5. MONITORING AND SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

Examples of and Implications for South Africa

INTRODUCTION

School success has often been thought of in terms of achievement. Emphasis has also been placed on the tools used to monitor the progress of pupils in order to ensure achievement (Safer & Fleischman, 2005). The purpose of this chapter is to present perspectives on school-based monitoring and how monitoring is undertaken in South Africa with the view of improving school success.

School success, however, is not merely achievement and the concept of monitoring needs to be defined. At present, there is little agreement in literature on the definition of monitoring (Sammons, 1999). Even though there is little agreement on what the concept means, monitoring is constantly mentioned in school effectiveness research (SER) and is often linked to the achievement of pupils (Scheerens, Glas, & Thomas, 2003) “…frequent monitoring and evaluation of students’ progress stand out as a factor that is consistently mentioned in research reviews as a correlate of educational achievement” (p. 14). While monitoring systems on their own do not necessarily diagnose the reasons for poor performance the fact remains that monitoring systems do provide valuable insights into the strengths and the weaknesses within the system (Willms, 1992).

Scheerens et al. (2003) are of the opinion that monitoring can be defined as a systematic gathering of information in order to make judgments about the effectiveness of schooling. This assumptions coincides well with the understanding of Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2005) who argues that schools need to “respond to external accountability measures” when having “to create school instructional systems that use data to guide the practices of teaching and learning” (p. 2). But to do this we need to increase the use of information for both internal and external evaluation (Shewbridge, Hulshof, Nusche, & Stoll, 2011, p. 5).

Furthermore, according to Scheerens et al. (2003) monitoring stresses on-going gathering of information as a basis for making decisions with the purpose to improve learning. Raffian and Ruthen (2003) further elaborate on the gathering of information by linking the activity to learning and observing learning, in terms of difficulties experienced and progress made. Thus gaps are filled between working knowledge and specific knowledge (Willms, 1992). The monitoring system utilised and envisaged in this research concentrates on the pupil at the classroom-level, but is also situated...
at the school-level as a monitoring system for governance and management bodies. The importance of the approach was recently emphasised in a secondary school improvement programme introduced by the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (2011) on behalf of the Gauteng Department of Education where renewed emphasis was placed on the roles principals and management bodies should play when working towards the restoration of school effectiveness.

Monitoring is important, as it provides mechanisms for formally regulating the desired level of quality (Scheerens et al., 2003). It is seen as a tool that focuses pupils, educators and the principal on set goals (Sammons, 1999). Monitoring of pupils also has the potential to inform planning, teaching and assessment, but, most importantly, monitoring sends the message that the educator and the school are interested in the pupil and in the progress being made (Sammons, 1999). Lockheed and Murphy (1996) concur by stating that monitoring is vital to the learning process and assists children who are not performing to reach their potential. Monitoring assesses achievement trends over time (Lockheed, 1996) and in the words of Hager and Slocum (2005) in “a system for ongoing progress, monitoring is critical to ensure the student is continually moving toward mastery” (p. 58). For the purpose of this research, monitoring is seen as gathering relevant information about pupil performance, at various stages, in order to ascertain whether academic gains have been made and to identify strategies where necessary. This understanding fits well within the concept of data-driven decision-making argued by Halverson et al. (2005). However, irrespective how we go about defining the monitoring of educational systems, it remains a serious challenge to those systems and schools wishing to implement it (Van der Lubbe, 2009).

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

Self-evaluation is all about the quality of teaching and learning (Shewbridge et al., 2011) which is according to the authors “the heart of self-evaluation and inspection activities”. Issues pertaining to educational quality are consistency highlighted in addition to school improvement, school inspection and quality assurance (Janssens & Van Amelsvoort, 2008). The reason for this is that as there is an increase in investment, there is also an increase in accountability (Kyriakides & Campbell, 2004). As monitoring educational quality has received amplified attention, the how of monitoring is being addressed in order to ensure that the results received by the process will be taken seriously. Education systems across the globe have recognised that state monitoring has to take place in conjunction with school monitoring undertaken by means of self-evaluation (McNamara & O’Hara, 2008; Nevo, 2001). Self-evaluation in this context is seen as a procedure that schools used to assess functioning on many levels, namely school and class, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness (Department of Education, 2001; Schildkamp, 2007; Van Petegem, 2001). The emphasis here is on the systematic collection of data which is used as a basis for reflection (Nevo, 2001). This reflection has to lead to school improvement as this is inherent in school