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RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

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The Difficulties Student Teachers Face When Researching their Own Teaching Practices
Using Action Research.

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Introduction

What is the portfolio and what are its purposes? I must define the portfolio as a summative document bearing the valuable experiences learned in a particular course of study. In this context, portfolio can be viewed as a selective entity that represents the level of learning, in terms of academic/professional growth and development, attained in one's participation in a particular course of study such as this Master one I have been attending. Portfolio can be educationally utilized to reflect and evaluate one's learning. As one goes throughout paging, one locates the level of learning achieved in terms of anticipated knowledge, understanding, and experiences, skills and attitudes or overly learning competencies. The level of development one has gone through in attempts to respond to the expected learning outcomes surface out more easily. And if further learning be conducted, the portfolio must as well shows the ways ahead. With these few words, I have attempted to present the portfolio as a useful tool that represents the level of advancement attained in learning. This portfolio comprises of my educational partaking in Rhodes University 's master program (theory and practice, in particular what and how I have gained from that program participation. It may also present what I could not learn.

The arrangement of the portfolio contents assumes a progressive procession, being structured in terms of the assignments taken. There are five pieces of assignments in this research portfolio. The first assignment is a contextual analysis of the Education Theory and Practice (ETP) curriculum of our current teacher education program, namely Basic Education Teachers' Diploma. It looks at the theoretical framework that informs and shapes everyday teaching and learning practices, particularly the degree to which we have been able to implement the theoretical perspectives into operational practices. To this is how our college is equipped with the technologies necessary for possible practices of the curriculum. The other emphasis focuses at the historical backgrounds that necessitated the undertaking of the BETD as an instrument of reforming and transforming the basic education rightly at the independence. The other area is on the question of how the curriculum or program intakers, the entering students, have been prepared to consume the curriculum program. Since the program has been as well designed to address and meet the four major national goals of education for all, another part has been focused on these goals so far as to locate the degree of attainment.

The second assignment is about contrasting and comparing the two main held dominant worldwide views of knowledge- namely behaviorism and constructivism. Each branch of knowledge is looked at firstly with particular attentions paid to its own individual versions of knowledge and its development and acquisition. The other focuses examine which base seems to offer better explanations of what knowledge is and how it can best be constructed and acquired in any educational setting.

The third assignment is that of literature review. I have chosen action as an area that I would be interested in exploring much further. Action research is what eventually became a part of my research proposal in which I would research on how our college students carry out their action research projects to examine their own classroom makings. It has been therefore important to read what others have written about this field and locate the lessons that can be illuminated on our own curriculum context.

The literature review paves the way to the research proposal. The research proposal or a research plan as I would often call it, sets the context, purpose, theoretical position and information gathering methods under which the research process will take place. The research proposal has thus been the navigating compass despite the that realities as the practical journey itself took off some deviation unavoidably came in as necessitated by the underlying research process itself. The research proposal finally accumulates into the sought, the final assignment. A critical view illustrates that this piece is actually another contextual inquiry like the first work only that this is viewing our supposed curriculum outcomes: our students, our products and how they have been equipped to carry out the research. Their research, with its successes and shortcomings, I have concluded, firmly serves to reflect the kind of education delivered from our teacher colleges. The portfolio contents also demonstrate the course orientation: focusing on one's professional field.

At end, I see this research portfolio as myself, a mirror that reflects my academic and professional participation in Rhodes University's world and its vision and mission expresses in the theme of *where leaders learn*. It thus represents the personal, academic and development accomplished throughout this Masters' course. In the other way around, I see it as reflecting what Rhodes can offer as from when the prestigious Augustana College, my American institution, has prepared after its boundaries.

The Difficulties Student Teachers Face When Researching Their Own Teaching Practices Using Action Research

Abstract

Research has always been central to any tertiary learning program. Since the inception of the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) in early 1993, the participatory classroom oriented action research has been adopted as a reflective practice in which student teachers must actively engage themselves during their third year School Based Studies (SBS) (Mayumbelo and Nyambe 1999: 65). Acting as both teacher researchers and reflective practitioners, students utilize action research as an instrument for addressing the problematic teaching/learning situations that make it impossible for the learners to learn more effectively. The intervention serves the purpose of assisting to overcome the learning problems which are stumbling blocks towards attaining expected competencies.

The key to the success of this research lies within the researchers' abilities to detect the problematic situations, defining them and their effects on learners' school progress or achievement, locating the possible causes of the problems and the strategies which can be assumed at resolving the problems. Dicker (1992: 13) would argue that such engagement demands students to develop a language of demystification by becoming critical about their own pedagogical practices, their understanding of these practices and about the school setting in which these practices are carried out. In addition, students need to examine ways in which learners are responding to their remedial actions. Remedial efforts are in light of doing justice to the learners in anticipation of addressing their learning needs, concerns and problems.

In the context of curriculum implementation, a series of questions remain. Are our student teachers well prepared to do just that? How do they go about researching their own teaching practices using action research? Are the action research projects becoming tools of making differences in the academic lives of the learners? These questions of grave concern are the focal points in this paper. This paper, therefore, pursues a critical and analytical look at the action research projects currently undertaken by our student teachers. It aims to establish the extents to which research creates the dynamic opportunities for teacher training, development

and empowerment, and for better balanced exploration, the focus is on both the strengths and shortcomings student teachers meet in conducting the research. While the BETD program remains in a reviewing stage, the exploration is worthwhile in developing future insights as to how the action research can be presented in order to produce future teachers who are excellently grounded in the whats, hows and whys of good teaching. The lessons drawn can also be worthwhile in stimulating great awareness of action research in a way that further expertise regarding research skills can be developed. The exploration is again of great significance towards the reform and transformation process, especially in the context of providing remedial education to the struggling needy learners in our schools.

Introduction

The paper initiates a critical look at how our student teachers carry out their action research component of BETD program. The paper is process-centered, that it is organized into various parts. The first is an abstract which offers the prospective reviewing mirror on the entire work. The second part explains the research paradigm selected to lead the research process. This part also provides the theoretical perspective which informs the undertaking of the research endeavor and how such individual perspectives correspond to the frame of reference chosen to drive the research process. This part ought to stipulate the kinds of roles envisaged for the research participants.

The third part explains the data collecting tools used, particularly the rationale for selections, the positions of utilization, the theoretical and practical contexts in which they are utilized and possibly the limitations of such utilizations. This is followed by the data analysis part which provides both the epistemological ground under which the information is interpreted or simply judged and the patterns of focus under which critical analysis is conducted. This also presents my personal experiences as a researcher.

The fifth part is the heart of the work presenting the research contents and findings of the research. It exposes the research setting, the participants and the roles they play in the research. The areas of focus are thereafter become more clear often in forms of sub-topics. The structure

is therefore organized into various points or steps students have undergone through while researching their own practices. The last part of the paper is a critical analysis of the findings. Like the other parts, it is segmented into sub-headings for a better-focused analysis.

Research Paradigm

This is a qualitative research design taking place through the theoretical framework of interpretive which is appropriate to its nature and practice. Cresswell (1994: 161- 162) indicates that the intent of research within this paradigm is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction. The occurring process and its outcomes are both important to the researcher. The process becomes an investigative one in which the researcher gradually attempts to make sense of the social phenomena by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloging and classifying the objects of study. Cresswell states that it requires the researcher to totally immerse himself in the everyday life events of the setting where the study is conducted. Through immersion the researcher enters informants' world and due to close ongoing interactions, seeks the informants' perspectives and meanings. The researcher' roles, according to Keirkejaard (2002: 2) then that of constructing meanings which individual participants illuminate on the particular occurrences and the contexts in which these occurrences occur. The focal point is basically of understanding and interpreting how things occur but Cresswell urges against generalizations.

The interpretive paradigm is chosen to lead this research. It explicitly appeals to the practice of action research which involves analyzing the contexts in which the individual student teaches are carrying out their educational practices. The participatory collaborative nature of the action research is also keeping with the selected paradigm. The interpretive framework further articulates the kind of research process to be followed and the roles various participants can assume. Lastly, the interpretive paradigm concurs with the research purpose of establishing meanings of the action research process and practices in which student researchers are involved. The concentration is on identifying possible strengths and weaknesses students are facing in order to be able to understand what they do, how they do and what can be done for

better improved educational outcomes. Therefore, the interpretive epistemological framework is the guiding compass of this research undertaking

Data Collecting Tools

The tools employed for data collection are always equally embedded in the epistemological framework selected to guide the research process. The data collection tools used must also provide deeper insights into the research questions to which answers are sought. In carrying out this research, I have used different tools that I find appropriate to the interpretive theoretical position informing the research process, the research purposes and type. The first has been observation. In Turner and Helms (1990:11) observation takes four different forms, namely naturalistic or unstructured, structured, participant and controlled experiments. Of these forms, naturalistic active participant seems to correspond to qualitative research studies such as this one. It aims at examining human behaviors under normal unstructured natural conditions because it minimizes the obstruction of the elements of the setting. It explicitly pre-supports the principle of naturality or neutrality expressed in the works of McKernan (1992) and Schon (1991). In my situation, it would mean pupils not being made aware of my purpose in their classrooms so that they can continue with their classroom routines as usually.

I became a direct participant observer in the lower primary classrooms at Okatana where the student teachers were carrying out their teaching assignments. I spent about four weeks in the classrooms, two or three days a week. I could not spend unlimited time in the school as this research coincided with the fact that I had full classes with my second year students. I then decided that data from observations would be supplemented with data arising from other gathering tools.

The primary focus was on the student researchers' topics in which they addressed learning problems. My observation was first focused on what students, as researchers, could recognize as problems and how they go about resolving them in the contexts in which they find them. This implies that I also had to pay attention to other aspects of the lessons that had to do with teaching. Again, when student researchers were not focusing on their research, I had merely to

observe their other teaching aspects in particular how they practically present instructions. I have also been a complete participant in the academic lives of the student researchers through my obligations as a college, though the selected students have never been in my classes, Education Theory and Practice. My professional experiences as a college lecturer will be essential for critiquing the collected data in this paper.

Interviews were the second valuable data collection endeavors. Interviews are defined as "two-person conversation(s) initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining ... relevant information, and focused ... on content specified by research objectives for systematic description, prediction, or explanation" (Cohen & Manion 1994: 271). Turner and Helms (1990: 16-17) state that these "face-to-face encounter(s)" offer numerous advantageous learning opportunities. They assist the researcher in establishing rapport and trust nurtures cooperation and relationships that will affect data to be collected. This reality is highlighted by Lotz (1996: 97): "the quality of data in interview research depends upon the quality of the relationships between the researcher and the participating teachers." The other positive side of the interviews is that the rate of participation can be raised during the process when the originally set questions promote the emergency of further elaborative responses. The interviewer can also learn of the respondents' oral responses in the light of the non-verbal communication signals if the two seem to contradict each other.

I have employed interviews to extract information from the students and their support teachers. The interview questions to the support teachers were aimed at finding out their roles that they have played in the students' research projects. Support teachers too often are expected to become students' research partners and must assume scaffolding functions in the process. This is vital as support teachers are thought of bearing adequate professional experiences of the problems that affect learners' school achievement and performance. The other intention is to establish if the action research projects are becoming participatory, interactive and collaborative opportunities under which dialogue exchanges are keys to its success.

It was also essential to interview individual student teachers. The interview questions concentrated on several dimensions. At first, they were aimed at finding out the kind of support

they have received from the support teachers regarding their research. As in the case of support teachers, this is in line with judging the extent to which the research undertaking becomes a collective reflective effort. Secondly, the interviews were aimed at establishing how the student researchers went about assuming the roles of researchers: identifying the learning problems, hypothesizing the causes, designing valid research questions, selecting and implementing the strategies as problem resolutions and assessing the resolutions effects. This last purpose is the critical one for it describes how students are taking their research projects for.

Much of what happens in everyday teaching and learning situations is heavily grounded in the subjects texts, subject syllabuses, work schemes, teachers' guides, references, policy documents etc. In entering the world of the classroom it is necessary for one to acquaint oneself with the available documents that offer beacons on the whats, hows and whys of teaching. But in this situation, it became very important to critically examine students' own written research reports. These written reports became the main source of data. The analysis of the reports directly revealed the whole picture of what they went through while conducting the research. The reports are also examined in the context in which they can become sensible student products that document their research experiences. The area of writing skills is important, as it must enable the researchers to interpret, document and present their works. This area requires a careful exploration as well.

Information discussions with co-participants are a delicate data gathering technique. They are exceptional in a sense that they create a free comfortable atmosphere unlike during observations and interviews where informants may feel intimidated. During the research process, I have maintained informal talks with my departmental colleagues, particularly those who have been serving in the lower primary education field. The talks have helped to explicate vital knowledge and insights in lower primary education. They have specific importance regarding how children are taught to acquire literacy and arithmetic. They have also opened doors of acquaintance with the instructional sources used such as the peculiar Molteno Project textbooks used at Okatana. I could not maintain that much of informal contacts with the student and support teachers due to time constraints.

Data Analysis

Judith Bell (1993: 171, 173) mentions that raw data collected using different techniques remains pointless unless analyzed, interpreted and evaluated. Bell asserts the need for creating different categories that look for similarities and differences, for groupings, patterns and items of particular significance in which the data can be analyzed. The central point in Bell's view is that the researcher must create grounds to establish meaning out of the data collected. Beside Bell, Hopkins (1993: 157-158) and McKernan (1996: 219) recognize that while there has been a growing interest in qualitative studies there has been a lack of a body of clearly defined methods that are practical, communicable and not self-deluding to interpret and understand the data. In the absence of definite formulae for data analysis, Hopkins (1993: 148) offers "making sense of social situations" as the best research tradition within which to analyze qualitative research. In this research context, classrooms are seen as complex social situations that are analyzed for understanding. The recommended approach involves assuming a validated hypothesis and fitting it into a frame of reference that gives it meaning. For some, it further means taking a hypothesis and relating it either to theory, the norms of accepted practice or the teacher's own intuition as to what comprises good teaching. Both Bell and Hopkins' analytical modes concur with those of McKernan in which a researcher's theorizing is "about perceiving, comparing, aggregating, ordering and generally finding connections in the data. Theorizing also includes speculating or making good guesses based on reflective activity" (1996:221).

Centered on these readings, I analyzed the collected data following the paradigm of Hopkins and Bell, which is immersed in generating meaning. The paradigm is definitely interpretive in which individuals attempt to interpret and understand the unfolding episodes in the social or educational contexts in which they occur. In my academic world, the newly discovered knowledge here is the recognition that the reference frame chosen to guide the research process informs the context in which the data is analyzed. The analysis is process-orientated, tracing students' travelling steps throughout each research process point while not ignoring this research undertaking's purposes.

Data gathering was not problem-free. I experienced situation that negatively impacted an accessing efficient data. This research coincided with the time I was expected to fully attend to

my second year students. Time constraints prevented me from spending enough time on observations. It was also difficult to maintain exchanges with the two student teachers, which would have helped to extract some efficient information. The two students refused to be interviewed complaining that they did not have ample time.

The other problem regards the support teachers. They see every teaching aspect as fine or positive. They lack a language of critical openness concerning how their student teachers carry out the research. I personally believe this has to do with the question of educational empowerment failing them to deeply engage themselves into the curriculum issues pertinent to their classroom practices. In the meantime, the only hope I have is to look at the students' written reports that I have confidentially access to with the assistance of my departmental colleague. The reports substantiate the data from interviews and observations.

Description of the Research Content and Findings

(a) Research Backgrounds

This is a small-scale research involving five student teachers and their support teachers. At an informal level, it has also involved my fellow teacher educators at our department who have played minimal roles as critical research friends by providing some scaffolding insights from what I have shared with them. The department partners were selected and interacted with on the basis of serving in lower primary classes, of which I only bear general expertise.

The research was conducted at Okatana Primary School situated at five kilometers north west of Oshakati, taking approximately twenty minutes driving from the Ongwediva College campus. The school has a learner population of about 613 catered for by eighteen teachers including the school headmaster. It is then the Okatana setting which became, to use Prawat (1991: 743) phrase a "scholarly community of inquiry" where we met to examine students' work in research.

The incorporation of action research into the teacher education curriculum has been seen by many educationalists as the genesis of developing a new outlook of the teachers becoming critical and reflective professionals in exploring issues pertaining to their teaching practices (Mayumbelo and Nyambe 1999: 65). Action research is viewed as fostering critical inquiry and

reflective thinking skills that can empower student teachers to become active independent agents of changes in such a way that they can respond to the vibrant and ever-changing environments of the classrooms where daily teaching and learning take place. Mayumbelo and Nyambe therefore present action research as a tool for change and empowerment.

Do the above viewpoints associated with action research become realistic? Do the action researches by our own student teachers become opportunities that empower them to deliver quality education, the primary intention of the projects? How does action research respond to the attainment of the curriculum objectives and competencies? Why is it that action research does not seem to meet the intended outcomes? These questions have been of grave concern to myself and my counterparts at Ongwediva Teacher Training College. On many occasions, we have expressed uncertainties whether the partaking by our students in this research contributes to their academic and professional growth and development. The students seem to have worked well on following the structural directions and procedures but coming up with quality works branched in quality knowledge generation and meaning construction is yet to be achieved. Mayher (1990: 228) would regard such works as embroiled in "a technology of transcription" which one ought to learn how to do, but which is not regarded as intimately connected with the processes of learning and meaning making themselves". Quotations by Mayher clearly demonstrate our current state of affairs: a success in the world of technical rationality more concerned with the rules of grammar, structure or page numbers but less with students discovering personal meanings out of the situations they explore. What are perhaps the stumbling blocks into moving students towards the curriculum's set ends? Questions such as these ones have compelled me to undertake this research on my students' research projects that they do during their SBS at partnership schools. The research is worthwhile in the sense that it can enable us to address those aspects that are dysfunctional and to discover better ways of improving research standards at our colleges. This is the underlying goal.

As stated earlier, the exploration is process driven, focusing on every important dimension of the research. The first dimension comprises of how students identify and define the problems that affect learning, how they research and identify the strategies to be used as tools to resolve the problems. The research for the problem resolutions lies in one's abilities to design relevant research questions that provide adequate and deeper insights into the hearts of the issues under

investigation. Success in designing meaningful questions is also imperative in exploring the aspects that call for improvements in the learners' ability to progress successfully. They are equally indispensable in designing the resolution actions and evaluating the resolutions' effects on the addressed problems. This part is also centered on the kinds of roles students themselves are assuming in the entire research process.

(b) Delaying Progress: Learners' Learning Problems

In our college guidelines on conducting action research, learning problems are defined as problematic situations that negatively affect learners' school studying progress. The problems must interfere with the normal progress rate at which learners are expected to progress. The problems, thus, must affect the performance or achievement of the learners. The problems must also fall under the practicing teachers' jurisdictions in a way that they have control over them and can effect changes. Lastly, the problems must be teaching-related and researchable. The cohort of student teachers has identified various problems that affect their learners' academic performance. These are presented in the Table below (**Box 1**):

Teachers Researchers' Identified Learning Problems and their Subject Areas

Teacher 1	In area if mathematics or numeracy. Learners reversing numbers by writing them up side down, or into wrong directions etc. Commonly reversed numbers are 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10. 4 not in the list of numbers wrongly spelt. Problems experienced by 6 learners only.
Teacher 2	In the area of mathematics. 3 learners have difficulties adding numbers together, a question of addition.
Teacher 3	In areas of literacy & numeracy. 3 learners have difficulties recognizing and specifying numbers and letters of similar or contrasting shapes. Letters: b, d, p, q, E, M, W, n, u, v, j and i with numbers 6 & 9. Numbers often wrongly reversed are 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7.
Teacher 4	5 learners have problems with reading in English, cannot properly say the words neither complete exercises successfully due to their inability to follow instructions on how to do the activities.

Teacher 5	In area of Oshindonga, a mother tongue subject. 2 learners cannot read Oshindonga words made up of three or more than three letters, e.g. she thathanga. Thwuwa, dhenga, shandje, Ondangwa, etc.
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Box 1

There are lots of similarities in these five student research studies. They all seem exclusive in selecting the number of learners that are assisted to overcome the learning problems. Such selective selection does not appear to mean that only the numbers of the learners they have identified have difficulties learning. Based on my personal observations in their classrooms, the problems in the lower primary education classes do affect most of the learners if not all. This exclusion simply illustrates the student researchers' attempt to have small-scale focused research which however contradicts the purposes of the action research. In a way all learners in the lower primary classrooms can be helped simultaneously, only good strategies need to be operated. This is further problematic as dealing with the problems in lower primary teaching requires a class effort in which individual approach rarely comes in.

The problems students have identified are very normal in lower primary education, because this is the phase where first encounters with reading or arithmetic demands take place. But not all students are aware of this reality except one but only to a limited point. The absence of adequate awareness that these problems are normal to the lower primary phase has impacts on what researchers will think are the factors responsible for the problems' existence and on the actions they will contemplate taking to solve the problems. Secondly, the problems selected appear to be in an area of reading with the exception of those in mathematics. Does this reveal that the students have closely interacted with one another to scrutinize their own teaching practices? Or does it simply imply that they have copied one another? Or does it imply that action research is too difficult for them to do as novice teachers? Through interviews and observations, it came out that there were not close fruitful collaborations between the support teachers and student teachers. Students mentioned of having been helped by the support teachers, but that help came mostly in form of teaching materials. Even when there were interactions, they were often lacking deeper critical engagements with one another. There were

interactions among students but at superficial levels. Therefore, the similarities among the problems identified seem to illustrate a kind of academic dishonesty: copying one another.

(b) Perceived Causes of the Learning Problems (B0x 2)

Student Researcher	Problem Cause Description
Teacher 1	Support teachers' ignorance of the learners' learning problems; lack of clear guidance and systematic instructions at the beginning; number concept not clearly early introduced; learners not attended pre-primary education.
Teacher 2	Support teachers, ignorance of the learners' learning problems; grouping learners according to their levels of abilities, support teachers not using concrete materials for lesson presentations, lack of number concepts among pupils.
Teacher 3	Common problems to the lower primary education grades, lack of pre-primary education, poor concentration & perception skills, absence of academic support at home, support teachers give up quickly on learners.
Teacher 4	
Teacher 5	Lack of motivation & interests from teachers, learners not paying attention being playful during the classes, "developmental differences of the language.

Box 2

In looking at the possible causes of the problems, student teachers seem to have formed their own perceptions which seem to constitute shallow or uncritical thinking. The support teachers who must act as their researcher partners are also not helpful in provoking the students to deeply think of the issues at hand. Therefore, both the student researchers and their teacher participants are locked up in a camp that seriously lacks the language of critical consciousness. How are these manifested in the students' research work? It is critical to closely examine what the student researchers have concluded as the factors responsibly contributing to the existing of the learners' studying difficulties. Box 2 illustrates that all five students attribute learners' learning difficulties to the subject teachers, their support teachers, whom they find less helpful,

being ignorant of the problems prevailing and having failed to offer good earlier "head starts", or utilize concrete materials in their lesson executions and grouping learners according to their ability levels. In the first conclusion, the blame is laid on the subject teachers with the students exposing themselves as educationally the rescuers who have arrived to offer liberatory education. Disturbingly, the students have not given explanations in which they identified the subject teachers as a part of the problems. They seemingly have based such labeling on the generally publicly held perception that teachers from the past educational dispensation did not acquire good training. But the Okatana teachers, as I came to know them, are of diverse educational backgrounds with some being BETD graduates.

Students also seem to tempt with the commonly stated pedagogical knowledge that grouping learners according to their abilities is wrong, that learners develop at different stages (the second is seen in the last teacher's indication of "developmental differences of the language" quoted without clear comprehension) and that the home environment must be supportive of the school efforts, and that some of the problems among lower primary pupils have to do with skills of concentration and perception. The problems with student reports do not have to do with the fact that they have mentioned these as problems but rather the fundamental grounds on which they base their arguments. Grouping learners according to the levels of abilities can be a problem to health learning, but not always. Why is it that other learners do not have difficulties despite the fact that they belong to the same class in which this grouping strategy is practiced? Can grouping learners according to their abilities also be an ideal strategy for effective teaching? If the classrooms' population is close to thirty, why is it that only three learners have poor concentration and perception problems? Or is it that the question of perception is not common to the lower primary education world? Yes, learners are persons of different abilities, but does this explain why only two pupils should be behind in cognitive development? These are some of the questions researchers ought to raise for deeper examination.

The other factor researchers attribute to the difficulties learners face is home environment. The learners do not have anyone to assist them doing the homework. This may be true, as most parents usually are not involved in the education of their children. But there is an artificial

exploration here because the students have not established the impacts of the home situations with other pupils in the class. Is it not possible that there are learners who also do not get academic support at home but who progress quite well in their studies? Surely there will be some.

Now the question of primary education. All student teachers locate struggling learners' difficulties in the past, instead of in the present, with the absence of pre-primary education as the impacting point. The reason why certain learners are struggling with reading and writing is because they did not acquire the pre-primary education. Again, there is not indication in the student research papers of exploring whether all learners in the grades acquired early childhood education. Therefore, no data has been sought to compare the progress of those who attended and those who did not. Is it not possible that there are learners who did not attend pre-primary but have not experienced problems learning? Or those who attended but still face difficulties? The other fact is to view the state of pre-primary education in the country. The reality of the matter is that the acquisition of pre-primary education is not a compulsory requirement to grade one. Therefore, one of the common realities will be that there are some learners who did not receive pre-primary education but are still doing fine in their studies.

What can one make of the student researchers' conclusions on the causes? There is a clear indication students lack deeper critical analysis of the issues they are examining. It also indicates that our students are not deeply grounded in the pedagogical issues pertinent to the teaching profession. The findings agree with the everyday outcry that the BETD program has met from the public that our graduates do not possess adequate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter indispensable for effective and efficient teaching-learning. This fact will be explicitly portrayed in the actions in which student researchers assume actions as resolutions to the confronting problems.

(d) Actions Taken as Resolutions to the Confronting Learning Problems

The presentations of the actions present a comedy of laughter. I quote directly to illustrate how student researchers went about addressing the learning problems. In the next quotations the

student teacher tried to help her learners to do proper recognition of the letters of the similar or contrasting shapes they usually confused. This is her own narration:

I have tried to make them aware and understand that letters never change their directions and shapes. ... For example I asked one child to stand in front of another learner. I told her to put her right hand up and turned very slowly until her back turned to the other learner. This was to show them that the right side or left side never changes even though the positions change. I explained the same thing applied to the letters, b, d, p, f, t.

The second student researcher tried to help learners in the second grade on how to do addition. First, he started by explaining the concept of addition to the pupils by focusing on every aspect in addition transaction such as + and = in the problem '5+5= ?'. He had identified that one of the causes of difficulties concerning addition is that the subject teachers never made use of concrete teaching materials that would have had learners grasping what are taught more successfully. He therefore used the learners themselves as concrete teaching aids. How did he do it? I quote:

I called some learners to lie in front of the class. Five learners lie vertically followed with two learners lying in a form that create a cross sign (+). The next are five learners lie vertically followed by two learners lie horizontally and parallel to each other to form equal sign (=). At the end are the ten learners lying vertically to illustrate that the correct answer is ten. This action proved to be successful since targeted learners were able to see the two signs: plus and equal.

In his interpretation that is a way of presenting lessons in concrete manners that bring fast grasping of the taught skills. He believes this action was successful because that day the struggling learners understood maths involving addition exchanges.

What are the inferences from the above examples? What can be made of them? The actions students undertake as solutions to the problems are not often well thought out. Action takes the form of not-so-well-thought out explanations such as using the phonic songs to teach learners how to read the words that are made up of three letters such as "thathanga", "thwuwa", "dhenga", "shandje", "Ondangwa", etc in Oshindonga. Others in this area of reading use the teaching corners to assist those who cannot read while others are concentrating on occupational tasks, a Molterno approach to remedial education. The problem with this strategy is that the teacher has to avoid being loud not to disrupt other learners. My observations witnessed

ineffectiveness at its worst. The fun in some actions meant that the student merely taught the learners how to join vowels with consonants to produce phonic sounds and then read the new productions. For the student researchers, such opportunity is a unique learning practice, but this is the most common used approach. Such actions are seen to be attaining magical ends with every struggling learner becoming capable of reading. How can the problems be resolved overnight? If the situations are solved overnight then they are not problematic. I believe real genuine educational problems take lengthy periods of continual resolving practices. There is therefore a misconception here regarding action research, that a good action research results into successful problem solving. If the attempted actions have not worked, then research projects are meaningless and this is a wrong assumption. Research can allow one to gain better understanding of the problems' existence, their relationships within the context in which they occur and any other complexities. The time frame under which students operate cannot also enable them to completely solve the problems.

Critical Analysis of the Research Findings

(a) Student Presentations of the Research Issues

Flower and Hayes (1988) in works concentrating on writing as a cognition of discovery, mention differences between good and poor writers. They find good writers responding to all aspects of the research question like trying to build a unique presentation of their goals involving the audience, their own persona and the text. As artists, they explore situations in "more depth, fingering, moving, touching, rearranging and playing with alternatives, versus moving quickly to a rather conventional arrangement and sketch" (1988: 101). In other words, good writers aim at effective presentation of themselves and of the issues they are addressing. The two authors mention that by contrast, poor writers in their problem presentations are primarily concerned with the features and conventions of a written text such as numbers of pages and format. The later appears to be the inclination with our student researchers. They are not creating patterns of focus for deep examination but are rather following structural outlines and procedures. For instance, they have used a variety of techniques through which they collect information. However, in presenting their findings each tool stands on its own without adequate comparison of all information accessed using all instruments to illustrate the points of

convergence or divergence. When comparison happens, it is often at the smallest scale. There are also points where the student researchers tend to contradict themselves in their presentations. A good example is when the student has observed subject teachers not using concrete teaching-learning aids during their lesson presentations and learners are organized into groups according to the ability levels instead of mixed abilities. But in interviewing them, subject teachers replied in contrast to the observation establishments, but nothing was raised on this point. There is also undigested consumption of the provided data lacking personal interpretations of the situations.

(b) Lack of Knowledge Base of Subject Content and Pedagogical Issues

This is a major problem that affects student research projects. In this research, all the students were serving in the lower primary education which is their major area of studies. They are all in their final year of college studies just about to enter the teaching profession. But by viewing their research, it is explicitly evident they are unaware that the problems they are researching are not unique to these grades for this is the phase where first encounters with the field of learning: listening, reading, speaking and writing and arithmetic occur. Another field illustrating the absence of adequate pedagogical knowledge and understanding is that of didactical approaches employed as strategies for remedial education. Students have done things that do not make any sense at all to listen to. Problems are overcome by simply taking learners out to the playgrounds to practice appropriate writing of numeracy on the sand or by singing phonic songs.

Such practices show the absence of strong knowledge of the subject content and of the pedagogical aspects. In research conducted by Bennett (1993: 3-5) in Britain in 1988 and with some inferences drawn from the United States, strong knowledge of the subject matter and of pedagogics were found to be among the several crucial areas for professional skills and competence. The mastery of subject matter and its application facilitate more effective teaching and learning, and teachers who have mastered subject matter have no difficulties effectively executing their teaching. The next quotations from Bennett's (1993: 6, 9) works indicate how acquiring a strong knowledge base is important for any teacher:

1. These findings strongly imply the roles of teachers' subject knowledge. For teachers effectively to diagnose children's schema, to plan appropriate tasks, to present quality explanations and demonstrations, and to make curricular choices, all require knowledge and understanding of subject matter. This raises such important questions as 'how can teachers teach well knowledge that they do not fully understand?', 'how can teachers make clear decisions about development or progression in curriculum areas with which they are not thoroughly conversant?' and 'how can teachers accurately and adequately diagnose children's understandings and misconceptions without an adequate knowledge of the subject?'
2. ... a teacher's capacity to pose questions, select task, evaluate their pupils' understandings and make curriculum choices all depend on their understanding of subject matter. Teachers are better able to help pupils develop flexible understandings of subject matter if they understand the subject well. ... their understandings enable teachers to develop a variety of ways of presenting them to children of varying experiences and knowledge.

Other vital knowledge bases needed for teacher to promote comprehension among learners include knowledge of the learners and their characteristics, knowledge of the educational contexts and of the educational ends, purposes, values and the philosophical and historical grounds of which the curriculum was born. Our student researchers also lag behind among these, for example in question of pre-primary education, concentration and perceptions skills among young learners and of how learners learn that they require continual practice as opposed to quick solutions. One wonders what the future has in store for us if the educational trends of this nature are not rushed into bud.

The lack of adequate knowledge regarding pedagogical issues has an impact on the degrees of explorations done. Reading the reports reveals that what is conducted is the uncritical, superficial exploration of the problems instead of in breath and depth. This is a making to which our present college education program has been vehemently rebuked to by the public for all the years since its inception. The research indicates that besides the held assumptions that teacher education is producing graduates who are very well versed in the hows of teaching, this is not necessarily the case. As Bennett (1993) points out a good teacher must have full knowledge of the areas he has been trained for and must contemplate the remedial strategies appropriate to his area of specialization. As a direct participant, an insider as opposed to intruder, the absence of this in student research only serves to reflect the kind of educational

quality delivered from the colleges of education premises countrywide, not necessarily at Ongwediva alone.

(c) Action Research as a Collective Reflective Practice

Several educationalists and authors such as Mayher (1990), Van Harmelen (2001) and Prawat (1991 & 1992) define action research as an act of continuous reflections marked by intensive examinations. It involves reflecting on oneself, on one's theoretical and practical approaches to teaching/learning, the understanding of such approaches and the rationale on which these practices become based. In the classroom situations such as ones dealt with by students, action research entails a critical analytical viewing of the effects on the problematics addressed. These critical voices are non-existent in the student research as I have early indicated. The other aspect absent is the focusing of the attention on oneself or one's doings. The student researchers are post-dated, heavily concentrating on the past: in the home backgrounds, pre-primary education attendance or a lack thereof and on the subject teachers. There is not a focus on their present makings and their effects. While close examinations of the previous periods are important, reflections on oneself ought to be the chief principle shaping the research. Or is it perhaps because students do not have their own personal teaching experiences that can serve as points of references?

What about action research as a participatory, collaborative, collective effort? Through our daily clinical experiences or observations as I often visit partnership schools to see students placed under my mentorship and by interviewing the two sides (students and support teachers), there are not the active and interactive engagements that we would like to take place. The two sides, student teachers and support teachers, do not work together due to the question of epistemological empowerment. It is rare to find support teachers who are knowledgeable of the subjects they offer or who can assist the practicing teachers. In some situations, subject teachers feel student teachers have acquired more ample knowledge, understanding and skills than themselves, as they are fresh from the college unlike them who received 'Bantu' education. The only kind of interaction or communication that exists is at lower level.

(d) Action Research a Tool for Educational Empowerment?

Does the incorporation of action research in teacher education become an opportunity for professional growth and development? Does it respond to and materialize the intended curriculum objectives? Does the research contribute to the Namibian local research knowledge base? These are essential questions that are worth deeper but honest evaluation. I strongly believe that in dealing with such questions of educational significance one ought to distance oneself away from the usual blind romance and protectionism associated with many Namibian writers.

The prevailing standards indicate that action research has not yet fulfilled the goals of an educational framework for changes and improvements for which it has been originally set for. It does not produce active, thoughtful, innovative and independent teachers who are, in Mayumbelo and Nyambe 's opinions (1999:65), capable of responding to the vibrant and ever-changing environments of their classrooms and society by generating new knowledge for new changes, implementing the changes and evaluating their effects on faced conditions. This is because like in the past educational dispensation, student teachers remain uncritical and unreflective practitioners who cannot scrutinize issues relevant to their classroom practices. What has been occurring is an adherence to the legacy strongly confirmed in passivity. Judging by situating this research in the domain of educational transformation process currently undergoing in Namibia, I can conclude that the research is yet to fulfill expectations.

How does the action research by our students contribute to the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) curriculum objectives and competencies? The competence areas include essential instructional skills, developing values of professionalism, and sense of accountability, and enhancing positive interpersonal, social and communication abilities. In this context, these competencies are expected to be achieved by making the research more interactive in a way that gives rise to the formation of a "scholarly discourse community of inquiry" centered on Prawat 's (1991: 743) values of conversations with self, others and setting. I would then like to respond to the corned assumptions by Mayumbelo and Nyambe (1999).

As far as interpersonal, social and communication skills are concerned, these skills are achieved at only superficial levels where students are told that their reports look fine while in

reality they are not. The kind of social and interpersonal values that flourished are not that are falling into the category of intellectual or academic developments. There is not a language of critique and demystification where individual persons participate in the research frankly, deeply and analytically reviewing the issues at disposal. That desperately desired dialogue and exploration is absolutely absent. The other side of communication is in form of written documents. Students' written research papers do not offer any aspect of admiration as they are incredibly meaningless to look at: lack of organizational coherence, illogical presentations in the development of the ideas or thoughts, improper referencing, contradictions, poor reasoning and poor language usage manifested in grammatical errors. If the improvements be brought into the research component of teacher education, written communication must be the first point of departure.

The pedagogicality is not different either. Students, as researchers, seem to be lacking even general awareness, knowledge and understanding of the questions they are trying to explore. They also face problems in the area of didactics, especially in the manners in which they take responses as solutions to the problems. These and others alike prove that students do not have, according to Flower and Hayes (1988:101), "a richer sense of what they are trying to do as they write". The research works of this lower level therefore cannot contribute to the documentation of Namibian local public knowledge base except perhaps where there is a disorganization in those entrusted with proper censorship.

Possible Explanation for the Current State of Student Research

Why have students' research works been less productive? What are the possible explanations for the current poor state of college research? Why this motion of crisis? The current state of student research appears to strongly reflect the kind of education delivered from our everyday teaching practices. To have fruitful research, students must have adequate understanding of the contents they are researching. Cockelreas and Logan (1971) focusing on writing in response to literature, indicate that many students have problems writing due to their inability to understand the works they read. In the context of this paper, students are not deeply grounded in the issues they are exploring. Cockelreas and Logan argue that analysis always precedes

understanding of issues one explores. Without deeper broadened knowledge and understanding of the subject matters they deal with, analysis remains impossible. The student research thus explicates the links with our teaching practices in the college classrooms. My personal lecturing experiences have been that the levels of our lesson expositions do not either go deeper or broader into the knowledge contents of the subject or professional pedagogical areas. At the end students do not fully grasp the contents and the contexts in which they are presented as coverages usually operate at concept level. Such approach is grounded in the belief that the graduates will serve only at grades 10 and down. So they will be able to deal with the demands of these grade phases. Due to these, attaining degrees wherein students develop deeper reflective inquiring and critical reasoning skills does not materialize. Therefore, The college education curriculum orientations have themselves become a contradiction to the development of knowledge, experiences, abilities, skills and competencies envisaged to be fostered in student research.

Mayher (1990) in his works of uncommon sense that deviates from technical rationality of education such as the ones in which we find student researches, advocates the development of language abilities which include writing ability. Mayher would suggest that students must be engaged in meaningful language usage occasions and opportunities in which they can gain research experiences, skills and abilities. At the moment there is not a single course in the BETD curriculum, which focuses primarily on equipping students with good writing and research skills. The absence of this course can be seen as one of the contributing factors.

One of my departmental colleagues, through information discussions, stipulated that we the lecturing staff must also bear the blame as we do not offer adequate guidance. The colleague's viewpoint is valid but to a lesser extent. Our covering of action research has been only theoretically, centering on how to go about it. It does not have a writing component. The SBS is the only time when students must put the theory into practice. Again the numbers of students allocated per lecturer are often higher showing a heavy overload. Nevertheless, circumstances such as these further explain the crisis of our college research.

Ways Ahead: a Recommendation

In his article "Education for All: The Namibian Experience", Minister Angula (1999: 27) of Higher Education Ministry under with teacher colleges fall, ponders about improvements in Education quality, concludes:

As we approach the turn of the century, education policies should now address the issue of quality and educational outcomes. ... efficiency of the system should receive equal attention from educational policy makers.

What Angula expresses in the reality that over the past years a lot of successes have been attained in developing relevant policy documents, guidelines and enabling frameworks to lay the fundamental foundations for the educational practices. The adopted policies, directives, theoretical frameworks and other enabling grounds are sound and appreciated by many role players (Swarts 1999: 44). Despite of such, their practicalities do not seem to work well as we do not efficiently correspond to the recommended notion of teaching. Confronted, Angula would imply that the gaps lie within those entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the practices. My colleagues and I, through our daily interactions, have pinpointed out that the problems are more a consequence of the teacher education system itself. Meanwhile a vital question is: How would the research practice, an integral part of our curriculum, be shaped to become transformative in order for the intended ends to be realized? Which changes out to be effected?

As Angula (1999) and Swarts (1999) do, I personally believe the incorporation of the action research component in the college education was/is a good start. There has been a good level of awareness among direct role players such as curriculum designers at National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), lecturers and students alike. What is needed are critical revisits on the entire BETD program offered by four colleges of education countrywide to identify the areas of successes and shortcomings. Revisiting may help redefining and adapting new ways of restructuring the program for it to become very competitive in today's world of changes.

I have argued in the preceding sections that the poor level of research seems to reflect the kind of education delivered from the college settings. Besides research, issues of productivity are manifested almost in every curriculum areas ranging from the length and breadth to which subject/professional contents can be covered to didactics, curriculum goals, curriculum organization and management, educational resources to language development and assessment and evaluation to mention just a few. Serious reviews may be the best ways towards improving the prevailing low standards of "an attempt at research" to a more advanced level.

Secondly, writing skills are critical to the field of research. I view them as instruments with enable the researcher to achieve sensible documentation and presentations of the research findings. At present students are empty-handed of these skills due to the absence of specific English course focusing on equipping students with necessary experiences and expertise concerning writing and conducting research. If some of these aspects addressed, it is only then when we can confidently talk about teacher development, empowerment and national building.

Conclusion

I have argued with convictions that action research in teacher education has the potential to become a competitive viable vehicle for initiating fruitful changes. In the current context marked by reform and transformation endeavors, it has the potentialities of bring significant improvements. The gathered research findings, however, indicate our research to be operating at 'an attempt at research' level. In a way I have interpreted such level as of general awareness.

As I move towards the closure of this writing, I must, once again, reiterate the need for open and critical debate on the functionality of action research in the teacher education curriculum among practitioners and scholars actively involved in the educational enterprise, in particular those of us serving at the colleges of education. The debate can help consolidating the attained, modifying the un-progressiveness and re-defining the roles actions research within college education. Zeichner (2000), with widened educational experiences in Africa, argues that the reason whey transformation processes in many African countries are not always errors-free is because the perspectives of the individuals who directly work with the curriculum

implementation are not sought. Zeichner advocates the soliciting inputs from the individuals who actively partake in the curriculum implementation area for deep illuminations of sights into re-addressing the existing questions. Zeichner therefore places the successful transformation of schooling and teacher education in Namibia in the domain of active and reflective roles for the practitioners who are to carry out the reforms. It is in the same vein, I foresee the future of action research if it must become an effective learning opportunity for a truly teacher development and empowerment.

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The Contextual Analysis of the BETD Curriculum: Investigating Education Theory and Practice

Introduction

In our Namibian context as a developing country, teacher education is very critical. It is critical in a sense that it aims at addressing and modifying the sad past, its economic imbalances left behind by the colonial era. The overall purpose is that of empowerment that is thought of being realized only by creating equal learning opportunities for all the citizens, particularly for those who were left out of mainstreaming. This valuable pursuit of education has been entrusted to the four current colleges of teacher education, countrywide. This pursuit is even more critical as it deals with the basic education grades where fundamental foundations for further learning must be laid. As stated in Toward Education for All, (1993) a comprehensive policy document for educational reform and renewal, "the basic education system's quality, efficiency and effectiveness depends, to a large extent, on the nature and success of the teacher education programs" (1993: 75). How far have we at Ongwediva teacher training college responded towards meeting these ends? What have been our successes?

This paper attempts to review teacher education concentrating on Education Theory and Practice (ETP) curriculum as a sample reflecting the whole BETD's roles of reforming and transforming the basic education. The nature of writing itself is that of assessing and evaluating. To be able to do so, specific focuses are centered on particular important aspects of the curriculum. The first is a closer look at the historical perspectives that laid the stage for the undertaking of the change and reform process. Particular attention is paid to the extent to which, after those 12 years of independence, our responses have been in meeting the goals we have set for ourselves as a nation. In the same vein, the theoretical frames that guide our teaching/learning practices are paramount. This part views our adopted epistemological definition in relationships to whether our philosophies are becoming practical or impractical. The reasons for practicality or lack of it are further explored so is the attaining of the four major national goals of education for all. Again, the question of how far we have moved to these becomes essential.

In the contextual analysis of the curriculum, the setting where curriculum and its contents is operated is always central. The question of how the setting is structured and equipped with the enabling grounds under which curriculum can be implemented to meet the set challenges is examined. Equally, the

participants are curriculum's integral part (though in this case the focus is on the students). They are the soils in which the curriculum is imparted. Their readiness, participation and eagerness to do consumerism are viewed again to the extent to how they are transformed to become active agents for educational changes and progresses upon graduation. It is in the preceding contexts the contextual analysis hoped to take place.

Research Methodology

In data gathering, I have extensively done in-situ analysis. In so doing, I have heavily relied on my personal lecturing experiences and observations in presenting ETP classes. My direct participation has allowed me to daily interact with the curriculum studied. However, the views of other fellow participants in this study have enabled me to move away from my personal emotional expressions, thus acting against what may be called personal biases. This further assists in presenting a better-balanced evaluation of the situations in which I find the curriculum.

I have also involved in documentary analysis. I have taken the ETP curriculum itself to review its contents, objectives and recommended competencies to detect what is taught and how and what we the implementers are practically doing. This has as well helped to identify the epistemology that underpins the curriculum practices. As I have worked with the curriculum for a long period of time now, it has not been that difficult. The written works on education, but especially those touching teacher education such as Toward Education for All (1993), Democratic Teacher Education Reform in Africa (2001), Perspectives on Teacher Education and Transformation in Namibian (2000) and many others have been indispensable. They offer perspectives and deeper insights into teacher education by different authors. Though most of their contents are more narrating as opposed to critiquing our current education performances, they have been useful in their own ways. I have attempted to make good use of them: in acquiring factual information regarding the history of teacher education and the circumstances that dictate the need for introducing changes and reforms for our teacher training. The adopted pedagogical philosophy is precisely revealed. Some other sources have greatly contributed to the outlining of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum.

The "handout" papers offered in this Master course have been of invaluable assistance. Like in other instances, I have made good use of them - in presenting our adopted pedagogical philosophy of student-centered Education (SCE) and how it is related to the accepted dominant view of social constructivism. As all of the handouts advocate teaching/learning within Social Constructivism, they really have been useful in explaining what this educational thinking is and how possibly it can be operated.

Survey has also been one of the research tools employed, specifically interviews. I have used them in getting information from my fellow curriculum participants: teacher educators and student teachers. The information sought in this case are more for evaluating the expressed strengths and shortcomings of the curriculum. It has also been important in illustrating the different perceptions that we may have on the issues surrounding the curriculum. Students have been more honest and open in their opinions though some may not be well grounded on the curriculum. The same applies to my colleagues, I enjoyed their frankness.

The research was not without difficulties. I have experienced a lot of difficulties or disappointments in working with computers. My floppy diskettes continued to be contaminated and in most cases some computers are themselves contaminated. Diskettes become un-opened that I have to restart on many occasions. As a result, I find myself doing this and that. Working with the assignment instructions has also been a question of main concern. It sounds like I was not sure as what is really expected of us, so at times misinterpretations and mis-directions were the practice. But the most challenging has been about laying out and organizing the paper with its various sections and still retains coherence. This has perhaps been the most challenge with all of us. I was, however, glad of the continuous discussions with my fellow course participants that have assisted, particularly on the need to become more critical, analytical, thus evaluative. The kind of continuous engagement with one another, though at limited occasions, has helped to find the ways ahead.

The Socio-Historical and Economic Analysis

The Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) program, of which ETP is an essential component, was introduced for the first time in 1993 with the first intakers graduating early 1996. The adoption of BETD was seen as one of the crucial efforts in the range of changes introduced to reform teacher education system in the country at independence. The new program was then undertaken as a vehicle for improving the standards and quality of education that were thought to be inadequate in several ways. The teacher education also aims at attaining the goals of education for all outlined in Toward Education for All, the policy document on issues of education. As a consequence, the educational programs previously offered by the colleges of education such as Education Certificate Primary, National Education Certificate and National Higher Education Certificate got replaced. These programs were found to be ineffective and inefficient in many ways. Mayumbeko and Nyambe (2001: 66) with Swarts (2001: 31) on the other hand describe how the past programs did not give student teachers enough exposure to the classroom practices for example on doing teaching practices, managing classrooms and organizing learning activities. Much time was spent on college-based studies than on clinical experiences. Worsened was the fact that close links were not made between theory and practice. Secondly, students were not considered adequately prepared for the world of teaching as the programs concentrated too much on prospective students acquiring full knowledge of the subject contents with formal examinations used as tool in determining the achievement of the ends. These aspects, it is argued, made the curriculum to be too much of content-based and formal examinations driven, thus, ignoring the pedagogical issues relevant to real teacher growth and development.

Thirdly, according to the authors mentioned above, teacher education was fragmented. It was set up along separate ethnic lines. There were no common visions, orientations and intentions to education. Personally speaking, in a country of cultural diversities such as Namibia, education would have placed the functions of uniting, of promoting cultural pluralism. Unfortunately, in this case, the previous programs fulfilled the colonial ideology of divide and rule. Fourthly, the programs were terminal (Swarts 2001: 32) with the primary purpose of securing certification necessary for someone to practice as a teacher. Once that certification was received that was the end of studying. It did not go beyond; it did not, in my opinion, look into the ideas of learning as a lifelong effort. Perhaps this was so to turn

black majority into the positions of servitude, serving the masters, which in the long-run culminated into dependence.

The fifth reason relates to the question of economy. There were not enough resources or funds to run the programs. The ethnic administrative authorities did not have adequate resources necessary to run the programs. This legacy is still felt today at our teacher colleges. Swarts (2001: 31) describes how that poor funding negatively affected the programs "in terms of scope, structure, sequence, duration, approaches, entry requirements and exit competencies".

The sixth is the pedagogical philosophy of education, its teacher centeredness (Mayumbelo & Nyambe 2001). The philosophical practices were not seen to epistemologically empower the students. Students were not directly involved in the construction and development of knowledge because in the process they were "mere consumers and transmitters of received knowledge" (2001: 66) developed by others. They could not question what they were involved in, so the teacher educators were the omniscient transmitters of the needed expertise. After studies, the graduates could not bring significant improvements in school performances.

It is against these backgrounds the likes of ETP curriculum, of the BETD, was born. The present curriculum is antithetical. It seeks to reverse the past trends by deconstructing the previous teacher programs to produce competent teachers who are capable of delivering high quality education.

Reversing the Past?

At this part opening, I would argue as Jesper O. Kristensen (2002) in his "Reform and/or Change? The Namibian Broad Curriculum Revisited" Our ETP practice(s) "falls short of providing the education system with ... reforming and ... certainly changing ... into a democratic learner centered education system for all" (2002: 5). While Kristensen sees this lying more with the frame of reference, I find it relating more to the practical implementation. Theoretically, (by the frame of reference), the curriculum is the best, its pedagogical philosophy with precisely stipulated objectives (meeting standards of Objective Model of curriculum in Stenhouse's) and contents though at most points the

depth and width degrees to which contents may be covered are not clear. The problems, however, lie more with the practicality of the curriculum due to some perpetuated loopholes.

But let me touch on how reversing the past has come about. Generally it is said we, Africans, were, after many tiresome years of liberation struggle, ready to grab national sovereignty and proudly guard it. Sovereignty usually is interpreted in terms of presenting alternatives to the past. The past is viewed with hostility, with stagnation, the present with progress. In Namibia this seems to have been the case with our teacher education. The reform directions merely present antitheses. While the previous curricula stressed the acquisition of subject contents at all costs, the present downplays it to the worst level. But does the development of the abilities to think critically or analytically take place in the absence of deep subject contents? What are the students going to think about? The significance attached to the examinations in the hated past get abolished in the present. Any progressive education system has, in the recent years, reformed its assessment approaches, but in ours it sounds like they got abolished simply because students in the past failed in the largest numbers. Thus in our program, examinations are not really directed at making sure students are meeting the learning objectives. It is more at eliminating terminal studies to achieve "positive achievement". Another thing that must be clear is that our examinations here do not necessarily mean setting, traditionally, for the tests, even in form of taking home assignments it is also alike. There is a worst crack. There is maybe an achievement in balancing the college and school based studies.

I am often happy to hear positive comments that we are more advanced in our educational thinking. We are perhaps at the par with the United States, the most advanced country on earth. What often is not asked is whether these "advanced thinkings" are practiced. This brings me to the issue of our adopted philosophy of student-centered education (SCE). As one of the curriculum implementers we have actually failed to practice SCE. Our students get failed, as they will never explicitly understand the practices constitute SCE. This is due to the fact that all we have been engaged in are at superficial level. The loopholes within the curriculum. Even the ideas of teacher educators becoming reflexive practitioners do not materialize partly owing to the preserving culture of silence. The past thus has not been reversed tremendously. As I continue with the next paper part this becomes even clearer.

The Epistemological Frames Informing our Teaching Practices

What is epistemology? According to Hessong and Weeks (1987: 147) epistemology is one of the four major divisions of philosophy along with metaphysics, logic and axiology. It deals with our definition of knowledge and how we come to acquire knowledge. The two authors state that epistemology includes the possibilities of knowledge or types and the ways of knowing. In their views, two main types of knowledge exist. The first is the knowledge that is gained through observations and experiences. The second knowledge is self-evident and does not need proof. For us educators involved in knowledge development, five ways of knowing are recommended (1987: 147). I quote:

The first way of knowing is by revelation from God, or such as the Ten Commandments. The second is by authority: on relies on an expert for knowledge. The third ... involves reasoning ability within the mind of the individual, and the fourth is knowledge gained through sense of perception by the individual (the scientific method). The fifth way of knowing is by intuition.

In the BETD program, the question of epistemology has always been central, especially in articulating teaching strategies and assessment and evaluation approaches. The kind of epistemology adopted serves to determine the classroom teaching approaches, practices and directions. Since its inception, the BETD has assumed a more liberalized student centered education philosophy within the dominant view of social constructivism. This assumption has been shaped by ideas of others that I will refer to in attempts to clearly define our pedagogical parameters. Just like Catherine Cornbleth (1987: 2-3) in her writings of myths persistently perpetuated in teaching and teacher education, particularly the one on the development of analytical thinking skills, the ETP curriculum rejects as well reductionism, the belief in universalism that there is “a universally agreed upon applicable formula” to education. Cornbleth would define learning as an “encounter that will depend to a large extent on the situation including the ideas encountered, the social context of the encounter, the prior knowledge and values of the questioner” (1987: 3). So I find the curriculum adopting the similar holistic approach thereby encompassing all different ways of learning though has strategically placed students at the centre of learning.

The student-centered education perspectives, theoretically, are of greatest admiration. They stand to define learning as a process of active participation, interaction and collaboration. For true learning to

occur, students must be actively involved in the construction of knowledge assuming major roles and responsibilities. They need to become active participants and equal partners in the learning process instead of being passive recipients of factual information and knowledge transferred by their 'expert' teacher educators. This demands a continuously active engagement with what is learned but the forming of close interactions amongst knowledge constructors will facilitate such learning faster. It should also be noted SCE requires students who are highly motivated, those who are eager to take their studies seriously. A high level of motivation and dedication to ones' studies is the key. Swarts (2001: 8) realizes this reality in her saying that it "demands a high degree of learner participation, contribution and production."

The above requirements, met, can help students to form the facilitating interactions. These interactive formations are what both Richard S. Prawat (1991: 743) and Laurrance J. Splitter (1991: 101-102) describe as "scholarly discourse community of inquiry". Both, but Prawat in particular, view such formation essential as it empowers the participants "to share the knowledge generated in the community instead of being mere consumers of its (community) finished products" (743). Similarly, Kenneth J. Gergen (1985: 1) proposes that in attempts for students to be able to describe, explain and understand their own world in which they live, they must establish a "communal interchange". In his views, the construction of knowledge takes place through the social interchange process among individuals of a particular given society with its own contexts of culture, history and social aspects but across time. Directly, he stresses that learning is "culturally, historically and socially situated" (1985: 273).

As Cornbleth and Gergen, Prawat (1991: 742) perceives knowledge as " social product" that stems from conversations with self, others and setting. The three in his viewpoints are ways toward actual teacher empowerment. Conversations with self is possessing of internal dialogue wherein an individual questions the claims made about education or knowledge or any kind of political relationships to be able to make reasonable evaluation with validity. Prawat views are quite fascinating. A call is made for us not just to be consumers of un-digested factual information or ideologies but to also be critically liberated thinkers who must at all costs develop the "language of critique and demystification". The second call is that of a need to become contributors to the knowledge development. Again in this

context conversations with self should be accompanied by conversations with others. Prawat hopes if such conversations happen, whether with epistemological or political agendas, they allow participants to interact and share learning with one another and further help shaping the contents of their own community. The third conversations (745-746) are that with setting. These conversations are of "reflective transactions" with the environment and what it entails with the hope to arrive at some workable alternatives or understandings to what is puzzling. As it is, Prawat (746-747) again, but more epistemologically, makes a call for empowerment, that as student teachers and teacher educators, we must be open-minded to "alternative theoretical frameworks for thinking about teaching/learning context" adopting "new conceptual lenses, 'pre-structures' ... thus creating new opportunities for development and change" in our classrooms. Splitter (1991: 101) would interpret Prawat 's conversations as "interpersonal dialogues ... the means by which a community publicly reasons its way toward truth and understanding".

The works such as those of Prawat and Splitter and of other greatest individual educationalists presented to us in this Master course have offered fundamental grounds upon which our ETP curriculum has become based. ETP calls for the teaching methods that seek to compel students to interact and communicate with one another. At some syllabus points, communicative language that encourages students "to verbalize their thoughts and ideas ... in the search for meaning and understanding is stressed (P: 3). Such methods are whole class discussion, group work, project presentation, debates and activities involving problem-solving skills to mention a few. In the words of Jerome Bruner (1996: 7) these strategies are of his concept "intersubjectivity" requiring the interactions of minds "through negotiation, instruction and enculturation". For these reasons, the use of language as a tool by which knowledge is expressed is highly recommended in the curriculum. In the ETP syllabus as a new topic opened, students are invited to reflect on their previous learning. They are also required to apply newly learned skills and knowledge to new situations.

Our future teachers are also not just expected to be merely consumers of knowledge constructed by others. They must question it. They must become creative, imaginative, comparing and contrasting, analyzing and synthesizing and critically evaluating what they are part taking in. They must get involved, as the syllabus recommends, into the exploration of their own ideas as well as those of

others. They can then compare all these to other recognized bodies of knowledge such as psychology, philosophy, sociology and didactics. The importance of reflections Prawat presents in his terminologies of conversation with self, others and setting is as well emphasized. During School Based Studies (SBS), students undertake critical inquiry processes. These are opportunities for them to examine their own teaching behaviors, seeing what work or not and think of possible remedial actions. The key to these practices are reflections- thus conversations.

The adoption of the ETP curriculum centered on SCE pressurized teacher educators to identify and locate both their positions and roles in the new system. Our roles should be of making our institutions of learning, our classrooms, positive learning environments where students discover real learning. The nature of our functions is that of scaffolding the learning activities in such ways that the interpersonal dialogues, deep critical reasoning, truthful conversations and social interchanges take place. To what extent have we responded to the recommended calls? Are we successfully implementing the adopted teaching philosophy? Or has it been purely rhetoric?

Epistemology in Practical Operation

In responding to the above essential inquiries, one-three points premise of approaching exists based on my personal teaching experiences, the viewpoints of my interviewees and those of some writers. At this point in time the curriculum remains "a wishful thinking document" as one of my close colleagues labels it. The curriculum is implemented at a superficial level. Perpetuated loopholes within the curriculum unconsciously preserve its superficial implementation. The implementation is further affected by the lack of enough good basic teaching materials such as good relevant textbooks. This premise is clearly manifested in the opinions of the interviewed though the degrees may differ.

The students feel the curriculum is fine. They find it more emphasizing student-centered teaching approaches. They also think that the curriculum gives them enough opportunities to do practical teaching during SBS. These experiences allow them to acquire necessary skills, for examples, in dealing with learners from different cultural backgrounds, organizing their learning activities, managing the classes and time, and assessing learners. They also enjoy doing reflections as they

discover themselves and their capabilities. They as well indicate how their self-esteems get boosted. To a certain extent, they feel being empowered even though I personally find this to be more psychologically than professionally or academically.

There are, however, some curriculum practices they find unsatisfactory. They feel their knowledge of the studies' contents need improved by going into details. Ndapewoshali, one of the students, for instance, mentions that they have not grasped enough about the learning theories and may enter the profession with this legacy. Up to now (in their last year), they do not quite understand what constitutes SCE. This is because when they are taught about these, we educators rarely go deep into the contents. The other fact is that they find themselves being confused by different individual teacher educators in practicing SCE. If one does teaching practice and observed by a certain teacher educator but has not done any group work, her lesson presentation may be rebuked as not SCE. In another educator's evaluation that may not be an issue. What the students express here is the reality that some educators do not have a clear conceptual understanding of SCE. If that is the case, are we adequately prepared to implement the curriculum? The other thing comes out is that SCE is equated to group work. The reason for such practice stems from our daily modeling: the excessive use of group work. Even though the curriculum recommends the employment of diverse teaching approaches, such as individual presentations, class discussions, debates, etc, they have not been used. Other methods are seldom practiced, students are rarely modeled about other ways of SCE except group work. This is partly attributed to the fact when you intend to have class discussions it cannot take place because students do not do readings. Group work activities sometimes are not carried out effectively. They tend to create laziness among the students. Kambeyo for example feels strongly about this.

The other problem by students is that of materials. Like most interviewees, they find it negatively affecting their studies. This problem weakens our practices. The reason for in-depth conceptual understanding is directly attributed to the question of materials. As there are not adequate quality materials, students heavily rely on our notes. Notes never give detailed pictures. This shortcoming is further associated with the non-existence of a culture of reading. The culture is further tied to a lack of strong assessment practices. The students think the assessment practices are lenient, relaxing, discouraging them to work very hard. There is no competitiveness in the BETD, the awarded grades do

not usually seem to indicate the true abilities of the students' performances. My six years of serving here are a testimony. It is all at a low level.

What have been the curriculum's strengths? When such question posed to teacher educators, often it is responded to with hesitations. Those I have interviewed describe the theoretical aspects as good and powerful. To a certain extent there is a general feeling that we are producing some few good teachers but only those who have responded to the calls. Nevertheless, we still have not responded to the level expected. Regarding SCE, there is awareness but the ideas are not effectively and efficiently applied.

The educators' viewpoints share lots of similarities with those of students. The teacher educators have different perceptions regarding SCE, a consequence of our diverse educational backgrounds. The scarcity of teaching materials is another struggle hindering proper implementation. They, for example, narrate their difficulties in presenting the learning theories, which in nature are abstract. As there are no references where students can be referred to do prior reading, it has been uneasy. Students also do not seem to take reading seriously. When asked to apply the presented theories to their own unique contexts, they usually misinterpret facts. They also find students lacking skills of selecting meaningful aspects in applying. The same is with doing reflections, they are not of good quality.

What these experiences demonstrate is that the program does not seem to encourage students to take their studies seriously, responsibly and with commitment. The reasons for such routines are due to the lenient assessment approaches. The lack of seriousness affects educators as well. I would say this happens because our assessment practices expect less from students. One of the assessment procedures requires lecturers to offer compensatory chances to students if they fail to complete the assigned tasks 'successfully'. While the original intention of this may be positive, at numerous observations it has served the opposite: laziness and irresponsibility. As an educator, sometimes I neither have enough time nor energy to set up corrective tasks. So I accept the poor performances of the students as a pass to avoid creating lots of work for myself. There is an overload. Students would also not work hard knowing further opportunities would be created for them to complete. Therefore, such conclusion that the program is not really taken seriously holds truth.

The depth and breadth to which ETP contents are covered are so shallow, on surface. This makes the curriculum more of a "wishful thinking" as one of my colleagues reiterated. As indicated before, our students do not always acquire deeper knowledge and understanding of the subject contents as they are covered more at concepts level. The (External Report 1999) rationale for little emphasis on the subject content knowledge is based on the simplistic thinking that students who are entering with IGCSE have already acquired sufficient contents during their high school studies. There is no need for extension. The 1999 Report found this a "seriously flawed argument" (p: 14). My colleagues also find contents lacking that it will incapacitate graduates to execute good teaching. A need for supplements is strongly sensed.

What can be inferred? There are intense contradictions between the curriculum theories and our teaching practices. Some built-in clauses constraint the intended. Students must be actively involved in the knowledge construction. The key to this is being responsible, serious and dedicated to ones' work but assessment strategies do exactly the opposite. Students must become critical, analytical, independent thinkers but these are developed in the absence of deeper learning contents. Van Harmelen (Conference Proceedings October 1998) would argue that the contents are conceptual frameworks through which intended outcomes achieved. Learning then requires the acquisition of factual information. What needs to be taken into consideration is how that information (is it through rote learning, simple recall, and memorization?) should be used, assimilated and applied. In our situations, there is a misconception regarding this. The curriculum aims to produce teachers who are highly motivated and committed yet the program runs away from these values. Students are expected to become so but not while in the college campus?

There have been other voices to the BETD program. Minister Nahas Angula (2000: 6), under whose ministry the teacher colleges fall, has discovered that BETD curriculum "has generated heated debate among educators". Like many other individuals, he is worried about improvements in education quality, particularly regarding poor educational outcomes that have been received across all regional educational centers (2001: 27). Angula (2000: 7) implies that the criticisms leveled against the curriculum quality depend on one's philosophy of teacher education in relation to the nature of knowledge. If one believes that knowledge is given one would want subject knowledge dominate the

program. However, those who see knowledge in the ways of social constructivism would advocate the need to equip students with necessary means to construct their knowledge. Angula also sees difficulties lying with implementers in implementing the requirements. No elaboration so far as how these difficulties are. Nevertheless, I am glad Angula, as an authority figure, accepts divergent views that may exist and calls for further researches into the impacts of the BETD on teaching and performance outcomes in schools. Swarts (2001) feels as Angula and other interviewees. She finds students and teacher educators showing appreciation for SCE in theory but have difficulties in practice. She finds both sides in a need of a "richer repertoire in teaching methods" (2001: 44). Looking at these views, Angula seems to perpetuate the loophole of knowledge development in the absence of subject contents. Our experience as implementers is that such thinking does not work. However, their conclusion regarding confronting difficulties in implementing the theory effectively is valid.

Other perspectives on the criticisms against the quality of BETD are from an academician, John Nyambe. Nyambe (2001) focuses primarily on the hostile reactions our BETD holders have been receiving when trying to enroll for the University of Namibia (UNAM) 's B. Ed program. What is more interesting are his explanations that BETD is unique in its origin, orientations and intentions. He presents various explanations for the leveled criticisms. Unlike the previous traditionally oriented programs where the main focus was on the subject content, the BETD does not emphasize content alone but also other issues pertaining to the students' professional development. He argues there is a good balance between the subject content and professional development. Surprisingly, no illustrations presented to show how that balance exists. Nyambe 's second explanation is more similar to his first. The BETD has not assumed the traditional approach, in this case of behaviorism, where the role of the teacher education is to fill prospective teachers with suitcases of academic subject knowledge. In the BETD, content knowledge is seen as a social construction requires students' active participation. It is all as Angula. What is not asked is whether this kind of social construction is taking place or not. Is there active participation by students? Or is all student passivity? How? These, I think, are the questions that need to be explored.

The third explanation is, again, similar to that of Angula. The blame is more on us, teacher educators and other implementers who may fail to do proper implementation. Therefore, the implementers are

held accountable. Encouragingly, Nyambe recommends the conducting of researches to validate this claim. The last explanation is that the launch of BETD in 1993 was a product of "compromise, gradualism, change with continuity and negotiation" (2001: 81) with former colonialists. The adoption then took place in the spirit of national reconciliation policy introduced at independence. The former colonialists seem presently residing with UNAM, but continue to resist the process of changes and reforms. But are the former colonialists the only people who have expressed their dissatisfactions with our curriculum? Not at all. Many individuals at numerous platforms have expressed their dissatisfactions. I personally find a sort of engagement in self-defensive mechanisms from educators in levels of authority when questions on teacher education raised. It suppresses health debate, further hinders the process of changes. There is a need for establishing a culture of open dialogue.

The kind of suppression is sensed in Ken Zeichner (2000: 33-38) s' viewpoints on the reform process. Zeichner, an American educationalist involved in teacher education staff development at NIED, presents perspectives of someone with extensive experiences in educational reforms in Africa. He reiterates that reform processes in Africa are not always mistake free. This is due to the fact that the judgments or experiences of the persons directly involved in reform implementation are not sought. They are also not expected to offer personal contributions. In this context, participant educators are merely reduced to "the passive implementers of ideas conceptualized by others" (2000: 33). Zeichner has been a critical observant. I personally agree with his opinions that participants' views, such as ours, are often ignored. It is the culture of silence, leads to another contradiction. National institutions of learning have, at several times, preached the practices of reflective practitioners. It appears this is confined to the classrooms only, not at all levels. Therefore, I conclude that real reflections must be practiced at all levels if we are serious about changes and productivity. Otherwise it becomes a stature of idealism. Nevertheless, Zeichner suggests a point of departure: the ownership of the reforms by all involved in reform process implementation. With the absence of such ownership, how does seeking the educational goals affected?

Attaining the Goals of Education for All

ETP seeks the attainment of the four major goals of education for all, namely access, equity, equality and democracy. These goals are the pillars of our educational reform and transformation. Presenting the 12th independence anniversary message at Ongwediva College on March the 27th, this year 2002, Higher Education Minister, Angula, defined the goals as “the catechisms of education”. Catechism teaching was important in the history of Christian missionaries in Ovamboland, so every child had to memorize it. In our context, the goals are our pursuits, they must be met. Are they realized and to which degree?

Our responses in realizing the goals have been limited. The presented loopholes appear to explain the limited responses. In term of accessibility, the responses have only been successfully in making sure the basic schools are adequately staffed with teachers to carry out entrusted teaching responsibilities. But at level of implementation, ETP curriculum as an educational opportunity, has not been that accessible. As already presented it is more at artificial standards. In my own lesson presentations, I usually find myself returning to teacher oriented methods because students cannot join in class discussions. It is a result of poor student motivation and participation. Van Harmelen (Core Test 1, P: 8-9) presents four possibilities of what may happen if the theory informs practices is inaccessible. Of the four, our curriculum falls into the third category- curriculum theory is not supported by the system in which it is expected to operate. The result is a turn to “that which is known”, the teacher-oriented. While we are not rejecting theory, we are not effectively practicing it. Our teacher education seems caught by this dilemma.

An equity goal seeks to realize equality. In my view, equity is more to establish an egalitarian society of equality. The key to this end lies in providing equal learning opportunities for all citizens. Equity then can be achieved if each institution of learning provides high quality education. In our ETP lessons, the practices of high quality learning are limited, low expectations, below standards. This unwelcome trend will unfortunately pollinate our nation’s basic schools where our inadequately equipped products will be serving. With pain, the goal is not realized; the past disparities are preserved. In the long run the future generation’s accessibilities whether to job or learning

opportunities will be affected. But of course if all teacher colleges are doing the same, as it sounds to be, there will probably be equity, but not quality.

On the other hand, there is a move toward equity goal in admission practices. In Mathematic and Science subjects, gender balance is pursued. The admission of the marginalized and disabled students, in compliance with Affirmative Action policy, further contributes toward equity.

The democracy goal of education, in Toward Education for All, should be a central purpose at all levels of education. If democratic practices are realized in our teaching, it will be easier to create a democratic Namibian society. I would say our classroom atmospheres are always free. Students often feel free to express their personal ideas as far as the lessons are concerned. The room for academic freedom and expression is maintained. What is often lacking is epistemological empowerment. The key to any kind of participatory democracy in any kind of setting is being well informed, well grounded in terms of knowledge and understanding of the issues raised. As such envied culture has not taken place, broad participation in matters of educational significance continue to be of fallacious nature. Students will not relevantly question the issues raised and may not clearly understand what is meant by democratic practices in education. Fortunately as teacher education is open to reviewing, and with a done-way with self-denial mechanisms, I am quite optimistic the ways ahead will be found.

The Ongwediva Setting

The delivery of quality education is often tied to the environmental setting and its contents. Van Harmelen in her Education Core Text 1, Liking Theory & Practice (p: 4), viewing the dynamic nature of knowledge, emphasizes this truth:

Knowledge is constructed by people who are dependent on what is available to them at a particular time and in a particular place. Equally, how knowledge is constructed depends on the values and attitudes of a particular society at the time and place of its construction and on the social interaction that are operational in the society at the time of its construction.

How does the construction of knowledge based on SCE within the bounds of social constructivism take place at Ongwediva College? What about resources necessary for the implementation of transformation process? The availability of teaching/learning materials, resources and other facilities in

any educational setting is paramount to the world of learning. In the educational setting, the library is directly connected to the respects of resources and other technologies. The library, therefore, plays significant roles in teaching and learning. Ongwediva College did not have a proper library until 2000. There was a small library in an upstairs hall with a size of a double classroom. Many of the shelved books were of local but neither advanced nor of quality. But there were some books and few useful materials but one needed a thorough check to locate them. But in most case the books are not that relevant to our Namibian context, so one has really to be researchful.

There have been some improvements over the past two years. A new library with enough capacity was constructed officially opened in 2000. So far new books have flocked in. Despite, one may not find information one desperately looks for. For our ETP lessons we usually prescribe books such as by Mwamwenda and Farrant but some contents may not be that relevant to our topics in terms of details or inclusion. We are more in need of books that are basic for the beginners. The sources of meaningful basic information are limited. I must also admit that we have not been that vigorous in searching for relevant reading materials with relevant contents.

Within the library is the computer room currently consists of about 20 computers for students. The computers were brought with the money collected from admission application forms annually. Students have been eager to utilize this facility, so most of them have become computer literate.

For the teacher educators, there is Education Development Unity (EDU) facility with close to about ten computers. These computers were donated by generous organizations but at moment only a few of them function properly. They are becoming outdated. In each department there is one computer. We have been able to process some of our work effectively, however, the computers' printers are not meant for heavy duties. The overuse has caused some of the printers to disjunction. Added to these are the two computers that offer e-mail and Internet services.

The other area is that of photocopy machines. There are only a few of these, making it impossible to make copies for all of our students. As the photocopiers are few, we usually over use them to the point that they get broken easily. The excessive utilization of the available resources continues to be a

problem. As I am writing now (April the 6th) there is not any machine functioning at the entire college. We only rely on the nearby Resource Centre. Sometimes it might happen that all photocopies in the entire Ongwediva environment including the Teachers' Resource Centre are not functioning in need of service. It takes weeks and months to get technicians in our northern regions, as most of them are located within the distant Windhoek. Under such situations we are confronted to write summaries on the charts or writing-boards. It is time consuming but with the shallow coverage of the subject contents it may work.

The limited numbers of classrooms available further aggravate our situations. We share classrooms- but it may happen a certain educator has not been well allocated. Continual shifting of students from this room to another is a daily habit. At the moment the construction of additional classrooms and offices for the lecturing personnel is underway. I do hope this on-going construction will resolve this question and eventually bring a sense of relief.

These are the conditions under which the curriculum is operated. Our learning environment is not that different from many of the secondary schools in the areas in many ways. The comfortability for one to work more effectively is limited. As a consequence, our conditions do not correspond well to the amenities needed for the theory's practical implementation. The other is our failure in investing enough efforts to improve the conditions conducive to the kind of learning practices envisaged. It is also an issue of being a developing country with limited resources. Yet how do the prospective students enter such kind of learning environment?

Knowledge Construction: Curriculum Participants

The Ongwediva College accommodates approximately 900 students annually. The capacity makes it the largest of the four colleges of education. The program participants are important in curriculum in terms of what they bring to the program and how well they are prepared to consume it. Our college student population is mostly from the regions of formerly called Ovamboland. Over the past years there has been, though, a good but small presence of Herero, Kavango, Tswana and Caprivian students. This adds a positive spectrum of a nation of diversity. Since 1999 attempts have been made to extend

recruitment and enrolment to the formerly marginalized groups from particular geographical areas and from the points of disabilities. Every year, recruitment takes place in Ruacana and Opuwo to recruit the marginalized students of Ovahimba and Ovadhimba communities of Kunene region. The same has been applied to the San communities of Kongo. Attention has as well been paid to the individuals with disabilities. The entry requirements for the marginalized groups can be waived. This special preferential recruitment is a response to comply with the government's policy of affirmative action.

The kinds of students annually admitted to the college successfully completed Grade 12 with satisfactory grades. Usually entry requirements are 21 points IGCSE or equivalent. There may be exceptions regarding marginalized candidates whose grades may be reviewed under reasonable circumstances. I personally find students well prepared from their last high schools. There are seldom few cases where some students may not be well prepared for college studies as one of my colleague indicated. From personal experiences, this is usually in English and Science subjects. This is often a situation to students who did their studies in foreign countries where the medium of instructions is not English. But for being here, I have not experienced students expelled from the institutions because they cannot handle the program. What is sometimes practiced is to send back that specific student to the previous year level. For example, if a student has entered 2nd year but cannot cope s/he can be taken back. It is sometimes contradictory, as remedial assistance is never made.

But generally our students are well prepared from their previous educational backgrounds. They have high expectations for what Ongwediva has in store for them. Their English usage is often good posing no difficulties in communication compared to my own high school days when communicating in English was a stumbling block in understanding the lessons. I personally find new students more eager to study, after all better prepared to assume classes. As classes start, feelings of sensitivity and anticipations are visible on their faces as they try to cope with the setting different from their high schools. This observed eagerness, this curiosity, usually lasts for a term, if long. A sort of country club emerges more concerned with relaxation and entertainment and less with academic excellence, academic success and real professional development. This unfortunate occurrence is attributed to the absence of academic challenges. As indicated at numerous paper points, it is all tied to the preserved myths. The values and attitudes for working hard to become more productive are compromised. In

such context, I deeply sense students' innocence; a victimization outside of their own making that the college is not adequately transforming the students to the intended standards. Again, the question what the standards are and who decides them becomes debatable.

Synthesis

Our past experiences with teacher education have directed us in selecting the tools for deemed changes. The tools informed by the past have been instrumental in both defining and articulating our epistemological angles necessary in the world of changes and reforms. The epistemological parameters adopted have been that of sound nature. They call for democratic participatory education where our student teachers' active participation instead of passivism is the key to real learning. The parameters as well define learning as a lifelong commitment. The epistemology has been envied by many individuals, including us direct curriculum participants: students and educators alike. While there is a greatest appreciation for the ideals such as those of student-centered education, there have been difficulties in implementing these ideals. The shortcomings expressed in practical implementation seem perpetuated by some persevered loopholes. Catherine Cornbleth (1987) would call these loopholes myths. The preserved loopholes have become stumbling blocks in the ways to successful implementation process. To these are our diverse educational backgrounds as we are products of different educational institutions, misconceptions or inconsistencies among us as to what actually constitutes SCE and the question of material availability. The setting is not adequately equipped with resources, facilities and amenities necessary for the assumed epistemological operation. These confronting aspects have far reaching effects on the delivery of high quality teacher education in the sense that the goals of education for all, for example, are not effectively attained. The anticipated improvements in basic education do not happen. Therefore, the hated past we have hoped to transform and totally deconstruct is still manifesting itself and continues the imbalances. What is needed is more of "revolution" as opposed to passive "evolution" that seems to maintain the status quo. As Jesper Kristensen in the paper presented during the January session, I would argue.

Conclusion

In his “Education for All: The Namibian Experience”, Minister Nahas Angula (2001: 27) concerned with improvements in education, concludes:

As we approach the turn of the century, education policies should now address the issue of quality and educational outcomes. ... efficiency of the system should receive equal attention from educational policy makers.

Personally, I believe the future lies in Angula 's viewing binoculars. Over the past years a lot of successes have been achieved in coming up with relevant policy guidelines, theories and philosophies to lay the fundamental foundations for our educational practices. The adopted policies, theories and philosophies are sound. However, their practicalities do not seem to work as we do not efficiently correspond to the recommended notion of teaching/learning. Confronting, as Angula implies, is a question of putting theories into practice. So questions arise. How can our teaching practices be shaped to become more transformative so that the reform process ends can be realized? In which ways should the teacher education system be modified to eventually attain the goals of education for all? What should be the responsibilities of different role players in the next renewal as we contemplate the future? In such puzzling context, what ought emphasized is the truth that solutions lie with the continuation of the reform process. With our ETP curriculum open to the wind of changes, the ways ahead can be found. But there is a word of caution: real reflective practitioning seems to hold the key. In the meantime it is hope we can live by.

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Appendix A

Questions on the Contextual Analysis of the ETP Curriculum to the Student Teachers

1. What have been your personal experiences about ETP in particular, BETD in general?

2. What have you find to be the strengths or the weaknesses of the program?

3. How do you think of the common criticisms that have been leveled against BETD that you are not picking up enough knowledge of the subject contents, and that students do not fail as there are not formal examinations?

4. Do you feel you are being very well prepared to handle the demands of teaching in the schools as you look forward to the teaching career?

Appendix B

Interview Questions to the Fellow Teacher Educators in ETP?

1. What have been your experiences in offering ETP?
2. From your personal experiences, do you think we are practicing what are recommended in the syllabus? Are we attaining our curriculum objectives? What about attaining the four major goals of education?
3. What do you find to be the strengths of our ETP curriculum?
4. What do you find to be the shortcomings?
5. Any point (s) of concern that you find to be critical as far as our curriculum is concerned?

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Education (General Education Theory & Practice)

CANDIDATE: F. F. AMWEENYE
No 602A2911

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PROVISIONAL TITLE:

The Difficulties Student Teachers Face When Researching their Own Practices Using
Actions Research.

Research Context

One of the ways in which the current teacher college education curriculum differs from the post-independence era programs is its inclusion of the critical practitioner inquiry component (Mayumbelo & Nyambe 1999: 64) in its contents. Mayumbelo and Nyambe argue that critical practitioner inquiry, equally advocated by Zeichner (1999) has set the stage of turning away from the "traditional mindset of the teacher as a passive and unreflective dispenser of received knowledge and for the developing a new outlook of the teacher as a critical, inquiring and reflective practitioner". The assuming of critical inquiry is therefore seen as the genesis marking the development of teachers questioning issues pertaining to their own classroom practices. Like the two, Zeichner (2000: 33) sees the real transformation of schooling and teacher education in Namibia from the authoritarian teacher-centred to a more democratic learner-centred approach starts only when teachers assume active and reflective roles in their on teaching practices. He believes such roles allow teachers to reconceptualise their own agency within the classroom and the school, unlike in the past where everything was initiated by others. If this is to be achieved, the teacher colleges, Zeichner argues, must become "places where these practices can be experienced, internalised, and given personal meaning by prospective teachers (educators) and students (teachers)" (2000:34). The critical practitioner inquiry component in the Basic Education Teacher Diploma is just "seeking" to fulfil this desperate need.

In the third year of academic studies, this component falls into the conducting of action research in which student teachers must research their own pedagogical practices at the partnership schools they have become placed. This opportunity takes place during the School Based Studies (SBS) time when students carry out their practical teaching in the school fields. Students teachers, acting as researchers and reflective practitioners, must research their own classroom based teaching practices with the purpose of firstly identifying the problems that incapacitate their learners to learn more effectively and efficiently. They must analyse the prevailing problematic situations in depth in order to think of the actions that they must implement as resolutions to the confronting problems.

The practical approach to the action research is modelled on the ideas of James McKernan (1991: 28-30) model of operation. The practical process is comprised of a series of steps, namely, problem identification, problem analysis, data collection, action plan development and implementation, evaluation and decision making. The whole process is signified by the numerous continuous reflections which Swarts (1999: 40-41) describes using the terminologies of "reflection-on-action", "reflection-in-action", "deliberate reflection", "reflection-on-practice", "reflection-in-practice" or "reflection-for-practice". The whole process is that of professional engagement in reflective conversations in practice, where students constantly frame and reframe a problem as they work on it, testing out their interpretations and solutions (Swarts: 1999: 42).

Therefore, the incorporation of action research into teacher education curriculum is seen by many educationalists as beneficiary. Swarts (1999), Zeichner (2000) and Mayumbelo and Nyambe (1999) see it empowering the student teachers in the sense that they are encouraged to be creators of new knowledge, ideals and experiences be on methods of teaching as opposed to being merely consumers of knowledge and ideals conceptualised by others. Such development presents the transition from passive implementers to active agents of change who are capable of responding to the vibrant and ever-changing environment of their classrooms and society. This also allows them to critically ask questions about themselves as teachers and about the social factors that affect learning in their own classrooms. In this context, I think the engagement in the practices of the action research is presented as a framework for change, improvement and empowerment.

Secondly, the undertaking of action research as a critical practitioner inquiry practice is claimed to contribute to the building of a Namibian knowledge base in education (Zeichner 2000: 35). This same development is echoed by Mayumbelo and Nyambe (1999) when they studied the written research papers by their own student teachers at Caprivi College of Education, Eastern Namibia. What they recognised is that the written action research reports by the students assist to document practical local knowledge so desperately absent in this country. The written action research papers, if published, can thus contribute to the prevailing research and library knowledge, perhaps only quality needs to be improved.

Thirdly, Mayumbelo and Nyambe (1999: 68-69) feel the undertaking of action research fulfils the attainment of college education curriculum's competency areas. These competency areas include developing essential teaching skills, developing the values of professionalism and a sense of responsibility, enhancing positive interpersonal, social and communication skills through engaging students in interactive learning activities. How do Mayumbelo and Nyambe demonstrate the interconnections between the research and competence areas? They presume professionalism is developed when students assume reflective, creative and analytical thinking and attitudes towards their work and situations. Through continual collaboration a scholarly community of inquiry, centred on the viewpoints of Prawat (1991) is created wherein sharing of research questions, problems and findings occur. These occurring opportunities, is assumed, foster the atmospheres indispensable for academic and professional development. Mayumbelo and Nyambe are convinced these develop the desired sense of responsibility and accountability in the students.

The other competence areas are those of interpersonal, social and communication skills. Just like in their above arguments, Mayumbelo and Nyambe believe that as the process is continuously featured by vigorous interactions among research participants, it creates rooms for the attainment of good interpersonal skills. The communication skills are also learned as the students discuss their research findings and experiences. The writing skills are also enhanced as students are expected to write initial drafts and final research reports. What about the teaching skills, the critical competencies we cannot do without in the enterprise of teaching /learning? Their arguments are that these skills are developed as students attempt to gain the awareness, the knowledge and understanding of their own teaching practices. They are furthermore developed when students start viewing or resolving practices of addressing the needs of their pupils.

My main concern is whether the action research is actually utilised by our student teachers to attain the stipulated curriculum objectives and competencies. This concern can be expressed in a number of questions: Are the good ideals, particularly the outcomes associated with the undertaking of the action research take place? Is the action research of student teachers becoming an opportunity that empowers them to

deliver better quality education, the primary goal of the projects? Are they become critical about themselves, the contexts in which they work and regarding the pupils as respondents to their inquiries? These are some of the major questions that I would like to explore further focusing on how our students carry out the research at Ongwediva College. While this topic serves as a course requirement, my curiosity and selection of it has been informed by the grave concern most of us, as teacher developers, have expressed over the past years. In my situation, these questions always surface throughout my personal lecturing experiences and official professional involvement in SBS each passing academic year. At many occasions, we have expressed uncertainty whether the partaking by our products in this research actually contributes to their academic and professional development. There have been evidences of students accurately following the structural directions and procedures but not in producing quality reports branched in quality knowledge generation and meaning making. Again, this over-emphasis on structure adds a negative dimension whereby the process becomes more rigid, entering the dogmatisms of technical rationality particularly when prescribing structures become more important than the other way around. But what hinder the expected skills? This research attempts to respond to these kinds of questions. It is a search for meaning in student research. I personally find it worthwhile to critically concentrate on the research of the students in a hope that the examination may provide answers as to how the research can be better developed or improved within the college education.

The exploration will be process-oriented, viewing each process point. The first dimension comprises of how students identify and define the problematic situations that affect their pupils' learning. This will be followed by the focus on hypothesised causes of the learning problems and the strategies students used as resolutions to resolve the problems. The search for the problem resolutions lies on ones' ability to design relevant questions that provide adequate and deeper insights into the hearts of the issues under investigation. The success on designing meaningful questions is also imperative in exploring the aspects that call for improvements in the ways how learners can be assisted to learn more better. In fact, I will concentrate on identifying areas where students are doing quite well and those where they need improvements. It is a type of SWOTS: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threat analysis. As I have indicated, the findings will be helpful in thinking of the better ways in which

action research can be presented to our students so that it can offer dynamic possibilities for the real teacher education development.

Research Purposes

The research investigates how action research is used as a tool for educational change and development. It aims at finding out what and how the practising teachers, acting as both action researchers and reflexive practitioners, can reflect on their practices by researching their own practices with the hope of effecting changes for improvements in lower primary classes. This context will require students to become critical and analytical regarding what is going on around their educational settings. The research, thus, hopes to learn of the extents to which action research is implemented as a tool for corrective action. This is finding out about how students are carrying out their action research; how they interact with other participants and how practically they take their actions. The overall purpose is to establish if the engagement becomes a tool for change and empowerment for which it has been set. To be able to do so, the finding must be viewed in the backgrounds of the raised claims and of meeting the established curriculum competencies. Such viewing, therefore, with to establish the truthfulness for the stated assumptions such as those regarding professional development, empowerment and change.

Research Paradigm

This is a qualitative research design. It should take place through the theoretical framework that is more appropriate to the qualitative study designs. The selected theoretical framework is then interpretive. Hopkins (1993:157-158), Bell (1993:171,173) and Kierkegaard (2003:2) indicate that the purpose of research within this paradigm is to understand and interpret the daily occurrences within the social context in which they occur. The paradigm seeks meaning individuals illuminate on such occurrences and their contexts. My research will thus follow the paradigm of interpretive, which is immersed in generating meaning. The selected paradigm will fit all the research participants: Students are individuals who operate in the classrooms as complex social situations that are analysed for meaning and understanding. Dicker (1990:13) would argue that such sought meaning involves three levels: of the

rationality on which pedagogical practices are grounded, the direct understanding of the practices themselves and of the setting that sets the contexts for the occurring of the practices. The support teachers' roles and positions in this research are also situated in the attempts of meaning making and of gaining better comprehension of the situations. My participation as a principal researcher falls in the same category. The meanings my departmental colleagues can bring in from their personal experiences as they often go visiting and tutoring the prospective student teachers over the action research projects in the school fields will be sought. But the process is envisaged to be characterised by active participation, interactions and collaborations, the features that are applicable to the nature and practice of conducting action research.

Research Methods

The data collecting methods do not take place in vacuum. They are embedded in the atmosphere of the epistemological framework selected to direct the research process. They must also provide insights into the research questions to which resolutions are sought. As this research is a qualitative study, the methods must also be in agreement to its nature. The methods employed must thus agree to the open-ended nature of action research as a qualitative phenomenon grounded in the ethos of collective reflection, participation, interaction and collaboration which spontaneously asserts open dialogues. The methods below seem appropriate for this research:

1. Observation

In their Lifespan Development works, Turner and Helms (1990: 11-24) present a section on scientific methods of inquiry of which observation is a part. There are different forms of observation: namely, naturalistic (unstructured), structured, participant and controlled experiments. Of these, naturalistic and participant observations seem both fit and applicable to the qualitative studies such as this one. Naturalistic observation means examining human behaviours under unstructured or natural conditions. This forms attempts to minimise the obstruction of the elements of the setting. It explicitly backs the principle of naturality or neutrality revealed by the literature review, especially in the works of McKernan (1992) and Schon (1991). In

actual researching, this observation form will mean young learners not made aware of my presence purposes in their classrooms. It will furthermore mean learners placing themselves in the classrooms as they usually do.

The other form is that of direct, active participant observer. Participant observation places the researcher as the direct witness of what unfolds in the setting. It is telling it as you see it technique. It enables the researcher to interact with what is studied. In this study, participant observation also affirms and confirms the interpretive paradigm and will supplement other data collecting tools.

2. Interviews

Interviews can be valuable research endeavours. Turner and Helms (1990: 16-17) define them as "face-to-face encounter(s) with a number of advantageous opportunities. They assist the researcher to establish the rapport and a sense of trust with the interviewees. The built rapport and trust promotes co-operation and positive relationship that will impact data to be collected. Lotz highlights this reality: "the quality of data in interview research depends upon the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the participating teachers" (1996:97). The rate of participation is also high as during the interview process the set questions promote the emergency of further elaborative questions or responses. The interviewer can also get the clear picture of the responses provided as he can learn of the respondents not only by their oral responses but by viewing their non-verbal communication as well.

In this research, interviews will become one of the used research devices. They will be for extracting information from student and support teachers. Their answers will be of great importance particularly in clearing my personal judgement of the classroom activities or events. In similar atmosphere, my participants' views will be essential, counter-weighting my own personal biases. This further becomes a useful instrument in attempts to present a well-thought-after research with a better degree of reliability.

3. Informal Discussions

Informal discussions with co-participants can prove to be the useful data collect technique. They are unique in a sense that they create a free comfortable atmosphere

unlike during observations and interviews therein participants may feel intimidated. I will then try to talk to the student teachers and support teachers during the class recesses or tea breaks to hear of their feelings about the teaching situations. I will also share with my departmental colleagues of what I have learned in the research setting for the insights they may illuminate. These discussions will then be entered into the research journal when deemed necessary.

4. Documentary Analysis

Much of what happen in everyday teaching and learning situations are based on the subject texts, subject syllabi, schemes of work, teachers' guides, references, policy documents, etc. To enter the classrooms, it will be crucial to first acquaint myself with the available documents that offer beacons on whats, hows and whys of teaching. In fact, some materials might provide pertinent insights as what must be covered, when and how. The other is exploring the question of the materials to establish the degree to which they may impact the resolutions taken by student researchers when remedy the situations.

Ethics

One of the threats to the conducting of research likes this one surrounds the use of English language. I hereby refer to the ability of the participants, particularly the support teachers, to actively play their roles in the process. The lower level of their English may incapacitate them to freely express their experiences, perceptions and concerns regarding the situations in which we find teaching/learning activities. The therefore man not feel confident communicating in English. Again, they might not be very well grounded in the issues of the curriculum they daily interact with and ought to operate. Lastly, there is a persistent tendency on the part of the teachers to view the teaching/learning situations as just excellent. These open realities are drawn from my personal involvement with the support teachers over the recent years, and it will be unfortunate to find the 'critical partners' in this education enterprise in positions that lack real professional empowerment, if that will be case.

The students belong to the similar campus though with some differences. They have not been receptive of the critical constructive criticisms made on their teaching. The criticisms are meant for them to reflect on their practices with the view to improve them. This has not been the case; too often students see it the other way around. As support teachers, students also tend to lack the languages of critique. How can these problematic situations be dealt with?

Kierkegaard (2003:8) has stipulated two ethical dimensions in his research proposal "work on progress". The first ethical aspect is related to the persons chosen to partake in the research process. He asserts that participants must be informed of the intention of the research, what their roles are and what they might benefit from the research. The respect of confidentiality even to the point of anonymity needs to be kept as well.

The second ethical dimension is the "respect for truth" (2003:8). Respect for truth appears to be concerned with the principal researcher. I also perceive it to mean loyalty to the research process, to the fellow participants and their integrity. In this context, I foresee Kierkegaard's frame of ethical consideration offering an operational praxis necessary for this research. Like him, I, therefore, will try to be open and sensitive as far as possible to my co-participants and the contexts I find them throughout the entire process.

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Forward with Reflective Practices: the Case of Action Research, a Literature Review

Introduction

In A. S. Hornby's *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* the literary sense of the phrase "forward with" demonstrates a journey being travelled. "Forward with" also seems to portray the holding of that what is travelled by and the imagination of when, why and how of reaching the targeted destinations. In this work "forward with", as a part of the paper title, is associated with defining action research as a worthwhile journey undertaken by others. Whether the targeted destinations get reached or not is not the principal concern. The principal concern is how others have acted towards the destinations using action research as an ideal compass for achieving the aimed goals and objectives.

In the above sense, the paper is a collection of what different researchers/writers in their own different ways informed by their own unique contexts have felt, experienced, interpreted and implied about action research as a constitution of reflective practices. It hopes to draw workable lessons from the experiences, perspectives, interpretations and anxieties others have undergone in carrying out the action research process. In such situations, the paramount questions such as "what is action research?", "how does it take place?", "when should it be assumed?" and "why is it worthy taking?" become worthwhile to explore. From others' works answers to these questions may be found as well.

Therefore, this paper serves as a search for the answers to such questions in the process of action research. Discovering possible solutions will better assist us to further adopt this kind of research as a powerful tool for change disseminations in a developing country such as ours that is in the process of transformation. There is an ambitious hope that what others have done, whether practically or theoretically, may be relevant, insightful and empowering to our teacher education that is presently caught up in the dilemma of

change. The change process perhaps can be better shaken, shrunk or even twisted by borrowing from others. In fact only when we do so does better progress in the reform and transformation process become easily located.

Action Research Defined

Defining action research has been a question of fierce debate and intense contestation among scholars from different walks of professions (Henry & McTaggard 1996: 1). This is mainly due to the fact that action research has been applied to cover a myriad of activities. There has also been, to a certain extent, a tendency towards abuse and misuse. What the two authors imply firstly is that the possible definitions are situated in the pressing underlying contexts in which action research may be carried out. Secondly, it seems that the level of participation, whether small or large-scale intervention, the primary purpose the research seeks to address as well as the roles played by both the research and the researchers do influence our definition of what constitutes an action research. Thirdly, one's definition may be shaped by the adopted theoretical frame of reference that guides the research purpose and process. Various viewpoints, therefore, seem to have shaped what our definition of the action research might become. These, further complicate the possibility of coming up with one satisfactory definition acceptable by all.

On the other hand, regardless of what the different foci informing the research meaning may be, the unifying area is definitely the common purpose for changes and future improvements. This is inherent throughout various definitions to the action research presented by various authors:

1. The widely used definition is that presented by Henry and McTaggard (1996:1). It is also one that has been advocated by Carr and Kemmis as cited by McKernan (1991: 4). It defines action research as “a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve rationality, coherence, satisfactoriness and justice of their own social [or educational] practices,

their understanding of these practices and the situations and society in which these practices are carried out”. A close scrutiny indicates that this definition is mostly placed within the theoretical framework of the critical version of constructivism, the emancipatory pedagogy of education. It is focused on scrutinizing the society 's educational system and its curriculum that may seem to preserve certain practices perpetuating any form of injustice against true emancipation of those seem disempowered. The urgent need here is that of reversing the confronting situations by rooting out practices that hinder the accessibility of justice and freedom. Therefore the adopted theoretical frame, grounded on the ultimate purpose, plays a dominant role in this definition.

2. Action research is “the study of a social situation with a view to improve the quality of action within it”. McKernan (1991: 3-4) commends that in this context it “is carried out by practitioners seeking to improve their understanding of events, situations and problems so as to increase the effectiveness of their practice”. This definition is traced to John Elliot. It appears merely to be located in the chief purpose of conduction action research: facilitating changes for better curriculum practices. However, it is not only confined to improvement but for a better understanding as defined in point 1. While participants may not entirely find solutions to the problems, they may be partially content having gained better perspectives as to how the problems exist.
3. McKernan (1991: 4) cites another definition by Rapoport. It goes: “Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework”.
4. The other definition cited by McKernan (1991: 4) is that of Hasley who perceives action research as a “small scale intervention in the functioning of the real world ... and the close examination of the effects of such interventions”. To the two is the cited one which occurs in Bogdan and Biklen’s, “the systematic collection of information

that is designed to bring social change” (p:4). The definitions in points 3 and 4 concur on the point of common purpose of improvements for social changes. Hasley’s is far more concentrated on the level of participation- the degree of intervention. But the definition by Rapoport is very unique, placing the research in the sphere of social science guided by the framework of ethics as opposed to theories. It serves to indicate the valuable concern regarding the issues of ethics as we have seen during the previous session on research methods at Rhodes’ Grahamstown campus particularly in the researched works of Raphael Adendorff and Jongi Klass (2002). It is, therefore, partly defining this research kind with the perspectives of morality.

5. The last definition presented is that by Lawrence Stenhouse, as quoted by McKernan, seeing action research as “systematic and sustainable inquiry, planned and self-critical, which is subjected to public criticism and to empirical tests where these are appropriate” (p:4). This definition seems located in the behaviorist base of positivism, in the natural science context, which subjects researchers to observable empirical evidence. The definition in this case is strongly influenced by the paradigm of behaviorism. The other unique aspect is its point that holds the researchers accountable to the public.
6. What can then be mutually acceptable action research meaning? James McKernan (1991:5), after reviewing the preceded definitions, structures what may be perceived as an inclusive definition. He would define action research as, I quote:

the reflective process whereby in a given problem area, where one wishes to improve practice or personal understanding, inquiry is carried out by the practitioner- first, to clearly define the problem; secondly, to specify a plan of action- including the testing of hypotheses by application of action to the problem. Evaluation is then undertaken to monitor and establish the effectiveness of the action taken. Finally, participants reflect upon, explain developments, and communicate these results to the community of action researchers. Action research is systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice.

McKernan claim his stresses two essential points: the systematically scientific planning and the critical-reflective ownership of the process and the results by the participants. But does he actually offer something new? Does he go beyond what others have given? What

make his definition so unique? Its significance is its focus on the practical process and products of the research. In addition, it emphasizes the participatory partnership nature of the action research with the larger research community. Unfortunately, McKernan's definition, for example, does not consider the standpoints of either theoretical or ethical frameworks. It cannot claim inclusiveness. At the end what is obvious is the fact that there is not a single definition of this research kind. It is all influenced by a number of perspectives. Schon (1991: 2) confirms the same truth. Analyzing the differences and their possible causes in the diverse study cases carried out by his associates but centered on his notion of reflective turns, Schon concludes- "Across these very diverse practice settings, the cases reveal different conceptions of a practice as an object of study and different ways of setting the terms of reference for a 'case'. These differences are rooted in the researchers' backgrounds, interests, and purposes". It is therefore impossible to arrive at a standardized definition.

Action Research as a Reflective Practice

The definitions in the previous section have clearly illustrated action research as a direct consequence of reflections, thereby situating its genesis in the domain of reflective practices. John S. Mayher (1990: 8-9) would view action research as a "'reflection-in-action' which combines both knowing and doing in a transactional relationship through which the doing affects the knowing and the knowing affects the doing". Mayher spells out that teachers as researchers must compare their knowing with their doing, their beliefs with their practices and artistically explore the connections among them. In this context, action research is a reflection-in-action engagement perpetuated into a continually growing inquiry by practitioners' own practices, both theoretically and practically.

Van Harmelen has called for similar explorations of epistemological connections between theories and practices. In her Core Text I- The Reflective Practitioner, Inquiry in Learner Centered Education, Van Harmelen (2001: 1-2), moving away from the conventional traditions, sees the ability to reflect on one's teaching practices as one of the best qualities of those whose business lies in education. She compares reflecting on one's practices to

the ways in which light, heat and sound reflect off surfaces. What reflects is "thrown back" off the surface it strikes. Therefore, in teaching, teachers are similarly thrown back to think back over what has happened, been learned or done. In this throwing back situation, they must make sense of a phenomenon or event by applying it to their existing frames of reference. In her personal viewpoint this marks the first step towards effecting changes.

The first step dictates the second: taking actions to respond to what has been reflected on to effectively confront the threatening issues. In this context Van Harmelen (2001: 2) defines action research as "*a framework of and for change*". She would therefore adopt action research as an ideal vehicle for efficient responding to the educational change and transformation process currently underway in Namibia. Her stance is further boosted by Mayher 's belief that handling the process of change from reflective practitioner perspectives would allow teachers to be in strategic positions of control and of responsibility to what might happen in their own classrooms or teaching (1990: 285).

Beside Mayher and Van Harmelen, the other influential figure, a true reformist and a champion of the action research, though he himself has not claimed such title directly, has probably been Richard Prawat. His outspoken advocacy for reflective practice values is explicitly expressed in his fascinating pieces of writing: "Conversations with Self and Settings- A Framework for Thinking about Teacher Empowerment" (1991) and "Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and Learning: A Constructive Perspective" (1992). As others, Prawat (1992:1) assumes that teachers have critical roles to play in the reform process by becoming important agents of change. Their roles must be of changing the faces of education at all levels of teaching, at classrooms and schools. He realizes that teachers themselves can also be a major obstacle to changes through their reluctant adherence to the outdated forms of instructions.

Prawat is convinced the key to tangible changes lies within teachers deeply re-examining their theoretical world of practices which underpins their classroom behaviors. These include beliefs (theories) such as assuming students and subject contents as being

separated fixed entities instead of being interrelated, the naïve constructivism of the teachers stressing a kind of faith in the ability of students to structure their own learning without teachers' guidance and the belief that equates student activism to learning- that as long as children are active, then learning is taking place. The last is viewing the bodies of learning and knowledge application as un-linked to understanding and problem solving. These beliefs have become a stumbling block to changes in Prawat 's American context. What is depicted is the reality that our daily educational routines do not take place in a vacuum. They are deeply grounded in the held theoretical parameters that shape the directions of our daily teaching activities. The ways of instructional execution affect the ways students learn. Prawat then seemingly calls upon us to establish closer connections between theory and practice, a fact we have been overly reminded of at numerous study sessions in this program.

It is strongly believed critical analytical rethinking about underlying beliefs will provide teachers with "a new set of theoretical or conceptual lenses" (Prawat 1992: 357) allowing them to find "alternative realities" to address " a new and more vexing set of problems". It will create opportunities for professional growth and development resulting in both political and epistemological empowerment. It will also enable them to "direct attention to important aspects of the environment that otherwise would go unnoticed" (1992: 356). But he has also recognized that "getting people to change beliefs, especially intuitively reasonable ones, is a difficult proposition" (1992: 357). It requires teachers and all those of us involved in the enterprise of education to enter into conversations with ourselves (Prawat 1991). Conversations with self are defined as internal dialogues, or internal reflections on critical self that "entail active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads" (1991: 741). Such internal dialogues are accompanied and set in motion by conversations with others. Prawat would therefore encourage the formation of scholarly community of inquiry seeing it as one of the first intellectual centers in penetrating action research. The action research is hereby facilitated through conversations with others. What would these conversations do?

Normalcy for the Rise of Action Research

Placing Prawat's viewpoints in the context of action research would require meeting certain constructivist criteria arising through the direct consequences of conversations with others. The raised criteria are as follow (1992: 357): "First, individuals must be dissatisfied with their existing beliefs in some way; second, they must find the alternatives both intelligible and useful in extending their understandings to new situations; third, they must figure out some way to connect the new beliefs with their earlier conceptions". These criteria are requirements of his perturbation he has mentioned at page 385. But Prawat has also stressed the desperation for the process to assume interactive relationships between teachers and their students. Such a process places greater demands on teachers and he seriously urges them to "work harder, concentrate more and embrace larger pedagogical responsibilities" (p:357) unlike before.

Etchberger and Shaw (1992: 412-3) in their "Teacher Change as a Progression of Transitional Images: A Chronology of a Developing Constructivist Teacher" have come up with five interrelated prerequisites necessary for the change take-off. These are:

1. Perturbation: This is dissatisfaction or uneasiness with the ways matters are. In our teacher education context, it may be unhappiness regarding certain aspects of a program such as assessment procedures. The dissatisfaction must mark deeper questioning of our practices and frame of references, etc.
2. The second is the awareness of a need to change among teachers. According to the authors, this occurs when teachers have realized that for things to improve, some changes must be made. Perhaps the essential question for Etchberger and Shaw to answer will be who must promote such welcome awareness in complex contexts such as at our Ongwediva teacher training centre.
3. The commitment to change is the third requisite. It requires teachers to take a firm decision that goes into real practical actions (action research then). It is a good pre-

requisite, the worry is solely if teachers are empowered to take actions to effect desirable changes. Nevertheless Prawat (1991 & 1992) would urge for the acquisition of critical reflection skills as the best way forward.

4. The fourth and fifth are the vision and projection of that vision into the future. The vision is about imagining what changing will involve; what it will take. Projection is thinking about possibilities for changes, challenges, risks, pros and cons. In my understanding, it means doing SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) kind of analysis.

The other contributions have been made by Doll. Doll is distinguishably the most inspiring writer using powerful language, a language that employs the voices of persuasion. His personal commitments towards change can be easily detected in his language usage. In his “Constructing a Curriculum Matrix” Doll argues - “If a post-modern pedagogy [of which action research an integral part] is to emerge, I predict, it will center around the concept of self-organization” (p:163). The way to self-organization is perturbation, the view equally shared by Prawat, and Etchberger and Shaw on the other hand. The system, according to Doll, can only organize itself when there is a perturbation, problem, or disturbance - when the system is unsettled and needs to resettle in order to continue functioning normally. The unsettlement or perturbation serves then as the driving force for re-development. However, Doll warns that not every perturbation leads to re-development, it can also lead to the chaotic “abyss of destruction”. For this very reason Doll calls for a well thought after self-organization.

Doll has laid conditions necessary for perturbation that must result in positive self-organization. Self-organization, parented by perturbation, must be based on heuristics, the methods of solving problems by learning from past experiences and investigating practical ways of finding a solution. So this is actually doing action research even though Doll does not say so directly. Secondly, the perturbation needs the adoption of evolutionary process of multiple uses. By multiple uses Doll means a matrix curriculum such as his that allows the spaces for the existence of divergent views. He emphasizes

this very truth which I must quote: "This requires a curriculum rich in diversity, problematics, and heuristics as well as a classroom atmosphere that fosters exploration and discovery. In his opinion, "perturbation will trigger self-organization only when the environment is rich enough and open enough for multiple uses, interpretations, and perspectives to come into play" (p:164). Perturbation ought not to be quick, so efficient duration is needed to allow a new frame to emerge and a time "to dialogue seriously with the students about their idea as their ideas (in this context participants as opposed to students) (p:166). Therefore, Doll has incredibly presented what it takes to assume actions-based kind of researches. It all resides within his concept of a matrix curriculum.

All the authors concur on the need for discussion and collaboration among all participants involved in the research process. In particular, Doll would say, "Dialogue is the *sine qua non* of the whole process. Without dialogue there is no transformation" (p:169). Can dialogue serve as our referencing frame in the acts of action research then? How would that be?

Action Research in Practical Operation: Assuming a Frame of Reference

That dialogue be our first marching step into action research constitution is a cherished reality. Richard Prawat (1992: 386) would say such needed dialogue should assist us to set up broader goals that would serve as beacons to help structure discourse. This preoccupation calls upon the participants to identify the frame of references or principles that would guide action research's practical operation. I personally find the answer to such valuable search to be situated in Doll's constructivist perspectives of a matrix curriculum. Doll, explaining reasons for naming his seventh chapter "Constructing a Curriculum Matrix" emphasizes the constructive and non-linear nature of a post-modern curriculum. I quote (p: 162):

Hence, a constructive curriculum is one that emerges through the action and interaction of the participants; it is not one set in advance (except in broad and general terms). A matrix has no beginning or ending; it does have boundaries and ... points of intersection or foci. So, too, a curriculum modeled on a matrix is nonlinear and nonsequential but bounded and filled with intersecting foci and related webs of meaning. The

richer the curriculum, the more the points of intersection, the more the connections constructed, and the deeper the meaning.

Prawat (1992:386) directly quotes Doll on a similar point of tremendous significance. The curriculum would be become a “multifaceted matrix to be explored rather than a course to be run. In this matrix, places where one begins and ends are far less important than how well one explores the myriad connections, logical and personal, inherent in the matrix”. What Doll emphasizes is that action taking must take place in the spirit of a matrix curriculum. Prawat positively responds to Doll’s calls by advocating a zigzag approach as opposed to a linear path (1992: 388). He continues by writing:

Working from a curriculum map [a matrix one] does not allow the teachers to anticipate future possibilities. It provides teacher with a sense of direction without limiting their ability to explore the conceptual terrain with students. This view ... fits nicely with the other constructivist views about teaching and learning.

The last point is by Doll himself centered on his ideals, interpretations and understandings of his matrix curriculum proposition (p: 170-171). It reads:

In a frame that recognizes self-organization and transformation, goals, plans, and purposes arise not purely prior to but also from within action. ...plans arise from action and are modified through actions. The two are interactive, each leading into the other and depending on the other. ... As the course ... proceeds, specificity becomes more appropriate and is worked out conjointly- among teachers, students, text. Such conjoint planning not only allows for flexibility- utilizing the unexpected- but also allows for planners to understand themselves and their subjects with a degree of depth not otherwise obtained.

The statements quoted are self-explanatory. They all stress the opened-door frame of references and principles in conducting action research. Such a frame strongly supports the principle of naturality, the neutrality of the setting and the process. At the same time it encourages the importance of troika relationships more centered on the viewpoints of Prawat’s (1991) conversations with self, others and settings.

The other aspects that would be enabled by such an opened frame of references, centered on values of democratic participation, would be the discussing and reaching consensus on the questions suggested by Donald Schon (1991: 9-12) in his writing of reflective turns. Schon raises a set of four questions researchers must agree on in forging ahead with research process. Firstly, researchers must decide on what is appropriate to reflect on and how much to reflect. There are not specific correct answers to this question, so participants must decide on their own. Schon has established this very reality when he writes (1991: 9): “There is no ends of things and relations to which one might pay

attention, no ends of patterns and possibilities one might bring to the practitioner's attention".

Secondly, researchers must agree on the appropriate ways of observing and reflecting. Schon would have participants asking questions such as the kinds of activities to be reflected on and whether the activities to be reflected on should be diverse i.e. written, oral, or non-verbal. In addition, they must think of the methods to present the descriptions of their discoveries and the possible impacts the ways they do things would have.

The third is the question of appropriate rigor that involves creating validity and reliability of the research outcomes. The selected epistemology of practice adopted to guide the research directions affects the rigor concerns. The lines of selecting would involve participants deciding between the grounds of technical rationality, which in nature are very behaviorist, and those of constructivism. The next sub-question regards thinking of how the assumed rigor in terms of credibility and validity would affect the acceptance of the research studies by the public.

The final question involves researchers deliberating on their relationships: relationships with the research subjects, with themselves (their internalities) and with the research itself. In Schon's opinions, the roles the subjects play in the entire research setting need to be clearly defined. Would they become co-researchers and in which specific ways? What would be the degree of their involvement? And secondly, how would researchers "distance themselves from their subjects"? Would they be participant-observers, absent participants, apprentices, field colleagues, agent-experiencers or spectator-manipulators - where and when?

Within the last question is the issue of subjectivity versus objectivity and how would researchers interpret the findings. Should the process be value free then?

Thirdly, which information should be included and how much should be shared with the subjects? Would sharing information make researchers vulnerable to their subjects? What

about subjects' vulnerability? What must the levels of confidentiality, confrontability and accountability be? These questions are directly concerned with the world of ethics which is equally critical in doing research works. Therefore, the whole set of questions by Schon is critical to researches. After all, Schon finds all the questions suitably applicable to all individuals who might have done or hope to conduct researches, regardless of purposes and contexts.

Like Schon, McKernan (1991: 5-7) has given substantial thought to similar questions. McKernan believes action research ought to take place within the principle of naturality, as he is contented that human behaviors are highly influenced by the natural surroundings in which they occur. In this situation, he argues for the employment of qualitative research methodologies as they are more aligned with researching naturalistic settings by not interfering with or obstructing the elements of the settings.

McKernan's point would have the setting and its contents define the order by which the researchers must relate to their subjects. To avoid research eroded by bias and subjectivity, the setting, reinforced by the qualitative methodologies usage, would enable the researchers to "give primacy to the feelings, narrative and values in the setting" (p:7). The researchers then have to sense the experiences or feelings of their subjects by placing themselves in their shoes. Next McKernan preaches the same point stated by Doll that the actions in the process come from within when he writes that the qualitative participant field study researcher "allows the data to emerge on their own, without any pre-conceived theories or forced structures imposed on the study and looks for meanings in the events".

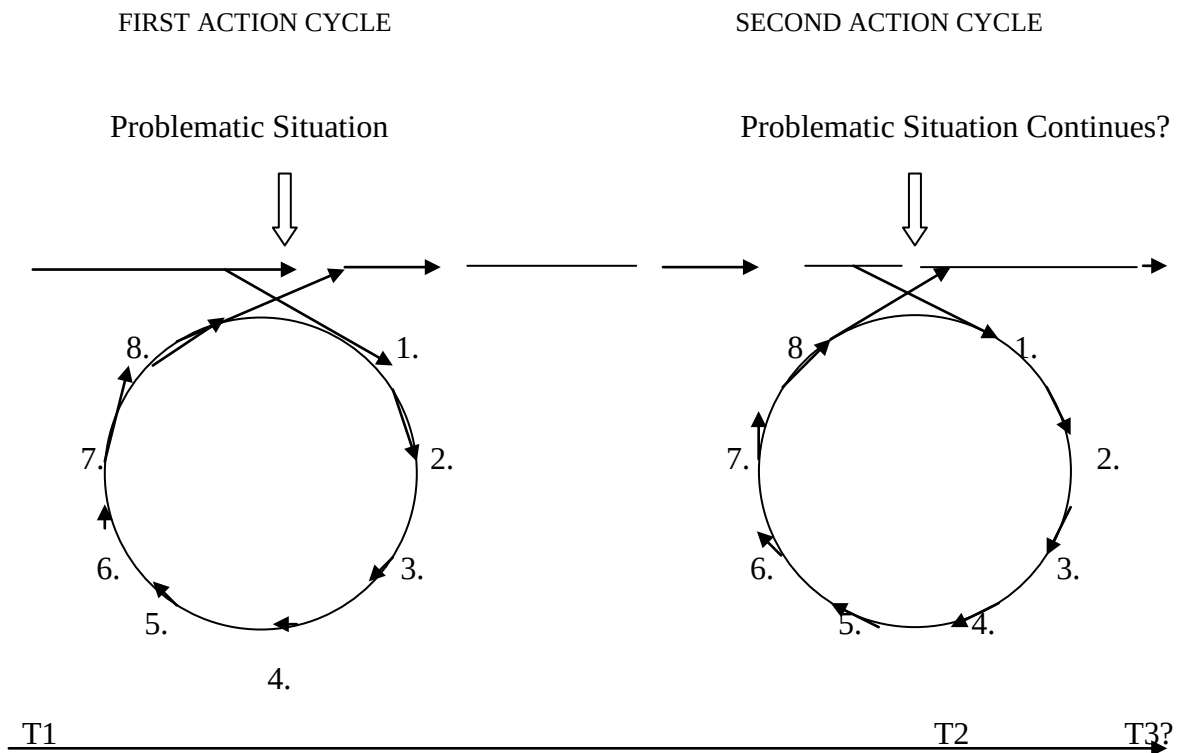
However, the concluding remarks by McKernan inviting the research practitioners to have control over the process and results of the inquiry demonstrate how impossible it is to have a process absolutely freed from human manipulations. Nevertheless the concluding remarks can also serve as a welcome precaution reminding how critical or even controversial doing action kinds of researches can be.

Practical Process Itself: Assuming a McKernanian Ideal Model of Operation

Many operational models exist ranging from that of Lewin, Taba and Elliott to those of Ebbutt and Deakin University. But the McKernanian model (1991: 28-30) seems more convincing: It is appealing to my professional setting as it exemplifies the kind of action research we have attempted to come up with at Ongwediva College for the past six years. McKernan seems to have restructured and deconstructed the other models, reviewing their prospective strengths and shortcomings to come up with a unifying umbrella approach. It again seems accommodative, being a borrowed production of all other models presented even though there are some gaps McKernan has somehow failed to articulate. I will specifically touch on these in the progression of this section. To a fair extent, the McKernanian model draws parallels with the epistemological frame of reference selected to guide the action research process examined in this paper. It overwhelmingly corresponds, for examples, to Doll's conceptualization of a matrix curriculum, to the envied uncommon sense views of John Mahyer as well as to Prawat's calls on teachers to examine the epistemologies of their practices.

As implied above, the McKernanian practical research process is a combination of diverse perspectives drawn from diverse schools of thoughts. It takes into consideration the research as a technical process that must be approached with a careful systematic or scientific planning while remaining open to the winds of change through the act of reflection. This stance therefore locates the process in the ethos of positivist procedures. The practical aspects are paid attention to, being placed in the framework of time. The model also takes on a critical basis of constructivism, aimed at helping people to "recover, and unshackle themselves from the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust and unsatisfying social [cultural, economic, political] structures which limit their self-development and self-determination" (Kemmis and Wilkinson 1998: 24). Critical intervention therefore has the purpose of emancipation and empowerment that seeks to

release the participants from the practices that contribute to irrationality, inefficiency, injustice and dissatisfaction. In this model, the technical and critical respects have then formed a part of the framework of reference. This model is presented in the figure below. The step in the italics form is borrowed from Taba 's to fill the gaps.



First Time Process

1. Problem identified/defined
2. Problem analysis
3. Hypotheses development
4. *Data collection*
5. Action plan developed
6. Action plan implemented
7. Evaluation
8. Decision taking

Second Time Process

1. Problem re-defined
2. Problem analysis
3. New hypotheses development
4. *Data Collection*
5. Action plan revised
6. Revised plan implemented
7. Evaluation
8. Decision taking

The practical process is composed of a series of repeated cycles of action taking, situated in the frame of time. The steps are cyclic with the first leading to the emergency of the next, depending on how far the participants are contented with the level of improvements attained on the problematic situations. In the academic setting, the inception of the action research process is when teachers, playing the roles of reflective practitioners and researchers, recognize that an unacceptable problematic situation exists requiring immediate attention to improve it. The situation must be a problematic one in the sense that it affects the expected performance and progress of the educational institution. During the first step of the first cycle, the problem must be specifically identified and defined. The first step is further consolidated by the second- "needs assessment". In Taba's model this is the analysis of the problem. It involves questions such as: What is the problem? How does it manifest itself and to what degree? What are its effects on teaching and learning? Examining the nature of the existence of the problem must enable the researchers to identify constraints that impede progress. It must also enable them to formulate ideas or hypotheses which will serve as a plan of action for effecting changes. McKernan reminds us that such hypotheses must not automatically account as correct approaches but merely "intelligent" guesses in the attempts to effect changes.

The fourth step in the first cycle is that of developing an action plan. There is a big gap here in this model. Despite McKernan's good efforts to make his design more sensible and representative, he has totally failed to include the collection of data and interpretation step which would have made it more adequate. It is therefore wise to refill this gap by borrowing this step from the model of Taba. The data collection and interpretation involves deciding and employing research methods as instruments to collect relevant information. The methods can be diverse depending on the problem researched, thus they will include observations, interviews, questionnaires, study cases etc. This also demands the division and description of roles individual researchers must play in the process. The researchers must analytically interpret their findings and meanings they illuminate on the problem.

The data collection and interpretation paves the way for developing an overall plan of action which will serve as an "operational blueprint for the project" (p: 28). The plan must also be clear regarding the roles each individual participant will assume during the process of practical implementation. What follows next is the implementation of the action plan everyone has longed for. The action plan implementation requires the focused observation on the effects and changes the actions have on the problem. This is the reflection-in-action emphasized by Mayher (1990) that must take place during the implementation step.

The evaluation of the effects of the action implementation on the problem is the seventh step. This is a collective effort whereby researchers deliberate on what the effects of the actions on the problem have been. What have the effects been? To what extent does the problem get resolved? And what may be the next? McKernan would emphasize that this is the step of deliberating on the process by reflecting, explaining and understanding the actions taken.

The last question of "what may be next?" marks the beginning of the decision making step that will, in turn, lead to the assumption of the second cycle of the model as deemed necessary by the participants. The next cycle will follow exactly the same steps except that it will be shaped more by the experiences learned during the first research cycle. The steps will be more of consolidation, modification and revisiting of the first cycle's steps. The process is an on-going, continuously unfolding one, with its mortality lying with the degrees of satisfaction the participants have achieved. It may also be affected by constraints of time, finance and other aspects.

Qualities of the Ideal Teacher

Action research seeks the attainment of good teaching and learning. Action research therefore ought to assist teachers to move to the ideals associated with good teaching. Hessong and Weeks (1987) and Farrant (1980) present the lists of what a good teacher is. In Hessong and Weeks' these range from being knowledgeable, humorous, flexible,

upbeat, honest, being clear and concise to being open, patient, a role model, diversified in preparation, self-confident and being able to relate theory to practice. Farrant's list bears exactly the similar features with differences occur in the terminologies used. It describes a good teacher as one who bears qualities of authority, competence, energy, enthusiasm, humility, humor, imagination, initiative, integrity, loyalty, perseverance, responsibility, self-control and single-mindedness. These qualities are expected in the situations in which they can be expressed. Again, the kinds of teachers one must have are also shaped by the assumed theoretical positions regarding the held views of the teacher and his roles in the teaching-learning process. In the lists presented, it is inherent most qualities conform to the technical-rationality perspectives wherein a teacher attains the upper hand, by being authoritative, knowledgeable, upbeat, a role model and single-minded in his course of actions. Some of these qualities contradict the constructivist learning theory selected as the ideal parameter to better educational improvements in today 's education systems.

In conducting action-based researches, the corridors to good teachers, thus good teaching, are situated in imagination, initiative, flexibility, openness, and diversification in reasoning and thinking about theory and practice. The teacher, per se, does not necessarily need to be knowledgeable and competent to undertake action research despite the fact that its engagement's permanent goal targets at such edges. These edges are explicitly presented by Woods (1990: 28-53). Woods sees the future of good teaching to lie in teacher creativity. Creativity involves innovation, ownership, control and relevance of the teaching situations by the teacher. By being creative, thus innovative, and learning from his own teaching experiences, the teacher can discover what adjustments are needed to solve the confronting situations. It can also allow him to adapt others' ideas, one of the exact possibilities emphasized in carrying out action research.

Woods also stresses that creative acts bring changes, particularly when teachers start to have accurate or complete pictures of the prevailing situations. He finds creativity leading into fruitful results, into transformation of the teachers, students and the contexts in which teaching and learning take place. The creative acts furthermore generate additional

creative activities. What are required, Woods recommends, are the adaptability, flexibility and willingness to do experimentation that must accompany the process.

The said creativity is enhanced by conducting researches. In Woods' thinking, research is "discovery" whereas teaching is "putting across [into practices] what have been discovered" (p: 29). The research here contributes to teachers' professionalism, self-awareness, increasing skills and personal innovation. By conducting researches such as action ones, teachers do investigate their own practices whereby submitting their teaching to critical scrutiny. The hope is that it may result in improvements of the "artful orchestration", the teaching (Woods 1990: 29).

Woods also associates reflective practtitioning ideals, similarly stressed by Schon, with good teaching: moves teachers towards being innovative and creative, in which they discover problems and issues and invent and experiment with them in the search for solutions. When necessary, they can continuously adapt their teaching strategies to changes.

Thirdly, Woods links action research to the conception of teachers as "user developers". Being user-developers teachers must assume sound decisions to develop and adapt materials applicable to their particular educational situations. In this context of conducting actions research, teachers get opportunities to improve "their ability to see and think about what they do" (p:30). It can be about curriculum design and development, teaching approaches, classroom management and assessment and evaluation. It is, therefore, about any issue in the enterprise of education.

Fourthly, Woods relates good teaching to the symbolic interactionism derived from the works of G. H. Mead. Symbolic interactionism is "the social construction of the self, and the ongoing dialect between the 'I' and the 'me'. The self is a flexible entity continually created and recreated in each social situation one enters. The 'I' is the cognizing subject's response to the attitudes of others while the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others, which one himself assumes" (1990: 30). These interpretations of the teacher are about

inter-relational conversations with others which is hoped to result in ones' improvements in teaching equally stressed by Prawat (1991).

The symbolic interactionism, in Woods' thinking, must lead to the notion of teachers as "constructive copers" (1990: 31). A constructive copers is the "one who struggles within situations always to adapt, seeking to maximize interests by frequently adjusting them ... to realize achievement in a continual dialect with the situation". Good teaching here is then defined as keeping in touch with the situations. Action research process itself enables teachers to do just that. In the above contexts centered on the contributions of Peter Woods, it appears meaningful to conclude that action research is an enabling tool for good teaching. In the meantime, the other question worth asking remains- where have we come from?

The Socio-Historical Background

The historical account presented in this section is based on the writings of James McKernan (1991: 8-15). In McKernan 's, the origin of action research, by implications and through using an interpretive approach, is diverse. It is traced to certain numerous educational movements, individual educationalists and to events or phenomena or historical periods such as the reconstructionist ones in the United States. Some phenomena were a result of international marks such as the First and Second World Wars. There appeared to be interactions among the movements and individuals that despite the separation barriers of geographical locations and distances, there seemed to lie an enabling networking of relationships among the different circles of the different countries that further spearheaded the ideals and values of action research. Nevertheless the United States appears to have played a major dominant role.

In the United States, the action research birth is linked to the Science in Education movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Science movement was seen as stressing the importance of scientific methods of research as an approach to solving problems in the field of education. That was also the time of the most influential

educational thinker, John Dewey. Like the Science movement, John Dewey was advocating the experimentalist and progressive ideal of educational research grounded on the application of the inductive scientific methods of inquiry as the best approach towards solving problems in the fields of aesthetics, philosophy, psychology and education as McKernan has put it. It was Dewey who coined the concept of reflective thinking. In his own country, the U.S, the works of Dewey were so admired by various educationalists that they eventually adopted action research programs to solve the problems regarding curriculum development and material production. In so doing Dewey's ideas of scientific method approach were rigorously used as the work ethic. Team researching or networking in carrying out researches was for the first time developed and used.

The origin of action research is also closely linked to the Group Dynamics movement led by Kurt Lewin during America's post-war reconstructionist period. As the name itself implies, the Group Dynamics hoped to solve problems that involved interrelations in social group settings. The focus was on examining and solving social problems of poverty, housing and urban centered situations. Again in early 1940's the movement also explored the problems of interracial relations, social construction, prejudice and any other problems which demanded "a social science response" (1991:9). McKernan writes then that it was under such circumstances of trying to understand and find appropriate solutions to the problems that "practitioner inquiry was... discovered and action research was seen as a credible response" (1991:9). Therefore action research was born in the context of applying social science research. Lewin himself developed the action research model to solve problems faced by groups of people. He is said to have used action research to help one of his student's families that owned a factory. The family factory had failed to meet its production or market goals. Lewin looked into the questions of family morale, their approaches to the work conditions, their attitudes and the ways decisions were made by the family as an entity and the effects of these on this business enterprise. In using sophisticated social inquiry skills and innovation in attempts to find solutions to the problem of group dynamics, Lewis earned himself a reputation of being both a "founding father" of action research and a "practical theorist" (McKernan 1991: 8, 9). The rise of the qualitative methods of research was also recognized.

Action research has also been used in the studies of industries and health and community settings especially in the United Kingdom and United States. In the area of industry, the initiations have been sparked by institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Tavistock Institute of Human relations, based in London. It seems the primary purpose was to help the industries to improve their production output and competitiveness. To overcome the confronting situations, external experts were brought in to work together with the inside practitioners to rescue the companies. McKernan (1991:10) observes that it was such a context that paved the way for the external intervention style of collaborative action research, which currently enjoys worldwide recognition, to come into being. The idea of participatory research process wherein insiders and outsiders working together for the common purpose of improvement was thus born.

The post-war 'Corey Era' reconstructionist curriculum development activity period also saw a lot of contributions to the emergence and growth of action research. This period led by the reconstructionist researcher Stephen Corey, among others, championed the use of action research in education according to McKernan. The belief was that having teaching personnel use action research to investigate the results of their own research investigations would dramatically change and improve curriculum practices. The Corey Era signified a period in which schools, teachers and students worked together with outside researchers to improve the practices and performances of the curriculum. The effect of that historical era further expanded the definition of action research as a "cooperative" undertaking (p: 10).

Other valuable contributions to the growth and development of action research were the activities of the teacher-research movement. In Britain this movement was led by Lawrence Stenhouse. The teacher-research movement developed the modes attaching teachers and their teaching roles to researching. In this emphasis, teaching got assigned new functions, new meanings. McKernan (1991: 11) observes: "All teaching ought to be based on research and that research and curriculum are the preserve of teachers; the

curriculum then becomes a means of studying the problems and effects of implementing any defined line of teaching". It is hoped that as teachers, as practitioners, go through the research process they will gain increased understanding of themselves and of their work eventually resulting in improved teaching.

Economically, action based research had also been used as a useful tool for professional development at the institutions of higher learning of North America, specifically in U.S and Canada. Too often it was organized in the terms of teamwork usually involving participants from external and internal organizations. Just like during the Corey Era, the widening of participation in this research kind further broadened its contemporarily perceived view and meaning to that of being seen as interactive. The interactive/collaborative nature of the action research allowed team members to share in their planning, implementation and analysis and reporting as McKernan writes. Team members, therefore, contributed in their own unique ways, offering skills and expertise to this collective effort. Teams were often made of university faculty, district teachers, education administrators, and laboratory research and development personnel and staff members of the sponsoring bodies.

At the moment, it is described (p: 12) that the interactive perspective seems to be the popularly accepted mode of conducting action research in the USA. It has been extensively used in school-based studies of curriculum, staff development, in-service training and qualitative studies of curriculum evaluation. Despite the successes, the worrying concern has been that of teachers acquiring research skills. As action research is a process of interaction and collaboration, a kind of smart partnership, the response has been that the process must enable developing researchers to use their own research skills while at the same time learning from their experienced counterparts. In the long run, these teachers, as researchers, will develop their own personal conceptions of what really counts as good research. This then constitutes the offerings of the "exciting new beginnings for the development of the curriculum, the profession and the person[s]" (p: 3). What is evident in this expression is another redefinition of action research as "a realistic professional development strategy for ... practical concerns" requiring teachers

to rethink of roles to include “a research remit” in which they must become “peer-critics” (p: 12).

The gathered evidenced proves that action research has a long history of existence; it was not born yesterday. It has been widely used and applied across different settings and contexts in many different countries on the different continents of our global village. Such histories should serve to persuade us towards its wider reception and embrace. For us in Namibia and South Africa it is neither a choice nor an opportunity but a question of survival and competitiveness in our attempts to transform and transcend our unique societies and swim beyond the current ocean waves.

Conclusion

At Ongwediva Teacher Training College, action research is still a becoming practice with experiences of close to nine years. Student teachers are expected to carry out action research projects during their third year of clinical experiences in the nearby partnership basic school fields. I personally find that our students have been successful in following structural directions and procedures but not successful regarding meaning making and construction. This over-emphasis on structure adds a negative dimension whereby the process becomes more inflexible; entering the dogmatisms of technical rationality particularly where prescribing structures to students becomes more important than the other way around.

The practices of action research at our institution need to be re-looked and deeply re-thought about. There is a desperate need to move beyond merely promoting the awareness of the action research to real implementation practices. At first, students need to design relevant research questions that will provide deeper, adequate and insightful information that touch the hearts of the issues being investigated. Students must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and critical reflective inquiry skills they need in order to critically and analytically examine the aspects that call for improvements in their learners' ability to learn more successfully. This is a need to acquire skills of identifying

and defining what and how the problems are, and think about what can be best done to resolve the existing confronting difficulties. There is also a call for active professional interactions and engagement between what they undertake to research and themselves, unlike at the moment whereby they tend to make up the situations, a kind of academic dishonesty.

The other problem is the lack of good writing skills. It has made it impossible for our future teachers to come up with better-written works, both relevant and meaningful to look at. This problem is partly due to the fact that writing and writing skills have not been paid any priority in the teacher education program. It is also an issue of limited institutional capacities. For example, in the entire program there is not a specific English course focusing on equipping students with necessary knowledge and skills about writing and conducting researches. Lastly, the fact that we as teacher educators do not seem to share a common understanding of action research being so as a consequence of our diverse educational backgrounds does more harm than good. To a large extent it negatively affects the standards and competencies the students are expected to portray in coming up with meaningful written works.

As some aspects of the teacher education program we have vigorously talked about show, there is a desperate necessity to refocus our immediate attention to meaning making in the action research works. By so doing, only then, at the end, can we confidently whisper about teacher education, teacher development, teacher empowerment and national building, and eventually move away from the direct betrayals of the greatest ideas of the greatest educationalists such as Doll, Prawat, McKernan and Mayher.

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Behaviourism and Constructivism: What is Knowledge and How can it be Acquired?

Abstract

Our orientations to education whether in terms of content selection and organisation, didactics, research, management, disciplinary measures and assessment and evaluation strategies are not independent on themselves alone. One way or the other they have been enormously informed by distinct theoretical perspectives, the epistemologies that provide the frameworks which eventually influence our daily educational behaviours and practices. The most significant ones of these epistemological forces have been drawn from the two dominant schools of thoughts, that of behaviourism and constructivism. These two frames while may be seen pulling strings into opposing polar directions, they are unified into a common entity of educational endeavour that of explaining what knowledge is and how it can be acquired. It is this closer exploration that lies at the heart of this work. Therefore, in this piece of writings attempts are critically taken to examine how these two antithetical opponents deliberate on the nature of knowledge, its construction and acquisition.

Behaviourism: a Theory of Knowledge Construction

In Van Harmelen 's viewpoints (1995: 51) behaviourism can be perceived as "a network of theoretical perspectives held together by the common belief that personal experience is understood and exhibited as behaviour or actions that result from our interaction with our physical and social environment". Inferred from this definition, this theoretical network is made of certain individual theoretical traditions of realism, materialism and empiricism which serve as the key epistemological versions of behaviourism. Each of these individual perspectives seems to have offered similar contributions in terms of what knowledge is and how it can be acquired. Perhaps the differences lie more in the extents and intensities of such contributions.

What have been the epistemological contributions of these perspectives to the accepted dominant view of the behaviouristic theory of knowledge? As implied in

Van Harmelen's (1995) definition statement, these perspectives are held together by their sharing of common beliefs. In the works of Hessong & Weeks (1987), Ozman & Craver (1986), Van Harmelen (1995) and that of David Aspin (?) on empiricism, they all metaphysically view the real world as the physical world that appears to our senses. This real physical world is a mechanistic universe with a well-established orderly system governed by the natural laws and rules of its own making. In learning to understand this world, ourselves as well as our residing with it, it is the sensory organs with their functions of hearing, seeing, tasting, feeling and touching that must act as the sources of knowledge. Furthermore, the discovery and exploration of all the truths about this world and about ourselves can only be possibly attained by subjecting the studies to the scientific methods of inquiry. The scientific research methods, is claimed, bear the features of being more empirically observable, precisely verifiable, specifically measurable and accurately predictable. Anything studied but not opened to the scientific explanations cannot constitute the truth. All these perspectives, thus, recommend the use of natural sciences and scientific exploration methods as the ideal ways towards a truly knowledge construction and acquisition.

The commonly held belief of the universe governed by its own system of natural laws and regulations in an educational endeavour does affect the position and the roles of the human beings in the creation (Hessong & Weeks 1987: 160). It diminishes us, disempower us in the sense that the picture of the humans is just that of other creatures, beside our complex nature and our effects on the universe. In the behaviouristic interpretation, ours is then the world on which we have lost control over (of course there are controllers perhaps the experts), the kind of society in which humanity is reduced to passivity with limited initiations or innovations as we can neither become the leaders of ourselves nor of what we view to be our own world. The world governance is all in hands of external forces.

Another area of commonality is the perceived position and functions of the mind in the process of teaching and learning. They all view the mind's origin as "a blank sheet of paper" with nothing written on until someone does. The mind therefore is innocent, unconscious of itself as it lacks inner states that it cannot achieve self-independence. Under any circumstances its reactions is far more regulated by the outside realities that come through reinforcements. This adopted position denies the mind as the centre

of the nervous system falsely makes it just one of its integral parts. It further diminishes it to emptiness.

In addition to their strong belief in the use of scientific inquiry methods, behaviouristic theories rely on inductive reasoning. This is reasoning from the points of specificity to the general that a finding in a particular situation will be applied to all situations as general rule despite the different contexts of time, space and place. In so doing, the inductive kind of thinking poses the unwelcome danger of stereotyping and generalising. For this reason, behaviourism has been vehemently rebuked for its reductionism and universalism that seem to advocate certain built-in formulas of doing things as the only reliable in spite of different contexts in which they may occur. This is obvious in the writings of Catherine Cornbleth (1987) on preserved myths, of Doll's "Constructing a Curriculum Matrix" and of Van Harmelen (1995). Lastly, the other point is the behaviourists' claiming of absolute truths on the learning process that theirs are the appropriately established scientific procedures by which all real knowledge can be discovered. Of what I found out to be divergent is perhaps realism's uniqueness in its explanation of the world in terms of cause-and-effect relationships.

I have tried to closely look at all the three versions of behaviourism collectively. It is now essential to concentrate on each perspective at a time despite that this may create unnecessary repetition.

What is realism? Hessongs and Weeks (1987: 158) define realism as a belief that the real world is the physical world as it appears to our perceptual senses, not the world of ideas in our minds. Like in the other two theories, the world is the mechanic universe governed by an orderly system of natural laws and rules and by cause-effect relationships. To acquire the knowledge of this world one must employ natural sciences, scientific methods of inquiry and inductive logic. As in the precedence, realism heavily relies on inductive logic as opposed to deductive reasoning to discover and master facts. Realism undertakes a socio-cultural responsibility- "The purpose of education is to conserve and transmit the cultural heritage to future generation" (Hessongs & Weeks 1986: 160). This cultural purpose serves numerous implications. In the classrooms, the teachers would be concerned with transferring of

what considered to be the culturally accepted values and norms of the knowledge to the learning children. This viewpoint would define knowledge as a transmission of adult expertise into inexperienced growing youth. This would have negative set impacts to which I will return when examining the theory's educational implications. Furthermore, realism holds the simplistic view of the mind as actionless acted upon by the external environment factors, being conditioned. It is another dangerous assumption.

It is evident realism's goal of heritage preservation has impacts on what realists see as the roles of the teachers and students in the educational settings. Both teachers and students would be more passive spectators than active participators in the events of the universe. They both do not take significant roles in the world affairs because it is beyond their control regulated by the natural laws. Placement of humans is more of receivers than transmitters. The world is unchanging, objective not affected by human actions in any situations. Hessong and Weeks (1986: 160) stipulates this reality: "The educational beliefs of the realists are that neither teachers or students are free; they are subject to natural laws and spectators in the universe".

Materialism, the second version, is perhaps the most extremist form of behaviourism. The human body and its nature are described in terms of physicalistic concepts likened to materials or machinery. The human body as presented in Ozman and Craver (1986: 3) functions in accordance with its own physical makeup implying that humanity can be better comprehended from the standpoints of matter (the objects) and motion (behaviours). The interacting of matter is expressed in motion i.e. behaviours. Like realism, there is recognition that humans are not supernatural beings above nature but are rather a part of nature. They, therefore, do not have control over the universe as the universe is governed by natural laws. The human beings can be studied just like any other creatures (Ozman & Craver 1986: 3).

Worst, materialism preaches of pre-determinism thereby rejecting elements of self-determination and free will among individual persons. The assumed view of the mind is that of emptiness lacking soul that it cannot act on its own unless operated as an artificial machine which can only function as designed by its operators. So the mind's functions are merely that of co-ordinating senses with motor responses. It is not, thus,

"a self active entity" (Ozman and Craver 1986: 5). The persons' inner states of feelings are completely disregarded, as what is count is the external environment. Ozman and Craver (1986) present the example of John Watson, one of the early behaviourists, who believed that people's behaviours are conditioned by the environment in which they reside. The strong belief in the external environment as the primary shaper of behaviour would mean that to control children's learning and engineer them into the desired kinds of persons the environment is the point of departure.

Like its co-traditions, materialism stresses sensation in the process of learning. What can be learned is that which can be sensed: touched, manipulated, heard, tasted and physically seen. All these sensational perceptions are that which can be precisely observed, empirically verified and measured. All matters that are not capable of scientific treatment for instance emotional feelings, motives, satisfactions etc. are rejected.

The third version is empiricism described by David Aspin in his "Logical Empiricism, Post-Empiricism and Education". In his works empiricism is derived from the Greek word "empeiria" meaning experience. Quoting the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1972) Aspin (?) defines empiricism as "the theory that regards experience as the only source of knowledge" (21). The experience is gained through the use of various sense organs that work as the recipients of the factual information of the evidence of the real existing physical world (Aspin 25). Paradoxically, the experiences gained through the senses are considered situated outside of the individuals who have involved themselves in the learning process.

In this behaviourist empiricism, experience is then regarded as the only way of learning that "without [it] nothing can be known sufficiently" (Aspin, 23). Importantly experience constitutes the account of human knowledge which stems from the interactions of the sensual perceptions with the outside world. With "all our knowledge derives from experience" (23) the senses serve as the ideal vehicles for knowledge acquisition and development. Like the other two versions, the world experiences must bear the features of objectivity, unchanging, experimentation and observation that they can copy and conform to the real physical world.

The adoption of sense experience as the best way of learning has created a negative perception of what mind is, its roles and placement in the process of knowledge construction. At birth, which is the mind's origin, the mind is thought as "an empty cupboard or a blank sheet of paper ... on which nothing is written" but "void of all characters and without any innate ideas or principle" (24). Another presented imagery of the mind is that of a wall that what can be on it is what painted on by someone. The wall cannot paint itself. The implication here is that the external forces direct the whats, hows, whens and whys of the learning process. In terms of epistemology, there is not a further step beyond the knowledge already given rather there is a working towards the presented. It is the notion of knowledge transmission pedagogy than active construction.

Having concentrated on individual perspectives of behaviourism, it is critical to look into assumed view of the learning person in the behaviourist kind of education. At first instance, the person is described in terms of lifeless, physicalistic concepts of machinelike or materials separated from his inner experiences. He is absent-minded, lacking self-awareness that he is not capable of taking independent actions. Here is the picture of the person not being an autonomous individual who is in charge and control of his immediate world.

Secondly, his is a peculiar world of which he is unconscious. To know and comprehend this peculiar world, he must wait for the world to act upon him, "to take him in" so that he can fully grasp it (Ozman & Craver 1986: 7). The external environment and its situational contingencies that act on the person, are what facilitating the emerging knowing, and the extent to which one comes to eventually grasp his world depends on the amount of stimuli one receives from the environment. The intensive reinforcement is encouraged to promote smooth learning. Here we are presented with the human who cannot know on his own, lacking self-actions, initiates and innovations in coming to real terms with his world. At the end he is neither the master nor the shaper of his future destiny.

Behaviourism's Educational Implications

As this section opens, I would argue that behaviourism has not presented itself, as an inclusive, complete theory of epistemology in teaching and learning that ought to meet new challenges or demands in the world of changes and reforms. Educationalists such as Doll would describe it as “ill-fitted and inappropriate to [address] problems of actual teaching and learning” (p: 162). So far it has only offered a partial explanation of what knowledge is and how possibly it can be acquired with its over-dependence on the external environment rationality. The environment where teaching occurs is truly critical to the healthy and smooth learning. Any attempts by teachers to make our classrooms positive environments conducive to the culture of learning would result in improved educational outcomes. The extrinsic motivation from all role players be parents, teachers and peers can also foster good learning habits. However, behaviourism falls short of presenting efficient learning theory because of its shortsightedness towards the preceded mentioned facts as adequate in themselves. The in-environments, for example the intrinsic kinds of motivation are probably more effective compared to those without as they, in addition, call for those who partake in educational efforts to be accountable to their practices. With its withouts, here is a dis-ownership of the process that ought to empower its participators. In education students would not find the sense of ownership or pride in what they are dealing with.

The behaviourist view of knowledge accepts a linear construct of knowledge. Knowledge is not undertaken as a social product requires interactive, collaborative, and co-operative efforts by those who seek to construct it. This notion is clearly demonstrated in the metaphor of the mind as an inactive entity alienated from interactions with others. Therefore, in learning, there are not active interactions, negotiations and conversations of the individuals with one another and with what are taught. In attempts to create and construct new knowledge, the key ingredients are therefore disregarded. This position of behaviourist thinkers based on their interpretation of what the mind is, is dangerously misleading, and deserves total rejection. The mind is and must be “an instrument of construction”, “an instrument we use to make meaning ... of our possible worlds” (Doll 162) that we cannot contemplate learning without it. The interaction of individual minds is paramount

with the pre-requisite to be the formation of the community of critical inquiry where ideals and experiences must be exchanged in the whole teaching/learning process.

Secondly, the definition of knowledge is that of "given", "external", originated somewhere but generously bestowed by the technical experts without any active involvement of those who have to learn. This viewpoint would have teachers focused on finishing teaching the prior planned contents and objectives so guided by teachers' guides, syllabuses and policy documents. What and how much is covered are what matter, not the experiences and the reflections of students as they undergo the process. The successes of the teachers in carrying out the entrusted responsibilities will be measured against the curriculum contents and objectives and these must be reflected on the grades students awarded in the assessment activities. Here is Tylerian's outdated objective model of curriculum best at work.

Thirdly, the behaviourist-adopted view of knowledge would also serve to articulate the teaching styles to be employed for possible construction. It is obvious the transmission kinds of pedagogy whereby knowledge is hierarchically communicated from the omniscient expert educators to the to-know-students would be the tools. Here, again, is a connotation of externally manufactured knowledge in which students are continually poured with cases of packages of information without any attempt to critique what it is all about- its possible meanings, usefulness and relevance to their own lives and that of their immediate societies. The students are merely reduced to inactive consumption of knowledge originated by others with them acting as passive recipients and conveyors. Their roles are minimal, as there is no fostering of deeper exploration of issues arise from the studies. It simply stresses rote learning, the pure recalls of factual information that lacks digestion. All what students are expected to do is to learn by heart with acute precision to be expressed in the grades they are awarded. In today's world, these students will not be able to act as agents of changes as they are not empowered be epistemologically or politically.

Doll (P: 168) would call this school of epistemology "a spectator theory of knowledge", a non-critical pedagogy that lacks the voice of empowerment, an education system that denies students opportunities to take a critical stance of what they are involved. Likewise, Paulo Fierre would label it as "a banking concept of

education" instead of being problem posing one. Here too passivity is not only applied to students but teachers too belong to the similar camp of unquestioning acceptance of consumption wherein they are simply conveyors of knowledge, skills, experiences and attitudes created by others. Thus, teachers too are not empowered for example to debate about questions of curriculum development and policy formulations.

Fourthly, in behaviourist system of education the issue of power relations and exercising is sensitive. The teacher is an authoritarian figure, someone who is concerned with absolute control over what is going on in the classrooms. The classrooms eventually become places for the power struggle between the teacher and the students. Doll 's (P: 166-168) article of a matrix curriculum presents a down to earth explanation on the question of power and control. He recognised that while the need to have control is critical in the world of teaching and learning, the problems come with the ways in which power is exercised. In behaviourism, control is externally imposed runs away from the values of self-control, attitudes of internal discipline. External control complies with the imagery of a world of machinery which Dolls presents as of "deus ex machina" (167). The better would be for the teacher to be "a leader from within", "first among equals" who involves others in the decision-making process not as "a dictator". There is then a need to utilise democratic practices in applying discipline in our schools otherwise it will be a big challenge to both teacher and students. For sure democratic procedures would work.

Behaviourism is absent from the stances of the critical pedagogy of empowerment, from the emancipatory education in which teachers and students act as subjects, as opposed to objects, who are deeply reflective, engaged actively with studies at hand, with one another to enhance their knowledge and fight for social justice described by Totten (1990: 25). I, therefore, agree with Doll's evaluation that behaviourism is "ill-fitted and inappropriate to the problems of actual teaching and learning". This leads to the fifth point of behaviourism's application of universalism, the tendency to view all situations alike in spite of the different context accounts of histories, cultural experiences and values of a particular locality. Its perpetuation of knowledge construct in vacuum preserves a status quo, further aggravates its ability to address the arising needs and concerns of education. So what? Samuel Totten (1990: 24), quoting Maher, John. S. on feminist pedagogy, expresses the need for contextualization-

"Knowledge must be contextualized and rooted in a particular framework and world view, and should have an emotional component, a feeling component that comes from the knower's sense of purpose, sense of connection to the material and particular context". Similarly, Van Harmelen, viewing the dynamic nature of knowledge in her Education Core Text 1, Linking Theory and Practice (p: 4), strongly stresses this truth: "Knowledge is constructed by people who are dependent on what is available to them at a particular time and in a particular place. Equally, how knowledge is constructed depends on the values and attitudes of a particular society at the time and place of its construction and on the social interaction that are operational in the society at the time of its construction." Therefore, even though behaviouristic influences are still significant today in some areas of education, its closed system makes it resistant to the process of changes and reforms. This respect and many others make it neither transformative nor responsive enough to meet the realities of our present times.

Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Education- Constructivism

Behaviourism 's failure to present itself as a reliable transformative epistemology in the world of new challenges, demands, questions and needs arising as a result of changes has necessitated a paradigm shift that eventually leads to the birth of an arch enemy-constructivism theory. Like behaviourism, constructivist view of knowledge is composed of different single forms of its own, specifically radical, social, and critical. These forms, whilst closest, differ more in terms of significances they attach to the mind and the world. The information on the first two are clearly presented by Paul Ernest (1993) in his "Putting the Social Back into Constructivism".

Radical constructivism is sometimes referred to as "the first principle of constructivism" or "the personal constructivist position" (Taylor & Campbell-Williams 1993: 3). The radical constructivist branch of epistemology places learning into student's own personal experiences of his private world. The cognising student is allowed to form and structure the world both as it fits his own experiences and as he perceives or sees it. In terms of knowing, there is no absolute conclusion as knowledge depends on ones' personal experiences of ones' world. In George Bodner's viewpoint this is "knowledge constructed in the mind of the learner" (1986: 873). The

underlying view of knowledge in this perspective is personal, individualistic unlinked to the broader sense of the world. What is immediately evoked is that at the centre of this perspective lies individualism and isolationism- learning is the mind and the mind is the world. Furthermore, one must guard one's evolutionary world to maintain a competitive or survival edge. This standpoint is likely to dismiss healthy co-operation thereby fostering ugly competition in the educational settings.

The radical version of constructivism has both strengths and weaknesses. The strength is perhaps its taking into account of students' unique private experiences in learning. However, the experiences are unlikely to be shared as the theory does not encourage interpersonal communication and social interactions where sharing is the primary key in the learning process. The student will bear a narrowed view of knowledge as the knowledge is what and how he himself sees it not connected to others. This is contrary to the ideal way of learning from one another. It thus poses dangers to real learning and eventually can lead to lawlessness in the classrooms as there is unlimited freedom. Like Ernest, I really agree that "whilst there is a need to let learners construct their own meanings, the teachers ... must interact with learners to negotiate a passage towards socially accepted knowledge" (1993: 4).

As has been the case in radical constructivism, Ernest (1993) again presents a brief overview of social constructivism. Social constructivism embraces individual subjects, their social worlds and their contexts as interconnected. With this stand, knowledge is a social product depending on those who actively seek to construct it, their collective interactive or collaborative efforts and the contexts of that construction. The key to real seeking of knowledge lies more in active interaction and engagement with one another and with what is learned. While the individuals may seek to understand the world from their own viewpoints stem from personal experiences, they are ought to share it with others. So social constructivism positively embraces radical version, as it is the "genesis of the knowledge". The underlying metaphor of learning, as illustrated by Ernest, is that of conversation, that of experience sharing. In the words of Prawat (1991) this would be conversations with self, others and setting. It is the process of inter-exchanges, of interpersonal dialogues. The held view of the world is a broader socially constructed that is

continuously opened to the processes of changes and reforms to fit the realities of its contexts.

The third view is that of critical constructivism. Critical constructivist perspective is a becoming of the three forms. This perspective is attributed to the works of Jurgen Habermans. It both embraces the other two views of constructivism enabling it to bear the features of inclusiveness. Like social, critical constructivism attaches great significance to the two discourses of openness and critique. In critical engagement with one another and what is studied the use of language- communication is the central to the construct of knowledge so both sides of teacher and students must be open to one another by promoting the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and trust (Taylor & Campbell-Williams 1993: 3).

The preceding promotes the ideas of "inter-subjectivity" aired by Jerome Bruner (1996: 7), that requires the interactions of the minds through "negotiation, instruction and enculturation". Furthermore, the establishment of a scholarly community of inquiry is maintained to allow individual participators to actively dialogue with one another in the learning process. Thus, the underlying learning principle is that of interactive conversations similarly undertaken by social constructivism. Like social constructivism, the critical perspective does not disregard the egocentric radical constructivism for it perceives it as the beginning into the acts of knowledge construction.

Secondly, critical constructivist perspective entails a critical discourse in which both teacher and students are involved in “an going collaborative endeavour aimed at make visible and subject to critical scrutiny the prevailing rationality that governs the social ... and constrains their intellectual development” (Taylor & Campbell-Williams 1993: 3). This critical discourse component signifies its uniqueness as a theory of knowledge explanation. Though social constructivism can be thought of being critical, critical constructivism’s stance is too revolutionary, politically adopting a hard-line attitude. Critical is partly concerned with contemporary society’ questions of justice, equality, freedom and democracy with the purpose of seeking to establish an egalitarian society based on values of participatory democracy where discriminatory practices are non-existent be in terms of race, class and gender. A critical analysis of

this perspective illustrates a bearing of Marxist viewpoints seeking the long-term goals of empowerment particularly for those who seem to have been left out of the mainstream. The street towards true empowerment is then education adopted as a decisive tool for the societal transformation. But education here is also focused on scrutinising the society's educational system and its curriculum that may seem to preserve certain practices perpetuating injustice and any ideological dominance against true emancipation of those seem disempowered. Belong to this school of thoughts are individual thinkers such as the inspiring Paulo Freire. Therefore, many a time critical constructivism can be called "critical pedagogy" or "a pedagogy for the oppressed" to use Freire's concepts.

Tried looking at all these perspectives, it makes sense to conclude that constructivism is preferably the ideal vehicle for the world of teaching and learning. It takes a holistic approach- being flexible, adaptive and opened to the winds of changes, challenges and demands that it correspondingly allows assimilation and accommodation schemes. Tolerance of the divergent views in knowledge development is emphasised. Through its participatory democratic values it empowers those who seek to construct knowledge. And overallly, constructivism has all elements indispensable for better-improved educational outcomes. The worries, particularly in our Namibian context, are probably concerning the successful practical implementations of these perspectives in our schools. However, constructivism is not without pleasantness, in reality it can also become dangerous to our becoming homogeneous society.

Constructivism: The Crisis from Within

While personally admiring constructivist view of knowledge, thus of education, I happen to feel a degree of cautiousness needs exercised in applying the theory's perspectives. In Ernest's (1993: 3) it is read that knowledge as a "socially constructed reality" is at all times ready for modification to fit "ontological reality"; that it can be pre-structured accordingly to fit socially accepted assumptions. It can never give a "true picture of it". This point, while recognizes knowledge as a changing reality, within itself seems to unconsciously lie a danger for deconstructing the society it seeks to transform. This clause is what Menand (1994: 97) called "accommodationist philosophy" that has caused many American universities to obscure their academic

identities, roles and functions. Menand clearly depicts this in his works titled “What Are Universities For?” In the United States context, the universities in adopting the constructivism view of knowledge production have experienced what Menand calls “indiscriminate appetite” (1994: 96) pressurizing them to accommodate almost any interest by creating new courses, new programs and new studies centres. This has also been guided by the held view that there should be available within the walls of the universities the full range of experiences ideally available outside. The results were the launch of new programs such as Third World Studies, Women’s Studies and Minority Studies, followed by co-housing (of sexes) of dormitories and the recruitment of minorities in the interest of social diversities in campuses. While such developments at American universities appear healthy they somehow obscure the roles of the universities. Graduate studies for example become “too many things to too many people” that universities become the breeding places for the conflicts of ideas among antagonistic interest groups of various cultures. Worst, while the universities are required “to give equal protection to every idea and point of view anyone chooses to express” (1994: 97), they have not been well equipped to resolve the conflicts. These examples of the accommodationist approach are indeed of “an indispensable principle of intellectual freedom” (1994: 97). But what Menand has exposed are struggles for power in the absence of well-defined educational expectations, beliefs, values, norms and customs. In the absence of such systems, constructivism has laid the stages for conflicts creation and dispersal among many interest groups in the pursuit of knowledge production and development.

In our Namibian context, constructivism through its accommodationist approach, seems as well to lack basic fundamental values especially in terms of morality as it overwhelmingly seeks to adjust itself to any incoming phenomena be culturally, politically or socio-economically. What is socially accepted by the majority or the powerful (economically) becomes the norm. How would for example the issues of homosexuality, lesbianism and prostitution be dealt with in our constructivist system of education? These issues have been accepted as normal life practices in some parts of global village. Of course one would argue with reference to contextualization but again in our homogenous world of globalisation? Therefore, while I personally find constructivism an ideal theory of knowledge construction and development, I, at the

same time, feel sceptical in applying it to every sphere of our present world due to its un-guarded openness.

Conclusion

With all the stipulated lines of divergence the two dominant world-views of epistemology will continue to shape the directions of education. This may help to create a thaw for possible co-existence. But with our modern (and not modernist) societies gradually becoming more closely aligned especially as a result of recent developments in communication technologies such as internets and e-mails which allow the quickest flow of ideas, there is a move towards the placement of the pasts to where they ideally belong. This is in addition to the new arising opportunities of teachers gradually becoming exposed to the ideals and voices of reflexive practitioning, critical inquiry oriented practices and conducting of actions based researches. The offering of educational programs such as this one will further add a positive dimension to the phenomena of changes. But within such blowing winds, a careful scrutiny ought to be considered. In the meantime the behaviourist-orientated thoughts of education will continue to manifest itself as a force to reckon with, and this is definitely obvious in our curriculum domains of determining learning objectives, stressing subject contents, disciplining in ways of reinforcement and setting examinations.

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A Personal Profile

I was highly privileged to attend Oshigambo High School, a Lutheran which was the only prestigious private high school in Ovamboland at that time. Oshigambo is well known for its traditions of highest educational standards, performance and achievement. Like many other students, I actively involved myself in the school's academic life and extracurricular activities and served as class representative in the Student Representative Council throughout my study years. I sat for Senior Certificate examination in 1989 and was one of the five students who graduated with Matriculation exemption at the end of year 1989, a success I greatly contributed to the hard work, commitment and dedication of the teaching staff there.

Upon leaving Oshigambo, I served as a teacher of History and English at Oshakati Secondary School, teaching grade 10. It was then the time that I got the sense of what it is like to be a teacher and the responsibility expected of in the profession. That opportunity raised my personal interests in further exploring the world of teaching, especially viewing Namibia's low standards in the pre-independence days. That desire for further studies, of acquiring new knowledge, skills, expertise and experiences became a reality when I was admitted to do studies in the United States of America under the Lutheran program in cooperation with Lutheran churches in Namibia. I hoped that opportunity would expose me to many unique educational experiences, especially when considering the fact that the States has been a highly developed society in most of its life spheres for many centuries.

Waldorf College is a small-sized institution with a student population below one thousand, situated in Forest City, Iowa. It was nice being at Waldorf, after all became my first American home. I enjoyed the college's brotherly interaction spirit and the sense of openness that existed among the students and professors alike. During the two academic years, I looked into the basic college studies, general educational courses with Sociology and English on the other hand. I took the advantages of the rarely offered opportunities, in particular when you think in African context, that I tried to commit myself so that I was able to enter the Dean's List of academic performance by constantly having maintained a good grade point average (GPA) over three. I was at several occasions invited to join honorary programs and activities such as honor course, Philosophy 2000 and being a member of Phi Theta Kappa, a national honors fraternity. All these additional learning opportunities laid a foundation upon which we discussed issues of great international significance in education and society and helped me to grow personally, intellectually and professionally. In May 1992, I graduated from Waldorf with Cum Laude and was offered an Associate in Arts degree for two years.

The gained GPA at Waldorf allowed me to transfer to Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. Compared to Waldorf, Augustana is a very challenging competitive institution with highly knowledgeable professors in their respective areas of teaching and specialization and all holistically grounded in the search for the academic development, excellence and truthful success. The process of assimilation and mainstreaming did not take long, but I could detect that was it was the environment for one to grow and be readily prepared to face the uncertain future. From the beginning, I was to study English and Sociology in Secondary Education. I had a chance to learn a lot in English classes with more emphasis on literature, research, writing and teaching with Education and Sociology- under very intense training that leads one

to self-discovery, an awareness of the world of literature and poetry, and of education with the sociology links all the worlds. At the end of November 1994, I graduated from Augustana with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English and with Sociology being the minor both in Secondary Education and returned home.

After Augustana, I spent about two years in high schools. I was a teacher at Oshakati Secondary School for one year where I offered English and Biology to grade 11 learners. But there was not that much room for academic and professional development, so I was a kind of felt out of its setting. In 1996, I then transferred to Oshigambo High School where I taught English and History for about 9 months. It was good to return to Oshigambo, a school that has allowed me to earn a lot but I could not stay there either for long. The Ongwediva Teacher Training College seemed to offer better working conditions for academic and professional growth and development, thus, I was taken in in later 1996.

I then became a lecturer at Ongwediva. My lecturing obligations involve offering Education Theory and Practice (ETP), a course that is covering all aspects to do with the world of teaching and learning. I have been working more with the second year students, though I also did teaching at the other two levels. I have also offered English Communication Skills at some limited occasions as well as participating in in-service training.

For the past seven years I have then been involved in the area of teacher education. It was through teacher education that I got admitted to Rhodes' Master Program, general education theory and practice. With an American educational background, I view my participants in Rhodes as both consolidating and extending the years of first-degree studies. It is, mutually, as a reflection on the novice years where you did something without much focused on the specific conceptual grounds.

This learning program has been ver rewarding. It empowers us to critically think about the issues that surround education in general and teacher education in particular. The most amazing aspect of the course is its focus on one 's area of profession, its contextualization orientation unlike during the first-degree studies when we looked at matters more generally. Such orientation allows us to critically and analytically think about our own professional context -what and how to teach, our teaching and learning practices. It is particularly important when we try to look into the situations regarding the theoretical frameworks that inform our teaching behaviors. It really helps us to see ourselves, our involving actions in education and our institutions of learning, and contemplate on what might be done to transform our institutions into the directions that would make them more productive and competitive. In this context, we have been kept on toe on Namibia 's change and reform process, and the grounds that necessitated its embrace. This is the area that a lot of us have had little knowledge about before. The toeing of the reform process has thus enabled us to establish the past, the present and begin to contemplate about the future.

The participation in this study program has raised my personal interests in teacher education. The reform process is becoming so essential that none needs to sit anymore and patiently wait for changes. In particular, the college education, catering for basic education schools where the foundations for upper learning are cemented, is something that ought to be re-thought about

with the uttermost attention. This dictates that we begin to address the issues of curriculum organization, its contents and competencies sought. The area of how assessment is done and its impacts on quality kind delivered is another area. All these Reggie the research conduction focused on our worlds of epistemological frame of references and its practicality or pre-requisite conditions for practicality. Based on the preceding reasons, my interests fall into the concept and ideals of reflective practitioning as opposed to pure rhetoric or education politicking. With this line of arguments I therefore conclude that the future of teacher education particularly at colleges, lies more within reflectiveness.

Into the Masters'- a Reflective Heart

In the personal exposition, I have strongly reiterated the fact that our participation in this master program has been of empowerment in many different ways. I have also written that it has been of a great reward, particularly through its unique orientation that focuses on our own Namibian context, the context of reform engagement, though not divorced from international perspectives. It has also worked towards the empowerment by its specific eye on each of us ' professional areas. This orientation kind has enabled us to deeply think about the issues that we are daily partaking in. The learned is that we have begun to re-look into our educational doings as professionals, our institutions and the contexts in which they are operating. Our prior limited experiences, knowledge and understanding about teacher education, my area of profession, become more expanded and more cleared. This is true for exempla, that by examining the teacher education's pedagogical philosophy, the learner-centered education, it becomes clearer as we see it connected to the notions of constructivism. I can thus sense its backgrounds and the rationality for having been adopted as the theoretical framework that must direct and guide the educational reforming process in Namibia. This has also changed my previous negative attitudes towards the concept of learner-centered practices. Besides the above facts, I believe we have begun a journey into our practices, looking what the theoretical position is and the necessary conditions needed for practical implementation. The SWOT analysis so is the lengthy article on strategic planning skills has been an acquired tool for changes.

Our development in this course is attributed to the presenters and supervisors. The not only talk about the ideals but have also acted them through their lesson presentations. Even though I have been a product of Augustana College which has distinguished itself as a constructivist institution, at the sessions we have been modelled as how constructivism can be practically operated. The presenters are so knowledgeable and experienced on almost every educational matter. They have played the roles of apprenticeship acting as models and exemplars. They have exemplified team teaching as presentations are often approached from the viewpoint of cooperative learning. They have also enforced the reflexive virtues as every new session is built and consolidated on the prior lessons. In many ways, our questions and ends get addressed. In addition, the greatest has been their sensitivity and patience demonstrated as we struggle with the assignments.

The program has been rich in many ways: issues, resources and levels of presentation. The first is the range of issues raised. I believe we have been better grounded in most of the educational matters. The issues are so many ranging from schools of knowledge and the imagined pre-requisites for operation, Namibia's reform process with international perspectives brought in, critical analysis of the curriculum objectives or competence areas and how these can be possibly sought in teaching. The assessment and evaluation practices of the curriculum and their possible linkages to the actual teaching and learning, to the research area and how this is linked to all other curriculum components such objectives and assessment approaches. The other field touched is that of policy documents on relevant educational matters such as that regards the teaching of languages- first, second, third etc. Presentations of these diverse issue contents have been extensively integrated into the sessions.

The program has been resourceful. We have been given hundreds of handouts. It is so rare to find a program that features distance learning is resourceful. These resources are logically chosen in terms of relevance and application to our Namibian situations. They all appeal to most of the themes in the teacher college curriculum. We have already started using some of the program materials for college workshops as part of the inservice or staff development. I have also used most of the articles in my own college teaching. The readings promote critical reasoning and offer divergent points of views on the issues of educational significance. Perhaps the challenge has been finding ways on how to make our college go deeply into them in such manner that they can gain conceptual understanding. As the question of resources is one of the threats to the delivering of quality teacher education, this program has furnished the answers to this desperate need.

The research session at Grahamstown campus: Firstly, it emotionally connects to its academic identity and setting, as we become conscious of its staff and geographical location or structure. It also linked us with other master degree program participants. Academically, it was a productive encounter. Most of us did not have adequate knowledge, skills and experiences regarding the research. For example, the truth that research as any other curriculum components falls within the adopted epistemology, that certain research methods are only applicable to particular research settings and purposes. At the end, I could establish the possible links that may exist with different components of the curriculum and how this symbiosis affects their individual operations.

As I move to the conclusion, I must say that our participation in this program has helped improving our writing skills, particularly regarding the research conduction that calls for the pursuit of definite research convictions. After being a student at Augustana College, I become so much distant from such research projects that I did not have any involvement for a long period of time. As a result, I feel my writing skills in this course get both consolidated and fined further beyond Augustana. I can confidently whisper that yours has been a really worthwhile program for personal, academic and professional development unlike many programs which are centered on political solidarity or camaraderie or merely built around pure licensing and certification without considering quality. It is therefore my hope that I shall be in a position to effect changes in my classrooms at the place of my work.