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The revision of an existing English language textbook to meet the demands of outcomes-based education

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Chapter 2

Learning Area in Focus

"Over the years many have objected to mastery learning for its fragmented, mechanistic, even trivialising approach applied equally to all students and subjects. English, for example, is a discipline that is not organised in a cumulative, sequential, linear fashion. A student can memorise the elements of a short story and never enjoy reading one or be able to offer an interpretation. A student may be able to share powerful insights about Shakespeare without having passed a preceding test on Chaucer. The behaviourist idea of breaking learning down into bits that must be mastered before a student can go on does not work well in English." (Schwarz and Cavener 1994: 1)

Both the "Discussion Document, Curriculum 2005", March 1997, from the National Curriculum Framework, and "Curriculum 2005 Lifelong Learning for the 21st Century A User's Guide", 1997, National Department of Education, discuss OBE in detail and outline the manifestations that the shift in educational philosophy and theory will take. Both documents enumerate the cross-curricular critical and specific outcomes for each of the eight learning areas, a total of 66 outcomes in all. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has

proposed these critical cross-curricular outcomes. Learners will:

1. Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.
2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation and community.
3. Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively.
4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
5. Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and/or language skills in various modes.
6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environments and health of others.
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Additionally, SAQA recommends the following five critical outcomes, which support national development:

8. Reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively.
9. Participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities.

10. Being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts.
11. Exploring education and career opportunities.
12. Developing entrepreneurial opportunities.

SAQA also prescribes specific outcomes for each of the eight Learning Areas. Those for the learning area that applies to the research project, Language, Literacy and Communication, span the Foundation (R – Grade 3), Intermediate (Grade 4 – 6) and Senior Phases (Grade 7 – 9) of the General Education and Training (GET) Band. As outlined in the Policy Documents for each Phase, they are:

1. Learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding.
2. Learners show critical awareness of language usage.
3. Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts.
4. Learners access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations.
5. Learners understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context.
6. Learners use language for learning.
7. Learners use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations.

As a supplement to the "Policy Documents", "Draft Progress Maps" have been formulated by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development (GICD). These "Progress Maps" describe the levels of achievement and the progression of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for all the levels encompassed in this Learning Area for the GET Band and can be used as an assessment tool for the teacher, learners and parents to gauge learner progress. They are particularly useful for materials developers as they track the progression of lower to higher order knowledge and skills along a continuum, providing a framework for building materials for each of the six levels of the Band.

The textbook on which the research is based is a Standard 8/Grade 10 title, a grade level which falls under the Further Education and Training (FET) Band rather than the GET Band. As OBE is being implemented phase by phase and band by band, the specific outcomes for the Learning Area which would encompass Literacy, Language and Communications for FET are as yet unavailable; for this reason, the "Senior Phase Policy Document" will be used to situate OBE philosophy and methodology as it is conceptualised for Curriculum 2005. In addition, the "Draft Policy for Adult Basic Education and Training", March 1997, the National Department of Education,

gives guidelines for assessing instructional material and, while the guidelines are ABET-specific, they could be used to assess instructional materials across a range of levels and learning areas; thus, for the purposes of this research project, the specific outcomes as put forth in the "Senior Phase Policy Document" of the GET Band and the ABET-specific guidelines for assessing learning material have been used as a model against which to weigh the analysis of the existing textbook and any revision that may be possible.

The "Senior Phase Policy Document" outlines the general development of learners from the Foundation Phase through to the Senior Phase: the Foundation Phase focuses on the development of the whole child; the Intermediate Phase has learners working more in co-operation with other learners in groups and project work; and, Senior Phase learners continue their intellectual growth and learn in a less contextualised and more abstract way. The document also describes the role of the FET Band in the furtherance of the education of learners beyond the Senior Phase of the GET Band.

> "At this level learners should be prepared for higher education, vocational education, careers and self-employment. The development of unit standards and curriculum on this

> band will have to be carefully co-ordinated, as the National Qualification Framework is based on the principle of integration of education and training, and the accumulation of credits across different institutions. These credits could consist of core units and optional units in different combinations, undertaken in a variety of modes." ("Department of Education Senior Phase Policy Document 1997: 4-7) [xii]

The document lists the various providers of education for learners in the FET Band, including senior secondary schools, technical colleges, NGOs, regional training centres, private providers, colleges, training centres and companies, industry training centres and community colleges. It also lays out the underpinning concepts of OBE: learners needs should be met through various teaching strategies, learners should be given enough time to meet their potential and an unbiased approach is essential. The document describes and encourages multilingualism as an opportunity for learners "to develop and value their home languages, cultures and literacies; other languages, cultures and literacies…a shared understanding of a common South African culture."(Ibid. 1997: 37)[xiii]

The definitions and descriptions of "text", "literacy" and "literacies" are spelled out to ensure that teachers understand that text may include spoken (conversations, speeches and songs); written (poetry, drama, letters, novels, newspaper articles, etc.); and, visual texts (posters, cartoons, advertisements, etc.) and that literacies may include cultural (values that shape the reading of a text); critical (the ability to questions a text critically); visual (the ability to interpret images, signs and body language, etc.); media (the ability to read TV and films as cultural messages); numerical (the ability to use and interpret numbers); and, computer literacy (the ability to use and access information from computers).

Language across the curriculum is emphasised. The document states that language is not an end in itself but rather a means to act in the world and it is underscored that learners must develop competency in the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT).

Assessment guidelines are offered, with an emphasis on continuous criteria- referenced assessment as critical. The document outlines its accepted Principles of Assessment, including validity, reliability, flexibility, fairness, and a holistic approach to assessment. The assessment process, according to the document, must be based on the outcomes, unit standards and moderation. A list of types of assessment is given and

includes, amongst others, continuous assessment, formative assessment, direct assessment, indirect assessment, summative assessment, self-assessment, and assessment by others.

The document situates language, literacy and communications learning in the context of the specific outcomes for the learning area and provides range statements, assessment criteria and performance indicators as well as levels of complexity of performance for each specific outcome. In addition, each specific outcome is expatiated, providing the teacher with a solid understanding of why a particular specific outcome is important to the Learning Area.

These specific outcomes are summarised from the document as follows:

1. Learners make and negotiate meaning. (Meaning is central to communication and this outcome strives to develop the learners' ability to understand, create and negotiate meaning in various contexts through the use of various skills.)
2. Learners show critical awareness of language usage. (The aim of this outcomes is to develop learners' understanding of language as a tool to reflect, shape and manipulate; the development of "decoding" skills, reading, listening and observing, is stressed.)

3. Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts. (This outcome strives to develop the learners' appreciation, use and creation of text as expression and to expose them to a variety of genres and literary devices.)
4. Learners access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations. (Language skills are developed in a cross-curricular environment to facilitate the development of competency in the language of learning and teaching.)
5. Learners understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context. (This outcome strives to develop grammar knowledge and understanding in addition to self-editing skills.)
6. Learners use language for learning. (This outcome strives to develop learners' ability to use language across the curriculum and as a tool for problem-solving, decision-making and creative and critical thinking.)
7. Learners use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations. (This outcome strives to enable learners' to use and apply communication skills appropriately.)

While the government policy documents outline in minute detail what is required of the teacher in terms of the new curriculum,

they do so in complex language that many teachers may have difficulty in understanding. The layout and design of the documents do not render the information contained therein accessible without intensive study, something that the average teacher may not have the time or motivation to do if s/he even finds copies available for her use. Complaints have been made that the very government documents that are meant to be a window on OBE teaching for teachers have often been unavailable to them and, if available, incomprehensible. On the other hand, the recently released "Draft Progress Maps" are couched in a language, and have a design, that is much more accessible; however, they are supplementary material and are not meant to take the place of the policy documents for the various phases.

The information within the documents cited above creates the foundation for the research of the textbook that is the focus of this paper. An understanding of OBE and the manner in which it has been interpreted by South Africa for Curriculum 2005 is crucial to the task of an attempted OBE revision for *New Horizons Grade 10*. In the next chapter, the theoretical framework for this research will be outlined in greater detail.

Chapter 3

Teaching Language in an OBE Environment

"Outcome-based education does offer many powerful ideas, such as commitment to learning for all students, possibilities for authentic assessment, and interest in an integrated curriculum…The complexity of schools as human systems, power or the ownership of the reform process, and theoretical questions about the nature of knowledge and learning remain significant problems." (Schwarz and Cavener 1994: 6)

The theoretical framework for this research paper will be the philosophy of OBE as it is to be practised in South Africa and the theoretical underpinnings of the critical outcomes common to all learning areas and the outcomes specific to the learning area Language, Literacy and Communication as articulated for the GET Band. The concepts informing the educational normalisation and transformation process will inform the revision of this textbook and will include amongst others:

- learner participation
- learner-centredness
- relevance
- integration
- learner support
- nation-building

•non-discrimination

•critical and creative thinking

•flexibility.

The material will support the rationale for the learning area put forth in the "Discussion Document Curriculum 2005" such that multilingualism in the language classroom will be encouraged and all languages will be valued. A communicative approach to language teaching that emphasises purposeful use of language will be taken in line with the learning area rationale that states that language learning empowers people to make and negotiate meaning and understanding in various contexts; access education, information and literacies; think and express thoughts and emotions; interact and participate in all aspects of society; understand the relationship between language and power; and, develop reflective and critical capacities. As far as possible, the various kinds of literacies for the learning area will be explored, including cultural literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, media literacy and computer literacy.

The textbook to be revised will be critically evaluated as it stands using criteria outlined in the "Draft Policy for Adult Basic Education and Training", South African National Department of Education, March 1997 and the criteria outlined in Ingrid Bruynse's "Workshop on creating learning materials

for OBE", an unpublished paper presented at the SAALA Conference at Wits University, 11 July 1997. An analysis will be made to ascertain what changes will be required to ensure that the philosophy of OBE, the critical cross-curricular outcomes and the outcomes specific to the learning area Language, Literacy and Communication are met and that the tenets of communicative language teaching, upon which the unrevised textbook are based, remain sound and intact.

The communicative language teaching approach is based on the principle that language is communication. In a communicative language classroom communicative competence is the goal and the emphasis is placed on the spontaneous use of language rather than on strict linguistic accuracy. Brown cites a focus on all the components of communicative competence; engaging learners in authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes; fluency and accuracy as complementary; and, use of the language in unrehearsed contexts as characteristics of the communicative approach." (Brown 1994: 245) [xiv]

In addition, the communicative approach emphasises skills development through the purposeful use of language in the classroom and it sees accuracy as following the development of fluency. Communicative classrooms are learner-centred, interactional (learners interact with each other and with the

teacher) and the use of appropriate language in social contexts is encouraged. Both guided and free communication tasks are aimed at communicating meaning. Lessons are often built around themes and tasks might include games, role-plays and simulations with drills as peripheral rather than central to the methodology. Materials used might include newspapers and magazines, posters, maps, advertisements, realia and audio and visual recordings of the language, i.e. communication is constantly encouraged.

For the textbook upon which the research is based, maintaining the communicative approach will be facilitated through the use of a variety of activities, including those involving whole group, small group, pairs and individuals; the development of skills, including reading, writing, listening, speaking and various study skills; the use of authentic materials, including advertisements, newspaper and magazine articles and other realia; the use of such graphic texts as cartoons and photographs; and, the foregrounding of issues of language and power and how that power is expressed along with issues of culture and cultural domination.

Effort will be made to ensure that language across the curriculum is included in the topics and activities so that learners have an opportunity to develop competence in the

language of learning and teaching. In addition, each of the literacies outlined in the "Senior Phase Policy Document" will be addressed in the topics and/or activities in the revised textbook, i.e. cultural, critical, visual, media and computer literacies.

A variety of assessment techniques will be used throughout the textbook to ensure that learners are not unduly disadvantaged because of assessment practices, which will include portfolios and journals, as well as traditional tests. Assessment techniques will include self- and peer- evaluation, and formative and summative assessment.

One of the tenets of OBE is that all learners can succeed at learning given sufficient time. To ensure that learners have the time they need to acquire the knowledge and develop the necessary skills, many opportunities will be incorporated into the text to assist them. In addition, knowledge and skills will be taught and assessment carried out in a variety of ways to ensure that no learner is disadvantaged in the classroom because learning or assessment techniques are biased to one learning style. For example, linguistic learners will be accommodated through assessment based on role-plays or dramatisation; spatial learners will be accommodated through assessment based on the creation and design of posters or other visual materials.

Keeping the philosophy of OBE, the "Senior Phase Policy Document", the guidelines for assessing learning material, the criteria outlined in Ingrid Bruynse's unpublished paper and the communicative approach in mind, questions posed to the text will include amongst others:

- How clearly are the learning outcomes expressed?
- Are activities communicative in nature, i.e. do they encourage learners to communicate meaningfully and purposefully with each other and with the teacher?
- Is the instructional sequence reasonable?
- How will outcomes be assessed?
- Is the content suitable for the target group as well as interesting, logically presented and free of bias?
- Are the exercises and activities related to the outcomes?
- Are the exercises related to the development of skills, i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing?
- Do the exercises and activities encourage individual learning, self-evaluation and critical thinking?
- Is the material useful to learners of varying abilities?
- Are the contents and sections easily identifiable?
- Are the chapter or unit headings clear and useful?
- Is the vocabulary level appropriate?
- Are new words or terms explained or defined?
- Do graphics support the text and enhance meaning?
- Are cognitive skills developed and promoted?

- Do questions test understanding and encourage independent thinking?
- Are various kinds of questions asked such that learners are required to translate, interpret, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate?
- Are the texts varied, authentic, relevant to learners' everyday lives, appropriate to level and stimulating?
- Are learners encouraged to make creative responses?