

◆ OBE INFO ◆

FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CURRICULUM SERVICES MAY 2004

MORE ON LANGUAGE ISSUES

In the Language in Education Policy, there is a requirement that all learners should study **two or more languages** in the pursuit of multi-lingualism. This has caused problems through the years as all schools already offer two languages (often just English and Afrikaans). Thus some schools take the position that since they already offer two official languages (with a foreign language sometimes), they are fulfilling the requirements of the policy and can maintain the status quo.

It is however important to read the Language in Education Policy as a whole to see the full context and to understand what the policy seeks to achieve. The clear intent of all language initiatives since 1994 has been to encourage the development of African languages so that eventually all South Africans will be able to communicate with one another in a particular area, because they will all speak the three or so majority languages found in that region, and so that languages that were previously disadvantaged now get the respect and attention that they deserve. The policy is clearly emphasizing the need for wider communication among all South Africans through the advancement of multi-lingualism.

In all Free State documentation and policies, the practice of true multi-lingualism has been encouraged and schools are expected to offer three official languages in GET. This is included in our draft policy. Through road-shows and energetic advocacy, we have found that the vast majority of our schools are co-operating and more and more schools are introducing African languages for the first time.

The Free State can report as follows on the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in the province:

The Free State has been proactive in terms of Language in Education as follows:

- ❑ *Road-shows have been held in districts explaining the language policy to primary and secondary principals as well as to School Management Teams. 3500 school leaders were reached during 2003. This has formed part of an advocacy campaign.*
- ❑ *A full complement of language learning facilitators (both GET and FET) has been appointed as languages are seen as a provincial priority. These field workers are all well informed as regards the Language in Education Policy and supply relevant information and do advocacy in all districts.*
- ❑ *The Free State has developed a draft language policy for the Foundation Phase sent to all stakeholders in LTA 26 / 2003 (June) which invited responses by September. We waited until the end of 2003 for responses and will proceed with the approval of this policy during 2004.*

LANGUAGE continued

This draft policy has been part of the training for the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) for Foundation Phase teachers (including Grade R practitioners, both at schools and community based sites), SMTs and principals (as well as departmental officials) and is also part of the training for Intermediate Phase with small adjustments.

⇒ During 2004, training in the Language Policy has been extended to the Intermediate Phase and in 2005, it will be extended to the Senior Phase and FET. Thus by the end of 2005, all components of the system will have been trained in the relevant sections of the Language Policy.

⇒ Full knowledge of and application of the policy will run parallel with the implementation of the Revised National Curriculum in GET and the National Curriculum Statement in FET.

⇒ The Free State has had a monthly newsletter, OBE INFO, since 2000. This newsletter deals on an ongoing basis with language issues and particularly the propagation of language policy.

The Free State Department of Education has attempted to bring everyone along on the path towards a more sensible and practical approach to language so that when our learners complete GET, language will not be a barrier preventing communication essential for their survival.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR ALL

In November 2001 the Free State Department of Education in conjunction with the Flemish Government, embarked on the Literacy and Numeracy for All Project within the Curriculum Services Directorate. The issue of improving the standard of literacy in our Province particularly in Foundation Phase is the essence of the above initiative. The whole project is embedded in the RNCS and was negotiated between the Free State Department of Education and the Flemish Government.

The training of potential trainers in Literacy is one of the operational goals of the project. A guideline manual "Fundamentals of Literacy for the Foundation Phase" has been drawn up in partnership with the Flemish co-operant who has been appointed for this Project. All Foundation Phase Learning Facilitators and Inclusive Education Personnel have been trained to become trainers in "Fundamentals of Literacy for the Foundation Phase".

It is on this guideline manual (consisting of 6 modules, which all need two afternoon workshops) that all Foundation Phase educators are being trained. The aim of this is not only to develop all our educators in terms of literacy but also to produce a common approach to the teaching of literacy throughout the province.

The trainers (Foundation Phase Learning Facilitators and Inclusive Education personnel) are supposed to continue with the training of all educators involved in the teaching of Literacy. The training of the educators in Literacy will also reinforce the training the educators received previously in the RNCS.

The "Literacy for All" project supports the Strategic Plan of the Free State Department of Education. This project falls under Programme 8 and is emphasised in Strategic Thrust 11 (Identify and align all interventions with the strategic objectives of the Department of Education"). As a result of this, the project serves Programmes 1 (Education Management), 2 (Public ordinary school education) and 7 (Early Childhood Development) in the Strategic Plan of the Department.

In some districts the project has progressed well. Planning for the whole district was drawn up and the training is happening according to the plan. The workshops conducted are at an appropriate standard and the educators gain enormously. Reports are submitted on a monthly basis. There is good co-operation between Learning Facilitation and Inclusive Education.

However in other districts progress has not been as desired. If there are Foundation Phase educators who are not receiving the benefit of this training, we would request you to ask your learning facilitator when their planning will include you. It is vitally important that a common approach to the teaching of Literacy (AND IT MUST BE TAUGHT!) becomes the norm in the province.

THEORIES OF LEARNING (especially for FET educators)

The theories underlying learning and teaching are being dealt with as a part of the training for the RNCS for educators in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. It is essential that FET educators also start becoming familiar with what theories underpin our OBE approach. This is the first in a series of excerpts from the Intermediate Phase module being used to train Intermediate Phase educators. The bibliography will be given at the end of the series of excerpts.

Introduction

Learning theories form a distinct part of *theoretical psychology*. In recent years, many psychologists have been dedicated to a study of learning theories. The interest shown by psychologists in this area is partially as a result of the interesting but complex nature of the concept of learning. In simple terms, psychologists are intrigued by how the mind acquires knowledge. **It is only if we know how knowledge is acquired that we will be able to use appropriate teaching and learning methods in the classroom.**

What is Learning?

Obviously, many researchers have attempted to define the concept of learning and no single definition can be said to be conclusive or correct. However, all attempts at a definition shed new light on the subject of learning. For example, according to Wakefield (1996: 364) learning can be described as a relatively permanent change in the behaviour of an individual based on his/her experiences or discoveries. Thus the processes of experience and discovery lead to a new understanding of the world and ourselves, and enable us to apply the acquired knowledge in new situations. **Knowledge acquisition, then, involves processes that transform data from experience into organised information.**

What is Knowledge?

The answer to this question seems obvious, but is it? Is knowledge something out there that we need to discover, or is it something that we construct? The answer depends on the perspective of the researcher. The researcher who believes that experimentation is the only true way of discovering knowledge will probably view knowledge as something that exists independently from humans. In this case knowledge will be perceived as something absolute and given.

The problem with such an approach is that it may not satisfactorily explain much of human knowledge, thinking and reasoning. Bruning, Schraw and Ronning (1995:96) make a distinction between three types of knowledge, namely, Declarative knowledge, Procedural knowledge and Metacognitive knowledge. Let us look at what they mean:

- Declarative knowledge, refers to factual knowledge.
- Procedural knowledge, refers to skills of doing things and how to execute activities.
- Metacognitive knowledge is about our awareness of how we think.

Furthermore, the knowledge that we have about a particular subject field is called domain knowledge. Such domains are best thought of in terms of traditional subject areas like mathematics, biology, language etc. Domain knowledge includes declarative, procedural and metacognitive knowledge. Note that the study of the nature of knowledge is called epistemology.

There are definitely no final answers to questions concerning learning and knowledge, and no theory can be found to be absolutely superior to others. Nevertheless, new discoveries take our understanding of the process of learning to a new and refined level. Furthermore, through the study of learning theories and their historical development, teachers should gain insight into the harmonies and conflicts that prevail in present educational discourse. Through this insight, they will be able to provide sound educational reasons for what they do in the classroom.

It is not enough to talk about theory without giving careful consideration to its practical implications. The value of any learning theory lies in its 'clarification' (or intention thereof) of classroom practice. (continued page 4)

LEARNING THEORIES con

Thus a number of learning theories support classroom practice at any given time. The point where theory and practice meet is generally referred to as **praxis**. This brings us to another question which is about teaching. If we can ask questions about learning then we can surely ask questions about teaching because the two processes take place almost simultaneously.

What is Teaching?

Like some of the questions posed thus far, we may be tempted to say that the answer is obvious and everybody knows what teaching is. But do we really understand what teaching is (and here we specifically mean classroom teaching)? Thick volumes of literature dealing with teaching exist, and it is not our intention to cover all of the important aspects raised in those works. But it is important that we touch on one or two aspects of teaching before we move on.

If we consider what we have said about learning and knowledge then the role of the teacher is to help learners acquire both factual and skills knowledge, and to help them use their cognitive skills to solve problems. But even this does not provide us with a sufficient view of teaching since teaching is more than just the interaction between teacher and learner. Teaching can be thought of as consisting of three distinct aspects, namely, **planning, interaction and assessment**.

During the planning phase, teachers think about the outcomes of the interaction and the needs of the learners that they will be teaching so that they can design learning experiences and activities in which the **learners will be involved**.

The teacher can generally include the following elements in his / her planning outcomes: instructional approach, declarative/procedural knowledge, learning materials, activities and assessment methods.

Interaction refers to what takes place between the teacher and the learners. Thus the learning situation should be structured in such a way that the interaction between the adult and learner will result in **realising the learner's potential for cognitive development**.

Finally, teaching also implies that the teacher assesses each learning experience created with the aim of **improving and developing strategies for assisting** those learners who did not achieve the outcomes set. Assessment can be done during the learning experience or after.

Conclusion for now

If one considers what has been said about both teaching and learning above, it is clear that this line of thinking produces a praxis we call Outcomes based teaching. By whatever name it is called, an approach with clear outcomes, with involvement of learners and with clearly designed programmes with built-in assessment leading to constant reflection and thus constant progression is the world wide educational approach of the 21st century.

PLEASE CONTACT 0832981119 OR 4054852 (051) IF YOU HAVE ANY QUERIES RELATING TO CURRICULUM ISSUES.