

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the first time for the degree of Masters of Science by coursework at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

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Abstract

The focus of my study is on how an informal science institution such as Maropeng Visitors Centre may influence teachers' knowledge about evolution and attitudes towards the teaching of evolution. This study was conducted because the South African government has introduced the topic of evolution in the FET (Grade 10 to 12) Life Sciences curriculum. The introduction of this topic is perceived as a challenge since the majority of Life Sciences teachers were not well trained on how to teach the new curriculum and in particular the topic of evolution (Ngxola and Sanders, 2008; Stears, 2006). To ensure that the Learning Outcomes mentioned in the policy guideline are achieved, teachers are encouraged to use informal science institutions (Nduna-Watson, 2007). There are several science centres and museums that are visited by thousands of teachers and learners in South Africa and this includes Maropeng Visitors Centre, Sterkfontein Cave, Sci-Bono Discovery Centre, Transvaal Museum, the National History Museum and others. Two theoretical frameworks were used as a guide in the development of the questionnaires and personal meaning mapping. The two theories are constructivism and attitudes towards science. Data was collected from the Grade 11 and 12 Life Sciences teachers who attended workshops at Maropeng Visitors Centre. The results revealed that some teachers showed knowledge gains in aspects of evolution and their attitudes towards teaching evolution have changed to positive irrespective of their personal beliefs. However, there were other misconceptions that were not changed by the visit. These included views about the origin of life which related to creationist accounts, and interpretations of the phrase "survival of the fittest". This study recommends an intensive content-based workshop is essential before teachers visit the museum or informal science institutions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Pages
Chapter 1: Introduction of the study	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Background of the study	2
1.3. Motivation	4
1.4. Aim of the study and research question	5
1.5. Theoretical framework for the study	5
1.5.1. Constructivism	5
1.5.2. Attitudes towards science	6
1.6. Delineation of the study	6
1.7. The report	7
Chapter 2: Literature review and the theoretical frameworks	8
2.1. Introduction	8
2.2. Teachers' knowledge and attitudes about evolution	9
2.3. Learning science in an informal context	14
2.4. Theoretical framework	18
2.4.1. Constructivism	18
2.4.2. Attitudes towards science	22
2.5. Conclusion	24
Chapter 3: Research design and methods	26
3.1. Introduction	26
3.2. Research design	26
3.3. Research paradigm	28
3.4. Research approach	30
3.5. Samples	31
3.5.1. Teachers	34
3.5.2. Intervention	35
3.6. Instruments used to collect data	39
3.6.1. Questionnaires	39
3.6.2. Preparation of questionnaires	41
3.6.3. Piloting the questionnaires	42
3.6.4. Administration of the questionnaires	44
3.6.5. Personal meaning mapping	44
3.7. Validity and reliability	46
3.8. Ethical issues	48
3.9. Conclusion	48

Chapter 4: Data analysis and interpretation of the findings	49
4.1. Introduction	49
4.2. Biographical data of the participation	49
4.2.1. Grade 11 Life Sciences teachers (Group A)	50
4.2.2. Grade 12 Life Sciences teachers (Group B)	50
4.3. Data analysis	51
4.3.1. Closed-ended items	51
4.3.2. Open-ended items	52
4.4. Research findings	53
4.4.1. Analysis of questionnaires	53
4.5. Personal meaning mapping	93
4.5.1. How personal meaning mapping (PMM) was conducted	94
4.5.2. Analysis of the PMM	96
4.5.2.1. Letsatsi's knowledge about evolution	98
4.5.2.2. John's knowledge about evolution	99
4.5.2.3. Sara's knowledge about evolution	100
4.5.2.4. Kgabo's knowledge about evolution	102
4.5.2.5. Des's knowledge about evolution	102
4.5.2.6. Mafika's knowledge about evolution	103
4.6. Conclusion	106
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications	108
5.1. Introduction	108
5.2. Findings	108
5.2.1. What is the knowledge level of Grade 11 and 12 Life Sciences teachers about evolution?	108
5.2.2. What are the attitudes of Grade 11 and 12 Life Sciences teachers towards teaching evolution?	112
5.2.3. Do the knowledge and attitudes of a sample of teachers change after a workshop and a visit to the science centre? If so, how?	113
5.2.4. What aspects of the workshop and science centre influenced their knowledge about and attitudes towards teaching evolution?	117
5.3. Implications	118
5.4. Recommendations	120
5.5. Limitations	120
5.6. Conclusions	121
References	122
Appendices	129
Appendix A: Pre- and post questionnaires	130
Appendix B: Data completed by participants during pre- and post-visit	135
Appendix C: Letter of request to the school principals	158

Appendix D: Letter of permission to conduct research	159
Appendix E: Information sheet	160
Appendix F: Informed consent form - teachers	161
Appendix G: Invitation to Grade 11 and 12 Life Sciences teachers' workshop	162

List of figures

Figure 1: Flow chart showing the overall research design of the study	27
Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation on how the questionnaires were developed and used in this study	42
Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation on how data collected was analysed	52
Figure 4: Simplified scheme of human evolution (Getty Images)	69
Figure 5: The percentage of Grade 11 teachers' preparedness of teaching evolution	92
Figure 6: The percentage of Grade 12 teachers' preparedness of teaching evolution	93
Figure 7: Example of the PMM drawn on the paper	95
Figure 8: Letsatsi's personal meaning map	98
Figure 9: John's personal meaning map	100
Figure 10: Sara's personal meaning map	101
Figure 11: Kgabo's personal meaning map	102
Figure 12: Des's personal meaning map	103
Figure 13: Mafika's personal meaning map	104

List of tables

Table 1: The schematic representation of research paradigms	29
Table 2: Part of the Grade 12 Life Sciences examination guidelines for 2009	36
Table 3: Content covered during the workshops of evolution	37
Table 4a: Results of Grade 11 teachers who provided the definition of evolution	54
Table 4b: Results of Grade 12 teachers who provided the definition of evolution	57
Table 5a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' responses about evolution and origin of life	60
Table 5b: Results of Grade 12 teachers' responses about evolution and origin of life	61
Table 6a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' responses about genetics related question	63
Table 6b: Results of Grade 12 teachers' responses about genetics related question	64
Table 7a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' responses about organisms' existence	66
Table 7b: Results of Grade 12 teachers' responses about organisms' existence	67
Table 8a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' evolution quiz	71
Table 8b: Summary of the results for Grade 11 teachers' evolution quiz	73
Table 9a: Results of Grade 12 teachers' evolution quiz	74
Table 9b: Summary of the results for Grade 12 teachers' evolution quiz	75
Table 10a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' feelings about the teaching of evolution	78
Table 10b: Results of Grade 12 teachers' feelings about the teaching of evolution	79
Table 11a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' attitudes towards teaching evolution	81
Table 11b: Results of Grade 12 teachers' attitudes towards teaching evolution	82
Table 12a: Results of Grade 11 teachers' responses about fossil formation	85

Table 12b: Results of Grade 12 teachers' responses about fossil formation	86
Table 13a: The summary of Grade 11 teachers who had strong religious beliefs	87
Table 13b: The summary of Grade 12 teachers who had strong religious beliefs	88
Table 14a: The number of Grade 11 teachers' responses about the centre's exhibits	89
Table 14b: The number of Grade 12 teachers' responses about the centre's exhibits	90
Table 15: Summary of Grade 12 Life Sciences teachers who completed the PMM	97
Table 16: Categories of the six personal meaning maps selected	97