

RHODES UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF PORTFOLIOS IN DEVELOPING
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirement for the Degree of Master of Education
(General Education Theory and Practice)

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the purpose and role portfolios are playing in developing reflective practice in student teachers and to assess the degree to which this role is being achieved in practice. This study was a interpretive small scale case study. The target groups were 3 student teachers in their final year of study, 3 teacher educators and the vice-rector of the college.

Data were obtained through interviews and document analysis. The findings indicated that the students had no meaningful orientation to both the role of portfolio development and reflective skills. The sources of this were the lack of common understanding among teacher educators, lack of support for both teacher educators and student teachers and lack of time, lack of guidelines for construction and clear assessment rubric. The results of this study indicated that the teacher educators were in need of vigorous professional development and considerable implementation strategies are needed to develop the desired reflective skills.

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ACRONYMS USED IN THIS STUDY

BETD: Basic Education Teacher's Diploma

PTC: Primary Teacher Certificate

ECP: Elementary Certificate Primary

NEC: National Education Certificate

NIED: National Institute for Educational Development

SBS: School Based Studies

MBEC: Ministry of Basic Education and Culture

MEC: Ministry of Education and Culture

ETP: Education Theory and Practice

LCE: Learner Centred Education

MEd: Masters of Education

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

This study examines the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice in the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) pre-service program. In introducing the study, the first section of this chapter provides an overview of the research site. The second section focuses on the research context, the third describes the research goal, and the concluding section offers an outline of the study as a whole.

1.2 Research site

This study was conducted in one of the four colleges of education in Namibia. The college is located in the Oshana region in the north of Namibia, in a semi-urban area between Ondangwa and Oshakati. Up until Namibia's independence in 1990, the college offered various courses, including a Primary Teacher Certificate (PTC), an Elementary Certificate Primary (ECP) and the National Education Certificate (NEC). After independence the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) replaced the NEC. The BETD is a three-year diploma that prepares teachers to teach grades 1 to 10. The BETD programme was introduced with the aim of integrating content knowledge and methodology more effectively and addressing the need to produce teachers confident in the learner-centred approach adopted by the post-independence educational reform process, with good communication skills and a commitment to democratic principles and professionalism in their chosen careers (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC], 1993: 81-82).

The college offers different areas of specialization across the spectrum of grades 1 to 10. These are: Lower Primary (1-4), Integrated Natural Science (5-7 & 8-10), Mathematics (5-7 & 8-10), Languages (5-7 & 8-10), Social Studies (grades 5-7), Social Science (8-10), Home Ecology (8-10), Commerce (8-10), and Technical Studies (8-10).

This college is the oldest and biggest of all teacher education colleges in Namibia, and enrolls 300 new students each year. It has a total student population of about 900 student teachers and 65 teacher educators. Although the college is situated in Oshana, it is a centre of learning for other regions as well, such as Ohangwena, Omusati, Kunene and Oshikoto (see fig.1). The Oshana region has 121 schools, of which 7 are secondary and the rest junior primary and primary. The average teacher-pupil ratio in the region is 1 to 40. The Northern University Campus is also situated in the Oshana region.



Figure 1: Regions of Namibia.

(S. Abraham, 2006. Graphics Services Unit, Rhodes University, Grahamstown)

1.3 The research context

After independence in 1990 the Namibian education system began an ongoing process of reform designed to contribute to societal development. The central idea underpinning educational reform is that of learner-centred education, with its focus on learning with understanding, quality, equity and democracy (Namibia, Ministry of High Education, Vocational, Training, Science and Technology [MHEVTST], 2002:5). The role of teacher education in the reform process was identified as follows: “the core agenda for educational reform is for teachers to become simultaneously and seamlessly inquiry-oriented, skilled, reflective and collaborative professionals” (Fullan, 1991, as cited in Swarts, 1998:306).

In this study I draw on the idea of a reflective portfolio, which according to Williams (1997:107) seeks to discover the guiding principles that shape not only an individual’s teaching, but also, in many cases, the institution and the institutional culture in which he or she works. “Reflective practice” enfoldes the idea that teachers reflect on their practice in order to improve their practice. Brubacher, Case & Reagan (1994:126) also see reflective practitioners as educators who are “concerned and involved with issues of social justice and ethics in education.”

The introduction of portfolios was guided by the need to “[provide] teachers with certain epistemological ‘tools’ that foster inquiry or critical reflection” (Prawat, 1991:741), under the general rubric of professional empowerment. One of the strategies for educating student teachers to become reflective practitioners is to help them to develop and to construct portfolios. Portfolios are believed to enable student teachers to document their teaching in the authentic setting of the classroom (Gipps, 1994; Stiggins, 1996). They also provide students with the opportunity to record and to reflect on their actual teaching and learning during periods of teaching practice known as school-based studies [SBS]. According to Swarts (1999:42), building a portfolio is one of the “key mechanisms for fostering and developing reflective practice. This includes also the concept of the teacher

as a researcher, which emphasizes an awareness of teachers' questions in the making of pedagogical theory.”

Portfolio development requires student teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning as an ongoing process. Students are challenged constantly to examine their values, beliefs and methods, both as learners and teachers (Winsor, Butt & Reeves, 1999; Klenowski, 1997).

The BETD Broad Curriculum stipulates that portfolio assessment can be recorded at the end of “any” semester (Namibia. Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education [MBE], 2006:25), but it does not include it among the items for summative assessment. My recent experience as a tutor responsible for the facilitating and marking of portfolios is that they are always prepared in a “rush” at the very end of the third year, that is, at the end of the period of study. The problems that I have encountered with developing portfolios include:

- Uncertainty about the role of the portfolio;
- Confusion about how to develop the portfolio. Lecturers and students rely heavily on a checklist which is provided annually by the vice-rector;
- Uncertainty about organizing and managing portfolios;
- No consensus about accountability for developing portfolios in the college. What this means is that no-one assumes responsibility for teaching student teachers how to develop portfolios.

These problems prompted me to conduct a pilot study. I gave questionnaires to 6 third year students and 6 teacher educators. In preliminary findings from the pilot study, it became evident that the third year students do not understand the essence of the portfolio as a tool of assessment, and have not been taught how to design and organize them before going in School Based Studies (teaching practice).

I therefore embarked on this study, which aims to investigate the perceptions of teacher educators and student teachers concerning the nature and role of portfolios in developing reflective practice and as a means to assess their practice.

The study is situated in the current policy framework adopted by the Namibian education system and seeks to understand how this policy is implemented rather than to provide a critique of the policy as I feel this is beyond the scope of my research goal. Rather I believe that the insights gained from this study may be a point of reference from which to critique policy in further research. The insights from the study will be useful in informing my work, which involves assessing portfolios, and advising student teachers in developing, and designing their portfolios. I also believe that these results will provide insights into the preparation of students in the area of reflective practice.

The guiding questions of this study are:

1. What roles are portfolios expected to play in promoting reflective practice in the BETD program?
2. To what extent are these roles being achieved?

1.4 The research goal

The goal of this study was to investigate the purpose and role that the portfolios are playing in the BETD pre-service program to develop reflective practitioners.

1.5 The outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing the context and the rationale for the study. In introducing the study the research site and the research goal are discussed, concluding with an outline of the study. Chapter 2 comprises a literature review, which provides a theoretical framework of the reflective practice and portfolio. It also includes an analysis of the relationship between reflective practice and portfolios. The chapter also outlines how the portfolio has been conceptualized within

teacher education with particular focus on the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice. It also highlights some of the key issues and challenges facing portfolio development.

Chapter 3 describes the design of the study and provides the methodological framework as well as the techniques used to collect data. The data collecting methods I used are interviews and document analysis, which includes an examination of portfolios in relation to reflective practice in the college settings as well as procedures used during the data collection process.

Chapter 4 presents the findings derived from the data collection methods. Chapter 5 discusses these findings, providing an interpretation and meaning of the findings.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a critical overview and discussion of the limitations of the study.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by providing the context and insight into the significance of the study. In introducing the study I have also provided a description of the research site. In the next chapter I review literature related to the notion of reflective practice and the role of portfolios in developing reflective practitioners.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

When pre-service teachers engage in reflective activities they tend to improve their level of reflection (Francis, Tyson & Wilder, 1999:38).

2.1 Introduction

It has been argued that teacher preparation programs and pedagogy should be designed to foster reflective thinking (Loughran, 1996; Francis, Tyson & Wilder, 1999). The reform efforts in Namibia after independence in the area of teacher education involve the development of portfolios to support educational transformation. This study explores the role of portfolios, especially in developing reflective practice in the Namibian Basic Teacher Education program.

This chapter gives an overview of the historical background of the portfolio in education and the theoretical framework underpinning reflective practice as well as an exploration of the principles guiding portfolios in education. This initial exploration provides the rationale for the adoption of portfolios in teacher education programs.

The second section of this chapter explores the implementation of portfolios and how they impact on reflective practice within the Namibian context, particularly the BETD pre-service program. A critical analysis of the rationale for portfolios and the process of preparing portfolios in teacher education in Namibia will be provided because this reasoning is central to the reform process.

The third section of the chapter focuses on an analysis of research studies on the use of portfolios in teacher education in different countries. It explores the purpose, implementation and issues associated with the use of portfolios in the

area under scrutiny. It also examines the challenges faced in developing portfolios. Looking at how portfolios are implemented both regionally and internationally will prove useful when introducing them in Namibia.

2.2 Reflective practice and portfolios in teacher education

This section provides the historical background and the theoretical framework underpinning reflective practice and portfolios.

2.2.1 The historical background

The historical background presented in this section briefly traces the origin of the use of portfolios in educational settings. It is therefore, an attempt to understand the origin and the rationale for portfolio implementation in education. The literature reveals that portfolios have been a focus in fine arts departments and creative writing courses for decades. Weisberg (1996) points out that the use of portfolios in the arts and other creative courses, where students document their accomplishments for final grades or awards, have been borrowed by education to be used to document teaching. Weisberg's research shows that portfolios were used in teacher education in Canada in the 1970's; however, their use has become increasingly widespread since the 1991 publication of *The Teaching Portfolio* by Seldin, (cited in Felder & Brent, 1996). This finding concurs with that of Winsor, Butt & Reeves (1999) who studied the history of portfolios in education and reported that:

- the teaching portfolio concept has been used in Canada (where it is called a teaching dossier) since the 1970's
- the value of teaching portfolios is currently being tried and tested in USA and other places internationally.
- portfolios as a means of documenting and portraying teacher development is not limited to North America only; there are also major research projects in Australia that focus on both pre-service and in-service teacher education.

- during the past decade, portfolio use in teacher education has rapidly expanded and continues to do so with increasing credibility as an alternative form of assessment of professional growth in both the pre-service and in-service context (Winsor, Butt & Reeves ,1999:9-10).

The popularisation of portfolios in education is currently related, among other things, to that of reflective practice. In the Namibian context of teacher education, reflective practice is a central theme shaping policy and the section below explores this notion. Thereafter, I give consideration to the role of portfolios in the development of reflective practice.

2.2.3 Theoretical framework

2.2.3.1 Reflective practice

This section explores the theoretical framework underpinning reflective practice. Loughran (1996) argues that teacher programs that are designed to develop reflective practice are based on the assumption that reflection is central to teaching and learning. Central to this assumption is the belief that reflection is a way of fostering change in teachers. This section explores the significance that reflective practice plays in current educational theory.

The research on reflective practice reveals that reflective practice is both defined and being used in teacher education in various ways through diverse theoretical frameworks (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Montgomery, 2002). However an exploration of the nature of reflective practice shows common elements. These include the need for individuals to be conscious of their own beliefs, understanding and knowledge about teaching and to be aware of different kinds of knowledge, which they can use to improve their practice (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005).

Hall (1997:2) defines reflective practice in education as “the practice in which the teacher undertakes deliberate and sustained action for the purpose of improvement”. Educators are arguing increasingly that teacher preparation programs and pedagogy should be designed to foster reflective thinking (Francis, Tyson & Wilder, 1996). The principle underpinning this argument is that reflective teachers use the education experiences in their pre-service courses as a means to develop their own practice positively. Reflective practice helps teachers to connect theory and practice whereby they use theory to understand their practice (Pollard & Tann, 1993; Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Wolf and Siu-Runyan (1996:32) claimed that “reflection is what allows us to learn from our experiences; it is an assessment of where we have been and where we want to go next”. According to Pollard and Tann, (1993:9) the notion of reflective practice stems from Dewey who contrasted ‘routine action’ with ‘reflective action’, which implies flexibility, rigorous analysis and social awareness. Therefore, reflective practice as based on Dewey’s notion of reflective action is practice that is based on the critical consideration of teaching and learning by specific individuals involved in that practice, the purpose being to improve and develop that practice

The reflective processes enable the teacher to discover the educational beliefs that shape their actions (Burke, Fogarty & Belgrad, 1994; Doolittle, 1994; Klenowski, 1997; Montgomery, 2002; Moseley & Ramsey, 2005). Therefore reflective practice involves critically examining beliefs in order to make personal meaning of those beliefs and this may result in altering perspectives about teaching and learning (Hall, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Calderhead and Gates (1993) suggest that Dewey emphasized the need to develop the attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness and skills of thinking and reasoning in order to enable reflection. These authors further suggest that the examining of beliefs and actions by practitioners is central to the idea of reflection, which is a fundamental dimension of discovering ways to improve their practice. In essence this involves problem solving and the recognition of teaching as ‘context dependent’ (Winsor, Butt & Reeves, 1999:26).

Pollard and Tann (1993:9) have identified the following six characteristics of reflective teaching:

- Reflective teaching implies an active concern with the aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency.
- Reflective teaching is applied in a cyclical or spiralling process, in which teachers monitor, evaluate and revise their own practice continuously.
- Reflective teaching requires competence in methods of classroom enquiry, to support the development of teaching competence.
- Reflective teaching requires attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness.
- Reflective teaching is based on teacher judgements, which are informed partly by self-reflection and partly by insights from educational disciplines.
- Reflective teaching, professional learning and personal fulfilment are enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues.

LaBoskey (1994:2) explored the development of reflective practice in the pre-service education of teachers and pointed out that the notion of reflective teaching is one of the alternative instructional strategies that develop reflection on teaching in pre-service teacher education. These can be categorized into different levels of reflection. He identified the following three levels of reflection:

- The process-product relationship
- Social -political
- The moral-ethical

According to this model it is believed that the highest level of reflection is that which incorporates considerations of moral, ethical and political issues as well as the process and product relationship. This corresponds with the three levels of teaching suggested by Handal and Lauvas, as cited in Zeichner and Liston (1996:39). They suggested that:

...the first is the level of action where a teacher ...gives assignments, explains, asks questions, monitors works and evaluates. The second level is planning and reflection where the teacher considers why they do what they do in the classroom...teachers' thoughts and preparation before teaching about what they do, and their reflections and activities after teaching as they try to learn from their actions... The third level... is the consideration of ethical and moral issues, where the teachers reflect on the moral and ethical basis of their own actions and raise questions about how their actions enhance equity and justice in the classroom environment.

Similarly, in seeking to categorize some forms of reflective practice used for pedagogical purposes with the aim of locating those within the levels of reflectiveness Hall (1997:7) also advocates three levels. Her first level she refers to as 'everyday or random reflection', which she identifies as a 'solitary activity', which does not involve in-depth engagement in the practice. The second level is 'deliberate reflection-committed', which involves the teacher in reviewing and developing his or her practice in deliberate ways. This is reflecting on or about action and it may or may not directly contribute to development in practice. The third level she calls 'deliberate and systematic reflection' which involves review and development of practice, which takes place through action as well as on and about action. However, she highlighted that the highest level is likely to bring about the most significant improvement in practice, which includes among others the action research and the teaching portfolio. Hall has also described reflective practice as programmatic because it takes place as part of the normal review and development of programmes and therefore is seen as "reflection through action as well as on action and about action" (1997:8).

Zeichner and Liston (1996) explored reflective teaching in teacher education in the United States and have identified 5 different traditions that guided the reform efforts in teaching and teacher education. These traditions are "academic", "social efficiency", "developmental", "social reconstructive" and "generic" traditions. They are explained below:

- The academic version stresses reflection on subject matter and the representation and translation of that subject matter to promote student understanding.
- The social efficiency orientation highlights the thoughtful application of teaching

strategies that have been suggested by research on teaching.

- The developmental tradition underscores teaching that is sensitive to and builds on students' backgrounds, interests, thinking, and patterns of developmental growth.
- The social reconstructionist version stresses reflection about the social and political context of schooling and the assessment of classroom actions for their ability to enhance equality.
- The generic tradition emphasizes thinking about what we are doing without attention to the quality or substance of that thinking. (Zeichner & Liston, 1996:51-52).

The proponents of reflective teaching claim further that it offers opportunities to recognize the 'thoughtful' and the 'professional aspects' of the teacher's work (Calderhead & Gates, 1993). Therefore, developing a portfolio as an integral dimension of reflective practice brings together the process and the product of reflective teaching as it documents and showcases the professional insights and personal growth of the teacher over time.

Reflective practice fits well with Schön's theory of the reflective practitioner (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Schön's notion of reflection 'on and in action' claims to require the highest level of reflectivity and is described by Hall (1997) as a deliberate and systematic reflection. In order to increase the level of critical reflective thinking in teacher education, portfolios have been adopted in teacher education programs. One of the principles underlying the adoption of portfolios enables students to "develop reflectivity by examining their beliefs and concepts" (Klenowski, 1997:1).

The adoption of portfolios in education for the purposes of enhancing and assessing the development of reflective practice draws on the work of Schön whose theoretical perceptions regarding reflective practice have made a considerable impact in the adoption of portfolios in the Namibian context. His views emphasise reflection in and on one's professional practice with the aim of bringing about well thought through modified action. At the heart of Schön's theory is the belief that reflective practice involves the

practitioner in conversation with himself or herself, and this conversation, provides an enabling framework for the appraisal of the practice (Alstricher & Posh, 1989, as cited in Hatton & Smith, 1995). The teacher essentially enters into what Prawat (1991) calls a conversation with her professional context and herself. For Prawat these conversations enhance the teacher's understanding of the educational setting and the epistemology and pedagogy in which practice is located. Through gaining such understanding the teacher is empowered and able to change.

Zeichner and Liston (1996) describe a reflective teacher as one who:

- examines, frames, and attempt to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice;
- is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching;
- is attentive to institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches;
- takes part in curriculum development and is involved in efforts to develop school change efforts; and takes responsibility for his or her own professional development (Zeichner & Liston ,1996:6).

The characteristics of a teacher described above indicate that to be a reflective teacher requires being self-critical, which is only possible if one is able to reflect critically. Jones (1994:23) argues that reflections are seen as an active process in learning about teaching and an essential dimension of critical thinking is learning to reflect purposively. What this means is that the teacher is able to analyze and evaluate her practice within the parameters of the educational goals and objectives that her learners are expected to achieve and that she is able to relate this practice to her professional context (van Harmelen, 2004). A portfolio is therefore, created for the purpose of recording this personal and professional development.

The portfolio in the context of reflective practice supports the professional development of teachers through providing a systematic and sustained means to record reflection, to develop and to provide evidence of action and to showcase this development. However, Richert, as cited in Russell and Munby, (1992) warned that preparing teachers to optimize their understanding of reflection and reflective practice requires creating opportunities for beginning teachers to learn the skills and attitudes required for reflective

practice. With this caution under consideration the next section explores portfolios in teacher education.

2.4 Portfolios in teacher education

This section examines the use of portfolios to promote reflective practice by highlighting the principles that underpin the use of portfolios for assessment. According to Grace (1992) the claim that the wide use of portfolios can stimulate a shift in classroom practices and education policies has led to the current thinking in education policy in Namibia. This includes the notion of reflective practice by adopting the use of portfolios. Further, the introduction of student portfolios in teacher education programs has been promoted by the constructivist view of knowledge and learning, and the dissatisfaction with the dominance of standardized assessment (Wolf & Sui-Runyan, 1996; Klenowski, 1997).

The literature on assessment claims that traditional standardized tests are norm-referenced in nature and only provide information on how much has been learnt rather than how well it has been learnt (Burke, Fogarty & Belgrad, 1994; Gipps, 1994; Stiggins, 1996; Klenowski, 1997). As a result, norm referenced testing is criticized for not being able to showcase meaningful insights into the process of learning and student performance; and for only comparing individual students to the norm or average group (Wolf & Sui-Runyan, 1996; Wilmot, 2003; Klenowski, 1997).

This led to a new approach to assessment referred to as performance-based assessment. Performance-based assessment is “concerned with how well a learner knows and understands or is able to do something in relation to a set standard or criterion, rather than with measuring how much a learner knows” (Wilmot, 2003:14). Portfolio assessment is also performance-based assessment because it showcases actual student performance over time (Gipps, 1994; Hibbard et al., 1995; Stiggins, 1996). Portfolios make the process and the product of learning and teaching observable seeing that students are analyzing and interpreting their own learning. In this context a portfolio is associated with the

notion of learner-centred education because students are actively constructing personal meaning of their learning and teaching experiences when developing portfolios.

Gillespie, Ford, Gillespie and Leavel (1996:487) have defined portfolio assessment extensively, calling it “a purposeful multidimensional process of collecting evidence that illustrates a student’s accomplishments, efforts, and progress (utilizing a variety of authentic evidence) over time”. They suggested that the collection of evidence should include both the evidence and accompanying explanations that reveal the student’s active participation throughout the development of their portfolio. They also suggested that such evidence should include:

- student selected, teacher selected, and collaboratively selected content
- student generated criteria for inclusion
- self- reflection, and student generated reactions to teacher and or peer conference
- the evidence should also clearly indicate how student growth is demonstrated.

It is clear that these authors emphasize the importance of collaboration in the process of portfolio development and that the growth should be verifiable. However, this is only possible if there are principles that guide the process of portfolio development.

Klenowski (1997) has identified the following principles that underpin the use of portfolios for assessment purposes, suggesting that the:

- Portfolios should provide a new perspective on learning that is active learning
- Portfolios should be part of a developmental process and represent student growth over time
- The documentation of process and achievements should enhance the analyses of teaching and learning experiences
- Self-evaluation should be integral to portfolio development.

These principles, showing that portfolio assessment focuses on individual growth and development and thus on the students’ demonstrable performance provides a direct link

with the Learner Centered Education underpinning the Namibian reform process. Portfolio assessment in this case measures what students know and it assesses the process of how students construct knowledge and make meaning (Wilmot, 2003). It is on this basis that Grace (1992) argued that portfolio assessment frees the student from the constraints of standardized tests because portfolios are not meant for comparing learners to each other.

In addition, “the portfolio provides evidence of the range of assessment tasks done and the types of learning these were assessing” (Wilmot, 2003:17). Therefore, portfolios are regarded as a powerful tool for presenting a holistic process and product of learning because students are actively involved in the process of learning, teaching and assessment (du Plessis & Koen, 2005). However, Stiggins (1996:455) highlighted the need for assessment quality control, which includes among others clear targets, a clear purpose, proper methods and control of bias and distortion. He further claimed that poor quality assessment misrepresents student achievement regardless of how the results are communicated. He also suggests that there ought to be explicit criteria for assessing student work. He cautions however that the applied criteria must reflect the proficiency of the desired skills and reflect the extent to which the students have met quality product standards.

Portfolios as indicated earlier are also believed to be powerful tools to encourage reflection on learning or teaching practice (Zeichner & Wray 2001, as cited in Reilly 2003; Klenowski, 1997). By implication reflection is aimed to foster learning and critical inquiry and this corresponds well with the notion of reflective practice, which requires the teacher to examine his or her assumptions and context as she or he undertakes deliberate and sustained action for the purpose of improving his or her teaching competence. According to Stiggins the process of self-reflection is the most important dimension of a portfolio because it enables students to “maintain contact with their own strengths and weaknesses” (1996:459). He also claimed that periodic student self-reflection on their achievements represents the centre of learning experiences and that these insights are made possible by documenting them in portfolios (Stiggins, 1996:459).

It is, therefore important that the relationship between reflective practice and the portfolio is understood in the context of teacher education programmes. The next section explores the relationship between reflective practice and the portfolio in more detail than done thus far.

2.5 The relationship between reflective practice and portfolio development

This section explores how portfolios are related to the notion of reflective practice in particular. Reflective practice requires teachers to reflect deliberately and systematically on their own assumptions and actions as well as questioning the theory underpinning their practice. Portfolios are claimed to be essentially reflective in nature (Williams, 1997). Wolf (1996) claimed that a portfolio without reflection is reduced to a mere scrapbook. In this case reflection is the process by which a student explains his or her learning progress (Yancey, 1996). This is believed to help portfolio students to articulate their thoughts and become aware of their learning as the reflective comments in the portfolios enable students to make meaning of their progress and achievements as learners and teachers over time.

Van Harmelen (2004) sees a portfolio as a reflective tool that can be used to provide evidence of impacts and outcomes of a particular course. She sees the reflective element of a portfolio as offering opportunities for selection and self-assessment and suggests such opportunities are crucial to learning. In addition, Klenowski (1997) suggests that reflection occurs both during the time of creating the portfolio, and in the process of selecting the materials.

McIntyre, as cited in Calderhead and Gates (1993) noted that in initial teacher education, reflection on one's practice has two functions. The first of these is the development of student teachers' immediate understanding of their own problems and needs, in order to give direction and purpose to their search for helpful ideas from other sources and their theorizing about ideas. The second is acquiring practice that helps students to develop the skills and habits of reflection that they will need as teachers (ibid: 44).

Therefore, the portfolio is seen as a vehicle through which these functions of reflection can be achieved.

The increased reflection from developing portfolios has been used to justify reflective practice in some programs, but this approach in teacher education raises some evaluative questions that are important to explore in order to extend our understanding of professional development. What is the role of the portfolio in promoting reflective practice? To what extent is this being achieved in practice? With these questions in mind the next section describes the nature and the role of portfolios regarding reflective practice.

2.5.1 The nature and role of the portfolio

In this section the portfolio is defined in the context of reflective practice and its specific purposes are further explored in order to look more specifically at the nature and the role of the portfolio. The section aims to expand on the more general earlier discussions. I begin by considering the statement below.

If carefully conceptualised, portfolios not only present a window on learning, but also promote growth and provide a textured picture of learning as it unfolds over time, enabling students and teachers to examine, discuss, and reflect on student performance and perspectives (Wolf & Sui-Runyan, 1996:30).

The above statement reveals the multifaceted nature of portfolios and provides a working definition for my study because the Basic Teacher Education Diploma (BETD) program that will be discussed later is concerned not only with the product but also with the process. I include some definitions as a means to relate and to describe the roles of portfolios in teacher education.

- Vavrus (1994), as cited in Cole et al., (2000) defines a portfolio as a systematic and organised collection of evidence used by the teacher and student to monitor growth of the student knowledge, skills and attitudes.

- Winsor et al., (1997) describe the teaching portfolio as a collection of information about teachers' efforts, progress and achievement in relation to their practice.
- Carroll, Potthoff & Huber (1996) describe portfolios as a purposeful collection of students and teachers' work that has been chosen carefully with the purpose of demonstrating competence, skills and accomplishments in one or more area.

The various definitions portray portfolios as “the multidimensional process of collecting evidence that illustrates a student’s accomplishments, efforts, and progress over time” (Gillespie et al., 1996:487). The definitions above suggested that portfolios are believed to document what the student is able to do or not to do. Therefore, the development of pre-service teacher portfolios documenting reflections on early field experiences ought to capture the richness and complexities of their teaching and learning.

Portfolios are used for different reasons in different settings. Wolf and Siu-Runyan, (1996) suggest that the purpose of keeping a portfolio ultimately determines the form that the portfolio will take. However, the main purpose is the documentation of the student learning and growth (Calfee & Freedman, 1996). This provides teachers with an opportunity to explore, showcase, and reflect on their teaching and learning (Wolf, 1996). A teaching portfolio is also used to determine the effectiveness of the strategies used to improve their teaching competencies (Van Wageningen & Hibbard, 1998). Portfolios are therefore used to increase reflection by giving opportunities for critically analysing one’s work and evaluating the effectiveness of lessons (Doolittle, 1994) and provide an ongoing record of a teacher's growth and development (Winsor et al., 1999; Klenowski, 1997; Montgomery, 2002).

Most portfolio theorists propose the use of a portfolio because of their understanding that reflection enhances learning. Van Harmelen (2004:1) framed this role by saying:

Within this framework, the portfolios will be used to provide evidence of students’ development and growth as reflective practitioners in their

particular situation. The portfolios are also used to provide evidence of the teacher education program's impact and outcomes. Given this role the portfolios take the form of a professional record, documenting and identifying students' professional activities.

Klenowski (1997:4) has identified the purposes of a portfolio as a means to help pre-service students to:

- develop higher order skills (problem-solving, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, creativity);
- self-assess and critique their work, teaching , and learning experiences;
- think about the learning processes they use;
- become more self-regulated and self-directed in their learning;
- develop reflectivity by examining their beliefs and concepts;
- enhance professional identity and skills;
- grow and commit to that growth;
- gain personal control by taking responsibility and ownership of their work;
- identify and use their strengths and successes;
- model appropriate professional behavior by demonstrating continuous learning.

These purposes indicate how the portfolio can be used to develop the pre-service student teacher holistically. Therefore, the portfolio serves as “a vehicle for determining the relationship between the teacher’s choices or actions and their outcomes” Doolittle (1994:2). As students reflect on their learning this way they are also forced to continuously adjust their views as they gain more insights into their strengths and weaknesses. The insight from self-reflection enables practitioners to examine their own beliefs and actions (Stiggins, 1996). In addition Centra (1993), as cited by Jones (1994), describes how teacher self-reports and portfolios can assist with various efforts to evaluate education. These purposes are used to direct the selection of items for inclusion and the process of the portfolio development. The content and the process of portfolio development are discussed in the next section.

2.5.2 Portfolio content and process

Portfolios can be used for various reasons. Therefore, the purpose of the specific portfolio in a specific setting will determine the content and the process of the portfolio (Grace, 1992; Wolf & Sui-Runyan, 1996; Gillespie et al., 1996). This section examines the two crucial aspects of portfolio development, namely the organisation of the content of a portfolio and the process of compiling the portfolio.

Portfolios are seen as a process and product (Calfee & Freedman 1996; Calfee & Perfumo, 1996; Montgomery, 2002; Moseley & Ramsey, 2005). Moseley and Ramsey (2005) claimed that the process is derived from the variety of actions of teaching and learning experiences and presentations that students were involved in during the entire education program. These authors further pointed out that the products are the individual items of evidence that the pre-service teachers produce to represent their understanding of these activities and experiences.

Oosterhof (1996) pointed out that the content of a student portfolio could be organized in three main components, namely actual samples of work, the lists of goals and the annotations about how these goals have been achieved. According to Williams (1997:107) the portfolio seeks to arrive at the guiding principles that shape not only teaching, but also, in many cases, the faculty. Williams emphasized that the portfolio is a reflective document rather than a simple list of student learning and learning experiences and it is a reflection of the competencies the student is required to demonstrate in the course or module. The student must use processes of reflection, analysis, synthesis and evaluation in its construction (Klenowski, 1997). According to Wolf (1996) the teaching portfolio should include the student's philosophy and goals of teaching. He also emphasized that the items selected for inclusion should be framed with a clear identification of contextual explanations, and reflective commentaries that examine the teaching documented in the portfolios. In addition Oosterhof (1996) highlighted that determining the goals that are to be assessed is very crucial to planning the content of the

portfolio. Therefore, he felt that the goal must provide the basis for including each entry and assessment.

Barret, as cited in Montgomery, (2002) suggested that portfolios should include student reflections on professional standards. Johnson (1999) reported that apart from the professional resume the portfolio should include a professional autobiography and a mission statement as well as demonstrating communication skills, ethical standards, and knowledge of the subject, of pedagogy and of reflective practice.

The emphasis of the portfolio is believed by Calfee and Perfumo (1996) to be on progress rather than accomplishment. According to Calfee and Freedman (1996) the process is ideally directed by a coherent combination of curriculum goals, strategic understanding and personal interests. Therefore, it is argued that a deeper understanding of how the portfolio process brings useful affirmations, insights and acts as a beacon for professional development is essential to portfolio development (Winsor et al., 1999).

However, adapting to portfolio assessment has involved considerable conceptual change for most students and teacher educators and achieving the intended results has been problematic. This problem has been identified as a fairly common occurrence and various studies into the conceptions and understanding of portfolios and the possibilities of the portfolio have created the need for teaching the concept of the portfolio and guided learning (Wolf, 1996; Wolf & Sui-Runyan, 1996; Gillespie et al., 1996; Cole et al., 2000; du Plessis & Koen, 2005). Klenowski, (1997:5) provides the following advice:

In implementing portfolios teachers need to provide the necessary time, guidance, direction and support for student teachers to develop confidence, independence and ownership of the learning process.

This also reveals the importance of the teacher educator's role as a facilitator in developing the portfolio because "without guidance, students will be tempted to focus on impressive products regardless of the instructional goals" (Oosterhof, 1996:143). This is

what Grimmet (1988) suggests adds to the false impression of the progress made by students in teaching practice periods. Therefore, a “portfolio guide” is necessary for portfolio development (Johnson, 1999). In this light Montgomery (2002) argued that an understanding of how practitioners develop reflective skills and an exploration of strategies is needed for teacher educators to provide the necessary support for students. In this regard modeling is seen as important if the process is to be understood and valued by student teachers

2.6 Portfolios and reflective practice in Namibian teacher education

This section discusses the rationale and policy regarding portfolio development in the Basic Education Teacher Diploma education program in Namibia.

2.6.1 The rationale for reflective practice and portfolio development in the Namibian context

The following discussion aims to take a brief look at some of the major assumptions and visions that have influenced the incorporation of the development of portfolios in Namibian teacher education. Thus, by presenting the theoretical framework of the Namibian reform I am attempting to create a foundation as to why portfolios are regarded as important in the BETD program.

After independence, with the emergence of the education reforms, several notions of reflection have dominated the discussions of professional development. Hence, the introduction of reflective practice as an educational concept and portfolios as a form of assessing that practice is directly related to educational reform in Namibia. This reform began in 1990 with independence from the colonial dominance imposed after the First World War.

The essence of this reform was to “develop reflective qualities and modes of practice through the acquisition of critical and analytical skills and through the development of

inquiring minds” (Swarts, 1998:121). It is argued that critical practice is central to teacher education in Namibia as a bridge between theory and practice, and that reflective practice is logically consistent with the ideas promoted in “Toward Education for All” (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC], 1993) in the context of learner-centredness located within constructivism (Ebutt & Elliott, 1998). The theory of Learner Centred Education (LCE) as described in this Namibian policy document draws strongly on the work of Vygotsky. Learner-centred education recognizes the prior knowledge and experiences of a learner. Knowledge is viewed as constructed in the minds of the learners (Bodner, 1985:873).

In essence LCE demands a radical shift from teachers as “tellers” of information to teachers as thinkers about information and how best to turn information into conceptual understanding (Swarts, 1998; Pomuti, 2000). The move from traditional teaching approaches had of necessity to impact on in- and pre-service programs for teachers. This feature is set out in the educational policy document “Toward Education for All” stating that teaching methods must allow active involvement and participation of learners in the learning process (Namibia. MEC, 1993:60). This shift of thinking in education has brought about a change in the view of knowledge and learning, and of how people learn. Teachers are viewed as crucial in changing classrooms and schools (Prawat, 1992). Thus, the policy for basic education and teacher training has identified teachers as key agents of change and as the vehicles to improve and develop practice.

Learning is viewed as the process of personal construction of knowledge and meaning making. In this context learners are required to develop high order skills and to be responsible for their own learning. The use of portfolios closely complements the emerging concepts of cognitive learning. The adoption of portfolios was guided by the need for providing teachers with reflective tools that foster critical inquiry and critical reflection on learning and teaching (Prawat 1991, Swarts, 1998, Zeichner & Wray 2001, as cited in Reilly 2003; Klenowski, 1997).

The BETD is based on a critical inquiry orientation. This orientation is “aimed at exploring new and better ways to support learning” (Swarts, 1998:200). Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) emphasise the importance of the teachers as critical, reflective change-agents and stress that in a reform process, teachers need to have a vehicle that helps them to become change agents. This is reflected in the aims of the BETD curriculum, which strives to:

- Develop a reflective attitude and creative, analytical and critical thinking
- Enable teachers to take responsibility of their own learning, to be aware of ways to develop themselves professionally both through their own initiative and as well as through formal educational opportunities. (Namibia. MBE, 2006:6)

These aims of the Basic Education Teacher’s Diploma have translated the ideals envisaged by the reform policy “Toward Education for All” (Namibia. MEC, 1993) to empower students to function as agents of change and have contributed to the renewal in the education system throughout the program and the teaching profession. Reflection is seen as a necessary component of the BETD program. Student teachers need to reflect on and critically analyze their prior experiences, assumptions, methodologies and approaches. As a result a reflective pedagogy was encouraged through both the pre-service and in-serve BETD (Swarts & van Graan, 2004:27).

The BETD broad curriculum requires the students to be provided with ample opportunity to develop cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, research and evaluation related to practical experience (Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education, [MBE], 2006:10). There is expected to be coherence between the subject area and the BETD broad curriculum. The critical inquiry in the BETD is translated in the Education Theory and Practice (ETP) syllabus, which begins in the first year and is developed over three years of study, culminating in action research (Namibia. MBE, 2006:10). In the first year students are introduced to the concept of critical inquiry and reflective practice, the actions that constitute reflective practice and the reasons for teachers assuming the role of reflective practitioners. These students are expected to demonstrate their understanding by carrying out a small- scale research project at school during School Based Studies (SBS). In the second year students acquire knowledge and understanding of critical inquiry as

reflective practice as well as how to identify learning problems and offer suggestions as to how a learning problem can be solved, but not to take action. During year three students identify steps of action research as a cyclic process and identify a need, a problem or an issue in relation to their own teaching plan and implement actions to bring change, monitor and reflect on the effects of actions. (Ibid.10).

According to McKernan (1991:5) action research is “the systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice”. Therefore, the adoption of portfolios in the Namibian context emphasis on reflection is seen as a vehicle that gives students the opportunity to develop the skills and competencies necessary for reflective practice. By implication reflection is aimed to foster learning and critical inquiry and this corresponds well with the notion of reflective practice, which requires the teacher to examine their assumptions and context as they undertake deliberate and sustained action for the purpose of improving their teaching competence. In the next section I discuss the policy regarding portfolio development in the BETD pre-service program.

2.6.2 BETD policy regarding portfolios

The BETD pre-service is a three-year program. This section examines the current teacher education diploma policy on portfolio development. The BETD broad curriculum describes a portfolio as a careful selection made by students of their work, using a variety of evidence selected to demonstrate long-term growth in meeting the criteria for the competencies, and a statement by a student justifying the selection of such materials (Namibia. MBE, 2006:24). The policy requires students to keep and maintain the portfolios on an ongoing basis. The BETD policy on the portfolio states:

Students are required to keep and maintain portfolios. It could include notes and summaries, assessment tasks related to themes and competencies, teaching materials prepared by students, lesson plans from school based studies, completed assignments, self assessment, etc. It is also the responsibility of each student to select from a range of subject areas the work they consider to be evidence of their

achievement of the professional themes and competencies. The student teacher may consult teacher educators and school-based teams on the appropriateness of specific pieces of work. (Namibia. MBE, 2006: 24-25).

It is explicitly stated in the BETD broad curriculum that the process of building a portfolio is ideally directed by a coherent combination of curriculum goals, strategic understanding, and the personal interests of students, and that the portfolio is a tool for reflective teaching in teacher education. In this context, teachers are encouraged to write reflections on their learning experiences, and about what they feel they have achieved.

However, as I stated in chapter one, the BETD broad curriculum stipulates that the portfolio assessment is to be recorded at the end of “any” semester, but it does not include the portfolio among the items for summative assessment. Thus, assessing and recording of the portfolio grade does not appear in the BETD National Assessment and Promotion Policy.

According to Stiggins (1996) the process of self-reflection is the most important dimension of the portfolio because it enables students to maintain contact with their own strengths and weaknesses. He also claimed that periodic student self-reflection on their achievements represents the heart of a learning experience which is made possible by documenting these in portfolios.

According to Francis, Tyson and Wilder (1999) pre-service teachers improve their level of reflection if they are engaged in reflective activities during their preparation. The Namibian reform efforts in teaching and teacher education curriculum are guided by these “academic, social efficiency, developmental and social reconstructive” traditions (Zeichner & Liston, 1996:51). It is apparent from the basic teacher education curriculum reviewed that it caters for the theory of reflective practice and the strategies related to its development as well as opportunities to put these in practice. Central to the portfolio is the notion of self-reflection and self - evaluation (Klenowski, 1997). Consequently prospective teachers are challenged to be attentive to issues concerning social justice in

documenting the professional content of their portfolios during training. This would include the institutional and cultural environment as well as the process and product relationship. However, the current curriculum is not clear about the nature and role of portfolios in the context of reflective practice and as a means of providing evidence of reflective practice as well as its implementation. The issues that surround portfolio implementation regionally and internationally are discussed in the next section.

2.7 The analysis of research on portfolios in teacher education programs

This section focuses on the analysis of studies on the use of portfolios in teacher education in different countries. It explores the purposes, implementation and issues. It also discusses the challenges faced in developing portfolios by looking at the lessons learnt regionally and internationally. The issues that complicate the implementation of portfolio assessment are defined and discussed.

2.7.1 Implementation

The research on portfolios shows that the primary purpose of a portfolio is the documentation of student achievements and growth. Teacher reflection has been found to be a personal experience leading to insights about oneself and one's existing perceptions. The study by du Plessis and Koen (2005) of the portfolio assessment of Information Technology, reveals that the students discover the portfolio in its essence as a step towards career orientation; a tool to facilitate lifelong learning and to encourage a deep approach to learning. It is believed that portfolios provide new ways of representation and responding to learning and teaching activities.

However, the study by Felder and Brent (1996) reveals that poorly designed or implemented portfolio programs are likely to have a minimal impact on institutional teaching quality and a negative impact on faculty morale. "The problem with performance assessment in general is that they often become "add on's" [*sic*] to the curriculum, instruction, and testing which already exists in school" (Johnson, 1996:32).

Klenowski (1997) investigated the implementation of portfolios and found a real need for practical clear guidelines to facilitate the use of portfolios for assessment and for the development of skills such as reflective practice. In addition Johnson (1999:46) pointed out that “vigorous administrative support” played a vital role in the success of portfolio implementation. In the next section I examine the challenges and issues related to portfolios in teacher education.

2.7.3 Issues and challenges

Research has revealed various issues related to the practical and technical aspects of developing portfolios that concern teacher educators and students. The issues identified include:

1. The validity and meaning of scores (Herman & Winters, 1994; Calfee & Freedman, 1996; Gipps, 1996; Oosterhof, 1996; Gillespie et al., 1996).
Inconsistency is reported as featuring prominently in scoring portfolios. However, according to Oosterhof (1996) consistency can be improved by carefully constructing a scoring plan and by basing each judgment on a variety of products.
2. The need for close support and frequent encouragement (Tann, as cited in Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Oosterhof, 1996; Klenowski, 1997).
3. A disjuncture between curriculum policy and practice (Wilmot, 2003).

These issues seem to be associated with the following problems portrayed by a number of research studies:

- Lack of shared vision and understanding of a portfolio (Johnson, 1999)
- Lack of knowledge about levels of reflection (Francis, Tyson & Wilder, 1999; Winsor et al., 1999; Parsons & Stephenson, 2005).
- Reflective statements of the students were not self-evident Tann (1993).
- Lack of knowledge on how to analyse, synthesize and evaluate. Hatton and Smith, (1995), and Korthagen (1999) as cited in Parsons and Stephenson, (2005) have

indicated that where the above lack of competencies exist, students' reflections are self-centered and remain at a descriptive level rather than being analytical. Hatton and Smith (1995) found that some of the students' evaluation statements were learner orientated, situation orientated and that they blame the learner if things went wrong.

- Lack of time to complete reflections in a thoughtful manner (Francis, Tyson & Wilder, 1999; Parsons & Stephenson, 2005).

These problems indicate the need for teacher educators to be knowledgeable about the dimensions of reflection and analysis of practice. It is in this light that Abruscato (1993) as cited in Gillespie et al. (1996) stated that a portfolio requires a high level of training and support to acquaint teachers with data analysis as well as logical ways of interpreting information. The research on the use of portfolios shows that it is a challenge to develop portfolios as a means for reflecting and analyzing the data (Oberg & Artz, as cited in Russell & Munby, 1992). The issues above indicate that portfolio development in terms of their design and implementation is faced with challenges that need to be taken into consideration if the portfolio is to be implemented successfully.

It is apparent from the literature reviewed that in order to develop reflective practice and to provide evidence of reflective practice through portfolios that pre-service programs have to include an explicit:

- articulation of the theory of reflective practice and the strategies related to its development as well as opportunities to put these into practice
- understanding of critical thinking and how to apply it in the context of practice
- articulation of the nature and role of portfolios in the context of reflective practice and as a means to provide evidence of reflective practice
- understanding of the primary conceptual frameworks, the skills, values and attitudes associated with the various subject areas in order to fully understand the aims and goals of teaching particular subjects in order to provide a platform for reflective practice

- understanding of the pedagogy adopted to bring about learning
- support structures to ensure that students are able to overcome the various problems and issues related to reflective practice and the use of portfolios in a meaningful way.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the historical background of the portfolio, tracing the origin of the use of portfolios in educational settings. This chapter has also provided the theoretical framework underpinning reflective practice as well as an exploration of the principles guiding portfolios in education. This exploration provides the rationale for the adoption of portfolios in teacher education programs. The chapter also examined the portfolios and reflective practice within the Namibian perspective. It provided a description of the rationale for portfolios and the process of preparing portfolios in teacher education in Namibia. I outlined the analysis of research studies on the use of portfolios in teacher education in different countries. The research methodology is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Further to the aim of this study to investigate the purpose and role of the student portfolio in developing reflective practice in the Basic Education Teachers' Diploma (BETD) pre-service program, this chapter provides the framework of the research methodology for the study. The chapter begins with a critical account of the research design. In this section I identify and justify the research orientation that informs my study. The second section describes the sampling approach used in the study. It identifies the type of sampling used and the role of the participants. It also describes the guiding principles and the rationale behind such selection. In the third section I discuss the data collection methods used in this study. The fourth section describes the mode of data analysis used for analyzing the data collected and how it was used. The fifth section explores the research procedures followed during this study. Finally, I identify the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research design

I wanted to understand how portfolios contribute to student learning, particularly in developing reflective practice. My research therefore involved the need to understand, to make meaning of, to gain insights into and to interpret how the teacher educators and students understand the role of portfolios and how this role is reflected in practice. Consequently, the study was located in an interpretive orientation, because it was aimed at understanding the perspectives and views of people (Schwandt, 1994).

As Winberg (1997) emphasizes, interpretive research allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of people's lived experiences by uncovering how the people's interpretations of reality influences both their views of that reality and their actions. An interpretive orientation is also an appropriate orientation to examine reflective practice, which involves students examining their beliefs with the aim of changing their actions in

the context of their teaching. This research orientation is also suited to the exploration of portfolio development, which involves students examining and documenting their personal and professional development having themselves been engaged in making meaning of their practice. Thus methodological coherence is provided between the study and the area being researched.

Although the interpretive orientation provides in-depth understanding of the situation being studied, it is criticized because its generalizability is limited by its focus on the subjective understanding and meaning of the problem being studied (Anderson & Arsenault, 1989; Patton, 1990; Merriam, 2001). Therefore this study seeks to illuminate particular aspects of portfolio development in order to better understand the views and actions of the participants.

An interpretive orientation dictates the use of a qualitative research approach because it focuses on interpreting situations and finding meaning in personal experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (1994), (as cited in Anderson & Arsenault, 1998:14) describe the qualitative approach as “multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the problem under study”. A qualitative research approach also lends itself to a holistic and descriptive small-scale study, which is striving to understand how people make sense of their situation and their lived experiences of the situation (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Patton, 1990; Merriam, 2001).

I selected a qualitative research approach because of its focus on the interpretation and meaning making of what occurs in a specified event or program (Merriam, 2001). I wanted an approach that would allow me to answer questions about portfolios with the purpose of describing and understanding the role that portfolios play in developing reflective practice from the teacher educators and students’ points of view in the context of teacher education. In this study ‘the particular’ related specifically to the implementation of portfolio development at one College of Education.

The qualitative approach allowed me to study the role of portfolios in depth and to detail the one area of focus (Patton, 1990). The case study method proved to be an appropriate means to frame the study. A case study is described as “contextual”, “particularistic”, and as providing holistic rich description and analysis, which is “system bounded” (Merriam, 2001:29; Stake, 2004:436). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) added that a case study is geographical and shaped by the institutional context. These authors argued that a case study is also defined by the characteristics, the roles and the functions of participants in the study. This study is geographically limited to the northern part of Namibia. It focuses on a particular college, a particular group of students and a particular group of teacher educators.

Nevertheless, I am aware that case studies within my research design are limited in terms of subjectivity. I discuss this critique inherent to the selected research design later in the chapter.

3.3 Sampling

This section explains the sampling strategy used and the participants involved in the study. The sampling for this study was purposive (Patton, 1990) since this type of sampling enabled me to focus on the third year student teachers who were engaged in preparing portfolios in the college.

“Selecting the desired sample size is one of principle underlying purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2000:102). Purposive sampling offers the researcher an opportunity to “select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2001:61).

The sampling for this study was heavily influenced by the institutional arrangements (Cohen et al., 2000) in terms of the timing of developing portfolios and the group of students and teacher educators involved. The general inclusion criterion was that the participants must have been involved in portfolio development in one way or another. In addition the other criterion was that the portfolios needed to have been completed and graded.

Usually a qualitative case study requires a small sample for in-depth analysis of the situation in order gain better in-depth and detailed data. Therefore, a total of 7 participants were involved in this study in order to capture their perceptions and personal experiences. Three teacher educators, three student teachers specializing in teaching from grades 8-10 and the vice-rector were purposefully selected. The teacher educators were tutoring the third year students during school based studies (practicum). I hoped they would shed light on the relationship between themselves and the students.

The students were selected by asking three tutors to submit one the portfolio each from their student teachers. The general inclusion criterion was that the portfolios must have been of the students who, in their view, had developed a competent portfolio was selected making a total of three students. This decision was primarily based on the idea of purposeful sampling as I felt that students who had put effort into their portfolios would provide more worthwhile insights about developing portfolios than those who had not. The anonymity of participants was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms, see Table 1 below.

Table.1 Research participants

Vice–Rector MEd	Teacher educators	Student teachers and their specializations	
	Anna (BEdHons)	Philip -BETD	Languages
	Alex (MEd)	Kaino - BETD	Mathematics
	Shivute (MEd)	Fala - BETD	Integrated Natural Sciences

The next section discusses the data collection methods used to gather the information necessary for the study.

3.4 Data collection

Data were obtained through interviews and document analysis. I used these methods because they suited the nature and purpose of my study. They are also recommended as they comply with the requirements of a case study by increasing its validity (Yin, 2003).

3.4.1 Interviews

The first data collection tool I used was a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews dictate the use of open-ended questions, while also allowing the researcher to determine a set of focal areas. An interview such as this, according to Anderson and Arsenault (1998:168) allows for in-depth analysis geared to each respondent. It also allows for follow up sessions should more detail be required on issues arising from the interview.

These interviews were designed to probe the participants' views of reflective practice. To investigate their experiences and understanding of the purpose and role of portfolios in developing reflective practice and to explore to what extent this role was being achieved in practice. The interviews concentrated on several foci. First, the conceptual understanding and role of portfolios. Second, the experience of portfolio assessment. I also focused on other aspects of portfolio development such as the content and the process. Finally I focused on conceptual understanding of reflective practice and its relationship with the notion of portfolios. In essence the interview as method was designed to gain insights into the teacher educators and students' thoughts and actions about portfolios in the context of reflective practice.

I conducted individual face-to-face interviews. Each interview was designed to take between 40 to 60 minutes. With the informed consent of participants the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Tape recording allowed me the opportunity to actively listen and to use follow up questions. One student preferred the interview to be conducted in their mother tongue, Oshindonga. I, therefore, translated that interview into

English. The vice-rector was unable to maintain his anonymity because of his leadership position. Mutual agreement was obtained through negotiation (appendix E).

The most common challenge to interviewers is that of asking leading questions. Pre-testing of the tool is seen as crucial for a researcher (Merriam, 2001). Therefore in my study critical friends were involved in reviewing the interview schedules (appendix D). As stated in chapter 1, I conducted a pilot study using questionnaires which helped to prepare the way.

I have been involved in portfolio development at the college under study for several years. However, I attempted to distance my assumptions and beliefs by being an active listener and being open minded. I also did this in order to encourage the participants to discuss their thoughts and feelings. However, after the interviews I felt obliged to conduct informal discussions with the head of department of Professional Studies. The strategy used for analyzing the data collected is discussed in the next section.

3.4.2 Document analysis

The second method I used in my research was document analysis. O’Leary (2004:177) defined document analysis as “the collection, review, and interrogation of relevant documents”. For O’Leary data analysis also refers to a data collection method and a mode of analysis. The documents analysed in this study included documents such as the portfolio checklist, the student portfolios (teaching portfolio and course portfolios), memos and annual moderation reports. This analysis included an examination of policies concerning portfolio development, the goals, the structure and the implementation strategies for fostering the reflective practice

Studying the portfolios was essential to get a picture of how the student teachers had undertaken deliberate and sustained reflection and action for the purpose of development and change. This was done by examining various aspects of learning, including the principles of facilitating learning; reflection on one’s work; the identification of beliefs

and actions; teacher's judgment and a change to reflective teaching (appendix F). This provided documented evidence of how portfolios are organized, developed and implemented at the selected College of Education. It also provided further insight into the design tools and strategies put in place to develop reflective practice in the area of professional development.

The document reviews helped me to study the students' empirical, analytical and evaluative competencies. Most importantly, I managed to gain insights into their attitudes toward teaching. Furthermore, the checklists and memos also revealed the rationale, standards and the guidelines for portfolio development. The checklist also shed light on the design tools that help students to organize their portfolios, the facets of portfolio assessment, and the interaction between the students and tutors.

Moderation reports, in particular, added another dimension of validity. The moderators as outsiders may see the situation from a different perspective to that of the college personnel. Reviewing these documents enabled me to understand the frame of reference around which the institution operated.

3.5 Data analysis

In this section I provide a description of the data analysis process. The interpretive perspective places primary emphasis on this process of making meaning. This implies that the researcher needs to identify emergent themes, patterns of meaning and questions that emerge from the data collected (Maxwell, 1996; Connole, 1998).

Data obtained through interviews and document analysis was analyzed and triangulated to capture an in-depth understanding of the research questions. The data collected was analyzed in order to find themes and patterns, which were placed into different categories. Categories were coded in response to the data that had been collected using matrixes for comparison (appendixes G, H & I). Coding took the form of labels that I

used to organize and retrieve the data. The main codes I used were descriptive codes (D) for beliefs or events; interpretive codes (I) for reasons underlying events or beliefs and code (P) illustrating motives informing actions.

In the first stage, the emerging themes were generated from interviews. I began by analyzing all data for each participant using an interview guide (Patton, 1990). Then, answers from different participants were grouped by topics from the interview guide looking for alternative explanations and as well as areas of commonality (Maxwell, 1996). Students' transcripts were also cross-referenced (Patton, 1990) with their specific tutors and with their portfolios. This enabled me to analyze different perspectives regarding the central issues of interest and the interaction between students and tutors.

The fact that I had been involved in portfolio development in this college made it crucial for me to minimize my assumptions in order to increase my neutrality as a researcher. Therefore the findings were validated by discussing the findings with the participants and critical friends and making a comparison of findings with existing theory (Maxwell, 1996). Nevertheless, as indicated, this study is an interpretive case study and its findings are not meant to be generalised. The next section describes the research procedures that were used in conducting the study.

3.6 Research ethics

The letter asking for permission to conduct research was submitted to the Rector (appendix A). In the same letter the purpose of the research was explained. The permission to conduct this research was granted by the Rector (appendix B). The participants were informed in writing (appendix C). According to Anderson and Arsenault (1998) informed consent is a fundamental principle of research ethics. Therefore, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and what was expected of them and the ethical protocol. This informed them about research ethics such as their rights to refuse and to withdraw, and emphasized their right to confidentiality regarding their identities.

According to Bassey (1999) participants are entitled to privacy. As a researcher I have to respect the confidentiality of the participants. Thus pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the respondents as indicated in section 3.3, Table 1.

Some of the participants gave written consent to participate, while others provided verbal consent. The participants decided on the logistics regarding the time, place and date of the interview according to what was convenient to each of them. With the informed consent of participants the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The vice-rector, as mentioned earlier, was informed that because of his position anonymity was threatened and this aspect was one on which we had to reach mutual agreement (appendix E). According to Merriam (2001) the researcher is obliged to be neutral during the interviews. Therefore I was an active listener and attempted to be completely open minded during the interviews. The next section discusses the limitation of the study.

3. 7 Limitations

This section indicates the limitations that may influence my study. The key limitation anticipated from this study, is my position as a teacher educator (senior), which might influence the authenticity of the data from participants, especially from student teachers. However, this was resolved as far as possible by building trust and rapport, and by showing respect for the participants as well as by using a multi-data approach.

There are several problems with self-reported data, such as withholding information, exaggeration and social desirability. The latter is the possibility that participants may have said what they think would please the researcher. However, triangulating (Cohen et al., 2000) the interview transcripts of participants eliminated as far as possible the self-report bias. I have also cross-analyzed the transcripts of students with their tutors and their portfolios. In addition the transcript reviews by participants and the discussion of the findings with critical friends helped to validate the findings.

The other challenge was the attrition of participants in the study. Initially, as stated in chapter 1 my sampling plan was to have 6 students and 6 teacher educators, but circumstances made me change my original plan. Firstly, one of the students interviewed was no longer accessible because of his employment in a remote area. The tape I used for his interview was not clear. After several attempts to get hold of him I decided to exclude him. Secondly, two of the teacher educators became inaccessible, as one retired and the other one resigned. However, a qualitative research sample is a small and flexible one, and a case study is not representative by nature. It is on this basis that I decided to use only 3 students who were accessible, as well as their tutors. The study was constrained by time in terms of it being a half thesis.

Furthermore, I realized that in spite of my small sample I might possibly have collected more data than I could handle as a novice researcher. Bassey (1999:69) cautions that “a researcher should not collect more data than she or he has time and energy to analyze”. The study was also constrained by the availability of the participants, particularly the teacher educators, as they were very busy. This delayed the interview process considerably. The overall limitation is that generalizing the finding or conclusions from this study is not possible taking into consideration the parameters of the interpretive paradigm, which guided the study.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the research methodology, beginning with the interpretive paradigm as the orientation that informed the design of the study. Next, I discussed data collection methods that were used, namely interviews and the document analysis. I have also described the data analysis process that was primarily inductive as to emerging themes and pattern and triangulation the data collected. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of this study. The next chapter presents the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings collected from document analysis and interviews. The background of the participants is described in order to better understand the themes that emerge from the data. The presentation of the interview results includes open-ended responses from the student teachers and teacher educators, unedited where relevant, to highlight the participant's voice and to enhance the validity of the study. The answers are categorized according to the perceptions of teacher educators and the students regarding the role that portfolios play in developing reflective practice and how this role is being achieved in practice.

The findings of the document analysis include the review of checklists, guidelines, handouts, memos and the student portfolios as well as the assessment moderation reports. I present the findings under the following categories:

- The background of participants
- The portfolio organization and management
- The role of the portfolio
- Analysis of the portfolio

4.2 The background of participants

All the participants, including the students, have been exposed to portfolios in their studies. All teacher educators and the Vice-Rector involved in this study have been guiding students to create portfolios in the college for many years. These teacher educators have been exposed to portfolios as part of their training. In essence both are

expected to have a thorough understanding of what a portfolio is all about and the role it plays in promoting reflective practice. However, I do not imply that all of them have the same understanding.

Establishing the background of the institution and of the participants involved in my study was important for me to understand their lived experience. For ethical reasons the college, tutors and student teachers are given pseudonyms, the exception being the Vice-Rector. According to Bassey (1999) anonymity of participants who are in a leadership position is not always possible. The Vice-Rector is in such a position; therefore it is appropriate to keep his title.

4.2.1 Student participants

All students who participated in this study were in their third year of study. They specialized in teaching Languages, Mathematics, and Integrated Natural Science (grades 8-10) and they developed the portfolio as a requirement of the BETD course. The student participants are Kaino, Fala and Philip. Kaino and Fala are female, while Philip is a male student. Tutors are referred to as Shivute, Anna and Alex.

4.2.2 Tutors and the Vice-Rector

Shivute is a male tutor, who heads one of the departments in the college. He is also a member of the Assessment and Promotion Committee. Shivute has been teaching in the college for 16 years and has been involved in facilitating portfolios for 12 years. He has a Masters in Education and has developed a portfolio as one of his Masters requirements. Shivute was Fala's tutor.

Anna has a B.Ed.Hons degree and is currently busy with her Masters. She has developed the portfolio as a requirement for both her B.Ed.Hons and Masters courses. She has 25 years of teaching experience at the college and has been involved in facilitating portfolios for 12 years. Anna was Philip's tutor.

Alex has a Masters in Education. He has developed the portfolio as a requirement for his Masters Course and has been teaching at the college for 9 years. Alex has also been involved in facilitating portfolios for 9 years and is teaching Education Theory and Practice. He was Kaino's tutor.

The Vice-Rector has a Masters in Education. He has developed the portfolio as a requirement for his B.Ed.Hons and Masters Course. He has been teaching at the college for 16 years and is also a member of the Assessment and Promotion Committee. The Vice-Rector has also been involved in facilitating portfolios at the college for 9 years and oversees the overall implementation of the BETD curriculum at the institution.

4.3 Portfolio organization and management

In this section I present how the portfolios were organised and managed at the college at the time this study was undertaken.

4.3.1 The organization of portfolios

Students were required to keep and maintain an SBS (teaching) portfolio and a course portfolio. This section focuses on the respondents' comments about the way in which the portfolios were organized at the college. All the teacher educators indicated that there was a set of procedures in place. They pointed out that in the first stage the School Based Studies (SBS) department allocates the student teachers to the respective teacher educators for supervision during the practicum. These teacher educators were also expected to facilitate the portfolio development. Alex said that the teacher educators who were appointed as tutors assumed the responsibility of portfolios. However, Anna stated that they were allocated to students whom they had never taught before.

All the teacher educators stated that in the second stage the portfolio checklists were distributed to the student teachers. In addition, the Vice-Rector maintained that the student teachers were provided with information on the development of portfolios. In

reality the only information students were given was the checklist and a 1-page memo provided below.

The college developed a checklist for each portfolio, an example of which is presented below.

Table 2. School based studies (SBS) Year 3 file checklist

Name of student teacher: _____ School _____

The student's SBS file **must** contain all the following in to achieve a *complete* grade for SBS

A The SBS file contains the following:	YES	NO
Table of contents		
School syllabus for the subjects taught		
Scheme(s) of work for the subject taught		
Your timetable		
At least 5 lesson plans per week		
Lesson plans grouped (successful/moderate / successful/not very Unsuccessful)		
Copies of other teaching materials used		
Reflections at the end of each lesson		
Weekly reflections		
All the feedback forms from SBS tutors		
All learners assessment records		
Conclusion, evaluating your learning by the end of SBS		
B In addition the SBS file is:		
Neatly organized in labelled sections		
Presented in a helpful and attractive cover		

Name of SBS Tutor: _____

Comments on SBS file (optional): _____

The signature of the SBS tutor below indicates that the SBS file is complete.

SBS Tutor's signature: _____

Date: _____

Student teacher's signature: _____

Date: _____

The checklist, once complete, should be kept in the student's SBS file.

The SBS file checklist focused on both the organizational and reflective components of teaching. The organizational component includes the syllabus, scheme of work, lesson plans, and copies of teaching materials used, learners' assessment records and feedback from the SBS tutors and the final evaluation completed at the conclusion of the SBS process. The reflective component includes the grouping of lessons in terms of how successful they were considered to be, daily and weekly reflections, feedback forms and

the evaluation of learning at the end of SBS. The lesson presentation feedback form has a reflection section for the tutor to assess student’s reflective ability.

The criteria indicated on the checklists are not expressed as assessment criteria that seek to identify how well students achieve tangible outcomes. They simply indicate the required items that should appear in the portfolio. This was emphasized by the design of the checklist and by the fact that the teacher educators’ comments were regarded as optional. This illustrates that the teaching portfolio was perceived simply as a file despite the inclusion of the reflection dimension which would explain the problem the students had in differentiating between the file and the portfolio.

The other checklist provided was the one for the course (BETD) portfolio, which is presented as table 3 below.

Table. 3 Student Teacher Portfolio Checklist- BETD Portfolio

Name of Student Teacher:

Assessment Category	Yes	No
The portfolio is organized in a logical manner		
Learner study report is part of the portfolio		
Critical Inquiry report is part of the portfolio		
Action Research report is part of the portfolio		
There are lesson plans for lessons taught during SBS		
Notes/reports from both support teachers and teacher educators are part of the portfolio		
Examination papers and answer sheets are part of the portfolio		
Materials included are purposefully selected and justified		
There is evidence of critical reflectiveness		
The portfolio contains diverse information		
The portfolio provides evidence of student's professional growth and development		
There is evidence of organizing and cross linking various BETD course components		
There is evidence of innovativeness and creativity		
The portfolio is presentable		

The checklist shows that the requirements for this portfolio are extensive and diverse.

The portfolio is designed to include the child study, critical inquiry and the action

research reports, as well the lesson plans, notes or reports from support teachers and teacher educators.

There is also a clear indication that students are given the opportunity to select other materials purposefully. Justification of the selection and evidence of critical reflectiveness on learning, professional growth and development, and the integration of various BETD components is also expected. There is evidence that organization and development as well as innovativeness and creativity are encouraged. This checklist indicates that reflection was central to the portfolio's development. However, some the statements of attainment were not clear enough to allow teacher educators to make judgments about mastery of the specific skills.

Despite the fact that these checklists were for separate portfolios there were similar features. For example, the format of all the checklists was designed using the 'yes' or 'no' approach typical of a checklist. The portfolio moderation checklist table 4 on page 49 also shares the same format except that it requires a comment on each assessment categories.

Table 4. NIED ‘moderation’ checklists

Student portfolios

Indicators	Yes	No	Comments
a) Is there a table of contents that includes introduction, the title of each work sample/year of study and its page numbers?			
b) Are the portfolios presentable?			
c) Is there evidence of the nature of the student's own work?			
d) Is there evidence of self-assessment written by the student, partner or group members?			
e) Is there reasonable amount of documentation/categories of work samples?			
f) Is there a rationale explaining what work samples are included, why each - one is significant, and how they fit together in a holistic view of the student's work?			
g) Are there citations of future goals/learning based on the student's current achievements, interests and progress?			
h) Are there other written comments and assessments/feedback from the teacher educators, support teachers, student's partner or cooperative learning groups?			

Summary of Overall impression

Revised on July 2006

There appears to be an overlap of items needed in the two portfolios. Nevertheless, the specific indicators of the level of reflection, the evidence of progress and the development of the student seem not to be dealt with. At the same time aspects such as future goals, learning based on the student’s current achievements, interests and peer collaboration were explicit in the NIED’s moderation checklist, but they were implicit rather than explicit in the college checklists.

Despite the checklists provided, all the respondents indicated that the college has no policy or document in place for developing portfolios. The checklists developed at the college provide insights into how the curriculum and the NIED checklist were interpreted. This indicates that the checklists and a memo were considered as the portfolio guidelines.

The Vice-Rector felt that not all teacher educators put much effort into portfolio construction, and not all of them had the same understanding of how the portfolio should be constructed and developed. The Vice-Rector's response below was interesting as it gives further insights into the portfolio system:

We don't have like a real policy document at the college that guides teacher educators. The policy is a big concept, big word, but there are just few pamphlets, few handouts that are normally distributed by the office of the school studies, but it is still up to teacher educators to interpret these. There is no mechanism to force or to encourage teacher educators to utilize this or to consult that. Others could still take it as optional and in that will make us as teacher educators to relax. Again those teacher educators who are more interested and have better understanding of portfolios use it effectively. Who are not, they leave it as it is.

What this response revealed is that the college lacks a mechanism to enforce the implementation of portfolios. Further to this was an indication that teacher educators subjected the checklists distributed to different interpretations and not all teacher educators used them. This leads one to believe that one of the most useful means to provide evidence of reflective practice and to encourage it is being downplayed.

The responses to my request for comments on their perceptions of the guidance given for implementing portfolios was interesting as it illuminated key weaknesses that had been identified earlier by the Vice- Rector. All the student teachers stated that the teaching portfolios were prepared during SBS (practicum). They also pointed out that the last term of the year was devoted to the preparation of the BETD course portfolio. Both student teachers and teacher educators indicated that the SBS department was responsible for the distribution of portfolio checklists. Kaino made it clear that all the third year students were gathered in the hall where they were told about the course portfolio during the

school based studies. All the student teachers stated that the head of the SBS department presented a brief sketch of the procedures for the course portfolio that included the checklists and a memo from the Vice-Rector's office.

What these responses revealed was that students experienced problems in sorting out the differences between the teaching portfolio and course portfolio. The guidelines they were given did not help in spite of the fact that there were two separate checklists. Both tutors and students showed dissatisfaction about the nature and the purpose of the checklists provided. They indicated that the portfolio checklists lack clarity in terms of reflection, organization and assessment. It is also evident that both students and tutors rely on the checklists provided. Anna illuminated this by saying:

I am not quite happy with that kind of checklist because it just requires students to include successful, moderate and unsuccessful lessons for example when it comes to SBS, but the reflections, to me what is important is not the items you put there.

The responses of tutors were interesting because they indicated that they were unsure of who designed and decided on the items to be included in the portfolios. This gives insight into the collaboration between the SBS department and the tutors. Anna in particular revealed that sometimes checklists are distributed to the students only. In the same vein Kaino, one of the students interviewed, suggested that tutors need to know what is going on at the SBS department.

The Vice-Rector revealed that he was responsible for designing the checklist for the BETD course portfolio in consultation with NIED and the School Based Studies department. He explained this by saying: “*with NIED we decide that the critical inquiry report, the learner observation project, and the Action Research is a must it should be in*”. He went on to say that in consultation with the head of the SBS they decided what should be included. He also stated that the students could decide for themselves what to include to show professional growth. This gives insight into the involvement of the

teacher educators in designing the assessment criteria. A memo Figure 2 below was issued ten days before the summative moderation of these portfolios.

Figure 2: Internal memo

11· November 2005

To: All year 3 student teachers

From: The Office of the Vice-Rector

Subject: Summative Assessment Moderation -2005

1. The College has received the Summative Assessment Moderation guidelines.
2. The Summative Assessment Moderation will take place at NIED, Okahandja, on November 22nd, 2005.
3. You are, therefore, reminded to submit your portfolio to your SBS tutor for marking, as part of the moderation preparation. Subject file, SBS file and resource box are not requirements for moderation. *A portfolio is a purposeful, and selective collection of students' works and records of progress that has been chosen carefully with the purpose of demonstrating competence, skills and accomplishment in one or more areas. It could include a wide variety of materials, such as samples of lesson plans, tests, assignments, project works, photographs of classroom life, interesting work students have done in the class, etc.* (Caroll J. et al, 1996).
4. Your portfolio should demonstrate your professional growth over the three years of study as student teachers, through the selected materials. This kind of selected materials (evidence) allows you to demonstrate what you know and can do, what you have learned in three years of study. Therefore, your portfolio should contain a diverse set of information collected across a variety of learning contexts, and content areas (it could be in ETP, Major, Minor, SBS, Art in Culture, Human Movement, English Communication Skills, Integrated Media and Technology, etc.). Through your portfolio you are able to inform the moderators of your professional growth over three years of study. For more information consult BETD Broad Curriculum section 8.5.4.
5. You can structure your portfolio in such a way that another person (a moderator) will find his/her way through what you have collected (documented). A content page is necessary to provide an initial summary of the content. You have to give reasons (rationale) for selecting an item, and you have to reflect on each item. You are also required to link the various parts (items) of your portfolio.
6. Your portfolio can therefore, serve as a vehicle for documenting and monitoring your professional development during the BETD course

.....**The moderators want to see**

The memo served as a reminder to students to submit the course (BETD) portfolio for marking. At the same time it provided a definition of the purpose of the portfolio. It also provided a brief guideline on the structure and the audience of the portfolio. The timing

of providing a definition and guidelines for developing a portfolio was only 10 days before moderation. The memo emphasized the fact the moderators wanted to see the portfolios. In addition its emphasis was on the content rather than the process. Furthermore the content was depicted simply as a collection of isolated materials without a clear sense that it should form some picture of the total development of the student linking all reflective comments on all the artifacts included in the portfolio. However, it is worth noting that there was no mention of the reflective role of the portfolio in the memo. This shed light on the reflective role and management of portfolios at the college.

4.3.2 Portfolio management

The Vice-Rector indicated that there was no mechanism to make portfolios a statutory requirement, or to motivate teacher educators to implement portfolios despite the fact that they are viewed by the ministry as an essential dimension of the BETD programme and are moderated by NIED officials. He further stated that it was only those teacher educators who were interested that took portfolio development seriously. He also revealed that a workshop was to be conducted for teacher educators to have a better understanding of portfolios. He was of the opinion that this would help encourage the teacher educators to develop portfolios themselves.

However, the Vice- Rector could also not say how the portfolio development was managed. This could indicate that the issues regarding the management of portfolio were not dealt with. This was also evident in the issuing of the memo reminding students to submit portfolios for marking a few days before the moderation date. This provided insight into the significance of the role of the portfolio, which is described in detail in the next section

4.4 The role of the portfolio

This section presents the role of the portfolio with special reference to its role in developing reflective practice and includes the participants' views about reflective practice and the portfolio, the role of teacher educators and the impact of portfolio implementation.

4.4.1 Defining concepts: portfolio and reflective practice

The portfolio and reflective practice are key concepts in this study. Therefore, determining how both teacher educators and students understand these concepts is essential. In this section, I first present the teacher educators' and students' understanding of reflective practice. Finally, I present how teacher educators and students understand the concept of a portfolio.

4.4.1.1 The teacher educators' perceptions of reflective practice

The responses provided insights into the various views held about the importance of reflective practice. The Vice- Rector's definition focused on reflective practice in terms of the teaching approach, the content, context and the background of learners, saying; "*It is a way if I was teaching the concept then I reflect on how I was teaching*". He stated that reflective practice is about questioning whether the students have reached the objectives by reflecting critically on their teaching, the teaching methodology and the content. He also felt that reflective practice entailed examining the environment under which teaching and learning took place. This meant that the teacher took the domain of the classroom and the background of the students into account.

In a similar vein Alex also saw reflective practice as "*a kind of critical inquiry, so the participants in the reflective practice they are questioning their own doings, their own makings*". He also made it clear that reflective practice was not only about questioning what they were doing but also questioning the context, the situations in which they were

doing their practice. In his opinion the main purpose of reflective practice was to bring about improvement in teaching, but he questioned what would happen in a situation where someone did not have the power to effect any changes. He also stated that another part of reflective practice involved interaction with others.

Shivute responded with these words: *“it is being in the position to be able to think back of what happened and maybe try to find out why it has happened and also maybe try to understand why it has happened that way”*. He was of the opinion that reflective practice ensured that a teacher identified, analysed and evaluated his or her teaching experiences with the aim of understanding them. Anna’s response was particularly interesting as she was the only one to make a distinction between reflective practice and reflexive practice. Anna saw reflective practice as reflecting on practice without necessarily taking action, while reflexive practice was to reflect on practice and to take action.

4.4.1.2 The student teachers perceptions of reflective practice

Fala identified reflective practice as being similar to being an agent of change and suggested that by reflecting and taking action the teacher adopted and accepted change. She responded with these words: *“reflective practice is for us to be like agent”*. She went on to say that the reflective teachers were good teachers and when they taught they reflected on whether the teaching was successful or not. Fala is of the opinion that reflective practitioners are obliged to make improvements, with these words: *“let me say it went wrong, and then I have to make sure as a reflective practitioner that I have made it right”*. For Kaino reflective practice involved reflecting on the teaching experience and assignments in order to identify the problems experienced by the students. Philip viewed reflective practice as the process whereby somebody looked back at what was done in order to reflect. Kaino made it clear that reflective practice was about the teacher reflecting in order to improve.

The responses, although placing the emphasis on different aspects of reflective practice, showed a common agreement on the view of reflective practice as a means to enhance

teaching because it provides a mechanism to look back and to think constructively about the teaching and learning situation. All the participants seemed to share this understanding of reflective practice as a way of reflecting back on their practice.

4.4.1.3 The teacher educators' perceptions of the portfolio

All three tutors and vice-rector have the same understanding of a portfolio. For example, Alex defined a portfolio as an entity that documents what the students have been doing. This indicates that a portfolio provides evidence of learning. Shivute responded with these words: "*it is a collection of items I would say that a person himself wants to reflect on*". He went on to say that the items collected must have contributed to the growth of the student personally, academically and professionally. Shivute indicated the diverse items that comprised the portfolio would demonstrate the student's growth in these areas. From Shivute's position it seems that the portfolio is used exclusively for documenting growth.

Although Anna shared the same definition as Shivute, she did not mention academic growth, but put more emphasis on the personal dimension of a portfolio. Although their definitions differ in terms of depth their responses indicated that they emphasized the common element of the portfolio as student growth.

4.4.1.4 The students' perceptions of the portfolio

Philip described a portfolio as an academic gallery. He explained that a gallery is where you can show what you can do. On the other hand Fala described a portfolio as something where you keep your information for safety and for future reference. Kaino shared this view saying: "*a portfolio is where you can save your information*".

These responses illustrated that these students had a limited view of the role of a portfolio. However, what was puzzling was that Kaino included a clear and precise definition of a portfolio in her School Based Studies portfolio. In her introduction she defined a portfolio as follows:

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of the students' work that tells the story of the students' efforts, and progress and achievement in a teaching area. It is an ongoing, systematic collection of products milestones in the student's teacher's journey towards excellence.

From her response it appears that Kaino did not internalize this definition of a portfolio and has simply copied a given definition. Shivute confirmed this confusion of a portfolio and a subject file. This confusion seems to suggest a lack of understanding of the portfolio concept among some of the teacher educators and the student teachers. For example, Kaino introduced her SBS file as a portfolio despite the fact that on the checklist and her cover page were written SBS file. The findings raise the question of the common misconception that a portfolio is just a file like any other file. However, Fala did attempt to differentiate between a teaching portfolio and a course portfolio referring to BETD portfolio as a general portfolio.

While the portfolio definitions offered contained no direct reference to reflective practice, the tutors and the Vice-Rector identified the development of novice teachers as reflective practitioners as the main purpose of constructing portfolios in the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) programme. Therefore they see the portfolio as providing a means of reflection through students documenting and reflecting on their own learning and teaching experiences throughout the teacher education program. This is supported by Anna who responded with these words:

“The aim of a student to develop the portfolios is for them to reflect on their work and reflect on their progress throughout the program for them to be able to, when there are reflecting they are able to help students to be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses”...

What is interesting was the additional response made by Alex that the portfolios were used for evaluating the program. Thus the policy makers can evaluate the program implementation by moderating the portfolios.

While the teacher educators and the Vice-Rector emphasized reflection as the main purpose of portfolio development. The students emphasized the assessment dimension. Fala reiterated that: *“I think for us to develop it is because maybe it will also help the lectures to assess us”*. Philip and Kaino have identified reflection as another purpose of a portfolio. They said they reflect on the materials that are in the portfolio; to see what they can do, and what they cannot do, reflect on what they have done, to reflect on their weakness and their strengths, to reflect on their academic growth and development. Kaino indicated that she could also make use of their portfolios in the field and for future reference.

4.4.2 The role of teacher educators

The responses of the tutors provided insights into the focus and emphasis placed on the role of the tutors in portfolio development. Anna and Shivute perceived their role essentially as facilitators guiding students on how to reflect and, at times even giving additional information. Anna asked her students to submit their reflections for feedback. Anna also indicated that she guided them on how to organize the portfolio, without being prescriptive. Shivute felt that his role involved guiding students on how to reflect. He emphasized that analytical skills are essential for reflection with these words: *“the most important is the analysis of situations, where they have to analyse, try to be critical and come up with the more strong points as far as their reflections are concern”*.

However, Alex perceived his role differently from the other two tutors. In his opinion the general role of a tutor included evaluating lesson presentations, supervising action research and assessing portfolios. Apart from that Alex did not see helping students to develop a portfolio as the responsibility of tutors. Alex responded with these words: *“I don’t play any role in guiding the students. That is not our duty, but I can say I only play a role in assessing the quality of portfolio”*. For Alex the role of the tutor is exclusively assessment.

All three tutors made it clear that introducing the concept portfolio was not their responsibility. Anna pointed out that no one was responsible for teaching about portfolios saying:

No one is responsible for portfolio...the responsibility of teaching the portfolio lies with the professional department, but that is not happening. I think so because, the students I had to supervise were not my students they were just allocated to me during school based studies, to my surprise they do not know about the term portfolio.

There is a belief that instruction about portfolios was included in the Education Theory and Practice (ETP) syllabus. This assumption was confirmed by the Vice-Rector, Anna and Shivute. However, Alex, who is teaching Education Theory and Practice (ETP), denied it by saying:

It is not in our syllabus. Portfolio is not a part of our syllabus, but I would say, it would be good if it becomes because we can use portfolio as a tool for students to reflect what they have done, but unfortunate it is not there.

In a scrutiny of the ETP syllabus it was evident that only reflective practice was a teaching topic, but not the portfolio. The students also revealed that they were told to construct a portfolio but the portfolio was not taught in the classroom. Fala's response was interesting because she revealed that the portfolio was only explained to them when they were informed about having to develop the portfolio. Kaino who indicated that the head of SBS department informed them about it and he gave them some handouts confirmed this. They indicated that they were only informed in the last term of their study. Anna and Shivute are of the opinion that the students were asked to develop portfolios in their third year because of the external moderation. The evidence was a memo (figure2) as distributed, which read as follows: "The moderators want to see it".

When the students were asked if the tutors were helpful, all three students responded that they were. For example, Phillip stated that his tutor, Anna was very helpful because she gave them samples of portfolios and feedback on their reflections. However, Kaino said that tutors were only helpful when assistance was sought. She also revealed that her class

asked Anna who was their Integrated Media and Technology educator for help instead of tutors assigned to them. Fala revealed that her tutor was not helpful in guiding them how to reflect, despite the tutor's claims made earlier. She illuminates this by saying:

The people ... just say you must submit your portfolio to your tutors, but they have not said anything what is the portfolio it is only that criteria we were given. ...we only submit them. And we do not even get them back from them to us, or maybe it is just me... I do not maybe know whether you can get incomplete in the portfolio, ... I think it is better for the tutor say you suppose to do this and that, or maybe we must first write the reflection maybe before we put them in the portfolio, maybe we can bring them to the tutors for tutors to go through. Even two of them, and then check how did I reflect? ...we normally just reflect everything and bring.

In this response Fala's suggestion is a reminder of the vital role that tutors play in guiding students how to reflect when developing their portfolios. In line with current theory the assessment of portfolios ought to be focused on how well students have achieved the set goals underpinning the portfolio, therefore understanding the process of how portfolios are assessed in the BETD programme of the college is important and this is discussed in the next section.

4.4.3 Assessment process

The students are all required to submit all their portfolios for marking. The external moderators, however, only expect to see a representative sample. It is interesting that Fala indicated that sometimes only those students who are selected are asked to submit their portfolio. The portfolio analysis reveals that Phillip's SBS portfolio was not marked. In the informal discussion with the head of the professional department, she revealed that she never asked her students to submit their portfolios for assessment.

All the three tutors indicated that they relied on the portfolio checklists for assessing portfolios. They also revealed that there were no assessment criteria in place. In the absence of criteria Anna designed criteria for her students using rubrics (see appendix J) in order to assess the portfolio effectively. All three tutors indicated that they did not like

the way the portfolio was being assessed because they felt they were only expected to check whether all required items were included or not. Alex responded with these words:

My role there is only in terms of look at the portfolio that they have, whether the portfolio is very well organized; the portfolio contain all items that the students are expected to put in, and then I can evaluate whether it is a pass or fail portfolio. I don't like it, because in most cases the portfolio does not tell you about the quality of the work that the student has done.

In a similar manner the Vice-Rector was questioning whether checking was the only assessment method tutors know. However, he also noted grading is the factor responsible for negative attitudes, lack of interest and support for portfolio development by stating that:

"However some students are more grade oriented... This means if it is graded as complete or incomplete those students who are grade oriented care little about knowing much or doing it because at the end they know that it won't make a difference to their grades".

He is also of the opinion that some of the students take that for granted and they may not pay much attention in constructing and developing their portfolio and even use it effectively. Shivute agrees with the vice- rector, stating that the assessment policy needs to be clear on portfolios. He felt that although portfolios are mentioned in the BETD broad curriculum, the national assessment policy is silent about it. He also pointed out that portfolios are graded; yet he has never seen a student who has failed because of the portfolio. In the same vein Alex also emphasized that:

So we have never really given an opportunity, where the student has been chased because of the standard of his or her work is not at the required level. They are just being accepted. I think these are some of the loopholes within our program.

The Vice-Rector and the teacher educators noted that the way portfolios were graded has impacted on the morale of both students and teacher educators. Anna pointed out that the efforts of students were not rewarded because the portfolios were only graded as a pass or fail. She felt it was unfair for students who put more effort in developing their portfolios.

She described how the situation had prompted her to design the assessment criteria rubric that allowed her students to be awarded higher grades (appendix J). Alex felt powerless.

On the other hand, Philip pointed out that he did not know how the portfolios were assessed citing the lack of assessment criteria as a reason. He also perceived the checklists provided as guidelines for assessment. However, Fala revealed that she did not know the reason for developing the BETD portfolio. She was of the opinion that teachers are assessing what students learn from the program. In the same vein Kaino indicated that the assessment focused on the student's growth. To what extent is the reflective role of portfolios being achieved in practice is presented in the next section.

4.4.4 The impact of portfolio implementation

All three tutors had doubts as to whether the portfolio development had an impact on student learning, particularly in relation to making them reflective teachers. Alex was of the opinion that the students' evaluations of the practicum were superficial. He illuminated this by saying: " *they simply say the SBS was a good opportunity it was fine, but they did not go deeper*". He also pointed out that portfolios portrayed quantity, rather than the quality. He also felt that the college itself was unclear about the quality of the reflection that students should be doing.

Similarly, Anna pointed out that in most cases student's reflections, described the lessons as being successful, but they did not go beyond that. She made it clear that student teachers were not able to identify some of their strengths and weakness. Anna noted that students "focus their reflections on other people". Alex further revealed that weekly reflections were merely the descriptions of events that were happening at school. This was also evident in the student portfolios and moderation reports as seen below.

Alex pointed out that portfolios do not help students to develop a capacity to evaluate their own growth or to develop critical skills. He also stated that some students are "*kind of praising themselves and that is not healthy*". Similarly, Shivute questioned the

authenticity of the reflections by stating that sometimes students did not really reflect on things that have happened. He went on saying that the time allocated for the development of the BETD portfolio was a limiting factor with these words: " *if the portfolio was only made in let me say 8 hours. And you hear a person talking about this and that.* He was of the opinion that reflections were made up to please the assessors.

On the other hand all the students involved were worried about the time allocated to develop their BETD portfolio during the last term of their study. Fala, one of Shivute's students revealed that students are forced to invent their comments both because of the limited time to develop portfolio and the fact that it was not done on a continuous basis but just as an add on with these words:

"Some of the reflections I think they are biased. They are not true... because I can just check I got 30 out of 30, then I can say it was good, it was very easy that why, but if I could have reflected the time I have done that assignment I could tell the truth".

The other two students also agreed that it was difficult to reflect on the work done in the previous years. This response was particularly illuminating and revealed that students felt such reflections are worthless.

When asked why their reflections in their portfolios were very shallow, the students commented that they were only taught how to reflect on the lesson orally and that was very superficial. Anna explained further saying: "*We are not teaching them how to reflect that is one thing*". She felt that the reflections of students were insubstantial because students were not taught how to reflect.

The participating tutors indicated that the students reflect in terms of whether the lesson went well or not. For example Shivute and Anna revealed that in most cases students do not go beyond "*the lesson was successful*". They also felt that student teachers' reflections are more a general and rather superficial self-evaluation. Consequently Anna described the portfolio as a fake portfolio, while the vice-rector and Alex called them low-level portfolios. They were of the opinion that the portfolios did not show the

evidence of a level of professional growth, despite having earlier identified this as a key dimension of the portfolio. The Vice-Rector also emphasized conceptual understanding of teacher educators because some teacher educators were not exposed to this concept during their teacher training programs. For him this training influenced the way the teacher educators guided students with regard to portfolios.

Despite all the negative views mentioned above the tutors and the vice-rector recognized that there were some positive results. They noted that some student teachers were able to reflect to some degree. Kaino and Fala for example maintained that they had learnt how to reflect on their practice.

When asked what they had learnt from developing the portfolios, Phillip felt that he had learnt organization skills and creativity only. All the participating tutors noted that the student teachers had shown these skills and creativity in organizing their portfolios. Alex recognized the impact in terms of creativity with these words:” *it helps the students to be more creative. In the area of decorating and creative presentation that is improving*”.

The interviews provided the basis of the analysis of the student portfolios presented in the next section.

4.5 The analysis of the portfolios

This section presents the analysis of the portfolios developed by the participating students.

4.5.1 The SBS portfolios

The SBS portfolio consisted of a wide variety of elements for example, the syllabus, scheme of work, timetable, and sample of lessons reflected upon, copies of some teaching aids, weekly reflections, feedback from tutors, learners' assessment records and the evaluation of the SBS. All student teachers had commented at the end of each lesson, Phillip had only 1 lesson presentation that was not reflected upon. His portfolio was also not marked.

The student portfolios that were analysed revealed that both the so-called reflections after the lessons as well as the weekly reflections were superficial and lacking any real analysis, so affirming the responses from the interviews. As Anna indicated they were simply comments about whether they believed the lesson to have been positive. What is particularly interesting is that most of the student teachers' reflections after the lessons categorized them as good even if there had been some aspect not well covered. The comments by the moderators also identified this pattern and reported as follows:

...the reflections of the student teachers seemed rather shallow and did not really address the main issues. For example even though the lesson did not go according to what was planned, and the time management was not correctly adhered to, student teacher still reflected that it was a 'good' lesson (Namibia. National Institute for Educational Development, [NIED], 2004:37).

Fala further illuminated this trend with this reflection:

“The lesson was good especially with grade 9 B & C even though I am having a problem with time management. I think I need to change something so that I can finish on time, but sometimes it is learners themselves who waste time on useless questions especially 9A.”

In this reflection Fala recognized her weakness as a teacher, but at the same time blamed one class for the time management problems citing the excuse that learners asked useless questions. In the same vein Kaino reflected that the lesson was not successful because there was only fifteen minutes left for the period due to the fact that the morning devotion took longer for 25 minutes. Kaino was particularly interesting because she had recorded the only one unsuccessful lesson throughout the practicum. What these reflections revealed was that students lack the knowledge and strategies to engage critically with the lessons taught in order to examine their assumptions and professional practice reflectively.

This situation was also evident in moderation reports and interviews with teacher educators. The Moderation (Namibia.NIED, 2004:27) report read as follows:

“...reflections were too general and did not show their realization of own strengths and weaknesses, nor their growth in their growth in certain areas. ...the focus should be largely on learner activities in lesson planning and not on teacher actions”.

The student teachers had not attempted to apply theory to practice. This was also illuminated by the moderation report which read as follow: *“it has been noted that the critical inquiry lacks theoretical support and reflection of possible sources used. Student teachers need guidance in this area of reflective practice.”* (Namibia.NIED, 2005:26).

In a similar manner the students’ contextualization of the learning and teaching environment was rare and poorly done. For example, Philip recognized how the learners’ background impacted on his lesson and this was evidenced by his reflection below:

The lesson was successful as the objectives were met, but I should have found topics that are appropriate to all of them as some learners were left with nothing to say because I asked some of them to present topics like, Bill Gates is one of the richest men in the world. Some learners do not know who Bill Gates is.

The last section of the SBS feedback form was for assessing the students' ability to analyse his or her practice and how self-critical the student was. However, tutors' comments did not say much, for example the comment 'good' was made with no clear directions or suggestions offered to students. In some cases there were no comments at all. This provided insight into the significance of reflective practice during the practicum. As Alex indicated earlier portfolios had also revealed that students had a problem in writing reflections but that their comments as tutors also brings into question the tutors commitment to developing this through modeling critically reflective comments. This was reported in several moderation reports. This suggestion shed light as follows:

The college should explore ways of helping students understanding what it means to be reflective practitioners as well as ways to record such reflections
(Namibia.NIED, 2004:35).

To recap, the weekly reflections were essentially descriptions of incidents and how those incidents affected students. Such brief descriptions included, among others, learner's behavior, tutors' visits, and action research and transport issues. It was interesting that the weekly reflections were not marked. This was also evident in the moderation reports. This sheds further light on the support given to students, as Philip comments:

Everything was back on track after the Science Fair. I remember in one period ...it was in Oshikwanyama class grade 8 A and B where learners failed to pay attention to the lesson.... Again my tutor come to observe me, it was unfortunate that she came on the wrong day, day 4, which she thought was day 5.

In their evaluations of the SBS there was no evidence to suggest that the student teachers were able to render a coherent picture as reflective practitioners of what they knew and could do, and of how they had progressed in the course of the SBS, in terms of competencies, skills and attitudes. Fala in her evaluation writes:

The portfolio demonstrates my professional growth for the period of three years in this course through the selected materials as it is appears in different sections. I therefore take this portfolio as a pillar for strengthening, monitoring and documenting my professional development during the BETD course. This can be used also used as my reference in the future as teacher to be.

Although, the quality of reflection was superficial, the portfolios were neat, systematic with the contents well organised into sections showing the work done during SBS. This was supported by the moderation reports and interviews with teacher educators. “*The appearance and organization of SBS portfolio were excellent*” (Namibia, NIED, 2004:32; Namibia.NIED, 2005:26).

4.5.2 The BETD portfolios

The BETD portfolio included a wide variety of materials including tests, assignments, learner study reports, critical inquiry reports and action research reports as presented in checklist Table 3 in section 4.3.1. The reflections on assignments or tests were generally fairly superficial and there was little evidence to indicate how these demonstrated the student growth in terms of particular competencies. This reflection, which was considered to be one of the more comprehensive comments of those analysed, 10 July 2003 comments:

This was the first and latest that I wrote in the foundation block and it was very easy as everything which was in we had covered them already it only because we were still in the foundation block otherwise I could have get a distinction as I only miss out 6 marks.

This task makes me learn more about language policy, factors affecting second language and the difference between first language acquisition at home and learning of the second language at school. I hoped I had gained something from this task.

The reflections were mainly based on the grade obtained, but not on the skills or competencies achieved. There was no evidence of documenting or showcasing the

professional insights and personal growth over time. They did not make meaning of their progress and achievement as learners and teachers over the three years. They also did not show how they had embarked on deliberate and sustained actions to improve their academic and professional competence. Although the learner study, critical inquiry and action research reports were included these were not linked to their professional growth. The portfolios scrutinized did not include any samples of lesson plans despite the fact that they were one of requirements. As in SBS portfolios, evaluations in the course portfolios provided no evidence to suggest that the student teachers were able to render a coherent picture as reflective practitioners. Nevertheless, participating student teachers experienced problems with the portfolio compilation specifically in terms of organization and whether to include their best work only.

4.6 Overall analysis

Although students were provided with checklists, the portfolio development process was characterized by procedural and logistical problems. There was no policy on portfolio design despite the fact that the BETD curriculum made provision for portfolio development and the role it plays in reflective practice. Although the checklists were separate, the word file made it difficult for both teacher educators and students to sort out whether the SBS folder was an ordinary file. Adding to this confusion the moderation reports had referred to it as a portfolio. The designing process of checklists was also characterized by a lack of explicit involvement of teacher educators and students, which could affect the collaboration to some extent.

In addition the time allocated for the portfolio process was insufficient. The BETD portfolio was introduced in the last term of the study despite the fact that the BETD curriculum made provision for portfolios to be assessed at the end of each term. This was reflected by the gathering of all the third year students for the brief sketch of the procedure of the BETD portfolio as well as the lack of student awareness of the fundamental nature and role of portfolios in developing reflective practice.

Nevertheless the role of the teacher educators was rather confusing. The perception seemed to be that all that was required was checking whether the required items were included. The fact that portfolio development was restricted to SBS tutors only, revealed how the portfolios were not linked to ongoing portfolio development. The students' reflections were superficial in the sense that they did not provide a picture of their development as reflective learners and teachers, of what they knew and could do, and of their progress since starting the BETD course. This lack of depth and understanding and a weakness in terms of the ability to engage critically with the materials selected for inclusion in the portfolio were further characteristics. In most cases the student teachers had not applied theory to practice. All the portfolios analysed did not provide a record of growth and achievement. Despite all the negative aspects, portfolios have shown creativity. What was most apparent was that students had little idea of either how to reflect or of what to reflect on and those reflections that were present indicated that the students simply did what they believed what was expected of them.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I showed how the portfolios were organized and managed at the college. The chapter also presented the participants' perceptions about the concepts "reflective practice" and "portfolio", the role of the portfolio and the impacts of portfolio implementation. The chapter also presented an analysis of the portfolios. The next chapter deals with data interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

DATA INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the results discussed in chapter 4 more closely and to synthesise the information obtained from the various data sources. I will also draw on the relevant literature explored in chapter 2 to help me frame my interpretation. I present the discussion of the findings under the following categories:

- The role of portfolios
- Portfolio implementation
- The portfolio as reflective practice

5.2 The role of portfolios

The main purpose of this section is to examine whether the notion of the portfolio is really linked to reflective practice and to what extent this has determined the student's interpretation.

While the responses seeking to define a portfolio contained no direct reference to reflective practice, the tutors and the vice-rector identified the development of novice teachers as reflective practitioners as the main purpose of constructing portfolios. This view of the role of a portfolio places a high value on reflection, which is consistent with Wolf (1996) who maintained that a portfolio without reflection is reduced to a mere scrapbook.

Anna argued for a portfolio being a way of reflecting on work and progress. She emphasized the importance of reflection in helping students to identify their strengths and

weaknesses. Alex stated that moderation was also one of the purposes as it enabled the policy makers to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Given the understanding of tutors as expressed in the interviews I would have expected students to have a clear understanding of the portfolio, rather than the limited understanding the analysis revealed. The students saw a portfolio mainly in terms of assessment purposes. On the other hand Philip and Kaino recognized that reflecting on what they did with the aim of improvement as another purpose of portfolio. Fala revealed that she was not aware of the reason for portfolio development.

Adding to the inconsistency of the understanding of the role of portfolios was the misconception that a portfolio was just a file. Shivute, a tutor revealed that this confusion was prevalent at the college. In addition Fala and Kaino described a portfolio as a file for safe keeping of information for future reference. The word 'file' was used for the SBS (teaching) checklists. This explains why Kaino used the words file and portfolio interchangeably. Fala however, did attempt to differentiate between a teaching portfolio and a course portfolio referring to the BETD portfolio as a general portfolio. However, this is contradictory to many studies, which identify a thorough conceptual understanding of a portfolio as essential for portfolio development (Wolf & Sui-Runyan, 1996; Klenowski, 1997; Gillespie et al., 1996; Cole et.al., 2000).

5.3 Portfolio implementation

Portfolio assessment has the potential for helping the student teachers to become reflective practitioners (Wolf, 1996; Klenowski, 1997). My study sought to discover how the portfolio process is being implemented towards achieving that role. The next section looks at how portfolio implementation either enhanced or supported reflective practice.

5.3.1 Portfolio organisation and management

The data shows that there was a set of procedures in place. The first step was the allocation of the student teachers to the respective teacher educators for supervision by the SBS department. At the same time tutors were expected to facilitate the portfolio development. However, it must be noted that some tutors were allocated to students whom they had never taught before. Alex explained that tutors assumed the responsibility for portfolios with little guidance as to what was expected from them and with no shared policy about the development and implementation. This is in contrast to the view held by Johnson (1999) for the need for a clear clarification of the purpose of portfolios in relation to the program. This random allocation of tutors gave the impression that all teacher educators were capable of facilitating the portfolio's development satisfactorily. This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

The second step in the organization of the portfolios was the distribution of checklists to the student teachers. Both student teachers and teacher educators indicated that the SBS department was responsible for the distribution of portfolio checklists. This approach was seen to be less than satisfactory. Although tutors were not directly involved in the distribution, they were responsible for facilitating and assessing the portfolio. Considering the role that the tutors were playing in the portfolios I would have expected tutors to be involved in the distribution of checklists.

Another problem that emerged was the poor collaboration between the SBS department, the tutors and the students with one of the students indicating that tutors sometimes provided contradictory information. Also the participating tutors were uncertain about who designed and decided on the items to be included in the portfolios. The fact that the vice-rector in consultation with NIED and the School Based Studies department was responsible for designing and deciding the checklists reveals that there was no consultation or shared understanding about the portfolios and their role. This is in contrast to the view held by Gillespie et al. (1996) of the importance of collaboration of both teacher and students in generating criteria for inclusion. Considering that these were

some of the tutors in the college who had first hand experience of portfolios, I would have expected them to be involved in decision-making at all levels of planning, development and implementation.

Despite the view held by Johnson (1999) that a portfolio guide is necessary for portfolio development, the respondents revealed that the college had not developed such a guide and the checklists were the only indicator on how the portfolio was supposed to be used. While all the participating teacher educators indicated that they relied on their experiences of developing portfolios to help the students in the absence of such a guide the resultant implementation was revealed to be problematic.

The results also revealed that the college tended to leave the BETD portfolio development until the last minute because it was constructed at the end of the final year. This planning was contradictory to the studies conducted in the field of portfolio construction, which advocates that effective portfolio development should start from the onset of the course, because the process practically requires a reasonable time (Doolittle, 1994; Winsor et al., 1999; Johnson, 1999; du Plessis & Koen, 2005). In addition, the situation at the college is contrary to the belief that the use of portfolios should be part of a developmental process (Klenowski, 1997) in order to represent patterns of developmental growth (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). One of the students, Fala, revealed that student reflections were biased because of the limited time devoted to the construction of the portfolio. This is consistent with the views of Francis et al. (1999) who argued that lack of time is a barrier to thoughtful reflections.

Therefore the organization of portfolio development at the college was characterized by the procedural and logistical problems. Factors contributing to this state of affairs include the following:

- The lack of a precise and shared policy relating to the organization of the portfolio
- The lack of any consultative process in terms of how these two portfolios should be organized

- The lack of a clear understanding of the different roles of the two portfolios and how these roles would and should impact on their organization
- The lack of a clear understanding of how the portfolios could be organized and developed to enhance, support and develop reflective practice

These flaws contributed to the fundamental problems associated with the teaching and learning of the role and value of portfolios and of reflective practice in the context of teacher development.

The college had not shown that collaboration was considered important for both teacher educators and students (Francis et al., 1999; Doolittle, 1994) as well as the lack of practical, clear guidelines to facilitate the use of portfolio for assessment (Klenowski, 1997). Nor was there evidence that the approach used by the college brought together the process and the product relationship (LaBoskey, 1994) for the development of reflective skills.

The BETD broad curriculum states that students should be provided with ample opportunity to develop cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, research and evaluation related to practical experience (Namibia.MBE, 2006). However the policy at the college was not clear on translating the organization in practice, nor does it make explicit the principle, which informs the practice. The first problem is related to the nature and the number of portfolios required to be developed and the second relates to the recommendation that the assessment can be done during “any” term. The results highlighted the lack of mechanisms to manage and monitor the effective use of the portfolio guidelines as indicated in chapter 4. The portfolio development system was poorly designed. Felder and Brent (1996) claimed that poorly designed portfolio programs influence institutional teaching quality and the morale of teachers.

5.3.2 Implementation approach

This section explores the implementation process in particular focusing on issues of the role of the tutors, the instruction and assessment.

5.3.2.1 The role of tutors

In this section the role of tutors in enhancing and supporting reflective practice is examined more closely. The results indicated that the tutoring role was perceived differently by the participating teacher educators despite their sound background knowledge and experience of portfolios in their courses.

Anna and Shivute perceived their role as facilitating, guiding and giving additional information. Given this evidence, their different perceptions could be related to the fact that supervising, which was expected of them is in essence a very different job from teaching about portfolios. However, Alex revealed that teacher educators usually do not play a role in helping students during portfolio development and here he included himself. Alex's position raises questions about his commitment to the portfolio development in general. The issue of tutor's commitment could be made more confusing by the statement in the BETD broad curriculum that "*the student teacher may consult teacher educators and school-based teams on the appropriateness of specific pieces of work...*" (Namibia. MBE, 2006:24-25).

Kaino indicated that tutors are only helpful when help was sought. Fala suggested that at least two students' reflections should be marked before the portfolio submission. There was a lack of support or feedback sessions. This raises two questions; where were the tutors' efforts and commitment mostly directed? And, what can be reasonably expected of the student teachers to develop reflective skills during the course of a pre-service program?

According to Montgomery (2002) an understanding of how practitioners develop reflective skills and strategies are needed for teacher educators to provide the necessary support for students. In addition Klenowski, (1997) emphasized that in implementing portfolios teachers need to provide the necessary time, guidance, direction and support for student teachers to develop confidence, independence and ownership of the learning process. However, what these results revealed is a haphazard and ad hoc approach to the implementation of the portfolios. However, the following problems exacerbate the issue relating to the role of the tutors:

- The confusion about the status of the portfolio in the context of the Namibian teacher education program.
- Added to this is the apparent lack of credibility given to the portfolios in terms of the assessment process and as a mechanism to assess the professional development of the students.

5.3.2.2 The role of instruction

This section explores the role of instruction in enhancing and supporting the reflective role of portfolios. Wolf & Sui-Runyan (1996:30) have claimed that:

If carefully conceptualised, portfolios not only present a window on learning, but also promote growth and provide a textured picture of learning as it unfolds over time, enabling students and teachers to examine, discuss, and reflect on student performance and perspectives.

Richert (1992) warned that preparing teachers to optimize their understanding of reflection and reflective practice requires creating opportunities for beginning teachers to learn the skills and attitudes required for reflective practice. However, in this study it became evident that no one was accountable for introducing the concept of the portfolio to students at the college. Anna in fact emphasized that “no one is responsible for teaching about portfolios”. The results indicated that this situation was related to the unconfirmed assumption that teaching about portfolios is part of the Education Theory

Practice (ETP) syllabus. On the contrary the ETP tutor indicated that only reflective practice was included in the syllabus, but not the portfolio.

The students consequently mirror the confusion related to the need for appropriate instruction linked to portfolios on the part of the college lecturers. This is consistent with Jones (1994:26) who argued that when student confusion, apathy, or resistance occurred, it was often because teachers had not adhered to basic assumptions about learning and teaching on which the portfolio process is based. This author also stated that such a situation could cause some students to fail to acquire the self-reflection skills needed to build sufficient ownership for learning.

The participating students revealed that they were told to construct a portfolio but that the theories and practices of portfolio were neither taught nor modeled in the classroom. This was in contrast to Wolf & Sui-Runyan (1996:30) who emphasised that “the realization of the portfolio is only possible if portfolios are carefully conceptualised”.

Further to this the results indicated a high level of frustration in both tutors and students because portfolio instruction was not integrated into the curriculum. The study revealed that because the college offered little help in guiding decision making about the content selection and assessment of the portfolios, the expectation was that the tutors would give additional information to the students. The results show that this did not work and that clear instruction was needed. This needed to be shared and understood by the tutors who, as facilitators, could keep track of portfolio development. It is in this light that Abruscato (1993), as cited in Gillespie et al., (1996) claims that the portfolio requires high levels of training and support to acquaint teachers with data analysis as well as logical ways of interpreting information. The general lack of understanding about portfolios resulting from the lack of instruction impacted on their assessment.

5.3.2.3 Portfolio assessment process

The study revealed that the college offered few suggestions to guide decision making about the assessment of either portfolios. There were no rubrics for portfolio assessment

because there are no criteria for assessing specific domains. This is contradictory to views held by Gipps (1994), Stiggins (1996), Gillespie et al., (1996) and Oosterhof (1996) of the need for explicit criteria which reveal the desired skills and the extent to which the students have met those competencies. The problems associated with this are consistent with Klenowski's (1997) findings that portfolios became problematic when teachers were given few practical clear guidelines on how to use portfolios for assessment.

In addition Oosterhof (1996) highlighted that determining the goals that are to be assessed is crucial to planning the content of the portfolio. The analysis of the checklists indicated that they only provided suggestions for the content for inclusion in the portfolios. On the other hand they did not offer guidelines for writing reflections about the materials included nor about how these were to be assessed. The results of the study also highlighted the difficulties that the teacher educators and student teachers experienced in using the checklists.

One of the tutors confirmed that reflective practice was not seen as a key role of the portfolio, rather that it was seen as a check on the students' ability to meet the technical requirements of SBS. All three tutors indicated that they relied on the portfolio checklists for assessing portfolios, with Alex and Anna indicating their frustration that there was no emphasis on the quality of the materials included.

The reaction of the tutors revealed that while Anna took steps to improve the situation, Alex felt powerless. A contributing factor here is the lack of administrative support that the tutors experienced. In this regard Johnson (1999:46) points out that, "vigorous administrative support" is essential for the success of portfolio implementation.

This issue could be associated with the existing competing views about the purpose of portfolios and the theory of learning identified by both participating tutors and the vice-rector as "the lack of common understanding" about fundamental tenets underpinning the reform process. Given the evidence it is obvious that the 'yes' or 'no' feedback option does not provide the necessary support.

As Winsor et al. (1999:20) pointed out; “a deeper understanding about the portfolio process brings useful affirmations, insights and acts as a beacon for professional development and is essential to portfolio development”. The challenges raised by these participants added to both tutors’ and students’ dissatisfaction about the nature of the checklists provided. The checklists were seen as problematic because they paid no attention to specific dimensions to be included in the assessment process. In light of this evidence I felt that the main problem was not the checklists per se, but the assumption that students understood what the criteria actually meant and what was required.

Crucially both the assessment and the development of portfolios were affected by the fact that the students were aware that portfolios did not contribute to their summative assessment mark. This is in conflict with the reform ideal, which regards portfolio development as central to the development of reflective practice.

Another key issue revealed by the results was that the portfolio assessment was not continuous because the students only developed and submitted their portfolios at the end of the SBS or at the end of the year. This, despite the theory of reflective teaching which encourages teachers to “monitor, evaluate and revise their own practice continuously” (Pollard and Tann, 1993:9). Added to that the BETD broad curriculum advocated that portfolios could be submitted at the end of “any” term. The problem with this type of performance-based assessment in general is “that they often become “add on’s”[sic] to the curriculum, instruction, and testing which already exists in school” (Johnson, 1996:32). These findings raise questions about the purpose and essence of the portfolio as an assessment tool in the BETD programme. It was evident that the significance and the role of portfolio assessment was downplayed or ignored altogether.

The Vice-Rector and participating teacher educators indicated that the portfolio grade did not contribute to the summative grade. This impacted negatively on the students’ efforts in constructing and developing their portfolios. This is in contrast to the policy and current educational theory adopted by the Namibian education system. The extent to

which the portfolio development has helped student teachers to become reflective practitioner is discussed in the next section.

5.4 Portfolios as reflective practice

This section analyses the insights gained about the views of reflective practice from the responses in the interviews and the evidence from the portfolios about how reflective practice is understood and the extent to which it was reflected in the portfolios. The one common idea in the responses to reflective practice was that of 'looking back'. The interviews revealed that all the participants were able to define reflective practice by articulating key concepts underpinning reflective practice. While the responses revealed varied ideas about reflective practice it was evident that critical thinking and action were generally identified as central dimensions of reflective practice. Reflective practice was seen to involve reflective thinking about their own teaching approaches, the content, the background of learners and questioning about the context and the situations in which they were teaching or learning. This suggests learning from experience.

Montgomery (2002) found that the research on reflection in the context of pre-service teachers shows that Dewey's idea of 'deliberation' and Schön's concept of 'reflection embodied in action' have become focal points in teacher education programs. The interview responses inferred some understanding of the role of reflective practice in the context used by Dewey and Schön. However, what was missing was their conceptual understanding. It must also be noted that the participants' responses did not make specific reference to these theories or to the theorists who have shaped, not only current thinking about reflective practice, but have also been instrumental in how the Namibian policy on reflective practice is framed.

The way in which reflective practice was understood revealed that the ideas underpinning Dewey and Schön were to a certain degree articulated by Fala who mentioned the empowerment dimension by identifying reflective practice as associated with a teacher being an agent of change, who on reflecting is able to take informed action and accept

change. The course did not appear to empower all students with a theoretical framework that enhanced their understanding of the educational setting and the epistemology and pedagogy in which reflective practice is located. This results in students not internalizing the ideals of reflective practice. This approach is contradictory to how Prawat (1996) described a framework for thinking about teacher empowerment.

Given the apparent understanding of participants about reflective practice I would have expected some explicit reference to a particular theory or to particular theorists, rather than the somewhat generalized overview of reflective practice the analysis of the responses reveals. Thus, despite the apparent fluency with notions such as critical thinking in the context of reflective practice I question the extent to which these were fully understood by all the participants.

An analysis of the checklists for portfolios revealed that in the SBS portfolio evidence of reflection was required at end of the lesson taught and through weekly reflections. These reflections were meant to provide an opportunity for students to generate their own professional knowledge through reflective practice and in a way make meaning based upon evidence derived from studying their own practice. Likewise the BETD checklist demanded evidence of critical reflectiveness. This implies that the meaning of the reflective practice has to be constructed through the efforts of the students to understand the implications for action within the historical and social context of the Namibian school. The BETD curriculum, through the critical inquiry approach, requires students to identify and examine and try to solve the problems of classroom practice. Through action research as a “self -reflective” inquiry (McKernan, 1991:5) students are expected as teachers to examine their assumptions and context as they undertake deliberate and sustained action for the purpose of improving their teaching competencies. In doing students are encouraged to be attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches. This corresponds with the view held by Zeichner and Liston (1996) of the ideal of the reflective teacher.

The SBS portfolio being a teaching portfolio, I would have expected the checklist to include a 'professional autobiography and a mission statement', Johnson (1999) or as Wolf (1996) calls it 'the student's philosophy and goals of teaching'. However such crucial dimensions were missing. Hall (1997) defines reflective practice in education as "the practice in which the teacher undertakes deliberate and sustained action for the purpose of improvement". However, the way in which reflection was applied in the portfolios revealed that these ideas were not put into practice. The student portfolios show that these students had little idea of how to apply reflective practice, having no model or guidelines upon which to base their reflections.

The reflections are consequently superficial and do not provide evidence of practical reflection and deliberation in a particular situation. It was evident that the theoretical structures were not correlated with strategies to enable deep reflection about teaching. In addition it was contradictory to the view held by van Harmelen (2004) that the teacher should be able to analyze and evaluate her practice within the parameters of educational goals and objectives that her learners are expected to achieve and that she is able to relate this practice to her professional context.

Although Fala identified reflective practice with taking action for improvement, it was obvious that her understanding of a teacher as an agent of change was not enough to influence her actions during the practicum. Her teaching portfolio showed that she focused mainly on the learners' ability to meet technical objectives. She also blamed one class for her time management problems. Kaino blamed the morning devotion for her unsuccessful lesson throughout the SBS (practicum). The data is consistent with Hatton and Smith (1995) who found that some of the students' evaluation statements were learner orientated or situation orientated and that they blamed the learner if things went wrong. Results such as these reveal a fundamental lack of understanding about what it means to reflect on practice and how to do it beyond a fairly naïve approach. This according to (Zeichner & Liston, 1996:52) is based on a tradition that emphasizes thinking about action without being attentive to the quality or substance of that thinking. This approach is not in line with reflective action, which is deliberate and sustained

(LaBoskey, 1994), and (Hall, 1997).

Wolf and Siu-Runyan (1996:32) claimed that “reflection is what allows us to learn from our experiences; it is an assessment of where we have been and where we want to go next”. Student reflections during SBS were not focused on evaluating the learning environment in order to develop action to support, remedy, or bring about change. The focus was neither on the implementation of action within the learning environment explored nor on monitoring and reflecting on action taken. The portfolios revealed the students paid little attention to their own practice within their classrooms and community. Nor did the students use their reflections to challenge their previous assumptions or to critically examine their professional practice.

This, despite the ETP syllabus which advocates teachers assuming a reflective role, thus the dimension of “developing reflectivity by examining their beliefs and concepts” (Klenowski, 1997: 1) was lacking. The participating tutors indicated that the students reflected in broad terms whether the lesson went ‘well’ or not and they did not go beyond that. The same applied to the weekly reflections, which were a description of events giving in diary form an account of what was generally happening during the week at their respective schools during the practicum.

Had the students fully identified themselves with reflective teaching, they would have focused on “learning from their own action and reflecting on the moral and ethical basis of their own actions in their classrooms” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996:39). According to Benalof and Dickson (1991) those who have problems with critical reflection exhibit a problem with metacognition, critical thinking and socio-ethical development. These authors ascribe failure in these areas as a failure to teach students how to think and reflect.

Given these problems Anna described the portfolio as a ‘fake portfolio’, while the Vice-Rector and Alex called them ‘low-level portfolios’. This is what Grimmert (1988) suggests adds to the false impression of the progress made by students in teaching

practice periods. The portfolios did not lead to increased understanding of the students' practice and professional growth in terms of their development as critically reflective practitioners and gave little real evidence of their understanding of classroom practice. Tann (1993) suggested in cases such as this that students are not freed from habitual ways of thinking, nor are they necessarily able to transform their already established perspectives through teaching practice periods without considerable scaffolding and support that includes theoretical inputs, modeling and monitoring.

Zeichner and Liston (1996) and Calderhead & Gates (1993) focused on Dewey's emphasis on the need to develop the attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and the skills of thinking and reasoning in order to reflect. They suggest that an examination of prior beliefs and actions by practitioners is central to the idea of reflection, which is in turn a fundamental dimension of discovering ways to improve their practice.

Further to the SBS reflections, in the BETD portfolio the reflections on assignments or tests were generally superficial and there was little evidence to indicate how these demonstrated the students' growth in terms of particular competencies. This was in contrast to Gillespie et al. (1996: 487) who suggested, "the evidence from reflections should also clearly indicate student growth". The student reflections that were analysed did not show any evidence of them instituting deliberate and sustained actions to improve their academic and professional competence. Critical inquiry and action research reports were included but these were not linked to their professional growth as evidence of a self-reflective process undertaken to improve their practice.

Tann (1993) found that the sort of reflective statements made by the students did not capture the essence of what it meant to reflect in the context of developing practice. Reflective writing is another dimension which the tutors found to be a contributing factor to the various shortcomings of the portfolios, which was further confirmed by the analysis of the student portfolios and moderation reports. This could be related to the nature of the checklists, the lack of knowledge on how to reflect and how to write

reflections as indicated earlier. These findings suggest that there is a need for a guided process approach to reflective writing for teacher educators.

McIntyre (1993:44) claimed that in initial teacher education, reflection on one's practice aimed at the development of student teachers' understanding of their "own problems and needs", and "acquiring practice of the skills and habits of reflection". However, the sense I obtained from the data was that reflective practice was approached in the college curriculum in a somewhat fragmented manner. For while it was associated with the notion of critical enquiry which included action research there was no evidence that reflective practice was seen as an integrated or integral dimension of all teaching and learning and that it ought to be reflected in portfolio deliberations about teaching and learning.

I was left with the sense that very little practical guidance was given to the student teachers about how to apply reflective practice in their daily teaching and learning or how to involve learners in the reflective process. I expected to have evidence from the portfolios of the learners' inputs into the lesson assessments either through learner evaluations or through the assessment process teachers were involved in during teaching practice. What the study revealed was that because the college lacked a mechanism to enforce the implementation of portfolios their actual implementation was problematic.

The study also revealed that teacher educators subjected the checklists distributed to different interpretations and not all teacher educators used them. The implication of this was a diminished opportunity to provide evidence of reflective practice.

The teacher educators also felt that student teachers' reflections were general and rather superficial self-evaluations. As Anna commented, students focused their reflections on others rather than on looking critically at their own practice. The data also revealed that the time allocated and the timing impacted on the student reflections. For example, Fala indicated that she looked at the grades instead of documenting the process, which led to such grades. These results are consistent with Francis et al. (1999) who argued that

insufficient time mitigates against completing reflections in a thoughtful manner and inhibits the ability of the portfolio to show evidence of professional growth, despite this having been identified as a key dimension of the portfolio.

Carr (1995) referred to the term reflection as an aspect of cognitive functioning, including the relationship between ideas to action, which is how reflection expresses itself in the life and work of the practitioner. There was no assessment of academic or professional growth since the students' reflections were thought to be influenced by a desire to please the moderators.

There was little evidence that these students had benefited in the manner suggested by Tann, cited in Calderhead & Gates (1993), as learning from their experience and making reasoned decisions, which were pro-active and leading to improved teaching and learning through critical reflection. This finding is consistent with Oberg and Artz (1992) who said that the challenge facing portfolio development was its use as a means for reflecting and analyzing the collected data. The factors contributing to this state of affairs are discussed in the next section.

5.5 Summary

The results indicated that the teacher educators have different views of what the portfolio consists of. The root cause of this situation is believed to be the teacher training which the teacher educators underwent before independence and the fact that the college did not provide professional development. The vice-rector indicated that some of the teacher educators who were assigned to support and guide students had never developed portfolios themselves in their teacher training. Consequently the two tutors, Anna and Shivute believed that the lack of teacher educators' knowledge of the portfolio's conceptual framework and method was one of the major obstacles in the successful implementation of portfolios.

Teacher educators are struggling with insufficient training and theoretical knowledge. Both participating tutors and the vice-rector commented on 'the lack of common

understanding' about portfolios. High levels of training and support are required to acquaint teachers with data analysis as well as logical ways of interpreting information.

The literature on portfolio research indicated that many problems associated with portfolio implementation and development can be associated with the lack of professional preparation for evaluating a student's work (Calfee & Freedman, 1996; as cited Stiggins, 1994).

The problems and issues associated with developing portfolios include:

- Uncertainty about the role of the portfolio.
- Confusion about how to develop the portfolios. Lecturers and students rely heavily on the checklist, which is provided annually by the vice-rector.
- Uncertainty about organizing and managing portfolios.
- Lack of understanding about accountability for developing the portfolio in the college. This means no one is responsible for teaching student teachers how to develop portfolios.

Other contributing factors involved curriculum development and management. Teacher educators and the Vice-Rector were not fully familiar with the broad curriculum in terms of whether the portfolio concept was included in the ETP syllabus. Curriculum outcomes were not ensured by the professional themes and competences in the classrooms and course programs.

This study provided insights into first, what can be reasonably expected of student teachers and what is only feasible in the long term after considerable time in the preservice program. Secondly, it revealed that both teacher educators and student teacher were not fully supported in terms of portfolio guidelines.

The challenges facing the achievement of reflective practice and the provision of supporting evidence for that practice are considerable in the context of pre-service

education programs. Also this issue is more widespread than the effective development of portfolios.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the findings as presented in chapter 4. I examined the role of portfolio in developing reflective practice. The chapter also discussed whether the implementation of portfolios was linked to reflective practice and whether the students become reflective practitioners. The next chapter concludes the study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study. The first section presents a critical reflection of the aims of the study. The second section in this chapter provides a critical reflection of the research process. In this chapter, the third section presents an overview of the key findings; the fourth section discusses the lessons learned from the study. The fifth section provides possible suggestions that need considered on the basis of the findings. Finally, I present possible areas for further research as well reflecting on the validity and the limitations of the study.

6.2 Aims of the study

A central claim in the literature consulted is that reflective practice is associated with good teaching. Therefore the Namibian reform policy has adopted the notion of reflective practice as one of components of professional development. The literature has revealed that there is a constant call for portfolio development in teacher education programs, but many obstacles challenge their development. This study aimed at understanding the perceptions of teacher educators and student teachers about the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice and as a means to assess their practice. It sought to examine the extent to which these roles were being achieved in practice as well as the challenges that are part of this development in the Namibian context.

The study is situated in the current policy framework adopted by the Namibian education system and seeks to understand how this policy is implemented rather than to provide a critique of the policy. Rather I believe that the insights gained from this study may be a point of reference from which to critique policy in further research. As a teacher educator the insights from the study will be useful in informing my work, which involves

assessing portfolios, and advising student teachers in developing, and designing their portfolios during the pre-service program. I also believe that these results will provide insights into the preparation of students in the area of reflective practice.

6.3 Reflection on the research process

I adopted an interpretive orientation for this qualitative case study and I found the selected research design to be an appropriate orientation to examine reflective practice. On reflection I believe that the research orientation selected facilitated the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data in a manner that helped me to address the research questions in a meaningful way.

Data collection methods were designed to illuminate the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice and the extent to which this role is being realized in practice. The reasons for using these methods were to obtain a holistic rich description of how people make sense of their situation and their lived experiences, and to increase the validity and reliability of the study. Data obtained were analyzed and triangulated to capture in-depth understanding of the research questions.

Through the process of data collection, although I encountered some difficulties, I managed to collect the information that I needed. This was enhanced by the willing participation of those involved in the study.

6.4. An overview of the main findings

The results of this study as well as the literature explored reveal the role that portfolios play in fostering reflective practice. In addition the study demonstrates that the implementers acknowledged that the process of portfolio implementation falls short of the intention of developing reflective practice in student teachers. The literature on portfolio research indicated that many problems are associated with portfolio

implementation and development. In this study four fundamental problems were revealed:

- First, the results indicated that the teacher educators have differing views on the concept of the portfolio, which exacerbates the students' limited conceptual understanding. The study revealed that related aspects include the fact that teacher educators do not have a shared conceptual understanding of reflective practice and the portfolio, the lack of emphasis on portfolios as vehicles for reflective practice in the college curriculum, as well as the problems regarding the development of critical reflection in the context of being able to articulate this in meaningful ways through the written form.
- Second, there is the apparent lack of support provided for the development of portfolios. The findings revealed that both teacher educators and students were not fully supported in terms of portfolio guidelines, which accounts for the lack of adequate preparation of student teachers in this regard.
- The third issue pertains to curriculum development. The findings revealed the lack of clear details about the status of the portfolio in the context of the Namibian teacher education programme. In addition the results point to the apparent lack of credibility given to the portfolios in terms of the assessment process and as a mechanism to assess the professional development of the students.
- The fourth problem relates to the organization and management of portfolio implementation. The results revealed that portfolio development was characterized by procedural and logistical problems. In addition the results indicated the lack of mechanisms in place to reinforce portfolio implementation.

6.5 The lessons learnt from the research

I have gained valuable insights into the role of portfolios, the process of implementation, curriculum processes and teacher preparation to foster reflective practice.

Firstly I realized how important the historical background and context of the situation being investigated is to any transformation, including the adoption of the concept of a portfolio in teacher education.

Secondly, I have come to understand how vital the support element is to the development of portfolios as well an understanding about the nature of the support needed for portfolios to provide evidence of reflective practice. In this regard I was also made aware of the need to clarify and to make explicit the role of the portfolio. The apparent lack of credibility given to the portfolios in terms of the assessment process and as a mechanism to assess the professional development of the students was a further point that was emphasized by these results.

Thirdly, I came to understand that some the problems identified were caused by curriculum development and interpretation. The results revealed the disjuncture between curriculum policy and practice. I have also come to understand that this can be attributed to a lack of clear guidelines about the status of the portfolio in teacher education.

Fourthly, the findings revealed portfolio implementation was influenced by a number procedural and logistical problems, understanding these will I believe help to improve the current situation to the benefit of all.

Finally, the findings revealed that the current state of portfolio development in the college is only part of the bigger picture. I came to realize that although we insist that the students develop a teaching portfolio and are expected to reflect on their practice, the students in fact have a limited understanding of reflective practice and the role of the portfolio in providing evidence of this practice.

6.6 Suggestions to strengthen the implementation of portfolio

From the results three possible actions were identified to strengthen the implementation of portfolios and also provoked a number of questions for further research discussed in this section.

6.6.1 Professional development opportunities

The results revealed that a lack of professional development at the institutional level shaped the different views of what the portfolio is. Teacher educators need to have a common conceptual understanding of the nature and role of portfolios and reflective practice as well as the skills needed to provide instruction and support in accordance with the expectations of the curriculum.

The findings suggest that a sustained improvement of the professional development processes is required. A mentoring system should be central to this professional development. Through this mentoring process teacher educators should benefit from mediated experiences of collaboration, learning together and be able to share their results and experiences, which is essential for personal learning. In this context the collaboration should involve teacher educators who have first hand experience of developing portfolios working with colleagues and students.

6.6.2 Managing portfolios

This study suggests the college should also establish mechanisms to reinforce the portfolio development process. The students should be provided with the necessary opportunities to prepare them for portfolio development. The preparation must include the conceptual understanding of a portfolio and how to develop the required portfolios. If reflective practice is to be a reality then the way we prepare our students is crucial.

6.6.3 Opportunities for further research

My focus in this study was to understand how the student teachers and teacher educators perceived the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice. Therefore some aspects of portfolio development were not dealt with this study. In order to understand the holistic use of portfolios in teacher education we need to explore the other roles of the portfolio. This study raises some questions for further research:

- How to integrate portfolio development across the curriculum and beyond?
- The sustainability of portfolio development in the context not only of policy but in the context of the demands of the pre-service teacher education programs.
- It would of interest to assess whether teachers who are exposed to portfolios and reflective practice use this in their teaching.

6.7. Limitations of the study

The primary limitation of the study lies in the nature of small-scale research in which the findings cannot be generalized. Thus, while this study has illuminated the particular situation being studied and has been of considerable value to my own professional context and that of my colleagues at best it is able to provoke further discussion and debate. The study was also constrained by time in terms of it being the half thesis.

6. 8 Conclusion

The study points to the apparent lack of credibility given to the portfolios in terms of the assessment process and as a mechanism to assess the professional development of the students. Simply going through the motions of portfolio development cannot be enough to develop reflective practice. The curriculum need be more explicit in this regard in order to support the practice.

The study also recognises the importance of the theory of portfolios in teacher education. Plus the importance of reflective skills required for reflective practice. Reflective skills need to be taught, learned, practiced, reinforced and assessed. This would involve making time for sustained reflection in teacher education particularly at the early stage of initial education. This study also revealed that the support system for both teacher educators and student teachers remains invaluable. This support is needed to overcome the challenges facing portfolio implementation if the portfolio is to achieve its role of enhancing reflective practice.

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Appendix A
3 November 2005

To: The Rector

From: Karolina Mbango
P.O. Box 3320
Oshakati

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am registered for a Master of Education (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

As part of the requirements of this Master's degree, I am required to write a research report on a topic that is linked to an aspect of the work undertaken in the coursework component of this Master's degree program.

I have chosen to focus on the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice in pre-service teacher education program.

The guiding questions of this study are:

1. What roles are portfolios expected to play in promoting reflective practice in the BETD program?
2. To what extent are these roles being achieved?

I respectfully, request you to assist me in this research by providing access to the institution, people and documents. I need access to these resources in order to collect data. I am bound by research ethics to observe confidentiality and to safeguard anonymity of organisations as well as individuals.

Your assistance will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Karolina Mbango

10 November 2005

To: Mrs. Mbango

Dear Mrs. Mbango

I am hereby acknowledging the receipt of your letter to my office dated November 3, 2005. At the same time it is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted to you, to conduct your research, for your Masters Degree on our campus.

I hope you will find our place conducive for data collection and I wish you good luck.

Yours truly,

The Rector

Appendix C

To: Vice- Rector/Teacher educator/ Student teachers
Ongwediva College of Education

From: Karolina Mbango
P.O. Box 3320
Oshakati

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am registered for a Master of Education (General Education Theory and Practice) at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

As part of the requirements of this Master's degree, I am required to write a research report on a topic that is linked to an aspect of the work undertaken in the coursework component of this Master's degree program.

I have chosen to focus on the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice in pre-service teacher education program.

The guiding questions of this study are:

1. What roles portfolios are expected to play in promoting reflective practice in the BETD program?
2. To what extent are these roles being achieved?

I respectfully request you to participate in this research by:

- Participating in an interview with me at a time convenient to you.
- Allowing me to tape-record the interview for later transcription and use in the research report.

You are assured of your right to withdraw from the research. You also assured that the data collected through the interview will remain confidential and that your name and that of the college will remain anonymous in the interview transcript and in the report.

If you do agree complete the attached consent forms.

Yours faithfully

Karolina Mbango

Appendix D (a) Interview questions
Vice-rector

1. What is your understanding of a portfolio?
2. Why do students are developing portfolios in the BETD?
3. What is your role in portfolios development?
4. How do you manage portfolios?
5. How you would describe reflective practice?
6. Describe the role that portfolios are playing in developing reflective practice?

Appendix D (b) Interview questions

A. Student teachers

1. What is your understanding of a portfolio?
2. What is the purpose of developing portfolios in the BETD?
3. How were you prepared to develop portfolios?
4. How you would describe reflective practice?
5. Describe the role that portfolios are playing in developing reflective practice?
6. What did you learn from developing portfolios?

B. Teacher educators

1. What is your understanding of a portfolio?
- 2.
3. Why do students are developing portfolios in the BETD?
4. What is your experience of portfolio development?
5. How you would describe reflective practice?
6. Describe the role that portfolios are playing in developing reflective practice?
7. How this role is being achieved in practice?

Appendix E
Consent Form

Consent Form 1 for all participants

I hereby agree to participate in an interview with Karolina Mbango. I understand she will be enquiring about my perceptions of the role of portfolios in developing reflective practice in the BETD program and to what extent to which this is being achieved in practice.

Signature :.....

Date:

Consent Form 2 (a)

Karolina Mbango is hereby given permission to record an interview with me as a part of her data collection for a report that she will be writing for the completion for her Master's degree. I understand that the transcript will be made of the interview and that extracts from these may be used in the final report. I have been assured that the college and my name will remain anonymous in that report.

Signature:

Date:

Consent form 2 (b) for Vice-rector only

Karolina Mbango is hereby given permission to record an interview with me as a part of her data collection for a report that she will be writing for the completion for her Master's degree. I understand that the transcript will be made of the interview and that extracts from these may be used in the final report. I have been assured that the college will remain anonymous, but not position in that report.

Signature :

Date:.....

Appendix F: Portfolio Analysis sheets

A.BETD portfolio assessment sheet

To what extent does the portfolio provide evidence of:	In which tasks	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Reflected on professional competencies			
2. Integrated current learning with professional experience			
3. The teaching informed by theories and self-reflection			
4. Analysed approaches to teaching and learning			
5. The student teacher has monitored, evaluated and revise his or her practice continuously			
6. Identified needs, problems & constraints in educational transformation and developed actions to overcome this.			
7. Reflection on one's work			
8. Professional attitudes: open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness			
9. Used inquiry to support development of teaching competence and to change to reflective teaching			
10. Collaboration and dialogue with colleague			
11. A coherent picture of a student as a reflective teacher and learner			

This assessment sheet is adopted and modified from portfolio self assessment of Rhodes University MEd Namibia 2005/2006

B. Teaching portfolio

The portfolio as professional showcase	Comments
What is the developmental nature of students' ability to reflect on their work?	
<p>The portfolio as reflective practice. Reflection:</p> <p>Is each piece in the portfolio accompanied by a clear rationale for its inclusion?</p> <p>Do the students reflect on personal insights gained as a consequence of the research experience?</p>	
Reflectivity: What is the developmental nature of students' ability to reflect on their work?	
Does the portfolio contain evidence that address growth and development across the curriculum?	
Does the portfolio give a sense of the students' interests inside and beyond the classroom?	
Theory being used to inform practice	
Assessment: What is the tutor's personal focus? (Competence, degree of analysis)	
General comments:	

This assessment sheet is adopted and modified from portfolio self assessment of Rhodes University BEd Hons Namibia 2002/2003

Appendix G
Data analysis Matrix

MATRIX				
Table 5. Summary of the key questions of Vice-rector and teacher educators				
Key questions	Vice-rector	Alex	Shivute	Anna
How the concept portfolio was viewed	Portfolios as tool to reflect on their practice inside or outside the classroom.	Portfolio is an entity that documents what the students have been doing. It can present what students have learned. I think the other one is that the portfolio has to be selective. Some people say that portfolio can be used to asses somebody	It the collective items, which have contributed to personal, academic professional growth.	A selection of materials by students to show professional and personal growth
The purpose of the portfolio	The aim of portfolio is to use portfolio as a tool to reflect on our practice, on our work, on our teaching. Some students have a better Some students do not	The portfolio is for the student to reflect on the entire process of the school-based studies. Portfolio enables students to reflect on their own doings.	The aim of the portfolio is to develop reflective	To reflect on work and progress
The content	Students to documents our experience on our practice Lesson presentation: Daily reflection Weekly reflection	Table of contents The syllabus Teaching aids Reflections at the end of each lesson Weekly reflections Feedback from tutors the learner's assessment records Overall evaluation of SBS	Academic: assignments & tests Personal: professional attitudes from classroom or workshop	Lesson plans Collection of research repots Items listed on the checklist
The portfolio process - How portfolio is believed to take place	The College does not have documents, which help students to develop portfolios The college has no something in place officially and at the same time teacher educators, they are not motivated to explore a concept of reflective on their own.	The provision guideline to check whether all the items that are recommended are in the portfolio lack of clarity i n terms of what kind of reflections that students should be involved in.	do not really have a guideline	do not really have a guideline none responsible for teaching the concept portfolio and how to reflect .
How reflective practice is viewed	Reflective practice basically is a way of think back or looking back on what you have been doing.	Reflective practice some say it is a kind of critical inquiry, - questioning their own doings, their own makings Questioning about the context the situations in which they are doing their practice the main purpose is for any person to bring about improvements,	Reflective practice the way I understand it is like being in the position to be able to think critical back. Think critically back on what has on what has happened and	To reflect on the practice, but do not take actions Reflexive to reflect and take actions

			<p>maybe try to find out why it has happened and also maybe try to understand why it has happened that way. And then you think also of what could be done, either maybe to improve or maybe you see, to get another steps up, you see. The way at least of thinking back and analyzing and try to understand why things have happened, they way they did happen.</p>	
Impact of portfolio development	It depends on teacher educator. Some Students used portfolios effectively, some not.	Portfolios are of low level. There is no level of development. Students are not able to write good reflections. Students lack critical thinking and reasoning skills Student portfolios do not document what the degree of student growth	It is quite difficult to tell about the impacts now or let me say the outcomes in the sense that these portfolios I would say are not graded, we only check what is in and what is not in	In doubt Fake portfolio

Appendix H
coding analysis

Descriptive (D) for beliefs/events. **Interpretive (I)** reasons underlying beliefs/events.
Patterns (P) illustrating motive behind actions

<p>DVice-Rector: Portfolio basically is a used as a tool for, in our case for our students and teachers to reflect of their practice or what whether their doing whether it is inside the classroom or outside the classroom. By outside the classroom I am referring to students at their schools during school based studies or whatever also teacher educators help students during school based studies. In short basically the main aim is to use portfolio as a tool to reflect on our practice, on our work, on our teaching.</p>	<p>Interpretation (I)</p> <p>Students and teacher use portfolios as tool to reflect on their practice inside or outside the classroom. Outside reefing to School based Studies.</p> <p>The aim of portfolio is to use portfolio as a tool to reflect on our practice, on our work, on our teaching.</p>
<p>experience of portfolio development VR: Number one is, if you were involving in any work, in any practice sometimes you use to forget. You know, what you have been doing, and therefore portfolio was p P: introduced to us as a teacher educator or students to documents our experience on our practice, when you document it and then it will be there for good. So, at any the other stage you want to have a look on your reflection or whatever you have been doing by able to go back to your document and able to see.</p>	<p>Beliefs: enrich experience for students to documenting their practice : Very enriching experience for him and students</p> <p>REASONS:</p> <p>Documenting experiences on their practice for future reference.- at any the other stage you want to have a look on your reflection or whatever you have been doing by able to go back to your document and able to see.(See Fala)</p>

Appendix I. A summary of data and results of the data (a sample)

Categories	Interviews Method 1	Document analysis Method 2	Issues confirmed	Issues not confirmed	Results of data (methods 1&2)	Results of data
Conceptual understanding of portfolio	Both tutors and students appear to understand the portfolio concept, but students seem need to require more knowledge and skills. Both tutors and vice-rectors indicated concerns as regards portfolio (e.g. lack of knowledge and skills of portfolio, lack of common understanding of portfolio, training of teacher educators).	Poor quality portfolios with superficial reflections	Student's limited understanding of the concept portfolio	lack of common understanding of portfolio	Teacher educators and students need more knowledge and skills concerning portfolio and reflective practice.	Inconsistency of the conceptual understanding of the portfolio. Lack of common understanding of portfolio comprise the quality of portfolios

Adapted from Holtzhausen (2001)

Appendix J. Anna's portfolio assessment rubrics

2005

CHECKLIST FOR BETO PORTFOLIO REVIEW

	1	2	3	4
1. Personal & Professional growth				
Evidence of personal and professional growth				
2. Organization of the Portfolio				
Show evidence of creativity				
Reader friendly				
Table of contents thorough and complete				
Professional appearance				
Logical sequence evident				
Contain all items of evidence				
Well-edited				
Thoroughly related to BETD competencies				
3. Reflections				
Insightful reflections				
Self reflection and understanding of teaching				

PORTFOLIO

Student's name:

Well-organized creative displays high degree of effort and care.	4
Cohesive, well chosen and fully developed evidence with well written and interesting self-reflections.	
Display a high level of insight organization and professionalism.	
Show evidence of understanding of the teaching profession	
Well-organized display effort and care.	3
Relevant evidence with some level of self-reflections.	
Needs further development in some areas.	
Adequately demonstrates understanding of and progress towards teaching.	
Loosely organized.	2
Minimum creativity.	
Less evidence or less careful reflections included.	
Display average level of insight organization and professionalism.	
Reflections include explanations rather than self-reflections	1
Shows some evidence of an understanding of the teaching profession.	
Include almost no creativity work.	
Not organized, sloppy	
Evidence was not adequate for items included	1
Reflections unclear.	
Did not reflect the student's personal and professional growth.	
No understanding of the teaching profession.	
4-Distinction	
3-Credit	
2-Complete	
1- Incomplete	