

# Assessment and Education Quality in South Africa

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**Gaining educational equity throughout the world**

**52nd Annual Meeting of the**

**Comparative and International Education Society**

Teachers College, Columbia University

New York, New York

17-21 March 2008

Social science that makes a difference



# Outline

- **Background**
- **Contextualising education quality**
- **Lessons from SSA**
- **Assessment in South Africa**
- **Conclusion**

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# Background

- The Centre for Education Quality Improvement (CEQI) was established by the HSRC to support government and education key role-players (teachers, parents, learners, NGOs, donors) to enhance decision making processes for implementing relevant and effective strategies to improve education quality.
  - It is a high level cross-cutting initiative of the HSRC to contribute to eradicating poverty in South Africa through evidence-informed policy dialogue.
- **Extensive consultation – identify key issues**
- **Based on partnerships**
- **Number of short or long term research fellowships available**

# Background 2

**CEQI is currently involved in a number of research and development projects in collaboration with the National and Provincial Departments of Education to review and strengthen current assessment system :**

**Enhancing teacher assessment skills:** Field trailing, pilot testing and determining impact and costs of classroom assessment resources to improve learning achievement

**Monitoring school performance:** developing and piloting a national indicator framework

**Grade 9 National Assessment Survey:** development and implementation of a model for Grade 9 National Assessment Survey

**Financing, equity and quality:** reviewing the impact of no fee schools, costing assessment surveys, developing alternative models for financial allocation to schools

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# Education Quality - 1

## Quality and EFA:

- is at the heart of teaching and learning. The EFA DFA mention excellence in learning one of the goals. Yet there is no quantitative target or much clarification about the goal.
- As NERs increase, quality becomes important
- Quality also has a crucial effect on enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion

# Education Quality - 2

- Multiple and contested meanings: differing meanings of the word quality
- **UNICEF – CFS**, quality founded on the rights of the whole child, emphasising 5 dimensions: learners, environment, content, processes and outcomes
- **De Lors**: ‘learning – the treasure within’, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be
- Two faces of quality in the **GMR**– learning to achieve (cognitive development) and learning to live (values, attitudes, citizenship)
- Quality as absolute vs Quality as relative
- Quality and equity: Is there a trade off?

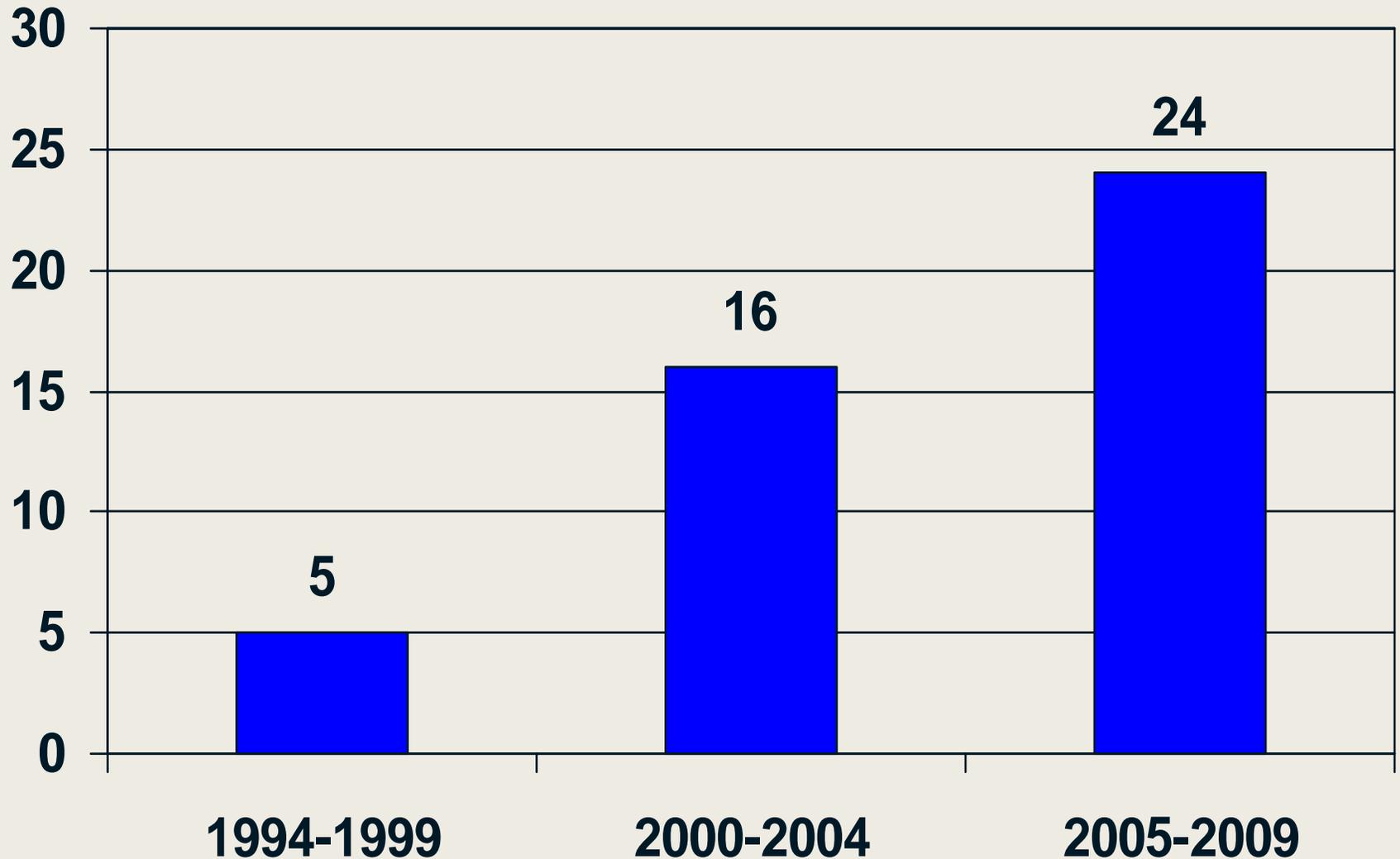
# Monitoring quality

- Notwithstanding different meanings, attempts to measure quality focus on three aspects - inputs, process and outcomes
- **Inputs** – resources and facilities
  - While NB – it is not about learning
- **Process** - the neglected dimension
  - Very few measures of the what occurs in the learning space. Commonly use proxies includes PTR, RR (though this more an efficiency measure)
- **Outcome** – exclusive focus on achievement scores
- Require more comprehensive definition and measures

# Assessment and Quality

- Increasing emphasis on assessment due to concern with declining quality
  - “... a national priority that requires involvement and engagement throughout all levels of our society” - SA Minister of Education, August 2005.
- Emphasis translates to focus on achievement scores, in “core subjects”
- The discourse of quality replete with the technology of testing mania –
  - In SA, National, provincial & District assessments, TIMSS, PIRLS, SACMEQ, project evaluations, exams
- However, testing indicates areas in need of intervention but not what is required
- Assessment and testing does not equal quality
- **You don't fatten the chicken by weighing it**

# LSAS in SA: 1994 - 2009



# LSAS in South Africa

- Majority of studies
  - designed to provide information to policy makers,
  - to evaluate specific intervention programs,
  - to obtain baseline information.
- Few studies designed to providing information to teachers to enhance learning in the classroom.
- Reporting
  - mainly aggregated by national, provincial or district level
  - group variables such as gender, language and geographical location (urban, rural); learning area (e.g. mathematics) as well as the sub-domains assessed (e.g. by learning outcomes or content areas).
- Limited analysis to identify factors affecting learner performance

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# Assessment in SSA

- Since the world EFA conferences in Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000) there has been a significant increase in the number of countries, mostly developing nations



# Assessment in SSA 2

- In SSA, for example, most countries have participated in regional studies facilitated by UNESCO/UNICEF including the MLA, SACMEQ and PASEC. To date 47 countries have participated in MLA I and II studies, 15 in SACMEQ studies and 12 in PASEC studies
- A growing number of countries, however, have begun conducting their own national assessment studies including Botswana, Eritrea, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia

# Overview of NA in SSA

<b>No systematic national data collection on student learning</b>	<b>Use of national examinations or other proxy indicators</b>	<b>Regional or international agency testing project</b>	<b>National monitoring program</b>
Angola; Burkino Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Cape Verde; Central African Republic; Chad; Ethiopia; Equatorial Guinea; Gabon; Ghana; Guinea Bissau; Ivory Coast; Liberia; Mali; Mauritania; Rwanda; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Somalia; Swaziland; Togo	Botswana; Cape Verde; Comoros Islands; Eritrea; Gambia; Guinea; Mauritius; Togo; Tanzania (Zanzibar); Zimbabwe	Kenya; Mali; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Nigeria; Seychelles; South Africa; Swaziland; Tanzania; Uganda; Zambia; Zanzibar; Zimbabwe	Benin*; Congo*; Democratic Republic of Congo*; Gambia; Lesotho; Madagascar*; South Africa; Uganda Zambia

# Continuous assessment in SSA

In the last decade, there has been a growing recognition of the value of assessment in improving the quality of education, in particular the use of continuous assessment (CA) for improving the teaching and learning process.

This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of countries developing policies and systems for conducting and using continuous assessment.

# Continuous assessment in SSA - 2

- CA for improving learning and teaching is a result of significant policy shifts - including Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland.

- In Namibia, CA at the primary level was introduced as a direct result of the Ministry's Education For All policy with training and support targeted to teachers in both lower and upper primary phases.

- In Malawi, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology obtained assistance from international and local organisations to develop a model for CA in primary schools as well as train teachers and other schools staff in its effective implementation.

- In a number of SSA countries, the final grade on the national examinations comprise of scores from CA exercises as well as the final examination paper.

- In South Africa, for example, the final Grade 12 exam grade is based on the examination score, which comprises 75% as well as the continuous assessment score

- in Tanzania, the examination and continuous assessment score comprise 50% of the final grade).

# Implementing CA in SSA

Implementation of CA far from ideal

- In Kenya the intention of using more authentic continuous assessments exercise as part of the national certification were put on hold as teachers were abusing the system with some teachers colluding with parents in allowing them to buy articles they were required to make and present for grading, while other teachers often submitted inflated or cooked up scores.
- in Ghana, a review by the West African Examinations Board also found significant differences between CA scores assigned by teachers and examinations scores of learners.
- In Swaziland, CA introduced by the MoE in 1993. Ten years on teachers were still unable to develop their own tests, relying instead on the National Curriculum Center to provide end of term CA tests, while testing was still entirely paper-and-pencilled based with the assessment of psychomotor and affective domains excluded.

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# Education policy in SA

- **1994 – 1999**      ■ **policy frameworks and documents**
- **2000 – 2004**      ■ **policy implementation and systems development (delivery)**
- **2005 - 2009**      ■ **Improving quality and understanding impact**

# Education policy in SA - 2

- **Multiple and potentially contradictory needs**
- **Discourse of needs to discourse of means**
- **Main directions of policy: equity, access, redress, quality, democracy, efficiency**
- **Strategy of transformation – gradualist, broad based, balancing change with the quest for stability**
- **Policy disjuncture between intention and implementation**

# Assessment in South Africa - History

- **Assessment practices and systems played a critical role in maintaining oppressive apartheid policies**
- **Assessment was the most neglected aspect of the new governments' efforts to transform the apartheid based education system, even though assessment formed the basis of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) that underpinned the new education system**
- **There is limited information on the impact of assessment policies and practices on teaching and learning, within the new education dispensation in South Africa.**

# Assessment interventions in SA

Major government initiatives to reform assessment and align with curriculum:

- 1998 – first national assessment policy promulgated
  - Conducted systemic evaluations (national assessments) ??? – conducted at Grade 3 (2001 & 2007) & Grade 6 - 2004

<b>Common Task of Assessment (CTAs) Grade 9 :</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Assessment Resources Bank for teachers</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Assessment Exemplars for teachers</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>National database of Language and Mathematics items for teachers in Grades 1 to 6</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Change in Grade 10, 11 &amp; 12 school based assessments</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Early Reading Assessment tools</b>	<b>2007</b>

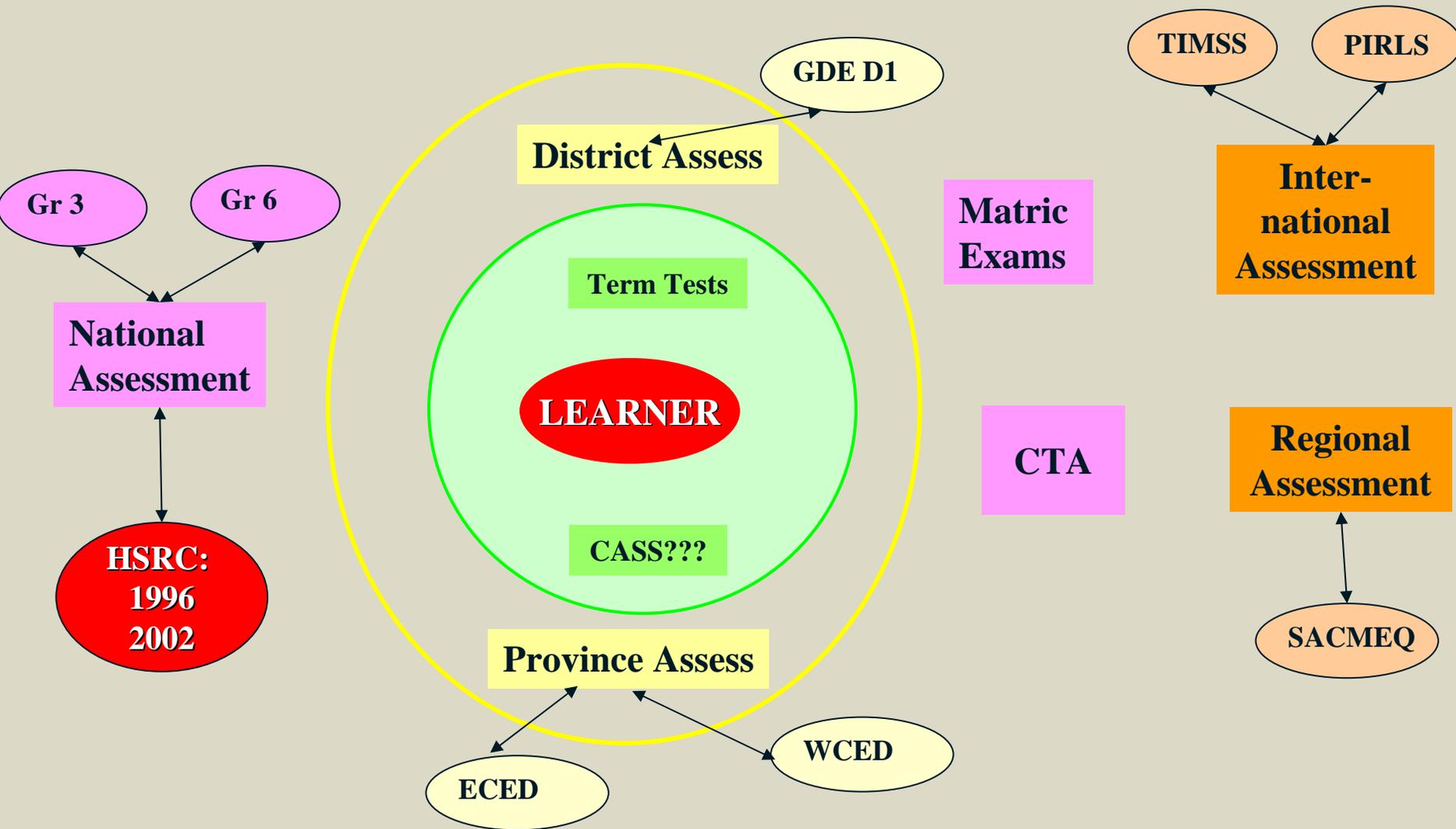
# Assessment reforms in SA - 2

- **1998 assessment policy revised in 2007**
- **Key features:**
  - **Greater emphasis on classroom based assessment**
  - **Requires teachers and schools to apply a greater range of assessment methods beyond paper and pencil tests**
  - **More structured into frequency and type of assessments (how and what)**
  - **Provides a reporting and interpretation framework**
- **Disjuncture rhetoric and reality**
  - **Limited efforts – enhance value of assessment for teachers**
  - **Greater emphasis on large-scale assessments**

# Consequences and Challenges

- **Data rich and information poor**
- **Limited information on costs**
- **No information on how assessment is/can be used to enhance decision making**
- **Limited access to data**

# Current state of assessment



**National Curriculum Statement  
Learning Outcomes**

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# Concluding remarks

- **Quality remains a key but elusive goal in education**
- **Assessment is important in improving quality but a means to an end, not an end in itself**
  - **Challenge of translating information into changes for improving learning**
- **Focus on supporting teachers in SA to improve assessment practices in the classroom – the focus of CEQI**
- **Publications – book + colloquia series**

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