

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH PORTIFOLIO

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

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PERSONAL PROFILE

I was born at Shaile, a small village in the Caprivi region(Namibia) 60 kilometres west of Caprivi. I attended my primary school at Ngwezi primary school from grade 1 to 7. Due to the reason that catholic schools were considered to be offering education of high quality; I furthered my secondary school at Kizito college.

After completion of grade 12 in 1994, I was then employed as a temporary teacher for Home Economics' because of performing well in the final examinations. In 1996 I then enrolled with the University of Namibia doing Bachelor of education majoring in Home Economics and Child Development. In 1999 I completed this degree.

I am not involved in any community activities but I am an active member of one denomination.

My achievements include being a student at Rhodes University and my promotion from a secondary school teacher to a lecturer at Rundu College of Education.

TITLE:

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Of the Home Science Curriculum at
Rundu College of Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to all my colleagues and the third year Home Ecology group, for their cooperation and input in my study.

My sincere thanks go to my Lord for the Rundu College community who created the atmosphere and support during this work. I do not know what would have happened without them. Mere thanks are not enough but my sincere love and care go out to them.

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A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE HOME ECOLOGY SYLLABUS

INTRODUCTION

In Namibia, as in many other countries, curriculum changes have resulted from a “highly complex mix of ideological, political, social, philosophical, economic and other influences” (McGee, 1995, cited by Swarts). Over time some influences become stronger while others lose ground. Different conceptions exist as to what school curricula should be. These conceptions are sometimes referred to as “theories of curricular” or ideologies (ibid). Ideologies in general are “*belief systems that provide value premises from which decisions about practical educational matters are made*” (Eisner, 1994:47). They derive from broad, international perspectives and views. Some views are unproblematic in that they are generally agreed, such as all children should learn to read and write. Others are more controversial and problematic, e.g. whether sex education should be taught in school. As a result of exposure to other views and perspectives, there is overlap between ideologies and no ideology represents a clear-cut concise school of thought. Nevertheless they provide a theoretical basis for the Home Ecology syllabus.

This paper will attempt to provide a critical analysis of the Home Ecology syllabus, the socio-historic and economic analysis of the learners for whom the curriculum has been designed and the analysis of the learning environment in which this curriculum is presented. The synthesis, which will link the sections together, and conclusion will draw the threads together. In providing this analysis it is imperative to provide a definition of what a curriculum is.

In the broader sense, a curriculum is the offering of socially valued knowledge, skills and attitudes made available to learners through a variety of programmes. Forquin (1995) cited in Swarts (1996:23) has the following to say about curriculum: ‘The concept of curriculum, indeed, implies taking into consideration the whole of the course of studies and not just one aspect or one stage considered separately’.

In examining official educational documents, especially curricular documents written after independence, there are signs of continuing traditional emphasis however, this is expected, as Fullan (1991) contends that change does not take place just because it has

been decreed and written down in the book of reforms. Change takes time to work its way in.

2. METHODOLOGY

Following the nature of the study a qualitative research methodology was considered to be the most appropriate means to gather and analyse data. As I wished to solicit the views, beliefs and experiences of the students and colleagues regarding:

- (i) Curriculum literacy;
- (ii) current perceptions of the curriculum;
- (iii) Strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum.

A Qualitative research approach was primarily chosen in order to understand the curriculum from the point of view of the people for whom it was designed, while colleagues viewed the syllabus of Home Ecology in relation to its strengths and weaknesses. The main objective was to interact with the third year class about their view of the Home Ecology syllabus. Sampling for the study was done through “purposive sampling” procedures, purposive sampling is designed to select a sample which is most appropriate for providing information and insights most relevant to the study Meriam, (1998:48) cited in Nyambe. In this context, three third year Home Ecology students at Rundu College together with three teacher educators were selected as the target group for the study by virtue of their experience in the programme. The sample drawn for the study was as follows:

Table 1. **Participants in the study**

Position	Male	Female	Total
Teacher Educators	2	-	2
Heads of departments	1	-	1

Data gathering was conducted mainly through interview questionnaires, in situ-analysis, cameo studies, document analysis.

The curriculum was considered:

- In the context of the current post-apartheid Education reforms;
- By analysing the curriculum in terms of developing, values, attitudes and skills that underpin the particular learning area;
- By comparing the preamble of the broad curriculum in relation to the curriculum content and the assessment procedures used in its implementation.

Data gathering was done by document analysis, the Home Ecology curriculum was reviewed looking at its content, objectives, and competencies to bring the understanding of what is taught and how and what teacher educators are doing in practice. This process helped in the identification of the epistemology that underpins the curriculum practices. Documents, however, may not produce a continuous account because they reflect a situation at a specific time and I found interpretation and analysis difficult because of the uncertain origin of the document.

There most useful texts in the Namibian context providing information on teacher education are, *Towards Education for All* (1993), and the journal, *Educational Forum*. The course papers were of assistance especially those addressing the social constructivism philosophy.

Data were also gathered through:

- Interviews questions and were simple to administer because the researcher was present. The semi-structured interview format (see questions in appendix) selected had a shortcoming in the sense that considerable input by the people involved was necessary. The interviews addressed questions regarding the different perceptions that teacher educators and students may have on issues surrounding the curriculum.

- Case studies were also used. The case studies approach in this instance was to invite the students to set out their experiences in the Home Ecology course in the form of a structured narrative. This was very useful because it allowed the students to express their ideas freely and it was made simple because a proforma was given (see appendix).

Like any study, some difficulties were observed in the course of the study. Students were reluctant to write the case studies because they complained of having too many assignments. Teacher educators were unwilling to be interviewed and therefore opted for a written questionnaire, which limits the richness of the data.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 Desktop analysis of the Home Ecology syllabus as related to the BETD

Broad curriculum:

This evaluation will be based on the following:

1. The extent to which the curriculum addresses issues related to democracy, equity, access, redress, quality and a safe environment;
2. The epistemology of the curriculum and the extent to which the curriculum is situated in/or provide opportunities for learner-centred education from within constructivist epistemology;
3. The learning area or discipline in terms of developing the conceptual understanding, values and attitudes, and skills that underpin the particular learning area;
4. A comparison between the preamble and the content as well as the assessment strategies used of Home Ecology in relation to broad curriculum.

Home Sciences Education consists of two components, Home Economics and Needlework. As they are taught as two different subjects the content areas are compiled separately. This prevocational course is a specialisation study in the BETD

three-year programme for teachers if a student completes this course successfully, he/she will be to teach learners in Home Economics from Grade 8-10. (Home science syllabus, March 2001).

The Home Science syllabus follows the same format and structure like other syllabuses of the BETD as identified by the broad curriculum. The structure consists of an introduction, rationale, aims, learner-centred approaches and methods, a list of subject topics, subject objectives and subject competencies, and assessment requirements. It must be stated from the beginning that the rationale and assessment procedures in the Home Ecology syllabus reflect the information contained in the broad curriculum. Thus the Home Ecology rationale states that Home Ecology aims to contribute to the total curriculum by providing the opportunity for students to develop their knowledge and skills in an area not only relevant to their own lives but also in relation to understanding the role and applications of Home Sciences in a contemporary, changing, multi-cultural society.

The family is the backbone of society, and Home Science is a subject that will help to empower the family. First there is power that comes with increased knowledge and skills. Secondly the power inherent in taking responsibility for and controlling resources in the home environment and lastly the power gained through participating in the formulation and achievement of values and goals in ones society. Developing the capabilities and skills of people enables them to make their own contribution to the improvement of their quality of life and quality of life of those around them.

Home Sciences Education focuses on the development and professionalism of the Home Sciences teacher as a person who has commitment and a sense of responsibility, plus the knowledge and skills to raise the quality of life and education in the community.

From the information given in the rationale, it is evident that Home Science is intended to develop teachers so that they acquire the skills that will help them to explore and exploit the resources to the benefit of the learners, the community and nation at large. Having explained the rationale of Home Science syllabus, it is of

importance to look at what the syllabus is aiming at. Thus the Home Science Education aims to:

- Enhance respect for human dignity, sensitivity and commitment to the learners;
- Develop awareness of the varying roles, functions and responsibilities of a teacher and commitment to the teaching of Home Sciences;
- Develop a positive attitude and ability to participate in self-reliance programmes through production;
- Demonstrate the value of Home Science to the teacher, the learners, the family and community and to show how improved management resources will contribute to the world wide campaign of improvement of family life;
- Equip the teacher with a positive attitude, analytical and critical thinking and problem solving skills. (Home Ecology Syllabus March 2001).

The Namibian Educational reform is based on the national goals of education: access, equity, quality and democracy. These goals set out a framework for teaching and learning and the implementation of a common national Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) programme (MEC, 1993). Therefore, the Home Ecology Syllabus, unlike in the past, allows entry to whoever has an interest in the subject regardless of their gender, race, or ethnicity. In this way, men who are trained in this subject, have an opportunity to teach both at school, in their homes or community.

It is based on daily life experiences; teachers are trained to be creative as there are enough resources in the communities that a teacher may need to use. As a central emphasis is on the development of a safe environment in the broad curriculum, Home Ecology students are also expected to be made aware of their responsibility in this regard.

The main problem that emerged from the curriculum document analysis was that the curriculum development was done by outside experts and teacher educators, now the question arises, how can a syllabus be designed without the involvement of the people receiving it?

Learner-centred education or student-centred is a view situated within the dominant view of social constructivism. Theoretically the Home Ecology curriculum gives good opportunity to use learner-centred approaches. Central to the view of learner-centredness is that knowledge is not a static amount of content, but is what the learner actively constructs from experience and interaction within the socio-cultural context. This statement is confirmed by Bodner (1986) who suggests that knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner. Learners do not simply mirror and reflect what they read but they look for meaning and will try to find regularity and order in the events of the world even in the absence of full complete information.

Practical skills and project work are an integral part of this course. Important ingredients in the teacher training in the subject is to use challenging tasks; group work; problem solving processes; experiment; research projects including searching the library and/or textbooks; practical work; and excursions to expand and/or apply the student teacher's knowledge and give opportunities for them to experience ways on how to develop learner-centred classrooms through the use of microteaching; peer and self-evaluation and school based studies.

Through their own experiences of the learner-centred approaches students will be prepared to be able to stimulate learner's natural curiosity and eagerness to investigate and make sense of their widening world through varying, challenging and meaningful tasks. Students will be able to organise teaching and learning so that the starting point is each learner's existing knowledge, skills, interests, needs and understanding. They will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to organise, sustain and evaluate learning environment and learning experiences, which are meaningful to the learner. The graduates will be able to formatively and summatively assess each learner's progress as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. The view of learner-centredness in the BETD is envisaged in a constructivist model of knowledge that attempts to answer the primary question of epistemology how do we come to know what we know. In the BETD it has been central in teaching strategies, approaches and practices.

Looking at the Home Ecology syllabus content it is evident what is taught is a repetition of matric work. Meaning there is a lot of duplication of facts rather than

through the sort of understanding that will equip teachers either to proceed successfully to higher qualifications or to develop to school curriculum within a learner-centred approach appropriate to their future learners. Therefore, it is difficult to say the syllabus is really learner-centred, as it does not reflect this philosophy. In so doing the Home Ecology syllabus has missed the point of the paradigm shift intended by the Namibian Educational reform process, which is clearly stated in *Towards Education for All* and in the Broad Curriculum. Therefore the Home Ecology syllabus has opted for a new adaptation.

Thus the syllabus of Home Ecology can be described as rigid as the outlay of the topics still follows 'recipes' Stenhouse (1975). The 'recipe' system is based in the behaviourist ideology and this theory focuses on observable behaviour and experience. The learner-centred approach is adopted within social constructivist epistemology, and if it is to work as advocated in the broad curriculum, the Home Ecology curriculum should truly show or bring an understanding of what constitutes knowledge. Thus, the view of what constitutes knowledge, determines the view of how learning occurs. Social constructivism is underpinned by the belief that reflexive practice can only be founded on a continuous critical evaluation of both theories in which it is located and other theoretical positions (Van Harmelen, 1995).

In the Home Ecology curriculum topics with no grounding feature most (Home Science Syllabus, 20001:10). Different cooking methods for example, have to be defined, the first question to be asked is how does one 'define a concept' and what definition will be considered and from which theoretical perspectives will they be defined? State the reasons for cooking food, whose reasons/ and how will the reasons be accepted? And from which theoretical perspective will the reasons be considered.

The Home Ecology syllabus has a lot of duplicated facts from Grade 12, which makes it impossible over three years to provide the student with substantial understanding of the areas covered. Thus creating a fragmented, technisist and reductionist approach to learning that is complete opposition to the learner-centred theory which is advocated in the broad curriculum. The idea of life long learning is lost in such a syllabus, as it is difficult to see how given facts will develop the student teacher's subject knowledge. The syllabus is compartmentalised which results in a characteristic feature of the old

style syllabus where content, objectives and competencies. The rationale must state who designed the syllabus and how topics were selected or subdivided.

Teachers therefore have no idea of what they should be teaching and learning. Van Harmelen (2000:8-9) presents possibilities of what may happen if the theory informing practice is inaccessible. From this paper the result always is turning to that which is known. On the other end the syllabus portrays constructivism because a lot of what is done requires student's creative thinking on how things should be done. And lecturers are expected to do preparation. Such creative thinking will assist student teachers to be more open minded, critical and objective in their reasoning.

The assessment in Home Ecology syllabus is learner-centred, criterion-referenced and therefore concerned with providing evidence of each student teacher's progress. This assessment is on going and progressive throughout the seven terms of the specialisation tasks, which are set. It is also designed to enable student teachers to integrate their growing content knowledge with their developing professional competencies. Therefore the student teacher's progress is measured against established criteria, which are based on professional and subject competencies (Home Science syllabus, 2000:43). Looking at the structure of the syllabus, the crux of the matter is that assessment is not really valid as it depends on adopting an alternative approach not adopting and incorporating various assessment strategies that are valid in relation to what is being assessed.

The analysis revealed that while the preamble to the curriculum is located in the reform ideals of the broad curriculum there is a disjunction in the translation of these ideals in the development of the syllabus content. This is seen to be the most problematic issue facing the implementation of this curriculum.

3.4 REFLECTIONS OF TEACHER EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS UPON THE HOME ECOLOGY CURRICULUM

During the interviews lecturers were asked questions according to how they will be discussed. Teacher educators and students shared a lot of similarities in their responses. On educational reform, the following views were expressed: Home

Ecology seeks to attain the four major goals, which are important for spearheading reform and transformation. Teachers in the past were not taught skills which prepared them for future life, hence with the new system everyone have access to teacher training colleges but equity is still far to be achieved. Everyone can be taken regardless of his or her gender and race. But questions arose with regards to the goals.

Does the philosophy of education that is chosen found on the democratic principles and means? Which sector of the labour market is the Home Ecology curriculum? The collected data showed general understanding of this philosophy. Also it was clear in the views expressed that the way in which different learners approach different tasks are essential in a learner-centred approach. Awareness of the learning environments and how learners interact with them is also vital. Rogers cited by Slabbert (1965:389) states that: *I cannot teach anything. I can only provide an environment in which he can learn.* Illich (1971:44) considers that most learning is not the result of learning of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. The Home Ecology syllabus is learner-centred as everything done involves practice.

There is little awareness of what constructivism is there were a lot of questions like what is constructivism? And what is it to do with curriculum. There was an agreement that the Home Ecology curriculum addresses the three domains. In the sense students are given opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills. Politically all gender are encouraged to consider Home Ecology as a subject which leads to higher ground. Teacher educators believed that the BETD is a professional course not academic; therefore the content in the curriculum is just to back-up the programme, because the course is more on methodology. The language in the broad curriculum is the same with the one in the Home Ecology syllabus in terms of aims, rational and other areas. The participants expressed themselves by saying Home Ecology curriculum is integrated with other areas of learning e.g. environmental education, Mathematics, Science to mention but a few.

4. SOCIO-HISTORIC AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

At independence, Namibia inherited a teacher education system that was based principally on separating people on racial lines. White privileges were clearly evident in the educational sector, while access for black learners were restricted, especially to secondary level of education, which impacted on the quality of teacher preparation as recorded in literature, education was to become the primary medium for inculcating the apartheid racial schemes into the minds of the young of the racial groups (Cohen, 1994).

The curriculum in teacher training institutions was determined by apartheid policies. It was used as the weapon for inferior education, especially in the black teacher's colleges (Salia-Bao, 1991). With a biased curriculum, badly trained teachers were produced who, in turn became ineffective in the schools. Students were not adequately trained for the world of teaching because the programme in the past concentrated on students acquiring full subject knowledge of the subject with formal examinations, thus the curriculum was content based and pedagogical aspects and real teacher growth and development was ignored. And the purpose was certification and no effort on lifelong learning as Nyambe and Mayumbelo (2001) states that teacher programmes were teacher-centred and thus construction and development of knowledge was non-existent and therefore students were mere consumers and transmitters of received knowledge and the programme was not to be questioned.

It is within this context of inequalities and disparities that the basic education teacher diploma (BETD) was introduced in 1993 (Dahlstrom, 1989). The introduction of the BETD programme was seen to be of vital importance to the reform of teacher education. The BETD is a professional course of study, related directly to the demands and challenges of basic education. The teacher is the key agent in the development of the nation as supported by Dahlstrom (1989); the teacher can serve as a local resource for the community and can integrate school and life for learners in such a community. In recognition of the dramatic implications of preparing new teachers and providing in-service education for serving teachers, the ministry expresses itself thus on the issue of teacher development:

Perhaps the most important challenge in improving the quality of our education system is to ensure that our teachers are well prepared for the major responsibilities they carry more than anything else, it is the teacher who structures the learning to be exciting and satisfying or alternatively who makes schooling a pain to be endured. It is essential, therefore, that we help our teachers develop expertise and skills that will enable them to stimulate learning. Their professional education must begin before they enter the classroom and continue during the course of their professional careers. (Towards Education for All, 1993:37)

Independence brought considerable changes in the education system that has, in turn, contributed to a re-think about the changes needed in the nature and purpose of teacher education. Equal access for all educational services and expanding life long learning opportunities and strengthening democratic participation are goals, which are all involved in education. These goals were translated into the basic education curriculum for schools into the basic education teacher diploma (BETD) for teacher education. The main aim of the latter as stated in the broad curriculum is *“to develop the professional expertise and competencies which will enable the teacher to optimise the new basic education for the learners and to be fully involved in promoting change in educational reform in Namibia”* (p.4). The documents served to move practitioners from a passive role as receivers and implementers to new active roles that of spearheading change.

To prepare practitioners for the new role, new approaches were advocated in the broad curriculum *“training based on democratic pedagogy, a methodology that promotes learning through understanding and practice directed towards the autonomous mastery of living conditions”* (BETD, Broad Curriculum 1998:14). Furthermore there is a shift from narrow scope of teaching practice to the broader concept of school based studies with its emphasis on student teacher’s active investigations and reflections on the interface between the culture of the school and that of the social reality.

4.1 ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNERS

Rundu College accommodates 360 students and is one of the smallest to all colleges. The curriculum implementation is important to the programme and how they are prepared to develop it further. The student population is however still dominated by people from the region but there have been some effort to bring in students from other

regions. There is a small number of Owambo, Tswana, Herero and Caprivian students. This adds value in terms of limiting localism. In 2001 a decision was taken to give room for the marginalised group especially the San, and this year there are two San students in the college. This is to comply with the governments' policy of affirmative action.

It is interesting to note that students who come to the college are from different educational backgrounds, but the admission requirement is Grade 12 with satisfactory grades. No foreign students can be admitted in the course as this is for national consumption now where are we heading to if we are to consider globalised education or international market. The language usage (English) of these students needs to be improved because their mother tongue has great influence on their pronunciation and accent.

4.2 RUNDU COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

The offering of quality education lies in the environmental setting and how it operates. How does teaching and learning taking place at Rundu College? Are the resources being utilised according to the transformation process?

There is a need for institutions to have teaching and learning materials, resources and other facilities for its programmes to run smoothly in the world of change. The library in this college is supposed to serve as a place where culture of reading can be developed but this is not the case as most books that are in are out-dated and not relevant to most subjects taught in this institution. The library does not have enough books for Home Ecology, which makes it difficult for students to do more research in this area of specialisation.

The classrooms in this college are not adequate for the student population in this institution therefore at most times teacher educators have to look for empty classrooms and this situation have encouraged late coming among student teachers and thus have affected the teaching/learning process. There are eight offices for staff members and two workrooms, which are converted into offices, to cater for staff members' administrative work. There is also an educational development unit (EDU), where teacher educators could get advice and direction, become involved in professional issues and establish external contact through networks with other

colleges, NIED and beyond but at Rundu college this unit is now more or less transferred into an office and a meeting place for teacher educators.

It must be stated that each department is having one computer but these computers are used as typewriters because they are not connected to Internet and e-mail services, which hinders teacher educators from developing professionally. Added to these is that there is only one computer in the rector's office connected to Internet and e-mail services, but teacher educators have no access to it. There are only two photocopying machines in this institution, making it impractical to make copies for our students. Because photocopiers are only two, they are always over-utilised and therefore always unfunctional and technicians are not in Rundu but have to travel from Tsumeb which means copies will have to be made somewhere else, therefore in such a situation we are forced to write summaries on the chalkboard. In my own classroom situation the cupboards are falling out because of cheap materials, which were used in building, this hinders my teaching, as the teaching materials are not kept properly. Though the conditions are not that conducive for teaching/learning process we try by all means to use what we have and students are always the centre of the lessons as this is the central feature of post-independent Namibia education policy. This feature is set in the seminal statement *Towards Education for All* (MEC, 1993). Teaching begins with the interests of the learners, their level of maturity, their previous experiences (MEC, 1993:60).

5. SYNTHESIS

To synthesise the paper as stated earlier, Namibia with its long history of apartheid legacy needs teachers who are capable of transforming society. In their report-Teacher education reform for Namibia-Andersson, et al;(1991:4) express this concern as follows: "In countries which are changing as is the case also of Namibia- the system of teacher education has to be flexible and produce teachers capable of change and development and with a favourable attitude towards development and change and themselves capable of making own contributions towards change and development".

Similarly, the broad curriculum for the BETD programme shares similar feeling by arguing for the need to produce teachers who can “be fully involved in promoting educational reform in Namibia” MEC (1993). The main aim of the basic education teacher diploma is to develop expertise and competencies which enable the teacher to optimise the new basic education for learners and to be fully involved in promoting change in educational reform in Namibia (MEC, 1993:3). In recent years, this strategic role played by teachers in societal transformation has increasingly been conceptualised in terms of paradigms of teacher education. In this regard the basic question has been “what paradigm of teacher education can best enable a nation produce teachers capable of playing a significant transformative role in education reform and progress or societal transformation?” In this regard Rundu College have undergone various stages in terms of development. From secondary school to a new infrastructure, this has a major impact in the implementation of the programme. From the physical set-up the new college is having necessary facilities and resources at its disposal, but whether these facilities are utilised accordingly it is yet to be researched. The college now takes students from all over Namibia. There is a clear move from segregation and separation based racial lines and skin colour. The question can be is the college still very regional and local? If it is to achieve equity and access. The curriculum literacy and perceptions of the curriculum of lecturers and students is lacking. The broad curriculum was just read because of the study. How does one implement a programme he/she does not know and understand? The broad curriculum and Home Ecology syllabus are important documents in the Namibian education reform. It is in the documents that the policy of reform must operate, as formulated in the Namibian constitution and policy document” Towards Education for all”. The broad curriculum of BETD guides the development of Home Ecology syllabus and other subjects in the college. From the findings, although the syllabus in collaboration with the broad curriculum echoes statements pertaining to reform, education for all and learner-centred Education it has not shed the” baggage of the past” Kristensen (2000).

The views expressed by teacher educators and students on curriculum, from the outlook, the Home Ecology curriculum, both in document and in practice, are a continuation of traditional emphasis, which has its roots in logical empiricism and Tylerian rational for curriculum (Van Harmelen, 1995). The curriculum can be

regarded as having opened up in terms of access but is it open in terms of equity and equality? Are we meeting every student's educational needs? Is it equitable when we expect the same performance and results from students with different starting points, very different resources to their disposal and very different backgrounds? On the paper at least, the curriculum strives to be learner-centred. It states clearly: "The emphasis in delivering the curriculum is on the quality and meaningfulness of learning. Therefore, the approach to teaching and learning should be learner-centred (MBEC, 1996:23).

However, the way in which it is interpreted and implemented differs in many lecture rooms and still is very teacher-centred, even while teacher educators profess that they have changed towards learner-centred approach. This raises the issue of whether we clearly and adequately identified what we mean by learner-centred education. Every subject, in its own way, contributes to the development of the set values. Every curriculum document is valued as it is underpinned by expectations and norms of the society it is supposed to serve. In respect like other documents the broad curriculum in one of its goals states, to "foster the highest moral, ethnical and spiritual values such as integrity, responsibility and reference of life" (BETD Broad curriculum 1998:4). Develop a teacher who will respect and foster the values of the respect and foster values of the constitution of the republic of Namibia. The issue of integration or fragmented Home Ecology syllabus, integration remains a word, as most subjects in colleges work on compartmental section, insulation and isolation and Home Ecology is no exception. Furthermore, the form of integration remained within the realm of elitist intellectual levels where it does not go beyond integrated learning content.

From the above it seems a lot needs to be done to the teacher education system. The reforming of minds, bringing curriculum development to the grassroots and most certainly decolonising the mind of the elitist oppressive system inherited after independence.

6. CONCLUSION

It appears from the guiding documents that the curriculum process is a continuous process and a curriculum developer's work is never done-it always goes around in a cycle or a spiral. There is no clear starting point and no clear end point –they flow into each other and the” exploitation “never ceases. We need to “keep the conversation going” (Doll 1993, cited by Swarts), whereas the guiding policy draws aspects from a radical constructivist theory (Bodner, 1995). Namibia has to deal with curriculum as a transformative process and not as a product. We need to develop our own curriculum based on Namibian experiences, insights and ideas, and then make a truly Namibian curriculum, which will prepare our teachers for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life and citizenship.

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8. APPENDICES

1. Interview questions for student teachers and teacher educators.
2. A proforma as guide for student teacher's educational background.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS

Name:

Date:

Venue:

I am Muituti J.M engaged in a small scale survey and would like to ask for assistance from you by providing me with information based on the following questions. The information provided will be treated confidential.

1. How is the BETD broad curriculum different from the previous teacher education looking at:
 - Democracy
 - Access
 - Quality
 - Cultural bias
 - Racial discrimination
 - Classes (level of economical status.
2. How does BETD Home science Education syllabus address the needs of the student teachers?
3. According to your view does BETD Home Science Education syllabus have enough content what do you consider to be content?
4. What are the challenges facing teacher education and how do you want them to be addressed?
5. Do you think the Home Science Education is based on the social constructivist philosophy and gender sensitive? Support your answer by giving reasons.

Thank you in advance.

A PROFORMA THAT SERVE AS A GUIDELINE TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

NAME:

DATE:

VENUE:

I am Jennety Muituti doing masters degree (Educational Theory and Practice) with Rhodes University and would like to use of your assistance by providing me with the following information. Make use of the provided proforma as a guideline to write a short story based on the below listed aspect. The information you provide will be treated as confidential.

- Your gender
- Your marital status and age
- Region, village or town where you come from

On a separate page include the following:

Educational background from pre-primary to present including:

- Learning environment
- Teachers (males or females)
- Facilities and resources
- Your proficiency (from grade 1 to date)
- Your cultural background taking into consideration your tribe, belief and the way education is viewed in your culture.
- How education is valued in your culture where does it start.

Thanks in advance.

TITLE:

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This study offers a critical analysis of the theory, which informs the study. The study will be structured in such a way that the argument will be developed by looking at various theoretical perspectives through an issues-based approach.

The study will address issues in relation to the significance of home ecology, the epistemology behind teaching strategies and teacher education and change. As teacher educators are pressed by their craft to prepare more diverse student teachers for the challenge of work and life beyond college, they are challenged to provide more authentic instructional contexts and activities than traditional knowledge-based curricula. In order to be successful, teacher educators must be reflective and analytical about their own beliefs and practices and they must acquire a deep understanding of cognitive and motivational principles and learning and teaching.

Today, most of the teacher colleges are concentrating on group work as the only approach or basic tool for teaching and learning. Therefore the aim of the study is to explore how effectively an issues based approach can enhance praxis in home ecology.

The research became of interest because for many of the student teachers in the subject, practicals are considered to be more important than theory. What is not realised is that the subject has moved from domestic studies, which have a strong theoretical base. It is from this argument that it is hoped that the study will help student teachers to better relate theory into practice. This is because one needs to understand the theory before practicing.

Teacher educators and curriculum planners must know and understand the implications of an issue based approach in enhancing effective praxis.

TEACHING AND LEARNING AS PRAXIS

Teaching and learning are not synonymous (Bodner 1986). Educators can teach without learning taking place. It is argued that actions in the classroom cannot be divorced from the philosophy within which the curriculum is situated. Thus the way we teach and interact with our students is influenced by how we think about the nature and point of education Van Harmelen (2000). Since all learning/ teaching is informed by theory, whether consciously, we refer to teaching and learning as praxis.

As all teaching and learning is praxis, it is argued that the better-informed teachers are about the theory on which they base their teaching; the more likely it is that learning will be successful. If as teachers we understand why we do and what we do in the classroom, we will be able to reflect critically on our teaching and learning environment. Then and only then are we able to develop our teaching (Van Harmelen Core text 1). Praxis enables individuals to draw attention to interactive processes of consciously or subconsciously. An individual engaged in praxis is well prepared to participate in collective actions.

HOME ECOLOGY AND ISSUES BASED APPROACH IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In their paper Van Harmelen & Wilmot (2001) suggested that bringing about effective learning and teaching within the broad outcomes in any subject requires the application of strategies and approaches that will ensure learning. The literature will be stated as adapted from Marsden's (1995) identification of "educationally worthwhile activities". Thus, to be educationally worthwhile teaching should:

- Involve learners in meaningful learning. Such learning seeks to be relevant, in that the process begins by drawing on the learners' prior knowledge and is located in the learners' cultural frame of reference. Effective learning is based on conceptual frameworks and development of values and competencies.

- Challenge learners to critically examine previously held ideas and existing understanding through application on new settings and situations.
- Involve learners in enquiry based strategies that encourage them to investigate current social and environmental issues and explore these issues from a problem-solving perspective
- Expect learners to reflect on and to refine the values they hold or their existing knowledge. This reflection and refinement must be applied to the work that they produce so that tangible evidence may be provided of their capacity for critical reflection.
- Provide opportunities for learners to make informed decisions and choices and to reflect on the consequences (Van Harmelen & Wilmot, 2001).

According to Johnson (1994) an issues based approach is an approach, which present studies have not concentrated on, especially with the focus on Home Ecology. As the present study focuses on Home Ecology and an issues based approach in teacher education, a number of relevant publications which include findings and views of issues based embedded in cooperative learning and the role of Home Ecology as well as policy documents were consulted.

In recent years much interest has focused on how learners can learn together and construct knowledge (Bodner, 1986). Learners as social beings develop conceptual understanding by working together in small groups where interaction is allowed. This understanding is shaped by the learning and teaching environment.

Previously, teacher education could not allow students to work together, but rather there was a notion of the 'lonely student'. Such a perspective has been challenged by constructivists who believe in the idea of people working towards a common goal of education. Teacher Colleges have to play a vital role in fostering the development of the students understanding of their world.

Pennock and Bardwell (1994:7) state that a variety of enquiry models are available that are appropriate for school-based investigations. This approach cannot be discussed in a vacuum but rather as a model for cooperative learning.

An issues based approach is fun, it almost always produces gains in social outcomes such as race relations, but it has been found to reduce student achievement substantially. Success in achieving the goal behind an issues based approach must depend on individual learning of all group members (Slavin, 1993). According to Van Harmelen and Wilmot, for an issue based approach to yield results the initiator of the investigation ought to be involved as much as possible in the development of the enquiry. The teacher educators need to consider:

- What prior knowledge do the students have of doing enquiry based investigations? (Where learners have no experience of this sort of work, the suggestion is to start with an investigation that ‘grabs the attention of the learners, that will not take too long from start to finish and that is well within their capacity, yet will provide them with a set of challenges.
- What ought the students to achieve with enquiry? Consideration should be given to how the enquiry is intended to enhance and add to their conceptual development within a particular section being studied; what networks of skills, values and attitudes need to be developed and how the enquiry will foster the development of the desired skills.
- What possibilities exist in the local environment for the enquiry, or what resources will be needed to structure the enquiry?
- What are the cross-curricula possibilities?
- In terms of what needs to be achieved, should each learner be involved in the whole enquiry, or would it be better to structure the enquiry as a cooperative learning exercise, or can a part of it be as a whole group activity with other dimensions better suited to group or individual?
- How ought and can the learners be involved in the planning and organisation of the enquiry? What will their preparation for the investigation involve?
- What sort of time allocation will be given for the enquiry, how much class time and how much “home time” will it involve? (Van Harmelen & Wilmot, 2001).

The teaching of investigative skills requires an understanding of students' development and how learning takes place. From the beginning, we need to investigate what prior knowledge, ideas and attitudes students possess. No student comes to the college as an empty vessel; all students actively construct knowledge based on their experiences (Bodner, 1986). It is only through identifying these that we may begin to design meaningful learning programmes.

We need to establish what we need to teach compensate, remedy or enhance and what the student already knows and can do. Within our multi-cultural context, the situation is especially complex; for not only do we have children from different backgrounds and child-rearing practices, but we are also faced with an increasing number of children whose freedom of independent movement in the environment is restricted for a variety of reasons.

An increasing number of students come from homes which have restricted codes and some from homes with a more elaborated code (Bernstein, 1986). Such environments have a big impact in schools and colleges. Therefore the role of the school will be to teach students interactive or communicative skills which will make them fit in that society and not be alienated.

HOME ECOLOGY THEORY AS MEDIUM FOR DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING

Fullan (1990) states that understanding any concept requires the use of activities which requires students to use what they know in new ways or situations to build their understanding of topics. In these activities the students must reshape, expand on, extrapolate from, and apply what they already know. Such skills challenge students' misconceptions, stereotypes, and tendencies toward rigid thinking.

The above views are also supported by Deutsch (1962) who states that understanding requires students to show their understanding in an observable way. It is not enough for students to reshape, expand, extrapolate from, and apply their knowledge in the privacy of their own thoughts. While it is conceivable that a student could understand without performing, such an understanding would be untried, possibly fragile, and

virtually impossible to assess. It is a little like the difference between a daydream about how you would like to behave in a particular situation versus how you actually behave when a situation arises: the day dream and reality might turn out to be similar, but then again they might not (Hedges, 1985). So performances of understanding involve students in publicly demonstrating their understanding. Therefore, knowledge of a subject comes in different forms, detailed in the Home Ecology Curriculum.

Knowledge needs to be constructed with the support of intellectual writers. According to Mays (1985) cited in Wilmot it is not possible for a child to come to understand the ideas and concepts embedded in each subject unaided, for if he or she does not possess the skills to do so.

It is important to note that Home ecology has two components theory and the application part of the theory. This implies that students need to familiarise themselves with the theory before application. A lot of focus recently has been in other related pre-vocational subjects of students getting more involved in the practical side and neglecting the theoretical dimension of the subject. The value of the subject has been reaffirmation that through it students can:

- Develop their knowledge and skills in an area not only relevant to their lives but also in relation to understanding the role and application of Home sciences in our contemporary, changing, multi-cultural society.
- Develop empowerment skills and later empower their families.
- Develop power by participating in the formulation and achievement of values and goals in society.
- Develop capacities and skills of people which enable them to improve their quality of life and quality of life of those around them.
- Demonstrate the value of Home Science to the teacher, the learner, the family and community and show how improved management of resources will contribute to the world wide campaign of improvement of family life
- Make the teacher and the learner aware of income generating skills which will provide employment opportunities to contribute towards the uplifting of living standards in the entire country.

- Develop a teacher with an aesthetic sense by encouraging and promoting creativity in using locally available and traditional material and foods (NIED, 2001).

Appropriate approaches to teaching and learning Home Ecology need to develop students as critical, creative and reflective beings who will be able to debate about the future of the subject.

From this stance it is clear that Home ecology most importantly ought to develop understanding and respect of cultural values and beliefs, especially those of the Namibian people. It should also promote environmental awareness. One may infer that Home ecology has an important role to play in promoting the social change which is necessary for achieving the goals of sustainable living.

This view is underpinned by the belief that existing conditions are unsatisfactory (Unwin 1992:16) and that at its most basic level, the central role of education is to provide people with the means of everyday survival and Home ecology ought to tackle some of the most critical issues facing contemporary society (Unwin 1992:210).

TEACHING STRATEGIES ENHANCING PRAXIS

Johnson et al, (1994:5), claim that teaching is essentially interactions between teacher and student under the teacher's responsibility in order to bring about expected changes in the student's behaviour. The purpose of teaching is to help students to acquire, retain and be able to use knowledge.

According to Bodner (1986) teaching and learning means shifting from someone who teaches to someone who tries to facilitate learning, a shift from teaching by imposition to teaching by negotiation. This view goes hand in hand with the current teaching strategies which encourage cooperation in learning.

Learning cooperatively provides a shared cognitive set of information between students, motivating students to learn materials, ensuring that students construct their own knowledge, providing formative feedback, developing social and group skills necessary for success outside the classroom and promoting positive interaction between members of different cultural and socio-cultural groups (Hedges, 1985). It is argued that good teacher education should be concerned with individuals interacting. Furthermore Van Harmelen (2000) states that to view teaching as a prescribed activity that can be and is controlled by curriculum and its philosophy is naïve.

Teaching should rather be seen as a process of social interactions that take place between learners and teachers in particular contexts. Therefore to identify the teacher and the learner as specific entities is to decontextualise teaching and learning as something that exists as a tangible reality. This would be as absurd as trying to identify teaching only as prescribed activity.

It is important at this stage to state that there has been research done on cooperative and individualistic efforts. Johnson's (1998) research on cooperation clearly indicates results in higher achievement, greater productivity, more caring supportive and committed relationships, greater psychological health, social competence and self-esteem.

The positive effect that cooperative learning has on so many important outcomes makes it one of the most valuable tools educators have. According to Johnson and Holubec (1993) group learning situations help ensure cooperative efforts and enable the disciplined implementation of cooperative learning for long-term success. Currently the most important element in structuring cooperative learning is positive interdependence.

There are important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that can only occur when students promote each others learning. This includes orally explaining how to solve problems, teaching ones knowledge to others, checking for understanding, discussing concepts being learned and connecting present with past learning. Each of those activities can be structured into group task directions and procedures (Slavin, 1980). This helps ensure that cooperative learning groups are both

academic support system (every student has someone who is committed to his or her learning). And a personal support (every student has someone who is committed to him or her as a person). It is through promoting each other's learning face to face that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their mutual goals (Deutch, 1962).

Two levels of accountability must be structured into cooperative lessons. The group must be accountable for achieving its goals and each member must be accountable for contributing his or her share of work. Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual is assessed and results are given back to the group and individual in order to ascertain who needs more assistance, support and encouragement in learning.

The purpose of cooperative learning groups is making each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Students learn together so that they subsequently can gain greater individual competency. The idea of cooperative learning is that it teaches the students the required interpersonal skills.

Cooperative learning is inherently more complex than competitive or individualistic learning because students have to engage simultaneously on task work (learning academic matter) and team work functioning effectively in a group. Social skills for effective cooperative work do not magically appear when cooperative lessons are employed. Instead, social skills must be taught just as purposefully and precisely as academic skills. Leadership, decision making, trust-building, communication and conflict management skills empower students to manage both team work and task work successfully since cooperation and conflict are inherently related (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). The procedures and skills for managing conflicts constructively are especially important for the long term success of learning groups.

Procedures and strategies for teaching students social skills may be found in Johnson (1991, 1993) and Johnson (1994). In addition it is still suggested that cooperative learning is group processing. Group processing exists when group members discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Groups need to describe what member actions are helpful and unhelpful

and make decisions about what behaviours to continue or change. Continuous improvement of processes of learning results from the careful analysis of how members are working together and determines how effectiveness can be enhanced.

LEARNING THEORIES WHICH INFORM THE STUDY

Bodner (1986) claims that the traditional view of knowledge is based on the common sense belief that the real world exist regardless of whether we take an interest in it or even notice it. This perspective of construction of knowledge and truth of that what is true is what corresponds to reality, this notion has been criticised.

This takes us to Piaget's belief that knowledge is acquired as the result of a long constructive process in which one tries to organise, structure and restructure our experiences in the light of existing schemas of thought, and thereby gradually modify and expand these schemas. Thus cooperative learning really brings understanding of how individuals construct their own knowledge and how groups of people appear to share common knowledge. As group members, individuals are able to build and continually contest this knowledge (Prawat, 1992).

Such a view quantifies the statement that knowledge is viable as long as it works and as long as it stands up to the constraints of our experiences. In addition to motivating students to work together, cooperative learning also motivates students to help one another learn.

Every teacher knows that we learn by teaching. When students have to organise their thoughts to explain ideas to team mates, they must engage in cognitive elaboration that greatly enhances their understanding (Dansereau 1985). Students can provide individual attention and assistance to one another. As they work one-on-one, students do an excellent job of finding out whether their peers have the idea or need additional explanation. In a traditional classroom, students who do not understand what is going on can scrunch down in their seats and hope the teacher won't call on them. Hunter (1982) states that in a cooperative team there is nowhere to hide; there is a helpful, non threatening environment in which to try out new ideas and ask for assistance. A student who gives an answer in a whole class lesson risks being laughed at if the

answer is wrong; in a cooperative team, the fact that the group has a of we are all in this together attitude means that other when they don't understand, students are likely to help each other.

If one considers what *Towards Education for All* prescribes in terms of student-centred education and how it goes hand in hand with cooperative learning, it is clear that the cognitive learning theories influenced the formulation of these life long learning goals.

This policy prescribes that methodology should be applied that promotes learning thought understanding (p.120). It further promotes the idea of going “beyond relying on what they have read or been told” and the need to learn “to think independently and critically” (p.119).

Nowadays, the discourse around learning theories in Namibia seems to be dominated by constructivist view points. What can be hoped for in terms of learning in the Namibian classroom is that learning takes place in a specific cultural context and that a student's knowledge of reality is constructed through new experiences and interaction which is linked to the student's existing knowledge. This only becomes knowledge when learners understand the nature of reality.

Although Piaget's “stage” theory is criticised nowadays, it is still relevant in terms of the selection of developmentally appropriate education. Whereas Piaget proposed that students become ready for certain forms of learning at specific stages, Ausubel (1978: IV) wrote this relevant caution: The single most important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain that and teach accordingly. Vygotsky's theories of learning are nowadays a powerful force in developmental psychology. Vygotsky's view on when children are learning is when they learn within their zone proximal development, which is the distance between their actual development and the level of potential development which usually realises under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky 1978:86).

Teaching students interpersonal and small-group skills has both short-term and long-term outcomes (Johnson and Johnson 1989) the short term outcomes include greater

employability and career success. Most people realise that college education or vocational training improves career opportunities, but many are less aware that interpersonal skills may be the set of skills most important to their employability, productivity and career success. Employers typically value communication, responsibility, initiative, interpersonal and decision making skills. A question all employers have in mind when they interview a job applicant is “can this person get along with other people?” Having a high degree of technical competence is not enough to ensure a successful career.

If the potential of cooperative learning is to be realised, students must have the pre-requisite interpersonal skills and should these be taught just as systematically as possible. Doing so requires that teachers communicate to students the need for social skills and ensure that students persevere until the skills are fully integrated into their behavioural repertoires. If teachers do so they will not only increase student achievement, they will also increase student future, employability, career success, quality of relationship and psychological health.

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND CHANGE

In the research and thinking leading up to the mid 1970s, the teacher was viewed as a doer, as an implementer of other people’s ideas about curriculum, methodology, and even about how students learned. If there was no mental life, then there could be few if any thought processes to support this doing of teaching. Further, in keeping with this view, new teachers were seen to enter professional training *tabula rasa*, with no prior knowledge of teaching or the teacher’s role.

These ideas go together with teacher education in Namibia which is now based on a democratic pedagogy, a methodology which promotes understanding and practices directed towards empowerment to shape the conditions of ones own life as is written in the Broad Curriculum of BETD (1998). The Broad Curriculum goes on to explain that a teacher who is well educated will promote participatory learning in his or her teaching. Participatory learning is one in which the methods of teaching enables each member to be accountable for the end results and also help members of the groups to work together in building up social skills.

Every subject involves the application in order to develop an understanding of learning as an interactive, shared and productive process; to enable effective teaching. Gillies (1998) stated that theory and practice teaching strategies need to be refined to maximize their effect and to underpin new ideas for supporting understanding.

The Broad Curriculum clarified some of the issues of professional ideologies that need to be achieving at the end of their studies. These include the teaching skills which a student needs to demonstrate, for example promoting positive professional attitudes and being a good role model for the country and effective communication and contributing to the knowledge base.

A methodology of teaching which involves all students at all times is recommended by the policy. The policy also encourages the use of a variety of teaching methodologies under the influence of a student centred approach. The teacher is expected to give students time to explore and practice new ideas. Home ecology in particular expects teachers to organise their classroom into a student-conducive environment. This environment must be created to meet all the teaching and learning needs both inside and outside in order for students to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

The ideology of moving away from teacher centred to student centred has brought all the changes. The aim is to bring knowledge of understanding of human culture and tradition. Furthermore the paradigm shift promotes learning through understanding and practice directed by the autonomous mastery of living conditions (MEC, 1993).

Teaching to gain conceptual understanding is an effective way of teaching as the time, background, experience, and social context must not be overlooked as they are the potential influences in how new teachers can form knowledge in their professional education. If followed then the context must be seen as a backdrop. Classroom and colleges were simply setting into motion that which teachers put their training into practice in the classroom (Freeman, 1998).

Jackson (1968) study of elementary schools and life in classrooms, offers a glimpse of how teachers' thinking were viewed in the period leading up to 1975. His description

echoes the norms of the day, norms that projected assumptions about stability, familiarity and predictability to classroom life.

Jackson (1968) observed that not only is the classroom a relatively stable physical environment, it also provides a fairly constant social context. Behind the same old desks sit the same old students, in front of the familiar blackboard stands the familiar teacher. There appears to be great regularity in the publicly visible world of teaching. Perhaps for that reason, the teacher's internal mental world was assumed to be minimally sophisticated as well (Freeman, 1998). Noting the absence of technical terms in teachers' talk Jackson (1964:144) commented that not only do teachers avoid elaborate words; they also seem to shun elaborate ideas.

While the 1970s marked a turning point in how research conceived teachers and their mental lives, the years from 1980 to 1990 marked a full decade of looking at teaching through the lenses of the notion of the hidden pedagogy or apprenticeship of observation of pedagogical content.

Interestingly, the notion of pedagogical decision seems to have found its way into educational research from work on physicians' decision making in clinical settings. While equating the mental work of doctoring with that of teaching has definite political overtones (Labaree, 1982) defining teachers' mental lives in terms of decisions they make created an easy, almost quasi-behavioural, unit of analysis that could be applied across multiple classroom settings, content areas, and levels of teaching expertise. Johnson (1999) extends this analysis to provide a very useful overview of how the concept of decision making has developed.

While throughout the 1980s teachers' decision making came to provide a discrete unit of analysis, the study of teachers' mental lives still requires new skills and theory. These were largely important from field work in anthropology and sociology with the widespread development.

The 1980s marked a fundamental change in how learning was understood and recent years have consolidated a deepening of that understanding. The move away from process-product paradigm, which begun in 1975, became more or less complete. The

notion of teachers' mental lives and indeed the concept of teacher learning were firmly established as a matter of public policy.

The central challenge for teachers, like anybody, is to find meaning in experience. If teachers' mental lives are storied or narrative webs of past and present experience, if their knowledge is reflective of their position in the activity of teaching, then it makes sense that reflective practice must become a central pillar in teacher education. The role of external input is in the form of theory, prescriptions and experiences of others. It is from this perspective that a better approach which will open up ways for teacher transformation in Namibia.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the reviews made thus far, it is clear that learning with understanding is the key to internalisation. Developing knowledge, skill and understanding is the trade of education. Most teachers must show commitment to all three for effective teaching and learning to take place. It has also become evident that the exploration of the issue based approach might bring a change in teacher education especially in the teaching of Home Ecology.

The shift in paradigm as indicated in the brief of the ministry of basic education will always be learning experience in teacher education. The application of theory into practice is a necessity because knowledge without application is useless. The statement is supported by Bodner (1986) who states that knowledge is knowledge only when it works.

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TITLE:

**EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF
BEHAVIOURISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM**

EPISTEMOLOGICAL BASES OF BEHAVIOURISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is continuously a highly debated issue and is changing and is being reformed as people gain greater understanding of and insights into their world Van Harmelen (2000) Therefore, this paper will concentrate on what constitutes knowledge in the context of two epistemological positions underpinning the practice of behaviourism and constructivism. Behaviourism will be discussed within empirical, materialistic and realist epistemology. Central to constructivism will be radical, social and critical interpretations. In conclusion I will present a case for the epistemology which I consider to be sound in the context of current educational practice. The two philosophies will be defined and central ideas and their strength and weaknesses will be stated. The threads will be brought together in the synthesis and the conclusion will summarise the paper.

BEHAVIOURISM AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS

The term “behaviourism” according to Van Harmelen (1995) “is perceived as a network of theoretical perspectives held together by the common belief that personal experience is understood and exhibited as behaviour or actions that result from our interactions with our physical world and social environment”. This philosophy is further defined by Curzon (1981) as a scientific approach, which holds that knowledge can be discovered through the use of senses or through experimentation.

BEHAVIORAL LINKS TO MATERIALISM AND REALISM

Behaviourism has its roots in several philosophical traditions. It is related to realism, largely in terms of the realists’ thesis of independent, that is similar to the behaviourists’ belief and therefore knowledge is external to the individual Ozman and Craver (1986). Behaviourism’s connection with realism is primarily with modern realism and its advocacy of science. According to Ozman and Craver (1986) behaviourists believe that human behaviour can be understood by continuous study of

particular behaviours. For them there is no internal reality because what is real is external, factual and observable behaviour capable of being known (Ibid). It is further stated for example by Francis Bacon who rejected the seeking of meaning in facts because making meaning involves the mind which is non-existent according to this philosophy rather he suggests that people should look to the facts of behaviour or that which is observable and capable of empirical verification Ozman and Craver (1986).

Behaviourism is also informed by the materialistic philosophy as promoted by Thomas Hobbes who held that reality is primarily matter and motion and all behavioural phenomena are capable of being explained in these terms. This close affinity of behaviourism lies in several areas. For Hobbes, Ozman and Craver (1986) an individual's psychological make-up can be explained in mechanistic terms. Therefore both materialists and behaviourists believe that we behave in certain ways according to our physical make-up. This make-up makes it significant to observe the behaviour (motion) of a body in an environment (supporting material conditions).

BEHAVIOURISMS' CLASSICAL EMPIRICAL ROOTS

Early behaviourism or classical behaviourism as developed by Watson showed the thinking of Comte (1778-1857), who suggested the view that all social phenomena should be seen in the same way as physiological or biological laws and theories be investigated empirically: Oldroyd (1986) as cited in Van Harmelen (1995). Situating the study to human behaviour to early positivists of Comte, behaviourism is a follower of the empirialists' belief that all knowledge is based on sense experience and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment.

The perception of behaviour as the result of, or caused by a reflex or conditioned stimulus arising in the environment linked classical behaviour to the empirical principle that every event has a cause' Van Harmelen (1995). This principle explains that all events and phenomena must be explained according to causal chain.

The behaviourists share a belief with the empiricists in an orderly world which is governed by 'rules or laws according to which change can be transformed Van Harmelen (1995). Within this belief behaviourism presents an account of human

behaviour as being determined in no less a manner by rules that govern our interaction with the environment (Ibid). Therefore “empiricism” according to Aspin (1995) is derived from the Greek word for “experience” *empeiria*. Knowledge according to Aspin was grounded only in human experience, and such experience is obtained through the evidence of the senses and inner feelings, combined into meaningful concepts of psychological principles such as association Aspin (1995). It is imperative however to the empirists this statement that all knowledge is from experience. This is a general statement and Locke (1632-1704) in Van Harmelen (1995) suggested a solution to the general statements that they had no real existence, but was fictions of language used as sensible marks to more easily comprehend the world.

EARLY BEHAVIOURISTS

Pavlov (1849-1939) and Watson (1878-1958) in Ozman and Craver (1986) established the foundations of behaviourism. Behavioural theorists such as Watson claimed in reality that nothing goes on in the mind other than electrochemical and neurophysical events’ Brent (1983:10) as cited in Van Harmelen (1995). Therefore Van Harmelen (1995) states that the theorists considered inner states or mentalistic concepts such as joy, feelings, intention and choice as nothing more than guesswork and speculation because they cannot be empirically observed and measured.

Skinner (1904-1990) also adapted and refined behaviourism in the tradition established by Watson. Behaviourists believe that future behaviour can be predicted than it is possible to control behaviour and to change it according to patterns of behaviour that are desirable and acceptable. The above account according to Van Harmelen (1995) represents a particular position within behavioural theory, which identifies “strong” behaviourism a position described because of application of the principle of significance, which excludes all reference to mentalistic concepts or inner states. This position is distinguished from “weak” behaviourism on the basis that weak behaviourists accept the possible existence of inner states, but suggests that because we do not have the means of studying them empirically we need for the moment to restrict ourselves to the study of external behaviour (Ibid).The two views of behaviourism are emphasised because of the decisive role in the development of

the objective model of curriculum. Further the position of behaviourism as suggested by Van Harmelen (1995) is mostly linked to empirical philosophy.

BEHAVIOURAL VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE

Behaviourists view and believe that knowledge exist externally to the human mind, therefore it needs to be discovered. The discovery according to this theory is done through the use senses, through observation and experimentation, therefore knowledge discovered through observation and experimentation become the “truth” Van Harmelen (2000). Therefore given such lenses behaviourism and behavioural epistemology has weaknesses and strengths. The weaknesses have been challenged. Key criticisms include the:

- Belief in the “right answer” as measure of student learning and understanding. Such a view gives credibility to classroom practices that foster achievement and which will too often emphasise factual- recall rather than conceptual understanding;
- View about thinking that conceptualise thinking as composed of discrete steps or skills that exist as a hierarchy and therefore acquired through a linear process, continue to shape much of the contemporary educational practice and the thinking that underpins the organisation of learning experience;
- Another ‘view added is the belief that these ‘skills’ are generic rather than content or context specific Prawat (1992); Cornbleth (1987) as cited in Van Harmelen (1995);
- The belief in a single learning style or method of knowledge acquisition is a view that has led to the belief in the teaching of ‘study skills’ as these ‘skills’ are perceived as generic, as are ‘thinking’ skills Cornbleth (1987) as cited in Van Harmelen (1995).

The critiques of behaviourism have been severe about the morality underpinning the theory. Stenhouse (1981) states that behavioural theory expresses the notion of control and rejects references to choice and intention. It is accused of being manipulative and coercive and leading to practices that are indoctrinatory rather than educational.

The strength of this model is that it allows for order and human nature craves order, it is safe. Thus David Hume’s philosophy of explaining the world according to the order

of cause and effect gave us is valid. Stenhouse (1981) suggests that behavioural theory and empirical epistemology to provides an orderly and comprehensive theory capable of synthesising a wide range of variables and problems characteristic of educational planning.

The influence of behaviourism on educational theory and practice has been identified as emanating from adherence of the strong behavioural position to empirical epistemology: Van Harmelen (1995). The power of behavioural theory and of the empirical philosophy in which it is located is derived in particular from the attempt of behavioural theorists such as Watson and Skinner to provide a learning theory which is being apparently devoid of vagueness and speculation. It was believed to guarantee effectiveness and teaching. The behavioural themes of prediction control and change are anchored in logical empiricism and can be identified with the notion that progress as that which will lead to continuing change and improvement through technological advancement Berger et al, (1973) as cited in Van Harmelen (1995).

Behavioural theory with objectives model appeared to provide such a theory and because of the particular circumstances of the social milieu, the abstractions of behavioural theory have become reified and entrenched in contemporary education theory and practice.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

Cognitive psychologists were concerned with how the mind works and about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired, rather than on the tangible behaviour of the human being Van Harmelen (1998). Thus, asked the question: “How do we come to know what we know? Cognitive psychologists would answer: “knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner” Bodner (1986:873). This deceptively answer is explained according to Bodner (1986) through the various theories of constructivism. Having challenged the notion held by behaviourists that learning was simply the result of conditioning demonstrated through particular forms of behaviour, cognitive psychologists challenged the fundamental premise of scientific belief applied to education Van Harmelen (1998).

Given the background then constructivism developed as a challenge to behaviourism. This challenge developed because behaviourism could not meet the continuously

changing world of education. Constructivism is not a single theory but rather, there are three approaches. These are radical, social and critical approaches.

Constructivism is a theory about knowledge and learning, it describes both what knowing is and how one comes to know, based on work in psychology and anthropology, the theory describes knowledge as temporary, developmental, non-objective, internally constructed, and socially and culturally mediated Twomey (1995). This account is further expressed by Mathews (1992) who suggests that knowledge is viewed by constructivists as personally and socially constructed rather than objective and revealed theories are provisional, not absolute.

Therefore constructivism as a radically different theory of knowledge and learning owes a great deal to the work of Piaget. Interpreted originally as a stage theorist, Piaget was recognised as the first theorist to identify the question that interested the cognitive psychologists and to provide an answer Mathews (1992). However Bodner (1986) traces how Piagetian thinking comes to shape early forms of constructivist theory and identifies two aspects in particular as central aspects of the theory. The first of these is related to the way in which the development of language is the enabling mechanism through which we make sense of our world. The second is how once having acquired language we use it throughout our lives to organise and restructure our experiences (our prior knowledge). Essentially this means that what we call knowledge, is our ability to make sense of the world we live in, and our ability to construct meaning, and that such an activity ‘can go on in the mind’ Van Harmelen (1998).

This is a complete departure from behaviourists such as Watson who said that, ‘nothing goes in the mind except electro magnetic impulses’ (Ibid).

Constructivism is also made up by other interpretations of radical, social and critical epistemology, and each has different tenet or view of knowledge.

RADICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Radical constructivism theory relates well to Piaget's theory of intellectual development Curzon (1981). This theory follows the principle of Glaserfeld (1989) that the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organisation of the experiential world not the discovery of ontological reality: consequently the cognizing subject is creative which generates cognitive schemas to guide actions and represent its experiences. It is the cognizer's experiential world, rather like the environment surrounding an animal: experiential but not ultimately knowable, Ernest (1993).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Social constructivists accept that knowledge is constructed through many and varied social settings as learners interact with and in their world and that this 'knowing is' articulated, refined and developed further through language Van Harmelen (1998). How the process of knowledge acquisition occurs was further refined and understood through examinations of the work of Lev Vygotsky a Russian who worked and wrote as much the same time that Piaget produced his definitive work in the 1920's and early 1930's. For Vygotsky the focus of teaching is not on transferring skills, as such from those who know to those who know less, but on collaboration, the social interaction, to create, obtain and communicate meaning. It is important to state that social constructivism gives pride of place to human beings and their language is regarded as the shaper of, as well as being the product of individual minds Ernest (1993). Therefore in my own practice much of the instruction and learning takes place through the medium of language.

CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Critical constructivism according to Glaserfeld knowledge is not passively received either through the senses or by the way of communication, but is actively built up by the cognizing subject Taylor (1993). The theory of critical constructivism rests on two main principles as identified by Ernest (1993) principle one states that knowledge is not passively received, but actively built up by the cognizing subject, principle of

cognition is adaptive and serves the organisation of the experiential world, not discovery of ontological reality, thus we do not find truth but viable explanations of our experience.

COMPARISONS OF THE THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

An examination of the underlying metaphors for mind and world of the various forms of constructivism reveal deep difference between them. An important feature of complexity of the underlying metaphors of mind. Critical constructivism sees the mind as active whereas radical constructivism sees the mind as evolving and adapting organism like an animal but not necessarily human. Finally the metaphor of mind of social constructivism is that persons are in conversation, according to human mind status, and recognising that social and linguistic contexts are definitely essential to the human nature of mind. As much as the interpretations may meet somewhere there are also weaknesses especially from the radical interpretations. Ernest (1993) emphasised that radical constructivism leads to overly-child-centred, and romantic progression.

THE VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

According to Van Harmelen (2000) knowledge for it to be called such it must be contested and must not be seen as unchanging truth. The learner through social interactions in many contexts of day-to-day living constructs this knowledge. Through this statement learning is accepted as a process through which we make sense in and for our world. Knowledge is identified as consisting of concepts, skills, values and attitudes. This is a move away from factual recall to conceptual understanding.

SYNTHESIS

It is evident from the two theories that behaviourism lays the foundation of constructivism, which seems to be an improved version of behaviourism based on its criticism. From the weaknesses and strength of the two philosophies one sees that constructivism assumes position in philosophy of science, mind and education. Constructivism shows epistemological and ontological positions: such as the view that knowledge is personally and socially constructed.

Simply constructivism can be described, as essentially a theory about the limits of human knowledge is necessarily a product of our understanding through understanding through our experiences and character of our experiences by our cognitive lens. Behaviourism views knowledge as something that exist outside a human body and also that experienced knowledge is the only true knowledge. Then if the behaviourists claim that the mind is only a black box and nothing is going on, how can someone try to make meaning about something if one cannot link thinking to the experiences that enables new ideas although much explanations was done by behaviourists, constructivism as a theory of knowledge appears to be the best epistemology but it can still be contested in order to bring in changes.

In this regard Van Harmelen (2000:7) suggests that“knowledge is contested, provisional and changing, this means that knowledge is not seen as unchanging truths, but as something that is being reformed as we gain greater understanding of and insight into our world.”

CONCLUSION

Behaviourism and constructivism theories have their strength and weaknesses, which can be good or bad to different people depending on time and a place where one finds oneself. Constructivism is a dominant theory of knowledge at this point and time because of the reform and transformation processes that is taking place. In addition to this the globalisation that initiated the world declaration on education for all Jomtien (1990) as cited in Van Harmelen (2000) has also contributed to the acceptance of this theory of knowledge; however the shift that is taking place is not to be seen as a complete change yet because of holding back to the baggage of behaviourism. In conclusion scientific knowledge is not the only valuable knowledge but knowledge can be constructed in many ways, such as through the use of language, socialisation and individual cognition.

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PERSONAL PROFILE

I was born at Shaile, a small village in the Caprivi region(Namibia) 60 kilometres west of Caprivi. I attended my primary school at Ngwezi primary school from grade 1 to 7. Due to the reason that catholic schools were considered to be offering education of high quality; I furthered my secondary school at Kizito college.

After completion of grade 12 in 1994, I was then employed as a temporary teacher for Home Economics' because of performing well in the final examinations. In 1996 I then enrolled with the University of Namibia doing Bachelor of education majoring in Home Economics and Child Development. In 1999 I completed this degree.

I am not involved in any community activities but I am an active member of one denomination.

My achievements include being a student at Rhodes University and my promotion from a secondary school teacher to a lecturer at Rundu College of Education.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1. Field of Research

General Education Theory and Practice

Provisional title

An issues based approach as a means to enhance praxis: A case study in Home Ecology

2. Context

Traditional Home Ecology teaching and learning approaches have ignored the cross-curricular nature of Home Ecology, resulting in the subject being rigid, compartmentalized and uninteresting (Vermack, 1997). Rather than focusing on the extent to which learners understand concepts, in traditional approaches emphasis was placed more on practical skills, rote learning and memorization of facts, little or no theory was done in most institutions (Van der Linde, 1999, cited in Vermack, 1997).

Importantly in institutions where practical activities were done, this amounted to following recipes, fostering little creative thinking. This contributed to the problem of unqualified or under qualified Home Ecology teachers and has exacerbated language problems facing both the Home Ecology teachers and learners in Namibia (Vermack, 1997).

The Namibian education system is currently undergoing transformation that is underpinned by a learner centered philosophy (MEC, 1993). Learner Centered Education is regarded as being located within a constructivist and Vygotskian social interaction perspective (Tao, 1999; Sprod, 1998). Learner centered education represents a major shift from traditional practices of teaching to one in which the teacher is the facilitator and learners are perceived as constructing and making meaning (Smith et al., 1999; Bodner, 1986; Gergen 1985).

Student teachers and teacher educators need to recognize that learners construct understanding of knowledge in their own ways (Ritchie, 1998; van Harmelen, 1997; Prawat, 1996). Duggan (1996:68) argues that “commitment to learner-centered education means putting learners first, recognizing and building on knowledge, skills, abilities and experience, responding to their needs, taking into account the different ways in which they learn and demonstrate respect for their language and culture”. Within this view teachers are encouraged to be reflective practitioners (Schon, 1997). A key dimension of the new paradigm is the emphasis on conceptual understanding rather than recall of factual information (Van Harmelen, 2000).

The Home Ecology syllabus aims to contribute to the total curriculum by providing opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and skills in an area not only relevant to their lives but also in relation to understanding the role and applications of Home Ecology in a contemporary, changing, multi-cultural society (NIED, BETD, March, 2001:2). This is based on the belief that, the capabilities and skills of people enable them to make their own contributions to the improvement of the quality of life and the quality of those around them.

The key theoretical areas within the Home Ecology syllabus are Family resource management, Nutrition, Household management and financial management. All these areas need conceptual understanding before they are internalized. Conceptual understanding in Home Ecology means understanding why we teach, what we teach and how we teach, so that we are able to reflect critically on our teaching and learning environment (Schon, 1991). The idea of conceptual understanding is also anchored by Prawat (1992) who states that, teaching and learning which is based on theory and practice leads to conceptual understanding.

The new philosophy of learner centered education encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning, and acquisition of skills that will both

facilitate understanding, and acquisition of skills and enhance their abilities to operate as individuals in their societies (NIED, 2001:2).

Given the traditional approach to Home Ecology the perception of Home Ecology as a practical subject continues. As a Home Ecology lecturer of some years, I am increasingly aware of how my students resist attempts to integrate theory and practice and to develop a sound foundational knowledge of the subject.

The concern expressed above has prompted this small scale study. I have selected to investigate whether an issues based approach in Home Ecology will provide a foundation for the development of conceptual understanding and emphasize the need for theoretical understanding. It is hoped that using this approach will trigger my student's understanding of the need for praxis.

According to Van Harmelen (2001) praxis enables individuals to draw attention to interactive processes of consciousness, practice and reflective practice in their experiences. An individual engaged in praxis is well prepared to participate in collective actions.

An issues based approach teaching can be traced back to the work of John Dewey. He maintained that the learner should develop the intellectual fact and sensitivity to solve problems by inquiring constantly in the classroom (Dewey, 1933). Therefore by following the steps of Dewey, it is hoped that my student's understanding for this approach will be triggered further.

3. Research Goal

The research goal is to explore how an issues-based approach can enhance praxis.

4. Research Methodology

The study will be located in a qualitative research framework, and will adopt a case study approach (Taylor and Bogdan, 1993). A case study approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it gives an opportunity for “one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale” (Bell, J. 1993:37). Robson (1993) and Adler and Adler (1987) further add that a case study allows the researcher to identify and understand recurring patterns of events, regularities, complexities and actions, and collection of data in a context specific situation. According to Bell (1993), the greatest strength of a case study is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify the various interactions at work. Vermack, 1997:78 further argues that this paradigm of case studies is an attempt to avoid the “ethicist and dehumanizing” elements of the positivist paradigm. Instead it produces a wealth of descriptive data that highlight complexity and promotes broad insights into the situation studied.

I intend to adopt the issues-based model of Pennock and Bardwell as cited in Wilmot and Van Harmelen (2000). This model first allows students to choose an issue, define a problem for that issue, search for solutions, take actions and evaluate the options. After the adaptation of the model, students will be involved in the preparation process, where they will be made aware of the relevance of the investigation, negotiate what will be expected of them, the outcomes they are expected to achieve and the need to know what the final product of the investigation is.

Students will be made aware of the implementation stage, where time will be set for regular monitoring and guidance. In the feedback stage, students will be informed about the time to be set aside for feedback whether this will be done in a group or as a “mini” conference (Van Harmelen and Wilmot, 2000).

Data will be analysed by analyzing the process and the product. Additional data will be taken from semi-structured interviews which will be held after the feedback time. Questions during the interviews will concentrate on the importance of theory, language importance, time factor and benefit of working in pairs or groups, Cohen, (2000) describes interviews as a conversation between interviewer and respondents with the purpose of getting rich data.

As Adler and Adler (1987) observed working with people you share the world with enhances the chances of collecting rich data. There are always limiting factors, among which is time, and lack of exposure of my students to this approach. The research goal will give direction to get appropriate data and also how to interpret these data. Data analysis will also be negotiated with the research participants where possible. Schensul and Schensul (1991:191 cited in Lotz, 1996:99) noted that participation in the analysis of data, even if it is on an initially superficial level, can "...contribute immeasurably to its interpretation because of familiarity with the context of the study".

The target population in this research will be the second year students majoring in Home Ecology in Rundu College.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the application of an issues based approach as a means for enhancing praxis in Home Ecology. The study concentrates on certain skills of investigation and inquiry in order to enable conceptual understanding to take place. The study adopts an interpretive case study involving fifteen (15) second year Home Ecology students in Rundu College of Education. An issues based approach was modeled with student teachers who were then tasked to do their own issues based study. The data generated through this process served to illuminate how by using an inquiry based approach such as this enhanced their conceptual understanding within the subject as well as aided praxis. However language problems and the time factor were some of the limiting factors in the study.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the way an issues based approach can enhance praxis through aiding conceptual understanding. The research focuses on the importance of theory in Home Ecology lessons.

In the past, Home Ecology was regarded as a purely practical subject and was based mainly on domestic activities which led to the subject receiving a lower status than other subjects. This was because most practical skills done in school were also done at home (MEC, 1993). However the subject has moved from this focus to promote understanding of the importance of putting theory into practice.

Conceptual understanding has thus become the central emphasis in the development of the Home Ecology student. This paper will include the research context of the study, the research methodology, the research findings, and the analysis of results, reflections and conclusion.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

In an attempt to address the problem facing Home Ecology students/teachers - that of not putting theory into practice - an issues based approach was chosen. Fifteen (15) second-year Home Ecology students from Rundu College of Education were involved in the study. In this study praxis is identified as the capacity the student has on the one hand to understand the theory underpinning the discipline, while on the other hand using this theory to inform their practice. The ideal of praxis in Home Ecology becomes particularly important when consideration is given to the role of Home Ecology as an agent of change within the reform process.

Participatory education strategies hold that conceptual understanding is enhanced through the adoption of problem solving/enquiry based approaches (Dewey, 1933). The argument guiding this research is that when students have a clear conceptual understanding of the issues underpinning the current Home Ecology curriculum, they will be better placed to apply their understanding of the discipline (Tao, 1999).

Studies show that an issues based approach when properly executed can result in learners feeling that they are freed from the focus on factual recall to one where conceptual understanding becomes prominent (Van Harmelen & Wilmot, 2001).

Not only does such an approach yield conceptual understanding, it goes beyond that. Evidence from Measor (1996) indicates that enquiry based approaches, if used effectively, encourage independence, resulting in learners working on their own without constant close supervision. Further skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation of data can be enhanced while creativity and decision-making skills can be developed. Therefore an issues based approach claims to provide learners with the opportunity to practice and to develop a considerable range of skills and competencies and in so doing lead to conceptual understanding (MEC, 1993).

This conceptual understanding can only be achieved if we as teachers understand why we teach, what we teach and how we teach (Van Harmelen, 2000). Therefore the way we teach and interact with our students is influenced by the way we think about the nature and point of education since all learning and teaching is informed by theory whether consciously or unconsciously.

An issues based approach to teaching can be traced back to the work of John Dewey. He maintained that the learner should develop the intellectual tact and sensitivity to solve problems by inquiring constantly in the classroom (Dewey, 1933). Such an approach provides students with the opportunity to clarify and identify the purpose of inquiry, formulate hypotheses, test hypotheses, draw conclusions in new situations and develop meaningful understanding.

Liew (1995) maintains that students can learn just as many facts and tend to be interested, enthusiastic and display a sense of relevance when taught to use an inquiry or issues based approach compared with more expository methods. Therefore it is from this background or process that the paper will be presented.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was located in a qualitative research framework, which employed an interpretative case study methodology with the aim of exploring how an issues based approach could enhance praxis and thus lead to conceptual understanding.

According to Cresswell (1994) qualitative research has certain limitations. The concept is seen as immature due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research. There is a notion that the available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased and a need exists to explore and describe the phenomenon to develop theory. However, qualitative research allows one to study the real world situations as they unfold naturally and the researcher has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation and phenomenon under study which in turn can result in detailed rich data (Best & Kahn,

1993:185). Based on the information above qualitative research was chosen as the more suitable approach for this study.

A case study approach was appropriate because it gave an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale (Bell, 1993:3). Bell further states that the greatest strength of the case study is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance of situation and to identify or attempt to identify the various interactions at work. Mckernan (1976) argues that this paradigm is an attempt to avoid dehumanizing elements in the positivist paradigm. Instead it produces a wealth of descriptive data that highlights complexity and promotes broad insights into the situation.

Data was collected using stages. Stage one was the modeling of the approach, stage two was the application, which was an investigation by the students, in stage three the students presented their findings in a mini-conference and the fourth stage focused on interviews with the students. According to Arksey and Knight (1999) approaching a research question from different angles and bringing together a range of views has the potential to generate new and alternative explorations.

Students were introduced to the approach and what was required of them. The process involved clarifications about the way forward. The issues based approach was done in pairs and only one group was a threesome. Data was analyzed and presented in a descriptive and narrative form. This type of analysis is adopted from Cresswell (1994) who states that there is no one right way and that the analysis should fit the research problem.

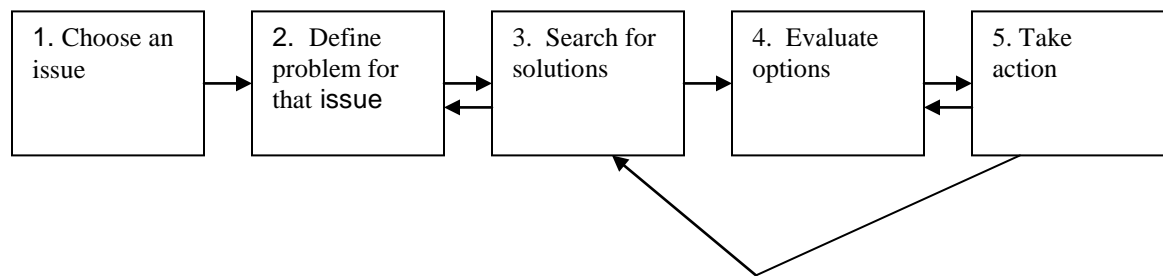
There have been some limitations but most the important one was time. It was hoped that this research would contribute to the wealth of teaching approaches in Namibia and, in the long term, encourage further research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are presented following the research process in stages.

Stage one: In this stage the selected issues based-model was introduced, this was done by modeling the approach indicated in Figure 1 below. I modeled the approach by analysing issues related to cleansing materials. In the process students were required to answer key questions which in turn led to the identification of key concepts relating to the issue identified.

1. An issues-based inquiry model



Source: Pennock and Bardwell (1994:7)

Stage two: In this stage students worked together in pairs though one group worked as a threesome. The students carried out their own investigation to test whether the approach encourages collaborative learning and participation and whether it helped them to better understand the area being investigated. Students went through the syllabus to identify issues of their choice for investigation. This is where planning of their investigation as per model was done. Students had to report back and also develop a written report.

Stage three: This was the stage where students had to show evidence of their engagement in their study of issues by reporting their findings. In this process students took the liberty to invite their colleagues from other subject areas to come and listen to

their presentations. Staff members from the hostel were selected on the basis of who can speak and understand English. This selection of participants for the mini conference was done to add credibility to the presentations of the students.

Stage Four: In this stage informal interviews were carried out so that students could reflect on the whole process. During this process students reflected on the whole inquiry process and key questions asked were based on the importance of concepts underlying the issue.

AN ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The four stages analysed below revealed key dimensions about the role and value of an issues-based approach in the development of skills that lead to conceptual development.

Stage 1

All students appreciated the modeling of the approach before the task there were about to undertake was given. The importance of knowing what the outcome of what was to be done was of great concern to them. Concerning identifying issues students felt it was too early in the year for them to really identify issues which would require intensive enquiry.

Stage 2

Five students felt that by studying issues in pairs or small groups to promote understanding had the dangers of making some rely heavily on others without putting in any real effort. The students also felt that an issues based approach made them develop conceptual understanding of Home Ecology concepts especially the theoretical dimensions of the subject. They also felt that writing up their findings improved language usage. One student said she did not understand the issue as a whole as she was concentrating more on the writing. When asked what they meant by conceptual understanding, it came out that they understand the subject. They also expressed the opinion that if they do not understand the theoretical aspect, they will not be able to put it into practice.

Stage 3

Ten student teachers indicated that the feedback time strengthened their understanding of the underlying concepts in Home Ecology. Two students indicated that they enjoyed the report back because they were able to listen to what their colleagues had to say. Thirteen of them indicated that they feel more confident to go out and teach the subject with understanding. There was also a common understanding about the link between theory and practice.

Stage 4

The interviews in this stage were specifically looked at how students benefited from the enquiry by looking at the importance of theory lessons, time, the benefit of working cooperatively and the importance of language when it comes to the application of such an approach. Students indicated that theory was important for one to be able to put it into practice and putting one's ideas/concepts into verbal and written language. On the question of language students indicated that writing the report promoted and improved and enhanced their understanding. On the question of time, all students stated that time was a constraint and therefore restricted them by not allowing them to study other issues which were of particular interest to them.

According to all the stages or processes, the study has explored and offered some insights into how conceptual understanding in Home Ecology through an issues based approach could enhance praxis. Analysis of the qualitative data provided some revealing insights into the impact of theory lessons in the students' understanding of scientific concepts, perceptions and attitudes in Home Ecology. It became evident that by doing theory work and then practice, student teachers found Home Ecology interesting and also that students understand Home Ecology better when they are doing it rather than being told how to do it. Evidence of this was found in the students' written work.

Students also indicated that working in pairs promoted interaction among them, even though some felt pair work limits ideas. The student teachers showed interest in the approach as Fagan (1984) defines issues based approach as an in-depth study of a

particular topic that one or more students undertake. The approach is also supported by Letts and Bailey (1997) who state that this approach encourages social adeptness among students. When students are left to organize and govern their own activities, much incidental social learning also occurs. What is more, an issues based approach encourages development among its recipients. Students become autonomous, reflecting thinkers, rather than robots (Fagan, 1984; Beckwith, 1985; Rogers, 1988; Chard, 1992; Katz and Chard, 1992 and 1994).

Whilst the inclusion of practical and theory were indicated as important by both student teachers and their educators, the students through their written reports indicated that the kind of understanding they got from studying issues deepened their conceptual understanding. All the student teachers perceived the application of this approach in their teaching as being helpful for clarifying and enhancing Home Ecology concepts learnt through the task. The students indicated that such an approach enabled them to obtain results more rapidly. Furthermore, they indicated that working on their own at their own pace removed fear from discussions.

Most activities done in Home Ecology are done in groups. The study found that collaboration in small groups (Wilmot, 1998; Johnson et al, 1999) enhanced the construction of understanding of knowledge. The student teachers when interviewed said that they generally enjoyed working in groups as this afforded them the opportunity to discuss and share ideas. Although some students favored working together, it is evident from this study that this is not always the case. Some students indicated that they preferred doing certain types of tasks individually as this ruled out relying on group members because, as some pointed out, a limitation of group work is the copying of results from peers without really understanding explanations. Some student teachers mentioned that at times their educators explained topics alone and one student said that due to lack a of some relevant sources and textbooks, they relied solely on the teacher educator's explanations.

Language, which according to Vygotsky (1991) is vital to communication and social discourse, has been identified as a possible barrier for some student teachers in this study. However, peers were useful in explaining to each other in their own local language if they came across difficult concepts in Home Ecology textbooks and other sources. Since the inquiry required student teachers to write the report after their findings, students had to be involved in writing. The writing of the reports was also perceived as beneficial by student teachers as it promoted their writing skills and helped to enhance conceptual understanding. Furthermore, student teachers found that by working on a specific issue it was easy for them to read and understand, and it also encouraged them to think when doing practicals. Student teachers expressed their satisfaction in that when they write up their findings the writing activity stimulated their enthusiasm and interest for the work, because they felt that when they find things out by themselves they remember better.

Students expressed the sentiment that Home Ecology becomes boring and uninteresting when the teacher does all the talking. However, the approach used during the study was perceived as different and made Home Ecology interesting. The teacher educator focused on understanding rather than the mere completion of activities.

Furthermore, class discussions and consolidation were perceived as useful in promoting conceptual understanding. In support of this, Roth and Boyd (1999) argue that discussions in Home Ecology classrooms can be triggered in a number of ways. These triggers provide a different potential for both the nature and quality of discourses that occur. According to Dane (1990) post-discussions are useful in clarifying some Home Ecology concepts and help learners interpret data and evaluate conclusions.

REFLECTIONS

Analysis of data involves working with the data, ... “Organizing, breaking it down, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learnt, and deciding what it tell others” Cresswell (1994). In this regard Tao (1999:372) notes:

...there are absolutely no rules except to do the best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveals given the purpose of the study...

...this does not mean that there are no guidelines to assist in analyzing data. But guidelines and procedural suggestions are not rules...

In critical research the researcher should allow each bit of data to ‘speak’ in the analysis. Analysis and confirmation of analytical concepts should be solicited from the research participants and collaborators familiar with research focus, and in so doing, allow for inter subjectivity and authentic dialogue between all participants (Mckennan 1976:129).

Finding my way into a process of qualitative and collaborative data analysis in this research is a story of an uncertain, unpredictable journey into unknown and uncharted territory. The more I became involved in the research process, working with student teachers, the better my understanding became of my research.

Time constraints and too few and too short contact sessions with student teachers seemed at times to limit student teachers’ involvement in managing and understanding the vast amounts of data being collected. This needed considerable work from all of us engaged in the study and involved me in having to go over the students’ work a number of times and consolidating it with the interviews. As most qualitative researchers will recognize, this is not a simple process as I was faced with my own ideological position and needed to view my interpretations of data critically. At times I felt as if I was over simplifying the data and was being too general in the writing, at other times I thought I was

'overdoing' the analysis and was always unsure of how to deal with my own bias in the interpretation process.

I often felt frustrated and daunted by my lack of experience in qualitative methods, not knowing if what I was doing was right, a factor which was made more daunting by a feeling of being 'out there on my own' with little outside support for the process I was going through.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A study on the use of English teaching during teaching and learning of Home Ecology is critical. Based on the gap between current and desired practice, outgoing student teachers need pivotal support in professional development.

The increasing emphasis on participatory approaches and the move away from teacher-centred approaches requires teachers to collaboratively develop and evaluate support resource materials. The study has opened the door for further research in order to determine whether an issues based approach can aid conceptual understanding in terms of practical implementation in Namibian schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Describing the research process is, according to Cresswell (1994:15), an essential element in reporting a study because of the light it can shed on the data. Looking back on my impression of how an issue based approach can enhance praxis, I feel the struggle to write this paper was to try to represent my learning experiences towards teaching for conceptual understanding as a result of interacting with the student teachers, whilst also researching my own practice, has been an eye-opener and a rewarding one.

This has helped bring about a new mindset about teaching and learning. Each lived situation and each experience has increased my understanding and insight. As a teacher educator, I believe that it shall only be a matter of time before the recent educational reforms will be effectively, and widely, put into practice.

It is my hope that educators will be quick to realize the validity and value of issues-based approaches, particularly at secondary and college level. However, I understand that traditional instructional habits are difficult to break, especially when passed down from the authorities, especially some school principals in both rural and urban schools who still feel that students can only retain and master concepts by memorization. For this reason it may be necessary to investigate both Namibia's primary and secondary schools in order to determine whether or not teacher based instruction in schools is still taking place in most of the learning situations in and outside the classroom.

It is also important to consider the way Namibia's teacher colleges are preparing future teachers who are expected to use 'student based' instruction in schools when they complete their teacher training. Are these student teachers being educated in a way which facilitates effective student teaching? After all, new teachers cannot be expected to conform to the government's educational initiatives if they themselves are educated to use traditional methods of teaching.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**EMPIRICAL STUDY
RHODES UNIVERSITY**

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Education
(General Education Theory and Practice)

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Provisional Title:

An Issues based approach as a means to enhance praxis: A case study in Home Ecology.

A reflection on the research portfolio

The writing of papers in a form of a research portfolio was a new thing to me and the journey taken through this was not easy because of the unknown destination, which had to be reached. A research portfolio is an important aspect of assessment that can determine one's progress over a period of time. According to Sweet (1993) an educational portfolio is a collection of evidence that demonstrates the progress of acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes. It also gives an illumination of the individual experience in a learning situation. The research journey consists of the contextual analysis, the epistemological research, the literature review, the research proposal and the research paper.

The reflection on the research portfolio is an attempt to focus on how I have grown as a researcher. I feel this act is very important, as it will show how I have grown personally, in terms of understanding the issues encountered during my journey. In this reflection I am looking at how broader and deeper my understanding on issues that underpin research, my professional growth and my current position now in the above mentioned papers above and where to from now.

My understanding of the academic world and research became a reality after the research methods course in Grahamstown- Rhodes. The presentation of papers made this a reality because the academicians were explaining their joy and sorrow in research doing. It is where aspects like academic writing; critical reading, critical thinking and conceptual understanding became a matter of concern in my research journey.

The persistence by tutors on scaffolding in class made my home reading sessions worthwhile in the sense that I was now able to read, write and think like an intellectual. This is the time I started looking at people's papers with new academic lenses. This is the time I realised academic writing is different from novels and reading storybooks. The reading of Namibian based research opened up my understanding of why there was a need for reform and transformation of our education system.

The research portfolio helped me with analysis; this skill was deepened after the critical engagement in the contextual analysis paper. I feel I have developed an analytic mind over the two years. Research methodology traditions, which are the qualitative and quantitative, became a reality after reading more. The stages in doing research became clearer and this process taught me the importance of formatting a topic before starting any research.

My professional growth can be seen in my engagement in the epistemology paper. It is in this paper where one sees theory and practice as one informing the other not as separate entities. My scope of understanding of behaviourism and constructivism has widened as my vocabulary became richer through the research process.

My understanding of curriculum became clear through the contextual analysis, I came to realise that knowledge is the one that works according to the current time and also the education system of today is politically influenced.

The whole process of tutoring, scaffolding, guiding when drafts were handed to the tutors made me realise that learning was seen to be continuous process not a point in time. I also realised that through this progress tutors considered my ability, effort and achievement and growth through the pieces of work brought before them. It was interesting to see that in such a process there was no comparison of one's work to the other.

I feel the pieces of work I wrote made me view myself as an agent of change who is tasked by the society I serve to meet the challenges of educational reform and transformation. In the sense that, every paper written had to have value in terms of improving the understanding of education by my fellow countrymen.

I feel though I have such a task to society, I made some errors but with clear directions from tutors I was always encouraged to work harder until I reach the stage where the paper was satisfactory. I must indicate that this process is frustrating especially when you feel you have done your best but only to be sent for a re-do.

During my study I came to realise that reflecting on my papers resulted in having one look at oneself critically. These include looking at the weaknesses and strength and in turn build on this to improve my growth professionally and personally.

I personally feel and think it was very useful to follow my growth step by step. I also think that I have learnt a lot of valuable theories for my own enrichment. Academically, my writing skills have improved.

In conclusion, I feel the success of my study contributed greatly to my professional and personal growth. I have increased my knowledge in terms of professional practice, which I believe has impacted on the effectiveness of my teaching, currently and in future. The fact that the whole course was based on recursive spiral model; I have linked the portfolio to be reflecting just that.