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Knowledge and practice of continuous assessment : The barriers for policy transfer

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the extent to which primary school teachers understood and implemented the requirements of the continuous assessment programme that has been introduced in primary schools in Swaziland. By focussing on teaching and learning activities that occurred during eight teachers' lessons within the Salesian-Ekutsimuleni zone in Manzini, and what they expressed as intentions and justifications for these activities, it tries to clarify, in particular, the relationship between their assessment strategies and the broader educational principles promoted by the programme. C*lassroom observations* and stimulated *interviews* were used to capture, respectively, data on what teachers did and principles that informed their behaviour. Codes abstracted from classroom observations and grounded on the views expressed by teachers indicate that they followed slavishly what was contained in the curriculum support materials with which they had been provided. Even though they used assessment strategies promoted by the Continual Assessment (CA) programme, their assessment strategies prioritized knowledge-retention rather than the cognitive development advocated by the programme and, in a specific sense, implied by lesson objectives they had to fulfil. The conclusion is that teachers could not translate the rhetoric of the CA programme into relevant professional judgement, decisions and practices without exposure to meaningful development programmes.

Key Words

Swaziland, Continuous Assessment, Criterion - Referenced Assessment, Mastery learning, Fordism, Post-Fordism