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## **From the Editor's Desk**

**We have two issues to say in introducing this publication to the readers.**

**First, for this first issue for 1997 the present editorial board wishes to acknowledge the initial preparatory work on the issue put in by the previous editorial board.**

**Secondly in this issue, we would like to reflect a bit on our Z.B.T.E. We feel it is appropriate that thirty three after the appearance of the first issue, we should refresh our memories by revisiting the original mission for the bulletin.**

**The original title of this bulletin was The Bulletin of The Institute of Education. The Bulletin arose out of a "cry for a professional journal concerned with contemporary teacher education and its problems both local and general ..... the need for a clearing house for information and forum for discussion". Vol 1 No 1, March, 1965, p1). Over the years, the title and format of the bulletin have changed to suit the changing times, but we have not deviated much from the original mission for publishing the bulletin as a re-confirmed by the Report of Teacher Education Review Committee (TERC) of 1986. It is our hope that the bulletin will continue to serve the interests, both local and general.**

**PROFESSIONAL STUDIES: EVOLUTION OR STAGNATION? THE ZIMBABWEAN  
EXPERIENCE**

**BY**

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Since 1980 numerous changes have occurred in the content and structure of teacher education programmes in Zimbabwe. The driving force behind the changes has been the desire to strengthen, in qualitative terms, the teacher preparation programmes. Effective teacher education programmes, would positively impact on the quality of teaching and learning going on in our schools since, as McNamara and Ross (1982) put it, "At the heart of the educational process lies the child"

In an attempt to create programmes that produce competent teachers, the teachers' colleges, in conjunction with the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Zimbabwe, have made deliberate efforts to upstage the role of Professional Studies in teacher training programmes. One such effort was the commissioning of the Teacher Education Review Committee (1986) which was tasked with the responsibility of formulating syllabus guidelines. Among other purposes, the guidelines would help "refine teacher education programmes so that they become increasingly more meaningful and effective" (TERC Report 1986 p iv) However, apart from pointing out that "Professional Studies is intended for pre-service teachers and combines upgrading of course content and methods of teaching subjects in schools" (p83) the report does not provide any guidelines on what constitutes Professional Studies nor does it provide a rationale for the inclusion of the course on teacher education programmes.

Lack of clarity on what constitutes Professional Studies and what role it plays in the preparation of teachers may have deprived teacher educators of opportunities to design effective Professional Studies Syllabuses. This paper attempts to define Professional Studies as well as proposing a rationale for perceiving Professional Studies as the key component of any teacher preparation programme.

May be the best way of defining Professional Studies is to point out the dimensions it encompasses. Vonk (1994) identifies three dimensions of Professional Studies: the personal dimension, the ecological dimension and the knowledge and skills dimension. The personal dimension focuses on the student-teacher's self concept. How do teacher education programmes help the student teacher to move from a learner perspective to an 'I - as - teacher'

perspective? As the student teacher moves towards and 'I as - teacher' dimension he/she has to grapple with the ecological dimension which entails adapting to a new school environment and the responsibilities that go with being a teacher. Adapting to the expectations of the new environment is made possible by the knowledge and skills dimension. This dimension encompasses pedagogical content knowledge, classroom knowledge and the development of a teaching repertoire.

Vonk's (1994) three dimensions of Professional Studies would seem to approximate the elements to professionalism suggested by Hirst (1979). Hirst argued that a professional must possess:

1. knowledge and understanding of the job, its context and its aims.
2. ability to make practical judgements of what to do.
3. skills necessary to implement the judgements.
4. dispositions, or a pattern of motivation and tendencies such that he/she actually does as understanding and judgement direct.

Commenting on Hirst's elements that a professional must possess, Proctor (1984) proposes a framework for the content of a Professional Studies course which has two broad divisions: professional knowledge and professional skills. Professional knowledge is deemed important because unless a teacher has some knowledge of children and their cognitive and social/emotional development then he/she is still working at the technician level. To avoid this, professional knowledge should be viewed as an academically rigorous and practically useful area of study in Professional Studies. In our Zimbabwean context this would mean following what McNamara and Desforges recommend - the abandonment of the study of separate education disciplines at initial training stage. Such a stance in the Zimbabwean situation would imply a re-examination of the current structure that divides Theory of Education from Professional Studies.

One way of proceeding would be to think of professional knowledge as consisting of propositional knowledge and practical knowledge. These two forms of knowledge would be derived from the current Theory of Education and Professional Studies B syllabuses. Propositional knowledge would entail an understanding of:

1. The ways in which children develop and learn.
2. The variety of pupils in terms of ability, behaviour, social background and culture.
3. Human relationships in schools; processes of interaction within a teaching and learning group.
4. Expected performance of children of differing ages, abilities, aptitudes and backgrounds.
5. Learning difficulties; giftedness; disadvantage.
6. Ethical, spiritual and aesthetic values of society as well as its political, economic and legal foundations.
7. The ways in which society and schools are interrelated - ways in which the

- background of pupils' lives influence what they bring to their learning.
8. The purposes of the curriculum and its relationship to the wider society.
9. Principles of assessment. (HMI. 1083 pp10 and 12)

The other limb of professional knowledge, practical, knowledge would deal with issues pertaining to:

1. Communication skills.
2. Creating a conducive learning environment.
3. Preparing schemes of work and lesson plans.
4. Educational media and technology.
5. Organization of class, group and individual work.
6. Selection and preparation of materials.
7. Techniques of presentation.
8. Methods of assessment.

The above two checklists would form the minimum requirements. They are by no means exhaustive nor are they prescriptions. They are provided here as a basis for initiating dialogue that may shape trends that can provide frameworks for improved Professional Studies Courses.

The other broad division for a Professional Studies Course that Rector (1984) proposes relates to professional skills. Professional skills lie at the heart of the initial teacher training process but it is not easy to specify the core professional skills that a student teacher would need.

Stones ( 1984, 1994) has made significant contributions towards identifying and defining the professional skills necessary for effective concept teaching. He argues that professional skills encompass complex cognitive activities and not merely simple motor activities. Motor activities are a manifestation of the deep structures of teaching ability which constitute the underlying mastery of principles and their practical application in helping pupils to develop effective learning strategies.

Like professional knowledge, the professional skills dimension of the content of Professional Studies can be divided into two broad entities - classroom organization and curriculum issues.

### **CLASSROOM ORGANISATION AND PEDAGOGICAL ACTIONS**

Although it is difficult to specify with certainty the professional skills required of an effective teacher it is possible to isolate some basic skill areas. The following content would need to be included in any Professional Studies Course:

- . integration of subject knowledge and pedagogy.
- . classroom knowledge

- . development of adequate learning tasks
- . organisation of pupils' learning activities
- . variation of pupils' learning activities
- . monitoring continuity in learning activities
- . adaptation of learning materials to the differences between pupils
- . pupil guidance (pastoral care)
- . creating conditions for pupil motivation
- . supporting pupils to play their role in the group
- . providing feedback.

### CURRICULAR SKILLS

Proctor (1984) singles out the area of curricular skills as a problematic one because of lack of adequate research data to go by. In Zimbabwe, Professional Studies Courses do not seem to pay close attention to this aspect. Issues concerning curriculum design, implementation and evaluation are hardly considered to lie in the domain of Professional Studies. It is the contention here that curricular skills should be focused on as the second limb of professional skills to be developed during initial teacher training.

Curricular skills content might include topics such as:

1. formulating and interpreting syllabus aims and objectives
2. the philosophy behind the organization of the curriculum
3. rationale for the teaching of the various subjects on the curriculum
4. access to the national curriculum: issues and problems
5. models of curriculum organization
6. syllabus interpretation
7. approaches to curriculum implementation: modular; disciplinary; integrative etc.
8. designing school syllabuses from national syllabuses
9. school and national examinations
10. time-tabling

Having delineated the possible content area that would constitute Professional Studies, it becomes important to clarify why this component should be seen as the key component in teacher training programmes. The overall aim of any Professional Studies Course is the development of professional competence in the student teachers. It may be prudent to ask; what components constitute professional competence? DES Circulars 9/92 and 35/92 concerned with the accreditation of Initial Teacher Training point out that the main objective of teacher training courses is to:

*enable students to become competent teachers who can establish effective working relationships with pupils. To do so, they will need to be knowledgeable in their subjects, to understand how pupils learn, and to acquire teaching skills (Council for the Accreditation*

*of Teacher Education p 9)*

The interesting point to note is that this objective roughly reflects the Professional Studies areas suggested earlier on. Student teachers need to have propositional professional knowledge which would require them to know their subjects, apply that subject knowledge in a well managed class.

It would appear that Professional studies helps to develop competence in subject knowledge, subject application, class management and assessment and recording of pupil's progress. Expertise in these areas seems only possible if student teachers are exposed to the Professional Studies content suggested earlier on.

Perhaps it may be prudent to indicate the value of developing competence in the areas of professional competence listed above. Subject competence helps student teachers understand what is implied by doing an activity using propositional knowledge. In addition subject knowledge exposes the student-teacher to concepts, ideas and principles that form the primary content of a discipline. Such exposure leads student-teachers to know how the fundamental principles and ideas can be transformed into appropriate and useful representations that make these ideas comprehensible to learners. Subject competence is developed through exposure to professional knowledge but subject application is developed through professional skills. Subject application can also be referred to as pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman 1986). Its main role in teacher preparation is to enable the teacher to transform subject matter in ways that will promote pupil learning through the use of the most appropriate forms of representation of the concepts being taught.

Analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations may be some of the ways used to make subject matter comprehensible to learners. Pedagogical content knowledge, according to Stones (1994), leads the teacher to think through the key ideas in the lesson and select alternative ways of representing them to learners. This is where the professional skills acquired in Professional studies come into play.

The professional skills component of Professional Studies helps to sharpen the student teacher's class management skills. Class management among other things focuses on:

- creating a conducive learning environment;
- organizing pupils into groups for particular activities;
- pacing lesson delivery according to the capacity of learners and ;
- motivating learners

Finally, Professional Studies helps student teachers to assess and record pupil's progress. They gain skills in reporting comparative information about pupils progress in relation to that of other pupils.

The professional competencies touched on above seem to coincide with the possible content areas for a Professional Studies programme suggested earlier on. May be what is now required of participants in teacher education programmes is to debate this way of looking at Professional Studies to see whether we cannot come up with qualitatively different teacher education programmes.

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