



**NARRATIVES OF SUCCESS AND CHALLENGE:  
THE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS  
WITH DISABILITIES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

All students require formative feedback on their educational performance, and all students can benefit from inclusive feedback practices. The experiences of students with disabilities are the focus of this study which has been guided by the research question: What can we learn about inclusive formative assessment from the experiences of students with disabilities? The study draws on Sen's capability approach and its specific adaption to TVET education (e.g., Terzi, 2014; Powell & McGrath, 2019) to underpin ideas of how inclusive formative assessment could contribute to the success and well-being of students with disabilities and other learning needs in TVET.

The aim of this study is to build knowledge on inclusive formative assessment through narrative accounts of experiences of formative assessment provided by students with disabilities. Accordingly, six narrative interviews were conducted with six students over the course of their first year in a business programme, from February to October 2022. Seven lecturers were purposively included as participants because their classes included students with disabilities. The lecturers were interviewed individually. The interview data were transcribed and analysed, drawing on the inclusive formative assessment framework developed for the study.

The study found that students valued formative assessment tasks that combined learning with preparation for working life. These combinations provided opportunities to showcase strengths and improve in areas of weakness. Above all, students appreciated teachers who adapted assessment tasks to their needs. The study argues that formative assessment is key to inclusive educational practice as teachers can use formative assessment to plan future teaching, while students can use it to evaluate their own progress towards achieving their learning goals.

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## **DEDICATION**

To all the females who believe that they cannot achieve things in life: anything is possible, you just need to believe in yourself, even if it is a little bit at a time. Believe in what you can become.

For my nieces, Aleena, Aaliyah, Leah, Nihaan, Reshma, Raziyah, Shajida, Shameera, and Sameya.

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## GLOSSARY

### Abbreviations

### Meaning

<b>TVET</b>	Technical Vocational Education and Training
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
<b>SWD</b>	Students with Disabilities
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>DBE</b>	South Africa Department of Basic Education
<b>DNE</b>	South African National Department of Education
<b>DHET</b>	South African Department of Higher Education and Training
<b>ICASS</b>	Internal continuous assessment
<b>ESASS</b>	External summative assessment

### Terms

### Definition

#### **Formative Assessment**

An assortment of methods teachers use or apply to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension.

#### **Summative Assessment**

Used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period – typically, at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year.

#### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education places all students in age-appropriate, general or vocational education classes.



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION: INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **1.1 Introduction to the chapter**

Chapter One provides background and contextual information for this study on inclusive formative assessment within a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college. In Section 1.2, a general introduction to inclusive education is given, including the terminology used in the thesis to describe students with disabilities and educational needs. Section 1.3 contextualises inclusive education in the South African TVET education sector. Section 1.4 provides the motivation and rationale for the focus of the study on inclusive formative assessment, while Section 1.5 introduces the problem statement and research questions. The aims and objectives of the study are briefly presented in Section 1.6; and Section 1.7 provides an orientation to the thesis.

### **1.2 Introduction to inclusive education**

In June 1994, the “representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations [including South Africa] took part in the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain” (Lindsay, 2003:3). The key statement resulting from the conference was that “ordinary schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994:ix). The Salamanca Statement marked a watershed in the development of inclusive education world-wide. Its influence is evident in the South African Government’s White Paper No. 6 on Special Needs Education (South African National Department of Education (DNE), 2001) which proposes an inclusive approach to the education of learners with disabilities and other special educational needs. The discourse of inclusive education has also influenced the TVET sector internationally (Alla-Mensah, 2019:2), although, in the South African context, the “Draft Framework and Guidelines to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges” (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2022) was only gazetted on 28 January 2022 and, at the time of writing, has not been finalised.

In South Africa, few schools are provided for learners with severe physical disabilities and neuro-developmental disorders (Harber, 2017:213). For example, learners between the ages of 14 and 18 “who experience barriers to learning because of cognitive, behavioural or specific learning difficulties, and who do not progress at the same rate as their peers”, can receive support in “schools of skills” (DNE, 2001:29-30). Most learners with disabilities and

other educational needs, including students in TVET colleges, are expected to participate in mainstream classes through the support of inclusive curricula and pedagogical practices (DNE, 2001). With limited specialist support, college lecturers are required to “recognise and address severe learning difficulties and to accommodate a range of learning needs” (DNE, 2001:47). Thus, the majority of TVET students with disabilities attend mainstream colleges where lecturers are expected to implement an inclusive approach to the “functional, vocational and skills-orientated content in the delivery of the curriculum for identified learners” (DNE, 2001:30). White Paper 6 provides a vision of inclusive education that required considerable changes to curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices to enable students with disabilities and other educational needs to succeed in mainstream classes. To this end, implementation plans (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2010a) and guidelines (DBE, 2010b) were developed to assist schools and TVET colleges to achieve inclusive education. While there has been some success in the implementation of inclusive education in South African schools (McKenzie, 2021), it is generally agreed that inclusive education has not been achieved in the TVET sector (Pereira et al., 2016; Mabaso-Mlangeni, 2018).

### **1.2.1 Terminology: Students with SEN, SEND or disabilities?**

SEN, which stands for Special Educational Needs, became a prevalent term in the 1990s. In several countries, SEN holds legal significance, encompassing individuals facing learning disorders that pose greater educational than those faced by their peers of a similar age (Warnock & Norwich, 2010). These challenges may manifest in various ways, such as incomplete mastery of fundamental skills like reading, writing, and mathematics, difficulty in effective communication and comprehension, struggles with specific types of information processing, the necessity for academic support, guidance in appropriate conduct, assistance in building social connections, interaction with adults, and organizational skills (Mittler, 2012). Additionally, some individuals with SEN may contend with sensory or physical needs that affect their academic performance (Cline & Frederickson, 2009). Furthermore, certain students with SEN may find it taxing to sustain their attention during extended classroom sessions (Corbett, 2002), while others might possess enthusiasm for learning but grapple with maintaining focus in a conventional classroom environment (Warnock & Norwich, 2010). For some students with SEN, encountering coursework that surpasses their abilities can be daunting and lead to disillusionment, causing academic tasks to seem monotonous and unproductive (Stubbs, 2008). Consequently, many of these students may develop behavioural issues stemming from disengagement with their studies (Amstad & Müller, 2020). These behavioural challenges can be categorized into two dimensions: externalizing and internalizing behaviours. Externalizing behaviours may involve traits such as

hyperactivity, impulsiveness, or aggression, while internalizing behaviours may encompass experiences of depression, anxiety, or social withdrawal.

The prevalent learning disorders encompass several common conditions: 1) attention deficit disorder, characterized by difficulties in processing sensory stimuli; 2) dyslexia, a language processing disability; 3) auditory and visual processing disability, a sensory challenge where individuals, despite having normal hearing and vision, struggle with language comprehension; and 4) dysgraphia, a writing disability that hinders letter and number formation, arithmetic problem-solving, and mathematical comprehension (Salim et al., 2019).

For educators, the presence of students with SEN in a classroom typically signifies the instruction of individuals "who have lagged in their educational progress" (Bryant et al., 2019:5). In many educational settings, students are expected "to read information from a whiteboard or PowerPoint presentation, absorb it, and then reproduce it as evidence of their understanding of an assignment" (Mittler, 2012:4). However, this style of rote learning often proves challenging for most students with SEN, leading to heightened levels of anxiety and frustration. In most instances, the classroom teacher provides support to learners with SEN, although in certain cases, specialised SEN experts are brought in or consulted.

The utilisation of terms like "students with special educational needs" has become problematic due to its inherent imprecision and inconsistency with the principles of inclusive education (Buchner et al., 2021:11). This imprecision is evident in the extensive array of potential diagnostic categories associated with special educational needs, encompassing conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit disorder, and a spectrum of learning disabilities including dyslexia and dysgraphia, and Tourette's syndrome. Conditions that involve cognitive impairments (as observed in Down syndrome), and impairments affecting physical mobility (as exemplified by cerebral palsy) have also been included under the umbrella term SEN. Sensory impairments, like blindness and deafness, speech and language disorders, ranging from apraxia of speech to stuttering, emotional and behavioural disorders, including anxiety, depression, and oppositional-defiant disorder, as well as physical disabilities, have also been included as SEN. This diversity underscores the imprecise nature of the term SEN, which can lead to confusion.

In response to this issue, the abbreviation SEND emerged. SEND stands for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and was introduced to differentiate between general special educational needs and the more specific requirements of students with disabilities. However, SEN and SEND have often been used interchangeably. For instance, SEND has

been employed to describe a student with a specific disability, even if they may not possess special educational needs. While individuals with disabilities often have additional educational needs, not all people with disabilities need educational support. Conversely, SEN does not invariably encompass disabilities (Buchner et al., 2021). For instance, students without specific disabilities may still exhibit special educational needs. Unlike special needs, a disability carries a substantial and enduring impact on the individual's daily life (Ladau, 2021). These terms can be perplexing, as each person's experience of disability varies significantly.

It is worth noting that learning disabilities such as dyslexia are categorized as disabilities due to their potential to affect individuals from childhood through adulthood. While diverse learning styles have occasionally been perceived as learning challenges, advocates for individuals with learning differences are reshaping perceptions and terminology. In some educational contexts, the phrase "learning difficulty" is evolving into "learning difference" to more accurately describe these variations (Buchner et al., 2021).

The term "special needs" has also faced criticism as a euphemism that has supplanted more straightforward terms like "disabilities". Previously, "special needs" was favoured over words such as "disability" or "impairment", as the latter were considered negative (Ladau, 2021). The intention behind using the term "special education needs" was to provide comfort and support to parents, allowing them to say, "My child has special education needs" rather than "My child is disabled." However, "special needs" has since acquired a stigma (Ladau, 2021). For instance, a study in 2016 discovered that many people regarded terms like "special needs" as more negative than the word "disabled" (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). Gernsbacher et al. emphasize that having a disability is not something to be ashamed of. Therefore, the use of euphemisms like "special needs," "differently abled," or "challenged" should not be considered preferable, nor should these terms replace a diagnosis. Terms such as SEN convey the impression that a disability is shameful and should be concealed or masked by euphemisms.

"Disabled" is a straightforward term with a clear and concise meaning, which is why many people prefer it over the phrase "special needs" (Buchner et al., 2021). Another option is to describe an individual's disabilities by naming their specific diagnosis. For instance, using person-first language (e.g., a person with dyslexia) is preferred over defining the person solely in terms of their disability (e.g., a dyslexic person). It is important to acknowledge that there are differing opinions about the most suitable terminology to use, as elucidated by Ladau:

I believe deeply that language preferences are a personal choice, and everyone should have a right to choose identifying terms that feel best for them. I try to remind people that language isn't one-size-fits-all, especially since there are more than a billion disabled people in the world (Ladau, 2021:13).

Ladau (2021) adds that a disability is "a state of being". In some cases, a disability can connote identity, history, and culture; avoiding the term can come across as more patronizing than respectful.

### **1.3 Background to inclusive education in TVET in South Africa**

In the immediate post-apartheid era (1994–2009), all education was under the governance of the National Department of Education (NDE). In 2009, the National Department of Education was split into two: the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The DBE dealt with all schools from Grade R to Grade 12, including adult literacy programmes; it was initially also responsible for vocational education, then known as Further Education and Training (FET). Vocational colleges were known as FET colleges but were subsequently renamed Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, which is the term used by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). On 1 April 2015, TVET colleges were taken out of the DBE and incorporated into the DHET. TVET colleges (as can be seen in Section 1.2, as well as in this section) were thus subjected to policy and legislation emanating from different ministries and governmental departments at different periods between 1994 and 2023.

Students who require low or moderate levels of support are eligible to enrol in mainstream TVET colleges (DBE, 2010a). Short-term consultative support for individual students is available to colleges (DBE, 2010b:26); but colleges are responsible for the implementation of inclusive curricula, pedagogies and assessment tasks that will accommodate students' special needs (DBE, 2010a). The DBE's strategic plan attempted to show how the ideal of inclusive education should be achieved. Firstly, "provinces and district support teams [would be] set up to assist schools, identify special needs learners and ensure they obtain the support they need" (DBE, 2010a:27). Colleges would then receive support that is "general and focused on building capacity of all educators and ILSTs [Institutional Level Support Teams]" (DBE, 2010b:26); and resources would be allocated to implement inclusive practice (DBE, 2010a). However, despite these intentions, several studies show that there is little or no support for students with special educational needs and disabilities within the TVET



sector. For example, Fourie (2019) found that TVET students with disabilities felt lost and isolated and that teachers had not been trained in how to support them. Mabaso-Mlangeni (2018) similarly found a lack of caring support services for TVET students with disabilities. In her study, Makanya (2015) found that college lecturers struggled to include students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom due to resource constraints, lack of lecturer training, and curricula that did not take students' needs into account. Podzo and Chipika (2019) found that curricula tended to discriminate against students with disabilities. A report on the implementation of inclusive education, commissioned by the Department of Basic Education itself, showed that the needs of the majority of "learners who have special needs [were] not met throughout their schooling years" (DBE, 2015:59). The situation in TVET colleges is even "direr" (Mabaso-Mlangeni, 2018). TVET colleges face several challenges in meeting the requirements for inclusive education, including the readiness of college lecturers to implement inclusive educational practices in mixed ability classes (Makanya, 2015; Zukani, 2018), the development of appropriate, inclusive curricula (Podzo & Chipika, 2019; McKenzie, 2021) and the implementation of inclusive vocational pedagogies (Florian & Beaton, 2018; Mabaso-Mlangeni, 2018). However, the most daunting challenge is the implementation of inclusive assessment (Dalton et al., 2012; Nkalane, 2018). The DBE's Guidelines for Full-service/Inclusive Schools state that assessment "needs to identify barriers to learning, with the purpose of identifying support needs that would improve the teaching and learning process" (DBE, 2010b:27). Schools and colleges are expected to "have measures in place for alternative or adaptive assessment in line with the Policy on Support and Adaptations for Learners Who Experience Barriers in Assessment – this would include staff identified to coordinate and manage the procedures, additional spaces and equipment needed" (DBE, 2010b:31-32). The literature highlights the centrality of formative assessment in inclusive education (Watkins, 2007; Dalton et al., 2012), yet no specific strategies for formative assessment are provided in the Guidelines for Full-service/Inclusive Schools (DBE, 2010b). Formative assessment is a particular area of concern for inclusive TVET education as it will assist lecturers to understand students' needs, as well as provide them with the necessary guidance and support to enable progress (Ainscow et al., 2019). The application of inclusive formative assessment in the attainment of curricular outcomes is under-researched in the general literature on assessment (Bennett, 2011; Bourke & Mentis, 2014). The field of inclusive formative assessment in vocational education and training is particularly under-researched and represents a significant gap in the literature (Watkins, 2007; Dalton et al., 2012; Kefallinou & Donnelly, 2016). It is for this reason that the focus of this thesis is inclusive formative assessment in TVET.

#### **1.4 Motivation and rationale for the study: Why formative assessment?**

Assessment is necessary to determine whether learners have achieved specified educational outcomes. Summative assessment “identifies successes and weaknesses in relation to specific goals, but it does not always provide formative feedback that can be used to direct future teaching and learning programmes” (Watkins, 2007:25). Formative assessment is thus needed to assist teachers to understand students’ strengths and challenges and to reflect on the extent to which their teaching and learning plans and practices have been effective for students’ success (Bennett, 2011). It is important that “the findings of initial assessment of SEN [should] be linked to curriculum goals” (Watkins, 2007:23). In this regard, formative assessment can raise learners’ awareness about where they are making progress towards achieving specified outcomes, as well as areas of challenge (Mukhtar & Ahmad, 2015). Formative assessment is important in preparing students for summative assessments (Watkins, 2007; Davies & Elliott, 2012). Formative assessment has five key characteristics: 1) it is diagnostic, enabling teachers to “better understand learners’ strengths and challenges” (Van der Kleij et al., 2015); 2) it includes feedback from the teacher to the students which helps students to understand their progress (Florian & Beaton, 2018); 3) it has different forms, e.g., peer assessment, carried out in collaboration with others, helps students to learn from one another (Topping, 2009); 4) it includes self-assessment, which enables students to take a more active part in their own learning (Bourke & Mentis, 2013); and 5) it is formative assessment which helps learners to prepare for summative assessment (Davies & Elliott, 2012). When formative assessment takes place within a classroom culture that encourages risk-taking and learning from mistakes, it can have substantial positive impacts on the achievements of students with disabilities (Brandmo, et al., 2020).

Formative assessment is key to inclusive practice as it can help students to learn from their mistakes in a supportive and safe environment (as formative assessment does generally not count towards a final mark). Formative assessment can be used to direct future teaching and learning. Inclusive formative assessment is particularly complex in vocational education as it must both support students’ academic success and prepare them for “life beyond the college” (Kefallinou & Donnelly, 2016). In this regard, “on-going, formative assessment that directly informs teaching and learning decision-making” has been shown to be particularly beneficial to students with disabilities (Watkins, 2007:39).

This study will build knowledge on the nature of high-quality inclusive assessment and the ways in which TVET lecturers need to take account of how inclusive formative assessment can enable or constrain the participation and success of students with disabilities and other educational needs in TVET. The study intends to draw on students’ narratives to highlight

key issues in the development of a coherent system of inclusive formative assessment that will support the academic success and well-being of all students.

## **1.5 Problem statement and research questions**

### **1.5.1 Main research question**

What can we learn about inclusive formative assessment from the experiences of students with disabilities?

### **1.5.2 Research sub-questions**

- 1) What do the experiences of students with disabilities reveal about their successes and challenges in formative assessments?
- 2) How can the experiences of students with disabilities be used to enhance formative assessment practices for all students enrolled in TVET studies?

## **1.6 Aim and objectives of the study**

### **1.6.1 Aim**

The aim of the proposed research study is to build knowledge on inclusive formative assessment through an examination of the experiences of success and challenge around formative assessment, as narrated by students with disabilities.

### **1.6.2 Objectives**

- 1) To identify recurring story lines, critical incidents and metaphors in students' narratives of success and challenge in their experiences of formative assessment.
- 2) To understand, through students' narratives, what enables and constrains their attainment of success in formative assessment.

## **1.7 Contribution of the study**

While there is a growing body of knowledge on inclusive education in South Africa (e.g., McKenzie, 2021) and internationally (e.g., Pereira et al., 2016), there is a gap in the literature regarding inclusive assessment. Regarding the methodology of the study, Nind points out that "inclusive research has underexplored potential to reinvigorate inclusive education and provide new connections to democracy and social justice in education" (2014:525). It is this knowledge and methodological gap that the study addresses. This research study intends to contribute knowledge on inclusive formative assessment through examining narratives of success and challenge of students with disabilities in their experiences of formative assessment.

### **1.7.1 Guide to the thesis**

Chapter 1: Introduction: Inclusive Assessment in South Africa

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature Study on Inclusive Formative Assessment

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology for a Study of Formative Assessment

Chapter 4: The Context: The ICT Module

Chapter 5: Lecturer Interviews: Inclusive Formative Assessment and the Duty of Care

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## CHAPTER TWO

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON INCLUSIVE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1 Introduction to the chapter

This review of the literature on inclusive formative assessment starts with a general introduction to that literature (Section 2.2), then introduces key research studies on inclusive formative assessment in TVET (Section 2.3), as well as issues in teacher professional development (Section 2.4). A short critique of the literature on formative assessment is offered (Section 2.5), along with the conceptual framework for the study, derived from the review of the literature (Section 2.6).

#### 2.2 Formative assessment

The research literature on assessment has been dominated by studies of summative assessment and the measurement of attainment (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). The differences between formative and summative assessment are related to the different purposes of assessment. The main purpose of formative assessment is “helping learning, while the main purpose of summative assessment is to provide information about what learning has been achieved at a certain time” (Dolin et al., 2018:55). The literature on school-based assessment tends to be divided into studies on formative and summative assessment, that is, studies on “assessment for learning”, and studies on “assessment of learning” (Black & William, 2006). Before notable assessment theorists such as Ausubel (1968) and Bloom (Krathwohl, 2002) reconceptualised the role of assessment in the promotion of learning, assessment was generally understood as summative, that is, as the evaluation of performance at the end of a learning phase.

Assessment plays an important role in vocational and technical education. Summative assessment, such as formal examinations required by professional bodies for registration or certification, is a “high stakes” practice in vocational education because it can exclude students from the field of practice (Richard et al., 2013). While students need to meet the standards specified by professional bodies, associations, or employers, the recent literature shows shifts towards more formative and holistic approaches to assessment that prioritize student learning (e.g., Boud & Molloy, 2013; Irons & Elkington, 2021). Yorke (2011:251) has pointed to what she calls the “measurement fallacy”, that is, the often subjective and over-simplified ways in which complex performance is measured in summative assessment. Boud and colleagues consider that “the job of feedback is complete with the imparting of performance-related information” (Boud et al., 2008:127). They also claim that formative

feedback has a greater potential for innovative practice, as it is inherently more responsive to local conditions and contexts than summative assessment which tends to favour compliance (Boud et al., 2008).

According to Weinstein and Mayer (1986), there are four activities that help students become more efficient and effective learners: 1) comprehension monitoring, 2) knowledge acquisition, 3) active study skills and 4) support strategies. Weinstein and Mayer (1986) understand formative assessment as largely cognitive development, including learning skills and strategies, while William (2006) extends the role of formative assessment into more social, interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects. He understands formative assessment to comprise five key strategies: 1) obtaining clarity on purpose of the assessment task and its related criteria or rubrics that indicate the features of a successful response; 2) facilitating class discussion and other classroom-based exercises that will demonstrate students' level of understanding; 3) providing ongoing feedback on the tasks that students are undertaking, for the purpose of helping them to improve; 4) supporting students to help one another as peer educators and assessors; and 5) enabling students to take ownership their own learning. Black and William (2006:4) undertook participatory research with teachers and recommended the following formative assessment activities: 1) sharing success criteria with learners, 2) classroom questioning, 3) comment-only marking, 4) peer assessment and self-assessment, and 5) formative use of summative tests. In clarifying these five types of activities, Black and William (2006) explained that learners should understand the assessment criteria, particularly the criteria that indicate success. Classroom questioning is a practice that enables teachers to understand learners' needs and levels of understanding, while comment-only marking provides feedback to students while eliminating the anxiety of receiving a mark for work done. Peer assessment and self-assessment are activities that enable students to take responsibility for their own learning. Finally, the formative use of summative tests prepares learners for summative assessment (Black & William, 2006:5).

Formative assessment in the form of peer assessment and self-assessment has been shown to have beneficial effects on student learning (Peters et al., 2018). These beneficial effects include students' ability to assess their own work. Tai and colleagues propose that, in all forms of education, a goal should be to develop students' evaluative judgement to enable them "to improve their work and to meet their future learning needs – a necessary capability of graduates" (Tai et al., 2018:467). Formative assessment has the additional benefit of helping teachers and trainers to understand students' strengths and weakness, as well as to review the effectiveness of the pedagogies that they are using (Irons & Elkington, 2021).

Formative feedback plays an integral role in reflective practice, which is central to learning for and from work practices, or work-like practices (Tigelaar & Sins, 2021).

For formative assessment to be effective in the context of vocational education, Oliver (2015) argues that the key components of 'authenticity' and 'proximity' are required. 'Authenticity' refers to a learning or assessment task that is similar to the kind of task required in the workplace. An authentic assessment task would usually need to be one in which industry is consulted, although the authentic task could be adapted to the students' level. For example, first year students are unlikely to be given a fully authentic assessment task. 'Proximity' is used by Oliver (2015) and others (e.g., Billett & Choy, 2013; Boud & Molloy, 2013) to refer to the authenticity of the environment in which the task is undertaken. Learning in an actual workplace may not always be possible, particularly at first year level, but the workplace could be simulated, as in a virtual learning environment (Azid et al., 2023), or a classroom could be adapted to make it approximate a workplace setting (e.g., Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). Authenticity and proximity in an assessment task orientate novice students towards the world of work. Formative assessment is essential in WIL, as it is key to how performance is improved (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Oliver (2015) points out that the expectations placed on students in the complex environment of vocational education are constantly changing, and assessment practices therefore need to be flexible and constantly updated. The formative assessment of tasks that have authenticity and proximity will be helpful in building all students' employability skills and abilities. This is particularly important for students with disabilities:

The skills of students with disabilities are important factors in determining their success or failure in the working environment (Mutanga, 2020:139).

### **2.3 Inclusive formative assessment TVET**

There is a large body of literature on inclusive education in general schooling (e.g., Corbett, 2002; Stubbs, 2008; Mittler, 2012). However, there is limited literature on inclusive formative assessment practices in vocational education that interrogates assessment in order "to view the whole curriculum differently through considering what may promote inclusion, equity, and participation" (Tai et al., 2022:16). This literature suggests that an inclusive orientation to enhancing students' confidence and career knowledge enables students with disabilities to transition successfully to employment. However, there are very few studies on inclusive vocational education and training, even though it is understood that learners who are faced with academic difficulties may benefit from an "appropriate placement in vocational education" (Jacobs & Collair, 2017) and many governments have pledged to support

students with SEN in vocational education and training (Malle et al., 2015). Where inclusive education is adopted, for example, in vocational education colleges that build SEN students' confidence and offer career advice (among other support mechanisms), it was found that SEN students "can successfully transition from college to employment" (Pereira et al., 2016).

There are many different assessment tools available to educators to facilitate the learning of students with disabilities and to document their progress. The key aspect of inclusive formative assessment involves actively involving students with disabilities in a conversation regarding assessment methods and determining the most effective ways to evaluate their progress. Such an approach has the potential to drive positive changes within schools and ultimately enhance the performance of these learners (Kefallinou & Donnelly, 2016). Inclusive formative assessment involves a shift from approaches that separate students with disabilities from the mainstream, as inclusion in the mainstream provides rich learning opportunities for everyone, so that they can all participate in classroom life. There is usually a need for initial assessments in TVET to assess educational needs (Fourie, 2019:94), but Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) note that inclusive formative assessment, when it is an innovative assessment that involves the whole class, has a positive impact on students with disabilities "as it does not mark them as different from their classmates". An important and impactful method for achieving diversity in assessment involves incorporating support mechanisms that help all students facing learning challenges. This enables them to showcase their abilities fully. By utilizing a broader array of assessment techniques, a more holistic understanding of learning is attained. A wider range of assessment approaches provides a more comprehensive account of learning. Just as students with disabilities "benefit from a range of different teaching approaches, so too can students with difficulties benefit from diverse assessment approaches that better inform and summarise their learning" (Nkalane, 2018:47). Research studies suggest that inclusive formative assessment should be integral to teaching and learning and "should take place in a classroom culture that encourages risk taking and learning from mistakes" (Bourke & Mentis, 2014:213). It is also important that inclusive formative assessment provides effective feedback, with careful use of questioning (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Inclusive formative assessment should include self-assessment and peer assessment. Self-assessment is particularly valuable for students with disabilities as it assists them to internalise the assessment criteria, requirements and processes of assessment (Bourke & Mentis, 2013; Kefallinou & Donnelly, 2016). Peer assessment and self-assessment foreground the role of the students' voices in assessment and enable students with SEN to take more responsibility for their own progress (Florian & Beaton, 2018). There is substantial



evidence that peer assessment can result in “improvements in the effectiveness and quality of learning, which is at least as good as gains from teacher assessment, especially in relation to writing. Importantly, there are gains from functioning as either assessor or assessee” (Topping, 2009:22).

Changing from more formal assessment texts to a more “narrative” form of assessment is “a particularly valuable assessment approach for learners with high needs in terms of including them in the assessment process and thereby building learner identity” (Bourke & Mentis, 2014:386). In this regard, “constructive feedback” is of crucial importance in inclusive formative assessment (Nkalane, 2018:44-46). Georgiadou et al. (2020:89) propose five factors that are key to inclusive formative assessment, namely: 1) responsiveness, 2) surroundings, 3) personalization, 4) training and 4) adequacy of facilities. Thus inclusive formative assessment would be responsive to students’ needs, make the necessary environmental accommodations, be individualised, include supportive training and ensure that there are adequate facilities and resources for the student. The thoughtful integration of inclusive formative assessment approaches should lead to more valid formative decisions, if a “range of evidence about student learning is used to continuously optimise student learning” (Van der Kleij et al., 2015:324).

It is commonly held that “assessment drives learning” (Bezuidenhout & Alt, 2011); in other words, students will study for an important test. However, Bourke and Mentis (2014) argue that inclusive assessment drives a different kind of learning that is deeper and more sustainable. Kefallinou and Donnelly (2016) state that, for formative assessment to facilitate the inclusion of all learners, it is necessary to use assessment information from individual learners, including those with disabilities, to monitor and then raise educational standards, ensuring that the assessment procedures used for the initial identification of a learning need provides information that can be used to inform teaching and learning.

Research findings suggest that, when students with disabilities are included in mainstream schools or colleges, there are no adverse effects on pupils without disabilities, with “81% of the outcomes reporting positive or neutral effects” (Kalambouka et al., 2007:365). In this regard, inclusive education is a form of pedagogical “universal design” (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020). Universal design is usually understood as the ways in which the environment (particularly the built environment) can be improved for the benefit of all, as in this description:

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits. By considering the diverse needs and abilities of all throughout the design process, universal design creates products, services and environments that meet peoples' needs. Simply put, universal design is good design (Irish National Disability Authority, 2023).

Fornauf and Erickson (2020) argue that the seven principles of universal design can be incorporated into inclusive pedagogy: 1) equitable use, 2) flexibility in use, 3) simple and intuitive use, 4) perceptible information, 5) tolerance for error, 6) low physical effort, and 7) size and space for approach and use. Similarly, inclusive formative assessment, which is an element of pedagogy, can be modified or improved for the purpose of enhancing learning and well-being amongst all students. Inclusive formative assessment 1) would serve all student equally; 2) would be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of learning needs; 3) would be straightforward; 4) would also include information about the assessment task to accommodate different learning needs; 5) would regard making mistakes as a part of learning; 6) would not make demands on students beyond their capacities or resources; and 7) the learning environment in which formative assessment takes place would be appropriate to all students' needs. While in some countries inclusive education is thought of as an approach that serves learners with disabilities within a general education setting, inclusive education is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006:231).

#### **2.4 TVET Lecturers' professional development and inclusive formative assessment**

Research studies indicate that "teachers' attitudes" are key to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Mukhtara & Ahmad, 2015:119). Teachers need to be sensitised "to recognize and commit to responding to the needs of diverse learners" (Okkolin et al., 2018:422). In the South African context, studies show that there is insufficient professional training of lecturers for inclusive assessment practices and for designing inclusive assessment tasks to support diverse assessment practices (Nkalane, 2018:44-46). Research points out that teacher development regarding formative assessment has been neglected (Liljedahl, 2010a). The professional development of college lectures regarding inclusive

formative assessment can enhance the “quality of mainstream education and address[ing] educational inequality” (Mooka et al., 2020:998).

Training in formative assessment gives teachers the skills to test students’ understanding, and this can happen in what Liljedahl (2010b:411) describes as a “rapid and profound” way. Thus, with basic training, educators can develop formative assessments that provide students with the ability to learn from formative tasks and feedback, and to develop their metacognitive knowledge on how to prepare for an assessment task, including summative assessment tasks and examinations.

According to Brookhart (2013), formative assessment aims to guide learning by giving students information that advances their learning. This is typically accomplished by offering frequent, practical, timely and constructive high-quality feedback so that students can learn to recognize areas where they need to improve (Irons & Elkington, 2021). When teachers enable students to participate in formative activities, this lowers the stakes for assessments by fostering a culture of assessment-for-learning; such improved formative assessment may help reduce some of the strain on students with disabilities (Irons & Elkington, 2021). Focusing on evaluation and feedback, and specifically increasing formative assessment, is justified by the fact that it has a significant impact on the standard of student learning.

## **2.5 Critiques of the literature on formative assessment**

In much of the literature, attention has shifted towards assessment for learning. Connecting assessment for and of learning can be challenging as there are “significant tensions between assessment for learning and testing designed to certify student attainment, such as public qualification examinations” (Deneen et al., 2019:39). Preparation for formal examination competes with other priorities for time, attention and focus within curricula; and the narrowing effect this can have on curricula is an issue of growing concern (Taras, 2010; Berry, 2011; Bonner, 2016). In affected curricula, the purposes and priorities of assessment for learning are often narrow competencies, or an over-emphasis on the attainment of achieving high external examination marks (Deneen & Brown, 2016; Leong, 2016). This is especially true at secondary school level where large-scale testing serves as a high-stakes summative sorting mechanism (Koh & Luke, 2009) and, by inference, is a mechanism for evaluating and ranking secondary schools and teachers (Leong, 2016). Under these conditions, it is difficult for secondary school teachers to develop and maintain the connection between assessment for learning and its intended purposes. To help bridge the gap between assessment for and assessment of learning, scholars have proposed the importance of feedback and guidance in

the assessment for learning processes, and have shown that “knowledge-rich” inputs from teachers create an optimal learning environment (Christodoulou, 2017:42).

Critiques of the formative assessment literature include concerns that foregrounding learning processes and the role of the learner has marginalized the role of the teacher (Tigelaar & Sins, 2021); but, equally, there are concerns that feedback should not constitute a one-way flow of information from a knowledgeable person to a less knowledgeable person, particularly when inclusive practices are introduced (Yaraya et al., 2018). There are also warnings against over-assessment and over-specification that could lead to fragmented knowledge-building (Knight & Yorke, 2003), a focus on narrow, behavioural approaches that encourage minimalist responses by learners (Davies & Ecclestone, 2008), or practices that improve rates of achievement whilst “encouraging instrumental and limiting forms of motivation and autonomy” (Ecclestone, 2007:315). Students tend to complain that they do not get enough feedback, and educators resent that because, although they put considerable time into generating feedback, students take little notice of it (Knight & Yorke, 2003). In seeking a new approach to feedback, it is necessary to recognize that students need to be much more actively involved in seeking, generating and using feedback, i.e., “rather than it being something they are subjected to, it must be an activity that they drive” (Boud & Molloy, 2013:699).

Formative assessments serve a variety of functions. They help students learn and make sure they are ready to complete a programme's intended learning outcomes. Additionally, assessments may affect students' final grades and marks which are linked to their final classification or standard attainment. Students' learning can be enriched and driven by formative evaluation and feedback (Irons & Elkington, 2021).

## **2.6 A conceptual framework for formative assessment**

Several key concepts emerged from the review of the literature above. Firstly, formative assessment, or assessment for learning, is guided by foundational concepts such as the purpose of the assessment and the principles underpinning it. The basic purpose of assessment for learning is to provide feedback on both the learning process and the students' understanding of the content. The key principles that should guide all formative assessment tasks are these: firstly, the task should be aligned with, or provide preparation for, summative tasks in diverse ways; secondly, it should target areas of difficulty to prepare students for the challenges of the vocational programme and to build students' knowledge; thirdly, the lecturer should provide timely and knowledge-rich feedback to the students to help them improve their knowledge and skills; and finally, formative assessment should focus

on sub-skills and learning strategies to enable student engagement and the building of knowledge and skills. There are several implications for the practice of formative assessment: 1) Tasks should target difficulties in diverse ways; 2) Tasks should align with summative tasks to prepare students for assignments and examinations; 3) Timely and knowledge-rich feedback should be provided on all formative tasks; and 4) Formative assessment tasks should identify sub-skills and strategies for learning and self-assessment of improvements/development.

The literature proposes many guidelines and best practice regarding the formative assessment of sub-skills, using multiple strategies, and guidelines for addressing difficulties identified in formative assessment tasks. The in-depth literature on assessment for learning suggests that formative exercises should provide students with the skills and strategies to understand basic assessment forms like comparison, problem-and-solution, cause-and-effect, sequence, collection (i.e., listing, enumeration) and description, as well as the differences between these various cognitive processes. Formative assessment is guided by foundational concepts, such as the purpose of the assessment and the principles underpinning the assessment; and these underpinning concepts have implications for practice. The conceptual framework, drawn from the literature for the study, is summarised in Table 2.1:

**Table 2.1: A conceptual framework for inclusive formative assessment**

<b>Purposes &amp; principles</b>	<b>Best practices (from the literature)</b>
Purposes of inclusive formative assessment	• Student engagement and learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013).
	• Feedback for understanding process and performance (Boud et al., 2008).
	• Metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003).
Principles of inclusive formative assessment	• Authenticity and proximity (Oliver, 2015).
	• Timeous and “knowledge-rich” feedback (Tai et al., 2022).
	• Confidence building (Jili, 2022).
	• Creativity, innovation, critical thinking (Davies & Ecclestone, 2008).
	• Targeting difficulties (Ajjawi et al., 2023).
	• Flexibility and accommodation (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020).
	• Reflection on practice (Tigelaar & Sins, 2021).
• Alignment with/preparation for summative assessment (Richard et al., 2013).	

The conceptual framework of purposes and principles has implications for the practice of inclusive formative assessment: 1) Tasks should promote learning/understanding; 2) Tasks

should include feedback on concepts, processes and performance; 3) Tasks should include metacognitive elements; 4) Tasks should be authentic and proximal; 5) Tasks should build students' confidence; 6) Feedback should be timely and knowledge-rich; 7) Tasks should promote creativity, innovation and critical thinking; 8) Tasks should target difficulties in diverse ways; 9) Tasks should be adapted to students' needs; 10) Tasks should promote reflection on practice; and 11) Tasks should align with summative formats.

## **2.7 A theoretical framework for understanding inclusive formative assessment**

The theoretical approach guiding this study is Amartya Sen's (2004; 2009) capability approach. The capability approach is a framework that focuses on individuals' capabilities, freedoms, and opportunities to lead a life that they have reason to value. The capability approach "is an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being" (Sen, 2009:16). The core concepts of "capabilities" and "functionings", as well as the idea of human well-being, are fundamental to the capability approach (Robeyn, 2017:23). The term capabilities refers to the real opportunities and freedoms that individuals have to lead a life they value. Capabilities thus represent the potential to achieve valuable functionings. Capabilities encompass a range of possibilities and choices available to individuals. They are not solely focused on what people actually do (functionings) but on what they can do. Capabilities are influenced by "economic, social and educational arrangements" (Walker et al., 2022:4). In the context of education, a capability could be the ability to read and write, which represents a potential skill that an individual can choose to develop. Functionings are the various ways of living that individuals can achieve. They represent the actual activities and states of being that people value and have reason to pursue; they are the tangible outcomes or achievements resulting from the use of one's capabilities; and they can include aspects of well-being such as good health, education, employment, social participation, and personal development. Using the previous example of the capability to read and write, the functioning would be the specific act of reading a book or writing a letter, that is, an actual manifestation of the capability to read and write.

Within the capability approach, human well-being is a multidimensional concept. It goes beyond narrow indicators like income and considers the broader aspects of a person's life that contribute to a meaningful existence (McLean & Walker, 2012:590). Well-being is therefore not solely measured by the presence of certain goods or achievements but also by the freedom and opportunities available to individuals. It involves the ability to lead a life that one has reason to value, with the opportunity for personal development, social engagement,

and the pursuit of one's goals. An individual with good health, access to education, meaningful employment, and the freedom to participate in social and cultural activities would be considered to have a higher level of well-being within the capability approach.

The capability approach is rooted in a normative stance that prioritises fundamental values, such as freedom, equality, and human dignity. It asks questions about what individuals should be able to do and be, setting normative standards for a just and flourishing society. The normative dimension provides an evaluative framework for assessing policies, institutions, and societal structures (Powell & McGrath, 2019:17). It allows for the critique of existing conditions and the formulation of recommendations to align with ethical principles (Robeyns, 2017:16). Normative dimensions in capability theory are concerned with justice and fairness, emphasising the need for social arrangements that enable individuals, especially the most disadvantaged, to have substantive opportunities and freedoms.

The ethical dimensions of capability theory involve considerations of what is morally right or wrong in relation to individuals' capabilities and functionings. It explores ethical principles that guide decisions about human well-being and societal arrangements. Capability theory is fundamentally concerned with enhancing human flourishing. The ethical dimension emphasizes the moral imperative to create conditions that allow individuals to lead lives they value, promoting their well-being in a holistic sense. Ethical considerations in capability theory emphasize the inherent dignity of individuals. The framework promotes respect for human agency and the idea that people should have the freedom to pursue their own visions of a good life. There is an ethical call for accountability and responsibility, both at the individual and societal levels. This involves recognizing and addressing inequalities and injustices that limit people's capabilities and functionings. Ethical considerations in capability theory often lead to discussions about empowering individuals. Empowerment involves providing people with the means and opportunities to make choices and shape their own lives.

The normative and ethical dimensions of capability theory go beyond descriptive analysis to prescribe what a just and ethical society should look like. They provide a framework for evaluating social policies, institutions, and practices based on principles of justice, human dignity, and the enhancement of individuals' opportunities and freedoms. This normative and ethical orientation is a distinguishing feature of capability theory, contributing to its impact on discussions of social justice and well-being.

### 2.7.1 Capability in inclusive education

Sen (2009) theorised that social arrangements (including educational arrangements) should be evaluated primarily according to the extent to which people have the freedom to achieve the functions that they value. Thus, Sen's capability approach understands education to be a process of enhancing people's capabilities by expanding their freedoms. Inclusive education draws its inspiration from a rights-based model of education that has potential for both individual and social transformation (Norwich, 2014:16). Inclusive education is fundamentally grounded on the social justice principle that social and institutional arrangements should be designed to give equal consideration to all students (Biggeri & Libanora, 2011; Terzi, 2014;). To underpin considerations of how inclusive formative assessment could contribute to all students' success and well-being in TVET, this study draws on Sen's capability approach, and its specific adaptation to TVET education (e.g., Powell & McGrath, 2014; 2019; Terzi, 2014; Burke et al., 2016), and students' transitions to the world of work (Mutanga, 2020). A number of studies of inclusive education draw on the capability approach, such as Terzi's (2014) study on the resources necessary to support students with disabilities and Powell and McGrath's (2013) exploration of the value of the capability approach with regard to the evaluation of vocational education. Tikly (2013:3) argues that the capability approach "has the potential to develop and extend existing approaches, while addressing some of their limitations". The dominant human capital approach in TVET advocates enhanced skills for economic productivity; in contrast, the capability approach addresses the issue of how all might benefit from a more equitable distribution and enhancement of skills (Thapa & Singh, 2019). To be effective, a "personal utilization function" must be achieved (Sen, 2004). A person requires resources and a "personal utilization function" to develop a "capability set". Thus, given the resources and the right conditions, students should develop a set of capabilities that enables them to undertake activities ("functionings") and implement actions that enhance their own and others' well-being. Figure 2.1 shows these core relationships:

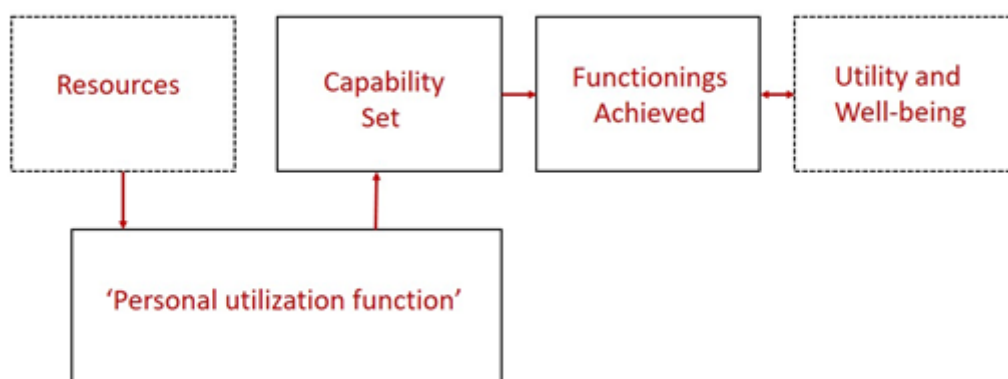


Figure 2.1: Outline of the core relationships in the capability approach (Sen, 2004)



The capability set (Figure 2.1) comprises physical, social, environmental, economic and psychological factors that are central to enhancing well-being.

The capability approach has been applied in a range of fields, including: “global public health, development ethics, environmental protection and ecological sustainability, education, technological design, welfare state policies and many, many more” (Robeyns, 2017:9). Of particular interest to this study are studies that draw on the capability approach to address issues in disability (Burchardt, 2004; Terzi, 2005; 2007; 2010; Mitra, 2006). The concepts associated with the capability approach provide a valuable perspective for studying students with disabilities in vocational education for several reasons. First is the concept of human-centredness which places individuals at the centre of analysis and takes into account their unique capacities, aspirations, and freedoms. This requires shifting the focus from a deficit-based perspective to understanding and enhancing the capabilities of students with disabilities and recognising their agency in shaping their own lives. The second key concept is a holistic understanding of well-being. Instead of narrowly focusing on traditional indicators like income or socio-economic status, the capability approach offers a holistic view of well-being. For students with disabilities in vocational education, this is crucial as it requires not only students’ employment outcomes but also their broader capabilities, such as social participation, personal development, and autonomy. A third concept in the capability approach encourages a consideration of the diverse needs and aspirations of individuals. In the context of students with disabilities in vocational education, this requires acknowledging that their capabilities and goals may vary widely. Research can explore how educational programmes and vocational training can be customized to meet the unique needs of each student, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Fourthly, the capability approach distinguishes between capabilities (the real opportunities and freedoms that people have) and functionings (the various ways of living). In the study of students with disabilities in vocational education, this framework allows for an examination of not only the opportunities provided by the education system but also the actual outcomes and freedoms students are able to achieve in terms of employment, social engagement, and personal development.

The capability approach has its roots in principles of social justice and social inclusion. Applying this approach to the study of students with disabilities in vocational education allows researchers to critically examine issues of equity and inclusion. It prompts questions about whether the educational system provides equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, and whether it facilitates the development of capabilities that lead to a dignified

and meaningful life. The capability approach has been used to evaluate and shape policies in various contexts (Powell & McGrath, 2019). Research on students with disabilities in vocational education, informed by the capability approach, can provide insights into the effectiveness of existing policies and suggest recommendations for policy changes that enhance the capabilities of these students. The capability approach offers a rich framework for studying students with disabilities in vocational education by emphasizing their capabilities, freedoms, and the opportunities they have reason to value. This perspective goes beyond traditional metrics and fosters a more inclusive, human-centred, and socially just approach to understanding and improving the experiences of students with disabilities in vocational education.

### **2.7.2 Adapting the capability framework for different contexts**

The capability approach provides a broad and inclusive framework for assessing and promoting human well-being by focusing on the richness of individuals' choices and opportunities. Sen's (2004) capability approach was developed into the capability theory of justice by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2011) who theorised that the requirements of human dignity derive from capabilities. Her central human capabilities include ten freedoms that are linked to human rights, namely the right to: 1) life, 2) bodily health, 3) bodily integrity, 4) senses, imagination, and thought, 5) emotions, 6) practical reason, 7) affiliation, 8) other species, 9) play and 10) control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2011).

There have been different adaptations of Nussbaum's capability sets in different educational contexts, such as the capability framework for "public-good professional capabilities" that includes the following adapted capabilities:

1. Recognise the full dignity of every human being,
2. Act for social transformation and to reduce injustice,
3. Make sound, knowledgeable, thoughtful, imaginative professional judgements, and
4. Work with others to expand the comprehensive capabilities of people living in poverty (McLean & Walker, 2012:588).

Another example of the adaptation of Nussbaum's freedoms is the "South African multi-dimensional, intersectional capability-based Miratho Matrix" that was proposed for students entering university from impoverished rural contexts (Walker et al., 2022:7). The Miratho Matrix proposes a framework of freedoms "pertaining both to university students while participating in university and to graduates when they have moved on to life after university as citizens and workers (Walker et al., 2022:13). Elements of the framework are listed below:

1. Epistemic contribution: Being an epistemic contributor;
2. Ubuntu: Being connected to and concerned for the well-being of others;
3. Practical reason: Planning a good life;
4. Navigation: Navigating university/society's culture and systems;
5. Narrative: Telling one's own story;
6. Emotional balance: Dealing with the stress and worry of challenges;
7. Inclusion and participation: Being a respected and participating member of the university and of society;
8. Future work or study: Being employable (Walker et al., 2022:58).

The above two capability adaptations are appropriate for university students in professional domains, although several capabilities are applicable to vocational education in general, and inclusive vocational education in particular, such as “working with others”, “attaining emotional balance”, and so on. Many of these capabilities have been noted in the literature, although usually in terms of “skills” rather than capabilities.

Powell and McGrath (2019) propose a “capability list” specific to TVET college students. This list is summarised here:

1. Economic opportunities that matter,
2. Active citizenship,
3. Confidence and personal empowerment,
4. Bodily integrity and health,
5. Senses and imagination,
6. Recognition and respect,
7. Upgrading skills and qualifications throughout the life course, and
8. Occupational knowledge (Powell & McGrath, 2019:132-133).

The adapted capability lists and matrices developed above resulted from extensive research activities. It is expected that similar, substantial adaptations to Nussbaum's “philosophical list of capabilities” (Walker et al., 2022) would arise from this study. While all Nussbaum's capabilities and freedoms are important in education, the following have been highlighted by Chiappero-Martinetti et al. (2015:160-162) in their adaptation of the capability approach to inclusive education:

1. Mental well-being,
2. Participation,
3. Enjoyment,
4. Safety,
5. Respect,
6. Autonomy (especially time-autonomy), and
7. Mobility.

Chiappero-Martinetti et al. (2015) developed their matrix of factors through participatory research with students; they explain that “the identification of a list of valuable capabilities” is dependent on input from the learners themselves (Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2015:153). Chiappero-Martinetti et al.’s list above is therefore likely to change following feedback from the TVET students with disabilities who are at the core of this study. Capability theory suggests that, if the key educational capabilities are addressed, students will be able to achieve the functioning associated with education, namely successful completion of the qualification and an enhanced sense of well-being. Terzi (2014:758) argues that “the capability approach helps substantially in conceptualising educational equality by focusing on the fundamental functionings, promoted by education, that are essential prerequisites for an equal participation in society”.

### **2.7.3 Reflections and “unfreedoms”**

Terzi (2014) warns that education cannot be transformative if it is of poor quality. Walker et al. (2022:4) emphasise that “economic, social and educational arrangements” are essential to the achievement of capabilities. They point out the limited research on how low-income students access education:

Access for disadvantaged students is tenuous and negotiated, rather than guaranteed. Whereas some students converted resources available to them ... opportunities were unequal and others had constrained choices (Walker et al., 2022:91).

Walker et al. (2022:19) describe such constraints as “unfreedoms”; the presence of which, such as constant “money worries” (2022:45), exacerbate the barriers and hinderances that students with disabilities face, and pose significant challenges to the achievement of capabilities and freedoms. Some critics have additionally argued that the capability approach does not sufficiently address the issues of resource allocation. They contend that focusing on capabilities without considering the availability of resources to convert these capabilities into

functionings may limit the approach's feasibility in resource-constrained settings (Robeyns, 2017).

In addition to the caveats on the economic and contextual challenges in achieving desired capabilities, there have been a number of additional critiques of the capability approach. For example, some scholars argue that the capability approach is difficult to operationalize (Pogge, 2010:17). Capabilities and functionings also present measurement challenges. Critics argue that defining and measuring capabilities in a way that is both comprehensive and universally applicable is difficult. This raises questions about the reliability and comparability of capability-based measurements (Pogge, 2010). This lack of specificity was seen as a practical challenge in policy formulation and evaluation (Powell & McGrath, 2019). Some critics contend that the capability approach is culturally relativistic, arguing that the universality of the capability approach should be questioned because capabilities and functionings depend on economic, social and cultural contexts (Alston & Steiner, 1996:192). Thus, capabilities considered valuable may vary across cultures, and the framework might not adequately address cultural diversity. The focus on individual capabilities and freedoms has been criticized for neglecting the role of social structures and collective capabilities (Ibrahim, 2014). Critics argue that societal and structural factors significantly influence individual capabilities, and a purely individualistic approach may not adequately address systemic issues of injustice and inequality (Ballet et al., 2007).

It is important to note that, while these critiques exist, the capability approach has also generated significant positive responses and has been influential in shaping discussions on social justice, development, and well-being. Researchers continue to engage with these critiques to refine and adapt the approach in practical contexts.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY FOR A STUDY OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

#### **3.1 Introduction to the chapter**

Chapter Three presents the research design and research methodology for the study. The research design, as well as the justification for the study, is explained in Section 3.2. In the next section (3.3), the methodology with regard to site and participant selection is explained and justified. Data collection methods are described in Section 3.4 and data analysis methods in Section 3.5. The next sections address trustworthiness of the data (3.6), the positionality of the researcher (3.7) and ethical considerations (3.8).

#### **3.2 Research design**

Research design in TVET generally, and with regard to assessment practices in particular, tends to focus on issues such as these: quality assurance (e.g., Rauner & Maclean, 2008); the alignment of assessment outcomes with occupational standards (e.g., Rauner et al., 2012); relationships between course outcomes and employment (e.g., Seung, 2014); the alignment of TVET programmes and industry needs (e.g., Kipli & Khairani, 2020); and, more recently, the needs of Industry 4.0 (Nurjanah & Ana, 2022) and the “green economy” (e.g., Musyimi, 2018). While research in these areas represents important contributions to knowledge-building in TVET, students with disabilities and their particular needs with regard to formative assessment, are at the heart of this study on defining and attaining inclusive assessment practices. For this reason, the research design of this study needed a critical paradigm to guide the research methods. Founding the research study on a critical paradigm had the intention of what Creswell and Poth (2016:27) call “empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them”. A critical paradigm enabled a more inclusive approach to the research study, and aligned it with the focus of the study, namely inclusive formative assessment. Nind points out that “inclusive research has underexplored potential to reinvigorate inclusive education and provide new connections to democracy and social justice in education” (2014:525). At the same time, the importance of TVET education (and assessment in particular) to the developing economy cannot be ignored. Could it be possible to ground the TVET research study on critical principles, while also valuing the contribution made by TVET to the developing economy?

Powell and McGrath (2014; 2019) argue the value of the capability approach in evaluation research in TVET contexts. The authors propose that the capability approach offers both a

critical account of a TVET system, while also allowing economic objectives to be retained, for example, with regard to improving delivery and outputs. While this research study is not evaluation research, the adaptation of Powell and McGrath's (2014) evaluation research methodology for this study aligns with the use of the capability approach as the framework for the study. Powell and McGrath make this point:

By emphasising the quality of life and well-being of individuals, the capability approach offers a normative framework alternative to the output and efficiency measures usually applied to social evaluation. A central commitment of this approach, informed by the principles of social justice, ... is to the dignity of each person (2014:135).

Powell and McGrath warn that "processes of inclusion and exclusion that take place during evaluation research [can] lead to both the privileging and silencing of certain voices" (2014:127). To avoid such "privileging and silencing", methods that foregrounded the students' voices were selected. A qualitative approach was therefore required for the "collection of data in a natural setting that is sensitive to the people and places under study" (Creswell, 2007:37). The natural setting in this case was the TVET college campuses where formative assessment occurred. The method of data collection required sensitivity to the stories told by students with disabilities and learning needs. A narrative approach was selected and data collection was based predominantly on the personal stories obtained from students during narrative interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:11; Creswell & Poth, 2016:4). Narrative inquiry is pertinent to the study of students with disabilities as their voices are often silent in educational research (Prunty et al., 2012). The use of narrative methodology was chosen as it could potentially foreground the voices of students with disabilities and learning needs in TVET.

### **3.3 Research methods**

#### **3.3.1 Site and programme selection**

For this study, the campuses and programmes of a multi-site TVET college were selected. The selection criteria for the choice of the campuses included in the study were as follows: 1) there should be students with disabilities or other learning needs enrolled at the TVET college campuses; 2) the TVET college campuses should include a diversity of students; 3) the selected programme should include both practical and theoretical subjects; 4) the programme should include formative assessment requirements for both the theoretical and practical subjects offered, as formative assessment is the focus of the study; and 5) the programme should be offered to a number of participants with disabilities to ensure that data

saturation was reached across the students' narratives. TVET College A (a multi-site college) was selected as, across its campuses, it offers all its programmes to students with disabilities.

The NCV programme in Office Management was selected as it has both theoretical subjects (e.g., Communication) and practical subjects (e.g., Typing). The Office Management programme requires both formative and summative assessments in both the theoretical and practical subjects. The Office Management Programme at Campuses 1 and 2 of TVET College A met all the site and programme selection criteria and was therefore selected as appropriate for addressing the research question. Many subjects, including optional subjects, are offered within the Office Management programme. As all participants were first year students (see 3.3.2 below for the selection criteria), a first-year subject within the programme was chosen. This had to be a compulsory subject, and the ICT Module of the subject Life Orientation was chosen. The ICT Module was selected because it had theoretical and practical components and also because the computer skills developed in this module are important job-related skills.

### **3.3.2 Participant selection**

#### *Students with disabilities and learning needs*

Students with disabilities and learning needs are at the heart of the study. Lester and Nusbaum (2018) recommend that between five to ten students with disabilities be included in a study to ensure that each student is given attention and follow up, if required. The level of the students was a consideration; and it was decided to focus on first year students with disabilities. The reason for the focus on the first year (or NQF Level 2), was that the first year has the largest student attrition rate in South African TVET colleges generally (Zulu & Mutereko, 2020); and it is a particularly crucial year for the retention of students with disabilities (Wessel et al., 2009; Siwela, 2017). In addition, Mutanga (2017), in his review of the literature on students with disabilities in higher education, found that the first year is an important period for tracking students' progress. For these reasons, first year students with disabilities and learning needs were selected for the study.

The TVET college administration identified 10 students with disabilities enrolled in the first year of the NCV in the Office Management Programme at TVET College A, Campuses 1 and 2. All these students were invited to participate in the study (following consultation with parents and lecturers – please see Ethical considerations in Section 3.8). Five of the invited students agreed to be participants in the study, and an additional student who was undergoing gender transition requested to join the group. While the student's gender



transition is not a disability, what created a learning need was her social isolation and lack of acceptance by classmates. The student requested to be a participant in the study to contribute to making the college a more inclusive place for all students. It was decided to include her in the sample as she could make an important contribution to social inclusion. The sample thus comprised six TVET students who were undertaking studies in Office Administration at the two sites, five of whom were students with disabilities, plus one undergoing gender transition. All participants had previously attended a school of skills, which are schools for learners with disabilities or other learning needs. Their prior schooling thus confirmed that the students had been identified as having a disability or learning challenge. The sample was representative in terms of gender and race. Their disabilities included physical, cognitive, communication, and emotional disorders. Research studies involving students with disabilities recommend a small study sample of five to ten participants as the researcher should spend time with the students and get to know them (Ellis & Beauchamp, 2012:48). The guidelines on narrative research recommend a sample size of between 1 and 15 due to the considerable data that narrative accounts generate (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:65). The sample size of six students thus aligned with recommended practices in the literature on conducting narrative research with students with disabilities.

The six students included in the study experienced physical, cognitive, communication, and emotional challenges. The challenges faced by students with disabilities are exacerbated in the South African context by the fault lines of race and socio-economic disadvantage. In this context, there is the danger of magnifying the inequalities that are starkly evident in South African society (Musengi, 2020). Thus, careful attention had to be paid to their ability to provide informed consent for the study (see Appendices A and B). Following Ellis and Beauchamp (2012), additional selection criteria were applied to ensure appropriate inclusion criteria for students as research participants:

- Participants were mentally sound to consent to participation;
- Participants were willing to participate;
- Participants were between 16 and 20 years or older;
- Parents or caregivers consented to the students' participation (Ellis & Beauchamp, 2012:60-61).

The participants, their age, sex, preferred pronouns, home languages, and disability or educational need, or both, are listed in Table 3.1. All names are pseudonyms.

**Table 3.1: Participants**

<i>Student</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Pronouns</i>	<i>Home language</i>	<i>Disability/educational need</i>
Andile	23	Male	He, him	isiXhosa	Hearing impairment
Bongi	19	Transgender	She, her	isiXhosa	Gender transition
Cebo	21	Male	He, him	isiZulu	Paralysis of hand
Danie	20	Male	He, him	Afrikaans	Hearing impairment
Essie	21	Female	She, her	isiXhosa	Paralysis of hand
Freda	21	Female	She, her	Afrikaans	Heart condition

All six students participated fully in the study; none chose to leave the study. The ethical issues involved in SEN students' informed consent and willingness to participate are fully discussed in Section 3.8 on Ethical considerations.

#### *Lecturers on the ICT Module of the NCV Office Management Programme*

All the lecturers on the ICT Module at both sites were invited to individual interviews at a place of the lecturers' convenience. Seven lecturers agreed to be interviewed. They were invited to share their perspectives and opinions on how inclusive formative assessment could be supported. These interviews were conducted in their offices, or online via MS Teams. Some lecturers requested that the list of interview questions be shared with them; they then responded to these in writing.

### **3.4 Data collection**

Three forms of data collection were required to address the research questions:

1. Document study;
2. Narrative interviews with SEN students; and
3. Semi-structured interviews with TVET lecturers.

#### **3.4.1 Document study**

The Subject Guide and the Assessment Guide for Information and Communication Technology (termed the 'ICT Module') within the NCV programme in Office Management were studied to determine the nature of the formative assessment requirements. The curriculum study was intended to contextualise the narrative study, as the narratives of the students with disabilities were predominantly about the formative assessment exercises required in the ICT Module. The curriculum provided the key context, or "narrative landscape" (Clandinin, 2020:6), for this study on inclusive formative assessment.

### **3.4.2 Interviews with TVET lecturers**

Individual interviews were conducted with TVET lecturers on the Office Management and Technology programme to ascertain their understandings and practices regarding inclusive formative assessment.

### **3.4.3 Narrative interviews with SEN students**

The narrative interviews comprised the main data set for the study. Students' experiences of formative assessment were elicited through narrative interviews. Narrative interviews are a form of semi-structured interview (Clandinin, 2007:5); they provide participants with opportunities to go "on narrative tangents and to fully convey their internal narratives" (Bruce, et al., 2016:5). Following Reissman (1993:56), two types of narrative interviews were conducted: "topical stories" and "personal narratives". Topical stories are restricted stories about a specific issue which, in this study, involved students' experiences of formative assessment within their programme. A topical story can take the form of "a research participant's answer to a single interview question" (Reissman, 1993:56). The second type of interview comprised a "personal narrative". Personal narratives could take the form of a long interview or a series of long interviews that give an extended account of a person's experience (Reissman, 1993:58). Clandinin and Connelly (2000:79) assert that the researcher should spend considerable time with the research participants, "gathering their stories through multiple types of information". For this study, it was proposed to use a series of in-depth interviews with individual students over the period of an academic year. This enabled the participants and the researcher to develop trust, enabled the students to reflect on formative assessment events as they occurred over the academic year, as well as allowed them to reflect on their more general experiences and understandings of formative assessment.

It is important in narrative research that the privacy and dignity of participants is always considered (Caine et al., 2019). In this study, individual interviews were conducted in a suitable venue, such as a small meeting room that was familiar to the students and close to their classroom. It was also ensured that interviews took place as soon as possible after a formative assessment exercise.

The narrative interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber. The transcriptions were cleaned, that is, all statements that could identify the students, classmates, lecturers and so on, were removed or anonymised. Member checks were conducted, that is, the participants and researcher discussed the cleaned transcripts and checked them for accuracy.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The principles of “immersion in the data, coding, creating categories, and the identification of themes” (Green et al., 2007:546) were followed. The curriculum documents were analysed, as were the interviews with TVET lecturers, drawing on the conceptual framework developed from the literature (see Table 2.1: A conceptual framework for inclusive assessment). Regarding the narrative interviews, there were two stages of data analysis, namely narrative analysis and conceptual analysis, as explained above. The process of working with the data enables what Maton and Chen (2019) call the “translation” of high-level theoretical concepts into usable concepts for the empirical study. In this case, the high-level capability theory concepts needed to be “translated” to apply them to the empirical context of inclusive formative assessment. The guiding purpose of inclusive formative assessment and underpinning principles needed to be brought into alignment to enable the linking of capability theory with inclusive formative assessment. The detailed analysis process for the different data sets is outlined below.

#### **3.5.1 Conceptual analysis of curriculum documents**

The analysis of the curriculum documents drew on the concepts of best practice in inclusive formative assessment (Table 2.1) to interrogate the extent to which the curriculum documents conveyed an understanding of inclusion in formative assessment. The analysis pointed to the ways in which inclusive formative assessment within these documents might be enhanced. The documents were also studied with a view to improving the alignment of the practice of formative assessment with the capability approach to promote the well-being and success of students with disabilities.

#### **3.5.2 Conceptual analysis of lecturer interviews**

The lecturer interviews were analysed using the approach outlined in Section 3.5.1 to determine the extent to which lecturers’ understanding and practices followed best practices in inclusive formative assessment, and were aligned with the capability approach.

#### **3.5.3 Analysis of the students’ interviews**

##### *Narrative analysis of students’ interviews*

Narrative analysis differs from other qualitative analysis methods in that it attempts to keep the individual narratives intact. In many coding methods, it is common to disaggregate participants’ narratives into smaller units and group them by theme with other interviewees’ statements. This fragments the individual’s personal narrative and defeats the purpose of studying the individual stories holistically (Reissman, 1993). Narrative analysis of the interview data thus includes the following six steps:

1. Identify narrative blocks;
2. Classify narrative structures;
3. Isolate critical incidents;
4. Identify key metaphors;
5. Retell the core narrative;
6. Compare elements across participants' core narratives (Reissman, 1993:46-49).

These six steps were followed in the first level of the analysis of the student data.

*Conceptual analysis of students' interviews*

For the second analysis, students' narratives were studied to consider how they aligned with, or differed from, the best practices in formative assessment arising from the literature.

*Theoretical analysis of students' interviews*

The key concepts in inclusive formative assessment emerging from the students' interviews were combined with the theoretical lens of capability theory to develop further insights into: 1) Purposes of assessment; 2) Principles of assessment; 3) General implications for practice; 4) Specific guidelines for practice; and 5) An assessment exemplar which would be studied with a view to determining how students' understandings of inclusive formative assessment were aligned, or misaligned, with the capability approach and best practices in inclusive formative assessment.

Table 3.2 summarises the research design for the project, as guided by the research question: What can we learn about inclusive formative assessment from the experiences of students with disabilities?

**Table 3.2: Summary of research design**

<b>Research sub-questions</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Data collection</b>	<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<b>Data analysis methods</b>
1) What do the experiences of students with disabilities reveal about their successes and challenges in formative assessments?	Students with disabilities	Narrative interviews (conducted over a semester)	Students' narratives	Narrative analysis, following Reissman, (1993): Story lines; Structures; Critical incidents; Metaphors; Retelling; Comparing. Theoretical analysis "translation" to

2) How can the experiences of students with disabilities be used to enhance formative assessment practice for all students enrolled in TVET studies?	Curriculum documents and formative assessment tasks	Collection of relevant Subject Guides and Assessment Guides, and students' formative assessment exercises	Formative assessment criteria, rubrics, tasks and activities	identify: 1) Purposes of assessment; 2) Principles of assessment; 3) General implications for practice; 4) Specific guidelines for practice, and 5) Assessment exemplar
	Students with disabilities	Artefact-based narrative interviews (conducted over a second semester and focusing on how changed practices would meet SEN students' needs)	Students' narratives	
	TVET Lecturers	Focus group interviews	Perspectives and opinions on inclusive formative assessment for learning	

### 3.6 Trustworthiness

Key to the trustworthiness of the findings is the “rigorous and systematic analysis of qualitative data” (Green et al., 2007:545). In this section, the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness are briefly described. The threats that are particular to narrative research relate to two areas: 1) the differences between participants' actual experiences and the stories they tell about those experiences; and 2) the connections between storied texts and interpretations of those texts (Polkinghorne, 2007:471).

Narrative research, like most forms of research, involves the collection of data and analysis and interpretation of that data. To address the first issue with regard to the trustworthiness of the data, it is important that the students' narratives are compared and contrasted, although it is likely that students with different levels or severity of disability will have had different experiences of formative assessment. Additional trustworthiness of the data can be achieved through triangulation, for example, drawing on artefacts that confirm or extend their narratives (Riessman, 1993:59). In this study, curriculum documents related to formative

assessment and examples of students' formative assessment exercises were drawn on to confirm and enrich the students' narratives. To address issues of trustworthiness in the interpretation of the data, it is important both to deconstruct the narratives, following long-established analytical procedures developed for narrative analysis, such as these: 1) identifying narrative blocks in the interviews; 2) classifying the narrative structures that are evident in the narratives; 3) isolating critical incidents; 4) identifying key metaphors; 5) retelling the core narrative; and 6) comparing the elements in items 1–4 above across participants' core narratives (Reissman, 1993:46-49). Smith-Chandler and Swart (2014:431) recommend extending “the narratives of experience toward more global, universal constructs of disability” through theoretical analysis, drawing on established theories. In this case, both narrative deconstruction and theoretical analysis, drawing on both the conceptual framework developed from the research literature and from capability theory (Sen, 2004; Nussbaum, 2011; Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2015) were used. The measures proposed above enabled the proposed study to attain the four main components of data trustworthiness: 1) integrity, 2) transferability, 3) reliability, and 4) confirmability (Connelly, 2016:436).

### **3.7 The researcher's position**

My position in this research project is one of participant researcher. This position had several advantages for this research project. As a lecturer in a TVET college, I was able to meet regularly with the student participants to elicit their narratives, and they were able to draw on me as a resource person, which aligns with the critical and emancipatory paradigm in which this research study is located. Probst and Vicars (2016:150) explain that the participant/researcher experience “sensitized [researchers] to the experience of those whose stories they sought to represent”. This was certainly my experience in getting to know the students and trying to do justice to their strengths, resilience, and commitment. When it follows inclusive research practices, participant research “that seek[s] to emancipate rather than oppress can do much to challenge the ongoing subjugation of individuals with disabilities” (Smith-Chandler & Swart, 2014:421). This was the intention of the study.

While the fact that I am a lecturer at TVET College A could have given me a certain advantage, it could also have created disadvantages. For example, I was concerned that the student participants might not feel comfortable to speak openly and honestly and might instead say what they thought I wanted to hear for my research project. This could have led to the possibility of bias in my data. To counteract this disadvantage with regard to data collection, I developed trust with the participants by engaging with them over a long period (one year). I gathered the narrative data over an academic year. To counteract the influences of bias in my data analysis, I drew on the guidelines for narrative analysis (Reissman, 1992),

the conceptual framework developed from the literature, as well as the theoretical framework of capability, following Chiappero-Martinetti et al. (2015).

My position is therefore that building rapport with the student participants during data collection was an “inclusive mechanism to consider the individual as a physical, emotional, social, political, and spiritual being” (Smith-Chandler & Swart, 2014:421). I maintain that many prior research methodologies in the field of the education and training of students with disabilities lacked such inclusivity. The methods of analysis in this study acted as mechanisms to address researcher bias and its potential to reproduce oppressive social structures or distress that could be felt at an individual level. My position is that, through the narrative study of formative assessments, students with disabilities could themselves challenge practices and stereotypes that have impacted their well-being in TVET education.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

The overriding ethical concern was that TVET students with disabilities are a vulnerable group, and they should not be harmed or negatively affected by the research in any way. For this reason, the narrative interviews were private and took place in familiar and comfortable venues as soon as possible after a formative assessment exercise, over the period of an academic year. Extreme care was taken to ensure that the students did not feel singled out or suffer discomfort. Following Ellis and Beauchamp’s (2012) best practice for research with SEN learners, the following ethical principles were followed:

#### **3.8.1 Spend time with the participants**

It was crucial to spend time with, and get to know, the students research participants to ensure that I understood the capabilities of each participant. As Ellis and Beauchamp (2012:48) explain, students with disabilities are “experts on their own lives”.

#### **3.8.2 Participants should benefit from the research**

Researchers should be clear on how the participants will benefit from the study (Ellis & Beauchamp, 2012:60). As research participants, the students in this study developed skills in assessment; in addition, the research process involved innovate formative assessment exercises that the students enjoyed. The longer-term benefits might involve changes in formative assessment practice that could benefit all students.

#### **3.8.3 Participants’ comfort and security should be prioritised**

The narrative interviews were conducted in a friendly way and in a familiar and comfortable, safe space.



#### **3.8.4 Informed consent**

Participants must provide informed consent. To enable the student participants to do this, the information provided to them about the research project was adapted to their level of understanding, and I checked that the students understood the project. This follows Ellis and Beauchamp's (2012:61) advice to monitor informed consent throughout the duration of the project. This was achieved by asking each participant to explain in his/her own words what had been requested prior to the start of each interview. The participants also indicated that they were happy to participate. For example, they were given clear choices and were reassured that any choice they made was the right choice. The students were also given the choice either to audio record their informed consent, or to sign a letter of informed consent. All chose to sign a letter of informed consent.

#### **3.8.5 Confidentiality**

The students were assured of confidentiality, for example, that their real names would not be used. Ellis and Beauchamp (2012) advise that pseudonyms be used as this personalises each participant. This practice was followed. The TVET college was also assured of confidentiality and so was not named in the study. The department, programme and subjects were given broad identifiers (e.g., the ICT module).

#### **3.8.6 The involvement of parents or primary caregivers**

It was essential to inform parents (regardless of the age of the student) of the research project, its potential benefits and risks to the student participants, the right of the students to withdraw at any stage without penalties, and the requirements (i.e., the interviews following formative assessment tasks).

#### **3.8.7 Access and permission**

This study on formative assessment is part of a larger research project on the Evaluation of TVET colleges that was funded by the National Skills Fund and was commissioned by the DHET's Policy, Research and Evaluation Directorate in consultation with the DHET TVET Branch. Ethical clearance was received from the University of the Western Cape for the larger project on Assessment in TVET, and a letter of permission to conduct research at public TVET colleges was provided to both the senior researchers and the postgraduate candidates. An important part of the study was obtaining research approval for my proposal and applying for ethical clearance from the Faculty of Education at CPUT. Because the study dealt with students with disabilities, the Faculty of Education required me to obtain ethics clearance from the Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences. This was provided (see

Appendix F). I also requested permission from each campus manager to conduct my research on the campuses of the TVET college.

### **3.8.8 Referral**

I informed Student Counselling Services at the college of the research project and ensured that, for the duration of the project, student counsellors were available to provide counselling to any student who required such service. I explained to each of the students that a counsellor was available to support them should they feel discomfort or need additional support at any time.

### **3.8.9 Data security**

The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) came into effect on 1 July 2021. The act governed the security of the personal data of human participants. To be compliant with the POPIA Act, I ensured that appropriate security safeguards for the interviews were in place. For example, the audio recordings of interviews were stored on CPUT's server under secure conditions, and not on my laptop. I used the transcripts of the recordings for data analysis, but cleaned and anonymised these copies before the analysis. The audio files and original transcripts are stored on CPUT's Library server and I was able to re-listen to the interviews or return to the original transcripts through the access provided by CPUT. On completion of my study, both the audio recordings and the original transcripts will be destroyed. The cleaned, anonymised data will be provided to CPUT's Library for open data purposes. With many journals requiring open data, I will be able to provide them with cleaned transcripts that do not contain any identifying data.

### **3.8.10 Feedback to student participants**

A series of interviews with the students was conducted and students were able to check their anonymised transcription for accuracy and to make corrections, if required. Once the findings had been analysed, all student participants were given general feedback on these issues: 1) best practices in formative assessment; 2) strategies for using formative assessment to help them achieve success in their studies; and 3) strategies for requesting additional formative assessment/feedback from lecturers (or the class representative) if they felt that the formative assessment has not been sufficient for their needs. It is also the intention of the researcher and supervisor to provide a seminar or workshop to the lecturing staff on formative assessment to enable them to improve formative assessment in the Office Management programme.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES MODULE**

#### **4.1 Introduction to the chapter**

In Chapter Four, the concept of formative assessment was contextualised within the Information and Communication (ICT) module of the Level 2 Life Orientation subject. The Subject Guidelines and Assessment Guidelines provided the context for the study, as the narratives of the students were predominately about their experiences of the formative assessment exercises that they undertook as part of the ICT Module. The ICT Module curriculum thus provided the key context or “narrative landscape” (Clandinin, 2020:6) for this study of inclusive formative assessment. Section 4.2 describes the ICT Module, followed in Section 4.3 by details of the assessment requirements for ICT, including formative assessment. Thereafter, inclusive practices within the guides are identified (Section 4.4) and discussed (Section 4.5). Section 4.6 concludes Chapter Four.

#### **4.2 The ICT module**

The Subject Guide and the Assessment Guide for ICT within the NCV Office Management programme were studied to determine the nature of the assessment requirements, with a focus on requirements for formative assessment. The Subject Guidelines document for the Life Orientation subject (hereafter referred to as SG, 2013) refers to Life Orientation as a “fundamental” subject, as it is:

... integral to all vocationally orientated qualifications that allow the student to progress into further learning along a vocational pathway in various fields. Life Orientation is one of three fundamental subjects that enhances students’ possibilities to achieve success in their vocational studies as well as in life (SG, 2013:2).

The Life Orientation subject is therefore appropriate for this study on inclusive education, as its stated purpose is to enable students’ progress and to guide them to be successful in their studies and in life. Accordingly, the Life Orientation subject:

... consists of a combination of life skills and information and communication technology (ICT) that covers essential topics such as personal and career development, health and well-being, citizenship, and learning skills, as well as basic computer applications (SG, 2013:2).

As the participants in the study are Office Management students who will need to have advanced computer skills to obtain employment in the sector, the section on “basic computer applications” is the focus of this chapter. This section comprises Part Two of the Life Orientation subject, which I refer to as “the ICT Module”. The ICT Module has two main components which enable students to “apply basic computer skills in a Microsoft Office programme”, including MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and to “use the Internet as a resource of information and communication” (SG, 2013:6). The ICT curriculum therefore has two key components, namely basic computer skills and digital literacy. Computer skills are important, both to enable students to succeed in their studies, as well as for future employability in office management (Lİce, 2018), while digital literacy has been described as a “boost factor” in the employability of TVET students (Vrana, 2016:169).

The ICT Module comprises five topics (Topics 5–9 in the Level 2 Life Orientation subject). These are: 1) Introductory theory of Information and Communication Technology (ICT); 2) Basic features of Microsoft Word (word processing programme); 3) Basic features of Microsoft Excel (spreadsheet programme); 4) Basic features of Microsoft PowerPoint (presentations); and 5) Introduction to E-Mail and Internet. Topics 2–4 state the basic computer skills that students will need to attain, such as “Use basic features to create and edit a spreadsheet” and “Use formulae to perform basic calculations in a spreadsheet”. These more practical topics have a more theoretical introduction and shift to digital literacy in the final topics in which students “Explore the World Wide Web” and “Use the Internet to communicate via e-mail” (SG, 2013:10-12).

The Subject Guidelines provide very little detail and offer no guidance to the lecturers who have to implement the ICT Module. These guidelines state this:

The ICT lecturer must be computer literate and have an advanced knowledge of the following programmes: Word processing, Spreadsheets, Presentation and knowledge of the Internet and e-mail (SG, 2013:13).

Apart from being “computer literate”, there are not specifications for the kinds of qualifications that lecturers who teach the ICT Module need to teach Computer Skills or digital literacies.

The Subject Guidelines list the resources required to teach the ICT Module (see Figure 4.1).

## **8.2 Physical resources**

- Theory classrooms equipped with notice boards
- Resources/media centres with internet access
- Suitably equipped computer room with internet access

## **8.4 Consumables**

- Files for Portfolios of Evidence (PoE)
- Printing paper and cartridges for printers
- Stationery, for example pens, pencils, crayons, magnets, cardboards and coloured papers

## **8.5 Learning and teaching materials**

- Student Textbooks
- Newspapers, magazines and posters

**Figure 4.1: Resources needed for the ICT Module (SG, 2012:13)**

In her doctoral study on the implementation of National Certificate Vocational Programmes, Makole (2015) found a lack of resources with regard to classrooms, computer rooms, overhead projectors, screens, computers, printers, libraries and simulation rooms – as well as a lack of Internet access. Her study reported on the negative impact of inadequate resources on teaching and learning. In her Master's study, Paul (2019) expressed concerns about the shortage of textbooks. As can be seen from Figure 4.1, textbooks are not specified, so lecturers make use of a wide variety of texts that they deem appropriate. Paul argues that textbooks are necessary to supplement the Subject and Assessment Guidelines, particularly in contexts where the lecturer does not have the necessary skills for the ICT Module. She argues that the lack of quality textbooks “places the students at a huge disadvantage when being assessed” (Paul, 2019:39).

## **4.3 Assessment requirements for the ICT Module**

In addition to Subject Guidelines, the ICT Module also has Assessment Guidelines (hereafter referred to as AG, 2013) that explain “the requirements for the internal and external subject assessment” (AG, 2013:2). The AG claim to be aligned to the objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), particularly to “facilitate access to and progression within education, training and career paths” (AG, 2013:2). The AG also state the principles that guide assessment practice in the Life Orientation subject, including the ICT Module. The AG claim to be similarly aligned with the underpinning principles of the NQF, including the principles of integration, relevance, credibility, coherence, flexibility, participation, access and progression.

The AG document identifies four types of assessment, namely: 1) baseline assessment, 2) diagnostic assessment, 3) formative assessment and 4) summative assessment (AG, 2013:5). However, the Assessment Framework only includes summative assessment in the form of summative continuous assessment and summative examinations, as follows:

**Internal continuous assessment (ICASS):** Knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes (SKVAs) are assessed throughout the year using assessment instruments such as projects, tests, assignments, investigations, role-play and case studies. All internal continuous assessment (ICASS) evidence is kept in a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) and must be readily available for monitoring, moderation and verification purposes. This component is moderated and quality assured both internally and externally.

**External summative assessment (ESASS):** The external summative assessment comprises TWO papers set to meet the requirements of the Subject and Learning Outcomes. It is administered according to relevant assessment policies and requirements (AG, 2013:4).

Internal continuous assessment, as described in the Assessment Guidelines, is summative rather than formative; that is, the projects, tests, assignments, investigations and so on count towards the student's final mark. Rather confusingly, the document claims that internal continuous assessment is "moderated and quality assured both internally and externally".

Methods used for internal continuous assessment include "lecturer assessment, self-assessment, peer assessment and group assessment" (AG, 2013:5). The Guidelines recommend "a variety of methods and instruments for collecting evidence", such as "Observation-based (Less structured), Task-based (Structured), Text-based (More structured)" methods (AG, 2013:6). It is not clear from the AG whether some forms of internal continuous assessment (e.g., self-assessment, peer assessment and group assessment) and some methods of evidence collection, (e.g., observation) are intended to be formative – that is, intended to provide feedback to students, rather than an exercise that counts towards the students' final marks – nor which forms and methods are intended to be summative. However, a section on the requirements for internal continuous assessment in the AG indicates that only practical tests, practical assignments and an internal examination are included for marks (Figure 4.2).

The following internal assessment units guide the ICT (Topics 5 -9) assessment of Life Orientation

<b>NUMBER OF UNITS</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>Time and Mark Allocation</b>	<b>COVERAGE</b>	<b>% contribution to the ICASS mark</b>
1	Practical Test – Test 1 Word processing	1 hour 50 marks	Topic 6 (Content of documents integrates with Topics 1 and 2)	10%
1	Practical Test – Tests 2 Spreadsheets	1 hour 50 marks	Topic 7 (Content integrates with Topic 3)	10%
1	Practical Assignment – Assessment 3 PowerPoint, Internet and E-mail	1 hour 50 marks	Topics 8 and 9 (Content integrates with Topics 3 and 4)  Example:  1. Use the Internet to obtain information on citizenship  2. Design a PowerPoint presentation based on this information (e.g. 6 slides)  3. E-mail your friend to inform them about the presentation.	10%
1	INTERNAL EXAM Paper 2	2 hours 100 marks	Topics 6, 7 and 8	10%
<b>Total contribution to ICASS for ICT</b>				40%

**Figure 4.2: Internal assessment of the ICT Module (AG, 2013:4)**

The internal continuous assessment requirements comprise two practical tests on word processing and spreadsheets, one practical assignment on PowerPoint, the Internet and Email, and an internal exam, the content of which is not specified (Figure 4.2). Each assessment task is awarded 10% of the final mark; thus internal continuous assessment counts for 40% of the final ICT Module mark. The assessment requirements are largely practical and skills-based.

The Assessment Guidelines provide topic weightings that show that various weightings are linked to 'teaching hours'. The heavier the weighting, the more teaching hours are required. Table 4.1 lists the weighted value and related teaching hours for all topics in the Life Orientation subject. Heavier weightings are given to the Life Orientation topics in general; word processing and the use of spreadsheets are prioritized in the ICT Module. In Table 4.1

which follows, The Life Orientation Module comprises Topic 1-4, shown in paler text, while the ICT Module comprises items 5-9, shown in the darker text.

**Table 4.1: Topic weightings in the Information and Communication Technology Module**

	TOPICS	WEIGHTED VALUE	TEACHING HOURS
1	Personal and Career Development	20	22
2	Learning skills	8	9
3	Health and Well-being	20	22
4	Citizenship	12	13
5	Introductory Theory of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Note: Not to be assessed	-	-
6	Basic features of Microsoft Word (Word-processing programme)	12	13
7	Basic features of Microsoft Excel (Spreadsheet programme)	12	13
8	Basic features of Microsoft PowerPoint (Presentations)	8	9
9	Introduction to the Internet and e-mail	8	9
		<b>100</b>	<b>110</b>
	NOTE: Topics 1–4 make up 60% and Topics 6–9 make up 40% of the total weighting in this subject		

The theoretical introduction to ICT (Topic 5) is not given a weighted value, nor allocated any teaching hours. Topic 5 is thus assessed formatively. It seems strange that no teaching hours are allocated to Topic 5. It might have been given zero weighted value (as a result of having no summative assessment), but it might take up, say, 4 teaching hours, as a guide to lecturers. A formative assessment task, which is not for marks, could have been used for the theory topic to check the students' understanding of digital literacy, and to prepare them for, and protect them from, the online world.

#### **4.3.1 Formative assessment**

There is no mention of formative assessment or assessment for learning in the Subject Guidelines. Similarly, there is no mention of formative assessment in the Assessment Guidelines, other than this definition:

**Formative Assessment:** This assessment monitors and supports teaching and learning. It determines student strengths and weaknesses and provides feedback on progress. It determines if a student is ready for summative assessment (AG, 2013:5).

It seems as if the Assessment Guidelines assume that formative assessment is part of the teaching and learning process, while the Subject Guidelines assume it is part of the assessment process. Formative assessment has thus fallen between the cracks of the two guidelines. Lecturers therefore need to draw on their own pedagogical content knowledge in planning formative assessment.



Continuous assessment usually includes both formative and summative assessment tasks and practical activities (Kennedy, 2006). Whilst formative assessment may be used as part of continuous assessment, it is not usually included in the final mark awarded to students. In fact, many educationalists believe that it should not be included in the marks allocated to a subject or module:

... in order for students to have the maximum opportunity to learn in a module ... there must be some option for a formative assessment which does not contribute to the final grade. Students can then obtain feedback which will allow them to address any gaps in their knowledge or skills (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005:98).

Continuous assessment is usually intended to be a combination of summative and formative assessment; in practice, however, “continuous assessment often amounts to repeated summative assessments with marks being recorded but little or no specific feedback being given to students” (Kennedy, 2006:63). This seems to be the case with internal continuous assessment as it is applied in the AG, and is evident in statements, such as, “All evidence collected for summative assessment purposes (ICASS) is kept or recorded in the student’s Portfolio of Evidence (PoE)” (AG, 2013:6); and “The internal continuous assessment (ICASS) must be re-submitted with each examination enrolment for which it constitutes a component” (AG, 2013:4).

There is also the possibility that the AG have conflated internal continuous assessment with formative assessment. The generic TVET Curriculum Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS) Guidelines for the NC(V) Qualifications, published in January 2021 (hereafter ‘ICASS, 2021’), conflate formative assessment with internal continuous assessment, as is clear in the following statement:

The lecturer only has five formative assessment opportunities in vocational subjects and seven for fundamental subjects to assess the students’ knowledge and competencies during the academic year and therefore each task must be planned and administered with great care. The quality of each ICASS task administered by a campus and/or college impacts directly on the calculation of the final subject mark awarded to the student (ICASS, 2021:18).

The five or seven “formative assessment opportunities” do not imply formative continuous assessment, but rather refer to summative continuous assessment. In the TVET system, the

term “Internal Continuous Assessment (ICASS)” is used interchangeably with “formative assessment” (ICASS, 2021). The ICASS document provides a more detail internal continuous assessment plan (Figure 4.3) than the one in the Assessment Guide (Figure 4.2).

**ANNEXURE A: EXAMPLE OF A SUBJECT ASSESSMENT PLAN**

Subject Name						NC(V) Level			Year	
No	Assessment Task	Assessment tool	Topics & Subject Outcomes	Time and mark allocation	Examiner	Moderator	Question paper submitted to the moderator - pre-assessment moderation	Assessment date	Memo discussion	Moderation of marked tasks (post assessment moderation)
1	Test	Marking memo	Topic 1: SOs 1-4 Topic 3: SOs 1-2	1 hr 50 marks	Ms G Training	Mr E Edu	03 February	22 February	XXX	01-04 March
2	Assignment	Rubric memo or checklist	Topic 2: SOs 1-2 & 4 Topic 3: SOs 2-4	2 hrs per day for 3 days 75 marks	Ms P Test	Mr E Edu	24 February	8-10 March	XXX	15-19 March
3	Internal examination	Marking memo	Topic1: SOs 1-4 Topic 2: SOs 1-4 Topic 3: SOs 1-4 Topic 4: SOs 1-3	1 hr 100 marks	Ms G Training & Ms P Test	Mr E Edu	27 May	20 June	2-4 June	7-11 June
4	Assignment	Rubric memo or checklist	Topic 1: SOs 1-4 Topic 2: SOs 1-4 Topic 3: SOs 1-4 Topic 4: SOs 1-3	1 hr per day for 4 days and 2 hrs on day 5 100 marks	Ms G Training	Mr E Edu	18 June	26-30 May	XXX	2-6 August
5	Test	Marking memo	Topic 2: SOs 3-4 Topic 4 SO 5	2 hrs or more 50 marks or more	Ms P Test	Mr E Edu	10 August	16 August	XXX	26-31 August

**Figure 4.3 Example of Subject Assessment Plan (ICASS, 2021:21)**

The generic guide shows an extremely regimented internal continuous assessment programme. In their study of the ICT Module, Atukunda and Maja (2022:152) found that it was difficult to complete the curriculum due to limited time and assessment methods that did not meet the diverse needs of students. They (2022:160) also show that lecturers had to work beyond the set assessment schedules to assist students who misunderstood assignment requirements or scored below average marks. From an employability perspective, an assessment regime that is test-orientated and lacks formative feedback is not conducive to preparing TVET students for the world of work, because “what we assess is what we produce” (Teane, 2021:663).

In the ICT Module, the topic titled, ‘Introductory Theory of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)’, which does not count towards a student’s marks, provides an ideal opportunity for formative assessment. It comprises the following two subject outcomes:

Subject Outcome 5.1: Explain what a personal computer is and how it is used.

Subject Outcome 5.2: Explore and use the Windows Operating System (AG, 2013:8).

The outcomes do not express the topic description, that is, an introductory theory of ICT. It is not clear how explaining what a computer is and using the Windows Operating System

provides any kind of theoretical framing. This is a missed opportunity to guide discussions on how computers and digitization have impacted society, education and working life, thus building students' digital literacies and providing them with a more holistic view of the role of computers and other digital technologies in society.

With regard to assistive technologies, none of the computers were equipped with software that could have been helpful to students with disabilities in their academic studies, such as supporting their reading and writing development (Svensson et al., 2021). Assistive technologies have changed the status of disabled persons in society and work (Jakovljevic & Buckley, 2011), but no such accommodations were available at the sites of this study.

#### **4.4 Inclusive assessment**

One of the principles on which the AG are based is "Access", the purpose of which is "To address barriers to learning experienced on different levels and to facilitate the students' progress" (AG, 2013:2). There is little mention of inclusive practice in either the Subject or Assessment Guidelines for the Life Orientation subject, which implies that the Guidelines are not aligned with their stated principles.

Another principle is posed as follows:

Fairness and transparency: To verify that assessment processes and/or method(s) used neither hinder nor unfairly advantage any student. The following could constitute unfairness in assessment: 1) Inequality of opportunities, resources or teaching and learning approaches, 2) Bias based on ethnicity, race, gender, age, disability or social class, 3) Lack of clarity regarding Learning Outcome being assessed, 4) Comparison of students' work with other students, based on learning styles and language' (AG, 2013:3).

Given that there is no attempt to accommodate students with disabilities or other special needs, this principle is aspirational, but does not appear to have been considered in the curriculum documents. The AG document directs readers as follows:

Policy on inclusive education requires that assessment procedures for students who experience barriers to learning be customised and supported to enable these students to achieve their maximum potential (AG, 2013:4).

White Paper 6 explains that lecturers are expected to implement an inclusive approach to the “functional, vocational and skills-orientated content in the delivery of the curriculum for identified learners” (DNE, 2001:30). White Paper 6 provides a vision of inclusive education but requires guidance from the Subject and Assessment Guides to implement the curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices to enable SEN students to succeed in mainstream TVET classes.

The ICT Module outcomes are stated without making any provision for students with disabilities. It is a concern that a highly practical course that demands manual dexterity, as seen in Topic 6, does not accommodate students who might have a physical disability:

Topic 6: Basic features of Microsoft Word (Word-processing programme)

Subject Outcome 6.1: Demonstrate keyboard proficiency in a Word document.

Subject Outcome 6.2: Use basic features to create and edit a Word document (SG, 2013:11).

In a UNESCO study on inclusive education in ICT, Watkins (2014) points to the synergy between learning computer skills and equipping the computers with assistive technologies to support students with disabilities. There is a range of “audio, video and vibro-tactile interfaces” that can be used to enhance learning in ICT and digital literacy amongst students with disabilities (Hersh, Leporini & Buzzi, 2020). Many studies have noted that technologies, like computers, provide rich educational experiences (Svensson et al., 2021). Hence, many scholars propose using computers in education (Lee & Templeton, 2008). These scholars have discovered that students who were taught via computer technology performed better compared to students whose education experience was based solely on traditional methods of teaching. However, when support, adapted outcomes and assessment criteria are not provided, it is “difficult to see whether ICT is used in a way that enhances inclusion, an overall goal for many people with disabilities in today’s society” (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2008:16-23). This is precisely the concern with the ICT module. There is evidence throughout the Subject and Assessment Guidelines that students with disabilities are largely ignored, while “enrichment” is provided for high performing students, as noticeable in this extract:

These Subject and Learning Outcomes are the minimum to cover to enable students to sit for the end of the year examination. Lecturers are however encouraged to allow students, where the need arises, to go beyond the minimum and add/use additional information for enrichment purposes (SG, 2013:7).

While it is commendable that special provision and encouragement exist for students who can “go beyond the minimum”, it is concerning that there is no support for students with the potential to meet the minimum, but who need additional support.

#### 4.5 Analysis of formative assessment requirements

The theoretical analysis of the curriculum documents drew on the principle of translation (Maton & Chen, 2019) (see Section 3.5) in order to develop a translation device to show the extent to which formative assessment in the formal curriculum documents of the ICT Module might be aligned or misaligned with the capability approach and best practices in inclusive formative assessment. Table 4.2 shows that there is considerable misalignment between the kinds of formative assessment required in the formal curriculum and the best practices in the literature.

**Table 4.2 Analysis of the curricular data**

<b>Elements of formative assessment</b>	<b>Assessment for learning</b>	<b>Examples from the Assessment Guidelines on ICASS</b>
<i>Purposes of assessment</i>	Student engagement and learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013).	Not addressed.
	Feedback on understanding, process, and performance (Boud et al., 2008).	“Evidence of marked assessment tasks and feedback in the PoE” (AG, 2013:10).
	Metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003).	Not addressed.
<i>Principles of assessment</i>	Authenticity and proximity (Oliver, 2015).	Not addressed.
	Timeous and “knowledge-rich” feedback (Tai et al., 2022).	Principle of ‘access’ (AG, 2013:2).
	Confidence building (Jili, 2022).	Not addressed.
	Creativity, innovation, critical thinking (Davies & Ecclestone, 2008).	Not addressed.
	Targeting difficulties (Ajjawi et al., 2023).	Checklists, Rating scales and Rubrics (AG, 2013:6).
	Flexibility and accommodation (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020).	Principle of ‘fairness and transparency’ (AG, 2013:3).
	Reflection on practice (Tigelaar & Sins, 2021).	Not addressed.
	Alignment with/preparation for summative assessment (Richard et al., 2013).	The internal continuous assessment (ICASS) must be re-submitted with each examination enrolment for which it constitutes a component (AG, 2013:4).

Formative assessment is adequately represented in the formal curriculum documents, while inclusive formative assessment is absent from the Subject and Assessment Guides. The only reference to inclusion in education refers lecturers to the relevant policy:

Policy on inclusive education requires that assessment procedures for students who experience barriers to learning be customised and supported to enable these students to achieve their maximum potential (AG, 2013:4).

Requirements for internal continuous assessment (ICASS) were found to be the form of assessment that contained elements of formative assessment. These sections of the AG were therefore focussed on. The AG were studied with a view to ascertaining the degree to which they had provided guidance that was inclusive of formative assessment, as developed in the conceptual framework and translation device. The documents were searched to identify how the purposes of assessment were understood, which principles guided assessment, and what general implications arose from the statements on the purposes and the principles of assessment. Specific guidelines for assessment practice were also sought, as were assessment exemplars.

The analysis of the curricular data (Table 4.2) revealed that the ICASS and AG emphasised assessment of learning, rather than assessment for learning. However, there were some indicators that the process of learning was important. For example, the portfolio of evidence (PoE), which is a requirement for internal continuous assessment, was required to contain “feedback” in addition to the marked tests and assignments. No detail was provided on what feedback was appropriate for students in general, or for students with disabilities in particular. How lecturers might provide respectful feedback that would promote students’ mental well-being was not addressed. Some statements, such as the definition of diagnostic assessment, suggest referring students needing specialist support to the college student support unit:

**Diagnostic assessment:** This assessment diagnoses the nature and causes of learning barriers experienced by specific students. It is followed by guidance, appropriate support and intervention strategies. This type of assessment is useful to make referrals for students requiring specialist help (AG, 2013:4).

The formative assessment principle incorporating authenticity and proximity is not evident in the AG.

The formative assessment principle of the alignment of formative tasks with summative requirements was also not addressed. Such alignment is a way of preparing students, especially students with learning needs, for summative assessment tasks, thereby promoting

students' autonomy and mobility, considered as basic human rights in the capability approach.

The formative assessment principle of "targeting difficulties" and the capability principle of creating a safe space for learning from mistakes, was partially addressed in the AG statement under the principle of "Access". However, once stated, there was no further mention of the provision of access to knowledge in supportive ways. Similarly, the formative assessment principle of providing timely feedback for the purposes of promoting students' mental well-being was partially addressed in the statement on the principle of "fairness and transparency".

The formative assessment principle of focus on sub-skills and strategies, and alignment with the enhancement of participation and encouraging enjoyment, was not addressed. This is a particular concern in the ICT Module, which is noted in the literature for engaging students and providing enjoyment (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010; Watkins, 2014).

The implications for practice of the stated principles was not addressed in the Assessment Guidelines. Guidance to lecturers might be expected, for example, that formative assessment tasks should target difficulties in diverse ways, align with summative formats, that timely and knowledge-rich feedback should be provided and that formative tasks should identify sub-skills and strategies for improvement. However, this was not the case. Lecturers are therefore left to their own devices with regard to formative assessment, as they need to follow the test-orientated assessment practices. This means that the students' rights to experience enjoyment, participation, mobility and autonomy in their education are denied.

Specific guidelines for assessment tasks include checklists, rating scales and rubrics which make assessment practices more transparent. However, these are for purposes of summative assessment; there is no guidance for lecturers on using such checklists, rating scales and rubrics for formative assessment. Formative self-assessment helps students to internalise assessment criteria and thus assists them to achieve autonomy. Amartya Sen's (2004) capability approach understands equality of autonomy as a concept in support of the notion that "the ability and means to choose our life course should be spread as equally as possible across society". Autonomy could be understood as a form of empowerment. The analysis reveals that the assessment practices in the ICT Module do not empower students to achieve success in their studies.

#### 4.6 Reflections on assessment in the ICT Module

The final reflection on assessment in the ICT Module is that there is a focus on the summative assessment of practical tasks in word processing and the use of spreadsheets. The concept of computer literacy, or digital literacy, is completely absent from the ICT Module. This is problematic, particularly as the ICT Module is embedded in a Life Orientation programme. The Subject Guidelines and Assessment Guidelines, dated 2013, are still being used in 2022. They clearly need updating, as computer programmes and affordances change very rapidly. There are many missed opportunities in the ICT Module to support SEN leaders, particular through assistive technologies, such as software that can be installed on a PC at very little cost but which could make a considerable difference to SEN students' self-confidence and likelihood of success.

There are also missed opportunities to make the ICT Module exciting and enjoyable. A sub-topic, such as “Explore the World Wide Web” (see Figure 4.4), could be one of enjoyment and enrichment for all students. Instead, it simply requires the student to “launch the Internet browser” and to “find and explore different websites”. The re-statement of the assessment standard and the learning outcomes indicates a lack of understanding of pedagogy. Repeating the assessment standard does not help the student to achieve it, nor does it offer the lecturer guidance on how to teach it. There are many issues that need to be addressed, not least of which is safety on the Internet, and the information literacy skills to judge the quality of the websites ‘explored’. As it stands, this assessment standard and the learning outcomes are far from representing best practice.

SUBJECT OUTCOME	
<b>9.1 Explore the World Wide Web</b>	
ASSESSMENT STANDARD	LEARNING OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Internet Explorer Browser is used to explore different websites on the Internet</li> </ul>	9.1.1 Launch the Internet Explorer Browser 9.1.2 Find and explore different websites on the Internet
SUBJECT OUTCOME	
<b>9.2 Use the Internet to communicate via e-mail</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An e-mail address is created on the Internet</li> <li>E-mailed messages to friends and fellow students are drafted and sent</li> <li>E-mails are retrieved and appropriately responded to</li> </ul>	9.2.1 Create an e-mail address on the Internet 9.2.2 Draft and send e-mails to friends and fellow students 9.2.3 Retrieve e-mails and respond appropriately
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessments must be practical (hands on) and students must be able to</li> <li>Create and Receive and respond to e-mails.</li> <li>Link with SO 1.4 and create and send a email messages about positive personal relationships</li> <li>Observation checklist – use where students are required to demonstrate their skills.</li> </ul>	

**Figure 4.4: Assessment of the sub-topics: “Explore the World Wide Web” and “Use the Internet to communication via e-mail”**



The second sub-topic, “Use the Internet to communicate via e-mail”, offers more possibilities for learning and for enjoyment, as students “draft and send e-mails to friends and fellow students”. The word “appropriately” implies that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to respond to an email, but this is insufficient for the student and the lecturer, and more guidance on e-mail etiquette would be needed.

Formative assessment creates the building blocks for the achievement of the stated outcomes and assessment criteria. As has been shown in this chapter, there are no stated requirements or guidelines for formative assessment in the ICT Module. However, this is not to suggest that lecturers do not undertake formative assessment. In the next chapter, the extent to which lecturers engage in formative assessment within Office Management studies is explored.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **LECTURER INTERVIEWS: INCLUSIVE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND THE DUTY OF CARE**

#### **5.1 Introduction to the chapter**

Chapter Five presents the findings from the interviews with lecturers in terms of their understanding of the purposes of formative assessment (Section 5.2), assessment principles (Section 5.3), as well as their formative assessment practices (Section 5.4). Section 5.5 summarises the findings and draws some tentative conclusions and implications arising from the lecturers' insights. Although lecturers were asked about the purposes, principles and practices separately, they tended to group these elements. For purposes of analysis, the separation is useful; so, although these elements were not generally separated in their lecturers' responses, lecturer data was coded according to whether the response focused on purposes, principles or practices. When there are verbatim quotations, the terms that lecturers used, such as "SEN students", are used and not corrected for inclusive language.

#### **5.2 The purposes of inclusive formative assessment**

The lecturers strongly valued formative assessment, particularly those tasks that enabled all students, and particularly those with learning difficulties, to learn from engagement with the lecturer and with peers, as well as from the feedback received and class discussions. The lecturers understood that the purpose of formative assessment was to encourage learning, to provide feedback on, and to build students' metacognitive understanding of, assessment. One lecturer compared the purposes of formative and summative assessment as follows:

They are not the same. Formative is working and growing students for the next step. Summative – this is final – pass fail – you move to next level or you repeat (Lecturer 1).

##### **5.2.1 Learning and engagement – and the provision of support**

The lecturers understood that formative assessment was intended to enhance student learning. Lecturer 6 explained her understanding as follows:

I feel that formative assessment helps a lot with the students' ability to understand their work and to remember it. It also helps with their critical thinking. Students with learning disabilities participate better with these tasks (Lecturer 6).

Because the subject and assessment guidelines did not provide the necessary guidance for formative assessment generally, and did not take inclusive formative assessment into account, lecturers had to develop their own inclusive formative assessment tasks, as in this example:

I am creating my own formative assessments that enable me to meet the learning support to my students (Lecturer 2).

Several lecturers pointed out that, to be inclusive, formative assessment needed both to encourage learning and engagement, and to offer “learning support”. Lecturers pointed out that students with disabilities often needed guidance and extra attention:

Specifically our SEN students they cannot always be left to just follow instructions when doing assessments. These students need to be guided throughout the entire assessment. They just require more attention than your ordinary student (Lecturer 5).

These students need extra attention especially in my computer classes. They are encouraged to go apply for extra help. We do not have a set policy for these students (Lecturer 4).

Lecturer 4 felt that that there was insufficient guidance for lecturers on formative assessment. He explained formative assessment as “extra activities” that the lecturer had to develop to promote learning:

The formatives are for extra activities for your students to apply the knowledge which was taught. They are helpful as many a time questions from past papers are asked. Only students who are really interested engage. There are too few as many times lecturers create their own formatives (Lecturer 4).

Several lecturers tended to use past examination papers as formative assessment tasks, in the absence of guidance or the pressures of time. Thus lecturers pointed to the need for professional development and training for inclusive education more generally:

I think it would be beneficial for all student teachers to be taught how to work with and handle students with special needs in the case of identifying these students and in cases where students and their parents are unaware of the case (Lecturer 7).

Lecturer 7 also pointed out her concern that, given their limited resources, they were not always able to accommodate all students with learning needs, particularly those who needed specialized support:

The resources we have need to be able to cater to all students at all levels. Specialized support for students with special needs. Train staff in special areas of expertise in the curriculum (Lecturer 7).

Several studies (e.g., Stiggins, 2010) point out that students need counselling to address feelings of shame about their disability. Other studies show that students can thrive when there is adequate support for their learning and the relevant assistance is offered, such as a scribe, extra time, more formative assessments, extra classes (if needed), assistance with being diagnosed (if undiagnosed), eye and ear tests, and study methods (Stiggins, 2010).

The lecturers also felt that all students, including students with disabilities, needed to take responsibility for their own learning and engagement:

The big problem we are facing are students are often absent and/or do not do the work – therefore they fall more behind. Students do not often attend the help offered by student support. I feel the assessment would improve if the students came to class and did the work to keep up and have better understanding (Lecturer 1).

### **5.2.2 Feedback and monitoring**

Lecturers identified the provision of feedback to students, as well as using this feedback to monitor their progress, as an important element of formative assessment. Lecturer 1 explained that formative feedback enabled him to “test the students’ understanding of the work done in sections”; once he was satisfied that the students understood the work, he could then “build onto the work and move on”. Lecturer 5 similarly regarded the monitoring of progress and the identification of strengths and weaknesses as important functions of formative assessment:

These assessments are helpful because they assist with monitoring our students. It helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses. Students do not engage because they are instructed to ... but some do not put enough effort into these assessments (Lecturer 5).

Lecturer 5 included the caveat that formative assessment cannot serve its purpose of enhancing learning through feedback if the students do not fully engage with the formative assessment task. An important source of learning encouragement and support came from peers – and creating group formative assessment tasks was useful in this regard:

I find this type of assessment [i.e., group work] helpful to students as students also learn from each other (Lecturer 1).

Feedback thus included receiving from and giving feedback to peers.

### **5.2.3 Metacognition**

Lecturers understood that learning about assessment, as well as how to prepare for an assessment task, was an important purpose of formative assessment. Lecturer 7 described this as follows:

To guide the students towards the development of their own 'learning to learn' skills.

In explaining how students with disabilities responded to assessment tasks, Lecturer 3 provided a thoughtful response about learning differently:

For me, these formative assessments test the knowledge gained during class time. Perhaps our society places too much pressure on the word assessment and thus places an unfortunate amount of stress on the student. Are they helpful? Yes and no, yes in terms of gaining an understanding of how the student grasps the information given in class. No in terms of the amount of stress a student experiences before having to attempt the assessment. Because of the stress they are not fully able to give 100% as it could possibly be answered in the classroom during a class discussion. Do you find that the students are engaged? Yes, because it is compulsory and students are aware of the importance of a formative assessment. Are there too many/too few formative assessment tasks? Yes, class discussion I believe should also play a part as giving results, some students are oral experts and some are written experts (Lecturer 3).

### **5.3 Assessment principles**

Most lecturers felt that they were guided by assessment principles that were similar to, but not entirely the same as, summative assessment principles. Lecturer 3 explains this in the following extract:

Summative assessments should definitely stand by the principle of being fair, valid, reliable, efficient and transparent. The aim should not be to catch the student out or bring them down. The principles for formative and summative assessment should align with one another, although emphasis is aimed at one (Lecturer 3).

### **5.3.1 Authenticity and proximity**

Despite being in a vocational field, most lecturers did not foreground alignment with workplace practices. This could be because the focus was on first year students. Lecturer 1 referred to role play as being meaningful in the Office Administration programme as it enabled the students to develop an understanding of the context for the computer skills:

Lecturers in most of the subjects in office admin need to create role plays and group work themselves. All formative is linked to the assessment guides (Lecturer 1).

Lecturer 2 addressed the importance of learning in a workplace context:

Learning experiences outside of the classroom – where students have to go to job shadow in the holiday at a company to practise or experience their study field. The manager then has to fill in a one page assessment guide about the student's presence at the workplace (Lecturer 2).

According to Lecturer 7, authenticity in formative assessment related more to those issues that were meaningful to students, rather than to the workplace:

The more you incorporate things they can relate to, the more they engage. If more of these types of assessment could be added or if all of them are relatable to their lives, it would be more fun (Lecturer 7).

Issues of authenticity and proximity deserve more prominence in vocational pedagogy, and in the preparation of students with disabilities for the world beyond the campus. The literature on the value of authentic vocational training for persons with disabilities is discussed by Mprah and colleagues below:

Through vocational training, persons with disabilities acquire skills to engage in some form of economic activities. However, previous studies suggest a lot needs to be

done to make vocational training programmes relevant to persons with disabilities (Mprah et al., 2015:70).

### **5.3.2 Timeous and knowledge-rich feedback**

The lecturers did not mention the need for giving feedback timeously following completion of an assessment task. They did, however, demonstrate their general efficiency, as in this example from Lecturer 1:

The college has guidelines for SEN students. Lecturers do their best to identify those students ASAP and do our best to make sure they have an understanding of the work day to day. Students are booked with student support for help with study lessons. Students are also given extra activities to help with better understanding. Students that need extra help/time are recommended for a scribe or extra time (Lecturer 1).

### **5.3.3 Confidence building**

Peer learning was noted by the lecturers, both for its impact on student learning and for creating supportive learning communities:

Encouraging cooperative learning/teaching at all times. Let students work together with projects (group work). Always create an inclusive community of students (Lecturer 2).

Lecturer 6 pointed out that respectful relationships between teacher and student allow the student to shine:

Encourage positive atmosphere for SEN students. Never reprimand them in front of other students, they feel embarrassed quickly and won't work with you again. Discover their strengths (Lecturer 6).

For confidence-building, Lecturer 6 felt that providing sensitive and encouraging individual feedback was essential for confidence building:

Focus of the task is to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback to improve their learning. Feedback is given one-on-one. You need to be specific and praise them with all their efforts and sacrifices. Encourage students to ask questions as well (Lecturer 6).

### **5.3.4 Creativity, innovation, critical thinking**

Lecturers understood the need to make learning enjoyable. To this end, they drew on their creativity to develop inclusive formative assessment tasks that promoted both learning and enjoyment:

I think that when it comes to formative, there should be more room to play, as this should be where they learn and not where they are tested. The principles are very much different. I do not think that there are specific principles that guide formative assessment (Lecturer 7).

Creating a space for learning to be enjoyed, without students being tested, was important for many lecturers. Even though Lecturer 7 did not feel that there were formative assessment guidelines for enjoyability, her approach is in line with capability theory which proposes enjoyment of learning experiences as a human right (Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2015).

Lecturer 7 felt that it was important not only to be creative in designing assessment tasks but that tasks should also enable students to express their creativity:

The task was to make a product out of recycled goods that the student could use while studying. This not only taught the students about recycling but they were able to be creative in what they chose to make and what they used (Lecturer 7).

Lecturer 1 combined creativity with the principles of authenticity and proximity:

Yes, but lecturers also needs to think outside of the box and become creative using real life examples – students relate to that (Lecturer 1).

### **5.3.5 Target difficulties**

The lecturers did not specifically target difficulties, that is, areas in the curriculum that required considerable practice; however, in some cases, aligning summative and formative assessment was a way of targeting difficulties, as in the example below:

I create my own [formative assessment tasks] by using old papers or tasks so that the questions are in line with summative tasks. Once content is covered then students apply the knowledge using a formative (Lecturer 4).



In Lecturer 4's example, content is covered, and then students apply the knowledge as a form of practice. Lecturer 5 used a similar approach: first an assessment was implemented, and then feedback was given – and the questions that were particularly challenging were discussed in class:

Assessments are designed according to the work covered and to test the students on what they have learned. Feedback is given after marking is done but also where the students see their work. Questions that students struggle with are identified and discussed in class (Lecturer 5).

### **5.3.6 Flexibility and accommodation**

Lecturers acknowledged the particular need for “adaptable questions when setting up an assessment” (Lecturer 3) to accommodate differences in learning abilities, physical dexterity and so on:

As a teacher you should identify a learner that is struggling or has a learning/physical barrier. All students must be accommodated or included at an educational facility, e.g., someone with dyslexia should rather listen to audio than writing/reading. Some students are struggling with emotion factors due to negative experiences. Counselling is needed (Lecturer 2).

Lecturer 2 described an ideal situation that was not always possible due to resource and time constraints. In some cases, students who needed “extra help/time”, usually in a summative examination, could be “recommended for a scribe or extra time” (Lecturer 1). However, as Lecturer 4 pointed out, “unfortunately these students do the same tests as the rest ... they could however apply for extra time but ... they don't get time needed” (Lecturer 4). Lecturer 3 reflected that, in the absence of official guidance, each lecturer had to take on the duty of care for students with disabilities:

Regarding SEN students, unfortunately there is no manual on what, how and when. From past experience it becomes easier to use the approach of inclusive education. Some students are slower than others, yes. Adaptable questions need to be placed when setting up an assessment. Therefore it is extremely imperative to know the students who sit in front of you daily. Due to experience some students do need additional time to perhaps complete an assessment. Provision is made for those students once the SEN student is identified (Lecturer 3).

Lecturer 3 explained that she always made an effort to adapt tests (and other assessment tasks) in ways that accommodated the students' needs:

I set up a basic test [which] included lower order questions as well as medium and higher order questions. I try to the best of my ability to adapt an assessment for SEN students. The aim of the class test was to answer multiple choice questions based on the content they had learned the previous week. Feedback was given in a form of positive criticism (Lecturer 3).

Lecturer 4 expressed the following opinion:

I think it is time that we focus more on these students. They should be included but also treated according to their needs. We should not single them out but also not expect the same from them as we do from our abled students (Lecturer 4).

### **5.3.7 Reflection on practice**

Lecturers did not specifically refer to reflection as a formative assessment strategy. However, their response to the role of feedback suggests the importance of reflection on practice in learning.

### **5.3.8 Align with/preparation for summative assessment**

There was considerable input with regard to aligning formative and summative assessment tasks. Lecturer 4 pointed to similarities in the principles of formative and summative tasks:

The same as with summative, you cannot test or expect a student to apply knowledge which was not yet taught. The principles differ as in a formative you could be focused on one topic only (Lecturer 4).

Lecturer 6 felt that in both forms of assessment, the lecturer was "collecting evidence", but in different ways:

Yes it's about collecting evidence about how students' learning is progressing during formative assessments. It's also to close the gap between the students' current understanding. No, they are different. Formative assessment is conducted during the learning process and throughout the course. Summative assessments are tests that evaluate how much the learner has learned throughout the course (Lecturer 6).

Lecturer 5 highlighted differences and similarities in the purposes of formative and summative assessment tasks:

Both these assessments serve a different purpose. Here the principles might vary. With formative we are continuously monitoring the students' learning and provide feedback on the learning. Summative measures the students' proficiency and certifies learning. They may vary but the end goal is similar (Lecturer 5).

Lecturer 2 pointed to the advantages of formative assessment, particularly when the student had learning needs:

Summative assessments are more structured and are used to evaluate the student at the end of a semester/of a year. Formatively I can adapt my test/training tools/methods to the level of the student (Lecturer 2).

Summative assessment tasks are high stakes assessment tasks in vocational education. Examinations are accredited by professional bodies, and both lecturers and students take examinations extremely seriously, as Lecturer 1 implies in describing his practice:

An exam preparation booklet was handed out at the beginning of the year and as a class we did answers over a period of 2–3 days (1 hour per day). The answers were discussed and agreed on. Students were also given questions from 2–3 question papers from the past in the week before summatives are done. Answers were discussed and agreed on the last day (Lecturer 1).

#### **5.4 Assessment practice: Designing and implementing formative assessment tasks**

The lecturers were asked to describe or give examples of their practice, which provided useful insights into the ways in which they practised inclusive formative assessment. In the following description from Lecturer 1, it is evident that he applied his understanding of the purposes and principles of formative assessment:

We use the subject and the assessment guide and we build the formative activity to the outcomes ... designing up. We also refer students to the textbook page numbers. We use past exam papers as preparation for summative assessment (a form of study). Own creativity – building an information/real life examples/group work/role plays/class discussions (Lecturer 1).

Particularly noteworthy is Lecturer 1's use of his own creativity to develop authentic and proximal tasks that have particular meaning in the vocational context. Similarly, Lecturer 3 drew on the Internet and her own creativity to produce inclusive formative assessment tasks:

Firstly, I use my subject guide/assessment guide to guide me. Our current textbooks are outdated therefore I do not place too much emphasis on it when setting up a formative assessment task. Other resources such as past papers with the Internet and my own creativity is the go to (Lecturer 3).

Lecturer 5 explained how he aligned his practice with the official "texts" (such as Assessment Guidelines for the subject), as it was on these that the student would be tested. While being responsible in terms of preparing the students for the final assessment, he also tried to make the task "fun":

When setting formative assessments I use the texts as a guide to what work was covered because this is what they are tested on. Sometimes I would download worksheets to make to make the assessment look fun (Lecturer 5).

Lecturer 6 listed the different methods and media used:

... Group work, discussion, Powerpoints, Mindmaps. Provide a specific worksheet to students to express their thoughts. Students to self-evaluate their growth and performance (Lecturer 6).

Lecturer 6 mentioned self-evaluation, which aligns with the metacognitive principle of formative assessment. Students who can accurately self-evaluate have internalized the assessment criteria.

Lecturer 7 explained that, while she used the subject guide as a starting point, she would also use her own creativity to encourage students to participate:

I start with the subject guide to make sure that I include all the main points required. I would include both textbooks and other documents for examples and to refer to but using my own creativity is how I find students to participate most (Lecturer 7).

After describing a range of assessment practices, Lecturer 2 reflected: "At the end I really want to promote student engagement and student learning."

### **5.5 Synergies with the capability approach**

Although the lecturers were not expected to have an understanding of capability theory, many expressed a social justice view on the education of students with disabilities that aligned well with the capabilities approach:

I know that these students require special attention but some institutions are not always equipped for this. However, we as educators try to treat our students fairly. All children have the right to proper education even those special needs children. Our SEN students do need extra time and individual attention from their educators (Lecturer 5).

Lecturer 6 summed up her position as follows:

Inclusive education is all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools, irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need (Lecturer 6).

Lecturer 6's position resonates with theoretical understandings of inclusive education as founded on the social justice notion that all students should get equal treatment in social and institutional structures (Terzi, 2007). Attentive lecturers will identify the barriers that their students face with regard to their disability which, in the South African context, could include funds for medical appointments. Lecturers noted that two of their students struggled with heavy bags and arranged for peers to assist them. Lecturers also assisted by sourcing supportive software for students who were dealing with a hearing impairment. Lecturers felt that the college should be more involved to meet the needs of students with disabilities; and that the student support services at the TVET colleges should create more awareness of the relevance and usefulness of their services so that all students would make use of these in future.

TVET colleges should also invest in educating their staff to be able to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Lecturer 3 thoughtfully reflected on difference:

Our curriculum is based on the 'average child', there is no such thing as the average child. Some are fast and some are less fast than others. The curriculum does not make provision for our SEN students. It is expected that SEN students be sent to special schools with the stigma of being different (Lecturer 3).

Table 5.1 summarises the analysis of the lecturers' interview data, aligning their understandings and practices with both best practices in formative assessment, and the capability approach.

**Table 5.1 Summary analysis of the lecturer data**

<b>Elements of formative assessment</b>	<b>Assessment for learning</b>	<b>Examples from lecturers' responses</b>
<i>Purposes of inclusive formative assessment</i>	Student engagement and learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013).	I am creating my own formative assessments that enable me to meet the learning support to my students (Lecturer 2).
	Feedback on understanding, process, and performance (Boud et al., 2008).	Feedback was given in form of positive criticism (Lecturer 3).
	Metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003).	To guide the students towards the development of their own 'learning to learn' skills (Lecturer 7).
<i>Principles of inclusive formative assessment</i>	Authenticity and proximity (Oliver, 2015).	The more you incorporate things they can relate to, the more they engage ... (Lecturer 7).
	Timeous and "knowledge-rich" feedback (Tai et al., 2023).	
	Confidence building (Jili, 2022).	Discover their strengths (Lecturer 6).
	Creativity, innovation, critical thinking (Davies & Ecclestone, 2008).	There should be more room to play, as this should be where they learn and not where they are tested (Lecturer 7).
	Target difficulties (Ajjawi et al., 2023).	Feedback is given after marking is done but also where the students see their work. Questions that students struggle with are identified and discussed in class (Lecturer 5).
	Flexibility and accommodation (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020).	Adaptable questions [are needed] when setting up an assessment (Lecturer 3).
	Reflection on practice (Tigelaar & Sins, 2021).	Students that need extra help/time are recommended for a scribe or extra time (Lecturer 1).
	Align with/prepare for summative assessment (Richard et al., 2013).	Students to self-evaluate their growth and performance (Lecturer 6).

## **5.6 Reflections on lecturer interviews**

This chapter probed TVET lecturers' understandings of and practices involving inclusive formative assessment in an Office Management programme. The lecturers provided many insights into their practices and the challenges they experienced in trying to exercise their duty of care, often with inadequate resources. The interviews highlighted the dedication and commitment of the lecturers, but also their frustration as they tried to meet the needs of their

students, build supportive communities, provide safe places to learn, provide creative and fun assessment tasks, and prepare them for the rigors of high stakes summative assessment. Sen's (2004) explanation that a "personal utilization function" is necessary for effectiveness was tacitly understood by the lecturers, although not in the form of capability theory. They understood that, to build a "capability set", the student needed resources and a "personal utilization function"; and that, given the necessary tools and an enabling environment, a student with disabilities would acquire the knowledge, skills and values that would enable their functioning with regard to taking responsibility for their own learning and well-being. Undoubtedly, students with disabilities who were able to make progress owed much to the dedication of their lecturers who showed how inclusive formative assessment could contribute to SEN students' success and well-being in TVET.

TVET has policies in place, such as the National Academic Support Guidelines for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (DHET, 2021), to guide lecturers in inclusive teaching, learning and assessment practice. However, what is missing is the needed staff development and the resources to make sure that students with disabilities are included. Inclusive formative assessments can play an important role in the education of all students but is essential for students with disabilities. Lecturers in the TVET sector are using their knowledge and skills to develop fair, valid, reliable, efficient, transparent and inclusive assessments. Such assessments are the key to meeting the needs of SEN students; and lecturers' creativity facilitates learning in original, clever and inventive ways. It also creates an element of fun within the assessment. Once given a fair chance, all students can achieve success:

When you judge someone based on a diagnosis, you miss out on their abilities, beauty, and uniqueness (Lecturer 6).

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **STUDENTS' NARRATIVES OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

#### **6.1 Introduction to the chapter**

Chapter Six addresses these research sub-questions: 1) What do the experiences of students with disabilities reveal about their successes and challenges in formative assessments?; and 2) How can the experiences of students with disabilities be used to enhance formative assessment practice for all students enrolled in TVET studies? In the next section (6.2), the narrative interviews and the student participants are introduced. In Section 6.3, a narrative analysis of student interviews is undertaken, and in Section 6.4, the narrative data is conceptually and theoretically analysed. Section 6.5 concludes the chapter.

#### **6.2 The narrative interviews**

In this section, the narrative interviews with the students are described. Narrative interviews are founded on the notion that humans are story-telling creations who use stories to make sense of their ever-changing universe (Sawyer et al., 2023). Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) noted that narrative interviews are useful to understand better participants' involvements and actions. For this reason, I conducted narrative interviews with the students. This allowed the students to be the centre of the research and, moreover, highlighted the values they expressed in their own stories. Narrative interviews place the interviewees at the core of a research study. They are a method by which individuals can share their own stories about their experiences of health and illness. Researchers can always use narrative interviews to understand better the experiences and behaviour patterns of people (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

##### **6.2.1 Andile**

The interview with Andile showed the many challenges he faced. He is hearing impaired and wears two hearing aids. His disability started after a growth appeared behind his ear and lower neck. After it was removed, his hearing was affected. He has difficulty cleaning his hearing aids as he was never taught how. He is also left-handed and writes upside down. He also noted that he cannot turn to his left or right side of his body when he is in bed but has to get out of bed to walk around and go to lie on the other side of his body. He notes that his disability is a challenge and it is worse during winter. It is then that he endures more pain which affects his studies and attendance tremendously. Andile explains his challenges in the extract below:



... this problem started back in 2008 and 2009. Before that, from the early 2000 in my life to 2005/6 and 7, I was really a clever child at school, my grandmother ... but then after this started it really changed me ma'am so much, you can even see my mouth even turned from this side to move this side a little bit this side. Okay, I got some other thing that I can call like a growth. Ja, this side and this side plus this side at the back of my hair, here and this side at the bottom of my head. Ja, then it started to be a wound, I would go to hospital every day, I mean from Monday to Friday I was always in the hospital, I stopped my studies. I didn't study from 2009 January to June. I came back to school after June and May. ... I would like to add ma'am to this ma'am that this really affect me more than you can imagine but I'm not like a person who can try to get attention and make all the people that are here see me that this guy is already really struggling, he's really feeling painful.

Andile further explains some of the financial challenges that exacerbated his condition:

I did receive in every assistance even at school, they did help me a lot at the community they did help me a lot, too my friends, my family there, everything was helping me even there were times where I had to be absent at school and go to the doctor by the mall and at Springs Hospital there in Johannesburg. Ja, but I don't get the help that I need because the help that I need doctor, I would say that ja, even maybe if I can maybe to get something from the government, maybe every month so that ... ja, financial so that I can, when I then I can accept my disability so that when the disability starts, I can have the money to go to hospital, clinics, to get the treatment I think every time because, my mother always gives me money you see to go these doctors. My family always gives me money but they do not have the money all the time. I always get the problem every time.

Financial challenges were a constant concern for Andile and affected his ability to engage fully in his academic work. In addition, Andile found little support in the classroom. When interviewed about his worst classroom experiences, Andile responded as follows:

Andile: Hearing, when the teachers were talking and even if I do hear but I wouldn't hear it all, I wanted to end I will be like I didn't hear this.

Interviewer: So they didn't give you a scribe like somebody to read little bit louder for you in a separate room like that?

Andile: No, they did not give me.

Interviewer: But they were aware of your disability, that you have a hearing disability?

Andile: They were very aware of it.

### **6.2.2 Bongi**

Bongi is a transgender student. What created a learning need was that she was not accepted by her fellow female students who did not want her to use the female ablution facilities as she is not biologically female. The male students made her feel unsafe about using the male student ablution facilities, a situation which created challenges for her. Bongi identifies as female and dresses as such. She felt that the discrimination against her created a barrier to her learning. She was hopeful that the TVET college would become a neutral, fair and accepting institution for all students. Bongi was reticent when talking about her past experiences as these were highly stressful to her. She often preferred to ask questions in the interview, rather than respond to prompts. When asked about what made her feel comfortable in class, Bongi turned the tables on the interviewer:

Bongi: I would like you ask you a question ma'am.

Interviewer: Okay.

Bongi: What do you do to get your message, the message, across to your students?

Interviewer: Oh. I am one of those lecturers I prefer to speak one on one with my students. So I would like to ask them a question, I would like to give, them to give me their explanation and then I will also add on to theirs. And I also like to – the one on one for me is, I get to know my students personally by talking to them and they get to know me personally.

Bongi: And that makes them so comfortable around you.

Interviewer: Yes, that is very important to me that my students do feel comfortable around me. But is that then all you want to ask?

Bongi: Yes. ... As a student, you need to feel comfortable around your lecturer, talk to them one on one so that you can get to learn new students and their strengths and the weaknesses.

After the detour, Bongi did answer the question; and in a later interview she elaborated on how she could be made to feel even more included in class.

### **6.2.3 Cebo**

Cebo has limited use of his left hand. He was born with this disability and said he had learned to accept it and challenge himself daily. He felt that he could do everything by himself but the challenges he faced were clear: he struggled with the computer subjects and needed extra time during examinations. During his first year of studies, his disability status

was not recognised and extra time was not awarded. Cebo explained his challenges as follows:

First of all, I'm a slow writer, yes, so I applied for extra time but unfortunately for me I was I didn't what's best now approved, the application wasn't approved so I was struggling when it comes to time. ... I did apply for extra time because I went to the counsellor, here at college but my application is still in process. I didn't find it difficult because where with my disability because my doctor said I have a slight disability. I'm able to use my left hand a bit but the thing is when it comes to maybe to – when I'm for instance, like for a computer, I am able press to the buttons but I'm not fast, but for me to hold a thing, like a mug or anything heavy, I can't hold it by myself but the thing is when it comes to, I'm not, I think, I don't know ma'am, I don't know how to explain it to just to be more clear about what my disability is because I can do everything for myself and I'm not getting even a social disability grant for example.

Cebo was determined to continue making application in the hope that his disability would be recognised and that extra time would be allocated in his second year.

#### **6.2.4 Danie**

Danie has a hearing impairment. He never thought it was necessary to inform his teachers. He took it upon himself to sit in the front of the class but, even so, he still had trouble hearing. Danie was awaiting hearing aids. He underwent an operation on his left ear and was due for another on his right ear. He would only receive hearing aids after his operations. Over the course of the five interviews, it became clear that Danie also had a reading difficulty: he could not identify many words, even if these were changed to an easier word selection. As he explained:

It is very difficult to understand. I have a reading problems. I don't understand long words.

Danie also revealed that he did not spend much time on his studies:

I only study and do my work at college, then I need to do or to focus on something because we're going to get it in exam. If I stay at home, when we get nothing to do for a test then all I do is I go out and I go play soccer. Sometimes ... if I write [a test] on Friday, the first subject then I practise the Monday and the Tuesday for it. Number of hours ... so easily six till seven, from six till seven, and then after supper ... then I go

bath then I just go through the things again, I talk to myself about my studies and things I don't remember then I just go over it the next day. I don't use the college timetable. Because it doesn't give everything we going through in there. We always have to look from our own side what we're really going to get and not get (Danie).

#### **6.2.5 Essie**

Essie's left hand is paralyzed and she struggled when carrying her bag. It was also a challenge when she had to remove books from her bag at the beginning of each class. She indicated that her main struggle was during computer classes as she could not use both hands to type. At the time of the interview, she had not applied for extra time for the practical assessments. Essie reflected on her strengths as follows:

Well, yes, there was this time when I realised it, okay, to manage time, it's easy, it's very easy, so I don't have a problem with that. I learnt and it was good preparation for the exams. So I did progress because of during my progressing I learnt more, I learnt really more. And I feel very confident about everything. I would just like it if they can give me more time to practise in the computer lab for more research to do, I need more time or if they can arrange in a study group for the learners.

#### **6.2.6 Freda**

At the time of the interview with Freda, she had a six-year-old daughter and a heart condition. Her attendance in class was negatively affected due to doctors' appointments for herself or when her child was ill. In February 2023, a doctor conducted allergy testing on her and she was diagnosed with allergies, including an allergy to grass which gives her a rash on her arms and body. The institution has a large grass field which is regularly trimmed – and every time the grass was trimmed, this triggered her grass allergy. Getting to class on time required her to run across the grass field daily. All these challenges affected her studies but had not deterred her from continuing as she was determined to complete her studies. In her first narrative interview, Freda provided insights into her prior schooling experiences:

At my previous school, I didn't really have that much help from the teachers. The teachers were absent or they would kick us out of class, and when we used to get our assessments, we weren't explained properly, fully about the assessment, so we basically had to run around on our own and figure things out. ... We never get a thorough explanation and we had to hand in, we had to submit, two days after we actually received the assessment [task]. Maybe, just to give us more days to work on our assessments. I was thinking like explain it a bit more, go into detail. Help us out

as the teachers could, so that we could actually get good marks for that assessment, but we didn't have good marks then.

### **6.3 Narrative analysis of student interviews**

Narrative analysis differs from other qualitative analysis methods in that it attempts to keep the individual narratives intact. In many coding methods, it is common to split participants' interviews into smaller segments and group them by theme. This breaks up the individual's personal narrative and defeats the purpose of identifying the individual stories holistically (Reissman, 1993). For this reason, the students' narratives were initially presented individually (see above) before they were subjected to a narrative analysis (see below), all the while trying to maintain the integrity of the individual students' stories and voices.

#### **6.3.1 Structures within the narratives**

In Section 6.2 (above), the content of the students' individual narratives was described. Now, in this section, the ways in which the students told their stories are explored in greater detail. The overarching theme or idea of the narrative that the students wanted to convey was their experience of assessment, particularly formative assessment. Each student had very different experiences; but, by identifying the structural elements in the student narratives, common features started to emerge, including elements of thematic coherence.

##### *Students as narrators*

The students told their own stories as first-person narrators. They were invited to share their experiences of assessment through open-ended questions such as, "Please tell me about your experience of assessment at your precious school". Additional prompts, such as, "How did you feel before the test?" shifted the participants from more formal descriptions into "storytelling" mode. Each narrator had a different style of storytelling. Some, like Danie, were more action-orientated; others, like Essie, were more descriptive; while yet others focused on the sequence of events, as in Andile's case:

This problem started back in 2008 and 2009. Before that, from the early 2000s in my life to 2005, 6 and 7, I was really a clever child at school ... but then after this started it really changed me so much (Andile).

Some students, like Freda and Bonggi, took the opportunity to reflect on their assessment journeys. Bonggi's journey took her from "nervousness" to "relief" and, finally, to actual enjoyment; she even enjoying "talking in front of the teacher and the students" (something

that many students would not enjoy). Some students chose a “confessional” style, taking the interviewer into their confidence, like Cebo, who regretted that he “didn’t study enough”.

### *The “backstory”*

The first interviews focused on the students’ “backstories”, that is, on their prior experiences of assessment. Each student told a different kind of backstory. Some had experienced considerable challenges:

I can tell you I really struggled there at school. Not even there at school but in my whole life, I’ve always struggled (Andile).

Others, such as Cebo, “never struggled at school”, even though he was not “committed in [his] academics”. Danie also “did very well in school”. Freda wrote about uncaring teachers:

At my previous school, I didn’t really have that much help from the teachers. The teachers were absent or they would kick us out of class, and when we used to get our assessments, we weren’t explained properly, fully about the assessment, so we basically had to run around on our own and figure things out (Freda).

This backstory established the theme of Freda’s narrative, which was about neglectful and uncaring teachers and how this made her more self-reliant: “I found out more about myself, my strengths, my weaknesses”. Unlike Freda, Danie had experienced “helpful teachers”, who had assisted him:

The school I was with ... I felt very comfortable with the teacher, the way she taught us. She always had to wear a mask, but she didn’t wear a mask because of my hearing so I could read her lips to understand what she was teaching (Danie).

For some students such as Essie, assessment had been a negative experience which affected them deeply:

Exams were tough, it was rough, but to get through it, I tried my best in every exam ... assessment, nothing was worse, nothing at all was worse (Essie).

### *Encountering challenges*

The students faced the double challenge of overcoming the limitations placed on them by their disability, of learning new skills, and of addressing assessment requirements. Each student had his or her own perspective on the events and experiences associated with formative assessment. It was expected that there would be more similarities in the students' experiences of the Computer Skills course than in their backstories, as all students had tackled the same formative assessment tasks. Individuals' experiences were thus likely to share what Strömqvist and Verhoeven (2004:15) describe as "details of the thwarted attempts along the way, with some commentary on the inner states that motivate and respond to some of the events".

It was pointed out earlier that Bongji welcomed the challenge of making a presentation in front of the class; in fact, most of the students preferred an oral to a written mode of assessment, including Essie, who had good language skills. However, because she could use one hand only, she found writing and typing difficult:

It would have been easier if you were talking, like speech, like you give a speech (Essie).

Much of the potential enjoyment of formative assessment tasks was thwarted by financial constraints, as Cebo explained: "I'm very creative but I didn't have finances to buy the proper equipment". Similarly, Danie enjoyed practical formative assessment exercises but lacked the resources "to make it perfect". Essie, who also enjoyed practical assignments, explained: "The worst thing is to find material, looking all over for material, asking for people for material, so that was difficult". Students had their own unique challenges. For example, Danie described himself as "a hands-on guy" but was determined to "work harder and focus" on theory and reading tasks. Many of the students found that their lecturers mitigated the challenges by preparing them for a task, and by providing useful feedback on the task in progress.

### *Critical incidents*

In qualitative research, critical incidents are events that have an important impact on participants' growth or development (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, critical incidents refer to events that changed students' attitudes towards assessment. Most of the students had not had particularly good experiences with assessment in the past, yet most had changed their attitudes towards formative assessment over the course of their first year of study. The students' narratives were studied with a view to understanding how critical

incidents might have changed their understanding of assessment from something to be feared, towards an understanding of assessment as something useful, even enjoyable, that supported their learning and development. Andile's description provides an example of a critical incident:

What [the lecturer] is telling us is something that is really getting up to my mind and then when something gets up to my mind, you really even change whatever that was in your mind (Andile).

In Freda's case, receiving positive feedback on a creative task represented a critical incident in which she "found out that we actually are quite talented". For Bongji, a critical incident involved writing an exam and realizing that she could answer the questions, thanks to the insights provided by formative assessment:

Maybe in the exam, something happened, something that made you realize, oh wow, this is easy, because as you say you're nervous before the exam, so maybe now you start writing your exam ... and now you realize, oh my gosh, it's something that was discussed in class, so you really see that your whatever happens in class is beneficial or not beneficial or something like that, something in that line (Bongji).

For Danie, who liked to work with his hands, a critical incident involved designing a poster on the work ethic. In the course of doing this, he discovered that he could combine working with his hands while expressing his thoughts and understanding. Thus, hand work and head work could be connected, and he found that he was able to do both.

### *Students' metaphors*

The students did not use many metaphors or figures of speech in their narrative interviews (perhaps because English was not their home language). However, metaphorical language did emerge when a student felt strongly about a topic, or when the idea that the student was trying to express was very complex. The metaphors provided insights into affective aspects of the students' experiences, as well as into their aspirations. For example, Andile was passionate about sport and tried to explain why he loved sport so much:

... exercising because first, before anything else, you have to have your mind be in control, so before your mind gets in control, we have to exercise and teach your body which then destroys and then the mind will start to focus (Andile).



Because of his disability, Andile felt that his body was in control. His studies were completely dominated by the state of his health and well-being. Exercise helped him to control his body; he used the strong metaphor, “destroys”, which provides insight into his frustration. Once his body was under control, his mind could take over and he could engage more fully in learning. Although enrolled for business studies, Andile was passionate about sport. He talked about rare opportunities “to dream [his] sports dreams”.<sup>1</sup>

Freda expressed delight at receiving a workbook with exercises to work through; she described the workbook as being “like a textbook in the textbook ... it’s shorter than the textbook but easier to read through”. Cebo described the excitement of working on a collaborative creative assessment task: “the ideas were popping” and “you were giving your all”. Bonggi described a breakthrough moment in her computer studies as follows: “computers are just like cell phones!” Danie described teamwork in which students could contribute different skills, as: “we can build each other up as peers.” Cebo used alliteration to emphasize how much he disliked studying for examinations, and that it was a lonely time: “being alone working alone”. Bonggi expressed her displeasure when given an assessment, such as a test, “out of the blue”. Her choice of metaphor to describe her computer studies showed that she understood there to be something of a competition between herself and her course of study: “I’m gaining ... with my computer subject”.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000:4) explain that “a person is at once engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories”. This was particularly the case in this study as students were experiencing assessment and reliving prior assessment events – and telling stories about past and present. Coles (1989:192) explains that stories create images, myths, and metaphors that “carry moral resonance and contribute to our knowing and being known”. Coles (1989) also suggests that stories are theories, and theories help explain and interpret phenomena. In this case, stories help explain and interpret what inclusive formative assessment could comprise. The students’ stories provide college lecturers and researchers with insights into what could be done differently.

#### *The way forward: Change and progress*

The last interview provided the conclusion to students’ stories. The narratives ended with challenges overcome, and hope for future success. The students’ journeys focused on learning new knowledge and embracing new ideas, and there was progress on these fronts. In the first interview, for example, Andile explained: “I failed matric so many times, so I

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<sup>1</sup> Asa Joseph facilitated Andile’s access to career counselling.

struggled ...”; but by the last interview, he could see that “there’s a lot of change”. Reflecting on her progress, Bongi said, “I didn’t know a lot of things ... now I am happy ... I know a lot of things ... I know how to quickly type”. Essie said, “I learnt more, I learnt really more”. Freda saw herself on a trajectory towards success: “I went from 60s right up to 80s”. Students felt “more confident” (Andile), “more accepted” (Bongi) or “at home” (Cebo). In the first interview, Cebo confessed to not being “committed in my academics”; but, by the final interview, he felt that formative assessment had motivated him “to work more extra hard in my academics and be confident to write my final exams”. For Freda, formative assessment was a journey of self-discovery: “my strengths, my weaknesses and what I need to do to better myself as a person”. The need to “better” herself was a pervasive theme in her narrative, at the end of which she was able to link formative assessment with self-assessment:

We did a formative assessment task that we had to find out about the qualifications that we would need [for employment at a particular company] ... I found it helpful because I could see ... that there’s a lot of things I need to better about myself (Freda).

### 6.3.2 Comparison of the students’ narratives

Key features of student’s narratives were identified and are summarised in Table 6.1. If one reads the table lengthwise, the distinctiveness of each student is evident; but reading the table across shows that, while everyone expressed themselves distinctively, there were several similarities regarding what students found useful in formative assessment, what they found enjoyable, what their worst experiences of formative assessment were, and so on.

**Table 6.1: Comparison of key elements in students’ narratives**

<i>What was:</i>	<b>Andile</b>	<b>Bongi</b>	<b>Cebo</b>	<b>Danie</b>	<b>Essie</b>	<b>Freda</b>
<i>Useful</i>	I have a lecturer who is good at making people understand	I learned how the questions are asked and answered	questions to work on just to prepare us for the exams	I really liked to do, do something with my hands ...	Old exam papers ... because we learnt more and read and understand how the question paper had been done in the exams	Workbook - Because it’s basically like a text book in the text book. It’s shorter than the text book but easier to read through ...
<i>Enjoyable</i>	where I did pass and I did well	Class discussion; making a presentation	Languages ... because I’m very good with languages.	Poster on work ethics	Talking, like speech, like you give a speech	to find out about the qualifications that we would have to go

			... develop our creative skills			into a certain job
<i>Worst</i>	write the formative assessment without remembering anything that I studied before	getting formative assessments out of the blue	Being unprepared. I find the revision very boring.	more difficult at home because there was no-one like the teacher to explain	Assessment, nothing was worse, nothing at all was worse.	The worst thing was, the answers weren't quite clear in the text book but we did have to do some research because not all the answers were in the text book. That was the worst part of it.
<i>Impact</i>	there's a difference after the task that I saw to myself like understanding when people talk and not being afraid	I gained more knowledge. I learnt new words.	developing our leadership skills or like a teamwork skill and all that	group assessments show that we can build each other up as peers	good preparation for the exams. I did progress because of during my progressing I learnt more, I learnt really more	I went from 60s right up to 80s; I found out more about myself, my strengths, my weaknesses and what I need to do to better myself as a person.
<i>Challenge</i>	understanding when people talk	I'm very creative but I didn't have finances to buy the proper equipment.	I'm not fast	I have a reading problem. I don't understand long words.	They can give me more time to practice in the computer lab for more research to do, I need more time or if they can arrange in a study group for the learners.	It was a bit difficult to actually do the [task] on our own.
<i>Need</i>	Hearing aid, disability grant	If our teacher gave us a lot of work to do	Extra time being more committed in my academics	I would like to work more with my brain, use the brain more than using my hands, because I'm very good with my hands but with my reading and listening.	Group work ... Because in a group work you learn more. You get more information from someone else. And everyone contributes in the group	A bit more questions and be paired in groups, so we could work together
<i>Recommend</i>	when you talk to me you must not shout at me	explain to me everything I don't know, yes and give	teach us about our creative skills ... we live in	The better way to help me it was when I can sit	More adaptable assignments	give us more days to work on our assess-

	because that confuse me	me old question papers to practise.	a world that we do need money. So, we can start ... businesses ... or learn more about it	with someone who understands		ments. Explain it a bit more, go into detail
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What most students experienced as useful in formative assessment was the feedback and the explanations. This is how they developed their understanding. What they found enjoyable was more varied but, generally, a task that accommodated their strengths more than their weakness was usually enjoyed – but with an appropriate level of challenge. The students did not want easy, low-level assessment tasks. For many, their worst experience was being unprepared for assessment tasks. Formative assessment tasks impacted the students’ growth over the academic year, usually evident in an increase in their marks. The challenges experienced were varied and largely dependent on their disability – but most challenges could be solved by adapting the assessment tasks. Students’ needs were also varied: many wanted to be intellectually challenged, but they needed both financial and academic support to reach their full potential. Students provided several sensible and easily implementable recommendations – from more creative exercises and employability skills development to more individual attention and adaptable assignments.

Ndlovu (2021) notes that the use of ICT in conjunction with appropriate pedagogical approaches may provide students with the opportunity to construct their knowledge. Innovative pedagogies create opportunities for students to learn and grow (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2013). In Table 6.1 above, it was made clear that some of the students had similar experiences of the ICT Module. For example, several students stated their need for extra time in ICT assessments. However, each student had different needs: one identified that the language barrier was a big concern; another was enrolled in a course where he needed to think a lot and apply study techniques, whereas he preferred to work with his hands.

#### **6.4 Conceptual and theoretical analyses of student interviews**

For the next round of analysis, the translation device, which combines key concepts in inclusive formative assessment with the theoretical lens of the capability approach, was applied to analyse the SEN students’ narratives.

##### **6.4.1 Key concepts in inclusive formative analysis**

Students’ narratives were studied with the view to identifying their understanding of key concepts in inclusive formative assessment, such as its purposes and the principles upon

which it is founded. For the students, inclusive formative assessment was a useful tool for communication between themselves and the lecturer. The provision of feedback on the formative assessment tasks was key to evaluating students' progress and for developing and internalising processes of effective learning. The provision of written feedback is a useful way for lecturers to report on the progress of a student to the student and parent community. As Liljedahl (2010a) points out, formative assessment can potentially offer opportunities and validation, as well as monitor how one is progressing towards reaching success.

The students valued opportunities to gain extra practice in areas of difficulty, to develop metacognitive understandings on assessment strategies and sub-skills, and to have the attention of lecturers focused on them for the purpose of enhancing their learning and understanding. While the students appreciated the ways in which their lecturers had accommodated them and had developed useful and enjoyable assessment tasks, there were areas in inclusive formative assessment that they felt could be enhanced, particularly through teamwork, learning from different lecturers (i.e., not always having the same lecturer for the subject but inviting guest lecturers from industry), including more creativity in formative tasks, developing research skills, and focusing on employability and entrepreneurial skills.

The students also felt that the institution should make better provision for students with disabilities, particularly with regard to assistive technologies. Some students' disabilities made it very difficult to compete with their peers, for example, in typing speed. The standard practice is that extra time should be awarded to each student who has a doctor's letter certifying their disability. However, assistive technologies could help ensure that students with disabilities type as fast and as accurately as any other student.

The students provided many examples of the kinds of formative assessment exercises that they enjoyed, as well as those that they found challenging. The ways in which students' narratives provided additional perspectives on the purposes and principles of assessment are summarised in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2 Summary analysis of the student data**

	<b>Assessment for learning</b>	<b>Examples from students' responses</b>
<i>Purposes of inclusive formative assessment</i>	Student engagement and learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013).	"create study groups, study venues available, rotate a lecturer so that we can learn from different point of view" (Bongi).
	Feedback on understanding, process, and performance (Boud et al., 2008).	"... she'll explain over and over" (Freda).
	Metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003).	"I learned how the questions are asked and answered" (Bongi)
<i>Principles of inclusive formative assessment</i>	Authenticity and proximity (Oliver, 2015).	"teach us about our creative skills ... we live in a world that we do need money. So, we can start ... businesses ... or learn more about it" (Cebo).
	Timeous and "knowledge-rich" feedback (Tai et al., 2023).	"one day they could be busy with assessment, the next day they could be busy with another and so on" (Freda).
	Confidence building (Jili, 2022).	"... give me their attention" (Andile).
	Creativity, innovation, critical thinking (Davies & Ecclestone, 2008).	"I would like to ... use the brain more than using my hands, because I'm very good with my hands" (Danie).
	Target difficulties (Ajjawi et al., 2023).	"If our teacher gave us a lot of work to do" (Bongi).
	Flexibility and accommodation (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020).	"It would have been easier if you were talking, like speech, like you give a speech" (Essie).
	Reflection on practice (Tigelaar & Sins, 2021).	"I didn't know a lot of things ... now I am happy ... I know a lot of things ... I know how to quickly type" (Bongi).
	Align with/prepare for summative assessment (Richard et al., 2013).	"Old question papers and class discussions ... I learned how the questions are asked and answered" (Bongi).

#### **6.4.2 Capability elements of inclusive formative analysis**

With a view to determining how students' understandings of inclusive formative assessment are aligned or misaligned with the capability approach, the students' narratives were studied for concepts or ideas in this regard. The students had different challenges and different prior experiences but, despite these differences, common threads emerged across their narratives. In this section, themes identified across the narratives are synthesised, drawing on key concepts in formative assessment and in capability theory.

The students' narratives resonated with the concept of promoting mental well-being through inclusive formative assessment. Respectful feedback that upheld the student's dignity and

privacy was highly valued; but they also valued opportunities for teamwork, as this promoted their enjoyment of the task. When lecturers introduced creativity into the assessment task, this increased their enjoyment and the students' sense of mobility (that is, that they were developing skills that they could take with them beyond the classroom). The students also understood inclusive formative assessment to be contributing to their autonomy as they developed skills in learning-to-learn and in understanding more about the assessment process. Instead of feeling terror at the approaching final examinations, they began to feel empowered to tackle the challenging final year assessments. More than anything, the students valued inclusive formative assessment as a safe space for learning from mistakes.

### **6.5 Reflections on students' interviews**

In this chapter, students' narratives were analysed in three different ways. Firstly, a narrative analysis was applied to the interview data which had been collected over the period of an academic year. Secondly, the narrative data were analysed with a view to ascertaining the extent to which the students had espoused the purposes and principles of inclusive formative assessment. Finally, the translation device, based on best practices in the literature and the capability approach, was used to explore possible alignments between the students' experiences and the capability approach.

Drawing on Fornauf and Erickson's (2020) application of universal design to education, inclusive formative assessment would: 1) serve all students equally; 2) offer accommodations for a variety of learning needs; 3) be straightforward and intuitive; 4) be understandable to all students, regardless of their sensory abilities; 5) would see making mistakes as a part of learning; 6) would not make demands on students beyond their capacities or resources; and 7) the learning environment in which formative assessment takes place would accommodate all students' needs. While, in some countries, inclusive education is thought of as an approach that serves learners with disabilities within a general education setting, inclusive education is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006:231). In this study, the students had practically no accommodations; in addition they had to deal with attitudinal barriers while their learning was facilitated by lecturers who, although well-intentioned, had limited knowledge of disability or accommodations. Considering the progress made by the students over the course of the year, I can only imagine what they might have attained with proper accommodations, assistive technologies, accessible learning, and adequate resources.

The insights arising from the analysis of students' experiences and reflections are taken up in the next chapter to put forward proposals, based on the literature, capability theory, and this empirical study, towards a framework for inclusive formative assessment to guide lecturers and service providers.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **WHAT STUDENTS' NARRATIVES TELL US ABOUT INCLUSIVE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

#### **7.1 Introduction to the chapter**

The next section (7.2) provides a brief summary of this study titled, 'Narratives of Success and Challenge: The Formative Assessment Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Vocational Education'. Section 7.3 considers the empirical basis that the study offers towards building a framework for inclusive formative assessment. In the final section (7.4), which concludes the study, an emerging pedagogy of inclusive formative assessment is offered as the main contribution to knowledge.

#### **7.2 Summary of the research study**

This study set out to address this research question: What can we learn about inclusive formative assessment from the experiences of students with disabilities? Curriculum documents were studied to establish the context in which formative assessment took place. The views of TVET lecturers who taught on the ICT Module were elicited for the purpose of understanding their practices with regard to formative assessment – as well as the extent to which their practices were changing towards more inclusive forms of assessment. Students' experiences of assessment practices were elicited through narrative interviews over an academic year in order to understand their experiences of formative assessment and their suggestions for a more inclusive approach to formative assessment. The aim of this research study was to build knowledge on inclusive formative assessment through an examination of the experiences of success and challenge around formative assessment, as narrated by students with disabilities. In the process, it was also intended to enhance participants' educational success and work-preparedness. Students' narratives assisted me to reframe formative assessment for educational well-being and work-preparedness in a more inclusive way. A framework emerged from the study which could assist lecturers in conceptualizing and operationalizing inclusive formative assessment in a TVET context. Based on empirical evidence from students with disabilities (whose voices are too seldom heard in educational research), reputable research literature, and the lens of capability theory, the emerging framework for inclusive formative assessment has the potential to assist both academic and support staff to reconsider formative assessment processes and activities for the benefit all students during their studies, and beyond. Using an inclusive formative assessment approach in vocational education programmes will help to safeguard students with disabilities from being disadvantaged by assessment practices.

The findings show that students with disabilities particularly valued formative assessment tasks that combined learning with preparation for working life, or for life beyond the college, such as tasks that incorporated skills development for employability or entrepreneurship. These combinations provided students with opportunities to showcase their strengths, as well as develop in areas of weakness. Above all, students appreciated teachers who understood their challenges and could adapt assessment tasks to their particular circumstances. The students had overcome many barriers to learning and wanted to help others; they felt that they could be role models and mentors, not only for students with disabilities, but for all students.

The study contributes to an understanding of inclusive vocational education from the perspective of students with disabilities, in particular the role that inclusive formative assessment can play in preparing students for learning in and beyond the college.

### **7.3 Towards a framework for inclusive formative assessment**

The students experienced different challenges and drew on different prior experiences; but despite these differences, common threads emerged across their narratives. In this section, themes across the narratives are synthesized, drawing on key concepts in formative assessment and in capability theory.

#### **7.3.1 Engagement and flexibility**

Some assessment tasks required adaptation for students to engage fully with them. Most students would have liked to see more flexibility in the assessment requirements: for some, this meant presenting their knowledge orally, including a practical element in an assignment, having extra time, or sharing the workload through a group task.

#### **7.3.2 Respectful and thorough feedback**

Students understood the importance of good relationships with their lecturers, whose inputs they valued. Cebo explained that being given an assignment adapted to his needs made him feel “more accepted”, confident and motivated. Andile similarly explained that, when lecturers gave him “attention”, he was motivated to work harder and improve, but he needed to receive feedback in a respectful way:

... when you talk to me you must not shout at me because that confuses me ... here I've never been shouted at, it's always good, even if I'm wrong, lecturers talk nicely (Andile).

Imagining herself as a lecturer in a context of diversity, Freda offered the following suggestion:

I would give [the class] an assessment where they would work in groups and find out more about each other's circumstances, so that they can have experience of each other's lives and they could understand and respect others' cultures and religions (Freda).

### **7.3.3 Understanding and transferring formative assessment knowledge**

The students were only able to engage fully with an assessment task, or tackle similar tasks in other contexts, when they understood the requirements. Students needed to develop a metacognitive understanding of assessment, expressed by Bongi as: "I learned how questions are asked and answered".

### **7.3.4 Authentic, proximal, and contextual**

Seeing the connection between a task and the kinds of work they were being prepared for, such as a task such that required them to interview an office manager, linked students to the world of work. Students requested more tasks that were aligned with the world of work, and that brought industry-based lecturers into the classroom so they could benefit from their perspectives.

### **7.3.5 Time to prepare and timeous feedback**

Students explained that, because of their specific challenges, having an assessment task sprung on them (even a formative assessment that did not count towards marks) was highly stressful. The students were often given extra time to complete assessment tasks, time which they greatly appreciated; however, they also felt that they needed sufficient time to prepare for formative assessments. Students valued timeous feedback so that they could learn from a task effectively.

### **7.3.6 Building confidence through enjoyment, and hard work**

Across the interviews, the students welcomed opportunities to improve their skills and to tackle difficult tasks, particularly when they saw the link between the formative assessment task and workplace practices. For the students, hard work did not conflict with enjoyment, particularly when teamwork was involved.

### **7.3.7 Creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and fun**

Students enjoyed formative assessment tasks that included creativity and innovation as they felt that these tasks prepared them for the world of work, and for entrepreneurial activities.

### **7.3.8 Targeting difficulties in a safe space**

Students welcomed challenges as they saw formative assessment as a safe space. While easier tasks had built their confidence, they wanted tasks that challenged them and gave them opportunities to practise the kinds of skills that they knew would be desirable in employment.

### **7.3.9 Constructive reflection on practice**

Formative assessment was an opportunity to reflect on the progress that they had made over the course of their studies, sometimes by increases in the marks awarded, growing confidence, or by helping others. Andile, for example, reflected on how he had progressed sufficiently to assist his classmates: “people there were getting help from me and they did pass”.

### **7.3.10 Alignment with examinations, and beyond**

The students had been given some old exam papers to work through in preparation for the final examination. Several students found this useful, although the literature suggests that dependency on having “the answers” provided could encourage rote-learning (e.g., Davies & Ecclestone, 2008). Freda implies in the following statement that she wanted clarity in the answers provided:

The worst thing was the answers weren't quite clear in the textbook so we did have to do some research because not all the answers were in the text book. That was the worst part of it (Freda).

Also, while clear and correct answers are useful, in this case, having incomplete information in textbooks prompted Freda to do her own research. Davies and Ecclestone (2008:75) point out that the culture of providing old examination papers and other readymade ‘answers’ can foster formative assessment that leads to instrumental learning in place of “deeper forms of learning”. Not all the students welcomed rote learning:

Sometimes – for I will just speak for myself – sometimes, revisions, I find the revision very boring because the reason why I'm saying it's boring is you might find that you're

doing well and again you are given the same questions ... I find it boring to do the same thing over and over again (Cebo).

The analysis of students' narratives on formative assessment, and synthesis of themes, seen through the concepts of formative assessment and the lens of capability theory, resulted in an emerging framework for inclusive formative assessment (see Table 7.1).

**TABLE 7.1 An emerging framework for inclusive formative assessment**

<b>Elements of formative assessment</b>	<b>Concepts and best practices (from the literature)</b>	<b>Capabilities</b>	<b>Examples from the students' narratives</b>
Purposes of formative assessment	Student engagement and learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013).	Participation	"I feel like I'm more accepted now ... it gives me confidence in fact it boosts my motivation to work more extra hard in my academics and be confident to write my final exams" (Cebo).
	Feedback on understanding, process, and performance (Boud et al., 2008).	Respect	"I've improved because the lecturers explain very thoroughly and it's very helpful ... and if we do not understand, we could always ask and she'll explain over and over" (Freda).
	Metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003).	Autonomy, mobility	"I learned how questions are asked and answered" (Bongi).
Principles of formative assessment for inclusivity	Authenticity and proximity (Oliver, 2015).	Autonomy, mobility	"We live in a world that we do need money. So we can start ... businesses ... so teach us more about it" (Cebo).
	Timeous and "knowledge-rich" feedback (Tai et al., 2022).	Respect	"We got the [ICT Module] work back which is very helpful because it made our notes easier for us" (Freda).
	Confidence building (Jili, 2022).	Enjoyment	"Very confident because I have grown a lot in my work ... they can give me more time to practise in the computer lab for more research to do, I need more time or if they can arrange in a study group for the learners" (Essie).
	Creativity, innovation, critical thinking (Davies & Ecclestone, 2008).	Enjoyment	"A poster [on work ethic] as I like to work with my hands, and it tested my creativeness" (Danie).
	Target difficulties (Ajjawi et al., 2023).	Safety	"I would like to work more with my brain, use the brain more than using my hands, because I'm very good with my hands but with my reading and listening ..." (Danie)
	Reflection on practice	Mental well-	"So I had to change and understand

	(Tigelaar & Sins, 2021).	being	this new form of assessment which is sometimes it's good" (Andile).
	Align with/preparation for summative assessment (Richard et al., 2013).	Autonomy, mobility	"... to find out about the qualifications that we would have to go into a certain job" (Essie).

The framework invites a rethinking of formative assessment through the experiences of students with disabilities. The framework is grounded both in well-established principles of formative assessment and the promotion of what capability theory calls human "functionings" (Sen, 2009). Ajjawi et al. (2023:1) point out that, while a generic model of best-practices in formative assessment is useful, not all students should be assessed "in the same ways or in the same circumstances", neither should they "be penalised for reasons beyond their ability to do so". The framework that emerged from the study contributes a "universal design" approach (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020) for inclusive formative assessment for the purpose of enhancing learning and well-being amongst all students.

#### **7.4 Conclusion: An emerging pedagogy of inclusive formative assessment**

Students' narratives assisted me to reframe formative assessment for educational well-being and work-preparedness in a more inclusive way. From the study, a framework emerged which could assist college lecturers in conceptualizing and operationalizing inclusive formative assessment in vocational education. Based on empirical evidence from students with disabilities, reputable literature, and the lens of capability theory, the emerging framework for inclusive formative assessment has the potential to assist academic and support staff to reconsider formative assessment processes and activities for the benefit of all students during their studies, and beyond. Using an inclusive formative assessment approach in professional education programmes will help to safeguard students with disabilities from being disadvantaged by assessment practices.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

##### **Informed Consent for Students to Participate in a Research Study**

“Narratives of Success and Challenge: The Formative Assessment Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs in Vocational Education”

M Ed Candidate: Mrs Asa Joseph (Ahmed), Faculty of Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology  
M Ed Supervisor: Professor Christine Winberg, Professional Education Research Institute, Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Dear [Name]

##### **Purpose of the study**

I am inviting you to be part of my research study on inclusive formative assessment. Formative assessment is about doing classwork, exercises and short tests that are usually not for marks. I will also contact your parents/caregivers to obtain their consent to your participation in the study. I plan to ask ten students with special educational needs to participate in this research project. This study is supported by the Department of Higher Education and Training’s Technical and Vocational Education and Training Directorate.

##### **Your participation**

If you agree to be part of this study, and your parents/caregivers give permission, I will ask you to tell me about your experiences with doing assignments for your subjects, taking practical tests and other short tests. I would like to interview you about five times over a one-year period. Each interview will take about 30 minutes. I ask your permission to audio record the interview, but you can still be part of the study if you don’t want me to record your interview(s).

##### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Even if your parents/caregivers give permission for your participation, the decision is yours. You may also change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You may also choose not to answer a question for any reason.

##### **Benefits**

You will benefit from the study by improving your skills in formative assessment and by engaging in exciting assessment tasks. Your participation will help the college to develop better formative assessment exercises and experiences. Even if you do not receive a direct benefit from participating, other students with special educational needs may benefit from the knowledge obtained in this study.

**Possible risks**

Answering questions about being assessed may be uncomfortable. You can choose not to answer a question, or you may stop at any time. Just tell the interviewer you want to stop.

**Compensation**

There is no payment for participating in the study. I will make sure that you have some refreshments at the interview. If the interview takes place after college hours, I will arrange transport to take you safely home.

**Confidentiality**

My supervisor and I intend to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you or your family members. To keep your information safe, the recordings of your interviews will be placed in a secure site on the CPUT website, where only my supervisor and I can listen to it. When a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created, the audio files will be destroyed. The researchers will enter study data on a secure university server. To protect confidentiality, your real name and any family member’s name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. We may use or share your research information for future research studies. If we share your information with other researchers, it will be anonymised, which means that it will not contain your name or other information that can identify you.

**Contact information**

If you have questions about this research, please contact me, Mrs Asa Joseph (Ahmed), at this email address: [ahahmed@northlink.co.za](mailto:ahahmed@northlink.co.za), or telephone: (021) 931 8238.

With thanks

Asa Joseph (Ahmed)

**Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. I will give you a copy of this document and I will keep a copy for my study records. Be sure that we have answered your questions about the study and you understand what you are being asked to do. You are welcome to contact me if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

*I agree to have my interviews audiotaped.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

### CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY PARENTAL/CAREGIVER CONSENT

#### 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

“Narratives of Success and Challenge: The Formative Assessment Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs in Vocational Education”

**M Ed Candidate:** Mrs Asa Joseph (Ahmed), Faculty of Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology

**M Ed Supervisor:** Professor Christine Winberg, Professional Education Research Institute, Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Dear .....

I would like to invite [Name] to take part in a research study on inclusive formative assessment. Please read the information below as it will help you decide whether to give your consent to [Name] to be a participant in my study.

- The purpose of the study is to improve practices in inclusive formative assessment.
- If you choose to let [Name] participate, I will invite [him/her] to about five interviews of approximately 30 minutes over the course of the academic year to discuss experiences of assessment in college.
- I will do my best to ensure that [Name] feels comfortable and safe during the interviews.
- The direct benefits of [Name’s] participation are to develop skills in assessment and to participate in innovative assessment exercises.
- Additional benefits are to learn more about assessment so as to benefit other students with SEN at college.

[Name’s] participation in my research project is voluntary and you do not have to agree to his/her participation. You can also withdraw his/her participation at any time.

#### 2. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to improve inclusive formative assessment at TVET colleges in South Africa for the benefit of students with SEN, as well as for the benefit of all TVET students, as research has shown that all students benefit from inclusive formative assessment practices.

### **3. WHO IS TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

**3.1 Who can take part in this study?** This study is open to students with SEN who are enrolled at a TVET College to study Office Management.

**3.2 How many students will take part in the study?**

Approximately ten students with SEN will take part in the study.

### **4. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY**

**4.1 What will happen to [Name] in this study?**

After [Name] has completed a formative assessment exercise, I will invite [him/her] to an interview, during a break, over lunch, or after school, to discuss their experience of being assessed. I will also ask them how the assessment task could be improved and what their preferences for assessment are – such as if they prefer written or oral assessments, or if they feel self-assessment and peer assessment are useful.

**4.2 How much of [Name's] time will be necessary for the study?**

I expect to conduct approximately five interviews of 30 minutes, which is 2 ½ hours over the course of an academic year.

**4.2.1 When will my [Name's] participation end?**

The research project will end after the five interviews have been conducted, which will take 6–9 months from the start of the study.

### **5. BENEFITS AND RISKS OF THE STUDY**

**5.1 Are there any risks to [Name] if s/he takes part in the study?**

I will do my best to ensure that [Name] feels comfortable and safe during the interviews. Because this study collects information about [Name], a risk is about confidentiality. I will protect [Name's] confidentiality and privacy. For example, all interview data will be securely stored and [Name's] first name and surname will not be revealed. No private information will be revealed.

**5.2 How could [Name] or other students with SEN benefit from the study?**

[Name] will benefit from the study by learning useful strategies for assessment, and for engaging in innovative assessment exercises. This study will help to change formative assessment practices at the college and make them more inclusive for all students.

### **6. WITHDRAWING FROM THE STUDY**

**6.1 If I don't want [Name] to continue with the study what should I do?**

[Name] is free to leave the study at any time. If [Name] leaves the study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you or [Name].

### **7. NO PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

**7.1 Will there be any payment for taking part in this study?**

There is no financial incentive to take part in the study. I will make sure that [Name] is provided with refreshments during interview. If the interview takes place after college hours, I will provide transport to get [him/her] back home safely.

## 8. PROTECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION

### 8.1 How will [Name's] personal information be protected?

With [Name's] permission, I will audio-record the interviews. The audio files will be securely stored on the Cape Peninsula University of Technology's server and protected by passwords and other security measures. The interviews will be transcribed. Once the transcriptions have been done, the audio files will be destroyed. The transcripts will be anonymised and will contain no information to identify [Name].

### 8.2 Who will have access to [Name's] information?

Only my research supervisor and I will have access to the interview transcripts.

### 8.3 What will happen to [Name's] interview information?

The interviews (with all personal information removed) will be an important part of my M Ed thesis, and will also be used in publications – but no information that identifies [Name] will be used.

### 8.4 Will [Name's] information be used in any other way?

We may use or share the anonymous transcripts, that is, the written copies of the interviews, with all of [Name's] personal information removed.

## 9. CONTACT DETAILS

Please contact me or my supervisor if you would like to:

- Have more information about my M Ed study;
- Ask any questions about the meetings and transport arrangements;
- Address problems/concerns;
- Withdraw [Name] from the study before it is completed;

**Researcher:** Mrs Asa Joseph (Ahmed)

**Email:** aahmed@northlink.co.za

**Phone:** (021) 931 8238

**Supervisor:** Professor Christine Winberg

**Email:** winbergc@cput.ac.za

**Phone:** (021) 959 6556

With thanks

Asa Joseph (Ahmed)

## 10. PARENTAL/CAREGIVER CONSENT

### Parental/Caregiver's Permission

By signing this document, you agree to [Name's] participation in this study. Please make sure you understand what my study is about before you sign below. I will give you a copy of this document and I will keep a copy for my study records. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me or my supervisor at our contact addresses above.

*I understand what the study is about and I give my permission for [Name] to take part in this study.*

---

Print Parent/Caregiver Name

---

Signature

---

Date



## APPENDIX C

### CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

#### **Informed Consent for TVET Lecturers to Participate in a Research Study**

“Narratives of Success and Challenge: The Formative Assessment Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs in Vocational Education”

M Ed Candidate: Mrs Asa Joseph (Ahmed), Faculty of Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology

M Ed Supervisor: Professor Christine Winberg, Professional Education Research Institute, Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Dear [Name]

#### **Purpose of the study**

I am inviting you to be part of my research study on inclusive formative assessment. Formative assessment is about doing classwork, exercises and short tests that are usually not for marks. This study is supported by the Department of Higher Education and Training’s Technical and Vocational Education and Training Directorate.

#### **Your participation**

If you agree to be part of this study, I will ask you to participate in a focus group interview, either on campus or via MS Teams, depending on restrictions in place. The focus group interview will take about 30 to 40 minutes. I ask your permission to audio record the interview, but you can still be part of the study if you don’t want me to record the interview.

#### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may also change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You may also choose not to answer a question for any reason.

#### **Benefits**

You will benefit from the study by finding out more about formative assessment. Your participation will help the college to develop better formative assessment exercises and experiences. Even if you do not receive a direct benefit from participating, students with special educational needs may benefit from the knowledge obtained in this study.

#### **Possible risks**

Answering questions about your practices may be uncomfortable. You can choose not to answer a question, or you may stop at any time. Just tell the interviewer you want to stop.

#### **Compensation**

There is no payment for participating in the study. I will make sure that you have some refreshments at the interview if it is on site.

**Confidentiality**

My supervisor and I intend to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you or your family members. To keep your information safe, the audiotape of the focus group interview will be placed in a secure site on the CPU website, where only my supervisor and I can listen to it. When a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created, the audio files will be destroyed. The researchers will enter study data on a secure university server. To protect confidentiality, your real name and any family member’s name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. We may use or share your research information for future research studies. If we share your information with other researchers, it will be anonymized, which means that it will not contain your name or other information that can identify you.

**Contact information**

If you have questions about this research, please contact me, Mrs Asa Joseph (Ahmed), at this email address: [aaahmed@northlink.co.za](mailto:aaahmed@northlink.co.za), or telephone: (021) 931 8238.

With thanks

Asa Joseph (Ahmed)

**Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. I will give you a copy of this document and I will keep a copy for my study records. Be sure that we have answered your questions about the study and you understand what you are being asked to do. You are welcome to contact me if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

*I agree to have my interviews audiotaped.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR SEN STUDENTS

#### Interview 1: Prior history of assessment/formative assessment

- Please tell me about your experiences of assessment at your previous school.  
*Prompt: how did you feel before/after an assessment task?*  
*Prompt: do you have any special stories/memories about writing tests or doing a project?*
- What was the worst thing about assessment at school?
- Was there anything that you enjoyed about assessment at school?
- What would have improved your experience of assessment?
- Would you like to add anything, or ask me any questions?

#### Interview 2: Experiences of formative assessment at the TVET college

- What formative assessment tasks (i.e., not for marks) have you been given?
- Did you find these tasks helpful/not helpful?
  - Prompts in which ways? Why?
- What was the worst thing about formative assessment?
- Was there anything that you enjoyed about formative assessment?
- What would have improved your experience of assessment?
- Would you like to add anything, or ask me any questions?

#### Interview 3<sup>2</sup>: Experiences of a theoretical assessment task

- Could you tell me about a formative assessment task in [Subject Name] that you did recently?
- Did you find these tasks helpful/not helpful?  
*Prompts in which ways? Why?*
- What was the worst thing about the formative assessment task?
- Was there anything that you enjoyed about formative assessment?
- If you were in charge of assessment, what exercise would you give the students to do to help them learn in [Subject Name]?  
*Prompt: why? In which ways would your ideas be better?*
- Would you like to add anything, or ask me any questions?

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<sup>2</sup> Interview 3 could be repeated, depending on the quality of the data.

### **Interview 4<sup>3</sup>: Experiences of a practical assessment task**

- Could you tell me about a formative assessment task in [Subject Name] that you did recently?
- Did you find these tasks helpful/not helpful?  
*Prompts in which ways? Why?*
- What was the worst thing about the practical [formative assessment] task?
- Was there anything that you enjoyed about the practical?
- If you could change something about the practical task, what would it be?  
*Prompts: Why? Why would it be better?*
- Would you like to add anything, or ask me any questions?

### **Interview 5: Reflections on assessment and the way forward**

- If you think back over the formative assessment tasks, which were helpful and which were not helpful?
- Do you think you have progressed in your learning over the year?
- Do you feel more or less confident about assessment?
- What do you think the college should do to improve assessment practices?
- What kinds of assessment would suit you and show your capabilities?
- Do you think all the students would benefit from your ideas on assessment?
- Would you like to add anything, or ask me any questions?

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<sup>3</sup> Interview 4 could be repeated, depending on the quality of the data.

## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR TVET LECTURERS

**Welcome** participants and make introductions, if necessary – explain the interview format, request signatures on consent forms and request permission to record the interview.

Explain that the questions are about formative assessment. Explain briefly what formative assessment is (i.e., to help with learning, not for marks or for a low class participation mark, etc.). Explain there are FIVE questions, everyone is invited to give their opinion – there are no “wrong” answers ....

1. Your assessment guides, recommend several formative exercises (ICASS) that students should do. Could you please give me your understandings on what the **purposes** of these formative assessment tasks are?
  - Are they helpful?
  - Do you find that students are engaged?
  - Are there too many/too few formative tasks?
  
2. In summative assessment such as examinations, there are **principles** – such as we don't test students on work not yet done, we must ensure fairness, reliability, validity
  - Do you think there are specific principles that guide formative assessment?
  - Do you think the principles for summative and formative are the same/different? Why?
  
3. Could you describe how you go about **designing and implementing** a formative assessment task?
  - Do you use the Subject Guide/Assessment Guide?
  - Textbooks?
  - Other documents?
  - Own creativity?
  
4. Are there any specific **guidelines** that you follow with students with disabilities?
  - What is your understanding of inclusive education?
  - From curriculum or other documents?
  - Does the student need extra time/help?
  -
  
5. Could you provide any recent **examples** of assessment tasks that you set for students (including students with disabilities)?
  - What the focus of the task?
  - How was feedback given to the student?

6. Is there anything else about assessment and students with disabilities that you would like to share?

**Thank** participants for their time and inform them that they will be send anonymised transcripts to check before these are used in my study.

## APPENDIX F

### ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

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**HEALTH AND WELLNESS SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HWS-REC)**  
Registration Number NHREC: REC- 230408-014

P.O. Box 1906 • Bellville 7535 South Africa  
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22 April 2022  
*REC Approval Reference No:*  
*CPUT/HWS-REC 2022/S4*

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Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences

Dear Ms Asa Ahmed Joseph

**Re: APPLICATION TO THE HWS-REC FOR ETHICS CLEARANCE**

Approval was granted by the Health and Wellness Sciences-REC to Ms A.A Joseph for ethical clearance. This approval is for research activities related to research for Ms A.A Joseph at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

**TITLE:** Narratives of success and challenge: The formative assessment experiences of students with special educational needs in vocational education

**Supervisor:** Prof Christine Winberg

**Comment:**

**Approval will not extend beyond 22 April 2023.** An extension should be applied for 6 weeks before this expiry date should data collection and use/analysis of data, information and/or samples for this study continue beyond this date.

The investigator(s) should understand the ethical conditions under which they are authorized to carry out this study and they should be compliant to these conditions. It is required that the investigator(s) complete an **annual progress report** that should be submitted to the HWS-REC in December of that particular year, for the HWS-REC to be kept informed of the progress and of any problems you may have encountered.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carolynn'.

Carolynn Lackay  
**Chairperson – Research Ethics Committee**  
Faculty of Health and Wellness Sciences

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