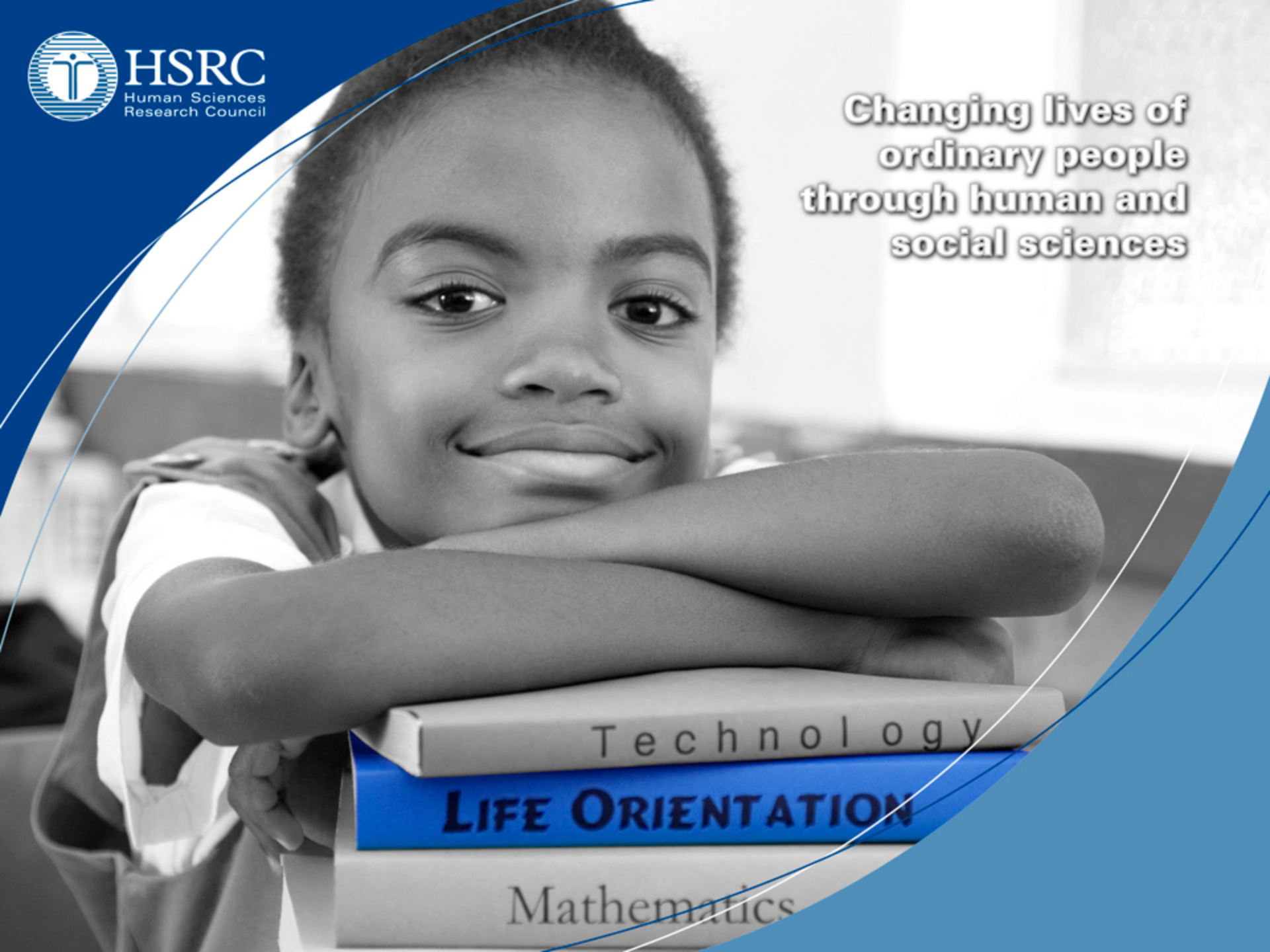


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Improving teaching and learning through the South African Annual National Assessment: Challenges, Possibilities and Solutions

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Background

- Close to 100 percent of learners currently enrolled in schools—major education achievement
- Major problem: poor quality of schooling outcomes—most learners at the end of the academic year often have limited understanding of the expected curriculum
- Current action plan to address problem include ANA as important diagnostic instrument for identifying and providing solutions
- Paper argues for ANA_professional development programmes to help develop a culture of formative assessment

The challenges—potential misuse of ANA

- inform policies that have not been well scrutinized and are based on measures and analysis with limited credibility (see Kane, 2002),
- control and limit educational innovations and the professional autonomy of educators, (Canadian Teachers Federation, 1999)
- hold teachers responsible for results they have limited control of (see Darling- Hammond, 2004),
- narrow curriculum coverage by encouraging “teaching to the test” technique which take valuable time away from non-tested subjects, particularly when high-stakes are attached to results (see Volante, 2004).

Possibilities:

How large scale assessment such as ANA can improve teaching and learning

- make students work harder and improve their performance (see Anderson, 1990),
- identify the most successful teaching practices and proficient teachers (see Cizek, 2001),
- enhance teachers' reflective and critical thinking when planning instruction (Goldberg & Roswell, 2000), lead to positive increases in educators' knowledge about testing and of testing issues (see Earl & Torrance, 2000),
- improve teachers' assessment and instructional practices, particularly when they are involved in marking these assessments (Gilmore, 2002),
- stimulate action research that serves as a basis for school improvement (Wideman, 2002),
- provide schools with valuable information about the consequences of their past practices and program effectiveness (see Anderson & Postl, 2001).

The ANA processes: Emphasis on data quality

- Involvement of the 2011 ANA processes
- Recognise the emphasis on data quality (as expected)
- enhance teachers' reflective and critical thinking when planning instruction (Goldberg & Roswell, 2000), lead to positive increases in educators' knowledge about testing and of testing issues (see Earl & Torrance, 2000),
- While the quality of data is fundamental to the analysis of school quality improvement, the engagement of education stakeholders especially, teachers in understanding these processes and their relevance in improving teaching and learning are equally important.
- There is therefore the need for policy directives to include in the ANA processes a professional development program.

Developing teacher assessment capabilities through ANA: International Perspective

- EQAO in Ontario (a province in Canada)
- Uruguay
- The National Education and Monitoring Project (NEMP) in New Zealand
- ' knowledge about testing and of testing issues (see Earl & Torrance, 2000),
- While the quality of data is fundamental to the analysis of school quality improvement, the engagement of education stakeholders especially, teachers in understanding these processes and their relevance in improving teaching and learning are equally important.
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Developing teacher assessment capabilities through Large scale assessment: Ontario, Canada

- In the province of Ontario in Canada, the assessment unit responsible for assessment, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), supports training in schools through their School Support and Outreach teams.
- PD programs train teachers to use data to improve the quality of classrooms and school management. Innovative platforms such as live webcasts are also used and workshops are conducted with parents to support learning at home through an understanding of their child's report card (EQAO, 2010).
- The EQAO also supplies school improvement committees (teacher communities representing every grade in the school) with detailed analysis of the assessment results. These are used to develop school improvement plans (Volante and Cherubini, 2010).

Developing teacher assessment capabilities through Large scale assessment: Uruguay

- Uruguay offers an excellent example of how to incorporate teachers into assessment processes.
- Initially resistant to the assessment, government instituted a 15 member advisory group representing teacher unions, education districts, teacher training institutions and private school organizations.
- This body met with the Ministry of Education to make key decisions on the implementation of its large scale assessment. Surveys conducted by UNESCO found that this collaborative approach had a positive impact on teaching with over 55 per cent of teachers changing their methodologies because of their involvement in the program (Gustafsson, 2009).
- The development of training materials actively involves teachers focusing on understanding learner's incorrect answers and strategies to address this problem. Teachers become familiar with the assessment program, encouraging buy-in and understanding for future tests.

Developing teacher assessment capabilities through Large scale assessment: New Zealand

- The National Education and Monitoring Project (NEMP) was New Zealand's large-scale assessment program that ran from 2005-2010.
- Teachers partook in a one or two week training program and together with NEMP formulated the marking criteria for assessment. Marking schedules were designed to include regular monitoring and discussion (Gilmore, 2002).
- A more collaborative process to marking is recommended with assessment and curriculum units working with teachers to develop test items, coding and moderation of scripts. For teachers to integrate formative assessment into their curriculum, they must have examples of these tools (Doig 2006). These include diagnostic tests, instructional activities, formative assessment tasks and scoring rubrics.
- Within NEMP, teachers responsible for assessment administration are relieved of their regular classroom teaching duties and a relief teacher employed in the participating school (Education Assessment Research Unit, 2007).

Informal and formal ANA professional development

- Following these success stories, we would like to propose ANA Professional Development (ANA_PD) program where education stakeholders, especially, teachers use their engagement with the ANA processes as an opportunity to improve their understanding of how large scale assessment such ANA can be used to improve teaching and learning.
- We envision ANA_PD to include two major components: the formal and informal engagements. The formal engagement might include the ANA processes such as; the development of test items, the marking of the test items, and the analyses and reporting of students' performance of the test items that directly related to the successful conduct and integrity of the ANA processes. The informal engagement should involve the use of ANA results to improve teaching and learning.
- The professional development of the formal engagement can take place during the period of ANA while the informal one can take place any time during the academic year. We recommend that university teacher development units and Non Government Organizations (NGOs) could be involved in the development of courses for this program. Technology for example web-based courses (with mobile platforms) could be considered so that teachers could take these courses at any time from any location. This would help minimize the loss of class time due to teacher absence because of these courses.
- Furthermore, attaching credit and promotion incentives to these courses can motivate large number of teachers to engage in the ANA_PD program. We expect this engagement to help teachers improve their assessment literacy and belief in assessment to improve teaching and learning. We contend that the continuous use of ANA data and analysis to inform school improvement decisions would help sustain ANA.

Concluding Remarks

- Our policy brief has provided a vision of how a large scale assessment such as ANA can support and improve teaching and learning.
- We acknowledged the challenges inherent in using the analyses from ANA data in informing school improvement policies and strategies. We argue that large scale assessment when directly linked to formative assessment has the potential to significantly improve learning. The link of ANA to formative assessment practices as outlined in the action plan 2014 is therefore a welcome proposition.
- This plan however would only succeed when all stake holders in education, especially teachers, accept this proposition and continuously use data analyses to inform teaching and learning improvement strategies.
- We have proposed professional development program linked to the ANA processes arguing that teachers' access to courses designed for this program would help them to develop their understanding in assessment literacy.
- We have recommended web-based technology with mobile platforms in developing these courses to allow many teachers access at all time.
- We proposed that accrediting these courses and linking them with promotion incentives would motivate teachers to engage in this professional development program.



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