What Can the Child Do?
A Case Study of Continuous Assessment in a Ugandan P1 Class

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Contents

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Abstract

Assessment is inextricably linked with teaching and securing positive learning outcomes for pupils. This small scale case study uses classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to investigate teachers' understanding and enactment of continuous assessment in a P1 class in Uganda. Vignettes of practice from literacy lessons reveal how teachers implement assessment within the teaching and learning process. These highlight that despite the challenge of large class teaching and tensions created in a system dominated by the high-stake Primary Leaving Examination (PLE), implementing classroom-based assessment is possible.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
NAPE	National Assessment of Progress in Education
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
PLE	Primary Leaving Examination
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPE	Universal Primary Education
Uwezo	Means 'capability' in Kiswahili

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Introduction

'What can the child do?' the question, as a teacher, I continually asked myself about all the children in my class and the question at the heart of lower primary assessment in Uganda.

Assessment is inextricably linked to the teaching and learning process and without effective practice pupils fail to maximise their learning potential. As a passionate infant practitioner, knowing the value and importance of pupils experiencing success in the first years of schooling I was keen to explore the issue of assessment. This research therefore examines 'how do teachers understand continuous assessment?' through a case study in a P1 class in rural Uganda. Fine-grained analysis of vignettes of classroom practice in literacy provides an insight into how teachers' understanding of continuous assessment shapes their teaching and pupils' learning.

The study is presented as follows; to contextualise the case study a description of Uganda includes the education sector and current status of the assessment system. A review of the literature on assessment considers how continuous assessment is understood in international education discourse and the differences between 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning'. This leads to exploring implications of assessment practice for the young child and the role of the teacher in the process. The next section establishes the research questions, the approach used to answer them and steps taken to ensure the quality of the research process. The findings are presented in two sub-sections; how continuous assessment is understood by teachers compared to policy documentation and the use of formal and informal assessments. This leads to a discussion on effective practice and issues of assessment within a large class context. The study concludes that despite the challenge of large class teaching and tensions created in a system dominated by the high-stake PLE, implementing classroom-based assessment is possible.

Context

Country context

Uganda is a landlocked, low-income country in East Africa with a population of 36.7 million, of which 48% are under 15 years (UNESCO, 2014a). 84% of the population reside in rural areas and 52% live below the income poverty line of US$ 1.25 per day (UNESCO, 2014a; UNDP, 2014). Over 60 local languages exist with English used as the official language (Altinyelken, 2010a). Though currently ranked 164 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index, the government aspires to be a low-middle-income country by 2017 (UNDP, 2014; GoU, 2013).

Education sector context

As a result of embracing international educational developments and reforms, Uganda is often cited as a model of development (Ward et al., 2006). Pupil enrolment increased by 73%, from 3.1 million to 5.1 million in just one year following the introduction of UPE, in 1997, placing a massive strain on already limited resources (Deininger, 2003). The education system suffered neglect during twenty years of internal conflict; therefore, it was unable to cope with the huge increase in enrolment. Many believe this influx adversely affected the quality of education and pupil attainment remains a major concern today (Altinyelken, 2010a; Nannyonjo, 2007).

UPE assisted Uganda in achieving 96% net enrolment rate and gender parity. However, the system is characterised by a culture of repetition; consequently, 45% of pupils are out of age and only 25% survive to P7 (UNESCO, 2014a). UNESCO's inequalities database reveals variations between rural and urban areas and the poor and rich, for example, only 14% of the poorest rural girls complete school compared to 78% of the richest urban girls (UNESCO, 2014b). Based on UNESCO estimates, it will be another two generations before Uganda's poorest children complete the full primary education cycle (UNESCO, 2014a, p.95). Class sizes remain large; whilst EMIS (2012) shows a PTR of 54:1[1].This average hides huge variations between urban and rural areas and between grades. Consequently, lower primary classes in rural areas can exceed 80:1 (MoES, 2013; Altinyelken, 2010a). This is not helped by the shortage of trained teachers and it is likely to be 2025 before Uganda achieves the EFA PTR of 40:1 (UNESCO 2014a). The problem is further exasperated by Ugandan teachers being amongst the lowest paid in the world (UNESCO, 2014a, p.255).

Thematic Curriculum

 Since the introduction of UPE, Uganda grappled with the challenge of providing quality education (Najjumba and Marshall, 2013). The Thematic Curriculum (2007) emphasised child-centred learning in the local language through thematic teaching to improve basic literacy and mathematics in the lower grades (UNEB, 2012; Ward

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[1] Figure for government schools

et al., 2006; Read and Enyutu, 2005). Additionally, there were high expectations it would create a literate and numerate population imperative to sustainable development, economic growth and the eradication of poverty (Kanjee and Acana 2013; Altinyelken, 2010a). However, the Thematic Curriculum has not been interpreted and practised as envisaged by policy-makers, partly due to insufficient training, guidance and resources for teachers (Kyeyune, 2011; NCDC, undated).

Assessment and attainment

The Thematic Curriculum is viewed as the catalyst for introducing a competence-based continuous assessment model to 'improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning through the use of valid and reliable teacher-made assessment' (UNEB, 2010, para.6; Acana, 2006). Pupil attainment and the effectiveness of classroom instruction are monitored through a range of internal and external systems (see Table 1).

Table 1: Assessment types and key differences

	Classroom Assessment	Theme and end of term tests	National PLE	National NAPE P3 & P6 Assessments	Regional SACMEQ & Uwezo
Purpose	To provide immediate feedback to inform classroom instruction	To select and verify pupils as they move from one level of education system to the next	To select and verify pupils as they move from one level of education system to the next	To provide feedback on the overall health of the system in P3 and P6. To monitor trends in learning	To improve competencies in literacy and numeracy among children aged 6 to 16 years old
Frequency	Daily	End of theme tests every three weeks Beginning & end of term examination	Annually	Annually	Annually
Who is assessed	All pupils	All pupils for theme tests and only students who pay exam fee for end of term	All P7 pupils entered by school	Sample of pupils in P3 & P6	Uwezo – country wide epresentative sample of households pupils aged 6 to 16 years
Format	Observations, questioning, paper-and-pencil & practical activities	Group pencil and paper activities. 1:1 oral activities	Multiple choice and short answers	Usually multiple choice and short answers	Uwezo - 1:1 assessment of oral and written skills
Language	Language of instruction	Theme tests: language of instruction Term tests: English	English	English	English Uwezo - local language in addition to English
Coverage of curriculum	All subject areas and competences	Covers main subject areas and collapsed competences for the term and theme	Covers main subjects	Literacy and numeracy	Literacy and numeracy based on the Thematic Curriculum
Additional pupil information collected	Yes, as part of the teaching process	seldom	No	Yes	Yes
Evaluation	Three levels ✓Below average ✓✓ Average ✓✓✓ Above average	Simple scoring creating % score for each subject and overall class ranking	Weighted aggregate leading to four divisions of pass	Ranges from simple to more statistically sophisticated techniques	Statistically sophisticated techniques.

Source: Author's compilation based on Clarke (2012)

These serve different purposes; classroom assessments to inform teaching and learning, PLE to determine movement to secondary level and National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) assessments to monitor attainment across the system. Table 1 demonstrates how different purposes influence what is assessed, how and to whom they are administered. The evaluation methods use more sophisticated statistical approaches when assessment data is utilised for organisation accountability. For example, NAPE uses a single criterion reference to compare pupil attainment for individual competences and a more a complex multi-criterion analysis to assess how well individual districts perform. Additionally, there is the capacity to analyse how different variables impact on outcomes e.g. gender, age, school ownership and location (UNEB, 2012).

NAPE assessment data indicates 46% of P3 pupils and 29% of P6 pupils achieved the expected level of proficiency in Literacy[2] with pupils in urban areas performing better than their rural counterparts. Therefore, the majority of children leave primary education without achieving basic skills in literacy (UNEB, 2012). Unsurprisingly, significant differences exist between lower-order simple recall competences and those requiring pupils to apply knowledge, for example, answering comprehension questions. In Uwezo[3] assessments, P1 pupils perform poorly; less than 1% could read a sentence level text, only 4.2% managed word level text and over 61% could read nothing (Uwezo, 2011). Furthermore, SACMEQ[4] assessments indicate Uganda's poor performance in comparison to its geographical neighbours and the lack of improvement overtime (Uwezo, 2014; Uwezo, 2012; Hungi, 2011).

As evidenced by the above data, schooling is not translating to learning. Internal analysis of 2012 NAPE data identifies the need to strengthen teachers' 'use of assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning' by teachers taking 'time on each topic in the curriculum until pupils have understood'. In addition teachers need training in how to interpret the curriculum for teaching and assessment purposes and formative assessment techniques (UNEB, 2012, p.76, p.79).

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[2] Literacy assessment is in English for government schools
[3] Covers Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda
[4] Covers 16 SSA countries

1. Literature Review

'Assessment of learning' has become linked with summative assessment and 'assessment for learning' reflects the shift from formal testing to formative assessment within the teaching process. For the purpose of this literature review, however, assessment is used without specifically linking it to either formative or summative interpretations.

In this review, the purpose of assessment is firstly considered before looking at how continuous assessment is understood in international education discourse including; its evolution, attempts to define the term and the benefits and challenges of implementing continuous assessment in the classroom. The next section examines features of 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning'. This leads to exploring implications of assessment practice for the young child and the role of the teacher in the process. Finally, consideration is given to the relationship between the two approaches.

Method

To identify publications with a specific focus on continuous assessment a range of search tools were employed including; library catalogue, Google Scholar and education electronic databases (ERIC, BEI, AEI and PsycINFO). The outcome of searching for 'continuous assessment'AND'Uganda' produced one paper of limited relevance as it focused on EGRA in Liberia. Assessment is a complex term with many derivations and the lack of consensus on key words resulted in searches using the term 'assessment' yielding unwieldy results. Different parameters and combinations were explored including 'continuous assessment'/'assessment' AND 'developing countries'/'primary education'. An initial screening of the abstract and key words was used to narrow down and select texts relevant to the research questions. Citation and reference index searches added additional texts.

Why assess?

The purpose of assessment is generally understood as contributing to pupil learning and is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. From experience, I have seen how effective assessment in the first years of school, characterised by sensitivity and rigour, ensures pupils get a good start on the path to becoming autonomous life-long learners. This is not easy; it requires understanding of the assessment purpose and strategies by teachers and active involvement of pupils. Today, school assessment policies and practices are shaped and influenced by the education system structure, the curriculum, socio-economic and cultural factors and the international agenda.

The current worldwide interest in assessment stems from the EFA goal requiring 'measurable learning outcomes' (Sayed et al., 2012; Wagner, 2011; UNESCO, 2000). With post 2015 goals likely to include a greater assessment focus, the significance of assessment for schools in developing countries will probably increase

(SG HLPEP, 2013; LMTF, 2013) . However, there is a danger the new assessment mantra of 'monitoring, auditing, regulating, quality assurance, accountability, appraisal and inspection' fails to take account of assessment for pupil learning and the cultural values, traditions and interests of individual nations (Broadfoot, 2000, p.xii). Therefore, it is important to ensure a clear distinction is made between assessment to evaluate education systems and assessment to improve pupil outcomes; the latter is the focus here.

Continuous assessment

The emergence of continuous assessment

Continuous assessment emerged through educators' recognition that systematic feedback to pupils and teachers, via a constant analysis of pupil progress led to good education. Furthermore, concerns existed that a single exam system appeared unfair (Nitko, 1995). Consequently, many developing countries adopted continuous assessment to ameliorate the negative impact of high-stake examinations that resulted in didactic teaching to the test (Perry, 2013; Sayed et al., 2012). Additionally, continuous assessment has the potential for teachers to discover if the pupils are learning and develop their teaching to improve learning outcomes (du Plessis, 2002; Pryor and Akwesi, 1998).

Defining continuous assessment

Continuous assessment is interpreted and understood in many different ways as the explanations below illustrate:

> *Continuous assessment comprises the use of marks, usually some percentages, obtained from internal school-based assessments conducted throughout the year to contribute to the final examination grade of a learner (Sayed et al., 2012, p.109).*

> *Continuous assessment refers to making observations periodically to find out what a student knows, understands and can do (du Plessis, 2002, p.57).*

Sayed et al. (2012) emphasise assessment over time and implies more formal methods of testing are used. In contrast, du Plessis (2002) emphasises classroom observation, focussing on finding out what pupils know, understand and can do. Being classroom-based is an important common feature though different purposes emerge; to provide a final judgement or to know what pupils can do. Black and Wiliam (1998) caution that, if continuous assessment is no more than a scheme of collecting marks for a final high-stake exam then, it is not being used as part of the teaching and learning process. Taking a wider stance, Nitko (1994) cites a further feature of continuous assessment is the use of data to inform education policy and curriculum development. Moreover, Nitko (1994) attributes the confusion over meaning of the term to implementation problems.

Benefits and challenges

Successfully implemented there are benefits for pupils and teachers. Sadler (1989) identifies three benefits for pupils; firstly, anxiety levels can be reduced through assessments over time contributing to the final grade rather than one make-or-break examination. Secondly, it allows for a more varied sampling of work and thirdly, by providing frequent, specific and action-oriented feedback. Furthermore, mistakes and misconceptions can be identified on a daily and timely basis enabling teachers to provide immediate feedback to individual pupils, a group or the whole class (Tunstall and Gipps, 1996). Additionally, teachers can use assessment information to inform future planning and adapt teaching to reflect the pupil's needs, whether it is repetition of a concept, further reinforcement or extending learning (Nsibande and Modiba, 2012; du Plessis, 2002).

Empirical research in developing countries highlights how laudable assessment policy does not translate into effective practice as implementation challenges are overlooked (Perry, 2013; Oonyu, 2012; Rogan and Grayson, 2003). To avoid this, assessment practice is most effective when aligned with the curriculum to 'form a seamless fabric of teaching, learning and assessing' (Nitko, 1995, p.3). Adopting a competence-based curriculum facilitates this alignment, however, the curriculum is often overambitious and classroom-based assessments add to teachers' workload (UNESCO, 2014a; Pritchett and Beatty, 2012; Gove and Wetterberg, 2011). In addition, inadequate teacher training, large class size and insufficient resources are barriers to continuous assessment succeeding in developing countries (Kyeyune, 2011; Kapambwe, 2010; Mchazime, 2003).

Continuous assessment can therefore be considered as a teacher-led, classroom-based process involving both assessment of learning by giving grades towards a terminal judgement or qualification, and assessment for learning by guiding teachers in how to improve pupil learning. These two approaches are considered in further detail.

Assessment of learning

Assessment of learning culminates in a mark at the end of a course for reporting, monitoring or certification (Sayed et al., 2012; Taras, 2005; Sadler, 1989). Associated with formal examinations it benefits from being low cost, easy to administer and allows comparison between pupils, making it attractive in resource-poor countries and remains the default method of assessment in many developing countries (Perry, 2013). Examination backwash affects both curriculum content and pedagogy; if an area is not tested it will not be taught and it will be taught the way it is tested (Somerset, 2011). This results in a behaviourist approach of didactic teacher-centred pedagogy coming to dominate as teachers strive to impart knowledge to passive pupils viewed as empty vessels. Moreover, examinations are not suited to subjects with a practical bias and a

lack of feedback limits the impact on pupil learning (Hardman et al., 2011; Black and Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1989).

Assessment for learning

Seeking a fairer assessment system that valued learning over time, assessed the full breadth of the curriculum and reflected child-centred learning, together with a shift in understanding about the role and nature of assessment resulted in assessment becoming an integral part of the teaching and learning process (Sayed et al., 2012; Harlen and James, 1997; Willis, 1993). Further supported by the findings of Black and Wiliam (1998) claiming, if effectively implemented, assessment for learning raises standards of achievement for all pupils but particularly low achievers it has become established classroom practice in developed countries (Sayed et al., 2012). Furthermore, it emphasises how teachers 'use the information to develop and implement appropriate strategies to improve learning' within daily teaching (Sayed et al., 2012, p.102; Torrance and Pryor, 1998). In other words, assessment for learning can be considered as any process that promotes learning by using evidence to plan next steps and make pupils aware of how they can make progress (Harlen, 2006).

Black and Wiliam (2009) provide a helpful description of the process, in their words:

> *evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers to make decision about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better funded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (Black and Wiliam, 2009, p.9).*

An assessment-learning cycle evolves through the sequence of eliciting evidence, interpreting evidence and taking action to bring about new learning as represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Assessment-learning cycle
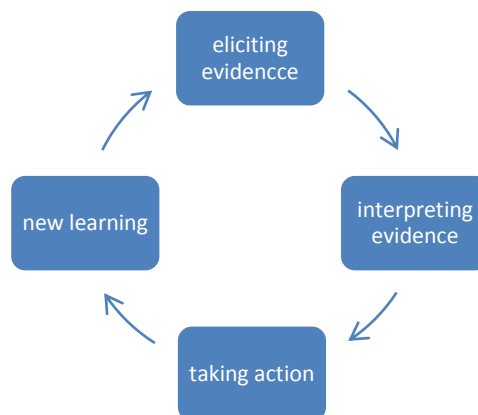
Source: Based on Black and Wiliam (2009)

Eliciting evidence

Eliciting evidence through questioning, observations, listening to discussions and reviewing completed work forms the first stage in the process in Figure 1. Writers vary in which method they stress with Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasising questioning from their work with older children, whereas, du Plessis (2002) working with younger pupils, cites the importance of observation. Torrance and Pryor (2006; 1995) concur that classroom-assessment is suitable for understanding the child's thinking and learning but highlight the underlying assumption that teachers can elicit clear responses from individual pupils in an unambiguous manner (Torrance and Pryor, 1995). From their work with infant pupils, Torrance and Pryor (1998) suggest this is not the case as misconceptions arise through pupil-teacher interaction.

Torrance and Pryor (1998) advise that classroom assessment does not take place in a social vacuum but, is an integral part of classroom life, therefore, complex and problematic. Their work reveals assessment as socially situated and influenced by the power constructs within the classroom (Torrance and Pryor 2006, 1998; Willis 1993). Furthermore, Filer (2000) cautions that insufficient attention is given to the social impact of assessment leading to the perpetuation of educational and social disparity within society. Additionally, as social-constructivist philosophy is underpinned by a child-centred pedagogy, whereby knowledge is constructed rather than created in line with Vygotsky's view of learning, it has implications for the curriculum, teaching and learning strategies (Vygotskii et al., 1994). Thus evidence is actively co-constructed and influenced by the understanding of social relations held by both teacher and pupil (Pryor and Torrance, 2000; Torrance and Pryor, 1995). Successfully implemented teachers gain important pedagogical information which, if effectively interpreted, guides their teaching and enhances pupils' knowledge and understanding (Sayed et al., 2012).

Interpreting evidence

Unless the evidence is interpreted assessments are meaningless. Sadler (1989), Nitko (1995) and Willis (1993) identify how criterion-referencing creates alignment between assessment and the curriculum, as assessment criteria emerge from curriculum competences. However, UNESCO (2014a) cautions that in developing countries as teachers lack training in this methodology it can significantly add to their workload. On the other hand, pupil-referencing is essential for individual success and Harlen and James (1997) stress the need for teachers to know every child and recognise the pupil's current level. Once again, this highlights the challenge in developing countries characterised by large classes, poor pupil attendance and lack of information on pupil backgrounds (UNESCO, 2014a). This is especially true in the lower grades which tend to have the largest classes.

Taking action

It is widely acknowledged that without effective feedback the impact of assessment is limited (Sadler, 1998; Harlen and James, 1997). Indeed, Harlen and James (1997) go so far as to say feedback is the essential component of assessment, and learning with understanding is dependent upon it. In response to the question 'what is good feedback?' Black and Wiliam (2003) give the simple response 'good feedback causes thinking' (Black and Wiliam, 2003, p.631). If this is the goal, the view of du Plessis (2002) that feedback is the information teachers give to pupils about their performance is limited. Whilst acknowledging feedback should contain suggestions on how to improve there is no attention given to the notion that it requires acting on to achieve new learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1989). Torrance and Pryor (1998) highlight in developed countries the practice of 'feed-forward', thus emphasising assessment is not just about what has happened but about what will happen. Again, this raises the importance of pupils having the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to 'feed forward' leading to improved learning outcomes. How this process happens in the classroom has further implications for assessment policy.

Torrance and Pryor's (1998) convergent and divergent forms of assessment are useful in highlighting how feedback changes dependent upon the adopted teaching and learning pedagogy. In a teacher-centred approach assessment is convergent and consequently feedback is authoritative, judgemental or quantitative. Whereas if a child-centred pedagogy dominates assessment becomes divergent and feedback is more descriptive aimed at prompting further engagement of the pupils. However, in their study of early years' classrooms Torrance and Pryor (1998) found most of the assessment practices were convergent as feedback followed the Imitation-Response-Feedback (IRT) pattern associated with a behaviourist theory of learning. In order to provide effective feedback teachers draw upon a number of different resources including their knowledge of the content and standards, ability to design assessment tasks, evaluative skills and expertise in framing feedback responses (Sadler, 1998). Furthermore, Sadler (1998) found teachers' practice is influenced by their attitudes and dispositions to pupils.

Implications for young pupils

The importance of pupil involvement in the assessment process is highlighted in Black and Wiliam's (1998) and Sadler's (1989) research with older students and Torrance and Pryor (1998) and Tunstall and Gipps (1996) work with infant-aged pupils. Based on research in developed countries, caution is required in applying their findings to large classes in developing countries where teachers often lack relevant training, pedagogic content knowledge, and understanding of assessment skills (Westbrook et al., 2013; Pryor et al., 2012; Kapambwe, 2010; Lewin, 2004).

In first years of schooling the young pupil needs to develop an understanding of how learning is constructed in the social context of the school environment whilst mastering the basic literacy and numeracy skills required for future learning (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). The literature identifies pupils need to; recognise what they are aiming for, know what quality looks like, self-assess, make qualitative judgements, understand and use feedback (Black et al., 2002; Torrance and Pryor, 1998; Harlen and James, 1997; Tunstall and Gipps; 1996; Sadler, 1989). Sadler (1989) believes children actively apply these skills in their daily lives, school presents an unfamiliar environment and consequently, evaluative skills are not easily transferred. This is supported by Torrance and Pryor (1998) who expose the complexity of eliciting accurate evidence through pupil-teacher interaction. To facilitate pupils moving from the known to the unknown or in closing the learning gap, Sadler (1989) provides a useful analogy of the teacher acting as a bridge.

Teachers using scaffolding has greater significance in the lower-primary years as Bruner said:

> *Once the child is willing to try, the tutor's general task is that of scaffolding – reducing the number of degrees of freedom that the child must manage in the task. She does this by segmenting the task and ritualizing it: creating a format (Bruner, 1985, p.29).*

In this process pupils build on what they know, they are supported to reach the new skill or a correct response. By providing corrective feedback teachers support pupils to move from their 'actual developmental level' to working in the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotskii et al., 1994). In other words, the advice and support of the teacher within the activity moves the pupil from what he or she can do alone to new learning. However, Harlen and James (1997) and Sayed et al. (2012) discovered this was an area teachers found challenging and needed assistance with.

Assessment for learning is dependent on a constructivist approach to child-centred learning, facilitated by an environment that enables pupils to be active learners. Thus learning becomes an interactive and constructive process mediated by the teacher through cultural tools and especially language (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Working as a class teacher in the UK enabled me to witness how following induction into assessment procedures, children as young as four can effectively self-assess using multi-criterion judgements and be active participants in the feedback process, highlighting the importance of recognising 'teachers are pivotal in determining how assessment takes place within the classroom setting and are therefore key to the success of any educational assessment system' (Sayed et al., 2012 p.112). It is apparent from the literature the need to understand more about the assessment practice with young children and specifically in developing countries.

Relationship between assessment of learning and assessment for learning

In recent years, greater recognition has been given to the need for both on-going classroom-based and more formal assessments. Driven by the desire not to erode the power of classroom-based assessment, the debate now focuses on finding 'ways of mitigating the tension' between the two approaches (Taras, 2005, p.15; Torrance, 2012; Sayed et al., 2012). Exponents of assessment for learning support this, though Torrance and Pryor (1998) caution that as functions of each are so different, the same assessment cannot fulfil both functions (Taras, 2007; Wiliam, 2000). Furthermore, in practice, Wiliam (2000) found teachers are not willing or capable of separating the two systems.

How this is to be achieved is a more challenging question. There appears to be consensus that good teachers assess while teaching (Torrance and Pryor 2006; Taras 2005; Wiliam 2000). This leads Taras (2005) to argue that the discussion should therefore focus on the purpose assessment will serve. She believes that starting from a teaching pedagogy perspective would focus on the strengths of a classroom-based system by developing teachers' understanding of the criteria against which judgements are being made and their skills in providing age-appropriate feedback.

The international education agenda post 2015 is likely to place a greater emphasis on accountability. The literature in this review indicates the potential danger that if education systems come to reflect how they will be held to account on the international arena then the curriculum becomes reduced to what can be assessed (SG HLPEP, 2013; LMTF, 2013). This highlights Wiliam's (2000) belief that there is a clear need to keep assessment for accountability separate and recommends an external evaluative system for this purpose.

2. Research Design

Methodology

The aim of this research is to seek to ascertain teachers' understanding of continuous assessment and how this is represented in their classroom practice. It is well documented that in many developing countries, like Uganda, both as result of 'policy borrowing' and lack of consideration for the contextual challenges, policies developed at national level often fail to translate into practice (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008; James, 2006; Ball, 1998). I wanted to see if this was the case with continuous assessment and to discover how policy translated into practice, especially away from the capital. Selecting a case study approach with an interpretative methodology allowed me to try and get inside the world of the teacher and appreciate the contextual complexities they face in understanding and implementing continuous assessment. Given the limited scope of this study P1 literacy is used as a classroom example.

The main research question asks, "How do teachers understand continuous assessment?" In order to establish this, the following sub-questions are explored:

1) What do teachers know about assessment?
2) How do teachers implement assessment in the classroom?
3) What use do teachers make of assessment information?
4) How do teachers record assessment information?

Case study approach

'A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations' (Cohen, 2011, p.289). This allows the phenomenon, in this instance continuous assessment, to be explored in context, the school (Yin, 2009). My sound grasp of assessment and an understanding of Ugandan schools support choosing this approach. Additionally, a case study is suitable for a lone researcher, with the flexibility to accommodate unanticipated events and ability to capture unique features and significant moments of practice that might otherwise be lost (Nisbet and Watt, 1984 in Cohen, 2011). I believed it would be advantageous for me to probe below surface responses to investigate 'how' and 'why', whilst allowing events to occur naturally and speak for themselves. It would also enable data to be collected in a systematic and rigorous manner, as outlined within the methods section. The need to establish validity is one limitation of a case study approach (Thomas 2011). I aimed to accommodate variables, establish validity and create a more holistic view through triangulation of multiple data sources; non-participant observations, interviews and documents (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, 2011; Yin, 2009). Using Stake's instrumental case study approach I aimed to investigate, observe and analyse continuous assessment, the primary interest, in everyday literacy lessons, to gain insight into how the theory and practice of continuous assessment come together, the secondary purpose (Stake, 2005, p.445). In the

following sections further consideration is given to issues of researcher bias, ethical dimensions and reliability.

School selection

To identify and select schools I drew on the expertise of an independent language consultant working in Uganda. She approached the schools in person, explaining and delivering my request for their involvement. Criteria for school selection included:

- Government aided schools, as there can be considerable difference in both class size and resources between government and private schools
- Schools known to be following the Thematic Curriculum and teaching in local language
- Teachers trained in implementation of the Thematic Curriculum
- Commitment of the head teacher
- Quality of education within the school
- Staff experience
- Familiarity with 'western outsiders' observing lessons and talking with staff
- Location and ease of access given the short time-scale for fieldwork and data collection

Two government-aided high achieving schools, based on PLE results, were selected; a large school in town and a smaller rural school and both head teachers consented to partake. The town school participated in a USAID funded intervention program for literacy in P1 linked to the Thematic Curriculum. From my lesson observations and discussions it became apparent, as the program provided its own guides and assessment templates, the teachers were not positioned to teach or discuss continuous assessment as expressed in government documents. Consequently, only the rural school data is used.

Research methods

Document analysis sought to identify the official stance on continuous assessment, while interviews and observations ascertained teacher understanding of policy and how they implemented it. In preparation, I undertook a familiarisation session spending time in class, but not formally observing. This gave me a flavour of classroom life and allowed teachers and pupils to become familiar with my presence.

Document analysis

A range of documents were gathered for analysis including; government policy documents, teachers' planning, assessment records and examples of tests (see Table 2).

Table 2: Documents used in analysis

Government	School
P1, P2 & P3 Teachers' Guides	Lesson plans
P1, P2 & P3 Curriculum	Class assessment record for Theme 5
UNEB website page on Continuous Assessment	Individual assessment record for Theme 5 (Pupil E)
NAPE report 2012	P1 Report Card 2014 (Pupil E)
Pedagogy Handbook for Teaching in Local Language	Assessment folder (Pupil E)
ESSARP 2012-2013	P1 Theme 5 Literacy Test (Pupils E, A, Z)
ESSP 2007-2015	P1 Theme 5 English Test (Pupils E, B, D)
Quality of Teaching and Learning at School and Classroom Level Paper presented at ESSR 2013	P1 End of Term 1 2014 Literacy Test
Road Map for Implementation of Curriculum Reforms (2005)	P1 End of Term 1 2014 English Test
Fast Track Initiative Appraisal Report	
Uwezo Reports	
SACMEQ Reports	

Accessing the majority of government documents online allowed for pre-fieldwork analysis. This provided an insight into policy development, expected teacher practice and unfolding trends which acted as a frame of reference. It was not possible to find the teachers' handbook, 'Assessment Guidelines in the Thematic Curriculum' online. Teachers in school did not appear to be aware or have access to the document. A school inspector showed awareness, but I could not access a copy. A further analysis, post field-work, involved revisiting original documents alongside those gained in the field. Screening the documents, observation records and interview transcribes using emerging codes allowed for triangulation between the different data sources. Recognise not all documents had the same focus, care needed to be taken in interpreting reasons for non-alignment of coding. Non-alignment could reflect lack of consideration or prioritisation, but equally, lack of inclusion did not necessarily mean omission in practice.

Interviews

The interview is a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee in which the interviewer attempts to understand the world from the interviewee's point of view (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A semi-structured interview adopts a conversational style, and allows greater flexibility. This enables the interviewer to respond to issues raised by the interviewee, that the interviewer may not have considered, and to clarify meaning and misunderstandings (Bryman 2012). Moreover, as all the interviewees were fluent in English, eliminating the need for translation, it allowed a more fluid conversation to take place (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). With participants' consent, interviews were recorded, further facilitating the development of rapport between

interviewer and interviewee, as notes did not need to be taken, and enabling an accurate transcription to be made for analysis (see Appendix 1). Whilst I made every attempt to conduct interviews in quiet places free from disruptions, this was not always possible. In order not to impinge on participants' time, interviews lasted between 15 and 35 minutes and were conducted while the co-teacher taught the class or during break-time. I aimed to understand teachers' interpretation of continuous assessment within the context in which they worked (Cohen, 2011). To try and ensure responses would assist in answering the research questions I used an interview guide linked to the areas of; teacher understanding of continuous assessment, what teachers assess, how they assess and use of assessment information (Bryman, 2012). In my attempt to reconstruct the teachers' understanding of continuous assessment I needed to avoid subjectivity and my own bias. To achieve this I endeavoured to verify my interpretation of responses within the interview. Recognising that asymmetrical power relations exist in any interview and my presence would inevitably affect responses. Furthermore, I recognised the possibility of interviewees giving responses they thought I wanted or were the 'official view'.

Observations

Observations are at the heart of many case-studies as they allow the researcher to collect live data from naturally occurring situations, potentially providing more valid and authentic data (Cohen, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2006a). From experience in Uganda, I knew pupils do not readily approach another adult during lessons, especially as the cramped conditions impede pupil movement. This led me to believe it would be possible to adopt a natural, unstructured and non-participant role (Cohen, 2011). To achieve this, I did not have any input into the content or timing of the lesson and used the co-teacher's table at the back of the class without interacting with pupils or the teacher during the lesson so as not to influence pupil-teacher interaction. I intended not to evaluate or judge teaching or learning, rather to observe actual classroom events for examples of assessment in practice. I realise teachers knew the focus of my study and when I would be in school, so the lessons may not be typical but I hoped they would give me insights into everyday practice. I planned to observe English lessons, where language would not be a barrier to following the lesson, and Literacy lessons taught in Rutoro, with the co-teacher to provide translation. Using an observation template format (see Appendix 2), allowed me to record both dialogue and actions and to add my own commentary. Consequently, the interpretation is to a greater or lesser extent my own construction of events (Torrance and Pryor, 1998). Furthermore, this method allowed me to record my thoughts as events happened and I did not have to rely on my memory later in the day to recall incidents (Wragg, 1999). Writing further thoughts and reflections in my research journal enabled me to narrow my focus to reflect the emerging issues.

Table 3: Lesson observation and interview summary

Rural School (data used)					Town School (data not used)				
Lesson 1	P3	English	1 hour	Teacher 1 (m)	Lesson 7	P1	Literacy 1 (Reading)	30 minutes	Teacher 4 (f)
Lesson 2	P1	English	30 minutes	Teacher 2 (f)	Lesson 8	P1	Literacy 2 (Writing)	30 minutes	Teacher 4 (f)
Lesson 3	P1	Literacy 1 (Reading)	30 minutes	Teacher 3 (f)	Lesson 9	P1	English	1 hour	Teacher 5 (f)
Lesson 4	P1	Literacy 1 (Reading)	30 minutes	Teacher 3 (f)	Lesson 10	P1	Literacy 1 (Reading)	30 minutes	Teacher 6 (f)
Lesson 5	P1	Literacy 2 (Writing)	30 minutes	Teacher 3 (f)	Lesson 11	P1	Literacy 2 (Writing)	30 minutes	Teacher 6 (f)
Lesson 6	P1	English	30 minutes	Teacher 3 (f)					
Post-lesson discussions		Lesson 2 Lesson 3 Lesson 6			Post-lesson discussions		Lesson 7 Lesson 8 Lesson 10 Lesson 11		
Interviews		Teacher 1 (m) Teacher 3 (f)			Interviews		Head teacher (m) Teacher 4 (f) Teacher 7 (f)		

From piloting the lesson observation format and interview schedule in the UK and Uganda I made adaptations to reflect local conditions and participants response. For example, teachers commented they did not have time for interviews but agreed to shorter post-lesson discussions allowing me greater insight by gaining the teacher's interpretation of what happened (Wragg, 1999). Additionally, for lessons delivered in local language it enabled me to clarify Rutoro language I had not understood in the lesson.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved translating spoken word and observed actions into text through transcribing interviews and typing up observation notes (Dunne et al., 2005). Analysis started in the field through 'progressive focusing'; starting from an initial wide-angle stance then moving to a more focused view through daily 'sifting, sorting, reviewing and reflecting on of salient features' of emerging evidence in my field-journal (Parlett and Hamilton cited in Cohen, 2011, p.539). This allowed for analysis to be both deductive by relating to the research questions and inductive by responding to specific field-evidence. At this stage tentative interpretations and explanations began to form. Post field-work, to facilitate a systematic approach to data reduction and organisation I used a 'constant comparative' method (Thomas, 2011). As outlined by Tomas

(2011) the process involved 'going through the data again and again, comparing each element – phrase, sentence, or paragraph – with all the other elements' (Thomas, 2011, p.171). The process triangulated and merged data from analysis of documentation, interviews and lesson observations. Two major themes emerged; informal classroom-based assessment and formal testing. Identifying smaller categories within these led to fine-grained analysis of specific features. For example, within the theme of classroom-based assessment, the category of feedback and sub-category of scaffolding pupils' learning emerged, leading to a fine-grained analysis of these in a handwriting lesson. In this way the meanings that emerged were constructed by both participants and me.

Ethics

The research conformed to the University of Sussex ethical review process. When seeking permission from the district, municipality and head teachers I revealed my previous teaching roles and my involvement with schools in a different district of Uganda. I outlined the subject of my research formed part of my MA dissertation. Once at the schools, I sought the informed written consent of all participants through both verbal and written explanation of the study prior to observations and interviews. I explained to the participants their right to refuse to take part or to withdraw at any point. Given the age and maturity of pupils I considered it inappropriate to gain their consent, further highlighting the importance of my role as non-participant observer. During my research, it became apparent that teachers in the town school were not positioned to teach or discuss continuous assessment as I had envisaged and I faced the ethical dilemma as to how to proceed. I decided to collect all the data as planned so individuals did not feel rejected by me.

Positionality

I aimed to interpret, as fully as possible, how continuous assessment is understood from the teacher's perspective within their unique context. Explicitly revealing my teaching and Ugandan experiences assisted in building trust and establishing credibility. Some teachers sought lesson judgements and advice from me and this could link with their involvement in projects run by the municipality and outside providers that included lessons observation, evaluation, feedback and advice by a 'white, female outsider' and the possibility they expected the same from me. I hoped the school's involvement in other projects meant teachers would not be intimidated by my presence nor would I be a novelty distraction to pupils. Whilst my experience provided me with good subject knowledge, necessary in a case study, I needed to ensure I remained open, sensitive and respectful to the context within which the research took place (Cohen, 2011). Additionally, I hoped my existing knowledge on assessment would give greater trustworthiness to my comparison of different sources of data and validity to my interpretations.

Limitations

I recognised three limitations to the study; time, local language and validity checks.

The time available limited the number of lessons observed. Observing all lessons in one subject, for example reading, across a week or complete three week theme would provide insight into whether teachers used information from one lesson to inform teaching in the next lesson and in developing pupils' learning over time. Additionally, during the research it became apparent the data set would be richer if it had been possible to observe remedial lessons and the end of theme testing.

Not being conversant in the local language limited my ability to fully understand classroom dialogue. I had anticipated a co-teacher would provide some translation. Unfortunately, due to staff absence this was not always possible. Consequently, some of the nuanced responses were not captured.

Case study methodology recommends participants are involved in validity checks (Cohen, 2011). Limitations of time and lack of access to technology prevented me checking interview transcriptions with participants. Gaining pupils' interpretation of lessons would add another level of richness and authenticity to the data, but given the age, maturity levels and ethical consideration this was considered impractical.

Context of research

The school is a small government-aided, rural primary situated 400km from Kampala and 12km from the nearest town. It has almost 700 pupils and 17 staff. Both pupils and staff walk long distances to school and there is no teacher accommodation on site. In addition to the 9 brick and tin roof classrooms there is a small room for staff to meet and work in and an office for the head teacher. There is no library, sports facilities, running water, electricity or provision of a midday meal, although a few local traders sell snacks on site. Approximately 60% of pupils bring a packed lunch. For lower primary grades the official school day runs from 8:30am to 1:30pm, in addition remedial teaching occurs from 7:30am and some afternoons. There is no pre-primary provision on site and not all children have pre-school experience before starting school. Rutoro is the dominant local language and the native language for the vast majority of pupils and teachers. The teachers are all trained with some currently upgrading qualifications. Experience ranged from those in their first year to teachers with over 10 years experience. The school is organised into nine classes with two streams in the largest year groups. It adopts a subject teacher system in all classes in contrast to the recommendation in the Thematic Curriculum for a class teacher approach in lower primary. The school is ranked as one of the top schools in the sub-county based on PLE results.

3. Findings and Discussion

Findings

The research set out to answer the question 'How do teachers understand continuous assessment?' Two major themes emerged; informal classroom-based assessment and formal testing. Over-lapping sub-themes of remedial teaching, using curriculum competences and the PLE were identified. The findings draw on vignettes of practice and discussed in three sections; first I outline how continuous assessment is understood by the teachers compared to policy documentation, highlighting how these different interpretations and understandings shape classroom practice. Teachers' implementation of assessment falls into two modes; formal and informal and these are discussed in turn. Finally, I look at how teachers interpret and use assessment information.

Two teachers taught the class, each responsible for different areas of the curriculum, Teacher 3 taught literacy and English and Teacher 2 occasionally taught these subjects when Teacher 3 participated in senior management duties. The 76 pupils; 39 boys and 37 girls sat in ability groups (28 below average, 25 average and 23 above average) facing the chalkboard with no more than 5 pupils to a desk. Only one pupil was out of age and one had a physical disability. The classroom was well maintained; teacher-made charts hung from the walls, pupils' work was displayed below the chalkboard, learning aids and pupils' bags stored neatly and a quality chalkboard enabled pupils seated at the back of class to clearly see. A positive hardworking atmosphere prevailed with teachers animated and encouraging. Observation and interview techniques were piloted with Teacher 1 and whilst this informed my subsequent field-work, as he taught P3, the data does not form part of the findings.

How continuous assessment is understood

The literature review reveals defining terms, particularly continuous assessment is complex. In the absence of an agreed definition and to answer my research question I needed to understand how continuous assessment is expressed in policy documents and understood by teachers.

Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) aims to 'improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning through the use of valid and reliable teacher-made assessment' (UNEB, 2010). To achieve this UNEB adopted continuous assessment for all levels of education, defining it as:

> *a systematic objective and comprehensive way of regularly collecting and accumulating information about a student's learning achievement over a period of study and using it to guide the student's learning and determine their level of attainment(UNEB, 2010, para.5).*

Furthermore, UNEB identifies three assessment outcomes; to improve classroom instruction, enhance holistic pupil achievement and contribute to terminal assessments of pupils. Curriculum documents state assessment 'must be **diagnostic** and **remedial**' (original emphasis NCDC, 2006a, p.12; NCDC, 2006b). The focus is on establishing 'what can the child do?' by gathering evidence related to competences identified within individual themes 'during the normal course of teaching' (NCDC, 2006a, p.12; NCDC, 2006b, p.74). Interview responses reflected the need to find out what pupils had achieved within a theme but participants focused more on the use of tests to gather evidence. On the other hand, classroom practice revealed teachers gathering and using evidence in lessons; to see what the pupil could do, to provide feedback and to decide if the pupil is ready for the next step. From interviews and observations it became apparent teachers were using a hybrid system of formal and informal methods to collect assessment data.

Formal assessment

Continuous assessment was introduced as the solution to the culture of testing which existed prior to the Thematic Curriculum; yet this does not appear to have translated into practice. Teacher 3 explained she gave tests to the pupils both at the end of each theme and at the beginning and end of term because *it helps the teacher to know how much the child has achieved in the class. It helps you to plan ahead for next term depending on how one has performed.* This practice appears to be contrary to official policy which states 'the teacher should not set separate 'assessment' tests/examinations' (NCDC, 2006a, p.12; NCDC, 2006b) . Then again, other statements allude to testing being an acceptable assessment strategy. For example, the P1 curriculum specifies any written tests used for assessment are to be in local language, other than English as a subject (NCDC, 2006a). Furthermore, whilst the ESSP states 'assessment should conform to the revised curriculum' it adds, 'schools will test pupils at least once a year to identify those who are weak in literacy and/or numeracy' (MoES, 2008, p.36). This could be interpreted as giving the 'green light' to continue with a regime of testing. Two categories of testing emerged; internally created end of theme tests and externally created end of term examinations. The purpose, process and outcomes of practice for both types of tests are explored to try and understand why testing dominates assessment practice.

Externally created tests

The importance of the PLE became apparent from informal discussions with staff. They explained the number of places in 'good' secondary schools is perceived by parents as limited creating additional pressure on the school to attain high PLE results (Altinyelken, 2010b). Furthermore, with no formal system of school accountability PLE pass levels appear to be used as a proxy indicator of school success.

Though not directly stated, it appears preparation for the PLE starts in P1 through using end of term examinations. Interestingly, the term 'test' applied to formal end of theme assessments and 'examination' to end of term testing. The P1 guidelines advocate both informal and formal assessment of specific

competences at the end of term (NCDC, 2006b). However, the use of 'formal assessment methods' appears to be interpreted differently. The teachers' guide appears to consider assessment as 'formal' if it is a planned activity rather than a naturally occurring task. On the other hand, schools appear to understand formal assessment as testing, reflecting assessment practice prior to the Thematic Curriculum. This could be considered a logical interpretation as many systems across the world categorise assessment into formal testing for summative purposes and informal observation for formative purposes (Torrance, 2012; Taras, 2005).

The school purchased end of term examinations from the local academic board. This is a new initiative led by local head teachers whereby best practising teachers are selected to set the examinations. A number of advantages are apparent from this system; a greater degree of relevance to local circumstances, use of local language, consistency across schools, and it increases the status of teachers involved. Additionally, it has the potential to establish local comparisons. Nevertheless, this does not eliminate poor quality low-order questions characteristic of commercial tests as the examples below illustrate (Kanjee and Acana, 2013; Weerhe, 2010).

Figure 2: Question 4 from end of Term 1 Literacy examination (produced by local academic board)
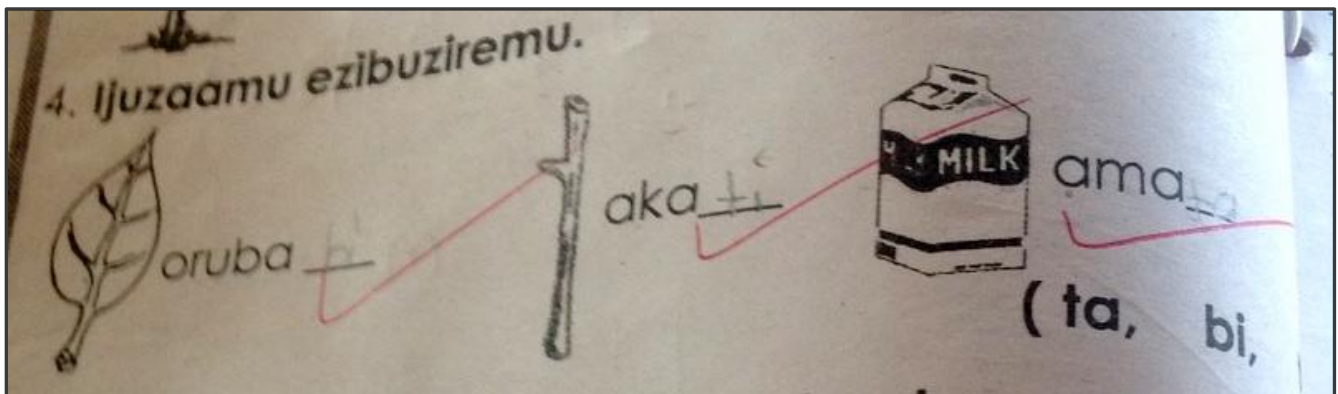
In question 4 above, the pupil needs to fill in the final sound for each word. This requires them to be able to isolate the final syllable and write this in. It is more challenging as the three syllables are similar; ti, ta, bi. However, the question would be further improved by not providing syllables for the pupil to select as this would assess if the pupil could represent the identified syllable correctly as expressed in the competence 'read and write at least 4 words with 2-letter syllables' (NCDC, 2006b, p.28).

Figure 3: Question1 from end of Term 1 English examination (produced by local academic board)
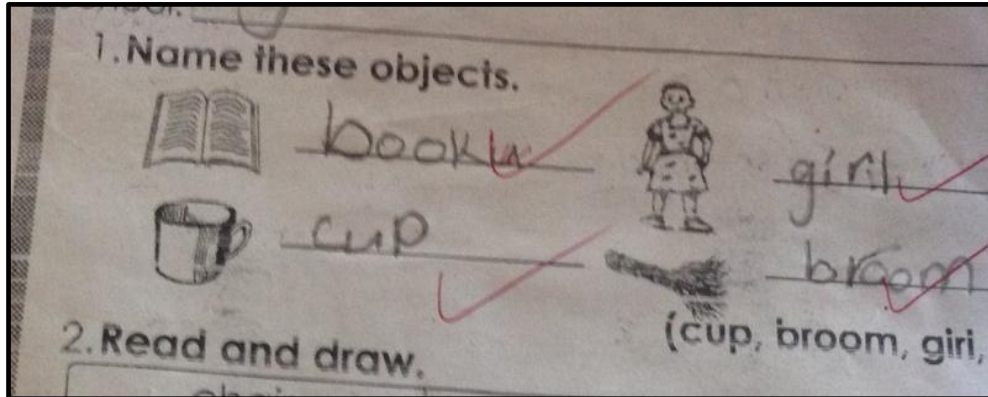
Question 1 requires pupils to fill in the missing word from the list provided. It assesses if a pupil can select the correct word and accurately copy next to the picture. The pupil needs to know the names of the objects and be able to read the word. However, as the words are provided pupils can still complete an answer with no understanding and have a one in four chance of being correct.

Figure 4: Question 3 from end of Term 1 English examination (produced by local academic board)
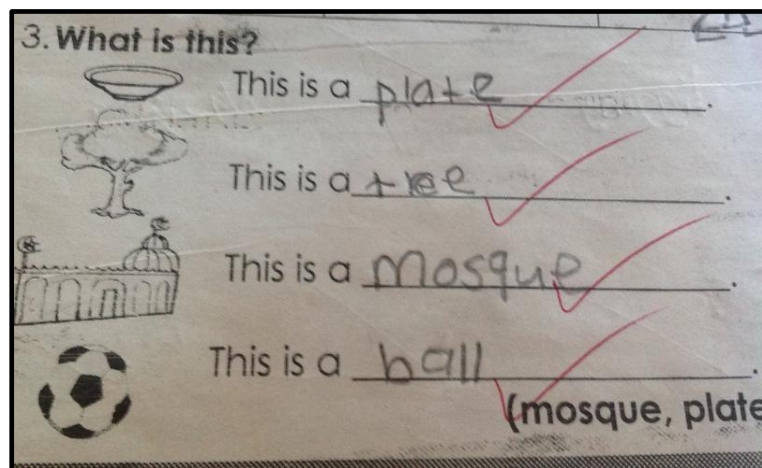
In question 3 the pupil does not need to be able to read 'This is a' in order to answer the question and so could not be used to assess the competence of 'using 4 learnt structures correctly'. Therefore it is only suitable for assessing the lower-order competence 'matching words with pictures' (NCDC, 2006b, p.78-79).

The problem is accentuated when assessing a subject taught in local language but then assessed in English. Figure 5 shows a commercial test for Religious Education (RE). The pupil is required to write true or false next to each statement. To do so they must be able to read the instruction and then each statement. This appears inappropriate for a number of reasons; RE is taught in Rutoro yet being assessed in English, the level of

reading required is advance compared to the English questions above and curriculum expectation for P1, there is a 50% chance of getting the question correct.

Figure 5: Question from end of Term 1 Religious Education examination (commercially produced)
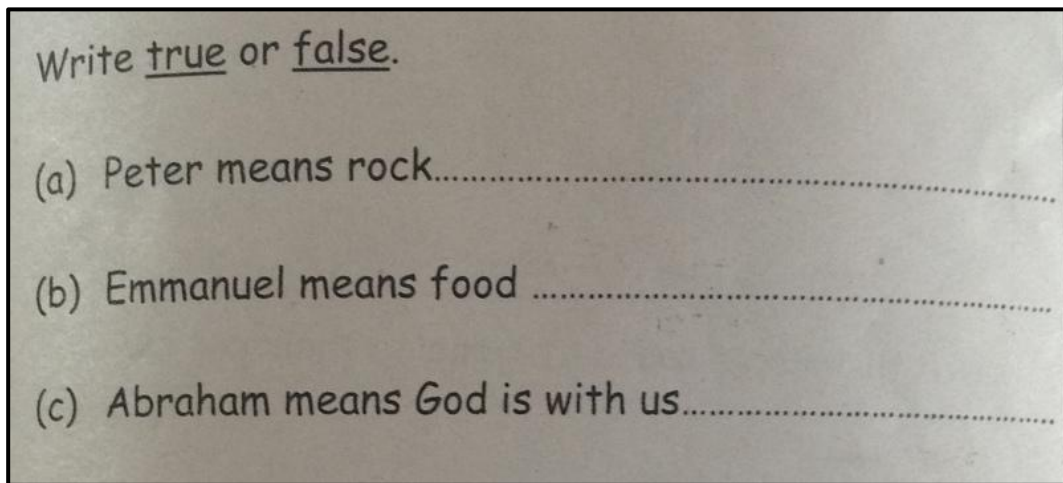
Questions used in tests and examinations reveal a number of flaws in providing accurate evidence of what pupils can do. Limitations include; testing lower-order skills, mismatch with curriculum expectations and assessing in English rather than language of instruction as found in studies by Hardman et al. (2011).

Internally created tests

The Thematic Curriculum indicates for each theme teachers should choose no more than four competences to assess, and less for large classes, either from the assessment guidelines or by adjusting or developing their own relevant competences (NCDC, 2006b, p.75). Recognising it may not be possible for teachers to gather evidence about every pupil through daily observations in the three week theme, and to assist in making a summative judgement, the guidelines state teachers 'may need to arrange specific time at the end of the theme to carry out some assessments' (NCDC, 2006b, p.75). Again, there appears to be different interpretations of what to 'carry out assessments' means. My interpretation of the curriculum documents is 'teacher created assessments' are activities 'specially planned' rather than 'naturally occurring' within the teaching process (NCDC, 2006b, p.75). This subtle distinction in the use of English terms may well be beyond the linguistic abilities of teachers for whom English is not their first language. The school interpreted 'teacher created assessments' as 'teacher-made tests' to *see how much they have achieved in that particular theme* (Teacher 3). This interpretation can be considered both logical and practical given the challenge teachers face of implementing a system based on daily observation of all pupils across the whole curriculum in the context of a class of 76.

Teachers appear to have autonomy to use their professional knowledge to create end of theme tests. Teacher 3 described how she selected which competences to assess through testing from those identified in the teachers' guide and P1 curriculum guidelines (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: Competences for Theme 5
(Curriculum competences in bold relate to competences assessed by the teacher in Table 5)

	P1 Teacher's Guide[5]	P1 Curriculum Assessment Guidelines
Learning area	Competence for assessment	Competences that can be assessed
Literacy 1 (Reading)	1. **Naming 4 element of the weather** 2. Logical sequence of 4 – 5 pictures to form a story 3. **Reading at least 5 sight words** 4. **Assembling 3 – 5 jigsaw pieces to form pictures with words related to weather**	• **Name different types of weather** • Describe different elements of the weather • **Read at least 5 sight words** • Recite rhymes correctly • Tell and retell stories correctly • Write at least 5 words • Write at least 2 short sentences
Literacy 2 (Writing)	1. **Writing 2 patterns and 5 letters with curves** 2. **Writing at least 5 words** 3. Writing 2 short sentences	
English	1. Pronounce 10 words correctly 2. **Matching at least 10 pronounced words to pictures** 3. Using 5 learnt structures correctly	• **Name 4 types of weather** • Describe the day's weather • Talk about what people are wearing

Source: P1 Teacher's Guide (NCDC, 2006b, p.81) and P1 Curriculum (NCDC, 2006a, p.32)

Table 5: Competences assessed through end of theme test

Learning area	Competence assessed	Test question
Literacy 1 Reading	• Read 3 weather words and match to pictures • Read weather words and draw pictures to match • Read 3 short sentences and draw pictures to match • Complete missing parts to pictures	Question 3, appendix 5 Question 5, appendix 5 Question 4, appendix 5 Question 2, appendix 5
Literacy 2 Writing	• copy patterns letters and words • Write at least 5 words	
English	• Name 4 types of weather • Match words to pictures • Read 5 words and draw pictures to match	Question 3, appendix 4 Question 2, appendix 4 Question 4, appendix 4

Source: Authors creation from field data

Teacher 3 explained she could not assess 'assembling 3 – 5 jigsaw pieces to form pictures with words related to weather' as there were no jigsaws or resources available to make them. Instead she devised her own

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[5] Title as it appears on original document

method; getting pupils to complete missing parts of the picture, see question 2 Figure 6 (pupils need to add the branches to the tree and a leg to the chair).

Figure 6: Question 2 from teacher created end of theme Literacy test
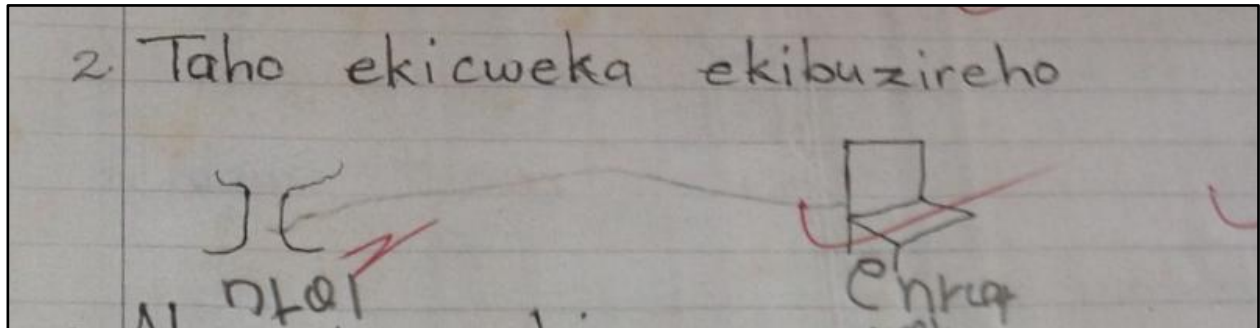
Not all competences were suited to assessment through written tests, for example 'pronounce 10 words correctly'. This is especially relevant when pupils are still mastering the basics of reading and writing. Teacher 3 demonstrated how she supplemented the written tests with individual testing of pupils on the competences required and oral assessment either within the lesson or during break-time. For example, during break-time, to assess the competence 'write 2 short sentences' Teacher 3 asked Pupil E to write on the chalkboard 'it is windy' and 'it is sunny' in Rutoro.

Teacher 3 spoke about how the tests and examinations helped her to know how much the pupil has achieved in class and to plan ahead for next term. Using assessment information to inform future planning and identifying next steps for individual pupils would be an example of assessment for learning as identified by Harlen and James (1997). However, I could not ascertain how or if she achieved this. In response to questions about planning and adapting the curriculum I could not elicit from teachers any practical examples to support their theoretical responses. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this practice is currently limited as examinations are only available to pupils whose parents pay and so may not be truly reflective of the whole class. Within the scope of this study it was not possible to gather sufficient evidence to determine if tests are truly used in a formative way and with a positive impact on teaching and learning or just to provide a summative judgment.

Use of testing at the end of each theme appears to be in part a practical response to the unrealistic expectation of implementing policy in large classes. Moreover, it appears teachers are attempting to make use of information from theme tests to inform future planning and teaching whereas, end of term examinations appear to have little influence on future teaching but occur as a response to the continued dominance and high-stake value of the PLE.
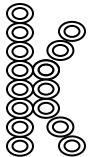
Informal assessment

Informal daily assessment involves teachers in the process of eliciting, interpreting and using assessment information. This section first considers how teachers use a combination of observation, listening to pupils and reviewing their work to gather assessment evidence. This is followed by exploring how teachers interpret and use the assessment information both within lessons and to inform future teaching and learning. In responding to interview questions teachers focused on the formal testing element of assessment making very little reference to assessment within lessons. Interestingly, lesson observations revealed teachers using different methods to gather evidence; then interpret and use this within the lesson to provide feedback and scaffold individuals in their learning.

Methods of gathering evidence

In talking about her use of observation, Teacher 3 explained, *you observe them, like how they are interacting with others, how they are performing the different skills... when they come to the board to read... when they are speaking because they are pronouncing words, we even observe that*. This practice is in line with the P1 Curriculum and Teacher's Guide which recommends 'direct observation during normal class tasks' as an assessment tool for daily, end of theme and termly assessments (NCDC, 2006b, p.75; NCDC, 2006a; NCDC, undated).

During a handwriting lesson a group of pupils, who had not developed pencil control, were involved in a practical activity forming the letter 'k' from bottle tops as in the observation record below.

Teacher activity & talk	Pupil activity & talk	Pupil's work[6]
Circulates amongst pupils with initial focus on getting pupils with bottle tops to work in different places on floor at front and back of classroom. Once all pupils have resources Teacher circulates with most of time spent interacting with pupils on bottle top task.	Pupils engaged in the activity they have been directed to. B3a creates using bottle tops.	

Literacy 2 (Writing) observation record 10.6.14

Whilst interacting with B3a[7], Teacher 3 demonstrated her attention to detail and pedagogic content knowledge in observing and pointing out how the two 'branches' did not meet in a point as she had modelled earlier. How she then used this evidence to develop his learning is described later.

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[6] So as not to disrupt the lesson photographs are of a recreation of the activity during break-time the following day.

Another example involved observing pupils reading words on the chalkboard enabling Teacher 3 to assess different levels of ability against the competence related to reading sight words. The observation record illustrates how the teacher observed pupil B3[8] applying blending skills in reading.

Teacher activity & talk	Pupil activity & talk
Writes word 'esaati' (shirt) on a different part of the chalkboard. Invites B3 to come and read word.	B3 comes to the chalkboard and holds the pointing stick in front of him with tip of stick just below the word. After some time he says 'esaati'

Teacher 3 Literacy 1 (Reading) observation record 10.6.14

In the post-lesson discussion Teacher 3 revealed how, by closely observing B3 pointing to each syllable , through an almost imperceptible movement of the stick, she knew he used the technique of silently saying and blending before reading the word aloud. These examples illustrate how specific and detailed information about an individual's ability can be gained within a whole class teaching activity. Furthermore, the possibility now exists of using information to close the learning gap for both pupils.

In addition, teachers used listening to gather evidence of pupils' abilities. Teacher 3 identified three different forms of listening she used within her teaching; *we listen to them as they are telling news or sometimes we give them questions orally, we see how they can answer those questions* and *when they are speaking they are pronouncing words even we observe that.* The competence 'pronounce 10 words correctly' appeared to be assessed through listening to individual responses within a chanting activity (NCDC, 2006b, p.81).

Teacher activity & talk	Pupil activity & talk
Listen *hat* x4 Shows pupils hat made from banana fibre as saying the word *hat* – repeats word after every couple of chants from the pupils in group 3	Pupils sit in silence Whole class chant x 5 Chant - Grp 1x2, Grp 2x5, Grp 3x11
Holding a banana fibre hat says, *This is a hat*. '*hat*' Teacher moves around the classroom and asks pupils by name to repeat the word	*This is a hat* B1, WCCx2, G1 *hat* Whole class chant x6 Individuals from - Grp 1x2, Grp 2x4, Grp 3 x9 Some pupils required to repeat word multiple times

Teacher 2 English observation record 10.6.14

The observation extract lasted 6 minutes and reveals an absence of interaction between Teacher 2 and pupils. This made it hard to understand why Teacher 2 required some pupils to repeat the word 'hat' multiple times, especially as there appeared to be no marked difference in their pronunciation. In this instance it is

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[7] To clarify pupils the following codes were used B/G = boy/girl, 1/2/3 = below average/average/above average, a/b/c=different pupils within same ability group. B3a= first lower ability boy teacher interacted with.
[8] B3= lower ability boy

unclear as to whether Teacher 2 used listening to gather assessment evidence or, just as a means of justifying using chanting as an appropriate teaching method without realising an assessment opportunity existed.

Reviewing pupils' work can provide the teacher with valuable assessment evidence without having to interact with each pupil. In a handwriting lesson Teacher 3 clearly demonstrated how to form the letter 'k' as in Figure 7, emphasising the lower parts of the letter need to touch the line and the 'arms' meet at a point.

Figure 7: Comparison between teacher's model and pupil's work

Teacher's modelling

'Arms' formed by one stroke starting with upper arm (2).

'Arms' meet at a point.

Both parts of the letter touch the lower line.

Pupil's work

Top 'arm' starts above the middle line. The positioning suggests the pupil completed 'lower arm' first and then added upper instead of one stroke for both 'arms'.

'Arms' do not meet at a point.

'Lower arm' does not touch the lower line.

The evidence from the pupil in Figure 7 indicates many errors compared to the teacher's model. There appears to be no evidence of Teacher 3 reviewing the work against expectations set within the lesson or the curriculum competence as the use of a 'tick', as in Figure 8, usually indicates the work is correct.

Figure 8: Pupil's marked handwriting
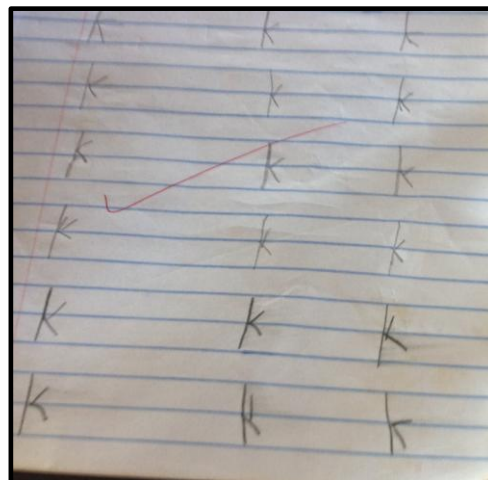
Opportunities to review work also occurred during whole class teaching when pupils completed work on the chalkboard. In these instances the whole class can benefit from the review of one pupil's work. The observation record below illustrates a more sophisticated approach to reviewing G1c's work.

Teacher activity & talk	Pupil activity & talk
Asks G1c[9] to come and write *ekiteteeyi* (dress) on board	G1c writes and correctly spells word *ekiteteeyi*.
Word covered as G1c writes word	Whole class give sounds as G1c checks her spelling against word teacher had written
Uncovers word and points to each syllable as class chant syllable and G1c checks her spelling of each syllable.	
Refocus pupils with movements	Pupils stand and copy teacher's actions

Teacher 3 Literacy 2 writing observation 10.6.14

Rather than simply acknowledge G1c has correctly spelt the word the teacher takes the opportunity to involve her and the whole class in the review process. In getting G1c to check her spelling is introducing the concept of self-assessment. I could not ascertain whether Teacher 3 knew she was beginning to train pupils in one of the best-practices of formative assessment, or indeed whether this is built on across subject and in future years (du Plessis, 2002).

These examples illustrate how teachers gain evidence by observing, listening and reviewing their work within lessons as part of the daily teaching and learning process. In a 30 minute lesson Teacher 3 could only assess 8-10 of the 76 pupils illustrating, as in the studies by Altinyelken (2010b), Nannyonjo (2007) and O'Sullivan (2006), the large class size and time available impinge on both teaching and assessment strategies. However, despite the challenging circumstances the teachers did gain a deeper knowledge of some pupil's abilities and this is an indispensable part of the assessment process; albeit she did not always use the opportunity to remediate mistakes. The next section explores how teachers interpret and use this evidence to assist pupils in making progress.

How teachers interpret and use assessment evidence

Assessment is only successful in bringing about learning and moving pupils from the known to the unknown if evidence gathered is then effectively interpreted and used by teachers and pupils. Before exploring strategies used by teachers in the classroom, first I outline how teachers use class and individual competence records. Finally, I elaborate on the practice of remedial provision.

Competence records

In the absence of reprographic facilities or the finance to pay for photocopying recording assessments appeared to be a time-consuming and laborious process restricting the use of exemplars provided in the

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[9] G1c Above average girl

curriculum (see Appendix 3) (NCDC, 2006b, p.90-92). Curriculum documents focus on procedures for collecting and recording evidence rather than interpreting and applying information gained (NCDC, 2006a, p.12; NCDC, 2006b, p.75-76). Two strengths of the system emerge; teachers have autonomy to select and adjust which competences to assess and determine what constitutes each level (NCDC, 2006a, p.12; NCDC, 2006b, p.75-76). However, this assumes teachers have the pedagogic content knowledge and time to do this.

Of greater significance is the lack of emphasis given to using the assessment records. In most cases, the wording of the competences does not suggest the next steps in learning or reveal why a pupil may be struggling. For example, Teacher 3's class record in Table 6 records whether pupils can 'read at least 7 words'. It is not clear which words or decoding skills were assessed and without Teacher 3 explaining the meaning of the different levels it is hard to understand the range of difficulties.

Table 6: Teacher created class competence record

Name	Selected competences for Theme 5 Weather				
	Name 4 different types of weather	Read at least 7 words	Read 3 sentences	Write 5 words	Write 3 sentences
	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Pupil E	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Key ✓✓✓ child is above average ✓✓ child is average ✓ child is below average					

In the individual pupil record, see Table 7, Teacher 3's comment 'she will be helped to read some sentences' still does not reveal which words or decoding skills involved.

Table 7: Teacher created pupil record

Name: Pupil E		
Learning area	Competences achieved	Remarks
Literacy 1 (Reading)	• Name 4 types of weather • Read 7 words • Read 3 sentences	She will be helped to read some sentences.
Literacy 2 Writing	• Copy 5 sentences correctly • Draw different types of weather	She will be helped to shape letters correctly.

In the interview Teacher 3 revealed a much deeper understanding of early reading skills, explaining how Pupil E *needs to be helped to read words with 2 consonants and vowel syllables.* This suggests having a sharper

focus to wording competences, such as 'can read words with two consonant syllables', would enable teachers to make greater use of assessment records. As the literature highlights this is the most important area and yet as in other studies teachers 'lack the capacity and skills to design and effectively use assessment for learning' (Sayed et al., 2012, p.119).

Classroom strategies

Teacher 3 appears to understand how paying attention to pupil performance enabled her to use assessment to identify next steps rather than just a measurement of performance. The observation record for a lesson teaching the pupils to write the word *esaati*[10] illustrates Teacher 3's use of modelling and scaffolding strategies.

Teacher activity & talk	Pupil activity & talk
Re-emphasis on syllables in pronouncing word *e-saa-ti* (shirt)	
G3[11] asked to write *esaati* on board	G3 writes *esta*
	Whole class clap and say syllables as G3 writes
G1[12] asked to come out and write *esaati*	G3 stands to side of G1 and watches as G1 writes
	G1 comes to board and writes *esaati*
	G1 points to the picture of a shirt on the chalkboard
	Whole class clap well done response for G1 and G3

Teacher 3 first models how to segment the word into 3 syllables and then repeats this with the whole class joining in, clapping each syllable, to scaffold G3 as she writes. By controlling the pace of saying each syllable, Teacher 3 isolates and reinforces each sound immediately prior to G3 writing it. Despite the scaffolding G3 is unsuccessful; providing Teacher 3 with new evidence to feed into the assessment loop. G3 receives feedback through watching G1 correctly write *esaati* and having the differences between the two words pointed out by the teacher. Teacher 3 did not mention modelling and scaffolding when talking about her assessment practice. One explanation could be this practice has become ingrained tacit knowledge and a seamless and unremarkable part of the teaching process so does not warrant special attention.

The activity with the bottle tops, mentioned earlier, provides a good example of complete process; observing, interpreting and using the evidence to identify and implement next steps. B3 made the letter 'k' (see Figure 9a[13]), enabling the teacher to elicit information.

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[10] Esaati is Rutoro for shirt
[11] G3 below average girl
[12] G1 above average girl
[13] So as not to disrupt the lesson photographs are of a recreation of the activity during break-time the following day

Figure 9: Letter 'k' activities

Figure 9a	Figure 9b
Figure 9c	Figure 9d
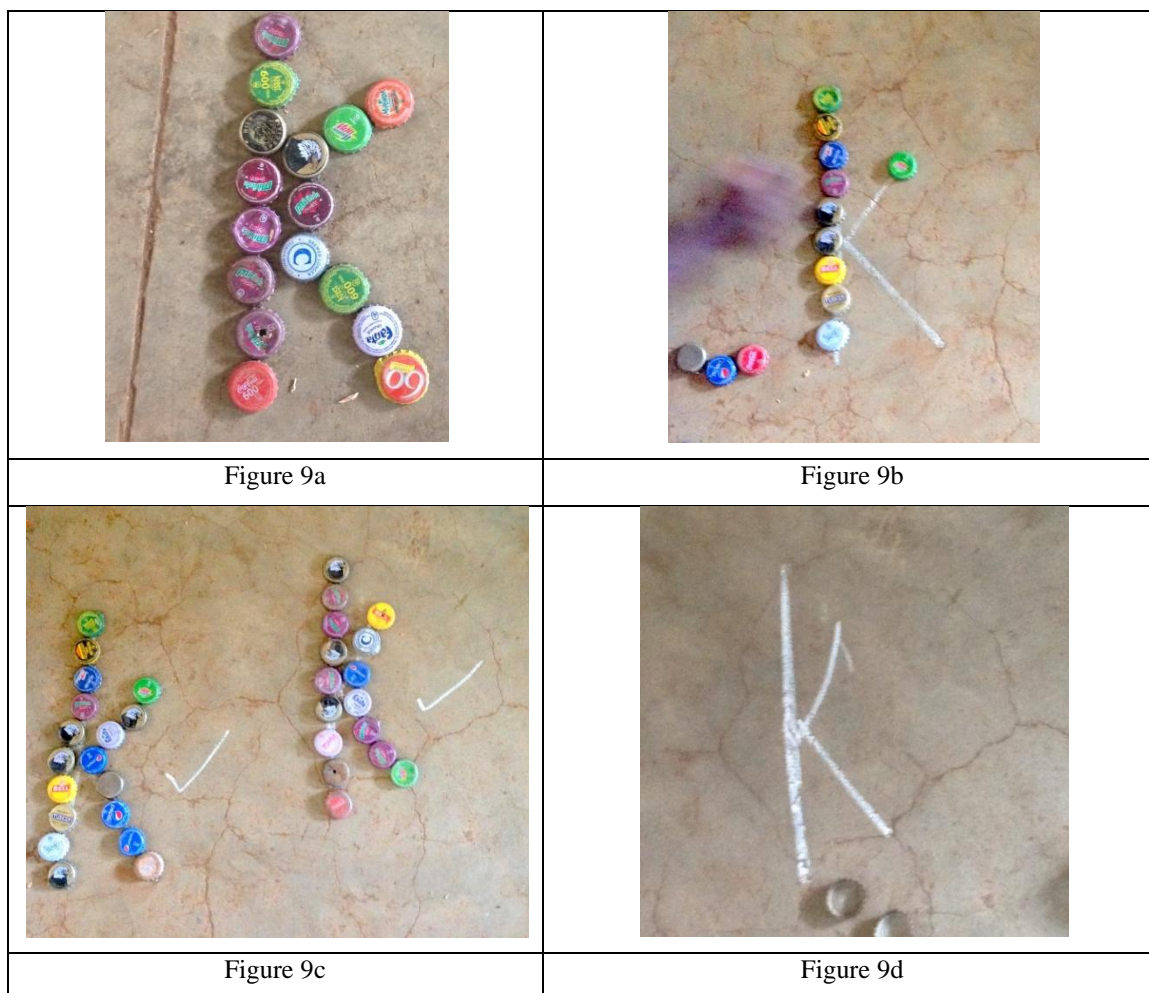
Teacher 3 explained, the *'arms' of the letter should meet at a point*, indicating B3 had not successfully completed the activity. She then scaffolded his learning by writing a letter 'k' on the floor and modelling how to lay the bottle tops on top of the lines as in Figure 9b. B3 completed this and then made the letter again without the support of an outline as in Figure 9c. Returning to B3, Teacher 3 had further evidence and this time provided feedback by marking his word correct with a tick. B3 then moved on to writing the letter 'k' with chalk on the floor as in Figure 9d. This example shows how effective use of feedback and scaffolding enabled B3 to make progress illustrating Sadler's (1998) analogy of the teaching acting as a bridge to facilitate closing the learning gap.

Remedial practice

UNEB documentation indicates assessment should be both 'diagnostic and remedial' enabling early identification of pupils' difficulties and subsequent planning and implementation of remedial support (UNEB, 2010). Sadler (1998) indicates the importance of using information from assessments to help close the

learning gap. The P1 teachers' guide states 'assessment without remedial support is of little value at this stage in learning' (NCDC, 2006b, p.75; 2006a, p.12). Furthermore, it outlines the need for this to be for individuals, both low and high attaining. I found no evidence of higher attaining pupils being given additional attention or extension work. Remedial appeared to be synonymous with lower ability pupils, for example Teacher 3 explained, y*ou see how much one has achieved and it gives me time to apply remedial for those who are still slow and to encourage those who are weak to move up.* Then further explaining how this extra support could be during lessons or break-time.

The more dominant discourse positioned remedial support as additional lessons provided before and after the regular school day. The official school day for P1 is 8:30am to 12:50pm, however in reality the day started at 7:30am with remedial lessons for one hour and extended into some afternoons. This appeared common in other schools in the area and in one case the learning day for P1 pupils was seven and a half hours long. As these 'remedial' teaching sessions were only accessed by those who paid, it is not unrealistic to conclude remedial provision through additional lessons is not reaching those it is aimed for. This reflects the strong correlation between wealth and attainment presented in the context section earlier (UNESCO, 2014a). I could not observe any teaching during these sessions so it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the use of time and the level of take up by different ability groups. From interviews and informal discussions it appears these sessions revisited areas of the curriculum pupils had not mastered or covered missed areas rather than closing the learning gap for the least able. A number of further issues emerged from this practice including equity of access, curriculum coverage, and remuneration of teachers that are beyond the scope of this study.

The UNEB anticipates if continuous assessment is effectively implemented the quality of teaching and learning will improve. If assessment does not actually improve learning then the time and effort exerted by teachers becomes meaningless. From interviews and discussion teachers appeared to associate the term assessments with testing in order to establish what pupils know. Classroom practice reveals some evidence of informal ongoing assessment in line with the philosophy of the Thematic Curriculum. However, the lack of teacher's historical records and their inability to cite practical examples to support their sound explanations leads me to question whether using assessment information to adjust future teaching is an embedded practice or an aspiration based on theoretical knowledge acquired through training and reading curriculum documents.

Summary of findings

The case study findings show evidence of good assessment practice despite the challenging context. Working with large classes in an under-resourced environment, teachers understood continuous assessment policy expectations and were attempting to implement assessment practices described in the Thematic Curriculum. The main findings are summarised below.

Understanding of continuous assessment: Establishing 'What can the child do?' is the purpose of the Thematic Curriculum competence-based assessment. Policy documents and teachers saw continuous assessment as both using judgements over time to determine level of attainment and to guide pupils' learning.

Assessment methods: Policy documentation placed emphasis on assessment as part of normal classroom routine. Teachers relied more on the use of testing at the end of each theme and this appeared to be due to the practical limitations of assessing whilst teaching a large class and the perceived role testing plays in preparing pupils for the PLE. Thus continuous assessment is interpreted as continuous testing.

Assessment whilst teaching a large class: Teachers articulated the importance of observing pupils and using this information to guide learning. While limited by the large class size, within a half hour lesson teachers generally assessed 8–10 pupils.

Remedial: Teachers spoke about providing remedial classes as extra support to enable individual pupils to catch up, reflecting Thematic Curriculum policy. In practice remedial lessons took place outside of normal school hours only for those whose parents were able and chose to pay. Teachers appeared to use this opportunity to repeat lessons where skills had not been mastered to the required level, or to teach missed parts of the curriculum.

Discussion

To answer the research question 'how do teachers understand continuous assessment?' required not only looking at how teachers and policy documents articulated this understanding but how this translated into classroom practice. This discussion focuses on two areas; firstly looking at what the school is doing well, and secondly issues related to implementing the policy in a large class.

Despite challenges of large classes and lack of resources, aspects of assessment for learning indentified in the literature review are being implemented with the youngest pupils with beneficial outcomes. I recognise that I only gained a brief snapshot of practice and it is hard to know whether this reflected everyday teaching. Given some discrepancies between verbal responses and observed practice it would be naive to consider the examples of best practice observed as being an embedded system. Nonetheless, the findings in this small

case study do provide evidence of teachers striving to implement continuous assessment and using their professional knowledge and experience to adapt curriculum expectations to what is feasible in reality.

Teachers demonstrated how they planned end of theme assessments, effectively using curriculum documents to select and adapt competences to assess. They made use of observation within their daily teaching to gather evidence about individual pupils and used this to scaffold learning. Teachers paid attention to detail, breaking tasks down into small achievable steps using age appropriate strategies. They knew each child by name and talked in detail about skills individual pupils needed to achieve next steps for specific competences.

It was not just how the teachers were attempting to embrace continuous assessment but their wider teaching skills that contributed to their ability to assess whilst teaching. Teachers demonstrated good generic teaching skills and pedagogic content knowledge. They enthusiastically guided pupils through the lesson using a range of whole class teaching strategies that made demands on pupils. Many of these features are similar to those O'Sullivan (2006b) found within the most effective lessons in her study. In addition, O'Sullivan (2006b) found teachers effectively using questioning and eliciting pupils' prior knowledge and this suggests these could be successfully implemented in the school.

The school adopts a co-teacher subject based approach. Two teachers are assigned to one class, each with responsibility for different curriculum subjects, allowing one to plan, mark and assist with behaviour management whilst the other teaches. This leads me to question whether large classes are artificially created; for if a class teacher approach is adopted then instead of one class of 76, there would be two classes of 38. However, lack of classrooms, an ethos of subject teaching and teacher absenteeism mean this is unlikely to happen. This brings me to examine the challenge of teaching a large class with limited learning materials. From discussions it became clear that teachers viewed testing as the only realistic way to assess large numbers in a time-efficient manner. The use of end of theme teacher-created tests appears to balance curriculum expectations with the reality of a large class. Other studies, Holland and Ali (2012), Nakabugo (2012) and O'Sullivan (2006b) confirm continuous assessment is difficult with large classes. They suggest through using effective large class teaching strategies learning outcomes can be further improved. The notion that large classes are synonymous with poor teaching is challenged in these studies and along with those by Westbrook (2013), Vavrus (2009), Hardman (2008) and Guthrie (2003) who suggest this is a more viable option than trying to pursue a child-centred approach.

However, the current assessment process is made cumbersome as the teacher needs to draw from four different sections within two documents. To overcome this issue Teacher 3 combined photocopies of the relevant pages into one document. Going forward, having all the documentation related to assessment of

each theme in one place would facilitate more efficient use of teachers' limited time. This might already exist in the teachers' handbook, 'Assessment Guidelines in the Thematic Curriculum'. However, not having actually seen the document it is hard to assess its value for teachers. The title suggests the target audience is teachers but it has not made it into their hands. Unlike the Thematic Curriculum and Teachers' Guides, it is not available online and as none of the teachers had seen or heard about it, this leads me to conclude it is not easily accessible. To gain value from the human and financial resources invested in its development, it needs to reach the teachers it appears to be designed to support, rather than remain locked away in the draw of education officials.

Policy considerations

School practice is shaped by government policy. My findings suggest assessment practice is limited by the current policy framework. Two areas emerge with a bearing on policy; firstly, continuous assessment policy is not implemented as outlined in the Thematic Curriculum; secondly, the PLE has a significant impact on school assessment practice.

Not implementing continuous assessment as articulated in the Thematic Curriculum appears to be the consequence of three interrelated issues: the influence of external factors resulting in a paradigm shift from the previous policy; failure to grasp the significance of the paradigm shift and the process of policy implementation.

The curriculum review led by outside experts bringing with them Anglophone values not necessarily relevant to Uganda, potentially influenced the adoption of 'best practices' from the developed North (Guthrie, 2011; Hardman, et al. 2011). This leads me to question whether policy makers thought about the cultural, economic and political dimensions of teachers' practice which Sayed et al. (2012), Vavrus (2009) and Filer (2000) indicate need consideration within the reform process. This is particularly pertinent to pedagogy and the decision to adopt a child-centred approach appears to be informed by international discourse without consideration to cultural context (Altinyelken, 2010b). Furthermore, as 50% of Uganda's education funding comes from foreign aid, the potential exists for donors to have significant influence on pedagogy (UNESCO, 2014a). Vavrus (2009) intimates ministry officials are unlikely to have the conviction to completely reject the advice of the 'international community'. Consequently, the possibility exists that shifting from teacher-centred to child-centred pedagogy and ambitious policy objectives reflect outside influence rather than national needs.

While teachers received ten days training for the Thematic Curriculum, Kyeyune (2011) and Altinyelken (2010a) found this proved inadequate to develop teachers' understanding of child-centred pedagogy and continuous assessment. Though teachers were told how to implement the process, it appears they did not

develop a secure understanding of the relationship between assessment and learning. The need for greater training at pre- and in-service levels continues to be an issue as studies by UNESCO (2014), Westbrook et al. (2013), and Kyeyune (2011) found. Teachers' understanding is further hampered as policy articulation does not make sense to the school conditions they work in (Nsibande and Modiba, 2012). As a result, many teachers lack the understanding to effectively implement the policy. The contextual constraints of large class size, insufficient resources and an overcrowded curriculum reflect findings by Kyeyune (2011), Kapambwe (2010) and Mahazime (2003) yet as Hardman et al. (2011) who found, reforms ignore these realities. This leads Nsibande (2012) to suggest that without the capacity to effectively implement continuous assessment policy teachers ignore or deviate from the ideal.

The PLE is another factor causing teachers to deviate from continuous assessment policy. The policy stipulates school-based assessments from P5 to P7 would comprise 25% of PLE marks, thus valuing continuous assessment as a valid method however; this has not translated into practice (UNEB, 2010). One possible explanation is the practicalities of creating a system to collect and collate marks, track movement of pupils between schools and establish validity of school created data has proved too onerous in reality. As Somerset (2011) found in Kenya, the PLE outcome for pupils continues to have a profound impact. It can make the difference between a place at a high quality secondary school and improved life chances or no further education and poor employment opportunities.

The high-stakes status of the PLE has a strong backwash effect on lesson content and teaching style. This is confirmed by Westbrook et al. (2013) who found in order to cover the curriculum teachers adopted more teacher-oriented methods. Thus a circular process evolves; the PLE measures the outcomes of teaching but it is a powerful determinant of teaching methods and content (Somerset, 2011; Pennycuick, 1991). This appears to have permeated down to P1 with tests every 3 weeks and remedial classes to cover the curriculum or revisiting learning until pupils master the skill. To have a greater chance of sustaining appropriate pedagogy and improve learning in the lower grades Somerset (personal communication) proposes postponing any form of summative assessment for as long as possible.

4. Conclusion

This research examined teachers' understanding of continuous assessment and application in P1 literacy lessons. The case study elucidates the challenges the school faces in preparing pupils for the PLE whilst attempting to implement the Thematic Curriculum and continuous assessment. The relationship between the two is riddled with tensions as outlined in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Relationship between formal and informal assessment methods

	FORMAL		INFORMAL
Driver	PLE	←TENSION→	Thematic Curriculum
Assessment Tool	Examinations throughout primary years	←TENSION→	Continuous Assessment
Frequency	Termly	Every 3 weeks	Daily
Teaching Style	Teacher-centred	←TENSION→ DAILY REMEDIAL LESSONS	Child-centred
	To enable those who pay to cover necessary content and prepare for examinations		To enable failing child to catch up
Context Suitability	Large class	←TENSION→	Small class To facilitate teacher–pupil interaction and group work
Resources	Low need for learning materials and easy to administer assessment system	←TENSION→	High need for learning materials to facilitate child-centred teaching and learning. Time consuming
	POSSIBLE IN CURRENT CONTEXT		**CHALLENGING IN CURRENT CONTEXT**

Source: Author's creation

Tensions clearly exist at every level; is the driver of actual assessment practice in school, the PLE or the Thematic Curriculum? Does the assessment system shape the teaching and learning pedagogy, or is it vice-versa? Is it a question of context suitability, whereby the large class numbers make it impossible for teachers to observe all pupils on a daily basis?

It could be regarded as a 'chicken and egg' relationship. In Figure 10 I have presented a top-down representation starting with the PLE and Thematic Curriculum. In other words, it is the PLE or Thematic Curriculum which determines whether assessment is through formal examinations or classroom-based assessment. This in turn impacts on teaching style; a didactic teacher-centred approach is more suited to preparing pupils for examinations in large classes, whereas continuous assessment is dependent upon a child-centred pedagogy in a small class to facilitate the required teacher-pupil interaction. Furthermore, without learning materials and time for teachers to assess within lessons a continuous assessment system cannot succeed. It also works as a bottom-up representation; the initial driver now becomes the contextual environment and the solution builds on existing good practice. In other words, resource-poor conditions dictate large classes and a teacher-centred approach assessed through examinations.

The findings in this very small case study suggest there is a desire to implement the Thematic Curriculum, as evidenced through teachers attempting to use observation information to contribute to competence judgements for individual pupils. The Education Review 2013 intimates the current practice of 'continuous testing' is not desired practice recommending, 'district inspectors and head teachers should ensure schools carry out continuous assessment' (MoES 2013 p.6). However, it appears the review findings may not have got to the heart of the matter as they do not appear to recognise that for many schools it is conditions and not ignorance or desire that restricts implementation. This is similar to what Vavrus (2009) found in Tanzania, and she suggests teachers should be rewarded for recognizing the limitations of continuous assessment policy where conditions do not warrant its use.

The end of theme tests and remedial provision appears to be a compromise deal. In Figure 10 they are positioned centrally to represent an overlap between the two approaches. They reflect the school's response to the different tensions and context limitations. If this interpretation is accepted then the solution can be created either from the top or the bottom. In other words, changes either need to be made at the top to the PLE or Thematic Curriculum or at the bottom by identifying practices and modes of assessment which reflect context. In reality reducing the examination content or high-stakes status of the PLE, or providing the resources, both learning materials and small class size, for continuous assessment to be effectively implemented are unlikely in the short-term.

Acknowledging the PLE impacts on internal assessment practice could open up the opportunity to align the PLE with the teaching and learning pedagogy in the Thematic Curriculum as espoused by Somerset (1996). He argues 'resources devoted to strengthening the quality of a national exam system in low-income countries would bring sustained benefits in the shape of more effective learning' and has the advantage of not requiring a vast outlay of resources (Somerset, 2011, p.144). The question is whether UNEB has the desire and capacity to make effective use of NAPE data to achieve this.

There is a general consensus from research that continuous assessment is difficult to implement in large classes (Holland and Ali, 2012; Somerset, 2011). In line with studies by Nakabugo (2012), O'Sullivan (2006b) and Westbrook et al. (2013), findings from this case study suggest rather than continuing with trying to enforce a top down change, without the pre-conditions needed for child-centred pedagogy, directing efforts to improving teaching, learning and assessment strategies for large classes would be a more effective and cost-efficient solution. This approach would represent a bottom-up solution.

Dyer's (1999) 'bottom-up' approach to policy reforms, starts with locally identified issues leading to locally initiated solutions. The local head teachers' response to the issue of creating relevant tests through establishing an academic board and drawing on the expertise of the best local practitioners, described earlier, is such an example. A 'bottom-up' approach can still pursue more child-centred approaches but recognising the contextual realities. A further advantage of this approach is its ability to accommodate and reflect contextual changes when they occur.

Studies by O'Sullivan (2006b), Nakabugo (2012), Holland and Ali (2012) and Somerset (2011), demonstrate effective learning can take place in large class contexts. Different strategies have been emphasised in the studies, for example Somerset (2011) highlights the importance of dialogue over methodology with questioning as the most powerful yet under-utilised assessment tool. Westbrook et al (2013) and Vavrus (2009) point to incorporating imaginative and interactive teaching alongside more formalistic methods.

Ugandan culture considers children questioning or challenging adults as inappropriate behaviour which Altinyelken (2010b) cites as another reason for promoting pedagogical approaches which combine teacher as authoritative figure with more interactive involvement of pupils. Embracing this approach would require teacher education programmes to emphasise pedagogy for large class teaching and continuous assessment which Westbrook (2013), Kyeyune (2011) and O'Sullivan (2010) found to be missing from ITE training. Developing strategies which can make teaching and assessment in large classes as effective as possible within the limitations of the context would be further assisted by policy

makers looking to make the advocated pedagogy in curriculum and assessment policies more large class friendly.

It is not possible to verify how embedded or widespread the effective practice witnessed in this study is; across classes, within the case study school, or in surrounding schools. However, it does highlight the potential for implementing classroom-based assessment, as assessment for learning, within the contextual realities to discover what the child can do.

Recommendations

The first steps to using continuous assessment to guide pupils learning have been taken by the school and the benefits of teachers' knowledge of individual pupils and scaffolding their learning were evident. The recommendations outlined below are based on the context of P1 teachers in this case study but I believe would be valid and relevant for other large lower primary classes in developing countries.

Recording and using relevant assessment information: Giving consideration to how competences are worded on teacher record sheets can facilitate future use of assessment data. For example, ticking a pupil 'can read seven words' does not reflect the reading skills involved whereas recording a pupil 'can read words with two consonants and a vowel' gives a clear indication of the skill and can then be used to identify the next steps. Additionally, this information can feed into future lesson plans and remedial support or extension for individual pupils.

Adopting a more interactive whole class teaching pedagogy: Making opportunities to elicit pupils' prior knowledge (before introducing new vocabulary or concepts), asking more questions (especially open and related to pupils' experiences), maximising opportunities for practical activities and involving the co-teacher in working with a group are just some specific strategies which could be explored. This approach allows pupils to be more active in their learning and does not rely on large quantities of specialist resources.

Applying skills and knowledge: Once basic skills have been secured the next important step is to give pupils practice in using and applying these skills in a relevant and meaningful context. For example, pupils displayed good skills in reading single isolated words but no evidence of applying this skill within a sentence. NAPE (2013) data indicates pupils perform poorly when assessed on competences related to application. It is essential to embed application of core skills in the lower grades so higher order skills may be mastered later and transferred to real life contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview transcription

Interviewer: How would you do that in the lesson?

Teacher: After teaching I give the children an exercise and after marking I see which one is doing better than another and I also record on a record sheet. That is not an individual record sheet that is another record sheet

Interviewer: I can see you have this one in the class? (Chart on wall with competences for term and one two or three ticks by each pupil for competences 1, 2 and 3 in English for theme 1 term 2).

Teacher: I use this one every Friday **[14] because it has got three weeks to be completed so each week we teach a sub theme and you assess the learners to find out how much they have achieved in a particular area and at the end of the third week you assess learners in the whole sub theme.

Interviewer: Here you have the learning area of English, you have completed theme 1, competences 1, 2 and 3

Teacher: Competences we have week 1, week 2 week 3, 1, 2, 3, cause in the whole term they have 3 themes.

Interviewer: So week 1 is it one competence?

Teacher: Yes it is one competence in a particular subject

Interviewer: Could you tell me what the competence was for one of these?

Teacher: Yes, there was the record book I used but now I don't have it here. But at least I first mentioned the competences that I am going to measure learners on then I begin calling them individually and ask the same questions.

Interviewer: What would you say are the biggest challenges to doing assessment?

Teacher: Doing assessment the challenge is especially on time. You are supposed to ask the learner several questions but you find that your time is limited. At times you cannot ask guiding questions that get learners to ** that is the challenge also.

Interviewer: You used there the term 'guiding questions', how are they different to other questions?

T: When you ask a learner a question you find that it is difficult for him or her cause that learner might not be as competent as the other one so you pose the question and the learner fails to answer you ask other simple, simple questions to help them answer the other question which you intended to ask.

Interviewer: With asking questions in class what types of questions might you give to the learners?

Teacher: I can give learners questions related to the theme**

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[14] ** represents inaudible phrase

Appendix 2: Lesson observation template

School:1		Lesson: Literacy 1 – Reading	Teacher: T3 Lesson ref:1/3a
Time	Teacher activity & talk	Pupil activity and talk	Researcher commentary & analysis
12:40	Gets pupils attention and then introduces song	Children sing song	
12:44	Talks to children and then holds up a sweater saying *esweta*. Repeats word several times emphasising syllables /e/swe/ta/	WCC, Grp 1, Grp 2, Grp 3 individuals	Individuals asked to say word by name. No hands up. Chanting responses less for most able and increasing to most for least able. Teacher repeated word in between chants from different groups and individuals. Individuals asked to repeat word several times if their pronunciation was not clear. Big emphasis on pronunciation.
12:50	Holds up a shirt saying *esaati*. Moves around class saying *esaati* and pointing to different children's shirts. *esaati*	Children listen and watch teacher WCC, Grp 1, Grp 2, Grp 3 individuals	
12:54	Writes /sa/ and /saa/ on chalkboard Points to each sound saying sound at same time	WCC, Grp 1, Grp 2, Grp 3 individuals	Clear distinction between the length of the /a/ and /aa/ element. Picks up and corrects individuals who do not gives sufficient stress to the /aa/ sound
12:58	Creates sound chart on board s se si so sa saa t te ti to ta taa m me mi mo ma maa Teacher points and says sounds s se swe Movement break with teacher	Children repeat sounds after teacher	First going across horizontally then vertically and finally random order
1:02	Writes *esweta* and *esaati* on board under each other, Points to words as reads them		Teacher uses pointing stick to emphasise syllables by taping under each syllable as she says word
1:04	Writes word *esaati* on a different part of the chalkboard. Invites B3 to come and read word	B3 comes to the chalkboard and holds the pointing stick in front of him with tip of stick just below the word. After some time he says *esaati*	It was almost imperceptible but just possible to see B3 moving the stick fractionally pointing to each syllable but without actually touching the board. He then touched the stick to the board and moved it along under the word as he read it out. This suggests he was silently saying and blending the syllables within the word before he said the word out loud. Teacher gave B3 sufficient time to complete this process. Also suggests that B3 was 'reading' the word rather than having just 'memorised' the word from earlier activities.
WCC: whole class chant response **B1/G1**: boy/girl above average group **B2/G2**: boy/girl average group **B3/G3**: boy/girl below average group			

	Writes word *esweta* under *esaati* Invites G2 to come and read word	G2 comes to the board and runs pointing stick under word saying *easweta*	G2 did not require thinking time but it is not possible to know if she had memorized word or was using reading skills

1:08	Teacher points to words in random order sometimes staying with same word and other times moving to the other word	WCR : read words teacher points to	Vast majority of class read correct words correctly but a few wrong responses
	Writes *esweta* on chalkboard Writes *eswet_* on chalkboard and asks B3 to come and fill in gap. Asks children to clap for him	B3 comes to chalkboard and writes /a/ in gap. Children clap for B3	
1:11	Writes es__ta on chalkboard and asks B2 to come and fill in missing letters Teacher asks class if response is correct Teacher invites G1 to come out Teacher points to letter 'e'	WCC B2 comes to chalkboard and writes 'e' in blank space. WCR: No B2 remains standing by chalkboard as G1 rubs out the 'e' and replaces it with 'we' G1 rubs out 'e' and rewrites	Teacher is talking to class and B2 while G1 is writing on chalkboard. At times she repeats word *esweta* very clearly annunciating the different syllables and especially /swe/ G1's formation of letter 'e' was larger than 'w' and it appeared that the teacher asked G1 what was wrong and then allowed her to self-correct.
1:15	Writes esaa__ on board and asks G2 to come and fill in missing letters. Teacher asks class if response is correct Ask children to clap for G"	G2 comes to board and writes 'ti' in gap. WCR: yes Children clap for G2	Co-teacher comes in and moves around room re-focusing those children who are drifting off to sleep and gives medicine to another child.
	Writes e____ti on board and asks B2 to come and fill in missing letters. Teacher asks class if response is correct. Invites B1 to come to the board	B2 comes to the board and writes 'sa' in gap. WCR: No B1 rubs out 'sa' and replaces it with 'saa'	
1:20	Starts action song	Children join in singing and actions	
WCC: whole class chant response **B1/G1**: boy/girl above average group **B2/G2**: boy/girl average group **B3/G3**: boy/girl below average group			

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS
INDIVIDUAL PUPIL'S PROGRESS RECORD CARD

SCHOOL: .... CLASS: ...... TERM: .... YEAR: ....

THEME: ....

NAME: . ...

LEARNING AREA	ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL	REMARKS

TEACHER'S SIGNATURE: ....

NAME: ....

CLASS PROGRESS RECORD SHEET

School: .... Term: .... Year: ....

Class: .... Stream: ....

Theme: ....

Learning Area	Mathematics (A)							Literacy I (B)						English (C)				CPA (D)						IRE (E)				CRE (F)				PE (G)					
Competences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Name																																					

Appendix 4: Teacher created end of theme English test

1. Match the following

75/100

2. Name these pictures

- hoe
- basket
- panga
- watering can

watering can
hoe
basket
panga

3. Name the types of weather

cloudy   Sunny   windy   Sunny

(rainy , windy , cloudy , Sunny

4. Read and draw

sun   axe   spade   umbrella   dre...

End.

Appendix 5: Teacher created end of them Literacy test

sa   ɯ ✓   si   ɯ   su

ᴎ ✓   re   ri   re   ru .

2. Taho ekicweka ekibuzireho

ꞁꞓ ✓   ⬚ ✓

ꞁꞀɑꞁ   enkɯ

3 Nywanisa   binu   nꞁꞓk

                        izooba ✓

                        ebicu ✓

                        enjura ✓

nꞁꞷꞁꝋꞁ nꞁꭒ ꭗꝋ

4. Yoleka obwire bunu

	✓	
✓		
Obwire bwenjura	Obwire bwomuyaga	Obwire

ꞁꞁ4ꝋꞁ r4ꝋ ꝋꞁ

5. Teera ebisisani binu

enfuka	ekipanga	esaati	endemu
✓	✓		
		✓	✓