

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

An investigation of the implementation of the thematic approach in
Namibian lower primary classrooms:
A case study

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the implementation of a thematic approach in the Namibian Lower Primary Phase of schooling. The purpose of the study is to investigate teachers' perceptions and understanding of the thematic approach and also to explore how teachers plan and implement a thematic approach in their classrooms. It is argued that a thematic approach allows for a combination of subjects that integrate content across the curriculum in such a way that learners can see the relations among concepts and so build up their knowledge in a more meaningful way.

The work was done in a qualitative paradigm using a case study approach.

Findings reveal that the majority of teachers have a shallow conceptual understanding of the principles of a thematic approach and this causes difficulties in their practice. The investigation concludes that in order for teachers to deepen their conceptual understanding of the thematic approach, follow-up workshops are necessary to help them develop appropriate strategies for their classrooms.

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ACRONYMS USED IN THIS STUDY

BETD	Basic Education Teacher Diploma
LCE	Learner-Centered Education
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education Sport and Culture
NIED	National Institute for Educational Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
HoD	Head of Department
NSHE	Natural Science and Health Education

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the background of my investigation and show how it was prompted by Namibia's educational reform processes, especially the new approaches introduced for the lower primary phase. I highlight what triggered my interest in choosing this particular area of study. I briefly describe the purpose and goals of my research and the research methods I used to support my investigation. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the chapters in my thesis.

1.2 Context of the investigation

In the 1990s, after independence, Namibia underwent a profound restructuring of its education system. One of the major changes in the reform process was to move classrooms away from a largely teacher-centered, behaviourist approach towards a more learner-centered, constructivist approach. The Ministry of Education and Culture observed that in the past, the approach to teaching and learning method in Namibia was based on the understanding that learners were empty vessels who come to school to acquire knowledge and information from the teacher. This teaching approach tended to ignore the views, opinions, experiences and knowledge that learners may have acquired from parents, friends and peers in the community. This was particularly true for the majority (black) of Namibian communities, where teachers themselves were also trained to "become good servants that conform rather than questioning the existing system" (Amukugo, 1993:62)

The Ministry cautioned that during the implementation of the Namibias' post independence curriculum the emphasis needed to be placed on quality, and on the importance of learning with understanding. The Ministry identified learner-centered education (LCE) as the approach to teaching and learning most likely to achieve this, as well as to help in the realisation of Namibia's national goals of equity (fairness) and democracy (participation), This was seen as important for the Namibians' education system as a whole, but most especially for black learners who had suffered under the pre-independence apartheid system

of education. Learner Centred Education was seen as a way to create citizens who could become empowered, and who had greater confidence in the value of their own ideas, opinions and in their ability to become whatever they wanted to be. Learner-centered means that the teacher puts the needs of the learners at the centre of what they do in the classroom. It is therefore important that the activities used in the classroom must acknowledge this and use the learners' existing knowledge, skills and understanding of the topic. The learner-centered method thus encourages the active involvement and participation of the learners in the learning process (Namibia. MBESC, 1993:60).

The broad curriculum for Namibia's Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) outlines what is expected of teachers in terms of learner-centered education (LCE):

Learner-centered education presupposes that teachers have a holistic view of the learner, valuing the learner's life experiences as the starting point for their studies. Teachers should be able to select content and methods on the basis of a shared analysis of the learner's needs, use of local and natural resources as an alternative or supplement to ready-made study material, and thus develop their own and the learners' creativity.

(Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture [MBESC], 2002:1-2)

The key element of LCE is a *constructivist* approach to teaching and learning. This approach holds the view that understanding is constructed through social interaction where learners are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding learners to construct their understanding through problem solving and through meaningful exploration of the world around them. "The teacher's task is to design experiences that will give students the opportunity to develop their own understanding of some data" (Hinchey, 1998:14).

Hinchey claimed that in more traditional classrooms the good students were those who listened very carefully and repeated what they read and heard (1998:17). This tendency was also experienced in the Namibian education system before independence. The previous education system in Namibia tended to be teacher-centered, and to rely heavily on rote learning and memorization. Pupils repeated after the teachers and memorized facts in order to demonstrate their 'cleverness'.

It appears that most teachers in Namibia still use this practice in their teaching because of the manner in which they were trained; thus they teach the way they were taught. Previous

teacher education programmes were designed to perpetuate this strategy. The BETD which is a three year diploma was brought in post independence in 1993. Its goal was to replace the philosophy and practice of teacher-centredness which emphasised teacher control, rote learning and negative assessment compared to the more learner-centred participatory and democratic education system (Craig, Kraft & du Plessis, 1998:33). The BETD is a course which prepares teachers for Grade one to ten. However, most of the teachers have found it very difficult to adapt to this new approach to teaching.

Since the implementation of our first curriculum reform, Namibian teachers have experienced great problems. Research conducted by Namibia's National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) revealed that curricula and syllabuses, textbooks and materials, assessment and examinations during the 1990s were inconsistent with learner-centered principles. This created uncertainty regarding how to implement the reform goals, which was exacerbated by a lack of understanding about the underlying principles and theory of learner-centered education. (2003:4).

Despite success in nationalizing the education system and increasing access, the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture continued to be dissatisfied with the quality of educational provision. The first Namibian curriculum had been seen as an important step towards a new post-apartheid system of education, but it was overloaded with content and too fragmented. Also, teachers were not clear about what their learners were supposed to achieve, and what should be assessed. It was recognized therefore that a new cycle of curriculum reform was needed to improve this situation. However, resources allowed only for a *revision* of existing curricula.

1.3 Namibia's education reform

Namibia through vigorous reforms, is attempting to promote literacy, numeracy and life skills acquisition through curriculum development and teacher training in the Lower Primary (LP) School Phase.

The first curriculum reform for lower primary education attempted to articulate the intentions of the language policy to promote literacy skills acquisition as a basis for all learning. The language policy for schools in Namibia (Namibia. MBESC, 2002:4)

highlights that “education in mother tongue, especially in the lower primary cycle or basic education, is crucial for concept formation and literacy attainment”. However, there was a mismatch between the policy intentions and practical implementation mainly due to the fact that learners and more importantly, many teachers, lacked the necessary language skills and proficiency. Furthermore, the curriculum was so content driven that there was no time for the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills that are crucial for conceptual development.

The second LP reform put more emphasis on the basic communication skills (literacy, numeracy and life skills) within a context that was meaningful to the learners. That thinking resulted in the lower primary revised curriculum employing the thematic approach because it was believed that in the lower primary phase the basic acquisition of literacy, numeracy and life skills competencies is best achieved through integrated teaching across the subjects.

Syllabus revision began in 2003. A conceptual framework for learner-centered education was developed to provide the basis for the revision process. NIED, in collaboration with a professional consultant and members of the Lower Primary Curriculum Panel, started off with the development of a competency framework or matrix for the phase, designing the curriculum from grade four down. Certain competencies were identified as specific outcomes within this framework. The process focused on helping teachers understand how to teach more consistently in a learner-centered way. The emphasis in the curriculum was on building learners’ *own* ways of perceiving and making sense of their world. The recommended teaching and learning strategy by the reform panel was the thematic approach. This approach was chosen because:

- The Namibian education system sees the thematic approach as important in bringing about learning with understanding. Learning with understanding can be defined as a process that moves from simple and progresses to complex. It is a process that can be described as a way of adapting new knowledge to pre-existing knowledge. Piaget explains learning with understanding as a process that the individual goes through in order to make meaning.
- A thematic approach is one of the learner centered principles, which provides an opportunity for the exploration of the subject in depth (Namibia. Ministry of Education [MoE], 2005:8)

These approaches “enrich the educational experiences of pupils” (Pumfrey & Verma, 1993:20).

The Lower Primary curriculum panel members identified three themes and several topics across the curriculum from the lower primary Environmental studies syllabus (see **Appendix A**). The three themes were: The Social Environment, Health and Nutrition, and The Natural Environment. The curriculum guidelines recommended that teachers build up thematic webs around sub-themes and topics from the different syllabuses. Thus, for example, Mathematics, Languages, Environmental Studies, Art, and Religious and Moral Education could be applied to a single theme. This was believed would guard against an unnatural compartmentalization of knowledge: “A child as yet cannot distinguish between Science, History, English and Geography. They think in broad categories” (Walton, 1971:23).

Below is an example of a thematic web adapted from the Lower Primary Training Manual Grades 3 & 4 (2006).

Date:..... Week:..... 2 weeks

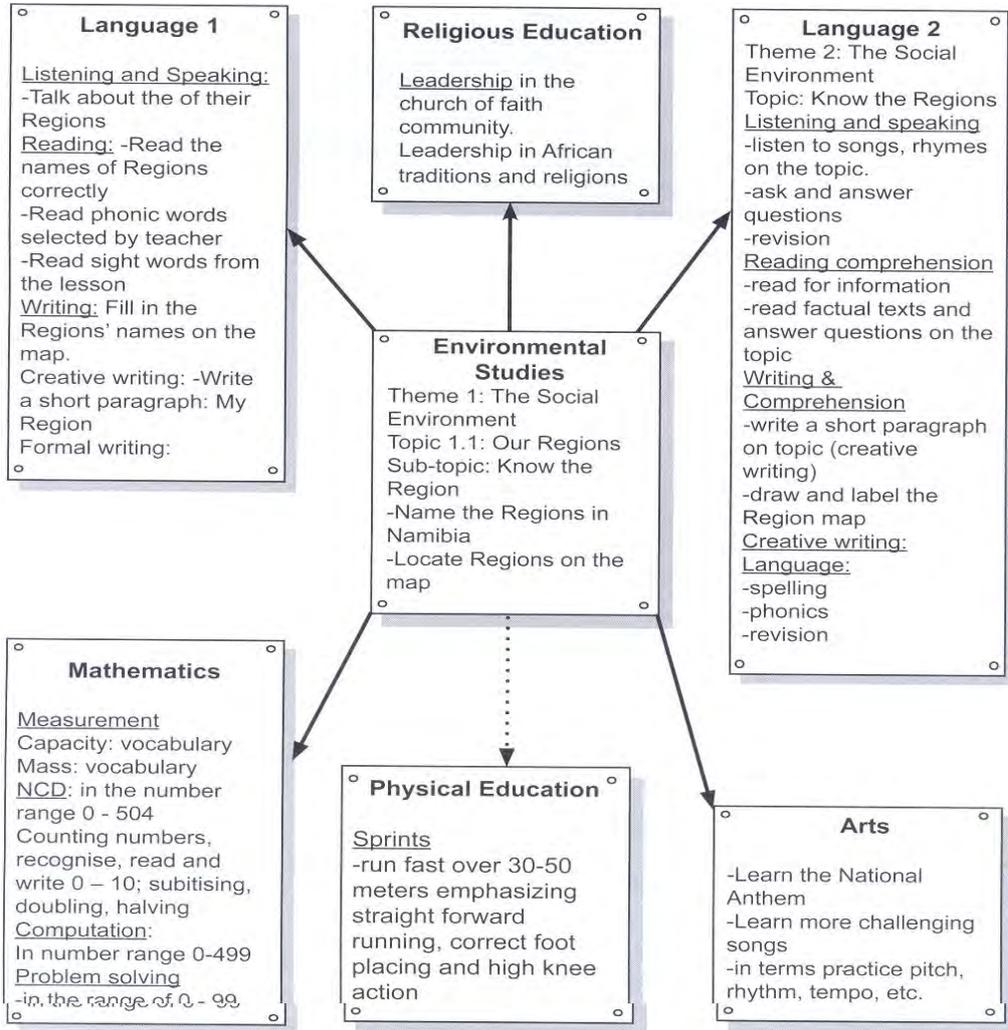


Figure 1: Thematic web

(Lower Primary Training Manual Grade 3 & 4 Teachers National Institute for Educational Development (NIED)).

The example above demonstrates how policy might be translated into practice. It shows how a number of subjects areas might be integrated and how the different literacy and numeracy skills (from Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies etc.) might be developed and practised via a topic such as “Our Region” through reading and writing about regions; through, using science techniques to understand why people in the regions live the way they do; through studying maps to locate a particular region and so on.

¹ Please note that I am aware that there are typographical errors in this document.

1.4 Scope of this study

The specific site of my study is the Otjozondjupa Region. Overleaf is a map of Namibia with its 13 regions. Otjozondjupa is numbered 13 on the map. Otjozondjupa means ‘place of calabashes’. It is the name for the Waterberg plateau. It is a large region covering 105185 square kilometres, with a population density of 1, 3 people per square kilometre. There are 61 schools in the region. Eighteen are senior secondary schools, 7 are combined schools, 47 are primary schools, and there are 6 private schools. There are two circuits² and 10 cluster³ schools in the region. Both cases in my study are urban schools situated in the town of Okahandja. These two schools fall under the Otjiwarongo circuit. A more detailed description of each school is included in Chapter 4 (section 4.2.).

² A few adjoining clusters form a circuit under the guidance of an Inspector of Education, while all the circuits together represent all schools in the region (Namibia. MoE, 2005:190)

³ A cluster is a group of schools that are geographically as close and accessible to each other as possible (Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward 2002:4)

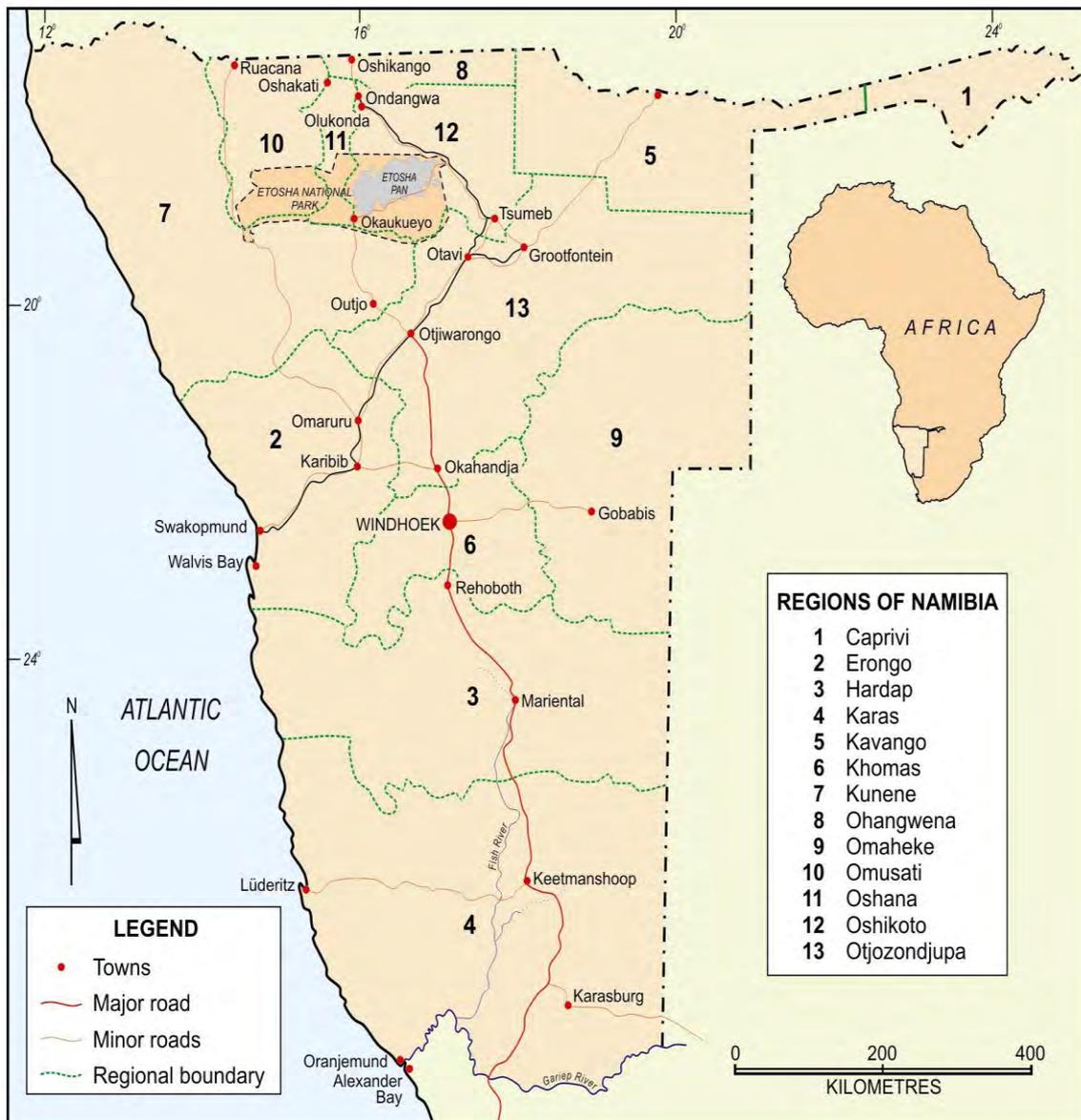


Figure 2: Map of the regions of Namibia.
 (Sue Abraham, 2006. Graphics Services Unit, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.)

I was originally an advisory teacher in Oshikoto Region (numbered 12 on the map). I had initially planned to do my study in this region where interviews could be conducted in Oshiwambo, which is my mother tongue and the mother tongue of the teachers I planned to include in my study. By using Oshiwambo, it would have enhanced the freedom and clarity of communication, but I was then transferred to the Directorate of NIED at Okahandja in January 2006. I decided to relocate my investigation to Okahandja because of cost and distance factors. It was a totally new environment to me. The teachers were new to me and they spoke several different languages. I therefore decided to conduct my interviews in English to accommodate everyone.

I am currently a lower primary education officer, working mainly with lower primary advisory teachers and partly with college lecturers. My job responsibilities require me to:

- Revise and update existing syllabuses and monitor the implementation and functioning of the lower primary phase.
- Initiate and co-ordinate the development of materials in all lower primary subjects and grades.
- Conduct ongoing targeted research on method, materials and new developments in the lower primary phase.
- Initiate professional development of lower primary teachers and assist in the design of in-service training programs.
- Participate in and support, in collaboration with others, the in-service training of teachers in the lower primary phase; the implementation of training of teachers in the lower primary phase; the implementation of the curriculum; and the monitoring of lower primary teaching.

(Namibia. MoE. Public service)

My choice of investigation was greatly influenced by the relatedness to my job responsibilities.

1.5 Purpose of the study

In 2004, all Grade 1 and 2 teachers were introduced to the new revised curriculum, which advocated that lower primary teachers use a thematic approach in their teaching.

Workshops were conducted by Lower Primary experts (ATs) to help teachers plan and implement a thematic approach. In January 2005 teachers began implementing the theme-based curriculum in Grades 1 and 2. In 2005 all Grade 3 and 4 teachers were also introduced to the new revised curriculum through workshops. In January 2006 these teachers began implementing the theme-based curriculum in their own classrooms.

During my period as an advisory teacher (2002-2005) it became clear to me that some teachers were experiencing problems with their planning and implementation of this thematic approach. During a joint school visit on 11 February 2005 with fellow advisory teachers and inspectors of education, great concern was expressed about these problems.

During this particular visit we observed that some teachers were not integrating the different subjects properly: some were still clinging to the old syllabuses.

Recognition of this problem inspired me to try and find out what was really happening, prompting me to make this the focus for my Masters research endeavour. Thematic teaching is central to the new revised lower primary curriculum. The teachers I observed indicate that there are many misconceptions about thematic teaching both in terms of theoretical understanding and of actual practice. If the Namibian education system sees a thematic approach as important in bringing about learning with understanding, then it is essential that our teachers are adequately prepared to use it in their teaching. If we are to know how best to prepare these teachers, it is necessary to know what issues, problems and challenges they face in this regard. My research seeks to clarify what is happening *inside* the classroom in order to inform the system where assistance is needed.

1.6 Research goals

The goals of my research are:

- To investigate teachers' perceptions and experience of the thematic approach
- To explore how teachers plan and implement a thematic approach

1.7 Research approach

I had to conduct the research within a paradigm that would allow me to generate sufficiently rich data for meaningful interpretation. I therefore chose to use a case study approach following an interpretive paradigm. My primary methods of collecting data were semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations. I used open-ended questions in my interviews to enable me to probe deeply in order to get as much information as possible from the teachers in my study. I analyzed documents such as the teachers' preparation notes and learners' books. I conducted classroom observations in order to see how these teachers actually implemented a thematic approach and also to verify whether what they said in their interviews and what they recorded in their preparation notes corresponded to what they put into actual practice.

I used a qualitative method to collect and analyse my data. The data were examined for emerging categories (or themes). I then organised the data under their relevant categories for deeper analysis and discussion.

As noted in Section 1.2 my research focused on lower primary teachers in two urban schools (in Okahandja in the Otjozondjupa Region). Two of these teachers were heads of department (HoDs).

1.8 Structure of the thesis

After mapping out the general context of my study, in the next chapter I present an overview of the relevant literature. I provide a brief definition for a thematic approach and discuss the advantages of this approach for teachers and learners. I examine the theoretical framework that underpins thematic teaching by exploring theme teaching in the international context. I also research specifically in the Namibian context referring to previous research studies and findings on the effectiveness of thematic teaching and the implementation of a thematic approach in LCE. Finally, I discuss the challenges, issues and problems associated with thematic teaching.

In Chapter Three I explain the research methodology I used. I discuss the interpretive research paradigm and my rationale for choosing this. Discussion of my sampling, and my data collection and analysis, as well as ethical issues and some of the limitations of my investigation are also included in this chapter.

In Chapter Four, I present the data under the emerging categories. This includes the responses from the respondents in my study. In Chapter Five I discuss and interpret my findings. In the final chapter I summarize the main findings of my study, discuss the impact of the study's limitations, and make some suggestions for further investigation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integrated curriculum is a gift to experienced teachers. It's like getting a new pair of lenses that makes teaching a lot more exciting and helps us look forward into the next century (M. Markus 1991).

2.1 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, the overall goal of my research is to explore lower primary teachers' perceptions and experiences of using a thematic approach in order to better understand how they plan and implement a thematic approach in their teaching and learning programmes.

In this chapter, I examine some perspectives and theories relating to thematic teaching and learning that have emerged from the literature. I explore views on its value and some of its characteristics, together with the implications for the ways teachers organize and implement their teaching. I try to relate these perspectives to the ways in which the Namibian reform process has adapted and adopted a thematic approach, most particularly in the lower primary phase. My intention for this chapter is to provide a broad framework within which to locate my own study and against which to evaluate my data. In so doing, I focus on some of the issues, challenges and problems associated with thematic teaching.

2.2 An overview of the nature and role of thematic teaching

In my first section, I examine various views on thematic teaching by considering some basic definitions of the characteristics of a thematic approach. I then look at some of the potential benefits of using a thematic approach in one's teaching.

2.2.1 Some basic definitions

Many related words are used worldwide to describe the practice of the thematic approach. These include *interdisciplinary teaching*, *cross-curricular teaching*, and *holistic teaching*. If these words are analysed, however, they all give much the same interpretation of

thematic teaching. To avoid confusion I will use the terms used in Namibian policy documents, namely *thematic* and/or *integrated teaching*.

In thematic teaching teachers teach around a theme or a topic, and in so doing address a range of subject areas (e.g. Language, Mathematics, and Environmental Studies). One of the more comprehensive definitions of thematic teaching is provided by Humphrey, Post and Ellis (1981). They describe it as “one in which children broadly explore knowledge in various subjects related to certain aspects of their environment” (quoted in Lake, 1994:2).

According to Lake links exist among languages, environmental studies, mathematics, social studies, music and arts. In such an approach skills and knowledge are simultaneously applied in more than one area of study. Teaching and learning are viewed in a holistic way so as to reflect the real world (Lake, 1994:1). A similar opinion was expressed by Shoemaker (1981). He defined a thematic/integrated curriculum as:

Education that is organized in a way that it cuts across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful association to focus upon broad areas of study.

(quoted in Benson, 1995:1)

Using an integrated curriculum is a strategy based on the idea that learning is a series of connections. The curriculum is organized around macro-themes, and teaching is based on the idea that people acquire knowledge best when learning in the context of a coherent whole where they can connect what they are learning with the real world (Thematic Instruction, 2001:1). These descriptions support the view that an integrated curriculum is one that prepares children for life-long learning. Those who support curriculum integration believe that “schools must look at educational processes for developing activities required for life in the twenty-first century, rather than as discrete, departmentalized subject matter (Integrating the Curriculum, 2004:2).

It is the interdisciplinary nature, or cross-curricular aspect of a thematic approach, which is seen as most valuable. A study by Yorks and Follo (1993, cited in Ritter, 1999:1) suggests “students learn better from thematic, interdisciplinary instruction than from a traditional, single-subject curriculum”. This view is supported by Vogt (1997:1) who stated “cross-curricular thematic instruction encourages learners to explore important topics, problems,

and questions by engaging students in many varied reading and writing opportunities”. Vogt further argued that thematic instruction builds upon what students know. Themes increase confidence, improve reading and writing, expand concepts and background, and foster positive attitudes about reading and writing (Vogt 1997:1). Similarly Siraj-Blatchford (1995:27) argued: “cross curriculum themes contain ideas and strategies which enable children to learn how to take responsibility for themselves and how to make decisions in preparation for adult life”.

The various definitions examined here relate well to my research context. The key characteristics that have emerged are well-captured in the following comment:

In general, an integrated curriculum or interdisciplinary curriculum allows for a combination of subjects, which integrate content areas in a way that makes sense to learners and helps them make connections and transfer knowledge they learn in a meaningful way. The approach of project work increases involvement of learners and learning in all the levels by using sources that go beyond textbooks. An integrated curriculum enhances the ability of learners to make relationships among concepts. It also provides opportunities for flexible schedules and organising flexible student grouping

(Integrating the curriculum, 2004:2).

A guideline on how to proceed with thematic teaching in mathematics has also suggested more use of cooperative learning, concrete materials, class discussion, guided discovery (Handal & Bobis, 2004:5).

2.3 The theoretical framework underpinning thematic teaching

In this section, I look briefly at some of the theory behind thematic teaching, and the question of how we come to know what we know (how knowledge is acquired).

2.3.1. Constructivism

A thematic approach lends itself to the application of a constructivist theory of learning since it provides an environment where knowledge is socially constructed. Constructivists reject the view that understanding simply resides in books; that it is waiting to be found and absorbed by learners. Rather constructivism argues that understanding is *constructed* by those involved in the learning process. Lorbash and Tobin argue that this view has “emerged as a reaction against a view of science as a search for truth, a means of discovering theories, laws and principles associated with reality” (1997:1).

Many writers point out that as a theory of learning constructivism stresses that the ability to know lies within the individual. It is “constructed in the mind of individuals and learning takes place through the process of transformation and regulation” (Pomuti, 2000:11). Knowledge cannot be transferred directly from the mind of a teacher to the minds of learners. “Knowledge is *constructed* by learners, not passively received from the environment” (Jaworski, 1993:6). Knowledge is not static. Learners try to make sense of what is taught by trying to fit new knowledge in with their past experience, for, as Doyle and Mallet argued, “New discoveries make us think and revise our theories” (1994:6). Knowledge is thus “... a matter of human interpretation” (Hinchey, 1998:45). This clearly argues in favour of the view that children actively construct their knowledge (understanding) of the world. What exactly is involved in *constructing* knowledge though?

A thematic approach as opposed to a compartmentalised approach to the curriculum can be an effective tool in helping learners to construct knowledge. The benefits of a thematic approach have been supported by the work of psychologists such as Vygotsky, Bruner and Donaldson, all of whom emphasized the importance of educating the *whole child* and of revisiting themes through a spiral curriculum which supports a child’s past achievements. A spiral curriculum is grounded in the idea that we start from what is known and keep on revisiting basic concepts building upon these until a learner has grasped a particular concept. When learning in any one curricular area, “students need scaffolded support from the teacher and peers to help them construct meaning” (Cooper, 1997:415). This scaffolding comes in various forms. Vygotsky in particular gave us a model to explain how teachers, the child’s peers or other adults may scaffold children’s achievement within a zone of proximal development (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995).

Constructivism, most importantly Vygotsky’s view of it, emphasises the importance of the social element in the way learners construct understanding. Learning is, or can be, a social activity where new skills and understanding are gained through interaction with adults and peers. We learn through playing games, imitating adults and interacting with our peers in our community. Social interaction “creates good interaction and provides opportunities for peer learning and peer collection” (Amukushu, as quoted in Zeichner & Dahlstrom, 1999:03). Young children, in particular, need opportunities to acquire their own views and ways of thinking through dialogue with others so that they become aware of different perspectives and points of view. Wadsworth argued that “peer interaction becomes

important for cognitive development when a child becomes able to assimilate the viewpoints of others when they are found to be different from theirs” (1989:158).

Similarly, Dowton (1983:1) claimed that a thematic approach “provides a framework for interdisciplinary study, through which the child experiences a diversity of techniques and practice catering to the development of the individual child, as well as for the class as a whole”. Along very similar lines, Wood (1988:15) claimed that “a great deal of what children learn occurs spontaneously outside the school walls as they play, observe, ask questions, experiment and make sense of the world around them”. Krogh (1990:77) argued that “children learn in a way that is most natural to them; they unconsciously integrate subject areas into a complex whole based on their current interests”. Most young learners are interested in making sense of the world around them. They want to learn more about what they see, hear, and feel. They tend to have a more holistic view of the world and experience it as an integrated whole. Krogh (1990:82) argued: “breaking their learning into categories by subject area is less natural, more forced and therefore less interesting and exciting than is working with thematic webs”. Similarly, Lake argued that:

... The movement towards an integrated curriculum is a move away from memorization and recitation of isolated facts to more meaningful concepts and the connections between concepts from isolated facts to a more constructivist view of learning, which values in-depth knowledge of the subjects
(1994:6).

Jones in *her* support for a thematic approach to teaching and learning concluded:

... topics need to be carefully selected to link various syllabi. In this way, learners are drawn away from the perspective that knowledge and experiences can be neatly compartmentalized into disjointed units. Learners learn to find and to discuss natural links between the subject areas that are being covered. They work independently, solve problems and use cooperative learning within the classroom.
(1995:7)

Hinchey, a strong advocate of constructivism, noted that “knowledge should not be presented in compartmentalized packages to be memorized as facts, but should be internalized in a coherent way in the mind of the child” (1998:54). Erickson took this idea further. He argued that an interdisciplinary curriculum provides a vehicle for a higher-level of thinking. When students’ learning is challenged to move beyond memorization of facts, to pursue a topic in depth, and to see the patterns and relationships, they are engaged in constructing knowledge rather than merely accumulating information. He argued that

learners are also acquiring analytic and synthesising skills (1995, cited in Drake, 1998:17). Drake (1998:14) argued “a traditional subject-based curriculum does not engage students in learning because it is often irrelevant and provides little challenge”. He further claims that by teaching in different subjects, teachers may present knowledge in a fragmented way. In contrast, an interdisciplinary curriculum is more often associated with real-life problems because life is not fragmented into subject areas. A real-life context gives students reason to learn (1998:14). Siraj-Blatchford concurs:

...even the youngest children bring with them into school understanding, knowledge, skills and attitudes that they have gained from their parents, brothers and sisters, peers and others in the community

(1995:2).

It is through the “linking of information to existing patterns of knowledge that we create new forms of understanding of the world and is the basic process of all creative thinking” (Fisher, 1995:57). Research conducted by the Natal College of Education in South Africa suggested:

...children, as active learners, need the framework of a more holistic curriculum rather than separate subjects. Learners do not naturally learn by first focusing on history, then on science, then on Maths and so on. They are not aware that this piece of knowledge is Mathematics and that piece of knowledge is Language. Children are not aware of these artificial divisions, rather they tend to look at the world around them and experience it as a whole, and this is how they learn too.

(South Africa. Natal College of Education, 1999:17-18).

Using a Thematic Approach (2005:1) highlighted the fact that by selecting a topic of high interest to learners, opportunities for active involvement in the process of learning are increased. It is argued that organizing a curriculum around a theme allows for curriculum content and the learning process to be addressed within a potentially more meaningful context.

In the next section I focus on some of the advantages of a thematic approach and the benefits it creates for both learners and teachers.

2.3.2 Some potential benefits of a thematic approach for teachers and learners

I am aware of the debate that some research shows that a thematic based curriculum shows that teachers tend to hold on to traditional teaching practices and pay little attention to the

use of real life applications in class (Kupari, 1989) but the feeling is that thematic approach has potential benefits for teachers and learners.

One of the benefits of thematic units is that they allow a teacher greater opportunities for ingenuity and creativity and encourage the adaptation of the curriculum to the particular needs of learners. Selected topics can be those which directly concern young learners and which capitalize on their interests as they learn about themselves and their environment. Pumfrey and Verma (1993:20) believed that thematic approaches “enrich the educational experiences of pupils”. Vogt (1994:3) suggested “thematic units allow the learners opportunity to explore important ideas that challenge them to seek information beyond what they already know”.

There are varied levels of subject integration. Palmer (quoted in Lake, 1994:2) identified some possibilities:

- Developing cross-curriculum sub-objectives within a given curriculum guide.
- Developing model lessons that include cross-curricular activities and assessments.
- Developing enrichment or enhancement activities with a cross-curricular focus. Including suggestions for cross-curricular “contents” following each objective.
- Developing assessment activities that are cross-curricular in nature.
- Include sample-planning wheels in all curriculum guides.

Because learners need to build their own understanding of information and ideas, their prior interests and experiences are very important to classroom life. To return to the research conducted by South Africa’s Natal College of Education, this “fits well with the young learner’s view of knowledge and the world to an integrated environment approach to learning because learners can integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge easily and in a way they find logical and natural”(1999:18-19).

Benson wrote that by “using theme teaching, projects, and units it is possible to use a variety of materials and effectively teach many concepts and skills” (2006:1). Dowton suggested that by linking the study of given topics across the curriculum in a thematic way, a teacher can achieve the following:

Firstly, a thematic approach maximizes teachers’ opportunities to make use of the available resources that are concrete and familiar to learners. This maintains a higher

level of interest in the subject matter and facilitates the application of basic skills, to practical situations. Secondly, a thematic approach encourages critical and constructive thinking through developing research and problem solving. Thirdly, it stimulates the teacher's creativity and diversity of thoughts, which leads to a broader understanding of the subject matter or concept. Lastly a teacher moves from the notion of being an information dispenser to seasoned facilitator by leading to new discoveries.

(Dowton, 1983:1)

A number of benefits for learners have been identified in Curriculum Integration (2004). A thematic approach allows learners to realize the relationships between ideas and concepts as they explore and experience theme-based learning. The relationship between in- and out-of-school topics becomes clear to learners as the whole of teaching and learning is based on what they already know extended to the unknown. A thematic approach encourages learners to share ideas, listen to one another and their personal grasp of ideas is expanded. Furthermore, it enhances respect and cooperation among peers as a result of the expansion of the learner-to-learner interaction. Learners become more responsible for and engage in their own learning.

Lipson *et al* (1993) identified the underlying rationales for thematic teaching as:

...helping learners to learn with understanding, as they understand why they are doing what they are doing. ... demonstrating coherent connections among disciplines that allow a transfer of learning from one context to another. ... helping learners to grasp the relation of context to process. ... facilitating the acquisition of an integrated knowledge base.

(cited in Ritter, 1999:1)

Cooper argued that, in contrast to teaching in a single subject, "learning across the curriculum is interactive, allowing students to construct meaning through a variety of problem solving experiences that use person, and hands-on projects and experiments" (1997:416). He further claimed that thematic teaching helps learners build relationships and leads to a greater transfer of knowledge and skills from one discipline to another.

This approach is seen to help promote learner-centered education by keeping learners' active; linking their school work to real life by using examples that are familiar to the learners and giving them the chance to incorporate new ideas into existing schema (Cooper, 1997:416).

Apart from the realization that a thematic approach may be effective in making teaching and learning more meaningful, there is a body of research related to how children learn that supports integrated teaching. Cromwell (1998:13) looked at how the brain processes and organizes information. He argued, “the brain organizes new knowledge on the basis of previous experiences and the meaning that has developed from those experiences”. He further claimed that the brain processes many things at the same time. Thus thematic teaching experiences may facilitate quick and easy recall and management of new knowledge (cited in Lake, 1994:6). In support of this idea, Lake cited Caine and Caine’s view. These writers suggested that connections between neuropsychological processes and educational methodologies improved a learner’s capacity to process information in the brain and to better search for meaning and patterns. Caine and Caine further claimed that the brain might actually *resist* the learning of fragmented facts: learning occurs more quickly and more thoroughly when it is presented in a coherent and contextualised way (cited in Lake, 1994:6).

2.4. Theme-teaching in the Namibian context

I have reflected on the above views and perceptions in the light of Namibia’s policy and practices regarding thematic teaching. My sense is that Namibian ideas are well in line with international perspectives. The Namibian document Pilot Curriculum Guide for formal Basic Education (1996:30) argues that:

The formal education structures knowledge into areas of learning and subjects. This does not reflect the way in which problems and issues are presented in reality. It is therefore important for the subject’s contents to be structured in a way that corresponds to themes from environmental studies.

(Namibia.MBESC,1996:30).

The policy further requires that in order for learners to experience the inter-relatedness of different subject disciplines, aspects of topics from the various subjects should be co-ordinated so that the same topic is treated at the same time in different subjects

In line with these requirements, Namibia’s recent revised curriculum for the Lower Primary Phase (2005) embraces a thematic/-integrated approach to teaching and learning. A thematic approach is in line with the Namibian learner-centred educational reform policy

and pedagogy. Curriculum guidelines recommend that teachers draw from different syllabuses across the curriculum to build up thematic webs around themes and topics.

This approach was introduced into Namibian lower primary classrooms because it is believed that thematic webs would guard against the compartmentalization of knowledge. In line with views elsewhere, Namibian policy sees it as important that learners experience a thematic approach that enables them to see society and nature as a whole, in the same way that they would learn things holistically in daily life. This approach “provides opportunity for the exploration of subject matter in depth” (Namibia. MBESC, 1993:60).

Namibia’s lower primary curriculum recommends that Environmental Studies be the central subject around which other subject areas are organized. Environmental Studies was chosen as the best naturally integrating subject because of its focus on getting learners to think about their surroundings. Learners’ thinking would be stimulated as they explore and investigate their own environment.

The starting point for teaching and learning in schools is the fact that learners bring to the school a wealth of knowledge and social experiences gained continually from the family, the community and interaction with the environment. Learning in school must involve and extend the learners’ prior knowledge and experiences.
(Namibia. MoE, 2005:8)

It is the teacher’s role to help learners by building upon their real life experiences. This sentiment is articulated in the Namibian Manual for Early Child Care and Development (Namibia. MBESC, 1994:94) as follows: “teachers can encourage this curiosity by offering opportunities for enrichment of earlier experience and the development of the learners’ interests”. Children respond best when they are interested in the things they are learning. Teachers need to find what interests their learners and plan learning activities that address and build on these interests. It is strongly recommended that:

...our teaching in schools allows for active participation of the learning process. Teachers should structure their classes to facilitate this active role. That will mean organizing learners in small groups as well as using teaching techniques that fit the purpose and the content of the lesson.

(Namibia. MBESC, 1993:60)

The Manual for Early Child care and Development notes that “young learners learn through experiencing, discovering and exploring” (Namibia. MBESC, 1994:3). In line with this sentiment, Namibian policy requires that teaching and learning should “encourage active

learners' participation through explaining, demonstrating, and posing questions, checking for understanding, helping provide for active practice and problem solving"(Namibia. MBESC ,1996:60). In addition, in line with the constructivist views of, for example, Vygotsky, Namibia's policies support the view that learners learn best through social interaction.

To sum up, the major features of the thematic approach which have emerged from this review of the literature are as follows. Firstly, connections between content areas are made explicit and children read, write and respond to a topic in variety ways, it allows children to explore a particular topic in depth from multiple disciplines. Theme teaching also provides the opportunity to create an environment that supports and encourages process learning.

Secondly, planning with a web provides an overview of the entire curriculum and gives the teacher a basis for decision making. A decision can be made between several choices; for example to put more emphasis on one content area.

Thirdly, for cognitive development, children do not naturally learn by focusing first on Mathematics, Science then Language. These decisions were made by adults who find it more convenient to follow the entrenched way in which they were taught. Children are interested in learning about what they see, hear and touch/feel. Dividing their learning into different subjects is not a natural style for them.

Fourthly, integrating subject matter extends natural learning. Selecting topics of interest to children implies that children will be more involved in the learning process compared to when the learning is done in subject isolation.

Finally, when learning is done through an integrated theme, the skills become much more meaningful to children. The spelling of the word for example needs to be right because it is part of the theme for the week, thereby combining both content knowledge and literacy.

2.5 Challenges associated with thematic teaching.

Based on my review of the literature, the following three factors emerged as potential challenges for the successful implementation of a thematic approach.

2.5.1 Time

Curriculum integration takes time; planning and preparation, gathering information and sharing of ideas take time. Lake (1994:11) argued that “time is needed to allow teachers to select themes, explore resources, discuss students’ learning styles and needs and coordinate teaching schedules”. In planning, it is essential that teachers take time too to become familiar with their own syllabi and those of the grades above and below theirs, hence Drake’s comment to the effect that “teachers need time not only to plan but also to make sense of new ways to deliver curriculum. Often it is difficult for teachers to find time” (1998:177).

2.5.2 Teacher capacity

Curriculum integration is not an easy task at first. It is, however, possible for all teachers, given good planning and preparation, and – ideally – teamwork. As Williams observed “the logic relating to the different fields has to be fully explored “much is left for the schools or individual teacher to do the exploration” (1996:162-163). If teachers are not provided with adequate in-service training or time to thoughtfully develop an integrated curriculum, things may go wrong, or teaching may happen in an unstructured way (Lake, 1994:12). In planning an integrated curriculum it is undoubtedly useful if teachers work together as a team. A single teacher may or may not have expertise in every content area. Teachers in the lower primary section of a school can help one another find appropriate connections that cut across each content area. In all of this teachers need to be “flexible, informed, enthusiastic and confident to cope successfully in their role” (Jones, 1995:7).

2.5.3 Scheduling

A third concern raised in the literature is the necessity for breaking from traditional scheduling in the way a timetable is organised. Larger blocks of time are needed to deal with a concept in depth (Drake, 1998:178). Where particular topics simply cannot be integrated, they will need additional scheduling, for, as Jones noted, “some subjects, specific knowledge and skills that can be taught by concentrating on them separately” (1995:8). Thematic teaching thus needs a more flexible attitude than school timetables have perhaps traditionally allowed.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented some key definitions for thematic teaching. I have also explored some of the theory and thinking that underpins thematic teaching, especially in terms of how a thematic approach can enhance learning with understanding. This approach presents teachers with a different way of thinking about curriculum and curriculum planning. Research indicates that thematic teaching can have rich benefits both for teachers and learners, creating many opportunities for teaching in learner-centered constructivist ways. A thoughtful and careful teacher can overcome many of the challenges this approach poses because, as the literature indicates, these challenges are far outweighed by its advantages.

In my next chapter, I discuss some research methodology issues, and explain the particular methods I used to investigate five lower primary teachers' understanding and practice of the thematic approach.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies my choice of research methods, as well as the instruments I used to collect data. I briefly describe the participants involved in my investigation, and how I approached data collection and analysis. In the first section I discuss my research design, namely an interpretive case study. In the second section I discuss the actual methods I used to collect data. These included semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and document analysis. The entire chapter is framed by my research questions, which focuses on exploring teachers' understanding and practice of thematic teaching.

3.2 Research design

Research design has been defined as a “basic plan for a piece of research” (Punch, 2005: 63). In this section, I briefly describe the plan for my research study. My research focuses on meaning making and looking at how people in a specific situation, a social and cultural context, attach meaning to issues or incidents but do not necessarily aim to predict or generalise their finding. “The emphasis of any interpretive orientation is on illumination, understanding, and extrapolation rather than on causal determination, prediction, and generalization” (Patton, 1990:424).

I chose an interpretive orientation as most appropriate for my exploration of teachers' understanding and practice of a thematic approach. In order to conduct my research I chose a case study approach. This approach is defined by MacDonald and Walker (1997, as cited in Merriam, 2001:21) as the examination of an instance in action – because a case study involves a study of particular incidents and events. This approach allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of how particular teachers perceived and implemented the thematic approach in their classrooms. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:181) note, a case study provides “a unique example of real situations enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or

principles.” I hoped through my case study to observe to what extent the teachers selected for my investigation confirmed or negated some of the key theories and principles relating to thematic teaching.

3.3 Sampling

Walter and Gall (1989:219) contend, “sampling involves the selection of a portion of a population as representative of the population”. I decided that a small sample would be more appropriate than a large-scale survey if I was to gain as deep an understanding as possible of teachers’ understanding of the thematic approach. Walter and Gall argued that “studies that probe deeply into the characteristics of a small sample often provide more knowledge than a study that attacks the same problems by collecting only shallow information on a large sample” (1989:236-37).

I conducted my case study in the Otjozondjupa region in the town of Okahandja. There are 45 primary schools in this region. I selected two of these schools for my study: one predominantly catering to Afrikaans-speaking learners, and the other to learners who speak mainly Namibia’s indigenous languages. Both are urban primary schools serving learners from Grades 1 through to 7. I focused on the lower primary phase (Grades 1-4). Both schools are multi-cultural in terms of the racial and/or ethnic composition of the learners, but – in line with Namibia’s language policy - use English as the medium of instruction⁴. They are both state schools. Although I did not delve deeply into the parental background, my impression was that at the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking school parents seem to be from a relatively affluent community, whereas at the other school, parents seemed to be from a predominantly poor community.

My selection of the teachers who participated in my study was purposeful. Firstly, the teachers had to have attended training workshops on using a thematic approach in their teaching. Secondly, the teachers had to have had 5 or more years of classroom experience. The number of years experience my five selected teachers totalled 86 years. I believed this relative wealth of experience would mean that these teachers would be likely to be:

⁴ Although ‘language of learning and teaching’ (LoLT) is perhaps a better term than ‘medium of instruction’ (MOI) in relation to learner-centred philosophy and practice, MOI is currently the term most widely used and understood in discussions of Namibian schooling.

- more confident in implementing the changes because they are familiar with the syllabus content.
- aware of the competency levels of their learners
- able to test different methodologies to suit different contexts
- aware of the available resources

All the teachers were female. This was not deliberate, but simply by virtue of the gender dominance in the lower primary phase. At School One, three Grade 4 teachers were selected, one of whom was also a lower primary HoD. At School Two, a Grade 4 teacher and a lower primary HoD, who was also teaching the Grade 1, were selected. My sample therefore included two HoDs. Given the leadership role that is expected of HoDs, I was particularly interested in finding out more about how these HoDs would implement thematic teaching at their schools.

All five teachers were interviewed. Regrettably, however, only three teachers were observed. Due to circumstances beyond either, their or my, control two of the teachers originally included in my study were forced to drop out. One was transferred to the upper primary phase and the second was never actually assigned a class of her own. I observed the three remaining teachers teaching three lessons each (in Mathematics, English, and Environmental Studies) in order to observe how they actually integrated the core skills (literacy, numeracy and life skills) in practice.

3.4 Research methods

As noted, in this case study I used a qualitative method that focused on a small sample. Qualitative inquiry according to Patton entails “going to the field – into the real world of programs, organizations, neighbourhoods, street corners and getting close enough to people and circumstances in order to capture what is happening” (1990:48). Patton further noted that going into the field means having direct and personal contact with the people under scrutiny in their own environments (1990:48).

3.4.1 Data collection

I collected my data directly from the teachers through semi-structured interviews, observations and documents. The discussion of how I used these instruments to collect my data is described in more detail in the following three sub-sections.

3.4.1.1 Interviews

I chose interviews because of a major advantage of adaptability. The semi-structured interview in particular ensures free conversation whereby respondents are free to explore their thoughts, elaborate on their opinions and to ask questions where they are unclear. Patton (1990:278) argued “qualitative interviewing allows a researcher to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain an understanding of that person’s perspectives”.. Bell believed “a skilful interviewer can follow up ideas probe responses and investigate motives and feelings” (1993:91). Cohen and Manion (1998:269) noted that an “interview involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals”. The purpose of my interviews was to engage in direct verbal interaction with specific teachers to explore their understanding and experiences of thematic teaching. Patton (1990) observed:

The purpose of the interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind. Since what is in and on someone’s mind can not be directly observed or measured, the interviewer has to ask questions in such a way as to obtain meaningful information.
(quoted in Merriam, 2001:23)

I drew up a set of interview questions (see Appendix B) and piloted them with a Grade 1 teacher, a former colleague of mine from the North. I wanted to see if any amendments should be made to my interview schedule. This exercise was most beneficial as I made several adjustments and restructured some of my questions to make them clearer for my respondents.

All the interviews were tape-recorded. My interview schedule helped me keep my focus and direction. I used open-ended questions throughout each interview which allowed for the possibility of asking more probing questions to get more information from my respondents. Patton recommended that “questions should be asked in a truly open-ended fashion so that people can respond in their own words and express their own personal perspectives” (2002:353).

A problem I faced during the semi-structured interviews was that my respondents went off the point in just about all of the questions I asked which wasted a lot of time. I tried to bring them back on track through redirecting questions. I believe that in the end the teachers did provide me with relevant information on their views on thematic teaching.

3.4.1.2 Observation

Classroom observation was another method I used to collect data. Johnson and Christensen (2004:186) defined observation “as the watching of behavioural patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest”. The purpose of my observations was to watch and explore more fully how teachers actually implement the new thematic approach. My observations enriched and consolidated the data I had obtained from the interviews. Bell commented that “it could be particularly useful to discover whether people do what they say they do, or behave in the way they claim to behave” (1993:109). I believe my observations may in fact have represented more reliable evidence than what the teachers actually told me in their interviews, as these provided *concrete* examples of what was actually happening in the classroom with regard to the teachers’ methods and approaches to thematic teaching. I looked for evidence to support whether the teachers acknowledged their learners’ previous knowledge, how the teachers introduced key concepts, what strategies they used to enhance learning with understanding, how they linked the different subjects into common themes and what learning materials were used.

Each of the three teachers was observed twice. I used an observation schedule to record everything that happened in each of the lessons (see Appendix C).

3.4.1.3 Document analysis

Finally, as noted, I used document analysis to collect additional data. Merriam noted that documents include visual and physical materials relevant to the study at hand (2001:112). The documents I examined included the teachers’ weekly planning journals (see Appendix D), and examples of learners’ work (see Appendix E). These sources provided further evidence of what was happening in the classrooms and gave me insight into the strategies the teachers used in their thematic teaching.

I looked at three lesson preparation schedules for each teacher. The purpose here was not to judge the teachers but to see what planning had been done to use the thematic approach, what different subjects they had linked, and whether cooperative learning was intended as a teaching strategy.

I also asked the teachers to show me their ‘learners’ exercise books. Again, my goal here was not to evaluate learners, but to see how the thematic approach was reflected in learners’ written work.

3.5 Data analysis

My data analysis involved carefully examining and analysing the findings that emerged from the interviews, the classroom observations and various documents. I organised these findings according to different categories and checked for the emergence of common themes. I needed to look for interrelationships and/or contradictions which would point towards the participating teachers’ understanding or perhaps to some misconceptions during their implementation of thematic teaching.

The taped interviews were first transcribed (see Appendix F). I studied each transcript in detail to first make sense out of the data, and then to look for potential answers to my research questions. As I read through the different transcripts, a number of issues and themes emerged. It was by reference to these themes that I started to arrange my data into categories.

I summarised the interview responses from each the teacher interviewed, and then began a process of cross- case analysis. Patton defined this as grouping together answers from different people to common questions (Patton, 1990:376) (see Appendix G). I used highlighters to help in my colour coding to identify similarities, differences and unique information. I used green for similarities, pink for differences and blue for unique or unanticipated kinds of information. Birley and Moreland point out that the “purpose of coding is to render the data into a form in which it can be presented and analysed” (Birley & Moreland, 1998:59). I found that this colour-coding definitely helped me gain clarity in my data analysis process.

After I had looked critically for similarities and differences, I grouped these into categories. I looked for patterns that emerged, keeping in mind my research questions pertaining to the understanding and experiences teachers had of thematic teaching. I also considered new (unanticipated) information emerging from the interviews for anything that was potentially relevant to my research goals. Some of this new information was forced me to look at some issues from a different perspective, which contributed overall, to a better analysis of the data, as well as important insights from, and about, my participating teachers.

The classroom observations were analysed differently from the interviews. I used the observation schedule (refer to Appendix C) to help me better understand the teachers' actual practice of a thematic approach. I studied each observation schedule and annotated what I saw as emerging themes in the margins.

During the document analysis process, I concentrated mainly on looking at how the teachers planning their lessons. I needed to identify *inter alia* whether they had highlighted explicit links between the different content areas; whether, and how, they intended to draw on learners' prior knowledge; whether they provided opportunities for cooperative learning; and how they proposed to utilise resources. I also looked through learners' books to see whether the activities that had been planned by the teacher had in fact encouraged them to see links between content areas.

3.6 Questions of validity

According to Anderson (1998:95) qualitative research is a form of inquiry that “uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning.” As a result of this understanding - and as noted in the previous sections - I used three main strategies to collect my data. I believe that triangulation between these multiple sources of information would strengthen the validity of my analyses.

I subsequently shared my interpretations of the interview, observation and document analysis data with my respondents so that they could confirm that I had represented their opinions accurately and fairly.

3.7 Ethical issues

Anderson (1998:16) maintains that all human behaviour is subjected to ethical principles and rules and research practice is no exception. Cohen and Manion (1994:354) assert that one of the most important principles for ethical acceptability is that of informed consent. In undertaking this research, I complied with the University's ethics protocol in a number of ways. I wrote a letter to the Regional Director of Otjozondjupa seeking permission to conduct the research in the region (see Appendix I). I also visited each site school to get permission from the principals, and to make arrangements with the selected teachers (see Appendix J). I clarified the purpose of this study and assured my participants that their right to anonymity would be respected.

3.8 Limitations of this study

In retrospect, three main limitations affected this study: English language barrier; my own experience as a researcher; and the fact that I did not know my respondents very well.

Ideally, I would have liked to do my research in Oshiwambo-speaking schools in the Oshikoto Region where the interviews could have been conducted in Oshiwambo, which is my own mother tongue. In this context, my respondents and I would have been able to use the language more freely and confidently. However, it so happened that I was transferred to the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) campus in Otjozondjupa region in January 2006. It became impossible, therefore, for me to follow through on my original research intention as the Oshiwambo-speaking schools were now just too far away. I therefore had to select schools closer to my new place of work.

Teachers at the newly selected schools spoke different languages from my own. Thus, my interviews had to be conducted in our common linking language, namely English. This limited the participants' ability to express themselves as fully and as articulately as might

otherwise have been the case. It also, inevitably, made it more difficult for me to be as free and confident in the interviews as I might have been.

A second limitation pertains to my background as a researcher: I conducted this research with very limited prior experience of the research process.

Finally, as I myself was a newcomer to the Otjozondjupa region, the respondents may not have felt fully comfortable talking to me. They may have felt I had come to evaluate them and might therefore write up negative reports on them.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the research design employed. I have also described the methods I used to collect the data needed to answer my research questions. Data obtained were analysed in order to enable me to comment more fully on how the selected teachers understood and practised the thematic approach in their classrooms. I realize that there may be some significant limitations in the methods I used to collect my data. I have done my best to minimize any negative effect these may have on my findings. These findings are discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the views of the five lower primary teachers who were my research respondents in my investigation of thematic teaching. My data are derived from the semi-structured interviews I conducted, from my observation of the teachers' lessons and from documentary analysis. I have used the following pseudonyms to protect the identity of my five teachers: Anita, Dolly, Gift, Magret and Riisa. Two of the teachers are heads of department (HoDs) and the others are ordinary class teachers. See Table 1 for further details.

Table 1: Selected teachers' profiles

Teachers	Sex	Grade taught	Qualification	Teaching experience (in years)
Anita	F	4	BETD (12+3 yrs)	8
Magret	F	4	BETD (10+3 yrs)	10
Gift	F	4 & HoD	HED (12+4 yrs)	25
Dolly	F	4	BETD (10+3 yrs)	12
Riisa	F	1 & HoD	HED (12+4 yrs)	31

4.2 Data presentation

The data have been arranged in the following four categories:

- Teachers' opinions on the integrated curriculum
- Teachers' understanding of the thematic approach
- Teachers' implementation of the thematic approach
- Challenges to the effective implementation of a thematic approach

Each of these categories is dealt with below to present the five teachers' responses to thematic teaching. I also include a brief description of the two schools involved.

4.3 Contextual description of the two schools investigated

The school where Anita, Magret and Gift teach is a formerly advantaged⁵ school with a predominantly coloured teaching staff including the principal. It has an enrolment of 854 learners. This school is one of the newer schools in Okahandja. It is well-resourced, having a computer and a sophisticated photocopier capable of making enough copies for the entire school. Magret's classroom is colourful with various ready-made learning materials displayed on the walls. There is also a large, well-resourced library in the school.

The second school, where Dolly and Riisa teach, is a formerly disadvantaged school⁶, and has staff and students from various ethnic groups. This multilingual school uses a mixture of languages, for example Khoekhoegowab, Otjiherero, and Oshiwambo. It has an enrolment of 554 learners. The majority of teachers in this school are black, including the principal. This school does not have a well resourced library. There is a computer in the reception area and a photocopier. In Riisa's classroom, there is a reading corner where she has arranged different readers, posters and some other printed materials. Her class is colourful materials on display made by the teacher and learners. Dolly's classroom does not have anything on the walls.

4.4 Teachers' opinions about the integrated curriculum

The five teachers interviewed expressed mixed opinions about the revised lower primary curriculum currently being implemented. I was interested to learn more about their feelings and experiences with this new integrated curriculum.

4.4.1 Positive attitude towards changes

⁵ Formerly Advantaged: A school that was under white administration and had enough resources and qualified teachers etc.

⁶ Formerly disadvantaged: A school that was not receiving attention in terms of resources and had no qualified teachers.

In their responses, Anita, Magret, Dolly and Gift indicated that they felt that change was good. They believe there was no problem with the new curriculum because competencies and objectives are clearly stated and easy to follow compared to the old syllabuses.

Riisa said, *“I am excited about the changes; the school readiness programme that is now integrated in all the syllabi has made teaching easier for teachers, because it allows them to start straight away with formal work”*. Riisa was also very positive about the way handwriting was now integrated in all the subjects. She felt that this is a good idea because it encourages all the teachers to monitor their learners’ handwriting every time they write something, whereas previously teachers only checked the learners’ handwriting during the handwriting lessons.

4.4.2 Constraints in implementing the integrated curriculum

Although most of the teachers seemed to be happy with the revised curriculum, they voiced their concerns about some subjects having far less teaching time available. Subjects such as Social Studies and Natural Science and Health Education (NSHE) were taught as separate subjects before, where NSHE had five periods while Social Studies had four periods, bringing the total to nine periods per week. But now these two subjects are integrated as Environmental Studies it only has five allocated periods per week.

Some of the teachers were concerned about the teaching of handwriting, which is no longer offered as a subject on its own, but is now taught across the curriculum. They think learners’ handwriting will suffer as a result. This indicates that these teachers have difficulty in understanding how handwriting is to be integrated with and practised in other subject areas.

Dolly is more concern about the lack of textbooks that are in line with the revised curriculum. She says, they are finding it difficult to implement the syllabus properly because the textbooks for the new curriculum are not yet in place: *“We are still using the old textbooks which are outdated and do not contain all the information covered in the new syllabus”*.

I asked the teachers how they got to know about the new revised curriculum. All five responded that they received news of the changes through the workshops that were conducted for all lower primary teachers in their region. Anita and Magret mentioned that

almost everything was understandable during the workshop; but when it came to the real practical situation, some things became difficult to implement even though during the workshop everything had sounded easy. Magret mentioned that some of the things were just too confusing, for example, assessment and lesson preparation.

I asked the two HODs about their role in the implementation process. Riisa and Gift said it is their job to convince teachers to follow the newly revised curriculum. Gift said that it was her role to “*Co-ordinate phase meetings, supervise all the lower primary teaching and assist them according to the new changes*”. Riisa said, “*If there is a problem, we come together and discuss the issue and work for alternatives.*” They also do demonstrations for the lower primary teachers to show how things are to be done; for example, linking subjects together, group work, teaching reading and so on.

All five teachers liked the new curriculum and saw it as the way forward for the improvement of teaching and learning in the classroom. Magret and Gift *were* concerned that some subjects, such as Environmental Studies, seemed to have less time available. Some teachers had differing opinions about handwriting: Riisa was happy that it is now taught across the curriculum, while Gift was worried about learners’ handwriting being neglected.

4.5 Teachers’ understanding of the thematic approach

In this section I provide evidence of teachers’ perceptions and experiences with the thematic approach. Almost all the teachers had a similar understanding of what the thematic approach is. Anita, Gift, Dolly and Riisa defined the thematic approach as an integration of different subjects in a theme or topic. They described it as topic-based, whereby the main topic or theme is taken from Environmental Studies and teachers integrate skills from different subjects, for example Environmental Studies, Languages, Mathematics, and so on. Riisa highlighted that theme teaching helps her to teach and develop numeracy and literacy skills among her learners as most of her learners have come from different backgrounds. While Anita believes that theme teaching makes teaching and learning easier because it links to learners experiences. She further that, “*It is difficult to integrate Mathematics*

because sometimes mathematics activities are very far from Environmental Studies activities. One hardly connects it".

When I asked Magret what she understood by 'thematic approach' she responded "*A hum, we are now forced to do integrated teaching*". She said that good things could come from it, because teachers were able to repeat the same topics in Mathematics, English and Environmental Studies. She saw this as both good and bad, saying "*learners will understand better, but they become bored, because the same thing is repeated over and over*".

As noted, most of the teachers understood the thematic approach as an integration of subjects. However, some teachers seemed to confuse the application of the thematic approach with repetition of the same thing in all the subjects.

4.5.1 The value of a thematic approach

Responding to my questions about the importance of the thematic approach, Anita, Gift and Riisa said that the thematic approach was introduced so that learners can learn from experience, because the topics are taken from the environment where learners are living. Gift also contended that through theme teaching, learners will understand better because teachers are referring to the same themes. Riisa claimed that, "*In this case learners are learning with understanding, because they have experience and knowledge about the topics they are learning*". Riisa further stated that what teachers have to do is to use the knowledge and experience that learners have come to school with and start from there.

Dolly said, "*The purpose of the thematic approach is for learners to understand the content better and realize the links between different subjects*". Gift further argued that in the past teaching was not integrated and so learners found it difficult to learn because everything was presented in compartments.

Magret said that the thematic approach should be introduced for all the teachers in the whole country to follow the same format so that learners learn and understand things in the same way. She also said that the content the learners learn in one part of the region should be the same as that learned in the other regions.

The majority of the teachers saw the thematic approach as an important way of achieving learning with understanding. They believed it was important for learners to make links between subjects. One other very important point emerging from the interviews was the recognition of the need to use learners' prior learning.

4.5.2. Changes resulting from the introduction of a thematic approach

The five teachers also highlighted what they felt were some of the major changes brought by the thematic approach. Anita and Gift felt that the thematic approach connects all the subjects in a theme, and there is now a flow between subjects. They indicated that teachers are required to give more work than was previously done, because learners have to be involved more in the teaching and learning in the classroom.

Dolly and Riisa believe the thematic approach has brought changes in our education system. Dolly said, *“In the past learners were asked to memorize the information they have learned through rote learning, but now the new curriculum has put more emphasis on learners to learn through discovery and meaning making, through investigation, learners have also to share their experiences and ideas with others in the class”*.

Riisa said, *“The themes are based on the learners' experiences, which means when they come to school, they have knowledge and skills that they have learned in their community”*. She said in the community life is not divided, learners learn everything together. Therefore teachers have to find out what knowledge and experience the learners have and build from there. She continued, saying that previously even teachers believed that learners come to school to learn from there. She believed that learners know nothing about what is to be learned in school. Riisa further claimed, *“In the past, teaching and learning in school did not bother to find out what knowledge and skills learners have brought to school”*.

Magret responded that she had mixed feelings about whether the thematic approach has brought about change. She uses one-way communication and presents what learners need to learn. She realised that in the new curriculum learners need to be full participants and they need to take the lead and get involved in all learning activities. This, however, needs a lot of preparation and also a lot of research is needed in order to teach in this way.

Every teacher acknowledged that the approach is learner-centered, but some of them appreciated the changes brought by the thematic approach, while some had mixed feelings.

4.5.3. Influence of a thematic approach on learners' performance

The teachers felt the thematic approach had an influence on their learners' performance. Dolly and Riisa were convinced that it had influenced the performance of learners even though this was the first year the approach had been implemented. Dolly said she could *"see a change in learners' learning because they are now active and confident in class"*. They showed interest in the activities and discussions and engaged in the presentations.

Gift said that there was much one could say on how the thematic approach influenced learners' performances: *"In a way some learners are doing well, their participation in class is fine. Some learners have started working on their own and make discoveries because they ask a lot of questions nowadays"*. Some of her learners were still finding their way as this was their first year of implementing the thematic approach. A further problem was the lack of support from home/parent as most of the learners were not doing their homework. This lack of parental involvement in the education of their children was an issue she and learners and fellow teachers still needed time to explore. She concluded by saying that she could however see the changes through her learners' pass rate in the first trimester and that progress was gradually being made.

Anita and Magret were of the same opinion that the thematic approach had influenced learners' performances. If learners were unsure of facts in the English lesson, they would have another chance at understanding during Mathematics as the same theme is covered in all the subjects.

In conclusion then, two of the teachers felt strongly that the thematic approach had a great influence on the performance of their learners who now actively and confidently participated in the teaching and learning process. One teacher felt that the approach was not easy for some learners as they were still finding their way in the process. The other two teachers felt that their learners understood better when the same theme could be spread over all the subjects.

4.5.4.1 Some challenges of the thematic approach

In response to a question about some of the difficulties they experienced in introducing an integrated approach, all teachers identified planning and preparation as their biggest challenge, and said that in order to deliver quality teaching, thorough planning was needed. A teacher needs to be familiar with the different syllabi to identify which subject knowledge and skills could be linked, and which are better taught separately. Gift further stated, *“Not all skills can be integrated, especially Mathematics”*.

Riisa continued, *“Preparation takes a lot of time because we teachers we have to read a lot in order to understand the content better. We have to plan teaching activities that can enhance learning through discoveries”*.

Dolly too said, *“We have to use a lot of time in preparing resources i.e. either teaching aids or resource experts to come to class to explain a certain topic in the field of own expertise or learners to visit some places”*.

Magret responded, *“I don’t know if everything is okay but planning seems to be a big challenge, one needs a lot of time to prepare for a lesson”*.

The majority of these teachers felt the biggest challenge lay in the planning and preparation stages if they are to effectively integrate the skills from different subjects.

4.6 Teachers’ implementation of the thematic approach

This section provides evidence of teachers’ practice. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three two of the teachers originally included in the study were unable to complete it. Anita was transferred to the upper primary phase and Gift was not assigned a class of her own. I could therefore only visit Magret, Dolly and Riisa in their actual classroom settings. I observed them teaching English, Mathematics, and Environmental Studies. These three subjects are core subjects in Environmental Studies (one of the subject’s central to theme integration). I wanted to see how skills from English (literacy) and Mathematics (numeracy) were linked in with a theme from Environmental Studies. I wanted to explore more fully how these

teachers actually implemented the thematic approach. It was also important for me to verify what teachers said in their interviews. I focused on the following five aspects:

- use of prior knowledge;
- linkages between subjects;
- cooperative learning;
- management of learning resources; and,
- questioning technique.

4.6.1 The extent to which the teachers built on their learners' prior knowledge

One of the issues of a thematic approach is that it can more closely mirror the ways that learners build up *real* life experiences. The acknowledgement of a learner's knowledge and social experiences gained from the family, the community, and through interaction with the environment is very important. The school must involve and extend this knowledge, and these experiences. In this regard, Riisa demonstrated her awareness of the importance of using learners' prior learning. She started her lesson by asking questions. In one lesson I observed, the topic was "Occupation of family members". She asked questions as follows:

Q. *Where did mum get the chips and cakes?*

A. They bought them.

Q. *How did your parents buy them?*

A. They gave money and they got them.

Q. *How do your parents get money?*

A. Some parents are working, some are not.

Her learners' responses clearly came from their prior understandings and experience. Riisa first found out what her learners already knew about the topic through her questions, and then took her learners through to unknown territory. She put up a poster of different occupations and asked her learners to discuss the picture in relation to their own experiences and to their parents' occupations. Riisa's learners learned a lot from the activity when they compared their parents' jobs with the jobs in the poster. Her learners found other jobs they had not known about before from the poster and class discussion and added this new knowledge to their existing knowledge.

Magret showed evidence of being aware of the need to acknowledge her learners' existing knowledge, experiences and understanding, but this was done in a narrow way. Before she started her lesson, she asked, "*Who can remember what was learned yesterday*". It

emerged from the observation that, for Magret, previous knowledge means the knowledge that learners learned in the previous lessons, not necessarily the knowledge learners brought to school which they had learned from their community and from peers.

Dolly also acknowledged her learners' previous experiences. She started her lessons, especially environmental studies, with questions such as: *When someone is talking about communication, what is she referring to?* Dolly's learners responded using their experiences from the community. After a short discussion Dolly put up posters, first of the transportation system and then showing different kinds of communication. However, as the learners were questioned, they shouted out answers which made it difficult for Dolly to control proper learning in her class.

4.6.2 The extent to which teachers try to link different subjects in a theme/topics

It was interesting to note from my observations that Riisa integrated most of the subjects and tried to prepare activities for different subjects within a topic for each week, which was then used throughout the three subjects observed.

Here is an example of how Riisa used the well-known folk tale of **Jack and the Beanstalk** to teach across the curriculum. The topic for the week was "Economic Activities". She used the story to teach Mathematics, Language and Environmental Studies. The story provided Riisa with several opportunities to cover activities across the three learning areas, and she demonstrated very clearly her ability to use a thematic approach in her teaching. On the following page, I have mapped out some of the integrated complexity and possibilities she made of this one simple story.

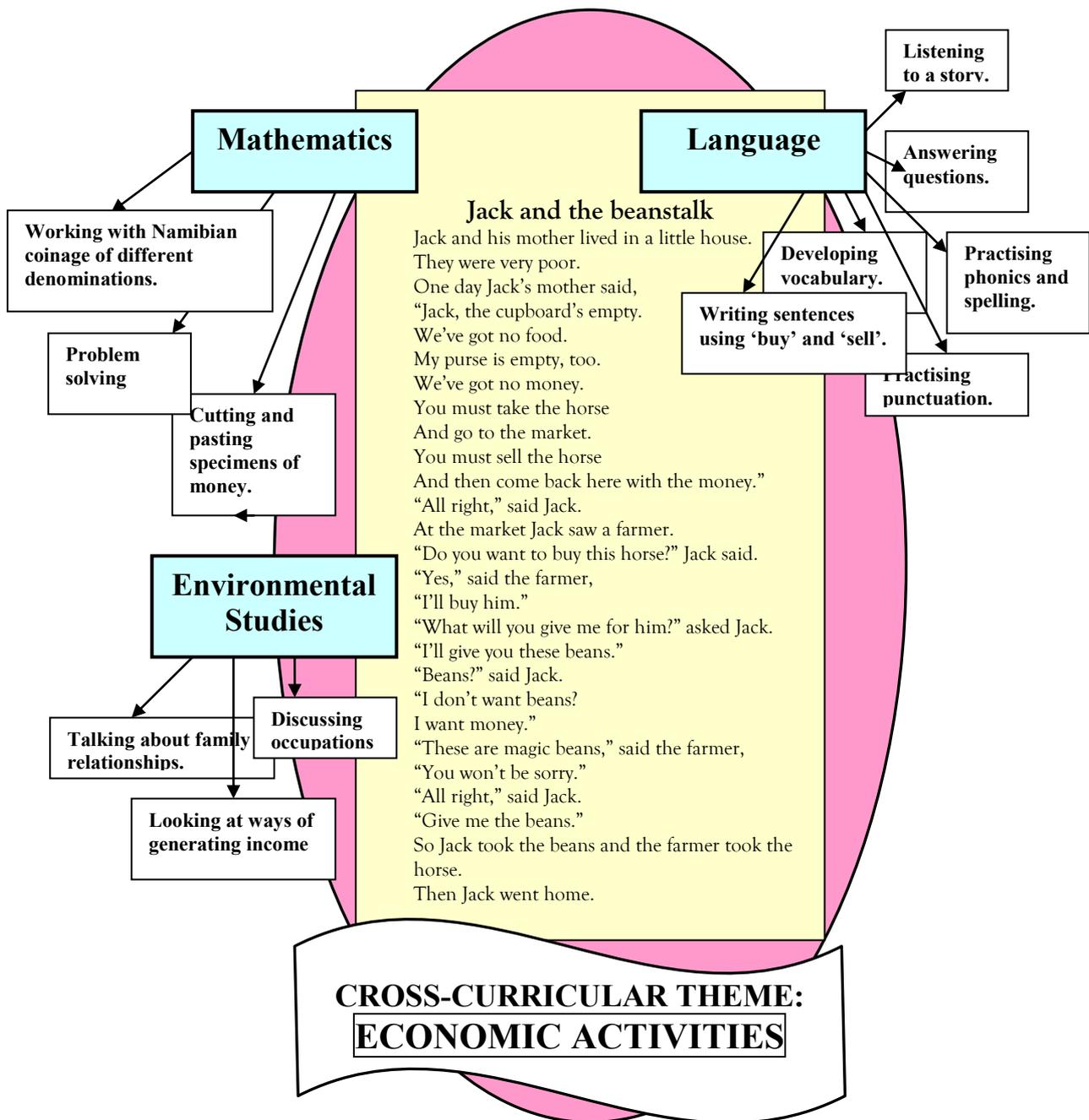


Figure 3: Thematic web developed by Riisa⁷

While she was telling the story, Riisa highlighted key words such as *buy* and *sell*. After telling the story she asked learners questions based on the story. Learners were given the chance to analyze the key words through sounding and spelling. Learners also had time to

⁷ I have scanned the first page from the story Riisa used to generate cross-curricular ideas into Figure 3. (Original source: Cobb D., Herzst J.L., Knoetze P.T., Pienaar P.T., Williams P.D. (1983). *English for Afrikaans speaking pupils. Junior Primary School*. Cape Town: South Africa.)

do an exercise in spelling out the words, putting together the letters to make up words, i.e. s-e-l-l and b-u-y. For the writing component, she asked her learners to formulate a sentence containing the words ‘sell’ and ‘buy’. She wrote the sentences her learners formulated on the chalkboard:

Usola sells sweets.

Elvis buys sweets.

She then asked them to read the sentences, and later copy them into their workbooks. She reminded learners of the punctuation (i.e. full stop, capital letter at the beginning and the spacing between words).

In Environmental Studies, the topic was “**Economic Activities**” with the sub-topic “**Occupations and ways of earning money**”. Riisa started the class discussion by asking learners to name their parents’ occupations. For example, what are the jobs your parents are doing? Learners gave different answers, such as teachers, shopkeepers, builders, nurses etc. After the discussion, Riisa put up a big poster with different occupations. Learners related their parent’s jobs to those in the poster. Riisa raised gender issues in the discussion. In the poster only men did things like building or working with cars. Riisa illustrated the gender issue by relating the discussion to real situations.

Magret also showed awareness of the value of subject integration and *tried* to make links between subjects, but in the lessons she presented, there was no clear link between Environmental Studies and English activities. When she taught languages, she taught Environmental activities (for example Geography in our region) instead of teaching English based on language perspectives. She used a map of Namibia to ask her learners to show in which region Tsumeb is, which area has high rainfall and so on. She told her learners to draw their regions. She appeared, however, to experience difficulties in taking activities from the theme to address English. This is regrettable given that the syllabus provides guidelines on what could be done. It was also not clear from the lesson how Magret linked Mathematics to the topic ‘Our regions’. In Mathematics she dealt with “fractions”, but did not link this to how each region could be seen as a fraction of the whole of Namibia. This suggests that she need to be supported in order to improve her in-depth understanding of how to plan and implement the thematic approach.

Dolly, too, integrated different subjects under the topic ‘Transport and Communication’ in all her lesson preparations for different subjects, but in most cases in her actual teaching she presented information in isolation without making appropriate links to the theme or topic. In her environmental studies lesson, the discussion was about transportation in the area; the communication system; and why this is important in our lives. The learners actively participated because they seemed to know a lot about the transport and communication in the area. Dolly gave short summaries taken from the social studies textbook for them to copy into their exercise books. For mathematics, her preparation listed the same topic (transport and communication). In the actual lesson, however, she asked her learners to count from 1-100, and then introduced “time”. She drew three clocks on the chalkboard and asked three learners to come to the front and write the correct time. This exercise went on like this until the lesson was over. It was difficult to see what links across subjects her learners could possibly have made.

4.6.3 The extent to which teachers encourage cooperative learning

Only one of the three teachers – Riisa - used cooperative learning in her teaching. It was clear that she had established group work in her class properly, and that she managed the group activities very well, especially in her Mathematics lesson. In this lesson, for example, she set the following tasks:

- Group 1 worked on problem solving.
- Group 2 worked on buying and selling (shopping activities) using real coins
- Group 3 worked on cutting specimens of money and pasting them in the items.
- Group 4 worked on adding coins together using real coins.

Riisa’s learners worked in their groups on these different activities. Once one group finished, they moved to the next activity. Riisa moved around explaining and assisting where necessary. Her learners were actively involved and in each activity they learned new things.

Dolly made almost no use of cooperative learning opportunities. She spent most of the time asking questions, which her learners answered as a whole class. This happened especially in Environmental Studies. Some learners shouted out the answer, some slept, and some appeared bored. In English, books were handed out and her learners were instructed to read

in pairs on a given page of a book. Learners were not asked to understand why they were reading in pairs and what they were expected to look for as they read.

On entering Magret's class for observation, I found her learners sitting in pairs, doing their work individually. She favoured individual work in her class. In Mathematics, she prepared worksheets for her learners to colour in, indicating the fractional parts of the whole and showing how many equal parts it was made up of. Learners did this individually. In English, she asked her learners to take their comprehension story out and read it - individually. In the Environmental Studies lesson, she asked questions of the whole group and learners answered in turns. In all three lessons of hers that I observed she made her learners work individually. Many worksheets had been designed for each learner and learners were kept busy all the time, but solved problems individually. She moved around the classroom to assist individuals where necessary.

4.6.4 The extent to which teachers use and manage learning resources

Magret and Dolly did not bring in other learning resources apart from the old textbooks and posters. Only Riisa showed greater creativity in her use of learning resources.

I found from my observations that Dolly relied heavily on posters, textbooks and the chalkboard. In Environmental Studies, her learners worked with the textbooks and sometimes drew on chalkboards. In Mathematics as she was teaching "Time" she drew a clock on the chalkboard and asked learners to come up and indicate the appropriate time.

Magret mostly used textbooks, maps, and pictures to further her learners' understanding. She referred learners to pictures in the textbooks and also to a map of Namibia to explain the regions of Namibia (As noted in a previous section, her topic for the week was "Regions of Namibia").

Riisa obviously believed that using concrete materials helped her learners understand concepts better. In her lessons she used a variety of concrete materials. She brought in money, clothes, oranges, posters, and work sheets. When she presented her lesson in Mathematics, Environmental Studies and English, she used quite a number of resources that supported and clarified things for learners. She even took her learners out to interview a

woman who was in the schoolyard selling things to learners during break time. Riisa encouraged discussion by asking the following sorts of questions:

What was she selling?

How did she have the things she is selling?

How did she get the money?

Where did she buy the things?

What do you think will happen if people are not selling and we are not buying?

One child asked what happened if things she sold were finished. These Grade 1 learners had obviously engaged with learning about the selling and buying cycle.

4.6.5 The extent to which teachers' questioning techniques promoted higher order thinking skills

The revised curriculum emphasizes that teachers must set questions that promote critical thinking and analytical skills among learners so that learners are able to solve problems, interpreting, communicating, valuing and investigating (Namibia. MBESC, 1996:11).

Based on my own experience as a lower primary teacher, I know that the question and answer method is one of the most commonly used strategies in Namibian classrooms. It came out clearly from my observations that these three teachers, especially Dolly and Magret, used questions as a way to involve learners in the lesson and also to assess their learners' understanding of the lessons presented. As mentioned earlier, Dolly used questions and answers in *most* of her lessons. Her questions were directive, requiring only one answer. Magret managed her class in the same manner.

Riisa, by comparison, used more open-ended questions in most of her lessons. The way she set up her group work activities really encouraged critical thinking; her learners were required to think and analyse the tasks she set them.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported on the findings from my semi-structured interviews, observations and documents relating to the teachers' understanding and practice of the thematic approach. In theory all my teachers appear to understand the principles of the

thematic approach, and in *planning* their lessons they do try to integrate as many subjects as possible. However this is not apparent in their *practice*.

The following themes emerged from the presentation and analysis of the findings and these will form my discussion in the next chapter.

- Theme 1: Teachers *do* support the principles of the revised curriculum.
- Theme 2: Teachers *say* they understand the thematic approach but do they really?
- Theme 3: *Successful* implementation requires deeper understanding.
- Theme 4: Making theories work in practice is a *real* challenge.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented findings from my semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and analysis of documents. A brief initial analysis of each aspect was undertaken in Chapter Four, but this chapter attempts to provide a more in-depth discussion of the material presented in Chapter Four. While reviewing my data, the following four themes emerged, and they form the basis of my discussion:

Theme 1: Teachers *do* support the principles of the revised curriculum.

Theme 2: Teachers *say* they understand the thematic approach, but do they really?

Theme 3: Successful implementation requires appropriate understanding.

Theme 4: Making theories work in practice is a *real* challenge.

5.2 Teachers *do* support the principles of the revised curriculum

Despite the challenges mentioned by the teachers during their interviews (relating to the availability of learning support materials and time allocation) there was general consensus and acknowledgement that the revised curriculum is comprehensive and thoughtful. It has the potential to create critical and innovative citizens. Two of the teachers I interviewed claimed that a thematic approach to the curriculum was easier to follow than the old syllabus because certain competencies, objectives and suggested activities are more clearly articulated.

In the interviews the majority of the teachers expressed the view that an integrated curriculum would help learners learn with greater understanding because the topics were better linked to actual life experiences and prior knowledge. This is in line with Vogt (1997:1) who argued that teachers should build upon what children know in order to increase their confidence; improve their reading and writing; expand their conceptual understanding and background; and foster positive attitudes towards learning about their world. A similar view is expressed by Krogh (1990:82) who argued that learners are interested in learning more about those things that they see, hear and feel. When learners

learn from things they have experienced their prior experience enhances their learning with the acquisition of the new knowledge and fosters understanding of new information.

Dolly and Riisa both commented on how, in the past, learners memorized information: they learned through rote learning. They believe the new curriculum places greater emphasis on learning through discovery, through investigation, and through sharing ideas and experiences (Namibia. MBESC, 1996:60). This is in line with Lake (1994: 6), who contends that curriculum integration is a move away from memorization and recitation of facts to more meaningful concepts. Anita and Gift said that this approach required *more* work of teachers than previously. Learners now had to be actively involved in all classroom activities. On a similar note, the MBESC (1993:60) states that our teaching in school should allow for active participation. Teachers should structure their classes to facilitate active roles; by encouraging active learning through explaining things to others, acting out things, demonstrating etc.

Magret said that whereas she had previously used one-way communication to instruct learners in what they needed to learn, her learners now needed to actively participate and contribute to their own learning. They must now take the lead and develop an innovative approach to learning.

To conclude, it is clear that there is much to be done to enable teachers cope with the new curriculum. Textbooks, once they are available, will play a greater role as teachers need materials as learning resources to do their teaching effectively. A variety of views about the thematic approach was shared by teachers I interviewed. The next section explores the teachers' understanding of the thematic approach.

5.3 Teachers say they understand the thematic approach, but do they really?

The interviews revealed that the teachers in my study interpreted the thematic approach in a variety of ways. It also became clear that they could all talk about the thematic approach and they could tell where themes/ topics came from, but - with the exception of Riisa, they showed a shallow understanding of the concept of an integrated curriculum. The question

then is whether the teachers in my study *truly* understand what the thematic approach is, its value and benefits.

Magret, for example, expressed concern that children had to repeat the same thing in all the subjects. This, she said, made them bored. This shows a clear lack of understanding of the principles of a thematic approach. She seemed to not fully understand the idea of integration. She saw little value in making links between the various subjects, and she did not identify ways of avoiding repetition in her lessons.

Apart from Magret, some of the participating teachers acknowledged that if their teaching and learning were planned in a *contextualized* thematic way, their learners would be better able to construct a sound knowledge of their world. Dolly also mentioned the benefit it had on her role as a teacher by requiring intense preparation. She saw the thematic approach as a good key to her professional growth because it made her improve her performance in terms of information searching and through proper planning. The thematic approach helped her to understand the bigger picture and interdependence of her lessons.

Although teachers' views reflect an understanding of aspects of the thematic approach, their responses suggest that at least some of them still prefer teaching in a traditional teacher-centred manner despite ten years of promoting LCE and the integrated approach. This is a source of concern which regional and national monitoring and support programmes to Namibian schools clearly need to investigate. The implementation strategies clearly need to be revised in order to enhance better understanding. This is the subject of discussion in the next section.

5.4 Effective planning and implementation requires appropriate understanding

In my interviews I investigated the extent of understanding and the role of HoDs during the planning and implementation process. Gift and Riisa said that their role as head of department was to monitor teachers' implementation of the changes and to assist and support them in their classroom practice. Both of them mentioned that they coordinate phase meetings in order to help teachers manage with the new syllabus. Riisa indicated that

it was challenging and needed hard work and teamwork. This indicates that both these HoDs acknowledge their responsibility for helping teachers to understand the new approach. Notwithstanding my concerns about whether or not they possessed a real and in depth understanding of this approach, these teachers and their HoDs worked really hard to implement a thematic approach in their teaching. In the next section I will discuss my findings with regard to their planning and implementation of this approach. My discussion is organised under the following five sub-headings:

- The extent to which the teachers acknowledged their learners' prior knowledge
- The extent to which the teachers tried to link different subjects into a theme
- The extent to which the teachers encouraged cooperative learning
- The extent to which the teachers used and managed learning resources
- The extent to which the teachers' questioning strategies promoted higher order thinking skills

The discussion of the next section centered around the importance of learner's prior learning as a way of extending knowledge, starting from the concrete to the abstract.

5.4.1 The extent to which the teachers acknowledged their learners' prior knowledge

Namibia. MoE (2005:8) states that the starting point of teaching and learning in schools must be the knowledge and experiences that learners bring to their schooling. The emphasis is building on to what learners already know and extending this to develop new knowledge. As noted in the Namibian policy, and from my review of other literature, it is clear that acknowledging learners' prior learning is an effective tool in making teaching and learning more meaningful, but during the interviews only Riisa acknowledged this wealth of knowledge and experience. She noted: "*Learners come to school with knowledge and skills which they learn in their community. In the community life is not divided. They learn everything together*". Riisa clearly recognized that her learners learned a lot before they even came to school. They acquired this knowledge from their play with peers, from observing their elders, from asking questions, experimenting and making sense of everything they saw heard and felt in their community experiences. This is in line with Siraj-Blatchford (1995:2) who argued that even the youngest children bring to school understandings, skills, knowledge and attitudes. It is a teacher's role to develop and build

upon such prior experiences. Riisa understands that when learning occurs naturally it does not focus on separate subjects. Children are not aware of subject divisions, that this piece of knowledge is mathematics and so on, they experience, and learn about, the world as a whole (South Africa. Natal College of Education, 1999:17-18). Riisa appeared to genuinely acknowledge her learner's previous experiences in her actual lessons.

Although Riisa regarded prior knowledge as a challenge, she also saw it as an important component in her learners' learning. She began her lesson by asking the learners what they knew about the occupations of their family members, before actually introducing the topic. In so doing she demonstrated a good application and understanding of how children learn. Perkins (1991, quoted in Drake, 1998:153) argued that "deep understanding can be demonstrated only when students can *do* something with what they know". Riisa's learners appeared to integrate new knowledge with their existing knowledge quite easily and in a way that helped them move on to new discoveries. I think that by bringing real objects into the classroom, Riisa really helped her learners see the connections between what they knew from the outside world and what they learned in school.

Dolly, too, expressed awareness of the importance of acknowledging learners' prior knowledge. She mentioned that in the past learners were expected to memorize the information they had learned through rote learning but that now the emphasis is on learning through discovery. A teacher needs to find out what knowledge children bring to school and start from there. Dolly clearly saw her learners' previous experiences as important. In spite of this awareness, however, I do not believe she really used this knowledge to build new knowledge. I observed that she accessed her learner's prior learning through the use of questioning. The questions Dolly asked called only for information that could be taken from the classroom posters, and these are what her learners used to answer these questions.

Although Magret also acknowledged the importance of learners' experiences, her approach was simply to check what her learners had learned in the last lesson she had presented. She clearly saw prior knowledge as that which she had taught in previous lessons. She did little to connect what her learners already knew from their own experiences. This was not acknowledged.

Next, I discuss how the participating teachers linked different content areas into a theme; the planning and implementation of the theme teaching.

5.4.2 The extent to which teachers tried to link different subjects into a theme

The MBESC's policy document (1996:30) points out that in order for learners to experience and realize the links between different subjects, aspects of the subjects must be coordinated and taught at the same time. My classroom observations and document analysis provided me with evidence of the extent to which the teachers tried to do this. My findings reveal that integrating subjects is a big challenge for these teachers. Of the three teachers observed, only Riisa successfully implemented thematic teaching using a single topic as a theme across the three subjects (Mathematics, Languages, and Environmental Studies). Magret and Dolly spoke of integration in the interviews and included it in their lesson plans, but gave no evidence of it in their actual teaching; although Magret spoke of integration and included it in her lesson plan; she adopted a different line, expressing caution about overdoing integration.

I believe Riisa really showed understanding of the principles of thematic teaching. She combined different subjects and integrated content areas in ways that helped her learners see the links between them. Her lesson plans showed that she understood subject integration in theory *and* in practice. She was able to show how each lesson was linked to the theme. Because of her belief that children like listening to stories and can make meaning through stories (Drake, 1998:169), she used a story to teach her topic '**Economic activities**'. She used the story to capture her learner's interest and help them learn with understanding that went beyond memorization and information given in class (Drake, 1998:154). She seemed comfortable with the revised curriculum. Her many years of teaching experience have influenced the way she thinks and does things in her class. She seemed to me to be a critical, creative and innovative teacher. In one of her lessons, learners did activities using real coins. Her approach clearly increased her learners' confidence and their numeracy and literacy conceptual understanding (Vogt, 1997:1). During lessons, she encouraged her learners to share ideas and listen to one another.

What Riisa presented to her class was evident in her learner's books. She gave different activities to engage the learners; learner's role played and did the activities in their

workbooks. This way Riisa encouraged learners' practice as they learned with understanding because they learned by doing, which is considered the best way for children to learn.

In terms of the principles outlined by the MBESC (1996:30), I believe that only Riisa's teaching is in line with how integration ought to be taught. The way she coordinated aspects of the topic: economic activities with mathematics, English and environmental studies as a way to literacy, numeracy, and life skill development, building upon what her learners already knew, was excellent.

Unfortunately, when I compared my interview data with the data I got from observations, I found that the way Dolly and Magret interpreted the principles of a thematic approach did not correspond well with how they *practised* it. Although both these teachers were aware of the requirements for integration they seem to find it difficult to incorporate skills from different subjects into a topic. Magret and Dolly's weekly plans mentioned integration of as many subjects as possible, but I did not actually see much of this happen in practice, especially in Dolly's lesson. Although clearly aware of the need for subject integration, she seemed to struggle to show how English activities could be planned and taught in an integrated way. In the case of Magret's English lesson, this was really an Environmental Studies lesson. She taught Environmental Studies activities. In both these teachers' lessons, mathematics was taught in isolation. Neither of them made links to the topic "**region**" to help "enhance a transfer of knowledge from one content to another" (Ritter, 1999:1). My own view is that the best way to link Mathematics is by treating it as a problem solving activity. For instance, Magret could have used numeracy skills to explore numbers of different language speakers in each region, compare populations in each region. It seemed however that she found it extremely difficult to link mathematics into any kind of thematic web. If we look back at the thematic web outlined in Chapter One, (*figure 1*) we see that whereas the web clearly shows how other subjects could make links, mathematics is not clearly shown how it links to the topic "Region". It is not clear for a person who is not well informed about the integrated teaching. The fact that an example given in the scheme of work was not good at showing how to integrate Maths into the theme demonstrates a lack of good guidance during the training sessions. This, in my view, contributed to the difficulties experienced by our lower primary teachers in incorporating Maths into the theme.

By contrast, Gift took a different line, asserting during the interviews that not all the skills *could* be integrated. This view echoes Jones' contention (1995:8) that some content and some skills just *cannot* be integrated and must be taught separately. I accept this. When I reflect back on my own experiences as a lower primary teacher, I too found it was not always possible or even desirable to link all of the content from different subjects together when planning my teaching.

5.4.3 The extent to which teachers encouraged cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is an important strategy that can be used in a thematic approach to teaching. The Integrating the Curriculum document (2004:4) states "an integrated curriculum provides opportunity for organizing flexible student grouping". My study revealed, however, that cooperative learning was not used to any great extent by the teachers. Only Riisa favoured group work in her class.

It was interesting to observe how Riisa's learners worked with different tasks in their groups. The way her learners moved from task to task showed that they knew how to take responsibility for their own learning, and they showed respect and cooperation as they worked in their peer groups (Integrating the Curriculum, 2004). Riisa's teaching was consistent with the view expressed by the MoE (2005:30) that co-operative learning and collaborative learning should be encouraged wherever possible. Her tasks were designed and clearly explained so that her learners completed these tasks working in pairs or groups. During her lessons, Riisa's learners participated actively and eagerly. During the lesson Riisa acted as a facilitator, leading her learners to new discoveries (Downton, 1983:1). She moved around the groups giving explanations where necessary and helping her learners develop their understanding. The way she managed this is in line with Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development. Through a scaffolding process, she helped her learners learn more than they would have done on their own. She encouraged them to come up with their own answers and then built from there.

By contrast, no new discoveries seemed to be made in Dolly's lessons. She did not give her learners any real opportunity to construct their own understanding by working with their peers (either in pairs or in groups). All three lessons I observed consisted almost totally of questions and answers. I felt from the learners' behaviour that they had no real motivation

or interest in what Dolly was presenting. The fact that some learners just shouted out answers made the class seem chaotic. Drake claimed “for teachers who teach in an integrated way, there is fewer discipline and attendance problems in their classes as learners tend to be more engaged in the learning” (1998:18). Dolly’s classes seemed especially unruly to me. Her lessons did not engage her learners in the kind of active learning that would minimize discipline problems. In her English lesson, learners were instructed to read cooperatively in pairs but the whole process took place individually. Learners were given no time to share ideas or to learn from each other. Wadsworth (1989) argued that peer interaction is important for cognitive development. It helps a child assimilate viewpoints of others when they differ from their own. Zeichner and Dahlstrom (1999) confirm that reading provides good opportunities for peer learning and peer correction. Dolly’s approach did not accommodate this. The manner in which Dolly presented and handled her lessons showed that she still needs support on how to set up and facilitate group work. Her whole approach was teacher-centered.

My observations showed that Magret also avoided using cooperative strategies. She used individual activities in all three of the lessons I observed. One could, however, say learning *had* taken place. Her learners were kept busy all the time and she moved around constantly to help. This meant that her learners managed to complete what was required of them. Even though learners managed to complete the given tasks, her learners were not given any chance to ask when they could not understand or to talk to one another. Two learners who sat in a pair tried to talk to each other but Magret told them to be quiet. She regarded this kind of behaviour as not paying attention. This situation contradicts the view expressed by the MBSC (1996) that teachers should encourage active learning whereby their learners learn through explaining things to others and demonstrating. Nor does it correspond to Siraj-Blatchford’s view that “learning for young children is a social activity where new skills and understandings are gained through interaction with both adults and peers” (1995:2). Magret gave her learners no chance to explain or clarify things for others. In my view, learners may often understand better when peers rather than the teacher give explanations.

5.4.4 The extent to which the teachers used and managed learning resources

It was interesting to see how the teachers in my study used and managed learning support materials. Benson argued (2006) that using theme teaching projects and units enhances the use of a variety of materials. My research showed that in all the classes observed, textbooks and reference books were the main sources of information. The most commonly used teaching aids were maps, textbooks, chalkboards, posters and worksheets. There is a danger in relying on textbooks in that a text might deviate from what is in the syllabus. The syllabus is the policy which every teacher must follow. Also, some textbooks may have insufficient information, or contain information which is difficult for learners to understand.

Of the five teachers, Dolly relied especially heavily on the textbooks and her chalkboard. Even the summaries she gave to her learners were taken from the textbooks. She followed the text page by page without reference to any other resources. This does not meet the MBESC's stipulation that "teachers should be able to use local and natural resources as an alternative or supplement to ready made study materials, and thus developing their own and learners' creativity" (2002:1-2). It also goes against Drake's view that "textbooks are only *one* source of data required today" (1998:187).

Magret did use a wider variety of teaching resources. She made quite a few of her own teaching aids and also got her learners to make some themselves. Riisa did the same, and – as noted - also used many concrete materials to help her learners learn and understand the content better. The concrete aids supplemented what was in the textbooks, thus helping Riisa deepen her learners' understanding of the various concepts. Her classroom was a rich and colourful environment. This appeared to increase her learners' interest and eagerness to learn. The discussion that Riisa set up between the elderly lady and the learners, for example, certainly appeared to have a motivating effect. Cooper advocated exactly this sort of interactive approach which gives a learner the opportunity to construct meaning through a variety of problem-solving experiences (1997:416). The fact that Riisa arranged for the discussion to take place outside the classroom also helped her learners recognize that learning is not only something that takes place in school. They also learned that it is not only the teacher who can provide information.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that, other than Riisa, the teachers in my study are not yet ready to properly implement the changes required by the new curriculum. Perhaps a feeling of insecurity in fully understanding what the curriculum required could be the reason for this.

5.4.5 The extent to which the teachers' questioning strategies promoted higher order thinking skills

The thematic approach curriculum requires teachers to ask questions that promote higher order thinking skills. Most Namibian teachers have been exposed to the six categories of cognitive learning identified in Bloom's taxonomy, even though they may not always use them properly. Riisa did make an effort to ask many questions, which required critical thinking, but it seemed to me from these observations that teachers in my study have a long way to go in terms of setting up questions for higher order thinking skills. This of course may not be true of other teachers. Dolly used a question and answer mode, but her questions were directive, requiring only one 'right' answer which requires a lower level of thinking. My sense was that in Dolly's classroom her stronger learners were not really challenged.

Magret expressed awareness of the importance of challenging learner's minds by asking questions that promote critical thinking. Although she asked questions that made her learners do some thinking, they were not at a particularly high level. For example, she asked her learners to name their region and the regions that shared borders with their region.

I observed many unnecessary questions being asked, and not a lot of encouragement to learners to ask their own questions.

5.5 Challenges to making theory work in practice

It is important that teachers are properly informed about the thematic approach (Jones 1995:7), and that they can be flexible in the sense that they have the ability to adapt their teaching to what best suits *their* learners. My interviews revealed that four of the five

teachers in the study regarded planning and preparation as their biggest challenge. They needed constantly to consult the syllabi to find specific subject knowledge links and also to ensure competencies required by the Namibian curriculum were being met. It became clear that these teachers did not find it easy to integrate the different subjects into a theme.

Planning has been identified in the literature as one of the most challenging aspects of effective teaching. Williams (1996) argued that teachers have to be able to fully explore (and understand) different fields of study in order to be able to make appropriate links. Drake (1998) pointed out that teachers who do not get thorough in-service training or who do not spend time on planning and preparation may go wrong. It seems to me that in Namibia this planning and preparation has been left largely to individual schools or individual teachers. I believe teachers need to learn to work as a team. The HoDs mentioned this during the interviews: they both remarked that coordinating and supervising teachers is not an easy task: it needs hard work and it needs teamwork if it is to succeed. The issue of teamwork is an important one. Teachers may not be experts in all content areas. They may not have had adequate or appropriate in-service training. If, however, they worked together as a team, helping and learning from one another appropriate ways to make connections between subjects, this would greatly improve the actual implementation of the thematic teaching.

A second challenge that came through in the interviews was the constraints of time. The teachers expressed the difficulties they experienced with some subjects now having less available time. Magret felt that if the syllabus coverage could be reduced, it would be easier for teachers to teach better, and provide adequate support to every child in their class. This comment concerns me because the thematic approach was introduced precisely because the old curriculum was overloaded with content and had become too fragmented. The teachers became preoccupied with finishing the syllabus, instead of teaching for understanding. It takes time to implement the thematic approach. Planning takes time. Making learning resources and preparing lessons takes time and is a skill that needs to be nurtured, supported and guided through mentoring and peer coaching. Dolly commented on how it *“takes time to prepare resources either teaching aids or finding experts to come to class to explain certain topics”*. Teachers need to decide whether the expert should come to the class or whether learners should visit a place to observe what the particular topic is all about. Study tours and excursions can contribute greatly to expanding learners’

understanding of certain things. They allow learners opportunities to feel, see and hear from the experts or learn from real situations, but this it seemed was challenging to most of the teachers in my study. They appeared reluctant to take their learners out to visit places pertinent to the topics being covered in class.

A third challenge is that thematic teaching requires that a lower primary teacher has in-depth knowledge of the entire lower primary syllabus. I believe teachers need to have a much deeper understanding not only of their own syllabi, but also of the syllabi above and below their own grade. The revised curriculum makes it clear that teachers *must* understand what has been covered in the entire lower primary grades. There is a section in the curriculum labelled 'scope and sequence'. This section contains all the competencies to be taught from Grade 1 to 4. During the interviews it appeared that although these teachers are aware of this section they had not used it to familiarize themselves with what was to be covered in each grade. This handicapped them from making appropriate connections, and organising their teaching in a coherent way.

Finally, the teachers in my study identified time-tabling as a problem. In Chapter Two I mentioned sources such as Jones (1995:7) and the Natal College of Education (1999:17-8) who argued that learners learn best in a natural way where they are not aware of subject divisions. Drake (1998:178) clearly stated that there is a need for larger blocks of time so that topics can be properly cross-linked. The teachers I investigated felt the time allocated to some of the subjects was insufficient. The separation of the subjects and time allocations to different subjects created a further stumbling block, leading to a compartmentalization of knowledge. Each subject is officially allocated only 40 minutes which makes it difficult for teachers to fully implement thematic teaching. Subject divisions in the timetable tend to drive teachers to teach each subject separately, each within its own time allocation. Because of their concern about keeping to the time-table teachers tended also to switch across to the next subject even when - it seemed to me - the lesson content had not been fully grasped by the learners. My question then is why does policy argue against compartmentalization of knowledge when official time-tabling systems still have subject divisions? Why - if we want our learners to learn in a holistic way - do we not do away with timetabling and give the teachers the latitude to deal with themes in-depth?

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, my discussion reveals that teachers in this investigation see the revised curriculum in a positive light, but the majority have a shallow understanding of what exactly a thematic approach involves and how best they can implement it. This has a negative impact on their confidence and competence in their classrooms. Many challenges have to be addressed if we are to improve lower primary teachers' ability to design and manage a thematic approach effectively. Of the five teachers I investigated, only one - Riisa - demonstrated any real capacity for teaching effectively in a thematic way. She was also the only one who seemed to understand the other principles of Namibia's move towards more learner-centred ways of teaching.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the main findings from my investigation. I reflect on the challenge which lies before me as one of the educators responsible for bringing our lower primary classrooms closer to Namibia's reform dream. In my review I put forward ideas - based on my findings - for possible ways to improve lower primary practice so that the curriculum can be better managed in an integrated manner. I briefly reflect on the potential value of my study in both general and personal professional terms. Finally, I identify some of the limitations of the study, and offer some suggestions for future investigation.

6.2 Overview of the main findings

The aim of the study was to investigate teachers' understanding of the thematic approach and also to explore how teachers' put this into practice.

My study reveals that most of the teachers included in my investigation can verbally interpret the principles of a thematic approach, but this does not necessarily correspond with how they practise it. There are several reasons why teachers experience problems in implementing the approach, but two of the main reasons are highlighted below.

6.2.1 Inadequate preparation

The professional preparation undergone by many of our lower primary teachers was traditionally teacher-centered. Their learning experience was moulded by a teacher-centered approach and that style has become entrenched in their practise. This continues to influence the way they approach and understand thematic teaching.

It became clear from my study that these teachers were finding it very difficult to change their ways of thinking and acting. They were really struggling to adjust their old ways to the new learner-centered approach, and to implement the thematic approach effectively.

The teachers underwent a weeklong training workshop in preparation for the introduction of thematic teaching and the implementation of the revised curriculum..

My study reveals, in essence, that this time was not enough to compensate for the training gaps created by their previous educational experiences. Some of the difficulties they revealed to me during my investigation included the following:

- lack of suitable materials necessary for teaching the revised curriculum;
- inadequate time allocation for some lower primary subjects which then made proper coverage difficult;
- their own imperfect understanding of the subject matter and approach which then reduced their confidence in implementing the revised curriculum as was required;

It was felt that much more was needed than a one-week workshop for teachers on the introduction of the revised curriculum and the thematic approach. Very few teachers could fully grasp the concept of the thematic approach in this time. The school administration which is responsible for timetabling needs a workshop as well. Therefore in-service programmes have to be developed with extended prior training.

6.2.2 The legacy of subject-centered teaching

The tradition of subject-centered teaching is a big part of the challenge. Teachers are accustomed to planning different subjects separately as allocated in the timetable under different themes and topics. This is in contrast with thematic teaching, which now requires them to link the content of different subjects together. During my observations and in the interviews it became clear that their traditional ways of planning and teaching influenced the way they now planned their teaching. The teachers said that it was *much* easier to plan separate subjects. They are obviously still struggling to plan for thematic teaching. My study suggests that schools need to provide professional development to help their lower primary teachers cope with the demands of the revised curriculum, which requires this integrated approach to teaching.

The teachers were very concerned about how little time is allocated for some of the lower primary subjects. They argued that this prevented them from covering the content in proper depth. They were forced to rush to finish a topic within a given time framework. They also needed to have more time to do compensatory and/or enrichment teaching.

In a nutshell, my study shows that these teachers *do* accept that the changes brought by the revised curriculum had value. They believe that these changes could be easily followed despite some of the problems such as the lack of adequate learning support materials that are necessary to the revised curriculum. In order to implement a thematic approach properly, they just needed a broader understanding of the subject matter and of how to deliver it in a thematic way as required.

6.3 Critical reflection on the study

The main focus of Namibia's educational reform is on teachers getting a clearer understanding of how children learn, and of how learning with understanding can be achieved. Both the general literature and the Namibian policy documents reviewed reveal the contribution a thematic approach could make to greater learning with understanding. This approach helps learners connect in a meaningful way what they know from the real world to the knowledge they are expected to build up in school. It stands to reason therefore, that if the thematic approach is properly understood and correctly implemented by teachers, it would bring us closer to the changes desirable for our reformed Namibian classrooms. The thematic approach will be derailed, however, if the teachers who are the implementers do not fully understand the concept and take ownership of the implementation.

6.3.1 What I learned

As an Education Officer responsible for the Lower Primary Phase I am concerned about the problems the lower primary teachers in my study experienced with their understanding and implementation of a thematic approach in their classrooms. At the same time, after in-depth reading, observation and reflection I came to realize my own shortcoming with regard to my understanding of the thematic approach. Hence I have been forced to question my ability to provide proper guidance to the advisory teachers I am responsible for so that they can educate classroom teachers properly. This study added to my own knowledge and skills, and broadened my understanding on how best to assist lower primary teachers in the better implementation of a thematic approach in their classrooms.

The study has broadened my personal professional understanding of some of the theoretical concepts underpinning a thematic approach. It also has improved my thinking on how thematic teaching links to learner-centeredness and a constructivist view of knowledge. The literature that I reviewed in this regard has greatly enhanced my insight by forcing me to critically look at these concepts from different perspectives and explanations.

By conducting the interviews, doing classroom observation, and presenting and analyzing data, I have had an opportunity to develop confidence in articulating the thematic approach. My skills of probing, writing and presenting as part of the research skills have also been developed. These skills will be useful to me and the institution I work for as an added value to my professional expertise. I learned to be focused, disciplined and sensitive.

Needless to say, I came to recognize the value of triangulation in terms of how it can increase the validity and reliability of data. As a researcher I was able to become innovative. I used a variety of methods to give me deeper insight into my particular teachers' lived experience of struggling with their implementing of the thematic approach. I can really say that this study has exposed me to the research process and to how best to write about my research. My use of the English language has also improved.

As noted in my first chapter the goals of my research were to investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences about the thematic approach, and to explore how teachers plan and implement this approach. The study was done in an interpretive paradigm using a case study approach. This allowed me to interact with a small group of teachers and to understand how *they* perceived and implemented the thematic approach.

At the end of my research I learned through interviews that even if teachers can 'narrate' theoretically about using a thematic approach, this theory is not easy to implement. This showed very strongly how there can be a mismatch between a teacher's theoretical understanding and classroom practice.

As a Namibian educator, I have gained valuable knowledge and skills that will continue to shape me into one who values a more participatory and active approach to teaching and learning. I now recognise more strongly the benefits a thematic approach can have as a way of helping learners learn with greater understanding. I will use the experience that I

have accumulated from this study to guide lower primary advisory teachers within my job jurisdiction on the thematic approach so that they can facilitate the process further to the classroom teachers.

This is a small-scale study but the results have provided me with a deeper insight into teachers' understanding and practice of thematic teaching. I believe the results will greatly influence my work and that of advisory teachers and college teacher educators, so that we may be able to assist and support teachers nationally. My findings will be shared with all teachers, educators, curriculum planners and implementers.

6.3.2 Potential value of my investigation

This study has highlighted some valuable lessons. The thematic approach requires higher order thinking skills. It demands flexible, creative and innovative teachers who have a genuine understanding of the principles of the revised curriculum and how to apply these properly. I acknowledge that because the thematic approach is a new concept in the Namibian education system, it is not completely understood or well explained by teacher educators and teachers. Policy and curriculum developers may draw some useful conclusions from this investigation. They may recognise the need to intensify their efforts at national, regional, cluster and school levels to provide the necessary support to lower primary teachers to help them understand and teach the thematic approach more effectively.

6.4 Suggestions for practical improvement

There is a need to expose teachers more fully to the conceptual underpinnings as well as the practical implementation strategies for a thematic approach. I believe this can best be done through:

- follow-up workshops;
- ongoing site-based professional development; and
- peer support and mentoring.

It is also important that Inspectors of Education, Advisory Teachers and Principals help their lower primary teachers to adapt the lower primary time tables so that they are able to:

- cover the contents sufficiently,

- make effective links between skills and contents
- make connections between different subject areas
- utilise prior learning in the classroom.

Lower primary teachers in a school should be encouraged to set at least 40 minutes a week aside to come together as a phase cluster to brainstorm (think through) and plan their lessons, and also share ideas for learning resources. In this way teachers will be encouraged to prepare their lessons properly. It is inevitable that some teachers understand better than others, and such teachers can share their creative ideas and help others. A good example from teachers in my study is Riisa. She and Dolly are in the same school but have a different understanding of the thematic approach. It would be useful if Riisa were to be video taped teaching a lesson for use in future workshops as an example of good practice. For her it was more than just understanding the thematic approach but her whole teaching style and the ability to relate to the learners experiences.

The cluster centre should be better utilised to serve as a central point for staff development for teachers to take place. Lower primary teachers could meet regularly at the centre, to plan and help one another under the supervision of their cluster facilitator. Experts such as Advisory teachers could be invited to the centre to give demonstration lessons showing how the thematic approach could be planned and implemented. Learning and teaching materials, such as videos tapes, DVDs and CDs could be collected to demonstrate how the thematic approach could be implemented in different subjects. It would also be helpful to identify competent practising teachers like Riisa, and ask them to share their experience with their peers.

The following areas could be considered for future research in the field of lower primary:

- Reasons why Lower Primary Teachers find it difficult to move from traditional teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches (such as the thematic approach);
- More effective ways to deliver workshops and training to teachers who need to change;
- Different ways of integrating subjects, especially mathematics, into themes/ topics.

These suggestions need to be taken up by policy makers and implementers who realize their usefulness and relevance, and embark upon programmes to implement them.

6.5 Some limitations of my study

A first limiting factor of this particular study is that the findings are not generalizable. The sample is too small for that. Only five lower primary teachers contributed to the interview data and only three to the lesson observations. This information therefore needs to be contextualized as being relevant to a specific situation only. What this study has revealed could however, be useful to lower primary advisory teachers. I believe that my fellow advisory teachers who face similar situations could draw insight from these findings and from some of my suggestions for future improvements in their own regions.

Time was a second limiting factor. A number of questions arose from the study that - due to the time frame within which the study was conducted - could not be adequately explored or addressed.

The actual timing of the study was a further potentially limiting factor. The Grade 1 and 2 teachers were in their second cycle of teaching in an integrated way; the Grade 3 & 4 teachers were only in their fifth month of this new approach. Teachers need time to adopt, and adapt themselves to, new circumstances. They have to do this through trial and error, and by experimenting with different strategies.

And finally, I believe that my presence in these teachers' classrooms will almost certainly have had an affect on the 'authenticity' of these teachers' handling of integrated teaching. Having me conduct my research at this time would inevitably have added another layer of complexity to their teaching/learning environments. The fact that my employing institution is NIED may have further complicated things. Firstly, the teachers may have found it difficult to distinguish my official capacity from the *unofficial* capacity I bore during the research period. Secondly, it must also be remembered that I was a newcomer to the region, and that I occupied a position senior to these teachers. Consequently, I had to constantly reassure them that they were not being officially evaluated.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe I have shown that some gaps remain between teachers' conceptual understanding of thematic teaching and their classroom implementation of a thematic approach. I have also shown that there are systemic challenges in the implementation of this approach. However, I believe basic understanding and acceptance *has* been reached. What needs now to be done is for advisory teachers, and education officers like myself to strategize in terms of follow-up workshops, ongoing monitoring of circumstances, and ongoing support for all of our lower primary teachers as they try to improve their implementation of the thematic approach in their classrooms.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATED THEMES AND TOPICS

YEAR PLAN GRADE 4 – MATHEMATICS

Week	No.	Topic	Measurement	Number concept development	Computation	Problem solving
2	1	Know the region	Capacity: vocabulary Mass: vocabulary	Within number ranges 0-504 Counting Numbers recognize, read and write 0-10 Subitising Doubling, Halving	Do computation within ranges 0-499	Do problem solving within ranges 0-99
1	2	Origins of people	Length: vocabulary	0-504 Counting Regrouping Ordering and comparing	0-499	0-19
1	3	Our family life	Graphs: duties of family members	0-504 Counting Regrouping Number patterns Decade numbers	0-549	0-139
1	4	The culture of our region	Time: hours, half hours and quarter hours	0-554 Counting Odd and even numbers Decomposition of number	0-549	0-159
1	5	Historical places	Geometry: 2-D figures	0-554 Counting Decomposition of numbers Subitising	0-549	0-179
1	6	Means of transport	Graph: different means of transport	0-554	0-549	0-199
1	7	Communication	Time: hours, half hours, quarters and minutes	0-604	0-599	0-219
1	8	Current events	Time: Radio/TV timetables Use of calendar	0-604	0-599	0-239

PLAN GRADE 4- ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Main Theme 1	The Social Environment	
Topic 1	Our Regions	
Sub Topic 1.1	Know the Regions	Weeks 1 – 2
Sub Topic 1.2	Origins of the People of our Region	Week 3
Sub Topic 1.3	Our Family Life	Week 4
Topic 2	Our Cultures	
Sub Topic 2.1	The Culture of our Region	Week 5
Sub Topic 2.2	Historic Places and Famous People	Week 6
Topic 3	Infrastructure and Communications	
Sub Topic 3.1	Means of Transport and Links in our Region	Week 7
Sub Topic 3.2	Communications	Week 8
Sub Topic 3.3	Current Events and Issues in the Region	Week 9
Topic 4	Economic Activities	
Sub Topic 4.1	How Early People Lived	Week 10
Sub Topic 4.2	Farming, Fishing, Mining	Week 11
Sub Topic 4.3	Entrepreneurship	Week 12
Topic 5	Civics of our Region	
Sub Topic 5.1	Social Groups	Week 13
Sub Topic 5.2	How our Region is Governed	Week 14
Sub Topic 5.3	Security and Social Services in our Region	Week 15
Topic 6	Geography of our Region	
Sub Topic 6.1	Location and Physical Features	Week 16
Sub Topic 6.2	Weather, Plants and Animals	Week 17
Sub Topic 6.3	Our Settlements, Towns, Villages and Farms	Week 18
Sub Topic 6.4	Our Population Distribution	Week 19
Main Theme 2	Health, Safety and Nutrition	
Topic 1	Health and Safety	
Sub Topic 1.1	My Body	Week 20
Sub Topic 1.2	Growing up	Week 21
Sub Topic 1.3	Myself	Week 22
Sub Topic 1.4	HIV and AIDS	Week 23
Topic 2	Nutrition	
Sub Topic 2.1	Good Nutrition	Week 24
Main Theme 3	The Natural Environment	
Topic 1	The Living World	
Sub Topic 1.1	Living or Non-Living Things	Week 25
Sub Topic 1.2	The Needs of Living Things	Week 26
Sub Topic 1.3	Plants as Living Things	Week 27
Sub Topic 1.4	Plants as Important Sources of Food and Raw Materials	Week 28
Sub Topic 1.5	Animals as Living Things	Week 29
Topic 2	The Non-Living World	
Sub Topic 2.1	Materials and their Characteristics	Week 30
Sub Topic 2.2; 2.3	Water, Soils	Weeks 31 & 32
Sub Topic 2.4; 2.5	Light, Sound	Weeks 33 & 34
Topic 3	Environmental care	
Sub Topic 3.1	A Healthy Environment	Week 35
Sub Topic 3.2	Plant and Animal Conservation	Week 36

YEAR PLAN GRADE 4 –ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE

GRADE 4	LISTENING / SPEAKING	READING	WRITING	LANGUAGE
Theme 1: Social Environment Topic 1: Our Region Sub-topic 1.1: Know the Regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to and repeat songs, rhymes about topic • answer questions • revision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read for information • read factual texts and answer questions on topic • groups/pairs read rhymes, songs and stories for enjoyment • read prepared/unprepared passage on topic • individual reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write sentences • creative writing • practice spelling of words • formal writing – own paragraph • practice handwriting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •phonics •revision •verbs: simple present
Theme 1: Social Environment Topic 1: Our Region Sub-topic 1.2: Origins of people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to and retell story • answer questions • rhymes and songs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read for information • read factual texts and answer questions on topic • groups/pairs read rhymes, songs and stories for enjoyment • read prepared/unprepared passage on topic • individual reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write sentences • creative writing • practice spelling of words • formal writing – own paragraph • practice handwriting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •phonics •verbs: simple past
Theme 1: Social Environment Topic 1: Our Region Sub-topic 1.3: Our family life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perform role plays • rhymes and songs • group discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make and read own booklets on topic • read for information • read factual texts and answer questions on topic • groups/pairs read rhymes, songs and stories for enjoyment • read prepared/unprepared passage on topic • individual reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write own stories on topic to use for booklet • write sentences • creative writing • practice spelling of words • formal writing – own paragraph • practice handwriting 	Phonics u i verbs

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Region: Interviewer: -----
School: Time interview started: -----
Date: Time interview completed: -----
Time: Interviewee: -----

1. Teachers Background Information

- 1.1. Gender M () F ()
1.2. Years of experiences:
1.3. Grade:
1.4. Qualification:

2. The teachers perception of the new revised curriculum

- 2.1 What are your opinions about the newly revised curriculum?
2.2 Explain your understanding of the thematic approach to teaching and learning.
2.3 Why do you think thematic approach was introduced?
2.4 How did you receive these changes?
2.5 In terms of your teaching, what do you regard as the major changes brought about by using the thematic approach?
2.6 Explain the role you play in the implementation process (HOD)?
2.7 Did thematic approach influence the performances of learners? In what way?
2.8 What are the main challenges of applying the thematic approach?

APPENDIX C
EXAMPLES OF THE OBSERVATION
SCHEDULE OF THREE TEACHERS

Name: Riisa	School: Two	Date: 28 June 2006	
Class: Grade 1	No. of Pupils: 45	Lesson length:	
Lesson Topic: Economic Activities		Subtopic: Entrepreneurship	
Time	Description of lesson - Teachers'	Learners' Response	Comments
08:00	<p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Told a story about "Jack and the beanstalk" - Show pictures when telling a story - Ask questions about what the farm sold. - Ask questions using key words "sell and buy." - Ask the learners (Ls) to sound by analyse the word and late synthesis, put together the letters to make up a word. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners answer to the teacher's question and retell the story - Sound the letters and read (together) the whole word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners enjoyed the story whereby they used their imagination and made meaning through listening and retelling the story and answering questions - Good practice of literacy skills
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Put up the vegetable poster and ask the Ls to tell the names of all the vegetables in the poster. - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mention the vegetable and point them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One could think of how the connection with the topic money could be
8:30	<p>Handwriting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instruct Ls to go to their sit and take their work book, showed them where they should start writing and how 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Took their writing books and wrote the date 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask Ls to sound the days letters - Write the date on the chalkboard and tell Ls to write it in their workbooks - she calls Usola to be a buyer and ask Elvis to be a seller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sound the days letter - Copy the date into their workbook - They demonstrated buying and selling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Every learner was actively involved. - Children were fully involved. - Children were motivated to learn
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask Ls to tell a sentence that is having “sell” and “buy” referring them to the Ls who were buying and selling. - Wrote the sentence on the chalkboard i.e. - Ask Ls to read it the sentences - Ask Ls to write those sentences into their workbooks - Ask them to remember punctuation especially full stop, spacing and capital letters. - Teacher move around and help but this time she emphasize on the punctuation. - Ask Ls to bring their books in front and everybody did so 	<p>Usora sells sweets. Elvis buys sweets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read sentence over and over one after the other. - Copy the sentences into their workbooks - Brought their books to the front 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elvis used real money to buy and - Usola used real sweets to sell. - Good integration of language skills - Learners finished their work on time because they were kept busy all time. <p>The development of literacy in this class was properly enhanced</p>

<p>9:20</p>	<p>Mathematics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask Ls to count from 1-30. - Ask Ls to count in 2s, 5s and 10s. - Double: she use real sweets to do the doubling e.g. 2, 4, 6. - Ask them to tell how much each have - Discuss money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Count using abacus/bottle tops - Count in 2s, 5s, 10s - Answered 1, 2, 3 - Share things and tell the answer - They say coins and they play around the coins, 5c, 10c, 50c, \$1, \$5 - They answer questions about money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - she used real money and concrete materials The experiences learners brought to school were used and these help them understand the concept of money
	<p>Class Activity-</p> <p>Group work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divide learners into four groups and instruct them to rotate once they finish with one activity 	<p>Group 1: Worked on problem solving</p> <p>Group 2: Worked on buying and selling</p> <p>Group 3: worked on specimens of money and paste on the items</p> <p>Group 4: worked on adding coins together using real coins</p>	<p>The teaching was pure contextualised and was links nice to the sub-topic occupation and ways of earning money</p> <p>Seems learners are used to this type of working environment because the way they rotate was impressive</p> <p>Learners communicate and learn from one another</p>

10: 20	Environmental Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask learners to tell their parents occupation -Put up a big poster with different occupations - ask learners to relate this to their parents jobs - took the learners outside and interview the old lady who sold sweets, apples and cakes in the school yard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Answered, such as teachers, work in the house, seller, nurses, etc. - Examine the poster and relate what was in the poster to their real life experiences - draw and write the words that describe their parents jobs <p>Went out and discuss with the old lady</p>	<p>The question the Riisa asked was open ended questions that encourage learners to think and make their contributions</p> <p>The concrete material/ resources Riisa used made her learners learn with great understanding</p>
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Participant: Magret	School: 1	Date: 27 June 2006
Class: Grade 4	No. of Pupils: 35	Lesson length:

Lesson Topic: Fractions			
Time	Description of lesson - Teachers'	Learners' Response	Comments
08:00	<p>Mathematics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain the fractional part of the whole. How many equal parts? - Move around and explain for children who did not understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen to the explanation - Do the class work individually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - But it was not clear how Maths was integrated in a theme "our region"
08:40	<p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listening & Speaking – Geography in our regions - Ask learners to take their comprehension story and tell them to read. Explain the map of Namibia - Look at the questions and answer them. Ask the descriptive questions where do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Took their paper and start reading - Listening and look up the information in their papers - Answer in full sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was not clear how English differ from Environmental Studies -The whole lesson was on questions and answer dialogue.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you find Tsumeb? - Rundu is on the way to Caprivi. - Ask learners to write the unclear/key words. - Which area has less rainfall? - Ask learners to do exercise 2 individually. - Draw their regions. - Write some words on the chalkboard asking learners to look at them when answering the questions. <p>Worksheet 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete exercise by filling/labelling the landforms and colour the landforms <p>Environmental Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name all the regions - Name your region - Write the landmark on the chalkboard - Ask them to name a place where they find those landmarks - Give information - Put up a poster where the landmark is clearly indicated and written <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribute worksheet to each student in the class - Read information in worksheet <p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start a sentence with - capital letters <p>Helped by those words to answer the questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners mentioned Otjozondjupa region - Read them together with the teacher. Mention the places - Discussed the landmark and associate them with the region where they found 	<p>The questions Magret used did not encourage deep understanding</p> <p>Magret is aware of the subject integration. What is needed is only to be shown how language activities could be planned from the theme</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask learners to read table by table Ask learners to come up and show the land form in the big poster 		
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Participant: Dolly	School: Two	Date: 28 June 2006	
Class: Grade 4	No. of Pupils:	Lesson length: 40	
Lesson Topic: Transport and Communication			
Time	Description of lesson - Teachers'	Learners' Response	Comments
09:30	<p>Environmental studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When we talk about transport what are we referring to - When we are talking about communication what are you thinking - Early people (grandparents) used - Put up poster with different homes where early people live - The teacher also bring in the time and clothes that old people put on and food they eat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cars, trucks, ships, airplane, canoe boat, bicycle - TV, radio, letters, telephone, fax computers - Donkey cart - Children shout answers - Children shout answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This discussion could be taken further to the function of transport and communication Learners pre-knowledge were tested The teacher did the revision of different topics covered The whole lesson ended up without learners not been given chance to actively involve - One could then find it difficult to see the link to the theme
11:10	<p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hand out the textbooks for children to read with peers and ask learners to open page 57 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Page through the books and read on page 57 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading could be linked to the topic transport/communication. What learners were asked to read was totally different from the topic. No link to the topic. Literacy skills in this lesson was not developed

11:31	<p>Mathematics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Put up number chart and called some Ls in front. Ask Ls in front to point to the mentioned number while one child is pointing to the number in the chart one is writing the required number. - Introduce clock show the clock and ask one Ls to come and draw the clock and put the numbers - Short stick tells us hour - Long stick shows us minutes - Introduce the terms, past, to, half - Ask Ls to come up and draw clocks on the chalkboard - Some Ls divide the books to the whole class and ask them to open on 202 - Teacher explain the past and to - Page 230 (Calendar) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Point to the mentioned number and write the mentioned number - Came up and draw and allocate - Some learners were listening some were not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She use the number chart 1-100 which is below Gr. 4 Ls level - It was not clear to whether the teacher was keeping her lesson objective in mind because she introduced in many topic while children had no time to do their class activities. Others were left with doing nothing. This could be done by all the learners. - She could have given chance to the Ls to practice individually in their exercise books.
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APPENDIX D

TEACHERS' WEEKLY PLANNING

RIISA'S WEEKLY PREPARATION

Weekly lesson planning
Languages

Grade: 1.A Week: 7 Date: 26 June - 29 June '08
 Theme/Topic: Economic Activity Sub Topic: Entrepreneurship

<p>Listening</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> Learn how to use appropriate language in a variety of daily situations.</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> Respond with understanding to useful information in different areas</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> flipchart of story.</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Listen to story: Jack and the beanstalk Rhyme: Daddy goes to work</p>	<p>Speaking</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> Extend vocabulary</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> Demonstrate adequate phonic perception and articulation</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> flipchart of story</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Answer questions, using new vocabulary, discuss pictures Learn rhyme, dialogue, extend vocabulary</p>
<p>Reading</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> Learn to read words in various contexts and meaning</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> Read aloud with understanding prepared 6 to 10 word sentences</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> poster; flashcards sentence strips</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Sentences given by learners Vocabulary: buy, sell, stall teacher, farmer, mechanic, nurse used in sentences</p>	<p>Phonics/Spelling</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> Develop auditory and phonic awareness and skills</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> Demonstrate adequate phonic perception and articulation</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> wallchart</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Soft th- think thing thin three Look and say words Revise previous sight words</p>

Grammar

Lesson objectives:

Develop a varied (6f) vocabulary of about 2000 words

Basic competencies:

Demonstrate correct use of grammatical structures in speaking and writing

Teaching aids:

chalkboard
workbooks

Activities:

Punctuation: use of comma

The vendor sells , , ,
Mother buys , , ,

Handwriting

Lesson objectives:

Learn to write print script rhythmically and with speed

Basic competencies:

Use dominant hand and demonstrate correct grip using writing tools + correct posture

Teaching aids:

chalkboard
workbooks

Activities:

Uppercase capital letters (incidentally)

pattern: UUUU letters: u t

Writing

Lesson objectives:

Exercise copying writing words

Basic competencies:

Write 4 - 6 word sentences legibly

Teaching aids:

chalkboard
workbooks

Activities:

Creative writing: write name and discover familiar letters and another word with each letter.

Write short letter to friend

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Weekly lesson planning
Mathematics

Grade: 1. A Week: 7 Date: 26 June - 29 June 2006
 Theme: Economic Activity Topic: Entrepreneurship

<p>1. Number concept development</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> · Recognise, read and understand numbers and practice numerical notation.</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> · Express orally and in mathematical symbols their understanding of number patterns.</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> abacus, bottle tops, real objects.</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Sing counting songs, say counting rhymes, count in 2's to 20; in 10's to 100; in 1's to 35; count objects in picture</p> <p><u>Revision:</u> Doubling / halving: 0 - 10</p>	<p>2. Problem solving</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> · Develop their knowledge and skills to enable them to regard Math. as a useful tool for</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> solving everyday problems.</p> <p>· Solve story problems about everyday contexts using addition, subtraction, grouping or</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> sharing, abacus; bottle tops, real objects; story sums on chart,</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Read story problems/ make up own story problems; apply own ways and methods to solve problems; discussing, sharing ideas.</p>
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<p>3. Computation</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> · Understand basic mathematical concepts to master addition and subtraction.</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> Add / subtract correctly any numbers within the number range 0 to 10</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> abacus, bottle tops, crayons, real money; play money drawings; numbers; worksheets</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> Use counters to complete sums; complete worksheets, write from chalkboard into workbook sums in the number range 0 to 6.</p>	<p>4. Measurement: MONEY</p> <p><u>Lesson objectives:</u> · Learn to use Namibian money/ coins.</p> <p><u>Basic competencies:</u> · Recognise 5c, 10c, 50c, N\$1. and N\$5 coins and compute money values 5c - 50c</p> <p><u>Teaching aids:</u> worksheets, play money</p> <p><u>Activities:</u> · Select a set of coins equal in value to another coin up to 50c; · Select coins which total a stated cost up to 50c eg. $10c + 10c + 10c + 10c + 10c = 50c$.</p>
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5. Geometry

Lesson objectives:

- Identify and use two- and three dimensional figures

Basic competencies:

- Correctly identify and name two- and three dimensional figures

Teaching aids:

- different objects in pictures

Activities:

- identify shapes in picture
- describe the shape.
- count the shapes

6. Data handling

Lesson objectives:

- Learn to collect information and note and interpret data on simple pictographs.

Basic competencies:

- correctly collect, organize display and interpret data on and from pictographs

Teaching aids:

- wallchart, worksheet

Activities:

- Collect and display data appropriate to the theme. Entrepreneurship.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

MAGRET'S WEEKLY PREPARATION

WEEKLY LESSON PREPARATION

Week: 6 Date: 19-23 June 2026
Theme: Social Environment Unit: 5J.6.1 Location and Physical Features

1. ENGLISH

Objectives: Understand the role of grammar tone and style and the need for correct syntax.

Basic Competencies:

Express value issues clearly and strongly (social / moral / cultural)

Listening and Speaking:

Down in my area

Read poem, asks questions, answer in sentences.

Reading:

Ra, the Sun God.

Ask questions.

Phonics/Vocabulary:

lan - magician musician social dunes

weather, landscape, features escarpment mountains

Language:

Degrees of comparisons

good - better - best

Writing:

Write own story about region

2. AFRIKAANS:

Doelwitte:

Basiese Vaardighede:

Weklemtuon sosiale, morele en kulturele waardes

sterk en duidelik

Luister en praat:

Lees gedigge Noord, oos, suid en ...

Beantwoord vrae.

Lees:

"Die onverwagte besoeker." Lees en beantwoord vrae.

Klanke/Woordeskat:

winderig; sonnig bewolk yskoud reënrig

Taalstudie:

Trippe van vergelyking

hoog, hoër, hoogste

Kreatiewe Skryfwerk:

Beantwoord vrae skriftelik oor Namibië

MATHEMATICS:

Objectives: Mathematics: Understand basic maths concept (+-x÷) Learn to estimate with measurement (length)

Basic Competencies:

Compare estimates correctly using measurement in units of length in mm, cm, m and km

Monday: NCD. Count 0-754

Do number concept development Worksheet 1.

Tuesday: NCD Count in 2's 3's and 4's

Computation Worksheet 2.

Wednesday: NCD Count in 5's 6's

Working with length Worksheet 3

Thursday: NCD Count 0-754

Working with Ass Mass. Do assessment quiz.

Friday: NCD Count in 5's 6's and 7's.

Do problem solving.

ENVIRONMENT STUDIES:

Objectives:- Appreciate main geographical features of their region

Basic Competencies: Describe the natural landscape of their region e.g. (mountain, plains, dunes etc)

Monday: The four main direction and direction pointer

Tuesday: Describe the location of their on a map of Namibia using a direction pointer.

Wednesday: Identify natural features. Different landscape.

Thursday:-

Friday:-

APPENDIX E

TEACHERS TRANSCRIPTS –FIRSTLEVEL OF ANALYSIS

DOLLY: A GRADE 4 TEACHER

The teacher's perception of the new revised curriculum

1. What are your opinions about the newly revised curriculum?

For me it is good to have new changes in Education. But some where some how, we experience a lot of problems because we try to implement all the changes but all the materials to accompany the new curriculum like the text books are not available. However, the new curriculum makes things easier for us to teach and learners to learn.

Question: How has the new curriculum made your job as a teacher easier?

The learning process is going easier for both of us; the teacher had less to do in this side because most of the learning experiences are coming from the learner's side. But now the process of evaluation has changed. We had to do a lot of input before determining whether the learners have been promoted or not.

2. Explain your understanding of the thematic approach to teaching and learning.

The thematic approach is an integration of all the subjects in one theme. haa! Knowledge is fluently in one length.

Question: What is meant by the saying that knowledge is fluently in one length?

One theme is for all subjects. You as a teacher try and see which topic address, activities in Maths, English, etc. To learn one topic in almost all the subjects this is addressed in a different way.

Question: Some teachers have commented that children are bored because instruction is being repeated in all subjects. What is your opinion about that?

For me it's not boring because in every subject there are different competencies/activities as I said it already, that competencies that address different subjects, which can make different variations of their knowledge, broaden their experiences and sees the relationship between subjects. It is successful because for me it makes learners, come up with their own ideas and learns with understanding, because the theme they are learning are from their environment, they know what they are learning about.

3. Why do you think the thematic approach was introduced?

To integrate learning contents, because in the past, teaching were not integrated.

Question. How are both the learners and teachers benefiting from this approach?

It makes learners to follow the teaching and learning and use their imagination.

From the teaching side of the teacher, she/he has the opportunity to discuss their problems, concerns, help one another were necessary, involving in many workshops, having more encouragement in studying further.

4. How did you receive these changes?

I received it positively because compare to the past learners were forced to memorize things, learn through rote learning. But now they are thinking around the topic and give out their ideas, they discover things; to learn through investigation and they share ideas when doing the project work.

We produce learning materials, teaching aids that I am now using in my class and learn from one another. In the workshop, we update our knowledge and skills.

Question: Okay you have been used to the method you have been trained in, was it easier for you to accept/change?

It surprises me very much because this is LC. As I compare this method to the old method of teaching, there is a big difference in terms of learner's involvement.

5. In terms of your teaching, what do you regard as the major changes brought about by using the thematic approach?

Of course academically it has improved my performance because I have to search for more information everyday. And learners are also improving their performances.

Question: In terms of your learners, what major changes have you observed by using the thematic approach?

Learners are now discussing their things freely, sharing ideas, using their own words when answering questions. No more memorization.

NOTE: Question 6 was mainly for HoDs.

8. What are the main challenges of applying the thematic approach to teaching and learning?

Planning is biggest challenge because it takes much time. You have to read more to understand the topic, you have to through understood which topics can emerge. You have to prepare learning materials.

ANITA: A GRADE 4 TEACHER

1. What are your opinions about the new revised curriculum?

There were some subjects, which are not revised properly. Some are revised but not practically in theory. Some were practically difficult.

Question: Can you tell which areas were not properly revised?

Preparation forms. They could have decided on the stand form to be used instead of giving us the choice, we can design our own forms or we can use that form as an example.

Question: How was form presented?

It is not a prescribed form, it is just an example, you can use it if you like to or the school can modify it so that it can suit their situation. We are struggling a lot with the preparation forms. One wants this, the other one that, which makes it difficult.

2. Explain your understanding of the thematic approach to teaching and learning.

There is a certain theme which you can incorporate, the entire subject that you are teaching and all the subjects can make a link example 'transport' as a theme, you teach all the subjects based on that theme e.g. Environmental study, Maths, and Afrikaans everything is integrated.

Question: Do you like the idea of thematic approach?

Yes, it makes teaching easier because it links to learners experiences

3. Why do you think the thematic approach was introduced?

First of all, when I was teaching grade 4, before thematic approach was not introduced, I was bored because I taught a certain topic let say English e.g. grammar it was on its own, out of the blue, no link to other topic or a theme. I just pick any thing I feel its nice for teaching grammar but now when you teach grammar you try by all means to base it to the theme, which makes it very interesting to teach, and for the learner to learn.

Question: Can you say more on how it makes learning interesting?

Well, as a teacher, you have to prepare a lot of teaching media according to your theme, which you can use when presenting your lesson. These media can capture the attention and interest of the learners. What also makes it more interesting is the fact that all the topics have come from Environmental Studies, from learners' surrounding/environment. Another thing is learners now have to go and find out thing from their parents. They have share the information with the rest of the class. This makes learning a lot more interesting to learners and teachers. You don't get bored.

4. In terms of your teaching, what do you regard as the major changes brought about by using the thematic approach?

The major change is lesson preparation and presentation because this is my second time of being a grade 4 teacher. I was teaching before, but I can now see the difference comparing to how I was teaching, the major change is the teaching has to be based in a theme. The way of preparation has also changed because now you have to prepare a well detailed plan composed of all the necessary components e.g. objectives, basic competences, separate teachers and learners activities etc. Now you have to give a lot of work to learners and ask what they know already before starting your lesson.

5. How did you receive these changes?

Well, at the workshop I was quite positive, but coming back to my class, to the practical, reality I got frustrated. Before the top people introduce things like this, they must look at the situation in reality.

Question: What do you mean by situation in reality?

The method and approach is okay but the work is too much now. We are now working constantly with pen and paper in our hands. We are no more paying attention to our teaching.

NB. Question 6 was for HODs only

7. Did thematic approach influence the performances of learners? In what way?

Learners want to work, they find it interesting to find out things, and find it interesting to work with others on projects and group works. They are now participating actively because they are constantly busy all the time. They are eager to find out more and make new discoveries. One good thing with thematic teaching is, if learners did not do well in Environmental studies, they will do better in other subjects because they are doing one theme in all the subjects.

Question: Some people are saying it's now boring for learners, because what you teach in Maths is the same as Environmental studies as well as in English and you try to teach all the subjects within 40 minutes. How do you find it?

Not with us in our school. We integrate subjects in a theme but each subjects had different periods (each 40 minutes)

Thematic is very interesting, because we use the same topic. In Maths, you use it in problem solving for example, data handling, English-vocabulary or Creative work etc. There is no way it can be boring.

Question: How do you find the preparation, because some teachers are saying some topics can't be incorporated?

I did not yet experienced that yet but so far everything is fine.

8. What are the main challenges of applying the thematic approach?

It is challenging to get the work done in the time allocated. It is only one week per sub-topic and sometimes the time is not enough. So sometimes you have to pressure the learners so as to be on time.

Question: How about the planning?

The planning is time consuming; it needs a lot of time because you must also prepare the teaching aids, worksheets, cards etc. It needs a lot of time.

Question: Now that you are provided with schemes of work by NIED, are you following it as is or you are also consulting the syllabuses?

We are using both, the schemes of work, which is showing us how things are linked, how we should plan. The syllabus is showing us what to be taught, the objectives and basic competencies. It has also some suggested activities, which help us to present our topics.

MAGRET: A GRADE 4 TEACHER

1. What are your opinions about the newly revised curriculum?

Okay, hmmm, I think there is no problem about the new revised Curriculum; the new curriculum is good but the time allocated to some of the subjects is not enough because previously Social Studies and NSHE were having 9 periods, but now the same work are covered but the periods allocated to each is not enough and the work to be covered is much. I will be quantity teaching but not quality teaching.

Question: How is the curriculum in general?

Yes! But I think in some cases I think children will get bored because we do integrated teaching then the same thing over and over again that will be a little bit boring, if we have to use the same things all over again.

2. Explain your understanding of the thematic approach to teaching and learning.

A! HUUU! The thematic approach let me say now all of us are forced to do integrated teaching. So I don't think it is a bad thing, a lot of good can come out of it if we follow the integrated teaching.

Question: What are the good things you think integrated curriculum has brought?

If we repeat things in English then again in Maths children will understand it better.

3. Why do you think the thematic approach was introduced?

Maybe for all teachers in the whole country to follow the same format/way, our teaching can be in the same level.

Question: What about the learners learning, how do they learn?

They are learning in a LC way. The learners will have the same understanding of the syllabus content. LC approach is more enhanced

4. How did you receive these changes?

I have mixed feelings but we have to work according to the new revised curriculum. We were used one way communication, only the teacher talking and now learners need to be more actively involved which I think need a lot of preparation in terms of search for more information. And also we as teachers need to learn to teach in this way because we were trained in the method we were trained in.

5. In terms of your teaching, what do you regard as the major changes brought about by using the thematic approach?

7. Did thematic approach influence the performances of learners? In what way?

Yes because now in class learners are a little bit active and they are becoming confident.

Question: Why do you say they will be confident?

Because we have to repeat things over and over in other subjects, let me say they have heard something in English, and then they will hear it in Mathematics or Environmental Studies. So their knowledge will expand more.

Question: You said you have to repeat things over and over again. Do you want to say what you teach in Maths is the same as in English?

Yes! You teach the same yes. There are some things you teach in English then learners hear it again in Maths etc. because we are integrating different subjects in a theme from Environmental Studies.

8. What are the main challenges of applying the thematic approach?

I don't know if everything is okay, but I think if we start to follow the integrated approach, then thematic Approach cannot be a big challenge for us teachers. But preparation is a big challenge because there is a lot of preparation

GIFT: A GRADE 4 TEACHER AND AN HOD

1. What are your opinions about the newly revised curriculum?

For me it is good to make changes, you don't get stuck to a specific routine. But seeing that I have no class this year, I can't give my real opinion but what my colleagues say and what I observed during the class visit, Grade 3 + 4 topics for Environmental Studies is too much and I think the 1st language is supposed to have more periods than the second language. The themes or topic of the Environmental Studies are overloaded, too much information especially in Grade 4. We have to rush for the year to finish the syllabus. If we can get less, it's better for the teacher to teach better.

Question: Apart from the things you mentioned, how is the curriculum in general? Are learners listening to what the teachers say? Are they now relaxed or how are the finding it?

No, it seems as if they have more work now and it is more paper work than to pay attention in the class to see that learners really gain something especially with assessment, it has a lot of paper work but you can't say to the teachers that it is too much.

It will depend on the teacher how they are drawing up activities for their learners according to their levels. But according to my opinion, the work is too much.

2. Explain your understanding of the thematic approach to teaching and learning.

Thematic Approach to me is theme/topics with sub-topics and all the subjects are linked in these topics, e.g. Environmental Studies, Maths. Learners I think will understand more/better because the teachers always keep on referring to the same theme. For example if the topic is “My family” discusses it in Language and you can also use it in Maths. But some teachers are saying it is boring because you use one theme. But I think it depend on the teachers, how they plan and present different subjects, if you are doing listening and speaking in Language you can use learners in class, one is father, mother etc. Demonstrates the role these people play.

3. Why do you think the thematic approach has been introduced?

I think it is introduced because learners will understand the subject content better.

Question: Why do you say learners will understand better?

Because you say it over and over because children will realize and understand the link within different subjects. Again it forces teachers to pay attention to different ability learning groups.

4. How did you receive these changes?

I always accept changes and I try to work according to what is expected of me. The workshop we had last year was good, we understood everything during the workshop but when we came to class to put things practically, it's another thing. This is to say in the class it became problematic.

5. In terms of your teaching, what do you regard as the major changes brought by thematic approach/

I think the major change is it is more Learner Centered. All the subjects as I say are flowing in one theme. This makes it easier for learners to understand. This is, now the teacher has to give more work than previously and she/he is always there as a guide.

Learners have to involve more, the teacher is just there to guide and assist, but the learner also got the best out of it.

6. Explain the role you play in the implementation process (HOD)?

I do monitoring and Evaluation on continuous basis and help teachers. I conduct in-service training to my teachers in the school. Like this year, it was really tough because teachers misunderstood about thematic Approach, which is grade, 3 & 4 they're few months they are implementing it. We had a lot of these meetings to discuss concerns and try together to find solutions. If the teachers are having problems, which I cannot handle, I have to call in the expert a Lower Primary Advisory teacher for help or advice. But we are really trying in our school to solve and call them together to discuss issues pertaining the implementation of the new revised curriculum. Most of the time I render help and coordinate phase meetings.

7. Did thematic approach influence the performances of learners? In which way?

There is much one can say about how thematic influence the performance of learners, in a way for some learners it's good because learners are now showing interest in the learning and also are now involved. Learners are now doing more work, the teacher is there as a support by moving around and give more explanation to those who don't understand.

Question: How is the involvement of the learners now?

Some of them you can really see active participation but some of them are really careless but there are some learners, who work on their own and try to make discoveries, work on their own projects. This happened because of a lot of encouragement. The environments also play a greater role in learners' performance because after school some learners go to town without doing their work. Parents involvement has also a role to play in learners performance because even you give homework to learners, no help from parents side because they go for work and come back late in the afternoon. No one really see whether learners have done their homework or studied.

8. What are the main challenges of applying the thematic approach?

The major challenge is giving attention to individual learners. Preparation is also a big challenge, because you have to prepare thoroughly a comprehensive plan with all the necessary components. You have to work a lot on different subjects to see the link, so as to plan accordingly based on a theme. You also have to prepare.

RIISA: GRADE 1 TEACHER AND AN HOD

1. What are your opinions about the new revised curriculum?

This is my second year that I am busy with the revised curriculum, I was very excited that the school readiness is integrated in the formal work and I felt that this revised curriculum is like giving us more freedom to start earlier with the formal work and get it more done before the first term is over.

I am also excited that the handwriting that is out as a subject, we use to see it as a big problem but after working with it slowly I became getting use to it, in every lesson. Writing must take place. I like the revised curriculum. Somebody said it is not new, we are just revised and change few things. As I say it is my second year to implement it.

2. Explain your understanding of the thematic approach to teaching and learning.

Thematic approach is like topic base, like we took the main topic from Environmental Studies Syllabus and we based our entire lesson on that topic.

Question: You said you have taught for 31 years. How do you find it comparing to how you have been teaching?

I work more thoroughly on the topic/theme, because in our school learners have come from different background. Some learners have come from farms having no literacy and numeracy experiences but when they come to school, they hear the reading, counting and sounding for the first time. So when I work with them e.g. teaching phonics and counting I took it from the theme and teach it the same time.

3. Why do you think the thematic approach to teaching was introduced?

I think maybe because of the experience learners have gain from the community start with the learners experience and to make learners hear the same things more often to

help them cope with the learning experience. Most of my learners are Oshiwambo, Herero and Damara speaking. So it is not the language they are speaking. When they hear something over and over in a theme, the same theme that they are working on for two weeks, they will learn and understand more because they will relate this to the life experience in the community.

Question: I understand themes are taken from Environmental Studies. Why do you think so?

Because the topics in Environmental Studies are from the Environment where children are living, things that learners know, things learners have experienced in their daily situation. It is also in their level of understanding.

Question: Have you noticed any differences between topics taken from Environmental Studies and any other topic from anywhere?

The difference is that learners/children will follow nicely because they have experiences and knowledge about the topic already. What you have to do as a teacher is to find out what learners already know about the topic and start from there.

4. In terms of your teaching what do you regard as the major changes brought about by thematic approach?

It brings changes because subjects are now integrated. We have got time now for languages. The themes/topics are taken from Env. Studies and are based on learners' background and experiences. Children come with their own knowledge and experiences from home so the school is expected to building on it. Thematic approach is very much LC.

Question: Why do you say it is LC?

Because the teachers are encouraged to find out what knowledge the learners brought to class and build on them. Like yesterday my topic was "Transport" all the knowledge I used during the lesson, I just got them from the learners. When I say was do you see the transport? I got all the information I needed from the learners and I fully agree with the statement which says learners are not empty vessels when

they come to school. They are having knowledge that they have learned from the community. We as teachers have much to learn from the learners.

Question: Is that not what we have been doing before?

Yes! That is what we have been doing but not in this way. Previously the teacher come to school knowing s/he knows much and believes learners are going to learn from her/him. Learners know nothing. There is no way we can find out what learners know. Teaching and learning did not find out what learners know. Therefore that makes it different.

Question: What forces you to find out what learners know about the topic?

Now the topics are familiar to learners that are forcing us to allow learners come up with their own views based on their experiences. In the past it was a topic of another country, which you even as a teacher has no much knowledge about. Now we are integrating cross-curricular issues e.g. HIV and AIDS, these are things they know about, some of them come to the houses where people are sick, so it makes it more interesting and easier to talk about it and learners can understand you and can also say their feelings.

Question: Are you really convinced that this new revised curriculum has brought a lot of changes?

I think this depends a lot on teachers, also how the teachers are experiencing it and how the teachers are practicing it. Putting it in reality in the classroom.

5. How did you receive these changes in terms of your teaching?

I received the changes positively like last year when I was introduced to the changes; I was excited and positive beside the little administrative issues that we are experiencing in the schemes of work. Any how, I like learning new things because you are kept informed of the changes.

Question: You mentioned something on the schemes of work, some things that are not clear. Can you remember some of those?

We use to start with the earliest pattern that we think is easier for learners to start with. They have also started with letters but not the same as before.

5. Explain the role you play in the implementation process (HOD)?

It is my job to convince the teachers to implement the changes and be positive about the revised curriculum. I supervised and monitor teachers practice. I usually do demonstration lesson to help teachers understand subject content and the method to be used. Here in our school, we have nice group we are working together. I never want teachers to see that I know more than them but to believe we are working as a team and learn from each another. If there is a problem we come together, we sit and find solution. To be an HOD is so challenging, need co-operation, but teachers are really helping me.

7. Did thematic approach influence the performances of learners? In what way?

The thematic approach has influence the performance of my learners. This is my first year of implementing the thematic approach learner's performance in my class but is improving, in terms of doing activities and classroom discussions. I am really learning a lot from my learners especially now that learners are encouraged to go and find out from their parents and community. I follow the performance of learners of my learners who are now in Grade 2 by discussing their performances with their class teachers and also when checking and controlling lower primary teacher assessment record sheet. I can really see an improvement in their learning.

8. What are the main challenges of applying the thematic approach?

Planning and preparation takes time because we have to read a lot in order to understand the content and see the link. It is very tuff to plan teaching activities that can enhance learning through discoveries. To be an HOD is always challenging because one need to listen to all the teachers and encourage co-operation among and with teachers.

APPENDIX F

SECOND LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

1. Opinions about the newly revised curriculum

Anita	Magret	Gift	Dolly	Riisa
Some subjects are not revised properly. Some subjects are practically difficult e. g preparation forms	There is no problem about the newly revised curriculum, but time allocated to different subjects is not enough. In some cases learners will be bored, because we do integration, we are repeating the same thing (topic) over and over in all Subjects	Time allocated to different subjects is not enough especially for Environmental studies. Now that it's combined with social studies. We have to cover the same work as it was when these subjects were separated, but the time is not as it was, it is now reduced. If we can get less work it would be better for teachers to teach better. L1 suppose to have more period than L2.	For me it is good to have new changes, But some how, some where, we are experiencing problems, because we are trying to implement all the changes, but all the material accompanying the new curriculum are not yet available. I don't think we as teachers fully understand the thematic approach.	I am excited, because the school's readiness is integrated in the syllabus, which will allow starting straight with the formal work. This is fine because everything will be included also in the learning materials we are using. The Hand writing is also integrated in all the subjects, especially in languages. It's also good because it forces us teachers to write neatly and legibly and also learners to write nicely every thing they have to write.

2. What thematic approach is?

There is a certain theme where different subjects can be linked and teaching can be based on that theme. Theme teaching makes teaching easier because it links to learners experiences.	A huu we are forced to do integrated teaching, good things can come out from it, because we are repeating the same topic in Math, Environmental studies etc.	Thematic approach to me is a theme/topic with subtopics, where all subjects are linked e.g. Math, Environmental studies etc. Learners will understand more and better, because teachers are always referring to the same topic, but some teachers are saying it is boring because you use one theme in all subjects.	Thematic approach is the integration of subjects in a theme. You as a teacher must try to see which activities address Math, Environmental studies.	Thematic approach its like topic based. We have to take the main theme/topic from Environmental studies and base all our lessons on that topic. I worked more through with the topic/theme because learners in my class have come from different backgrounds; some have come from farms, they have no literacy and numeracy experiences.

3. Why thematic approach?

Anita	Magret	Gift	Dolly	Riisa
For learners to learn with understanding, because topics are taken from Environmental studies and the learners are familiar with the topics. It makes learning very interesting for the teacher to teach and learners to learn	May be for all teachers in the whole country to follow the same format, so that teaching can be in the same level. Learners will have the same understanding of the syllabus	I think it is introduced for learners to understand the content better. Because you use the theme over and over, learners will realize the link between different subjects. It forces teachers to pay attention to different ability groups.	It was introduced so that learners can learn everything together, to see the link and broaden their knowledge. In the past teaching was not integrated, therefore children were not making sense of what they learned	Thematic approach was introduced maybe for learners to learn from experiences, because the topics are taken from environmental studies. Learners are familiar with topics because they are what learners know and experienced in their daily lives/situations. Learners will follow because they have experience and knowledge about the topics. What we have to do as teachers is to acknowledge what they know and start from there.

4. How the changes were received?

Anita	Magret	Gift	Dolly	Riisa
At the workshop I was positive, seemed to understand everything, but when I came back to my class (to the reality), I got frustrated, because things are not how I understood them. The method and approach is fine but the work is too much. We are no more paying attention to our teaching rather we constantly busy with pen and paper in our hands.	- I received it through the workshop. I am positive about the changes even though there are some things that become difficult practically.	I received it positively, because I am benefiting a lot from this by finding more information, I am learning new things. The workshops I attend also contributed a lot to my understanding	- I received it positively, because I am benefiting a lot from this by finding more information, I am learning new things. The workshops I attend also contribute a lot to my understanding	I receive the changes positively, like I was excited and positive about the new changes beside the little administrative issue that we are experiencing. In the scheme of work there are things that are unclear

5. What are the major changes?

Anita	Magret	Gift	Dolly	Riisa
<p>All the teaching has to be based on the on a theme.</p> <p>Give a lot of work to learners.</p> <p>It asks what the learners already know about the topic. The way of preparation has changed we have to prepare a detail plan composed of all the necessary components</p>	<p>I have mixed feelings, I'm used to a one way communication, only the teacher talks, but now learners need to be fully participating, one need a lot of preparation and also teachers need to learn a lot in order to teach inn this way</p>	<p>- I like the change it is more Learner centered. The teacher has to give more work than before, learners to involve more. The teacher is there as a guide/assist. All the subjects are flowing in one theme, this makes learning easier for learners to understand</p>	<p>I like the changes; I received the changes through the LP workshop which was conducted nationally.</p> <p>The emphasis is on finding out what knowledge learners brought to class and build on those. Learners are having knowledge which they have learned from community</p>	<p>- It brings changes in our education system, subjects are to be integrated we have time now for language and Maths. The themes are based on learners experiences, which means when they come to school with knowledge and skills that they learn from their community. So we as teachers just have to build on those experiences and extend this new knowledge. Thematic approach is very much learner centered because teachers are encouraged to find out first what learners know</p>

6. The role the HODs play in the implementation process

Gift	Riisa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do monitoring and evaluation to support teachers - Conduct in-services training - Coordinate phase meeting - Call in experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Help teachers with the new revised curriculum -Work as a team -Do monitoring and help teachers with their practice -Do demonstrate lessons -It is my job to convince teachers to implement the new changes

6. Influences on learners performances

Anita	Magret	Gift	Dolly	Riisa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners are now participating actively, because they are constantly busy all the time. They are eager to find out more and make new discoveries. - One good thing is that if learners did not do well in English, they will do well in Math, because they are doing one theme in all the subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, because now in class learners are a bit active and they are confident. They are repeating things over and over. In this case, learners are becoming confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -There is much one can say about how thematic approach has influenced the performance of learners. - In a way some learners are doing well, their participation in class and progress. The passing rate has changed a little bit. - Some learners has started working on their own and making new discoveries. But the support from parents/home is not there because most 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the past learners were forced to memorize the facts, they learned through note learning, but now the change is, learners are to think around the topic and give their own ideas, they discover new things, they also learn through investigations and share ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Thematic approach has influences the performances of my learners in terms of discussion and doing activities - Learners are free to act, role play and asking constructive questions - I am learning a lot from the learners because I used to ask them to go and find out from parents and communities.

		learners are not doing their home work. That shows lack of parental involvement	with others in groups.	
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7. Main Challenges of applying the thematic approach

Anita	Magret	Gift	Dolly	Riisa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To get work done on time - Time is not enough to cover the syllabus content - Planning takes time because we have to prepare the teaching aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation - Giving attention to individual learners - Finding links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning needs more time - Read more to see the link - Challenging to prepare teaching aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation takes time -It is challenging to look for activities that enhance learning through discovery - To co-operate and work as a team

APPENDIX G

**LETTER OF PERMISSION TO THE OTJOZONDJUPA REGIONAL
DIRECTOR**

To: The Director
Otjozondjupa Region

Dear Madam,

Re: Permission to do research in Otjozondjupa Region

I am a registered part-time student with University of Rhodes (student no. 60516509). I have been studying for a master degree: General Education Theory and Practise since February 2005. To successfully complete my masters' degree, I am required to do research on a topic linked to course work done through the year and also related to my work as Education Officer for lower primary. My research 'topic' is **the implementation of a thematic approach in Namibian lower primary classrooms**. The study aims to explore lower primary teachers' perceptions and experiences of the new approach as well as to observe teachers' actual planning and implementation of it.

I am humbly requesting permission to use two schools in Otjozondjupa region in Okahandja as my research sites for report, which I am required to write. Data will be collected through interviews, classroom observation and documentary analysis with the HOD and grade two teachers. Should you allow me to use the schools, research ethics will be observed i.e. I will ensure teachers of their right to privacy and anonymity and obtain their participation consent. They will be invited to proof read drafts of the report to ensure that details are accurately recorded and reported.

As my research interest was triggered by the classroom visits and lesson observations that I do as part of my official duties, I hope that the result of this study will be of value not only to myself but also to teachers, curriculum developers as well as the education sectors in general. I will therefore be grateful if permission is granted to me to do my research work in the above-mentioned schools. Should you have any questions about this request, I can be contacted at (062) 502446 ext. 9022 during business hours or at (061) 223201 after hours.

Counting on your support and understanding

Sincerely yours



EO: Lower Primary and ECD

APPENDIX H

CONSENT LETTER- OTJOZONDJUPA DIRECTOR



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

DIRECTORATE: OTJOZONDJUPA REGION

Enquires: Ms F.N.Caley
Tel 067- 303212
Fax: 067- 304871

Private Bag 2618
OTJIWARONGO
27 March 2006

Ms. Alina Amukushu- Niipare
National Institute for Educational Development
Private Bag 2034
Okahandja

Dear Madam

PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH IN OTJOZONDJUPA REGION.

Your letter dated the 3rd March 2006 on the above mentioned subject is hereby acknowledged. Therefore, permission is hereby granted to you, Ms Alina Amukushu-Niipare, as a registered part-time student at the University of Rhodes for a Master degree, to research in Otjozondjupa Schools.

The Director does not have any objection for you to conduct your research at **K.W. Von Maree's Primary School, as well as Eden Primary School.** However, you are therefore, advised to contact the two primary schools, **through the Principals, to make arrangements so that your research will not interfere with the schools programmes.**

We hope that the results of your study will benefit both the schools, the Regional Office as well as the entire Ministry of Education.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

F. Caley 27/03/2006
Faustina Namutenya Caley
Director: Otjozondjupa



APPENDIX I
CONSENT LETTER- PRINCIPAL

To: Ms. Alina Amukushu
National Institute for Educational Development
OKAHANDJA

RE: PERMISSION TO VISIT OUR SCHOOL FOR RESEARCH

We have accepted the request of Ms. Alina Amukushu-Niipare to do research at our school.
We further agreed to assist her in any way she might need help from us.

Yours sincerely

THE PRINCIPAL

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