**A CERTIFICATE WITH COMPETENCE OR THICK DOCUMENTATION?**

*Competence based assessment in teacher education is a new concept in Botswana. The teacher as a transmitter of knowledge has to find best ways of facilitating life long learning of their students. This is achievable only if in their training, teachers are introduced to methods of teaching that allow them to reflect on what they do as a way of determining whether any learning is taking place. There has to be evidence of competence for this breed of high quality teacher. The strength of competence-based assessment is the evidence that can be collected on the competences of the teacher trainees. This makes portfolio assessment a hopeful venture. Minimum competence evidence can be sought in portfolios kept by student teachers to determine if they are competent enough to be certified as teachers. In the discussion of competence based assessment for teachers using portfolios, lessons learnt from involvement with an institution that already uses portfolio assessment to certify teachers in Botswana will be used to develop a model that other Botswana teacher training colleges can use when they join the revolution. The emphasis of the model is to give the institution based assessors the upper hand as they play a major role in this process.*

## INTRODUCTION

The need to improve the quality of education in Botswana has mandated that we cast a mirror into our traditional practices to establish if there are things that need changing or improving on. The need to improve the quality of education is reiterated in the national Vision 2016 document (1997). In talking about the quality of education, the concern is on the quality of the products of an education system. If schools can equip school leavers with skills that can allow they to function independently and contribute to the economy of the nation, then there is no doubt that indeed the quality of education is high. The ability for schools to do so rests on the quality of teachers. A caption from the 1993 Botswana National Commission on Education states:

*"..that the quality of teaching is the most important determinant of the quality of education……"*

The quality of teachers is a teacher-training issue. In their, training, teachers have to be introduced to methods that allow them to reflect on their teaching to be able to determine whether learning is taking place. The teacher therefore has to be competent in skills facilitate learning. Teacher education programmes should therefore sufficiently prepare student teachers for this task.

Competence- based education is geared towards the needs of the individual and places emphasis on what the individual learner has to know and to do, at the same time allows for flexible modes for demonstrating the attainment of the learning outcomes

The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE, 1994) emphasizes among other things learner-centered teaching approaches as the dominant teacher-centered approaches reinforce passive behaviour in students (See, e.g., Tabulawa, 1997). Evidence of cooperative learning, creative lesson development and use of appropriate teaching aids as well as critical self-evaluation and reflective teacher practices are necessary ingredients for the proposed departure.

Competence based assessment in a teacher training programme is a way of ascertaining that teachers are capable of dealing adequately with the teaching of their subjects. The benchmarks for competence are put in place to provide assurance that the student teacher sufficiently adheres to predetermined set of standards. The teacher has to show knowledge of content as well evidence of competence before they are certified. Teacher certification under this kind of assessment can be seen as implying quality and competence. The traditional practice of lecture or teacher centred teaching methods followed by paper and pencil tests cannot solely prepare learners to be independent and functional in life. The skills needed for this shift require a change in tackling the content taught to make it more meaningful for the learners to internalize. Certification based on the traditional assessment approaches of written tests is being questioned in this quest for quality education. Limitations associated with dependence on grades have been discussed as Lucas(1992) says:

*"Beyond the extrinsic motivation of test scores and grades lie some intrinsic reward, some freedom to feel curiosity, if a student---or any other performer--- is to muster the*

*long-range commitment that makes deep and lasting learning possible, and with the kind of deepening perception, steady concentration, critical thinking and creative imagination that we hope our students will aspire to."*

Performance assessments such as portfolios have capitalized on such limitations. Portfolios have been gaining popularity in the American education system for at least a decade. They have been used mostly to assess writing proficiency at different levels and with teachers for accountability purposes and demonstration of competencies. They have however in most of these been used together with other traditional modes. Though they can be used for various purposed, in this paper we will focus on their use with students.

**Portfolio assessment**

A student portfolio is a purposeful collection of student performances that exhibits their effort, progress, and achievement over time. It is composed of student's work, student reflection on their performance as well as teacher's comments about student's reflection and work. This provides specific information about the quality of work a student has done as well as ways in which processes and products of their work are improving. The self-evaluation and self-regulation become an integral part in the teaching- learning process. This self-assessment is the foundation for a purposeful portfolio. Information about specific elements of quality of the work and about the process of producing quality work gained through the self-assessment is paramount.

Using portfolios in high-stakes assessment such as being a certified teacher can be problematic if not well thought out. By setting high standards and developing new forms of assessment more closely aligned with the current views on learning and good teaching practice, we can transform education. Portfolios have been identified as an ideal recipe for educational reform because they offer new, more individualized modes of instruction, and they promise to capture information not easily assessed by other methods (Murphy, 1997).

**Overview of the Advanced Certificate in Technical and Vocational Education (ACTVE) programme**

The College of Technical and Vocational Education (CTVE) in Botswana joined the international movement towards competence-based teacher training. The pilot programme was implemented in September 2001 and the first cohort finished in May 2003.

*Structure*

The ACTVE can be taken as a one and a half year full time programme or as a three year parttime programme. The programme consists of ten (10) professional modules with a total of credit value of thirty(30) calculated as one credit per six hours of learning time. A student had to be declared competent in all modules to be able to graduate.

The modules are:

1) Assess learner needs;
2) plan for effective learning;
3) prepare resources to support learning;
4) facilitate learning;
5) provide learners with support;
6) assess learning;
7) evaluate learning sessions;
8) reflect upon roles of a teacher;
9) improve own professional practice; and
10) undertake an action research.

Cutting across the modules are key skills that include communication, personal and interpersonal skills, numeracy, information and communication technology, and problem solving.

Students admitted into the programme must already have a technical skill or experience. Students spend time at the beginning of the programme in an induction programme. This is followed by compulsory facilitated sessions. Students spend half of their training time on teaching placement at a technical college or institution for fulltime students or at one's place of work for part-time students. Given the type of programme, student-teachers are to collect evidence of their competence in facilitating learning. The student teacher is to make decisions in choosing activities and strategies that will facilitate the learning for their students. This therefore requires the teacher to be knowledgeable of their subject

matter. During the teaching placement, both the mentors at the respective technical institutions and their college facilitators assist student teachers in developing these compepetencies.

*Assessment*

Assessment reflects competence of individual students in meeting evidence requirements for the learning outcomes of each of the modules. The performance indicators are clearly stated in the module description. Student teachers have opportunities to redo facilitation of classes based on their reflections and feedback from college facilitators. Credit is awarded only if module is passed. If evidence requirement for a module is not submitted by a set date, the student is deemed to have failed unless they have requested for a deferral. However, if a module is failed, there is an allowance for repeating the module. A deferral is a formal application to hand in work later than the set date for valid reasons. Facilitators for respective modules serve as internal examiners and are the first ones to assess the student portfolios. The portfolios are then passed on to internal verifiers whose task is to ensure that the assessment by the internal examiner is up to the set standards. The University of Botswana where the college is affiliated appoints an external examiner and an external verifier in the final assessment of the student teachers.

The external verifier checks the quality of the assessment based on the evidence they find in the sampled students' portfolios. In the portfolio for any given module they check for evidence deemed adequate for module learning outcomes, consistency of assessment procedures, quality of internal verification, adherence to standards as spelled out in respective modules.

As an external verifier for this first cohort, I was impressed by the amount of work and commitment shown by the programme staff. There is undoubtedly a lot that the programme staff at this college should be commended for in terms of being the first to implement a portfolio assessment based programme in Botswana and upholding the quality. Their hard work as reflected in the work of their students is clear evidence that the reform can indeed bear fruits.

Those opposed to portfolio assessment are not against the benefits they offer but argue in terms of it being a costly endeavor. My experience from this exercise left me wondering about staffing challenges especially with the plan for such colleges to roll out. But above

all, I kept wondering if the external verifier (or maybe even external examiner) had to battle with the voluminous files to acertain that indeed fair and valid assessment has been carried out. The verifier has to go through all the files for a student in their sample for any particular module. In some cased students had more than one file. There is no way that given the time allocated for the exercise, one can effectively report on having done a thorough job. I therefore thought of ways in which this can be made less painfull but still fruitful. The proposed model is a result of that line of thought.

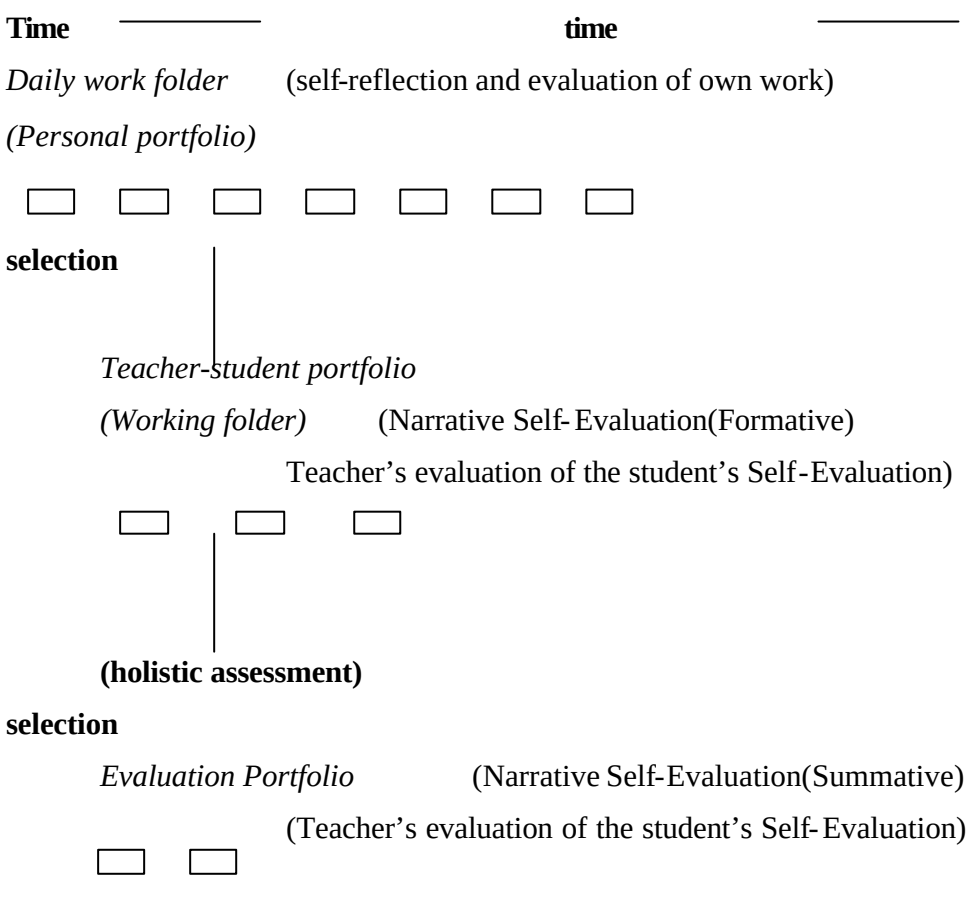
**Proposed model**

The use of portfolios for high-stake decisions such as certification and advancement is not yet universally endorsed. Reasons for this include the subjectivity involved in evaluation of portfolios, variability in content and construction of portfolios, and the lack of consensus in what a teacher should know and be able to do (Doolittle, 1994).

In any case, the collection of students work is to a large extent based on course objectives and other context information. The absence of this base would make it difficult to determine what the student was supposed to do or be able to do. This task can be extremely difficult if the final work is to be evaluated by an outsider. An outside evaluator lacks the perspective of time, resources, processes or assistance that students had in compiling the work. The teachers on the other hand are best in providing overall insights of the work presented in the portfolio. They have been there to see the development and completion of the work.

The work that is submitted for evaluation doesnot have to be all the work the student has been doing but rather highlights of the student development and their interaction with their supervisors. They have to be able to show evidence of developed competencies in organized and simple documentation as possible. The filing therefore can be narrowed as seen in Figure 1. The envisaged transformation of the teaching –learning process is dependent on the trainee teacher's understanding of their changed role. The control of the learning is based on their ability to reflect on the activities of their classrooms. For this therefore they would need to document a lot of what they do.

**Figure 1 Portfolio as a product of self-assessement**




(*Adapted from "A Teacher's Guide to Performance-based learning and Assessment", Educators in Connecticut's Pomperaug Regional School district 15( 1996).)*

**Portfolio building for portfolio assessment**

In the building of the portfolio, the purpose and audience for a portfolio must be explicit and that purpose must be meaningful to the student. This has to be communicated to the students at the beginning of the programme. The context under which the assessment is to be done has to be understood so as individual students can be able to collect appropriate samples, judge themselves against appropriate criteria and objectives and be able to judge their achievements.

The most important elements of a good portfolio are evidence of authenticity and self-evaluation. Evidence that one is able to make and execute plans of actions based on their own self-checks goes hand-in-hand with a creative eye. These therefore have to be shown at all stages in this kind of assessment. Additional evidence of progress necessitates the dating of the work as it progresses. For the student teacher, there is no argument that above all the planning they can do, their knowledge base in their respective subjects should be solid. With a solid knowledge background, they can then plan a conducive learning atmosphere using an outline such as the one in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Reflective evidence for teaching**

**Planning to facilitate**

-what do you want your students want to know and be able to do? Why?

-how does this unit fit with other units?

**Class facilitation**

-evidence of creating a learning environment?

-evidence of student learning?

-any modifications made? Why, why not?

-action plan after class?

**Evaluating student learning**

-what did you learn from student knowledge and skills from their performances?

-what implications do these have on your teaching?

-how will your class facilitation be modified to use the "new" knowledge of your students?

**Analysing your teaching**

-what have you learnt in facilitating this unit about your students and yourself as a teacher

-what overall changes would you make in your planning for this unit in the future? Why?

*(Adapted from Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Programme, Connecticut State Department of Education)*

The role of the supervisor is to ensure that students are introduced to the purpose of the portfolio, what is expected of them to succeed and provide continuous support in the form of feedback on their reflections and action plans. This process will for the most part be at the working portfolio level. The final analysis of what should be seen as evidence of the competence lies highly on the ability of the student teacher to show what constitutes their competence. Depending on how successful the reflective role has been played, the supervisor's evaluation at this point will be more of verification. In this way, the verifications that follow could be facilitated more efficiently.

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