

# **BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION AT SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTHERN FREE STATE**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the implementation of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) at selected primary schools in two Education Districts in the Free State Province. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in this study. Simple random sampling of schools evaluated were done so as to give each school an equal chance of being selected. Data were gathered from 125 educators and twenty three WSE supervisors using questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted with the Chief Education Specialist: Whole School Evaluation, the parent complement of School Governing Bodies of sampled schools and the Director: Quality Assurance Directorate, Department of Education, Free State Province. Data from interviews were analysed by developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. The study found that the Provincial WSE unit is faced with a problem of shortage of resources and that the manner in which training on the WSE process is offered to stakeholders is inadequate because the stakeholders are not trained and are not aware of the role they should play in the process. Detailed conclusions and recommendations drawn from this study are included in the article.

**Keywords:** Whole School Evaluation, primary schools, South Africa

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Studies show that although evaluation policies regarding teacher development and whole-school improvement have been put into place and even though schools express willingness to participate in such evaluation actions, they remain deeply suspicious of, and even subvert, the original goals of these policies (Quan-Baffour, 2000; Van Petegem, 1998; MacBeath 2004; Fearnside, 2000). This study explores the implementation of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) at selected primary schools in two Education Districts in southern Free State Province. WSE is the official evaluation system in South Africa. Schools undergo both external and internal evaluation.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Whole School Evaluation (WSE) is a process of external evaluation of the work of a school carried out by the WSE teams of the Department of Education (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). 'WSE is the cornerstone of quality assurance systems in schools.

It enables the school and external supervisors to provide an account of the school's current performance and show to what extent it meets national goals and needs of the public and communities' (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). The process is designed to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided by the state within schools. Schools should strive to improve and should therefore be constantly evaluated or assessed. Different countries use a variety of methods of evaluation as a means of ensuring quality education for learners or a means of ensuring that schools are effective and efficient (Jose, 2003; Nevo, 2004). Within the international context, external inspection programmes are used to evaluate schools. In the United Kingdom (UK) England and Wales use a model of evaluation carried out under the auspices of the Office for the Standards in Education in England (OFSTED) and the Educational Review is used in New Zealand (Griffiths, 1998; Fearnside, 2000). In Ireland a framework based on WSE derived from school development and quality assurance point of view was undertaken. The system has the disadvantage of 'being a disturbing distraction in the life of the schools' (Lennon, 1998).

During the apartheid era, there were laws such as Bantu Education Act of 1953 which brought inequity into the South African education system based on race and ethnicity (Squelch, 2000). Apartheid also left a legacy of differential allocation of resources to different racial groups. Inspectors then came to schools without necessary developmental support and mentoring. Support for teaching and learning was limited to short in-service courses offered by the state education departments which focused only on content and methodology (Squelch, 2000; National Conference on Whole School Evaluation, 2000;).

Following the general elections of 1994 a new system of education and training was created in South Africa based on the fundamental principles of democracy, unity, non-discrimination, equity and equality (Squelch, 2000). With the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa embarked on restructuring, reform and re-organisation in the education (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996, section 16). New policies were laid down and legislation passed such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 and the National Education Policy Act of 1996 which aimed at democratizing governance in schools and improving appalling conditions in previously disadvantaged schools to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities for education (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). This means, among others, that government is committed to the development of a democratic system that provides for participation of all stakeholders with a vested interest in education (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996, section 16).

Since 1994, the National Department of Education has expressed concern about lack of proper evaluation strategies in South Africa. For example, Prof K. Asmal, the former Minister of Education in South Africa launched Tirisano, a Quality education for all: statement of public service commitment.

Tirisano, meaning 'working together' in September 2000 (Tirisano, 2000). Tirisano spells out the priorities of the National Department of Education as including school effectiveness and teacher professionalism. In order for this priority to be realised, Whole School Evaluation was adopted as an intervention to improve performance and ensure quality education in South African schools (Tirisano, 2000).

Whole School Evaluation is not an end in itself. It is the first step in the process of school improvement and quality enhancement. It also suggests partnership amongst all stakeholders (Headington, 2001). In order to understand the purpose and expected impact of Whole School Evaluation (WSE), one needs to look back at the origins and problems of education in South Africa and the problems that have beset this important instrument of good citizenship and development.

WSE is transparent and interactive (Naicker & Waddy, 2002). It involves holistic evaluation of performance of schools against set criteria with a view to improve quality of education. In order for WSE to be effective, it should be well communicated to all stakeholders within a school and take into account the different circumstances within South African schools. As cited by De Grauwe (2001) 'Improving the quality of schools and the achievement of students remains a priority throughout the world, not at least in the developing countries. To monitor quality, national authorities rely strongly on the school supervision system.'

WSE serves a purpose of moderating externally the results of School Self Evaluation (SSE) as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of a school using agreed upon or set criteria (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). It enables supervisors to provide an account of the schools current performance and show the extent to which the school meets national goals, while able to meet the needs of the community in general (Du Plooy & Westrand, 2004). WSE increases the level of accountability in education and involves all stakeholders as well as support by District Support Services (DSS) (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001; Du Plooy & Westrand, 2004),. Feedback is given to all stakeholders as a means of achieving continuous school improvement. Who are the customers of the school or stakeholders in the process of WSE? They are the learners to whom education is provided, the parents of these learners, the department of education whose responsibility is to recruit suitably qualified and skilled staff and the community at large.

Stakeholders have the right to know how well their school is doing and what role are they expected to play to bring about improvement and development in their school (Du Plooy & Westrand, 2004; Headington, 2001), WSE was introduced in South African schools to bring about an effective monitoring and evaluation process which is vital to the improvement of quality and standard of performance in schools (Steyn, 2003).

It is therefore through WSE that aspects of excellence of effective schools or models of good practice within the system are identified and shared in order to understand what contributes towards effective schools.

In conducting WSE, the supervisors are governed by the Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting which sets out general principles and guidelines under which members of the WSE teams should engage in the process of evaluation and reporting (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). The general principles of the Professional Code are that supervisors will be consistent, fair and courteous and will work with members of the school community in a climate of mutual respect (Government Gazette 433 No. 22512 of July 2001). Supervisors are also committed to basing their judgments on first-hand evidence and to applying evaluation criteria objectively and reliably.

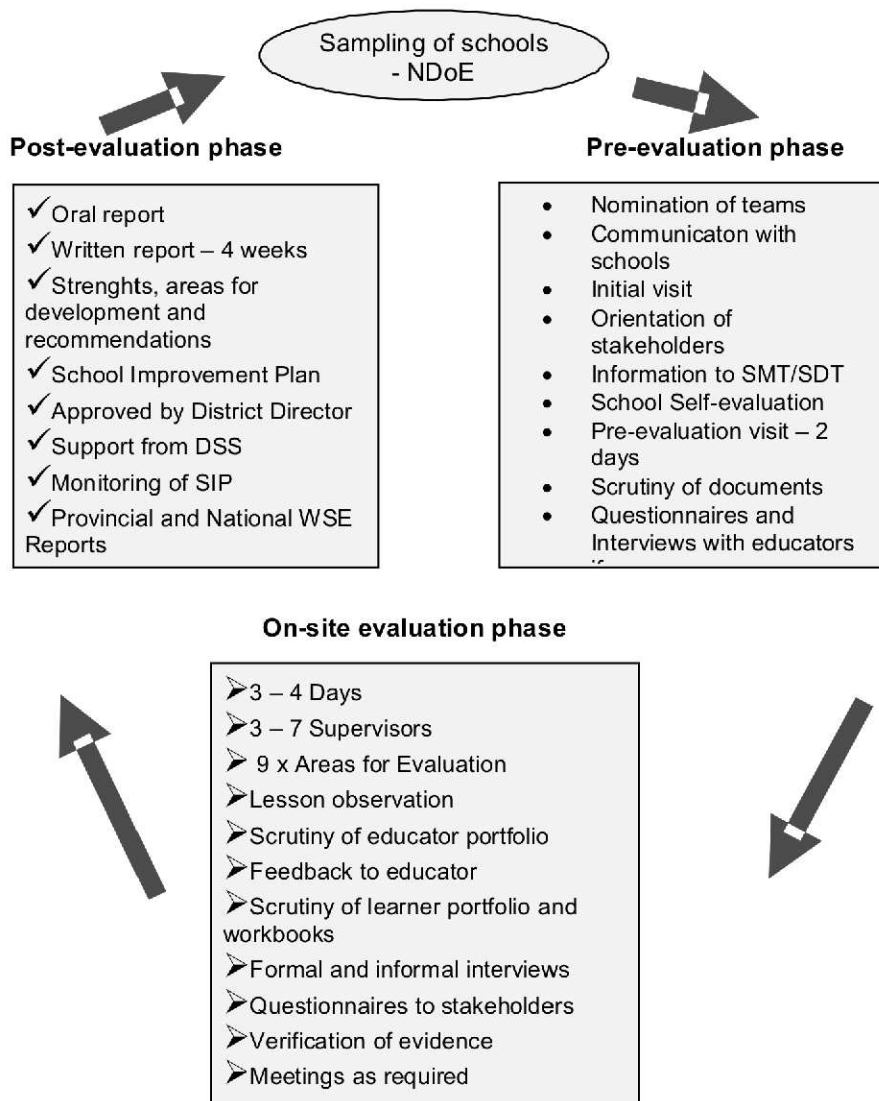
### The importance of WSE in schools

A review of literature was done as a means of finding a base to support this research. There are notable similarities in school evaluation processes within various countries from this literature. However, it is evident that evaluation has a critical part to play in assisting with all aspects of quality in schools. School inspectors or WSE supervisors are therefore responsible for identifying in schools good practice and encourage teachers to develop further the desirable practice. This will foster and promote collaborative work within schools as a unit as well as development (Naicker & Waddy, 2002). It should also be noted that schools can empower themselves to do school-based self-evaluation in order to benefit maximally from WSE.

### The Whole School Evaluation Process

The traditional method of quality control in South African schools has been external evaluation by inspectors and emphasis which tended to be on control rather than quality assurance (Squelch, 2000). The WSE process is divided into three phases namely, pre-evaluation (a school's self measure and evaluation of its progress), on-site evaluation (which involves evaluation by WSE teams) and post evaluation (a report presented orally and in writing to the principal of the school which will in turn guide the stakeholders in the development of the School Improvement Plan). The WSE process is outlined on Figure 1.1 in the next page.

**Figure 1.1 THE EVALUATION PROCESS**



## **2. AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The study was intended to:

- Unearth problems which lead to some schools exhibiting no noticeable change even after the introduction of WSE though recommendations for improvements were spelt out in their reports, Ascertain the interpretation and understanding of WSE by schools,
- Examine and evaluate the impact of WSE intervention and the extent to which desired outcomes for quality learning and teaching are being achieved in the sampled schools
- Find out whether stakeholders are informed about WSE and do they know their role in the process as well as the extent of their involvement in the development and implementation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)
- Identifying problems, if any, that WSE cause for stakeholders and educators initiative specifically relating to teaching and learning in the classroom and recommend solutions for such inadequacies.
- Find out if there has been any follow up or monitoring by the WSE teams after external evaluation.

## **3. METHOD**

In this study, a mixed mode approach was used. A pilot study was also carried out prior to the main study. The purpose of this pilot study was to check whether if there were any items where respondents may have difficulty in understanding exactly what the compiler of the questionnaire is seeking to determine and also to gain feedback on how valid the questionnaire items are. The population in this study was made up of schools evaluated during the period 2002 to 2007 in Motheo Education District of the Free State Province. A random selection from a list of all Motheo District schools evaluated during 2003-2007 was done since all schools evaluated appear on the list. Three primary schools from each Education District were sampled. As cited by Mwamwenda (1996), "what holds true for a sample holds true for a population". Simple random sampling of schools evaluated was done so as to give each school an equal chance of being selected (Mac Burney, 1994).

Data in this study, was gathered by means of questionnaires and structured interviews with stakeholders in WSE of the selected schools as well as the WSE supervisors, Chief Education Specialist: Whole School Evaluation and the Director: Quality Assurance Directorate, Department of Education, Free State Province. Qualitatively, various techniques were used to evaluate finer details. The qualitative approach was applied, amongst others, to discover how schools interpret reports particularly the parent representation of the school, the School Governing Body on issues of governance to be able to formulate School Improvement Plans since parents in some schools are illiterate.

The researcher detailed specific outcomes and questions for the interview prior commencement of the interview. The survey method was used to allow the researcher to collect information from a large sample of people and to enable the researcher to generalise findings from a sample of responses to a population.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this study, themes were used in data analysis. The following shortcomings were identified in this study:

##### **Lack of clarity regarding the WSE process**

It should be noted that lack of knowledge may prohibit participants to function successfully. Stakeholders in WSE should work towards a common goal. According to Arcaro (1995) 'The vision provides people with the direction to follow. Once the direction is known, the next step is to remove obstacles and barriers that prevent people from achieving excellence in their performance.' In essence, when stakeholders are not trained and are not aware of the role they should play in the process then recommendations stated by the WSE teams on reports they send to schools evaluated will always remain words in the wind which will frustrate schools and WSE supervisors. If all stakeholders could thoroughly understand the aim of WSE and the roles that they as stakeholders have to play in the process we would see progress and improvement in the quality of education in our schools. More advocacies on Whole School Evaluation, particularly to clarify roles that stakeholders within a school should play are still necessary.

##### **Stakeholder involvement in School Self Evaluation (SSE)**

There is a tendency of doing School Self Evaluation single-handedly amongst principals and School Management Teams since timing of principal training and the actual evaluation at their schools is usually not sufficient to allow principals to take stakeholders accordingly through the whole process, also taking into consideration other programmes going on at the school. Self-evaluation that is made as a result is a kind of reflective measure, but the data and observations so derived are not strategically used to provide feedback to informing pedagogical consideration or improving on learning and teaching as most of the stakeholders are not involved as such.

Some educators pointed out that the principal had not guided them to work on the revealed problems together. Moreover, they indicated that they were not widely involved in the follow-up discussions. It can be seen that the lack of follow-up discussions further limited the chance of educators in sharing their views on solving problems revealed from the SSE data.

It is recommended that, perhaps the principal and School Management Team member should attend training conducted by WSE Unit so as to be in a position to remind one another and give support at their various schools. Some principals leave training being not very clear themselves and are expected to cascade training to other stakeholders in WSE at their schools. This creates a problem as it is not easy for a manager to own up to his or her subordinates and say he or she did not understand what was entailed in the training/ course he or she attended. Hence they mostly resort to doing the SSE single-handedly. The schools could also consider, through collaborative effort of the key players, formulating appropriate measures to further substantiate and refine self evaluation amidst their undertakings as a tool helping schools to make informed decision in support of school's development, to exercise quality assurance and to develop accountability.

At the launch of a campaign called Quality Learning and Teaching, the Minister of Education in South Africa, Naledi Pandor emphasised the importance of stakeholder involvement in ensuring quality education by stating that 'Education changes lives and communities, but communities must also get involved. Let us all get involved' (City Press, 11 January 2009). She further said 'we have to move away from the belief that education is the sole responsibility of the government and the office of the education minister. We have to awaken South Africans to promote quality learning and teaching '(City Press, 11 January 2009).

Not all WSE supervisors are trained and accredited.

Regarding training of WSE supervisors, there is a dire need for the other WSE supervisors who were not trained and accredited to be taken aboard. All WSE supervisors also need to be well informed regarding the details in training of principals so that they are in a position to give appropriate support where necessary as they monitor evaluated schools after WSE.

Lack of co-ordination between the WSE unit, District Offices, Examination and Curriculum Development sections of the Department of Education and teacher training institutions

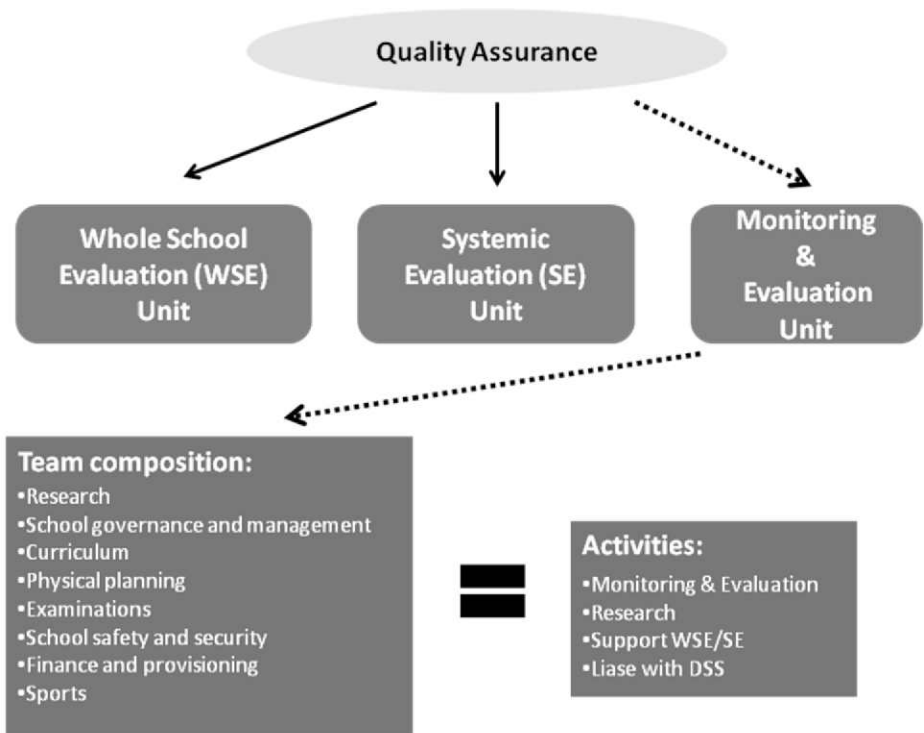
There should exist co-ordination between the WSE unit, district offices, teacher training institutions, curriculum development section of the provincial department of education and the examination section. Schools need support of stakeholders before and after evaluation. It has come out clearly in this study that there is a need for support to schools particularly by the District Support Services after schools have been evaluated to assist and guide in the development and implementation of the SIP. Presently follow up visits made by WSE supervisors to schools evaluated tends to serve very little or no purpose at all due to this lack of co-ordination. Schools need support.



Furthermore, it is proposed that a Monitoring and Evaluation unit be established under the Quality Assurance Directorate of the Department of Education to monitor, evaluate, research, oversee and support the activities of Whole School Evaluation and Systemic Evaluation respectively. The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit team should be made up of a representation of membership with expertise in at least one the following respectively as illustrated on figure 1.2 in the next page:

- Research
- School governance and management
- Curriculum
- Physical planning
- Examinations
- School safety and security
- Finance and provisioning
- Sports

Figure 1.2 Proposed structure for the Quality Assurance Directorate



The team of this unit has to be trained in Whole School Evaluation, the same way it is done with the WSE supervisors so as to be able to support and in particular assist schools with Post-Evaluation activities in collaboration with the WSE unit and various structures of the DSS where necessary.

Stakeholders not kept informed about the happenings and developments within the WSE unit.

As a means of improving communication and updating stakeholders with the developments within the WSE unit, manuals, newsletters etc on WSE activities could be sent to schools and other stakeholders in addition to an annual report. At school level, strategies that will enable two way communication between parents and the school need to be devised.

This study necessitates a revisit into the training of principals in preparation of evaluation and report writing by WSE teams thus enabling schools to make sense out of the whole process involved as well as suggested recommendations for school development and improvement. This will contribute meaningfully towards training of principals for WSE and improvement of quality of reports emanating from WSE teams, which will in turn enable schools to meet national goals of achieving quality in education

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The researcher is of an opinion that, sorting out the obstacles in the implementation of the Whole School Evaluation process may lead to drastic and positive improvement in schools and this would ultimately have a positive effect on the quality of education offered at our schools and also quality life and prosperity within the communities in South Africa. The researcher concurs with Arcaro (1995:2) in that: 'The quality of education will improve when administrators , teachers, staff and school board members develop new attitudes that focus on leadership, teamwork, cooperation, accountability and recognition'. If all stakeholders could thoroughly understand the aim of Whole School Evaluation and the roles that they as stakeholders have to play in the process, there would be progress and improvement in the quality of education in schools not only in the Free State Province but South Africa as a whole.

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