 1-12 and colleges of education in all subject areas. National implementation will be in place by 2015. The implementation will be phased, building on the existing activities, materials, and plans.

Each of the participating units identified some of their existing activities in 2004 that will be used as building blocks for the next portion of the planning process. By unit, these activities included:

TED

- *PRP Courses in basic schools at grades 1-7*
- *Numeracy training at grades 1-7*
- *Preparation of materials for teachers grades 8-9 and colleges of education*

Standards and Curriculum

Baseline study of CA in schools and colleges

CDC

- *Implement Grade 1 new curriculum*
- *Review Grade 8 and 9 new curriculum*
- *Review Grades 10-12 curriculum*
- *Ensure CA is taken care of at all levels*

ECZ

- *Enhance teachers capacities in conducting competence-based assessment (Training @ Basic, High and Tertiary)*
- *Develop appropriate assessment procedures for newly developed curricula (competency based)*
- *Piloting materials at Basic, High, and Tertiary (tentative)*
- *Develop competence-based assessment system (Grade 7 and 9)*
- *Develop and implement mechanisms for timely feedback to schools and colleges*

- The participants agreed that most of the elements for reaching full implementation of a holistic assessment system are in place, but that the Directorates are neither communicating nor coordinating efforts to achieve a common goal;
- The participants articulated the elements in place (e.g. training for teachers on continuous assessment, inclusion of continuous assessment in the curriculum frameworks, teachers' manuals on basic competency testing) that are incorporated into the National Implementation Framework (2002-2007) upon which a long-term, phased implementation plan may be constructed.

- Participants identified areas of overlap and redundancy among the Directorates (e.g. all interested in “monitoring” but there should be more coordinated effort on the ground in terms of the information collected and the feedback provided to the local educators).
- All participants learned about (some were more familiar than others), and recognized the importance of, the PRP methodology as having implications for each directorate’s contribution to a CA model.
- The participants mapped out critical path activities from 2004-2007 leading to implementation of CA by 2015. These activities were derived from the National Implementation Framework, based on the assumption that inclusion in the Framework represents fiscal support for the activity.
- There was consensus that meetings among the key MOE stakeholders (others may be named) should occur on a regular basis. This would ensure communication among the stakeholders. Participants also noted that communication within their own groups / units must also be conducted on a regular basis. Planning should continue and must include representatives of other Directorates (such as Planning).
- Participants articulated a wide range of issues relative to planning and implementation (e.g. magnitude of management) that are included in the proceedings of the meeting.
- Each participant saw the activities his or her own Directorate in relation to other Directorates, particularly with respect to Continuous Assessment.

Suggested Next Steps

1. **Prioritize Continuous Assessment by Establishing an Office.** Take advantage of the widespread interest, activities and materials in place, and continuing meetings and conversations about moving forward to an integrated, holistic assessment system. Advocate that MOE take responsibility for implementing the long-term vision by establishing an official “institutional home” within ECZ. By so doing, the leadership EZC has demonstrated to date is transformed into and recognized as not only the coordinating body, but the official resource for all Directorates which are implementing CA in their activities. MOE’s commitment to fulfilling national policy re: Continuous Assessment will be reflected in establishing such an office (e.g. with officer in charge, staff, an office, a senior management responsibility) that has the authority and the responsibility to implement CA within the GRZ assessment system. Failure to do so may risk losing the enthusiasm and energy currently at work within MOE, particularly if MOE is committed to the vision for CA contained in its official documents.
2. **Form a Ministry Steering Committee.** Coordination of the CA effort at the highest Ministerial levels will be needed to provide clear policy and direction for the operational units. To fulfill this need, AIR suggests that a Ministerial Steering Committee be empowered to give the guidance and policy direction to the CA effort. Senior Ministerial representatives with authority and links to top

management should serve on the Steering Committee, as might other stakeholders such as parents and/or business community representatives.

3. **Form an Inter-Directorate Technical Committee.** There is interest and commitment among the Directorates and Units to move toward a holistic assessment system. Consider appointing an inter-Directorate Technical Committee to coordinate planning and monitor the progress of the implementation, (including inclusive schooling efforts). This will help ensure that coordination is built into the process. One option for managing the Technical Committee is to have the Chair of the Group rotate among the key MOE Directorates (e.g. annually). Not only will this contribute to a “buy-in” by the Directorates (and other stakeholders), it will share the responsibility for the implementation. The Inter-Directorate Technical Committee should be represented on the Steering Committee to ensure smooth coordination between the two groups.
4. **Learn from the Current Experience.** A variety of workshops, manuals, curriculum frameworks etc. in support of implementing Continuous Assessment have been ongoing for several years. More are planned. However, little is known about the implementation process the feedback from the recipients or the outcomes in terms of implementing continuous assessment. There has been no situational analysis or formative evaluation conducted. A systematic effort such as this, could explore where the CA activity has been successful and why – for example, are teachers learning enough from the training sessions to be able to use CA as intended; what type of feedback is being learned from the teachers that may influence the future workshop design and the type of materials useful for teachers; is monitoring in place to provide feedback to teachers and head teachers so as to keep them on track with the appropriate use of CA; how do parents react to their children experiencing a CA methodology? If there have been such a wide variety of activities called “CA” that are “active” in Zambia, then knowing what’s working and not working through situational analysis and the lessons learned would streamline the larger-scale implementation and increase the efficiency of the implantation.
5. **Identify the Key Implementers.** Not all Directorates are “in the same place” with respect to existing activities, plans or understanding about what’s required. The Standards Unit of the Standards and Curriculum Directorate is well-advised to become more actively involved with the other Directorates and coordinate its CA activities within their own and other Directorate.

Zambia may wish to consider an overall “monitoring” function that combines the needs of the key Directorates in terms of information required from local educators, learners and their parents and the process of implementing CA. A mechanism for sharing the information (e.g. immediate feedback to local educators at a resource center or a school after a monitoring visit) would stimulate the use of the information, bring local educators into the process as partners and

reduce the need for cumbersome reports that are prepared long after the need exists. Each Directorate might choose which of the information gathered is useful and in what form it should be presented. Attention should be paid to “user-friendly” documents that provoke discussion and stimulate change in the right direction.

- 5. Recruit a Continuous Assessment Specialist (either internally or externally).** Continuous Assessment is being implemented several places – e.g. Curriculum Framework, TED workshops, preservice lectures and practical student teacher experience - but there is no central resource or knowledge-base about CA to ensure that the messages and methodology are consistently delivered across all Directorates. A Continuous Assessment specialist who guides the use and application of Continuous Assessment – the intellectual capital and the management locus is essential to the design, implementation, and management of the CA efforts. Options to provide this resource are: a current staff member could be assigned this role or a consultant maybe hired part-time, or a permanent position could be created. .

Another idea, related to the rotating Chair suggested in #3 above, is for the CA Specialist to serve as the group’s Chairperson. The CA Specialist must have full responsibility for directing CA efforts throughout the education system and the recognized authority to do so. Guidelines for all aspects of developing and implementing CA would come from this office that would be the “anchor” for CA.

- 6. Visit other Continuous Assessment Sites.** Other countries (many in sub-Saharan Africa) have developed and implemented Continuous Assessment in teacher training and primary school curricula. They are also wrestling with the relationship between CA and the exams system. . It can be extremely useful to observe what others have done and to learn from their experience about the successes and difficulties in conceptualizing and implementing CA. Consider a formal study tour whose very specific agenda is linked to Zambian needs and the holistic assessment vision with a mandate to return with concrete ideas for the implementation plan in Zambia. Consider organizing and sponsoring on-site visits to other locations that have successfully implemented CA.
- 7. Take Stock of the Vision.** The “working vision” for implementing a nationwide holistic assessment system is very ambitious. Starting immediately, the details of a phased implementation plan should be worked out so that a determination can be made about how realistic it is to implement Continuous Assessment in all subject areas and all grades, including colleges of education, by 2015.

Consider a dual focus – both at grade 1 (consistent with CDC plans) and on the grades most influencing the Grade 7 and Grade 9 exams – 5 through 8, as the immediate targets.

The PRP methodology in Grades 1-4 may address the immediate needs for CA in those grades (certainly for literacy). That methodology may be modified for other subjects in the lower primary grades with a modest investment. Targeting grades 5-8 would increase the possibility, beginning in 2004 or 2005, of introducing a parallel assessment that used BOTH exams and CA (as a pilot or feasibility study). This schedule would provide more time for parents and others to understand the benefits of CA, thus strengthening advocacy for CA among parents, teachers, and learners, as an important component for determining successful completion of a grade. At some future point (e.g. 7th grade), there may be convergence so that the exam would be either eliminated or reduced in influence.

8. **Prepare for Success.** One anticipated outcome from incorporating Continuous Assessment into the assessment system is that learners will accelerate their proficiency and therefore, will reach the Grade 7 at a higher level of functionality and potential for passing the Grade 7 exam. If this outcome is realized, then there will be a greater number of learners eligible for places in Grade 8 and Grade 10. Provision for more school spaces should be made to avoid possible wastage.
9. **Strengthen Technical Capacity.** The need for stronger technical capacity in both quantitative and qualitative skills will be necessary as a revised assessment system is planned and implemented in Zambia. Since there is increasing commitment to and interest in establishing a coherent assessment system, the capacity to understand the technical interrelationships among system elements is crucial to affect program planning and determining program impact. For example, it is important to determine if teachers are assigning marks in a consistent fashion across Zambia. The technical capacity to design such data collection effort needs to be resident with the MOE. Clearly, the amount of data collected, analyzed, interpreted and reported will rise and the system is not yet prepared to handle this additional requirement.
10. **Build a Monitoring & Evaluation Component into the Implementation.** There is overall agreement that “implementation” can fall off the track and that it is critical, if a vision is to be realized, a systematic examination (e.g. a formative evaluation or situational analysis) be in place so as to make adjustments as necessary. Harmonizing monitoring instruments from all MOE units will be essential to a comprehensive view of CA implementation and management.

Including such a monitoring and evaluation effort as a pillar of CA is critical to the success – not only documenting what is happening with all participants, but using the information to make specific changes as necessary, providing immediate feedback to “on the ground” implementers, and reporting to national figures about the returns on their investment.

