UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF STUDENTS' PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the meaning of practical experiences in home economics for year seven students. The research sought to gain insight into, and a deeper, richer understanding of the meaning of practical by investigating students' perspectives and the meanings that they attribute to the practical through their actions and experiences in home economics.

The research involved the students and the teacher of two classes of year seven home economics students in a small town in British Columbia. The study was conducted over a twelve week period in the Spring of 1992.

Students from both classes participated in the study by way of response journals. In addition, nine students selected from one class participated in semi-structured interviews and conversations on four occasions.

The study used a phenomenological approach in order to elaborate on practical experiences as gleaned from conversations, stories told in conversation and response journal writings provided by year seven home economics students. Data was collected through guided response journal entries, audiotapes of conversations, and entries in the teacher's journal. The collected data was analysed and loosely collated into two categories; shared or similar themes, and variations or unique themes. It was through both the common and the unique themes that a sense of students' meanings of practical experiences developed.

The students' conversations, journals and stories presented a colourful collage of varied experiences and meanings of the practical which could not be reduced into a simple statement of definition. The themes did, however, speak of practical experiences as valuable and relevant assisting students in a process of "becoming." The practical from the perspective of the student is that which mediates between themselves and the adult world in their process of "becoming adult".
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"And the purpose of this activity," the teacher inquired. "You learn how to make your own food and then you can eat it," came the response in chorus.

Reflecting on my own experiences as a youth in home economics I can not summon forth a crystalline notion of the "practical." I did undertake a variety of enjoyable "practical" learning activities, yet I do not recall any thoughtful consideration or questioning of my understanding of "practical" apart from the day's handiwork and edible products. Nor did I view the activities as empowering me to take critical or deliberative action on problems related to myself, my family or my home. And perhaps on reflection that was as the activities intended, technical tasks oriented toward an end product.

The concept of the "practical" within home economics and education has been a contentious issue since the late 19th century (DeZwart, 1990), contentious in part because the term itself lacks a consistent agreed upon definition. Historically in its original sense Aristotle identified the practical as one of three classifications of the disciplines, the other two being the theoretical and the productive.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries practical within the context of schooling came to mean "manual" to describe the learning of skills that involved the manipulation of tools and materials. And "practical" has been used instead of "applied" to describe skills and ideas that could be directly utilized, but which may not necessarily be manual (Heyneman, 1987). The
notion of "concrete" also developed along with the "applied" and "manual" interpretations in describing practical learning as relevant to students.

Schwab (1969) added another interpretation of the meaning of practical in relation to curriculum. He maintained that the practical was concerned with "choice and action" (Schwab, 1969, p.80) and leads to "defensible decisions" (Schwab, 1969, p.80).

In 1980 Brown reconceptualized the field of home economics as a critical science. Within this definition the practical was defined as that which enables and empowers enlightened and deliberative action in solving problems of home and family (Brown, 1980). This conceptualization introduced yet another interpretation of the meaning of practical, adding a moral and ethical sense characterized by an individual's and family's critical thought, choices, actions and reflection in their daily lives.

None of these meanings or interpretations of the practical has replaced another. Some interpretations have been favoured at times because they appear to remedy industrial, political or economic situations (Layton, 1984), but they have all co-existed within education. Brown (1980) acknowledges and Thomas (1986) concurs that home economics itself as a practical discipline has been fragmented by the different interpretations. Currently all of these views of the meaning and significance of the practical are represented in our education systems, and often multiple views are held concurrently within the same school and department (Thomas, 1986). This fact in itself invites a new questioning, a re-view of the meaning of "practical" in home economics and education.

These notions or views of the practical from Aristotle through to Schwab and Brown are representative of an academic or "top-down" perspective, and it is from this perspective both historically and currently that school curricula is initiated and developed.

New home economics curricula have been developed in the United States and recently in British Columbia based on the notions of Brown. And it is the theorists, planners and
teachers like Brown who have conceptualized the practical, who define the "perennial practical problems" (Brown & Paolucci, 1979) and who design the experiences to enable and empower deliberative action in our students. But at no point have we explored the other key perspective, that of our students. We have not attempted to understand the meaning and the significance that classroom activities, what we may regard as "practical," have for students in home economics education; nor are we sensitive to the ways in which students experience such curricula components.

Curriculum planners and teachers alike make many assumptions regarding the learning that "will occur," or that is "expected to occur" as a result of undertaking practical activities in home economics. But do students see and understand these activities as we expect? For example, do students see their specific nutrition and food preparation activities as connected to enabling their action and solutions to world food problems? Do students understand consumer education activities and their connection to empowerment in solving inequities? Or do students see practical activities as breaks from regular schoolwork, as opportunities to socialize, or as time to make things?

There is increasing awareness and sensitivity in some branches of education to students' experiences in curricula. Studies such as Children's Experience of Place, (Hart, 1979), The Tone of Teaching, (van Manen, 1986), and "Seeing It Their Way: What Children's Definitions of Reading Tell us About Improving Teacher Education" (Bondy, 1990) offer alternative points of view to guide educators in curriculum planning and decision making. But as yet there has been little or no attempt to understand how students experience practical curricula, or to understand the meaning and significance that practical activities have for them.

In "Bases for Curriculum Decisions in Home Economics: From Questions to Lived Practice" Hultgren (1990) acknowledges the need for teachers, curriculum theorists and
planners to reflect on their understanding of the practical, to look at the field and to reflect on how we have experienced and understand the practical. Hultgren suggests this is a necessary step of re-viewing "what is," and "what has been," in order to go beyond to that which "could be." How can clear direction and focus of curriculum be achieved? How can the intents of the curriculum be met if we don't understand student experiences of the practical? It would seem that if curricula purposes and practices are to be defensible, we must consider not only the current understanding and conceptions of those that teach the curriculum, but also the understandings and meanings of those who experience it. The students' perspective cannot be neglected.

The focus of this research is on understanding, understanding the richness, the significance, and the meaning of students' practical experiences. Seeing the experiences of the practical through the eyes of the students will hopefully provide insight and understanding into this often neglected perspective.

**Focus of the Study**

Specifically the study will focus on year seven students' practical experiences in activities in home economics and the meaning and significance of these activities for them. The research will explore the meaning that students attribute to the practical through their actions and experiences in home economics classes.

**Statement of the Problem**

The research seeks insight into, and a deeper, richer understanding of the meaning of practical and the meaning that practical activities have for seventh year students. While the focus of the research is on home economics, other areas of the curriculum and experiences at home unavoidably constitute students' meaning.
Research Questions

In exploring students' practical experiences and meaning of the practical, the following specific questions guide this research. The central question of this study is:

What is the meaning of practical experiences for year seven students?

The following questions elaborate on the central question:

What school activities and experiences do students see as being practical?
What sense, what understanding do students make of their practical activities?
What is unique, and what is common in these experiences?
What is it about these activities and experiences that constitute "practical"?
In what ways is the practical pedagogical?

Background and Rationale

Concern for the practical has its origins with the Greek philosophers and Aristotle. During this time the practical was established as one of the three classifications of the disciplines. The concept of practical education in schooling which has been variously known as practical arts, manual arts and manual training has been associated with home economics in Canada for close to 100 years (Peterat & DeZwart, 1991). As the public education system expanded to include not just the elite, but all children, the areas known as home economics, agriculture and mechanical sciences gained recognition as school subjects. Their popularity increased with the "new" or "progressive" education which maintained that education should be relevant to the reality of the child's everyday life.
The "progressivists" included William James and John Dewey who believed that children were more apt to learn general principles and subsequently would be more curious about other applications if they had the opportunity to be actively involved with actual materials in concrete situations (East, 1980). But practical education was also relevant to the times and found support among the new industrialists and social elites as appropriate education for the working classes, and particularly for young women (Peterat & DeZwart, 1991). These interpretations of the practical stressed the utilitarian aspects in which manual skills and application of knowledge were promoted. Within home economics Alice Chown supported the progressivist notion of the practical, but cautioned against education for the home that was primarily utilitarian in its appeal and consequently anti-intellectual (Brown, 1985).

Jesse McLenaghen put forth the view of home economics and practical education in the 1930's as integrating knowledge, skills and attitudes from across the curriculum to better equip individuals for life in the modern world (Peterat & DeZwart, 1991). Schooling in the 1950s and 1960s was influenced by the launch of "Sputnik" and the ensuing over emphasis on science and technology. Technology, instrumental reasoning and empiricism dominated all disciplines including the practical where the utilitarian, product oriented and applied science interpretations were emphasized.

The rapid and continual changes in society and schooling have necessitated changes in how we as teachers and curricula developers conceptualize the practical and home economics. Brown's (1980) reconceptualization of the field of home economics focuses on the perennial practical problems of families. This notion of the practical has become a basis for the British Columbia curricula revision for home economics which emphasizes "understanding family problems in a multi-disciplinary frame-work" (Peterat & DeZwart, 1991, p.58).
In the rhetoric of education there is renewed interest in the practical and the significance of practical learning experiences. This renewed interest is evident in the curriculum and program revisions in Britain, the United States and British Columbia. In the province of B.C. new programs are organized around four strands, one of which is the practical arts (comprised of home economics, technology education, physical education and business education). Theoretically the revival of the practical in education in British Columbia in part supports a fundamental principle of the curriculum, that of being "learner focused." A key feature in the development of this learner focus is the provision of relevant curricula and learning experiences across the four strands. Students are encouraged to be "active learners," to take responsibility for their learning, to develop critical thinking and to be reflective. However, in reality the justifications for these practical learning experiences remain ambiguous, reaffirming many of the historical views ranging from the utilitarian, vocational skills acquisition arguments, to arguments for a competitive labour force, as well as for a liberal integrative education (Thomas, 1986).

As a home economics educator involved in curriculum issues I am keenly aware of the tensions that the conflicting interpretations of the practical have created in education and particularly in home economics. But what of the understanding of those whom we teach and who experience the curriculum? If we as educators and curriculum planners experience the tensions of conflicting interpretations, what of our students? Student and parent comments such as: "Mrs. M____. My mom wants to know what home economics has to do with families?" brings forth the vivid realization that misunderstanding and misinterpretation also exists outside the profession. Misunderstandings such as these reveal an oversight on the part of teachers and curriculum planners. We have overlooked how students experienced curricula. We need to return to those that we teach to discover and uncover the meaning of
practical for students. If curricula intends to support the concepts of active learning, reflection and critical thinking it cannot ignore students' experiences.

**Significance**

This research seeks to understand students' experiences, understandings and meanings of the practical in home economics.

In theoretical terms the significance of this study lies in broadening and deepening our understanding of the practical in home economics. By recognizing and understanding "what is" we can then authentically plan our curricula and our teaching towards critical social action and "what could be," and perhaps a reconceptualization of the practical, considerate of and attuned to students' experiences.

Understanding students' experiences and bringing their meanings to our attention has the potential to inform better our practice as theorists, curriculum planners and home economics educators. An understanding of students' experiences can facilitate the development of relevant curriculum, curriculum that is cognizant of the developmental stages of its audience. Furthermore, this understanding of students' experiences is equally if not more important to the implementation phases of any new curriculum, lessons or practices. Relevant curriculum that is implemented in a way that is attuned to its audience is much more likely to achieve its intentions. In addition, the research may also have implications for the design and implementation of teacher education programs.
Terms of Reference

Practical

Historically the concept of practical has had different meanings particularly in its relationship to education and home economics. It has been associated with utilitarian objectives, manual activities and the application of scientific methods and principles.

More recently in home economics education the practical is concerned with what Brown (1980) and Schwab (1969) describe as "choice" "reflection" and "action on those choices." This appears to be a return to the original Greek interpretation of the practical disciplines and the forms of knowledge and reasoning that are appropriate to it. According to Schwab (1969) the theoretical deals with abstractions and representations of real things and leads to the drawing of conclusions. The practical on the other hand treats real things, real children and experiences and leads to the making of defensible decisions. The essence of the practical in curriculum lies within these "experiences of actions and their consequences, to action and reaction at the level of the concrete case" (Schwab, 1969, p.91).

Brown's notion of the practical in home economics education similarly emphasizes choice and action. The focus is on the perennial practical problems of families. These problems are practical in that they are concerned with understanding and taking action after critical thought and reflection.

Today's home economics educators have most likely been influenced by one, or more, or all of these meanings of the practical. In fact one could make the assumption that we hold multiple views of the practical and the significance of practical activities in education. These different views or interpretations of the meaning of practical have as Brown (1980) acknowledges created tension within the field of home economics. I personally experience this tension between my understanding of the practical and the significance of practical
activities in education and the understandings of many of my colleagues and students. In part it is this tension which has provided some of the impetus for this research.

As an educator and researcher the meaning of the practical that I hold is based on Brown (1980), but has been further developed by Hultgren (1990). Hultgren considers the practical in curriculum as fostering the development and practice of attitudes, behaviours and skills of interdependence, responsibility, critical thought and reflection in a modern and complex society.

The purpose of this study is to uncover student meaning and come to a deeper, richer understanding of student meaning of practical experiences, and therefore any attempt at this point to put forth a comprehensive definition of the practical would be of little value. However, it is important to identify and make clear the understanding and the meaning of the practical that I as a researcher and educator hold.

**Meaning**

This study is concerned with meaning. Within the context of phenomenology meaning has special significance and it is within this context that the term is used in this study. Meaning is more than just the definition or significance of a thing. It refers to the experience of a phenomena and the understanding of that experience. For example, this study could have inquired only as to the definitions of practical that each student held. This may be quite different from the descriptions that students might give as to their understanding of the practical through their experiences. In this way a teacher can come to an understanding of "how a child meaningfully experiences or lives a certain situation" (van Manen 1990. p.183) without having the child explicitly articulate the situation and perhaps without their awareness of these meanings. Within phenomenology this is often termed "lived meaning" (van Manen, 1990).
Perspective

The focus of this research is to understand the meanings of students' practical experiences. It is the experiences from their points of view or perspectives, seeing the world with their eyes, hearing with their ears and understanding the world from that place, from the life world of a year seven student that I seek to understand. A student's perspective may differ from that of an adult or a teacher because of the different conditions which may affect or influence their views. A student's perspective may be influenced by prior knowledge and previous experiences with a phenomenon and their understanding of it. A student's perspective may also be influenced by their expectations and anticipation of both the phenomenon and of their experiences of the phenomenon. In this sense then a student's perspective is not only how they might view a phenomena or situation, but encompasses all that they may bring to the experience to make sense of it.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is associated with the philosopher Edmund Husserl (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). "It is a philosophical position concerned to describe the phenomena of consciousness, that is the foundation of our common-sense-taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p.100). Max van Manen (1990) has contributed much to the understanding of phenomenological research and writing and its relation to education. He maintains that a definition or true understanding of phenomenology can only be achieved by "doing it." However, he does characterize phenomenology through a series of remarks. For the purposes of this study van Manen's descriptive statements will constitute a working definition of phenomenological research.

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience.
Phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness. (van Manen, 1990, p.9)
Phenomenological research is the study of essences. (van Manen, 1990, p.10)
Phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them.
Phenomenological research is the human scientific study of phenomena. (van Manen, 1990, p.11)
Phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness.
Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human. (van Manen, 1990, p.12)
Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity. (van Manen, 1990, p.13)

Assumptions

It is assumed that understanding the meanings of students' practical experiences can draw us closer to an understanding of the meaning of the practical for students. Furthermore, it is assumed that students' experiences can be articulated and the meaning of those experiences constructed through conversations, stories and response journal writings.

The Organization of the Thesis

The first chapter describes the context of the research and identifies the focus and purpose of the study, its limitation and the definitions of relevant terms. Chapter two presents a review of the relevant literature investigating the concept of the practical and its various meanings in home economics education. Chapter three describes the phenomenological methodology used in this research. Chapter four consists of the description and analysis of the qualitative data. Chapter five is comprised of the researcher's reflections and conclusions about the research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study. It includes four areas of review:

1. The diverse views and meanings of the practical.
2. The meanings of 'practical' in education and in home economics education.
3. Related research on students' perspectives, and students' meanings.
4. Using phenomenology in the search for meaning.

The Origins of the Practical

The concept of "practical" and practical education is anything but a new concept. However, it is a concept that has over the course of history been re-vitalized, reinterpreted and reconceptualized in support of economic, commercial and educational issues. The practical originates from Greek philosophy and Aristotle who argued that it was a distinct discipline that differed considerably from the theoretic and productive disciplines.

Aristotle's "System of Categories of Knowledge" (East, 1980) formed the basis for the scholarly disciplines of science, art, practical wisdom, intuitive wisdom and theoretical wisdom (East, 1980). These derived from the "five states of mind through which truth is reached" (East, 1980, p.8). These five scholarly disciplines were classified as theoretical, productive or practical disciplines (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).
For each of these classifications Aristotle described appropriate forms of knowledge and reasoning. In the theoretical disciplines truth was reached through contemplation, "its telos is the attainment of knowledge for its own sake" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.32). In the productive disciplines the form of knowledge considered appropriate was "poietike" which could be best described as "making action" and is exemplified in the required skills and knowledge of a particular craft (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). "The craftsman's disposition was termed techne, a disposition to work in a true and reasoned way according to the rules of the craft" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.33). Because the productive discipline is concerned with the making of products it has often been interpreted as practical. Many school curricula and vocational/industrial education curricula are described as practical, but are in their original sense productive. From this productive discipline and the disposition techne we have derived the form of reasoning that is termed technical or means-end reasoning (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

In the practical disciplines the form of reasoning was termed praxis. Praxis can be understood as "doing action" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Praxis is differentiated from poietike because it is "informed action which, by reflection on its character and consequences, reflexively changes the knowledge base which informs it" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.33). In Aristotle's view practical wisdom was not about how things were made, but rather "the power of deliberation about how a whole state of being can be brought into existence" (East, 1980. p.8).

It is this definition of the practical by Aristotle which appears to be drawn upon by Schwab (1969) in his description of the practical in education and by Brown (1980) and Hultgren (1990) in home economics education. For example, Brown (1990) uses the term "deliberative action" which returns to the Aristotelian notion of action and change as a result of reasoned reflection and deliberation.
The Practical in Education and Home Economics Education

The "New Education" or progressivists in the late 19th century supported the inclusion of practical learning experiences in education and the inclusion of home economics as a practical discipline in public schooling. They emphasized practical learning using concrete examples as opposed to abstract reasoning which characterized the "old education." Manual training was important not only for utilitarian reasons, but also for its educative and sense training potential (Selleck, 1968).

The progressivists saw the orientation in curriculum towards the practical as fostering the development of the intellect. Students would be engaged in the application of general principles in concrete situations and would be more likely to explore further applications and transfer their knowledge to other situations (East, 1980). One of the proponents of this view, John Dewey had a significant influence on home economics. The "Cooking and Sewing" model is one by which home economics has come to be defined and considered as a practical art (East, 1980). It is based on an interpretation of John Dewey's inductive reasoning model. According to Dewey practical activities such as cooking and sewing were part of a liberal education if they initiated and promoted both inquiry and reflection (East, 1980). The utilitarian and vocational interests were quick to see the benefits of practical orientations in curriculum as a key to the revival of industrial and commercial competitiveness (Layton, 1984). This belief that education and particularly practical education could remedy industrial malaise originated around the turn of the century in Great Britain (Selleck, 1968) and has been resurrected at times during the twentieth century (Layton, 1984). According to Peterat and DeZwart (1990) practical education also became "classist and sexist" (p.57) as educators determined the education that the working class was to have and the "appropriate education for young women" (Peterat & DeZwart, 1990, p.57).
Dewey's notion of the educational value of practical arts was subscribed to by Canadian Alice Chown among others. Chown, like Dewey saw the educational value of practical experiences not in the making of a product as the "end" sought, but rather in the activity as the application of principles which then gave it "the potential to broaden the intellectual horizon" (Chown in East, 1980, p.22). However, it was the utilitarian and vocational aspects of the practical that were upheld in the early 20th century particularly by industrial concerns. As practical education became available to an expanded public school population there emerged the potential of providing industrializing economies with the necessary labour force. East (1980) maintains that as this manual training aspect of practical activities was increasingly emphasized it was as if Dewey's inductive reasoning model had been amputated, the practical experiences and manual training remained, but the notion of developing the intellectual traits, of inquiry and reflection were severed. It became as Chown had cautioned "anti-intellectual."

For women, the occupational/manual training aspect was de-emphasized in favour of education for their traditional role of homemaking. This interpretation remains deeply embedded in the current understanding of home economics and practical curriculum evidenced by the predominance of females enrolled in home economics courses. In addition, Thomas (1986) found that some of the descriptions provided by school and community officials continue to reflect the view of home economics as "contributing to homemaking skills" and as "something all girls should take" (p.164).

The integration of the practical into the public school curriculum has been neither smooth nor long-standing. In British Columbia it enjoyed a golden age from 1935 until about 1960 with the support of Jessie McLenaghen (DeZwart, 1990). McLenaghen maintained that home economics was practical because it drew its content from many subjects across the curriculum to address the issues and problems of living in the times:
Practical Arts courses justify their place in a curriculum today upon the basis of social need as well as upon their cultural values to the individual, and therefore they have attained a new status in education. They are gradually being regarded as a necessary agency in the development of types of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which are increasingly necessary for successful living in a new and extremely complex social and economic order.

(British Columbia Department of Education, 1934-5, p.248)

In a new expansionary phase of the late 1950s and early 1960s curriculum became less integrated and more specialized and technically oriented (DeZwart, 1990). Science and technology were given a high priority in the post-Sputnik era in schooling, and the instrumental and applied approaches to practical activities were emphasized. Within home economics this encouraged the use and application of scientific knowledge to the practical activities of everyday life (Thomas, 1986). The purpose was to control and improve the environment. Science and technology influenced food preparation as in "kitchen science" or "food science" courses, where educators focused on such things as the properties and functions of carbon dioxide gas in baking. Earlier in this century the applied science view had also been emphasized and was concerned with the physical and biological sciences in terms of health and sanitation. Later in the 1960s the social sciences became more visible, and there was a corresponding shift in home economics to a "focus on the family as a social environment" (Thomas, 1986, p.167).

Currently within home economics Hultgren (1990) considers the practical in curriculum as fostering the development and practice of attitudes, behaviours and skills of interdependence, responsibility, critical thought and reflection in a modern and complex society. In both the views of Hultgren (1990) and Brown (1985) home economics is a critical
science and with the introduction of this critical view there is a moral-ethical notion attached to our understanding of the practical.

These conceptions of home economics are consistent with one of the four historical views of the discipline put forth by Thomas (1986), that of "Education for Household Management" (p.171). This view is rooted within Aristotle's description of practical wisdom and households and supports "the practical as a home economics perspective" (Thomas, 1986, p.171). Underlying this view of home economics is the democratic notion of improvement or betterment through thoughtful deliberation and planned action to determine and achieve worthy goals and states. The major concern of the "Household Management" view is with achieving a "good life" which in turn produces "good people" (Thomas, 1986, p.171). While "Household Management" reaffirms the current conception of practical as choice, deliberation and action, the term unfortunately has been misinterpreted by many who are unaware of its history. Consequently "Household Management" is frequently associated with the view of home economics as appropriate education for women (Thomas, 1986).

In recent years the concept of practical has been re-introduced into the educational rhetoric, particularly in curriculum revisions in the United Kingdom, and in British Columbia. However, it does not appear that the concept has been clarified, nor rehabilitated to its original sense.

The many and divergent views of home economics and the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the practical as a home economics perspective has from the outset led to tension and dichotomy within the field. There remain those from a technical rationality that hold home economics as an applied science and support practical experiences in home economics for skills acquisition and vocational interests. This view of the practical is concerned with the end product or materials which have value in and of themselves. Others hold the practical in home economics as part of a liberal arts education, supporting cultural interests and enabling
"productive action" (East, 1980, p.15). In this view of the practical the product is the means by which one can enter into larger considerations. The material or product may not be necessary, "but the deliberation is practical, focused in moral and ethical considerations" (L. Peterat, personal communication, October, 1990). However, for the most part home economics educators try to synthesize and pull together these different views to present a "coherent whole" in our K-12 home economics programs (Thomas, 1986, p.162).

Public perception is equally confused. Divergent conceptualizations have affected students and the community. The meaning, significance and implications of practical experiences in home economics are different depending on one's view of home economics and understanding of the practical. For example, experiences in food preparation activities in classrooms where the understanding of the practical is utilitarian and supportive of vocational interests may emphasize the acquisition of skill and focus on the "end product" as in a lesson on preparing and cooking meat. Whereas experiences in which the food preparation is a process of applying principles, of orienting student's inquiry and reflection, then the process has the potential to enable productive or deliberative action in solving problems related to home and family (Brown, 1985; East, 1980). For example, where the preparation of a meatless meal is part of a larger study/problem solving exercise based on questions like: "What should be done about the health risks related to animal proteins, and, what should be done about the environmental costs of providing animal proteins?"

The purpose of this review has been to establish the development and current understandings of the practical in home economics. To date as Thomas (1986) suggests, the home economics "whole" has been a synthesis of these views with differing emphases at different times. However, curriculum decisions are made and planned in support of a particular view. There has been much discussion regarding the conceptual and paradigmatic change that home economics educators need to make to support a critical view of the
practical, but all this is accomplished from a perspective which appears disassociated with the very foundation which gives it legitimacy, the students.

Authentic and defensible curriculum, be it practical or otherwise, must be grounded, must be considerate of and attuned to those who will experience it. Understanding students' meanings of the practical, starting from their experience, forms part of the logical ground from which to make such curricular decisions.

**Related Research: Students' Perspectives**

The notion of a student's perspective is an emerging concept within education, but one that is not yet reflected to a great extent in the literature. In today's curriculum terminology one hears "learner-focus," "child centered" and "active learning," to describe ways in which students are encouraged to become involved, responsible and reflective about their thinking and learning. However, these concepts alone are not sufficient to describe a student perspective.

A student's perspective needs to encompass experiences, and what those experiences are like, what meaning and significance they have. What is it like to understand something? What is it like to know? As educators and curriculum developers we often talk and think about children "professionally," in theoretical language overlooking the uniqueness that each child brings to school. Van Manen (1990) suggests we attach theories to everything in our lives to make sense of our world and forget "that it is living human beings who bring schemata and frameworks into being and not the reverse" (p.45).

Bollnow in a phenomenological writing translated by van Manen explores the "Pedagogical Atmosphere." He defines the Pedagogical Atmosphere as all "those affective conditions and qualities which are necessary for the raising or educating of children to be possible or successful" (Bollnow, 1989, p.5). In this pedagogical situation he explores the
The perspective of the child is characterized by the necessary and fundamental preconditions for learning. The most important of these are the pedagogical relationships of trust and security between child and parent, and between child and educator, and the virtues of the child. The virtues of the child are described within the context of "mood and life feeling" which includes cheerfulness, joy, expectation and the sense of "morning-ness" (Bollnow, 1989, p.22). Bollnow suggests that it is within the notion of "morning-ness" that lies the significance for pedagogy, in its unique character which presents the pre-conditions on which "all future approaches to education should be based in order to be successful" (Bollnow, 1989, p.24).

"Morning-ness" is that "sense of the joyful unfolding of lived time" (Bollnow, 1989, P.22). Experiencing morning is to experience a new beginning, an awakening, a freshness, a brightness towards the day. Expectation is very much a part of the "morning-ness" in a child's perspective. However, Bollnow (1989) maintains that educators "have no idea what the expectations with which children confront the future mean for them" (Bollnow, 1989, p.28). "Educators are usually oblivious of the often exciting expectations children cherish..... and they tend to plan their curriculum without any consideration- completely independent of what it means for children" (Bollnow, 1989, p.28). It is "these forgotten notions, the child's silent ideas and questions, which connect the new concepts to life in a deeper way" (Bollnow, 1989, p.28.)

If curriculum is to be authentic, if it is to be truly learner focused, then it must foster the spirit of "morning-ness," it must be considerate of and attuned to the perspectives of students, to their expectations, and to the meaning that experiences have for them. Max van Manen (1990) perhaps best summarizes the importance of the student's perspective when he
inquires, "Can classroom methodology be responsive if it does not understand the ups and downs of one child's experience?" (p.150).

**Related Research: Students' Meanings**

As curriculum theorists, planners and educators we design and implement practical activities to attain desired learning outcomes with respect to knowledge, skills and attitudes. We make assumptions about the learning and understanding that will occur as a result of the lessons we plan. We assume that students see, know and understand as we do. In discussions on the principle of "understanding" McClaren (1988) notes that students do not arrive in our classes as "blank slates." "They bring with them existing ideas, past experiences, and established patterns" (McClaren, 1988 p.97). New ideas and knowledge that is presented becomes integrated with the established structures (McLaren, 1988, p.97). This integration is not the same, nor does it occur in the same way for everyone. The integration may be faulty, old concepts may not be replaced, or modified. New information may be superimposed atop old, consequently, the potential for knowing and understanding differently is great.

In the area of curriculum implementation the teacher is one of the key factors in the success or failure of new curricula. Considerable research, inservice and pre-service training goes into determining what the curriculum and the changes mean for teachers (Fullan, 1982). However, we make the assumption it seems that the pre-understandings and meanings that curricula have for students are of no consequence. While we purport to be learner focused and encourage students to become more actively involved in their learning, we do not adequately consider the meanings and understandings that they already hold. Similarly, Hart (1979) in *Children's Experience of Place* found that "any attempts to design successful environments with children should be preceded by an understanding of children's activities in and experience of the physical environment" (p.3).
The notion of understanding the child's perspective, and meanings was also portrayed rather humourously in the movie "Big" starring Tom Hanks. Hank's character is a little boy who is granted his wish of becoming big. Trapped inside the big adult body Hanks is still the child, a child who manages to climb the corporate ladder in the toy business. His success arose from his uncanny ability to know and understand toys and play from a child's perspective. While "Big" was sentimental and entertaining it did make very clear the point that we cannot ignore the meanings, understandings and experiences of children in designing curricula, (toys, environments).

While there is considerable phenomenological research on human experience and the meaning and significance of experience, it is primarily from an adult perspective. There is little research available that explores the perspective of the child or the young student. The obvious difficulties surrounding the child's ability to articulate and communicate do not negate the richness nor the value of the experiences, it does however make them much more difficult to access. How does one understand and interpret student experience and what those experiences mean for them?

In "Seeing It their Way: What Children's Definitions of Reading Tell us About Improving Teacher Education" Bondy (1990) focused on first grade students' social construction of definitions of reading. Bondy (1990) used interviews and observation in a qualitative study that drew from constructivist and symbolic interactionist theory. The student definitions of reading were not their own direct verbal accounts, rather they were socially constructed from the classroom contexts, and from the types of reading activities that were presented. Bondy (1990) explains, "by focusing on the many classroom contexts in which reading occurred, I investigated 'the work that teachers and students do together to construct, maintain, and modify their definitions and conceptions about reading'"(p.33). For
example, "saying words," a reading related activity, became one of the children's socially constructed definitions of reading.

For Bondy the social construction of meanings about reading effectively overcame the difficulty of young children trying to articulate and communicate their experiences and understandings. However, constructivism tended to reduce the experiences and understandings of reading into generalizable categories. Consequently, the "construction" of a meaning may also make it "untrue" to the individual child's experience. While the social construction of meaning may overcome the problem of articulation it may overlook the unique in children's experiences of reading.

The intention in this study is to explore students' practical experiences and to describe them in their own voices. However, Bondy's work is nevertheless significant in that it provides an alternative window through which one might explore students' experiences and meanings. The notion of social construction of meanings could become pertinent, particularly if data from students' journals is limited (a problem that Oldham found with journals from high school biology students).

In her research "On Difficulty" Oldham (1986) gathered direct accounts from high school students on their experiences with difficulty. The study sought to uncover the meaning of difficulty as experienced by high school biology students. The research included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, written accounts and journal writing. Oldham found the phrases students used to describe their difficult experiences in biology revealed much about the meaning of difficulty. Experiencing difficulty was described and understood from a surface level within the context of the biology curriculum and at a deeper level as "a mode of being in the world" (Oldham, 1986, p.vi). Part of the significance of Oldham's study for this research lies in the methodology. Oldham's study demonstrates that student descriptions of their experiences reveal much about the meaning of a phenomenon.
As stated by Barritt et al., (1985), "meaning resides unanalyzed in experience" and therefore it need not be constructed.

Related Research: Using Phenomenology in the Search for Meaning

In *Researching Lived Experience* van Manen (1990) describes a human science approach (hermeneutic phenomenology) to research and exemplifies it by engaging the reader in narratives, anecdotes and conversations, thereby allowing us to reflect as teachers, parents and educators on how we live in this world with children. While it is a methodology that may be employed in many fields, van Manen (1990) maintains that the orientation is pedagogic. And pedagogy "is the activity of teaching, parenting, educating or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations" (van Manen, 1990, p.2). Teachers and parents acting tactfully and thoughtfully in their relations and their living with children are in this world in a pedagogic way. A human science or phenomenological approach is sensitive and attuned to children's lived experience ("children's realities and lifeworlds") (van Manen, 1990, p.2).

van Manen's work is important to this research in that it not only explores and orients us to lived experiences as a form of research data, but also provides a framework and demonstrates the "how to" in terms of gathering, interpreting and writing experiential material.

Summary

The review first discussed the literature on the meaning of the practical and the diverse views and interpretations that the practical has represented over time. The review then discussed the meanings of 'practical' within education and particularly within home economics education. East (1980), Brown (1985) and Thomas (1986) maintain that there are many
divergent conceptualizations of the practical in education and home economics education and that this has led in part to tensions within the field and confusion and misunderstanding outside. Thomas (1986) maintains that home economics educators try to pull together and synthesize these divergent views into their home economics programs.

The third area of the review discussed related research on the student's perspective and on students' meanings. Research from other areas of education was reviewed to explore the significance of the student's perspective to pedagogy and what it is that constitutes a student's perspective. Bollnow (1989) maintains that the perspective of the child is fundamental to establishing a "Pedagogic Atmosphere" and those preconditions necessary for education.

Other qualitative research was reviewed to explore the "how" of orienting oneself to human experience in education, how students articulated their experiences and understandings, and the ways in which researchers interpreted and drew meaning from those experiences. Bondy (1990) investigated first grade student's socially constructed definitions of reading and the implications of the study for teacher education. Bondy's research provides insight into ways in which one can research student meaning when the informants may not be able to verbally articulate their definitions and understandings. Although dealing with older students (Grade 12) Oldham (1986) used students' direct accounts and phrases as they described difficult experiences. Oldham found the phrases to be metaphoric revealing much about the meaning and the significance of difficulty within the context of high school biology and within the context of living in this world.

The final area of review explored using phenomenology in the search for meaning. van Manen (1990) presents a human science or phenomenological approach to researching experience which is both sensitive and attuned to the realities and lifeworlds of children.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The research approach in this study is based on phenomenological assumptions. The central research question is a question in search of meaning. The meaning of practical and the significance of practical activities in the lives of students who experience them are not questions that are observable or quantifiable phenomena, and for this reason qualitative methods are most suited. The methodology requires an approach which constructs or displays meaning by way of rich description and through reflection provides greater insight into the "ordinary" and "everyday" experiences of curriculum. In addition, the methodology needs to accommodate the notion of the teacher researching within the practice setting with the intent of developing a deeper understanding through which practice may be improved. For these reasons, it was decided that a phenomenological approach would provide the best methodological framework in which to pursue the central research question.

What is Phenomenological Research?

Phenomenology is the study of the life world or lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). The phenomenon or experiences are found in the common places, the taken-for-granted in our everyday existence (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1985). Phenomenology tries to capture the meaning of everyday experiences, as they are experienced pre-reflectively.
One attempts in phenomenological research to take a fresh look, to look with new lenses at the phenomena, for the moment suspending our categorizations and preconceived ideas. It is a search for what is essential (essence) in a particular experience, "what it is like," or the nature of the experience as opposed to a search for generality.

Phenomenological questions are questions of meaning, not problems to solve. Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes an individual as condemned to meaning as one throughout life tries to interpret, understand and make sense of the situations we encounter. As we experience things, we simultaneously experience the object and the meaning of the object as one (Barritt et al., 1985). For example, a book is perceived not as a rectangular object and then named a book, it is perceived as a meaningful object, a book. Accordingly, "meaning resides unanalyzed in experience" (Barritt et al., 1985, p.22).

Phenomenological research may pose many questions, yet there are few answers. But the questions in and of themselves will be better and more richly understood. It is understanding in a new way that may allow us to act thoughtfully and tactfully as educators (van Manen, 1990).

There are three main branches within phenomenology; transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology and hermeneutics. Transcendental phenomenology developed with Edmund Husserl, existential phenomenology with Maurice Merleau-Ponty among others, and hermeneutics with Martin Heidegger (Barritt et al., 1985.). Within these branches there are a number of schools of thought as to what it is that constitutes phenomenology and phenomenological inquiry with the result that new methodologies such as critical hermeneutics and phenomenography have developed.

The phenomenological tradition is not a rigid methodological approach with defined boundaries and orthodox procedures, but rather, an approach with broad guidelines to accommodate different problems and different approaches. While phenomenology lacks
specified dimensions there are three criteria that an approach claiming to be phenomenological should meet (Speigelberg, 1975):

(1) A phenomenological approach must start from a direct exploration of the experienced phenomena as they present themselves in our consciousness.....
(2) It must attempt to grasp the essential structures of these experienced phenomena and their essential interrelations.
(3) It should also explore the constitution of these phenomena in our consciousness, i.e., the way in which these phenomena take shape in our experience. (p.267)

Why Do Phenomenological Research?

In a search for meaning one needs to recognize that children are also part of social worlds and they too are "caught in webs of meanings which are part of their language" (Barritt et al., 1985, p.23). Acting tactfully and thoughtfully in education requires us to understand children's lives and to try to see and understand this world from their perspectives. Phenomenology invites us to explore this perspective, to allow the ordinary world of school curriculum experiences to become extraordinary.

Phenomenological research is an appropriate qualitative methodology because it seeks to uncover and bring to our awareness meanings of which we were previously unaware. In their discussions of phenomenology, Barritt et al. provide insight into and justification for the use of a human science perspective in educational research:

Through description, analysis, and thematic identification in interaction with informants, one names the world. This moves the overlooked from the
background to the foreground, making it possible for critical reflection to lead to understanding and to change. (Barritt et al., 1985, p.69)

Phenomenology studies the nature of everyday experiences and situations rather than "a set of pre-selected variables" (Barritt et al., 1985, p.24), and therefore the studies are context bound (Barritt et al. 1985).

On Objectivity and Subjectivity

Phenomenological studies are subjective; there is no alternative. They study events that are "personal and private" (Barritt et al., 1985). The goal is to describe the phenomena, to name the world as it is experienced by those that are in that world. It is assumed that through description the phenomena will become more clearly, more deeply understood and that the description might be plausible to the reader bringing forth a common or shared understanding of the experience.

On the other hand, objective experiences are in a sense impersonal and "public events" (Barritt et al., 1985, p.61) as the experience is for everyone. The individual or the unique aspect of an experience is not important, but rather, the parts of the experience that can be agreed upon by those that were present. For example, one person's feelings and reactions to a particular painting in an art exhibition is a personal and private event. The description of that person's experience of the painting is subjective, but may well be shared by others. This same example as an objective experience would be concerned with the fact that an art exhibition featuring a particular artist occurred at a particular place, day and time, aspects of the experience that all who were present could agree upon.

Some of the criticism of phenomenological studies suggests that their subjective nature makes them untrustworthy (Barritt et al., 1985). While they rely upon the personal reports and stories of informants and the interpretation and judgement of the researcher, that is not to
say that there are no boundaries or standards. Phenomenological studies must be rigorous. They must provide an interpretive description of some aspect of experience in its fullest and truest sense. It must be true to the experience of the informant and must ring true to the reader. Phenomenological studies also must exhibit the "bounds of common sense, of fair argument and of honest prose" (Barritt et al., 1985).

On Generalization

Phenomenological research seeks the uniqueness and enlarging of a particular experience rather than a reductive generality which is the common pursuit within the empirical tradition (or mode) of research. Phenomenological research ascribes to a different meaning of generality. It is that which occurs from the "shared understanding of an experience that the researcher describes and the reader responds to" (Barritt et al. 1985, p.26). For example, when the description of an experience brings forth from the reader, "I felt that," or "I understand that," or "I can appreciate the possibility of that," then generality is achieved.

The Phenomenological Research Method

van Manen (1990) discusses a human science research method as an interplay between the following research activities which loosely constitute a phenomenological research method:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
(6) balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole. (p.30)

**On Language**

The language of phenomenological research is the language of the everyday world as it seeks to understand the unique in ordinary experiences (Barritt et al., 1985). In phenomenology there needs to be an attentiveness to language and precision in its use. It is through language that we come to understand our experiences and share with others in that understanding. Heidegger states that "it is language that tells us about the essence of a thing" (1954, p.324), but even language has its limitations and we must be wary of its own essence. For example, a particular experience may not be captured in its original sense with the language available. However, the language that is used by the informant to try to describe that experience may have an essence of its own, reflective of the time, and the world from which it derived.

**Research Setting**

In an effort to come to a richer understanding of student meaning of the practical I chose to work within my own classroom. The school is a middle school comprised of years six, seven and eight and is located in a small town on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The school population is about 500 students. The students come from backgrounds that are ethnically very homogeneous, but economically, socially and politically tend to be very diverse. Many of the communities on Vancouver Island and in our district have developed distinctive reputations based on their positions on issues such as the environment, peace, development and alternative lifestyles. Many of these attitudes are evident in our student population.

The school itself is an old structure that does not lend a very good first impression aside from some spectacular views of the Strait of Georgia and Mt. Arrowsmith. Though the
school has been slated for either renovation or demolition since 1980, at present no decision has been made. The structure remains, the school functions, and what the facility lacks in aesthetics it makes up for in terms of the programs and services offered. It has been the recipient of an Intermediate Program Developmental Site Grant for two consecutive years. The grant moneys were used to develop and sustain an Interdisciplinary Teaming Project. Year seven students participating in this research have had considerable exposure to the Interdisciplinary Teaming project both in their year six classes as well as in this year seven. The Teaming Project has few if any implications for this study except for the fact that the students are familiar with guests in the classroom, and are comfortable with observers and with talking to visitors about their activities in the classroom and school environment.

The middle school philosophy promotes the notion of a gradual transition from the elementary to the secondary school. This is accomplished by decreasing degrees of home basing of classes from year six through to year eight. Year seven students are homebased from 75% to 80% of their timetable. This means that their home economics class is one of the few opportunities for many students to see and work with friends not in their homeroom. This can enhance the popularity of courses such as home economics because students can plan their practical arts choices with friends. It also can lead to some interesting classroom situations.

The Research Group

The entire research group was comprised of two year seven classes. The conversation group was a group of individuals selected from one of the year seven classes. The decision about which class the conversation group would be drawn from was based on timetable considerations. The class that was chosen met on Tuesdays and Fridays for a 47 minute period in the final term of the year. The term began at the end of March and extended twelve
weeks until the middle of June. On Tuesdays I had a preparation period prior to the class with recess following, and on Fridays the class was just before lunch which afforded some extra time for set-up, note taking and reflection.

Students are timetabled into home economics for two blocks per week for one term of 12 weeks. For the other two terms they have choices of technology, computers, industrial education, art, drama and choir. Because there are six year seven classes and two separate sections of home economics, students will participate in their home economics classes with members from two other divisions. In effect, in each term there are new classes constituted for the practical arts courses. In this final term, year seven classes met on Tuesdays and Fridays while the other section met on Mondays and Wednesdays. Almost all students in Home Economics seven would have had home economics in year six and would likely be familiar with some of the classroom procedures and content.

The research group was forty-four students drawn from six year seven divisions. There were 28 girls and 16 boys. The classes were extremely active and vocal. As homerooms the classes had been involved in a number of proactive and community projects and were quite comfortable and vocal in class discussions and activities. They represented a wide range of abilities, personalities and socio-economic backgrounds. The students were keen to take home economics, for a variety of reasons. However, cooking seemed to figure large in the decisions of many individuals. Like all year seven students this group was anxious to "do" and to "make" things reflected by their comments on the first day of class: "Do we get to cook anything today"?

The Conversation Group

The students were selected from the Tuesday/Friday year seven co-educational home economics class. Letters were sent out to all parents of students in this class requesting their
consent for students to participate in this study. Eight students were to be chosen from the
class to interview or engage in conversation about their experiences with the practical. Every
effort was made to choose eight students that represented diversity within the class so as to
gain as broad and deep an understanding of the students' perspectives as was possible given
the class. Unfortunately, return of the consent letters dictated to some degree the choice of
the eight. There was a disappointing return of eleven of twenty-four issued and of those
eleven one was negative. Consequently, of the eight students that I had initially identified as
offering some diversity in terms of background, culture and gender, only four were able to
participate. The balance was then made up by individuals I had previously identified as
second or third choices.

Three boys and six girls made up the conversation group. The boys were Tim, Jack
and Roy; and the girls were Linda, Kathy, Mary, Ann, Carol and Lana (names have been
changed). A brief description of these nine students follows.

Tim is a small boy for his age and very quiet and thoughtful. He is a bus student from
a rural area well-known for its proactive community spirit. Through conversation Tim
indicated his and his family's interest and concern over environmental and health issues. At
one point he commented, "We don't even have a microwave; my parents are totally against
them."

Jack is large for his age and has a very easy-going manner. He could be characterized
as the class comic as he manages to joke about everything. He is very vocal in both his
support and objections to various issues that arise in discussion. Jack was not one of the
students that I had originally intended to have in the conversation group primarily because his
father is an educator in the same district, is also working on his Masters Degree in education,
and is a friend of mine.
Roy is a very enthusiastic student and a chatterbox. He is average to above average in academics and works well in a group. He is always cheerful and easily excited and lacks a little of the maturity of the other boys in the class. He was chosen primarily because of his interesting response journal entries.

Linda is an enthusiastic and involved student. She is well thought of by her peers and teachers. Academically, Linda is one of the stronger students in the school and a moving force on the student's council. Both of Linda's parents are professionals and are active members of the local Parent Advisory Council.

Kathy is a new student to the school. She appears to be strong academically and is quite articulate as evidenced by her response writing. Although new, she has adjusted and settled into her year seven class with few problems. She was chosen because in coming from another school in the province it is quite likely that her experiences (if any) in home economics might be quite different. Her perspective I thought would be helpful to the research adding a new or fresh view.

Mary is an outspoken student. She is very confident and very verbal. She is not afraid to ask questions or to question the reasons behind activities and lessons. She is quite willing to take risks and to experiment with new ideas. She is very bright, but appears to lack a "stick to it ness."

Carol is a quiet, friendly and cooperative student. She is average in her academic abilities. She is a bus student and from the north end rural area which is characterized as a lower socio-economic area. Carol was chosen because of her responses and because I feel that she is the type of student that can be overlooked in a classroom, going about her schoolwork quietly, without drawing any attention to herself.

Ann is a very caring and cooperative student. She is above average in her academic ability and is really enthusiastic. Originally Ann was a second choice for this study partly
because she lives in town, is academically strong and is also very close friends with Mary. To try to maintain a gender balance I was hoping that a male student would be available. However, that not being the case I had to go to second choices. As with all the students I got to know Ann a lot better through the course of our conversations and I found her contributions very interesting and am consequently very pleased that she participated in the study.

The ninth student to participate was Lana. Lana is a pleasant and enthusiastic student. She tries to do everything to the best of her ability and is stubborn in her determination to do well. She is a very thoughtful and articulate student and provided us with some interesting insights. Lana was not originally identified as part of the conversation group. However, very soon into the start of the research there were a number of absentees and Lana was keen to participate, and consequently became a regular contributor regardless of the absentee situation.

**Sources of Data**

**Response Journals.**

There were a number of sources of data for this research. One large source of data was the response journals of both the year seven classes. Response journals are part of regular class room procedures at our middle school and students are becoming familiar with their use in language arts. Response journals or "Readers Journals" have been used in the language arts area for some time, where they are a method of capturing a student's initial responses to literature. The purpose of response journals is "to encourage students to develop the habits that research has shown successful readers have such as predicting, looking forwards and back for connections, reflecting and speculating" (Terpening, 1992, p.8). Journal writing is an approach that is consistent with the notions of "active learning" as
described in the B.C. Intermediate Program Document, however, its value goes beyond literature. Response journal writing is a method that could have wide application in many areas of the curriculum encouraging students to reflect on activities, their meaning and significance, to look for connections to other disciplines and aspects of their lives, and to evaluate their participation and understanding in an activity. [Written response journal entries were collected from all students (approximately 44) on four occasions following specific units of study in home economics classes in the last 12 week term. Though the students had the option of remaining anonymous, most put their names on their responses.]

In terms of the current research, all year seven home economics students completed Response Journal activities. The first Response Journal activity asked students to record their thoughts and feelings about their activities for the last week of March 1992 using "Response Starters" (see Appendix A). The second response journal activity followed a food safety unit and required short paragraphs that began again with "Response Starters" (see Appendix B). The third journal entry was collected in mid May and required students to reflect and write about their activities and learnings in home economics to date in the term (see Appendix C). The final journal activity asked students to reflect on their home economics experiences of the past two years and to write what they liked about the courses, their thoughts on the purpose of home economics and their understanding of practical and home economics as a practical school subject (see Appendix D).

The responses can be utilized in many ways by teachers, parents and the students themselves. Responses can be used to assess comprehension, to construct, share and negotiate meaning. They can be used to initiate, develop and sustain the writing process. Responses are also valuable to the development of inquiry and critical thinking skills as well as for valuing and evaluating.
For teachers, response journals provide valuable insight into student's comprehension, thinking skills and learning styles. They are also invaluable to lesson planning and evaluation. Response journals could be considered formative evaluation allowing teachers to adjust teaching, and to emphasize or de-emphasize concepts.

In home economics the purpose of the response journal is to provide the students with the vehicle and the time for reflection on their own learning and understanding. Through reflection students will hopefully see the significance/insignificance in their lives of the learning and activities, as well as connections to other parts of their lives, such as home and family. Students may also use the response journal as an evaluative tool for self, group, teacher, and/or course, reflecting on their participation, strengths and areas needing improvement and preparing or planning for change.

The use of student response journals as data for research into home economics is a new concept that may have been first initiated with this particular research. It is, however, not unlike other journal writing except that perhaps it can be more subject and activity specific.

The data that was collected from the journals was used in a number of ways. First the data alone provided a window into the perspective of a year seven student in middle school home economics. Secondly, it provided the backdrop for the conversations, uncovering some of the commonly held notions and in a sense validating the themes, notions and issues that emerged from the conversational data. And finally response journals identified some of the unique issues and questions that could be pursued by way of conversations to further the understanding of students' perspectives.

On each occasion following a journal activity I would review the responses and highlight interesting and/or unique comments, commonly held points of view, thoughts that
needed clarification or that students in the conversation group might be able to elaborate on. For example, consider the following early response journal entry:

Roy: I enjoy the way the teacher lets us do everything.

Roy later became a member of our conversation group. It was one of those types of comments that I felt needed clarification both for this research and for job security. Consequently, in our conversation group I asked what was meant by the statement. Roy explained his response and the context from which it was made. Others in the group seemed to have little difficulty with the language of the statement. There was it seemed an intuitiveness about the meaning as they willingly contributed comments and examples to further my own understanding. It reminded me of the saying and its many variations, "I know you think you know what I said, but you know it is not what I meant." Language, articulation or its lack thereof, may prove significant in this study.

From a phenomenological point of view I couldn't be sure that one individual's thoughts, ideas, and attitudes would be representative of all the year sevens, nor was I expecting that to be the case. However, although consensus was not necessary in this research it was reassuring to find that some of the notions, ideas and themes were held in common by the conversational group and the rest of the year seven classes.

Student Conversations.

In addition to response journals, semi-structured interviews (conversations), were held on four occasions with nine students. There were four students in one group and five in the second group. Each conversation group met separately with me on three occasions and the fourth meeting was with all nine students for pizza and windup discussions. The dates of the meetings were; May 12th and 15th, May 19th and 22nd, June 9th and June 12th with the windup party on June 16th. We met lunch hours for approximately 25 minutes. Students
were encouraged to bring their lunches and I supplied some soft drinks and cookies. Generally the conversations were initiated by a question or two to stimulate some thought and discussion and then students would answer, comment, and discuss the particular question or issue. On some occasions there would be much round table discussion, comments and jokes with little prompting from myself, and at other times the students would comment or answer more directly. They were encouraged to reminisce and relate anecdotes and stories to illustrate their points or issues and a number of "stories" did emerge. I would have liked to have had more conversations, but our year seven students were extremely busy at term end with four day camping trips, band trips and field trips.

The central question of this study was, What is the meaning of practical experiences for year seven students? The following questions are a sample of the types of questions that were used to initiate conversations. These questions derive from the central question and are an attempt to begin to draw from the students their sense, their understanding of their experiences in home economics as a way to uncover the meaning that practical has for them. It was hoped that each of these questions would reveal a new layer and would begin to uncover that which is essential about the practical for these students.

(1) What do you like about courses such as home economics?
(2) What kinds of things do you like doing in this class?
(3) Why do you like these?
(4) What activities do you like the most?
(5) What is "good" about this or that activity?
(6) What is the experience like?
(7) What are your feelings when you are doing this?
(8) What is important to you about this activity?
(9) Will you use this again?
(10) Is this like anything you do at home or out of school?
(11) What do you see as the purpose of these activities?
(12) What does practical mean to you?
(13) What is practical about this experience or that experience?
(14) What activities/ experiences would you describe as practical? Why?
The conversations were audio-taped and transcribed as soon as possible after school. I also kept a journal that started before the data collection stage and was maintained throughout the research and writing stages. I used my journal to record my thoughts, worries, concerns and questions as the data collection proceeded. I recorded descriptions and perceptions of my students and analyzed and commented on their conversations highlighting thoughts and notions that might be of significance. The journal was also useful when on one occasion there was a tape recording problem and a number of minutes of dialogue were lost. Students recapped for me their comments and I wrote them in my journal. The journal was also used to do some preliminary speculation as to the themes that appeared to be emerging from the research. During the analysis and the writing stages it was used to record my reflections and possible recommendations for the final chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE MEANING OF THE PRACTICAL

Those who absorb themselves in their children's experiences of learning to read, to write, to play music, or to participate in any kind of in or out of school activity whatsoever, are struck by the staggering variability of delight and rancor, difficulty and ease, confusion and clarity, risk and fear, abandon and stress, confidence and doubt, interest and boredom, perseverance and defeat, trust and resentment, children experience as common everyday occurrences. (van Manen, 1990, p.150)

This variability quite aptly describes how early adolescents experience the world. The world of the early adolescent is a complex world, one that is increasingly unfamiliar to adults (except perhaps for vague recollections of having visited "once upon a time"...). An adolescent's experience of events and activities, their meaning and significance while different is no less important than that of the adult. There is much to learn from the experiences of youth in educational activities, and as Connolly (1990) concurs, more studies are needed that seek to understand the world and the worlds of education from the early adolescent student's perspective.

What is the meaning of year seven students' practical experiences? As I explored this question with my students I was alternately panicked and then reassured. Panicked! Will I be able to collect sufficient data? It remains a question. And when conversation and response journal data emerged there was reassurance and then panic again. Panic because these year seven students didn't respond as philosopher kings, but they did respond and it took me some time to put aside my panic, to put aside my expectations and to recognize and
to see the world of home economics, of the practical through an eleven year old's eyes. I had to and still have to continually orient myself to their perspective, to those things that matter most in the eyes of these students.

Do you remember what it is like to be eleven in public school? A time when new "back to school" jeans were suddenly too short before school even started. A time when there was never enough food, milk or bubble gum to stave off the hunger pains between after school and dinner. A time of heightened sensitivity, when friendships could be forged or permanently severed with one careless glance. And teachers forever scorned for failure to notice the absence of orthodontic hardware. It is an age where causes and love are entered into with fervor and short, but unswerving loyalty. However, parents and family are often not identified as one of those causes. It is also a time when the gruesome, the macabre, the "Freddy on Elm Street" command more thought provoking conversation than a home economics teacher inquiring about the meanings of experiences with the practical; hence my panic.

It is the perspective of these students, their understanding of the experiences of the practical that I set about to research. Through conversations and written response journals from March through June in 1992 I tried to come to a sense of their understanding of experiences in home economics and to look at them in light of my own understandings and pedagogy. And it seems that in a sense we share in adolescence, I with my pedagogy, and they with their being.

Home economics is a practical subject and my own understanding of the "practical" has been evolving and maturing through my career and my studies. It is an issue which to this day is divisive of home economics education, and I was curious as to how my students understood the practical. I wanted to get a sense of what was important, what was essential
to their experiences in home economics. At first I intentionally avoided inquiring about the meaning of practical, and only well into the study did I broach the topic.

Connolly (1990) in her dissertation "Asking After the Lived Experiences of and with Difficulty in Physical Activity in the Lifeworlds of Children and Young People" describes what emerged from her interviews as a "constellation of difficulty" (Connolly, 1990, p.87). The terminology is thought provoking for without delving into the substance of the dissertation I am immediately struck by the description of the interview data as a constellation. As I review my own data I see as van Manen's quote suggests an incredible variability in children's experience. In my minds eye a constellation has an outline, a shape in the sky, clearly defined with key points formed by brilliant stars. Constellations are easily recognized like the Big Dipper, Little Dipper and the Southern Cross.

The metaphor of a constellation is not one that describes the data I've collected on the practical. Perhaps the best descriptor to frame the practical from the student's perspective would be that of a collage, because a collage is composed of ideas, notions, attitudes, pictures, and emotions. A collage, ill defined as yet, with fuzzy edges, but overflowing, expanding beyond the borders with potential, possibility and energy, much like the early adolescent. Thoughts, ideas and feelings are juxtaposed somewhat haphazardly on this canvas, but it is hoped that a composition will emerge that will capture the uniqueness of practical experiences from the students' perspectives at this particular point in time.

It's Fun

In this collage many ideas surfaced that describe students' experiences of the practical and their understanding of these experiences. One of the notions that was extremely important to these year seven students was the notion of "Fun." In the conversation group Roy tried to describe for us his idea of fun in home economics.
Roy: I wouldn't like to lose courses such as home economics because I like them and you do learn allot in a fun way. School isn't always fun, but it is fun for these courses.

In asking about their experiences in home economics invariably responses, whether conversational or written, mentioned the notion of fun, enjoyment and/or pleasure. My first reaction was guilt; I wanted to close the classroom door and erase the tape. Why does fun figure so prominently in their discussions? How can they be really learning? How can I be doing my job if they are having fun? I found it disconcerting. However, since "fun" was so overwhelmingly identified with their home economic experiences I was reluctantly obliged to explore the notion further.

What makes courses such as home economics fun? What is it about these experiences that brings enjoyment? Are fun and enjoyment critical to education? As our conversations unfolded it became apparent that it was a certain kind of fun, of enjoyment that was important to their experiences in home economics. It wasn't the exhilarating fun of a ride at the fair or the amusement provided by the clown in the circus. Rather these students spoke of en-joy-ment, the joy in, the taking delight in and the pleasure they derived from their experiences. They spoke of the en-joy-ment from activities that are hands on, when they are engaged in learning with friends in activities that allow them to try, to do, and to explore. Some of the members of the conversation group were quick to elaborate on their en-joy-ment.

Roy: I like courses such as home economics and shop because you get to do things with your hands, and I feel good when I'm doing them.

Ann: It's fun because I enjoy what I make.

Kathy: It's less structured. You don't have to write about things we do. It is more fun. I have the opportunity to talk and mix with friends. Sometimes we talk about other stuff, but most of the time we talk about what we're doing in class.
Linda: I enjoy the group I'm with because we know each other well. It's fun because we are given a thing to do and we work on it by ourselves.

Response Journals: It's fun. I like making different things.

I like hands on stuff—it's better than just sitting.

It's fun because it's real, like you get to see what 125 millilitre really looks like.

What is wrong with having fun, with taking delight or joy in classroom activities? Are fun and learning incompatible? And why is it that teachers feel guilty and want to conceal or de-emphasize the notion of fun in practical activities?

Joy is an important quality of life. Cheerfulness, joy, laughter are essential qualities of mood and life feeling. These according to Bollnow (1989) are often overlooked in education, but have far reaching consequences. The joy that characterizes unrestricted play, activity, productive work, the enjoyment that arises from the sense of power and accomplishment contributes positively to the growth of the child. Joy then has the power to open the student to the world. "Joy leads the person to gain interest in his or her surroundings and so experience joy in his or her own activities" (Bollnow, 1989, p.19).

For Roy, Ann and Linda their enjoyment arises out of their feelings of being productive, their sense of accomplishment. For Kathy the lack of a rigid structure allowed her to take pleasure in sharing thoughts and ideas in the company of her friends. Fun (joy) of this nature hardly seems incompatible with education: rather it appears to be fundamental to it. Somewhere, somehow between year one and year twelve (if we are to listen to what our students are saying), education seems to lose much of that enjoyment. As Bollnow (1989) suggests:

It is in the nature of education to be oriented to learning and schoolwork in a conscientious, orderly and disciplined manner, in contrast to free play
which sponsors joyful laughter and other signs of unrestricted childhood
which tend to be clumsily smothered by the serious attitude of education.
(p.21)

Roy: School isn't always fun, but it is fun for these courses.

Jack: Courses like home economics give us breaks from regular schoolwork.

Were Roy and Jack through their comments identifying the practical as one area, different from "regular" schoolwork where students are encouraged to take pleasure in their productive activities and accomplishments, to have fun and to open themselves to the world of potential and possibility? In that sense then shouldn't all schoolwork, all subjects be practical?

JM: Why should we keep courses such as home economics in public schooling?

Mary: If they took these courses away we'd have nothing to look forward to every day. Its practically all I look forward to are my electives.

I Can Do It Again At Home

Another theme that characterizes students' experiences of the practical is that of "I can do it again at home." At first, I superficially interpreted this notion as it presented itself to me in the conversations.

Ann: I like things like cooking and making food. I learn stuff that I can make at home, like when we learned how to make peanut brittle and my dad loves peanut brittle. He wants me to bring the recipe home.

Response Journals: I will make hamburgers for dinner one night because my dad will appreciate it.
I like home economics because you're learning for what you can do at home now.

Preparing meals is important because it is something you can take home.

This is after all what we as educators strive for, the transference and application of learning from one situation to another. I look at these statements, I listen to the students and I get a sense that students feel that having explored and experimented with a concept within the classroom context and having incorporated that learning into their lives they can now transfer that learning to new situations, specifically their home environment. The new or changed behaviour, the knowledge, or skill will not only be appreciated by others, but also it seems to enhance their regard within the family.

However, intertwined within this theme of "I can do it again at home" are two other related and very important issues or sub-themes. The first is simply that of competence, "I can" and the second one of permission, "I can/ may," or "I am allowed."

One of the important concepts in education and particularly in adolescent development is that of self-esteem. How we see ourselves, value ourselves and understand ourselves are now considered critical issues for educators. There are hundreds of educational programs available that are designed to enhance self-esteem in the learner and teacher alike. Self-esteem is a major component of programs written into the current curriculum for home economics, family management and learning for living. In addition, many schools provide additional programs to enhance the development of self esteem such as Skills for Adolescence. How we see ourselves and define ourselves is in terms of "what we are," "what we know," "what we do," "what we can do," "what we think " etc. Acquiring skills and knowledge, being competent and even good at something is important to one's feelings of self-worth. Both the conversation group and the response journals mentioned the "good" feelings they got from their accomplishments as an important aspect of practical experiences.
JM: It seems that in these courses you like making things.

Roy: Yeah, because of how you feel when you see that you made it with your own hands, you feel quite proud.

Mary: I have learned to cook for myself and my family or when I am bored and hungry. It is useful because I can cook myself and enjoy what I make.

Ann: You get a satisfaction out of it because you made it... we are proud of ourselves when it is finished and it is efficient and effective.

Roy: I like these courses because you’re expanding everything.... your knowledge.

Response Journals: I have learned that cooking isn't as frightening or as hard as I thought.

I like to be able to take care of myself.

I like the food we make because I make it and I know I can.

These attitudes, the "I can" and "I am able to" are important milestones in our life's journey. I use the term milestones for many of these abilities mark significant points in our lives. The passing of a milestone allows one to enter into new and different worlds, broadening the horizon and bringing the future closer. Each milestone demands new and different knowledge, skills and responsibilities, but also marks the journey into a world that offers more opportunity. Surpassing a milestone marks a time at which we can re-define who and what we are and where we look forward to an ever-broadening horizon of what we can become.

As educators, have we lost touch with this aspect of the student's perspective, with understanding "what it is like to learn, to know, to be able"? Have we forgotten the elation, the pride, the empowerment that came with learning to read? The horizons it opened, the opportunities it provided. One can be re-defined, "I am a person who can read." I can read
even that which is not intended for me. I can read instructions, but so enabled have the responsibility to heed them.

In our conversation group we had fun discussing our memorable practical experiences. My intent was to try to get a sense of their feelings in these experiences, "what it is like." Lana recounted for us her determination, exasperation and finally button-busting pride in learning how to tie her shoelaces. For Ann it was learning how to ride her two wheeler. Although Ann didn't elaborate much on the process, she did provide some interesting insight into the feelings one has at accomplishing or mastering something.

**Two-Wheeling**

Ann had been riding a bike with training wheels for sometime, but was not confident enough to go without them. She was envious of her older brother who had much more mobility with his bike and who didn't hesitate to tease Ann about her training wheels. What is particularly wonderful about Ann's recollection is her pride, her sense of self worth and her wanting the whole world and especially her brother to recognize her passing that milestone.

**Ann:** My brother and everyone except my mom was either at school or at work when I finally managed without the training wheels. It was really important that I show my big brother and his friends that I could ride without those wheels. So I rode and rode up and down and around my street all afternoon until he came home from school. I was afraid to stop and get off in case I wouldn't be able to do it again.

Ann's story is a simple story of one milestone in her life. But it is a story which takes us back into our own life and our own milestones. It makes us remember that learning something new can be difficult and frightening. Realistically it is no mean feat to learn to ride an object which is 48 inches long, 32 inches high and contacts the ground in only two places. It is imperative that one stay balanced and upright, which can only be achieved by continuous motion, pedaling. Add to this seemingly impossible task the physical realities of childhood, able only to pedal perhaps half of the circumference necessary unless standing, and unable yet
to grasp the concept and coordination of feet, pedals, position, lean, and timing to apply the brakes. Yet now we have the audacity to jibe, "It's as easy as riding a bike."

What Ann's story did for me was to bring forward the memories, the feelings of pride, of power, accomplishment, and grownup-ness associated with being able to... and how important it is to education to build, maintain and preserve those feelings of self-worth. In this sense the notion of "I can do it again at home" becomes much richer. It is not a statement of fact that something can be redone at home like a spelling list. It is an assertive statement of self. "I am a capable person." "I have the ability to make a meaningful contribution to this family." From a student perspective their understanding of the practical and the significance of practical learning experiences in their lives appears to be not unlike the notions of Brown (1980). Both recognize the capacity of the practical to "enable," to "empower," to "become."

The other aspect of "I can do it again at home" has to do with the notion of permission, that is, being allowed to.

**Jack:** Courses like home economics are important because when I'm home alone or whatever I can cook for myself instead of ordering in pizza. My mom doesn't let me touch anything. I'm only allowed to cook microwave stuff.

From student conversations and response journals I developed a sense that parents feel that once their children have experimented and completed projects at school that there are now grounds for permission to be allowed to try it at home. Teachers often hear comments like Jack's about not being able to touch equipment at home until after first report card so that parents are somewhat reassured that disaster is not imminent.

**Mary:** I wanted to make some macaroni one time when my parents were out. I asked my older sister to help me but she wouldn't. I got really mad and set out to do it by myself. I put a bunch of water in the pot together with the package of
macaroni and I put it on the stove, on high. Soon the water and macaroni started to boil and foam. It boiled over and everything boiled over onto the stove. I wrecked the stove. We had to get a brand new stove. I was crying and stuff because I really didn't know what I did. For quite awhile I wasn't allowed to make anything for myself if no one was there.

In *The Tone of Teaching* (van Manen, 1986) discusses how the school like the home has the special and unique responsibility of providing both the time and the space to allow children to explore the larger world without becoming part of it.

On the one hand school is a protective enclave, a shield against various realities for which children are not yet ready. On the other hand it is a place where the private and personal space of home is expanded to take in larger public or community space. In this sense the school mediates between home and the larger world. (van Manen, 1986, p.33)

"I can do it again at home" or *I am now allowed to do* suggests that through the practical activities of home economics students have the opportunity to experiment and explore concepts, issues and products that are associated with the larger adult world. There is little threat or risk from within this protective enclave. They can try on, experiment with roles, attitudes, ideas and products in a very adult way.

**Response Journal:** The learning in home economics is different from other courses because- well, you actually get to try things you do like cooking and helping others.

Practical activities in a sense provide the opportunities for students to enhance self-esteem, by enabling and empowering. It allows students to play a meaningful and productive role within the family, as in "I can do this again at home" and offers, or "allows" the potential for larger opportunities and greater freedoms. Risk and the prospect of failure in the adult sense are not deterrent factors in this world which may serve to enhance their enjoyment and
delight in such activities. One student in the final response journal entry spoke to this notion of risk.

Response Journal: I feel that I like this course because I may tell my feelings. Home economics is different from other courses because in home ec you can say what you think and not be embarrassed if you are wrong.

Building Trust, Becoming Responsible, Beginning Independence.

Closely connected to the notion of "I can do it again at home" are the notions of building trust, becoming responsible and developing independence. Trust, responsibility and independence are three very important and related issues in the social development of adolescents. In conversation students commented that they weren't "allowed" to do things because they weren't trusted. Through these conversations and Response Journal writings students spoke of allot of frustration with what they perceived as the lack of trust the adult world placed in them. It is a difficult issue and one I'm sure that adolescents, parents and teachers will wrestle with until the end of time. However, in the view of these students, practical experiences in school and in home economics were seen as positive steps in building trust, responsibility and developing independence between themselves and the adult world. In our conversation group and in the response journals students often described their experiences in home economics class as having "more freedom."

Roy: You're not as supervised in these courses. You kind of do your own thing. You get a project and you just do it instead of the teacher always checking up on you.

Jack: I think teachers put more trust in you in these classes. I learned that some teachers actually trust their students not to fool around.
**Student Comment:** My mother trusts me now. She will let me work alone in the kitchen. (Prior to commencing this research I visited another middle school home economics class and was engaged in discussions with a number of students. The above comment I recorded from those discussions).

The nature of and the quest for trust was perhaps best revealed to me from a surprise source. Tim was a participant in the conversation group. He is quiet and as I discovered very perceptive. I first met Tim in the Fall of 1990. He was one of those tiny year six students that was nowhere near adolescence and seemed so out of place in the middle school. It is not that the middle school is bad, it was just that Tim seemed too small, too vulnerable, and too quiet, to weather those first weeks. I remember speaking to Student Services (counselors), afraid that he might be one of those students who slips through the cracks and becomes a casualty of the system for no other reason than being quiet, sensitive and unobtrusive. My fears were probably exaggerated as Tim was quite successful in adapting to middle school life. This year I was delighted to find that he had again chosen to take home economics and felt that he might have a unique perspective to give on the practical if he could be included in the conversation group. However, at first his mother wouldn't consent to his participation, but later in the week Tim sought me out to explain she had thought the letter of permission referred to his younger brother who was already involved in too much. Tim now had permission and was able to join our group.

Tim really enjoys the practical arts courses like home economics and although others in the group related similar descriptions and feelings he was one of the few that seemed to be able to capture those feelings and experiences so clearly.

**Tim:** I guess I like these courses because I have more of a responsibility here. You see my dad has a workshop at home and my mom loves to cook, but they treat me like a little baby and here I get to do what I want.
The frustration was evident in his voice. I didn't take issue with his statement about getting to do what he wanted because I realized from my observations of his classroom manner and efforts in the past two years that it wasn't the "I can do anything I want without regard for others" type of comment. It was more of a statement recognizing that there were opportunities to make some choices and decisions on his own, which allowed Tim to be in control of one aspect of his life. I wondered aloud if he was allowed to try some of the things that we did in home economics at home?

Tim: Well if I am, my dad or my mom helps me allot when I don't really need it. I am the oldest now and my sister has moved away and I can't really do anything. They won't let me.

Our conversation turned to discussions about experiences with practical activities at home. Tim mentioned that he had just finished a project at home.

Tim: It is more related to woodwork. Does that count?

I assured him that I was generally interested in experiences in a number of practical activities and it surely did count.

The Goal Stick

Tim wanted to make a hockey stick, a goalie's stick as a gift for a friend. I had never heard of a year seven student actually making a hockey stick let alone a goal stick particularly since it wasn't part of the woodworking program. Tim wanted to make this on his own outside of school time.

Tim: But I had to do it on weekends because my dad wouldn't let me use the shop when he was away.

As a teacher in an area that has safety as a focus I had little difficulty understanding his father's position. As our conversation continued I began to realize that this was not a short term project and that Tim was crafting the goal stick completely on his own, without it
appeared his father's knowledge or assistance. Tim mentioned that he discussed many of the
details with the technology teacher after class. He inquired about and learned how to cut, fit,
mold and glue the various components of the goal stick. He would then go home and work
on it. However, at a certain point Tim needed to use the equipment in his father's shop, but
that was essentially off limits.

\begin{quote}
**Tim**: I told my mom that I needed to go over there, and she
said yes because she sometimes takes my side. It was just my
dad... I guess he's pretty scared. So I went over there and
worked on it.
\end{quote}

**JM**: How did it turn out?

Tim blushed almost crimson and in a barely audible voice said,
I guess it was pretty good.

I don't know if it was the blush or the way that he lowered his head and mumbled,
however, it was evident to all in our conversation group that he must have done an
outstanding job. He was extremely proud of the fact that his friend was not only pleased with
his gift, but was using the custom made goal stick regularly. I asked if his father knew now
that he used the shop, and, if he treated Tim any differently?

**Tim**: I guess he trusts me a little more.

The word "trust" seems to be one of those words in the language that is used
frequently and often benignly to the point where perhaps some of its original meaning and
significance is lost. Bollnow (1989) in his description of trust and its importance to education
and the "Pedagogical Atmosphere" maintains that trust is "related to the person's moral core"
(p.41). He distinguishes between two words that we tend to use interchangeably, that of
trust and confidence. Confidence is "a simpler form of behaviour" (Bollnow, 1989, p.38)
related to a person's abilities. We can have confidence in the ability of a coach or a mechanic,
however, we might not trust them. Confidence then is one-sided and "independent from a
person's reaction to our confidence in him or her" (Bollnow, 1989, p.38), whereas "trust demands a response" (Bollnow, 1989, p.38). It is reciprocal in that trust requires one to have faith in one that trusts us (Bollnow, 1989). Trust is also distinguished in that when we trust, we trust the whole person, and not selected abilities. It is this general trust that is indispensable to education. On the one side it begins with the trust of the child in the mother, and the trust the child has in his or her surrounding world and the subsequent development of the child's sense of security.

The other side of trust is the trust of the parent, educator, (the environment), in the child. He or she needs to be able to trust the surroundings, to feel secure, but also needs the trust of the environment, of parents and educators for social and moral development (Bollnow, 1989). The trust of an educator and often the trust of a parent is risky for there are no guarantees that the trust will not be abused. There will inevitably be disappointments, where the student or child does not live up to the beliefs and expectations of parents and educators, (just as the child's trust is disappointed when he or she realizes that people [including parents], are not gods and are fallible). Faced with disappointments it is often difficult as an educator to restore trust, but it is the beginning again, the re-building and re-storing of trust after such disappointments that is important to a child's social and moral development and to education.

Tied to the notion of building and developing trust are the issues of responsibility and independence. The trust placed in students by parents and teachers carries with it the notion of reciprocity, the responsibility to uphold that trust.

**Tim:** I like courses such as home economics because I have more of a responsibility.

**Roy:** I like being independent... you get to do your own stuff instead of like the teacher always being on your back.
The phrases "let me," "by myself," "by ourselves" and "on my own" punctuated many of the conversations and response journal entries. In practical courses students felt that they were "let," were trusted and seemed to appreciate having the opportunity to demonstrate the reciprocal nature of the responsibility.

Taylor (1991) explores this notion of "Letting Learn" and refers to Heidegger's discussion of the "exalted activity" (p.351) of teaching. Heidegger contends that one of the most difficult aspects of teaching is to "let" students learn. Taylor further elaborates that for teachers the concept is uncomfortable and unsettling. What it implies is a "letting go" where the focus and responsibility lie no longer with the teacher, rather the "attention and emphasis is on the student, who gropes his or her way toward personal understanding, who discovers, with surprise and delight, what it is like to own knowledge" (Taylor, 1991, P.351).

Linda: You give us a thing and we get to work on it by ourselves and no one is really helping us or telling us what to do.

Ann: Well if you always have people telling you what to do then you're not going to really learn....because you can learn from your mistakes when people aren't telling you what to do.

Mary: It is kind of boring when people tell you what to do and stuff.

Independence develops as parents and teachers do not necessarily place more confidence and trust in children, rather the situations in which trust is placed in the early adolescent are expanded. As children uphold the trust and become responsible for themselves and their actions to the world in an increasing number of situations they become less dependent on their parents. With an expanding of the child's circle of life the child's dependence on the parent to provide a "trusted realm" of security diminishes as children begin to build their own (Bollnow, 1989).
You Will Need It When You're Older

One of the questions posed in the response journals and to the conversation group was, "What is the purpose of Home Economics?"

Ann: It prepares you for the future.

Kathy: It will help me when I'm older and married or when I move out of my house and go to college.

Response Journals: It is important to learn about cooking and responsibilities because you will have to use it when you grow up.

It is important that you know how to cook and take care of a family when you are older.

I'll need it for the future or for when I'm grown up, concurred several other journal entries.

Roy: Probably people would learn more in these courses, it is more like, more to do with reality. Like for instance cooking, when you get older you can't do without food and sewing, you'd just let your clothes get all ruined.

The students' replies were puzzling to me in two very different respects. In the first instance the comments about needing home economics for a time when they are older or grown up seems directly to contradict earlier statements (by the same students) regarding the fact that they like home economics and practical activities because they "can do them again at home, now." I wonder what if anything distinguishes that which can be done at home now as opposed to that which they will need for the future? Could those things be one and the same? Could they be different aspects of the same activity, product and process? For example, specific food recipes, preparation techniques, safety precautions, (products) are things that students are realistically "able" and "allowed" to do at home now. Whereas the whole concept of menu planning, budgets and shopping for a family, (process) are knowledge
and skills that are not realistically things for which they are "allowed" or "able" to have responsibility. However, they will need them for the future.

**Response Journal:** What is not practical about home economics is why we have to learn about the price of groceries for a meal for a family.

While puzzling, these contradictory statements are enlightening on the students' meanings of practical. It appears that which is most useful, most relevant to their everyday reality, to the here and now is that which is viewed as practical. When asked directly about the practical, the notions of utility, relevance and reality reoccurred.

**JM:** What does the practical mean to you?

**Roy:** You would use it allot.

**Lana:** It's a modern day thing in everyday life, you cook... and you have to make breakfast and dinner so you probably do it every day.

**Response Journals:** Practical means useful and real.

In contrast to the relevant and utilitarian definitions students spoke of some of their practical learnings as if they were items they were collecting and storing away like the contents of a trousseau. And when at last that magical "grown-up" or "older" day arrives they will be able to pull forth these items, like rabbits from a hat to assist their adult life. It appears that for concepts other than food preparation there is a distinction between now and when they are grown up. Where is the connection, the thread in which they see the interrelationship between all the learning in their classes and their own lives, here and now?

Perhaps many of the practical learnings are things that they identify more directly with the adult world. A world that they are looking forward to, but a world at this time for which they lack a sense of responsibility. Bollnow (1989) describes this "future oriented sense of life of the soon-to-be-adult young person" (p.23) in his discussion of the "Morning-ness" and
"Expectation" in a child's perspective. Grown-up life represents a world of promise to young people. "The growing youth craves the realization of his urge to be useful in the active life of adults, where he or she wishes to enjoy a full sense of responsibility and power to accomplish things" (Bollnow, 1989, p.23). Those things that students can do at home now, allow them perhaps to enjoy that usefulness, the sense of power and responsibility however, practical learning experiences like creating a family's food budget are areas where they feel they have no usefulness, responsibility or power to affect. Consequently, it remains as something to look forward to.

Cooking and Eating

Home Economics is more than just cooking and sewing. Yet even as I try to emphasize other more critical aspects of the discipline I am continuously fighting with the old stereo-types. I knew in undertaking this research that to a large majority of my class cooking and sewing were the only reason for the existence of home economics. Why else would one have six kitchen units in a classroom? And true to my fears the notion of home economics and practical was largely one of cooking.

**JM:** What kinds of things do you like doing in home economics?

**Mary:** I like cooking and eating.

**Tim:** Yeah, I like cooking because most of the stuff we cook is good.... because sometimes my parents make really awful meals, elaborate and really spicy.... it tastes like your mouth is going to burn up.

**Mary:** Mostly food preparation. I like to sit down knowing that I or we made it. It's a good feeling.

**Kathy:** I like cooking because it is fun and interesting.
Carol: I like cooking because I cook at home for my dad and I can learn how to make sure stuff is really cooked and not let it burn.

Tim: My favourite activity is cooking because it teaches me valuable lessons. (Tim didn't have the opportunity to elaborate because the bell had rung to signal the end of lunch.)

Response Journals: You get to eat.
Baking, because it's neat.
Making food and eating.
You make your own food and then you can eat it.

In our next meeting I went back to their comments of the previous day. Feeling more than a little frustrated I asked the students why cooking and eating were so prominent in their conversations and in the response journals.

JM: What is it about cooking and eating that is so important?
Almost every person in this class that I speak with gives the same response.

Linda: We like to eat... Everyone our age likes to eat.... we're usually hungry.

Carol: It's important to me because when I'm home I'll know how to make things.

Kathy: So you'll know how to make more things and follow more recipes.

Carol: You start to understand and you can do more, understand and follow more difficult recipes.

Kathy: There were some things that I don't understand what they mean and when you come to home ec you learn how to do things, like the things they don't mention in recipes.

Jack: It's important because in shop and home ec we make things that we really need.

Roy: It's important because of how you feel when you see that you made it with your own hands, you feel quite proud.
Response journals also identified cooking and eating as important and one of the things they liked about home economics. The reasons given in the response journals confirmed those of the conversation group. Cooking is something that is important for them to learn. It is something that they can "take home" and "can do" and in most cases are "allowed to do."

Perhaps for the early adolescent cooking is one of those "milestones" that are passed on the journey to adulthood. If we look back on our lives and look at our own "milestones," they are many in childhood; first steps, tying shoelaces, riding bikes, learning to read, and they are many in young adulthood; first date, first job, learning to drive, and graduation from school. However, that period between learning to read and learning to drive, early adolescence, seems to be somewhat lacking in milestones. From the students' perspectives it appears that learning to cook certainly qualifies as a milestone in their world at this time.

The student's new found knowledge, ability and expertise is something that can be immediately appreciated by the rest of the family, particularly working parents. A keen interest, a willingness not only to experiment in the kitchen, but to help out in the day to day preparation of family meals must be readily welcomed by parents. Being able to cook, to prepare foods allows them to take a useful active role in the adult world, whereas perhaps some of the other practical activities might be seen as more speculative and even threatening in nature. Budgeting meals for a family, being responsible for the planning and buying as well as the preparing of all the meals or making changes in the way things are done at home are not activities for which they are responsible or for which they are likely to be given any consideration. It is not realistic for them at this particular time. Consequently, it may not be viewed as practical because it does not allow them to take a realistic, active and useful role in the adult world, the same as preparing a meal might.
A colleague recently made a comment to me about his daughter's activities as a result of a "Foodsafe" lesson in my class.

Teacher/Parent: When I cut chicken I always wipe my wooden cutting board well. I don't need to hear from my daughter about what I should cut on and how I should be preparing chicken or about salmonella and cross contamination!

As a teacher I was impressed to hear how much of an impact the Foodsafe lesson had made on the student. And, I thought to myself this is perhaps nudging that critical level that Brown (1980) speaks of; enabling deliberative action for the well-being of the family. But I was made very aware of the limits of this child's responsibility and her clearly defined role within the family. In effect it revealed to me in a much more telling way a tension that exists between home and school that underscores many of the student comments about the meaning of the practical and practical activities. Does the true essence of my colleague's comment speak for other parents? "Teach my child how to cook, don't teach him or her to question or correct my practices."

And Finally: What Does Practical Mean To You?

It was my intention to try to get a sense of students' understanding of the meaning of practical by trying to understand that which characterized their experience of the practical. However, I still needed to pose the question. The definitions were many and varied with many focusing on the notions of "usefulness," "immediacy" and "reality."

Roy: Practical means something that you would use allot.

Lana: Yeah, it is a modern thing in every day life... you cook... and you have to make breakfast and dinner so you probably do it like every day.

Kathy: It is something that you will use not just maybe use... sometimes in math you learn stuff that you might use
depending on what you do, but in home economics you would use it.

**Jack, Roy, Kate and Lana:** Yeah, useful normal, modern, sensible, important.

**Roy:** Yeah, right to the point nothing fancy, just normal.

Many of the responses from both the journals and the conversation group elaborated on the "everyday," "useful to me now" aspects of their notion of the practical. Some of the conversation data seemed a bit convoluted, but I and the reader must remember that for most people, whether eleven years old or forty, being asked to define a word point blank is a difficult task. There was a little groping, grasping and negotiating of meaning that was evident, as well as some "leapfrogging." By leapfrogging I suggest that when a common idea was expressed, e.g. "useful," others in the conversation would use that to clarify and add to their own thinking, and then would "leap" on to other connections thereby negotiating their own meaning.

It is perhaps pertinent to point out that the one distinction I noticed between the conversational data and the response journal data was that the conversation periods allowed for much more clarifying of thinking, negotiating meaning and understanding as well as discussing the connections to their lives. For example, the stories, the anecdotes and the more thoughtful comments emerged from the conversations and not from the response journal data which might indicate the degree of clarification, negotiation, understanding and connecting to their own lives that the conversations naturally incurred.

There may well have been among the conversation participants very disparate meanings of the term practical and the role of practical in home economics however, these were not extracted through the conversation. Rather, after an initial silence and tentative sharing of a definition by Roy a lot of negotiating of meaning occurred. Whereas the
response journals (except for those from the conversation group) showed a lot of disparity. For example;

**Response Journals:** I don't know what practical means can I use a dictionary?

Practical means the simple things not the extravagant.

I haven't really thought about it much. It means the usual way of doing things.

Practical means cheap, but not too cheap like not good quality.

The word practical means to me that it is the most likely thing to do.

I don't know maybe practical means to be calm and not to go overboard, to take control of yourself.

The response journal question on the meaning of practical followed a week or so after the conversations on practical. Response journal entries from those in the conversation group supported the same notions they had discussed in their groups and some of their responses indicated more of the negotiated meaning around the notions of "useful," useful now as well as in the future and "sensible" or "realistic." In addition, being in their regular table groups in home economics class a fair amount of discussion took place between people in the conversation group and members of their table groups. Some of the responses from some of the tables where members of the conversation group were located indicated that there had perhaps been some negotiation and discussion of meaning within the table groups. For example, the following response journal entries are from individuals who were in table groups with the conversation participants.

**Response Journals:** Practical means being normal, smart, being aware.
Practical means useful and real to me.

Practical means useful.

Practical means reasonable or realistic.

It means something that is not difficult, but is helpful.

It seems from these conversations and responses that the notion of practical that these year seven students have is tied up with the notions of "useful" and "real" as in realistic. Something that is practical allows students the opportunity to become active, "useful" members of the adult society. It affords them some definition, some space to "be" or to "become" at a time in life which has metaphorically been described as "Incompleteness."

In "The Metaphor of Adolescence" Michalko (1984) discusses how theorists have typically represented that period of life known as adolescence. It has been described as incompleteness with adulthood representing completion. It is commonly referred to as a transitory stage, a transition from childhood to adulthood or as a preparatory stage in which one spends adolescence in preparation for adulthood (Michalko, 1984). In-transition, incomplete, in-preparation and in-anticipation of adulthood, adolescence might then be defined as "becoming." Michalko (1984), sees adolescence as such as a metaphor.

It is a metaphor for the lack of wholeness or for incompleteness. And more than this adolescence is a metaphor for the desire, on the part of that which lacks a whole and that which is incomplete to be whole and to be complete.

(p.298)
Summary

The data in the form of student conversations, stories and journal writings has helped me to see that understanding the meaning of students' practical experiences could not be reduced. Rather, what emerged from the data was an overall picture or collage, a composition of numerous themes depicting students' meanings of practical experiences. Within this collage students characterized their practical experiences as "Fun." They took pleasure in and enjoyment from productive activities that allowed them to do, explore, and accomplish.

Practical experiences were meaningful for students in that they "Could Do Them Again At Home." Home economics class activities provided opportunities for students to enhance self esteem, to develop abilities allowing, (permitting) them to play a more meaningful role within the family. In addition, I found students descriptions likened their experiences to milestones; those significant points in their lives where they could re-define themselves in terms of new abilities and understandings, and, where passing a milestone allows entry into new horizons, the future, and what they can become.

Closely related to the notion of "I Can Do It Again At Home" was the theme of "Building Trust," "Becoming Responsible," and "Beginning Independence." Students understood their practical experiences as exceptions to what they felt was a general lack of opportunity at home and at school to develop these adult attributes. Students also spoke to the notion of "Letting Learn," of being given the opportunity to do, to try, and to make mistakes as they develop personal understanding.

One of the unique themes that emerged from the data was "You Will Need It When You're Older." This theme seemed to stand in opposition to the notions of "I Can Do It Again At Home." Students understood practical learning experiences that they could do again at home as allowing them to enjoy the usefulness, the sense of power and responsibility
they associate with the adult world. However, if practical activities were such that students felt there was little opportunity to make a meaningful contribution, to take responsibility, or that they lacked a sense of power to affect change, then their understanding of these activities was that they would be important for the future.

Students' understanding of practical and the meaning of practical experiences was meshed with the notion of "cooking." This theme emerged continually in conversations and journals, and in a sense provided the context or background for other themes. Cooking and eating are important to this age group. Being able to cook is not only fun, but also enhances self-esteem, builds trust and allows for the development of responsibility and independence. In that sense "cooking" represents a milestone along the path to "becoming adult."

The above themes and sub-themes juxtaposed on a canvas created a collage that attempts to capture the meaning of practical experiences for year seven students. However, the canvas seemed somewhat incomplete, perhaps untitled. I felt that I needed to get some sense of students' understanding of "practical," aside from their experiences. While the meanings were varied numerous students spoke to the notions of "useful," "real" and "relevant." And, if one were to superimpose this notion onto the collage we might be able to summarize that the practical and the meaning of students' practical experiences is that which allows students realistic opportunities to become active, useful, and responsible members of adult society.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION, CLOSINGS AND OPENINGS

The purpose of this research was to explore students' practical experiences as a way to understand student meanings of the practical. The study used a phenomenological approach in order to elaborate on practical experiences as gleaned from conversations, stories and response journal writings provided by year seven home economics students. The study began with data gathering by way of guided response journal entries for two year seven classes and continued for approximately 12 weeks with four sets of response journal entries. The major source of data was comprised of audio tapes of four conversations that were held with each of two groups of four pre-selected students. The data were collected through audio tapes of the conversations, collected student response journals, and entries in the teacher's journal. Once the data were collected they were analyzed and loosely collated into two categories: "shared themes" or "common statements" and unique statements or "variations" (Barritt et al. 1985). It is through both the "shared" and the unique statements and themes that a sense of the students' meanings of the practical developed.

Reviewing the conversations, stories and journals the image of a collage came to mind as a way of picturing the meanings of students' practical experiences. In a collage numerous themes can be captured; the canvas is in a sense infinite. The collage allows for great variability: the common that may overlay the canvas, the unique that may stand alone, the majority and the minority. All experiences can be represented equally without order, without
priority. In its infinity it may never be complete, but what hopefully emerges is an essence of the experience of the practical. The artists of this collage are the students themselves. They are young and their youthful enthusiasm and some of their brashness colours this canvas, but it is the meaning of their practical experiences from their life world, from their perspective that this research seeks to uncover. However, one must be mindful that this collage is but one possible canvas, at one instant in time and may not speak to all the possibilities.

Summary and Discussion

The following summary discusses each of the themes, their uniqueness and some of issues that they raise to help broaden and deepen our understanding of the meaning of students' practical experiences.

It's Fun

One of the many themes in this collage of practical experiences was the notion of enjoyment. En-joy-ment, the joy in, the pleasure in productive activities and accomplishments was important to the students and was often associated with their practical experiences. Cheerfulness and joy are the qualities of mood and life feeling which according to Bollnow (1989) are essential to a "Pedagogical Atmosphere," essential to a student's openness to a world of learning. However, by year seven as students commented, school is not very much fun. It seems that education starts to become serious business with the consequence that much of the joy is smothered. Perhaps it is because curricular demands and course requirements allow little time to en-joy our learning or perhaps it is because we associate fun-in learning with childhood and these students are no longer children.

King (1984) explored the work/play dichotomy in which fun and enjoyment are the criterion that intermediate students use to differentiate work from play. Three types of play
were identified; "instrumental play, recreation, and illicit play" (King, 1984, p.5). Classroom activities such as experiments, games, films, and (home economics activities) would be considered instrumental play in that they are enjoyable for the students, but are still directed and controlled by the teacher. King (1984) found that the "locus of control" (p.6) is a key factor in the differentiation of work from play. "The more aspects of an activity which fall under the child's control, the more likely the activity will be seen as play" (King, 1984 p.6). Activities such as those students participate in in home economics are considered enjoyable and fun when there is opportunity for students to direct and shape their activities according to their thoughts and expectations. Becoming responsible, being able to do things on their own, to direct their own learning were the words that students in this research used to describe their understanding of their practical experiences as well as their enjoyment of them. Seen in light of King's (1984) notion of play, Roy's comments about his practical experiences, as being more "fun" than other courses, and, as enjoyable because "the teacher isn't always on your back" take on a greater significance.

One of the questions to which this research is directed inquires as to how the practical is pedagogical. If one aspect of students' understanding of the practical is fun and enjoyment, how does that speak to pedagogy? From the point of view of Bollnow (1990) cheerfulness, joy and the pride in accomplishment are essential to a student's openness to learning and desire to learn, to know, and become. Fun and enjoyment need, therefore, to be encouraged in our pedagogical relationships with children. From the point of view of King (1984) fun, enjoyment, and play need to be integrated into the curriculum so as to avoid the sharp distinction between work and play. Perpetuating sharp distinctions between work and play may negatively affect how students see themselves in their present workplace, the school, and may affect their future work and potential as adults.
During real play children learn to organize their time and set their own tasks and goals. They learn to negotiate personal relationships, to settle disputes and to share materials. Such experiences create the opportunity for exercise of genuine decision making and personal autonomy. While such skills may not seem directly relevant to the work situations of some adults, these skills are certainly relevant to all persons who hope to create personally fulfilling lives. (King, 1984, p.11)

The pedagogical significance of this differentiation between work and play lies in the fact that we can as teachers and pedagogues plan and organize curricula so that activities are not rigidly divided between work and play, and, so that students have the opportunities to exercise autonomy in all areas of learning (King, 1984). Accordingly schools should be "more concerned with preparing students for participation in a rich variety of adult activities" (King, 1984, p.14) in which they have the opportunity to develop their capabilities, responsibility, independence and creativity rather than preparing students for specific and rigidly defined work situations. Students, then, may "learn to expect to organize and to enjoy their work (a potentially radical expectation)" (King, 1984, p.14).

As a teacher I experience some feelings of guilt when my students describe home economics as fun because of the tension between curriculum requirements and enjoyable practical learning, and, between what we feel we should be teaching and what we are teaching in practical courses. My own and others' guilt feelings may arise from our failure to recognize the value and significance of "play" and "fun" in education. I too am caught as my colleagues in perpetuating the work/play dichotomy and only when faced with trying to understand the practical and learning with our student's eyes do we understand the significance of "enjoyment" and "fun" to education. If practical activities are fun because they "let students learn," because they encourage students to control and direct their learning,
because they encourage responsibility, independence and creativity, then, all learning should be practical.

Perhaps teachers perpetuate the work/play dichotomy because of the perception that "fun" courses, (play), have little credibility in an education system which has placed considerable emphasis on academics (work) and university entrance. To gain credibility and status, to be considered worthy of the term "work," should teachers then de-emphasize those very qualities that are essential to practical learning, those qualities that make it unique? Adding to this dilemma is the guilt that arises from abandoning my own principles and ideals about practical learning. Must I perpetuate only a "doing" curriculum and sacrifice the "practical," (making action), curriculum to maintain that uniqueness and ultimately class enrollments? This dilemma is shared by many colleagues within home economics education. It is a question that invites continued discussion and its resolution would seem to lie somewhere in the balance of the two.

I Can Do It Again At Home

A theme that was characteristic of many students' practical experiences was "I Can Do It Again At Home." My first reaction to this theme was "how ordinary." It wasn't until I reviewed some of the stories that I began to understand the description of phenomenology as seeking out the "extraordinary in the ordinary" and the "uncommon in the common places of curriculum." In a small sense I may have found some of the "uncommon." The stories conveyed much more than a simple repetition of an activity at home. Students commented on their practical experiences as activities that they had "the ability to do" and "the permission to do" again at home. Feelings of pride, accomplishment, power and of being grown-up enriched and coloured this theme.
Three sub-themes or issues emerged that were intertwined within this theme. First is the notion of exploring and experimenting with concepts, skills, and activities within the classroom situation and then being able to use and apply their learning in a new situation, the home. Students saw their practical activities as something that they felt confident enough to do at home and also recognized that practical abilities in many cases served to enhance their status within the family at home.

A second notion is that of competence illustrated in the simple statement; "I can do it." For these year seven students acquiring skills and knowledge, "being able," "accomplishing" and having confidence in their abilities was important in their experiences. The student narratives also let us see practical experiences as significant points (milestones) in their lives where students could redefine themselves in terms of their learning and look forward to an ever broadening horizon and new milestones.

A third issue or sub-theme woven into the notion of "I can do it again at home" was that of permission or, "I am allowed to." The school in this sense was seen as the mediator between the home and the world at large. It provides a protective environment in which the student can explore and experiment and having done so might be permitted to demonstrate his/her capabilities at home, but without yet having to take on the associated adult responsibilities of that world.

The theme, "I Can Do It Again At Home" and its sub themes raise a number of issues significant to both pedagogy and the practical arts. In terms of thinking and learning students commented that not only have they acquired new knowledge and skills, but that they are also incorporating the knowledge and skills into their lifeworld and applying these to new situations, their homes and families. The significance to pedagogy lies in the fact that through their practical experiences students are engaging in some higher order cognitive processes. They are not passively memorizing and reciting, rather, they are actively engaged in using,
applying and transferring learning to new situations. This supports the notion of practical education held by Dewey and the progressivists where active involvement with actual materials in situations relevant to the child's world enhanced their learning of general principles and their curiosity about other applications (East, 1980).

As educators we need to recognize the importance of activities that integrate theory and experience. Activities such as food preparation in home economics, manipulatives in mathematics, and field studies in science and social studies hold a significance for pedagogy at all levels of education. Educators need to continue to develop and implement relevant, "hands on" activities and experiences that re-establishes the "use-full-ness" and that personal sense of wealth, of "knowing" for all learners and in all curriculums. Perhaps the pedagogical significance of the notion "I Can Do It Again At Home" is most aptly and simply stated in a Chinese Proverb:

I hear and I forget  
I see and I remember  
I do and I understand

Another question to which this research is addressed inquires as to what it is about students' activities and experiences that constitutes "practical"? How does this theme, "I Can Do It Again At Home" speak to the notion of practical as choice and action? Admittedly I was disheartened by student responses to their activities that appeared to focus more on the "productive" considerations than those of the "practical." Again I needed to remind myself to see the world through my students' eyes and through their experiences.

The ability to choose and to take action does not begin at a community or global level, it begins with the individual, doing, acting and choosing for themself. By doing, by incorporating new, changed behaviours and knowledge, by doing for one's self they are changed. While perhaps not able or permitted to alter the practices or habits of the family, they have begun to act on a personal level and that personal change, choice, and action
should indeed be recognized and celebrated. It is within this personal change and personal action on one's own behalf, "at home" that we can see the constitution of the practical.

Within the sub-theme "I can do it" arose the notion of milestones. The term was not used by students in their discussions, rather the notion came to mind as I reflected on the data. As educators we generally expect and accept that children learn and will be able "to do" certain tasks and activities. That is the ordinary. The extraordinary, and the phenomenological interest lies in understanding what it is like for children to learn, what it means to "be able," and, "to do" something. Therein lies the significance for pedagogy; the knowledge of the experience of learning, of what it is like "to do" that enables us to act thoughtfully and tactfully in our relationship with students.

Students spoke of memorable practical experiences that seemed to mark an important stage or turning point in their lives. They spoke of their pride, their joy, their sense of power and grown-up-ness that came from learning to tie shoelaces, learning to ride a bike, and learning to cook. I likened these experiences to the milestones we may pass in our life's journey. I realized that there are many important experiences and points (milestones), in our lives to which we look forward, work toward and mark passage into new horizons. Each milestone we journey towards demands new and different knowledge, skills and responsibilities. In passing a particular milestone we re-define ourself as a person in terms of those newly acquired attributes and look forward to an ever-broadening horizon, to new milestones, and, to what we can become.

Students viewed their practical experiences, (acquiring knowledge, skills, responsibilities, attitudes etc.) as empowering and enabling. They are able to reach or to accomplish a particular milestone. They are empowered both by the actual knowledge, skills and attitudes that have allowed them to attain a milestone and by their sense of self worth and confidence that comes from knowing and understanding that he/she "can do it."
The issue of self-worth and/or self-esteem and its relationship to a student's ability to learn is currently a key focus in education. Many programs have been developed to foster positive self-esteem, however, the notion of a separate program, to develop self-esteem seems somewhat artificial in contrast to that sense of self, of confidence that students developed quite naturally from their practical experiences. And, perhaps it is in the unique contribution which the practical makes to that sense of self that is important to pedagogy. Engaging in practical experiences, acquiring new knowledge skills and attitudes and in "doing" students define and redefine themselves in terms of these attributes developing a true sense of self-worth and the knowledge and confidence that they can make a difference in their world.

Building Trust, Becoming Responsible, Beginnings of Independence.

Another theme of the practical that colours this canvas is the notion of "Building Trust," "Becoming Responsible," and the "Beginnings of Independence." Students expressed the feeling that the adult world did not extend the kind of trust to them that they felt was their due. There was a sense of frustration that they had few opportunities in which to build that trust and responsibility. Comments such as "without the teacher on your back," "won't let me touch a thing" and "let us do it by ourselves" indicate some of that frustration. However, their practical experiences represented some exceptions and students understood their experiences as fostering those attributes.

Students' conversations and anecdotes revealed that their understanding of their practical activities included some of the current conceptions of the practical in home economics. Brown (1980) and Hultgren (1990) use terms such as enabling and empowering, the students in this research talked in terms of being "trusted," "responsible," "able, and "independent." As a society we expect our young adults, (almost by definition) to exhibit
such qualities, but as students' conversations illustrate we seem to provide limited opportunities in schooling for early adolescents to practice and develop these adult attributes. Practical activities in home economics were identified by students as fostering these qualities, allowing students to try, to practice, and to develop some of the skills and attitudes society requires of its adult citizens. But here again a tension was created. A tension between "home" and the traditional view of the practical, and the "home ec teacher" and a new conception of the practical. While we may aspire to enable and empower deliberative action through curriculum, the reality of the situation is that many families may not maintain that view. Families may not be very democratic. There may well be very distinct role definition and expectations. In this case "empowerment," even if it is for the well being (the health) of the family, may be viewed as threatening by the parents.

Again, I need to be mindful of the age and the lifeworld of these eleven year olds and to not let my expectations prevent me from understanding the meaning of their experiences. In practical activities, the "doing" for oneself is a subtle and perhaps necessary way to begin to engage in deliberative action. Through cooking activities students are incorporating new ideas, knowledge and practices and may be made aware of other related issues. And while promoting change in others, (the family), is important we must recognize that critical first step in the change of self.

An image that superimposes itself on the trust and responsibility issues is the notion of "Letting Learn." Students' conversations and journals often mentioned their desire for parents and teachers to "Let Us Learn." As educators we direct, we teach, we deliver curriculum, but do we let our students learn? The students were honest in their understanding that there are no guarantees that given the opportunity, or "let" would they always be able to uphold our trust, to live up to our expectations and to be responsible enough. They realize that they are going to make mistakes, that they will probably lose our
trust and will likely experience some failures in their lifetime. However, they also understand that mistakes and failures are integral to lifelong learning. Being able to begin again, to learn from mistakes, to rebuild from a position of greater understanding is a skill and an attitude necessary to their development and to our world. In Ann's words:

Well if you always have people telling you what to do then you're not going to really learn...because you can learn from your mistakes when people aren't telling you what to do.

The theme "Building Trust," "Becoming Responsible," "Beginnings of Independence" and the notion of "Letting Learn" raise important pedagogical issues. One might suggest that it is pedagogically good to place more trust in our students and to "let them learn," but what should this mean for educators? How, for example, can we stand on the sidelines without neglecting our purpose as teachers?

With the sincerest of intentions many teachers wish only to impart to their pupils the information, understanding and appreciation of the world that has excited them and which they feel is important and worthy of knowing. They want to help their pupils avoid needless mistakes, to save time, energy and frustration. However, as Taylor (1991) suggests "it is sometimes appropriate to be reticent, to withhold information, to withdraw from conversation as an active participant....in the interest of letting learn" (p.352). This does not mean that one sits idly on the sidelines, but rather, listens to students openly and thoughtfully. "One must be silent yet supportive, leaving space for learning" (Taylor, 1991, p.353). This means learning to listen to our students, not just hearing their words, but listening attentively, creating the atmosphere, the space where students are listened to and where they can listen to each other. As teachers we need to acknowledge our own role as learners and open ourselves to that learning. As such, teaching in the true sense "can only take place when the teacher is more teachable than the students" (Taylor, 1991, p.351).
Cooking and Eating

Another theme that provides the background color to this collage is the notion of the importance of "cooking and eating." Student's knowledge about and skills involved in food preparation were commonly identified in descriptions of their practical experiences and many of the emerging themes and sub themes are connected or framed from the context of cooking. Cooking was considered fun, important, immediately rewarding, relevant, and a milestone in their lifeworld. Students understood their food preparation activities as something they could become accomplished at, something they could gain status and recognition within the family for, and could foster such attributes as responsibility, trust, and independence. In addition, one cannot dismiss the reality of the importance of food to this age group. Early adolescent growth demands increased caloric intake, and as most parents and teachers are aware, food is a subject that is never far removed from their conversations and thoughts. In light of these factors it is perhaps somewhat understandable that "cooking" receives so much attention. As Linda commented:

We like to eat.... everyone our age likes to eat....we're usually hungry.

The pedagogical significance of practical activities such as cooking lies in that they are the vehicle through which students engage in real life situations exploring problems and solutions, developing knowledge, skills and attitudes and beginning to taking action on issues that affect them on a personal level. Developing the ability to cook and care for their personal nourishment adds to their sense of self worth, helps to build self-confidence and affords the opportunity to be "grown-up." Practical experiences then have the potential not only to develop capabilities, but also to foster students' recognition that they have the power within themselves as individuals to make a difference in their world.

It was disappointing at first that cooking figured so prominently in students' understandings of their practical activities. I had hoped that by emphasizing other topics and
more critical aspects of home economics that the practical would come to mean more than "making things." However, the reality of the situation is that the more traditional conception of the practical in home economics, the "cooking and sewing model" is deeply entrenched and is perpetuated by parents, primary teachers, and by our own actions in the classroom. The fact that students identified many of their practical experiences in terms of cooking further raises the question that research such as this serves only to reify a "doing" curriculum. And, that may be pedagogically good depending on one's interpretation of "doing."

To "do" means to carry out, to make, perform or effect. As such all curriculum should be "doing" curriculum as the term speaks to the action of, or the engagement of students in and with curriculum. The distinction or the problem lies in the end product of the "doing." What is it that we as home economics educators want as the end product of a "doing" curriculum? Is it the making or effecting of "things" as in Aristotle's notion of the productive, or is it "making action" and "effecting change" in the practical sense that is the intention of home economics educators? Historically, much of home economics curricula has been productive. This research indicates that students like to make things, and there is much to be said for the contributions that a productive curriculum makes to the development and practice of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In that sense this research does reify a "doing, productive" curriculum. However, the productive is but one part. The practical curriculum in home economics education fosters the development and practice of attitudes, behaviours and skills of interdependence, responsibility, critical thought and reflection. This research also indicates that students responded to practical curriculum in terms of "making action" and developing skills of interdependence and responsibility. Through their "doing" students are "making action" and effecting change, change in themselves.

This research does then reify a "doing" curriculum. More importantly it points to the notion that all curriculum, be it home economics or otherwise should be "doing" in the sense
of engaging, making and effecting. Furthermore, I suggest that for home economics curriculum it is not an "either," "or," situation; either practical, or productive. Rather, the curriculum should aim to achieve a balance or complementarity between the two.

To achieve a balance, to go from predominantly productive curricula there is a need to re-interpret curricula in the "practical sense," in terms of "making action." This will require understanding "action" in a broad, rich and varied way. Action is more than mere activity or movement. Action encompasses all of activity, movement, doing, directing, ...., but in a reasoned and reflective manner. This does not mean that skill developing activities and making products are de-emphasized, rather that the curriculum become more proactive in the critical sense, in terms of making choices, reflecting, deliberating and acting on those choices. For example, environmental concerns are often discussed as part of lessons for students engaged in making food products. In teaching we might only mention and raise awareness about the packaging of certain products used in our food preparation and that is the extent of it. Students have little opportunity to "make action." However, within the same activity by allowing students the opportunity to choose an environmental packaging issue that affects them as individuals, by reflecting on how as individuals or as a group they can effect change regarding that issue and then carrying out that plan, illustrates "action" in a deeper and richer context. Understanding "action" in this broad sense and providing opportunities in curriculum for students to make "action" can only help to foster socially responsible, educated citizens.

Closings

Phenomenological research may pose many questions and yet provide few answers. However the questions may themselves change, and be posed from a position that is more deeply and richly understood. Phenomenology demands a rigor and attentiveness that writing
and rewriting never quite seem to achieve. In essence, it defies conclusion for one is still thinking, questioning and seeking greater understanding. And, while there is no conclusion in the traditional sense, there is closure to this phase of the research, but with the explicit recognition that there are new questions, new openings to explore.

Part I

The purpose of this research was to seek insight into and a deeper, richer understanding of the meaning of practical and the meaning that practical activities have for year seven students. The literature review discussed the diverse views and meanings of the practical that have developed over time and the meanings that "practical" has had within education and home economics education. While current curricula in home economics is developing along the notions of Brown (1980), Hultgren (1990), and Schwab (1969) in which the practical in home economics education fosters the development and practice of attitudes, behaviours and skills of interdependence, responsibility, critical thought and reflection there still remains as Thomas (1986) suggests a multitude of views that are somehow synthesized into a "whole" that home economics presents to students.

The meaning, significance and implications of practical experiences in home economics are somewhat contingent on the view of home economics that a particular educator may represent and on the conception of the practical that the public and the students themselves hold. The preconceived ideas and notions that the students in this research brought with them to class, their "expectations" (Bollnow, 1989) about the practical, about home economics, and the nature and significance of practical activities was prominent in their understanding. The references by students in their conversations and anecdotes to cooking and making things reminds us that traditional views of practical activities and home economics are still quite prevalent.
In this research the educator's concept of the practical as choice, deliberation and action has developed along the critical lines of Brown (1980) and Hultgren (1990). The lessons around which the research occurred were planned with this notion of practical in mind. The students' experiences of the practical taken from this context were many and varied, reflective of the traditional as well as the current conceptions of the practical, and yet different in that they have provided some fresh and unique views of the experience and meaning of the practical in home economics.

The conversations, anecdotes, journals and stories have presented me with a colourful collage of students' experiences and meanings of the practical, each significant and contributing to the overall picture. A collage of students' meanings that cannot be reduced into a simple statement or definition. However, many of these themes spoke to the notion of practical or described something as being practical as that which was realistic and allowed students to "become" useful, active, productive members of adult society. Practical experiences are valuable and relevant assisting students in a process of "becoming." The practical, from that unique perspective of the student is viewed as that which mediates between themselves and the adult world in their "becoming able," "becoming responsible," "becoming self-directed and autonomous," in essence "becoming adult."

Part II

In coming to understand the meanings of practical experiences I have been allowed to see the world with my students' eyes. Their experiences have captured for me much of what is important to these students in their lived worlds. They captured the pleasures, the frustrations, the expectations, the desires and the fears. This collage of experiences, this view from a student perspective is invaluable to me as a teacher of home economics, as a curriculum planner and as a pedagogue. It causes one to question not only what it is that
students should know, and how they should come to know and experience that curriculum, but also what it is that creates the atmosphere that encourages students to want to know, to want to learn; in essence to become "possible." Bollnow (1989) describes this notion as the "Pedagogical Atmosphere." He uses it to mean "all those fundamental emotional conditions and sentient human qualities that exist between the educator and the child and which form the basis for every pedagogical relationship" (Bollnow, 1989, p.5).

Seeing the world with our students' eyes may give us insight into fostering the "Pedagogical Atmosphere." This view may allow us to develop truly learner focused curricula, curriculum that is practical, relevant and engaging, attuned to the students' understandings and experiences. And understanding the meanings of student experiences may allow us to teach with thoughtfulness and tact. Pedagogic thoughtfulness is that special quality that develops from that "certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding" (van Manen, 1986, p.12). This knowledge may help us as teachers to act with tact, to do intuitively the right thing in our pedagogical relationship with children.

It became apparent to me very early in this study that to come to a rich understanding of the experience and the meaning of the practical, the methodology would have to be based on a phenomenological approach. It is an approach that I have come to respect, that has the potential to truly illuminate the "what is," the essence of a phenomenon.

Through a phenomenological approach, through the stories and conversations, I have been given the opportunity to view practical experiences from the lifeworld of eleven year old's. I have been able to get a sense of what was important and essential to these experiences of the practical for my students. Coming to understand the "what is," the essence of students' experiences provides insight into "what should and could be" in terms of curriculum planning and teaching. As a methodology phenomenology is sensitive to and
allows one to capture the ups and downs of one child's experience. A phenomenological approach also accommodates the notion of a teacher researching within her own practice.

Phenomenology invites us to reflect, to come to deeper understanding, and, ultimately invites us to change, with the result that while I began researching students I have come to research myself. Earlier in this thesis I commented that upon reflection I found that the students and I share in adolescence, they with their becoming and I with my pedagogy. I struggle with my pedagogy itself in adolescence, in the process of becoming. I struggle with my notion of the practical that has been evolving and maturing through my career and my studies and try to resolve some of the tensions that persist because of different conceptualizations that my colleagues and my students hold.

Yet through this research I have come to a better understanding of myself as a teacher, of my pedagogy, and of the issue of the practical. More importantly, I have gained a sense of "what practical experiences should provide for students" and "what could be" in terms of the potential of practical curriculum in education.

It is now almost a year since the research began, and as I review my journal I have to ask, "Have I made any progress?" "Do students understand their practical experiences any differently now than a year ago?" The answer to that question lies outside the realm of this research, but within the response journals of the present year seven classes. While progress may not be a certainty, change is. Throughout this research I have experienced changes in my thinking, my teaching, and my relationships with children and colleagues.

In planning for this research both my lesson planning and teaching changed considerably. It was a risk, not only was I trying to present new lesson materials in a practical problem solving manner, I was also collecting data, by way of conversations and response journals on students' experiences with these same lessons. I was encouraging students to take responsibility for directing their own learning, to research what they needed
to know and do, and to evaluate their performance and knowledge. For example, students were given a problem/recipe with certain requirements (evaluation criteria), and then students were left to research the problem, plan and carry out tasks, and then assess their performance. It was risky because quite suddenly the teacher became a resource person and had to "let go," transferring some control to the students. And, risky, for how would colleagues interpret what appeared at first to be chaos as students grappled with the new responsibilities. Intuitively I knew it was pedagogically the "good" thing to do. I was not relinquishing my responsibility for the education and safety of my students, but I was allowing students to assume responsibility, to take control and direct their own learning within given parameters.

This research and the resulting implementation of some practical problem solving approaches has had an impact on my teaching and has affected my curriculum planning for future years. I now find myself asking, "What will this mean for students?" "How can I make this relevant to the lifeworld of the eleven year old?" "How can I encourage proactivity?" To this end I see future curriculum considerate of a balance and complementarity between the productive and practical aspects of home economics. Activities need to be attuned to student experience and allow opportunities for students to control, direct and take responsibility for their own learning, and practical activities need to be re-thought to emphasize more proactive, "making action" opportunities. Both current and future curricula needs to be cognizant of the connections, the threads by which students see the interrelationship between what they learn in class and the relevance to their lifeworld, here and now.

I have throughout this study experienced the full range of emotions, but luckily, not all at once. I have been frightened, disappointed, panicked, elated, puzzled, guilty, confident, insecure and happy. There is always that fear and insecurity in starting out on any new
venture and the constant worry that nothing will happen. However, once underway I really
enjoyed researching within my own class. There was a reciprocal feeling of comfort and
security that I am positive fostered good discussion, and storytelling. I had hoped that the
lessons and my teaching over the past year would have made a big difference in students
understanding of their practical experiences. I was at first disappointed that productive
activities dominated their view of home economics. However, once I cleared away my
disappointment and really listened to what students were saying I came to the realization that
there is a complementary relationship between the productive and the practical. And as home
economics educators we need to become more aware of that relationship and engage students
in curriculum that combines both the productive and the practical.

Openings

While this research has broadened my own understanding and given insight into the
meaning of students' practical experiences it has also opened new possibilities and new
questions, and, may have implications for teacher education, curriculum development and
further research.

Throughout this study it has become apparent that there needs to be further and
continued research to try to understand experiences from the perspective of the early
adolescent student, not only in home economics, but in all curricular areas. Often times early
adolescent thoughts, ideas and experiences are not seriously considered on issues such as
those related to gender equity, science and technology and the environment. Research on the
experiences of youth in environmental movements, or the experiences of girls in science and
technology or mathematics might prove to be not only interesting research topics, but could
also serve to better inform teaching and curriculum planning.
To understand the student's perspective we must learn to listen to our students, hear with their ears, see with their eyes, and try to come to understandings of their experiences, of "what it is like ...." It seems only logical that coming to understand the "what is" for the student informs us of "what should be taught," "when," and informs our curriculum planning and teaching methodology that in the true sense of teaching thoughtfully leads our students to "what could be" and "what they can become."

Connolly (1990) also noted a need for more studies from the early adolescent participant's perspective. Such studies have perhaps been inhibited because of the difficulty in obtaining experiential descriptions and/or the inability of young children to articulate their understanding. Those difficulties are not insurmountable when one considers the wealth of knowledge and understanding to be realized. In this particular research it seemed that at times students were unable to find the words to convey exactly what they meant and part of the challenge of such research is to devise methods of data collection that allows one to construct meaning while still remaining true to the experience. In situations involving early adolescents I found that employing a number of data collection strategies most useful in constructing meaning. Informal and loosely structured conversation groups were quite successful with this age group. Students were more relaxed in situations with peers and there was allot of opportunity for clarification and negotiation of meaning and understanding. Response journals also proved invaluable to this research and I would highly recommend the use of directed journal type activities in studies involving early adolescents. One data collection strategy not employed in this research was video taping. If students were accustomed to videotaping it would be helpful in capturing the actions, body language and expressions of conversation groups, those insights that we often miss in our observations.

In terms of practical experiences there are many possibilities for research however, the following questions raised by this study may warrant further consideration. As new curricula
is developed and implemented it will be important to continue to research and monitor how students understand their practical experiences. For example, will students' understanding of their practical experiences change significantly after exposure to curricula developed in the context of practical problem solving?

Coming to understand the meaning and significance of students' practical experiences in home economics has raised questions as to the role of practical learning in other disciplines. For example, would students' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics be enhanced through practical problem solving or "hands on" approaches? The information and understanding gained from such studies would assist teachers and curriculum planners in meeting the needs of students, and may significantly change curriculum and teaching methodology.

This study may also have implications for teacher education. In terms of practical curriculum and teaching in the practical arts we need to be mindful of the notion of "Letting Learn" and provide the opportunities for students to "make action" as well as to "make things." It is important to curriculum planning as well as teacher education to recognize the merit of play and to promote the integration of play into the intermediate and upper levels of education avoiding sharp distinctions between work and play. Teacher education could also benefit from exploring the notion of the "Pedagogical Atmosphere" (Bollnow, 1989) and the qualities of the educator and the child which create that atmosphere and which are basic to pedagogical relationships.

In terms of the practical in home economics education it is recommended that there be serious discussion and consideration by all teachers of the meaning and significance of the practical and practical activities in education and in home economics education. The following questions have been raised in this research and may serve to focus discussions. What is the aim of home economics curriculum? Is it a "doing" curriculum in the productive
sense? Is it a "making" action curriculum in the original sense of the practical? What is the relationship between the productive and the practical in curriculum? Are they complementary as this research suggests or are they opposed? Is there a need to reconceptualize the practical in home economics education? How do we use our understanding of student experiences of the practical to better inform our teaching and curriculum development? These and many more questions need to be explored and addressed to resolve tensions within home economics and to de-mystify the practical in home economics, among colleagues, our students and the public at large.

"And what is practical or not practical about the activities you do in home economics?," the teacher inquired. "Most things are practical in home ec. because what we learn is used for real life," came the reply.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Home Economics 7


Record your thoughts, feelings and ideas about this week's activities and classes in home economics.

Listed below are Response Starters. Choose 5 and respond to them and then explain your response, (follow it up) with a "because" or an "explanation."

I like

I don't like

I learned

I found interesting

My favourite activity/part

This reminds me

I will

I think

I would like

I enjoy
APPENDIX B

Response Journal for April 10-24th

Record your thoughts, feelings and ideas about this past two weeks activities and labs on "Foodsafe."

Listed below are three response starters. Respond to each one and then follow up your response with a 2-3 sentence "because" or "description" or "explanation."

I learned-...

It is important-...

I care about-...
APPENDIX C

Home Economics 7


Think back on the things that you have learned and the activities that you have done in the past two weeks in Home Economics. In the space below write down the things that you have noticed, though and felt about the activities in your home economics classes. Note things that you have found exciting, boring (and why) an also include things which puzzle you and the questions you think are important.

What things have you learned that are useful to you?

How are they useful?
APPENDIX D

Grade 7 Responses for the weeks ending the 12th of June 1992.

Take a minute to think about your experiences and activities in home economics over the past two years, then answer the following questions.

1. What do you like about courses such as home economics?

2. Why do you like these courses?

3. What is important/or not important about the things you learn in home economics?

4. What is different about the learning that happens in home economics as compared to other courses?

5. What do you see as the purpose of courses such as home economics?

6. What does the word practical mean to you?

7. What is practical/not practical about the things you do in home economics?
APPENDIX E

Sample Lesson Plan for a year seven home economics class

Lesson 1 Meal Preparation-

Your group is to prepare the following recipe in a safe, cooperative, and efficient manner. Your group will be responsible for:
- using the proper utensils in preparing the meal
- observing safety guidelines
- following the method
- setting the table and serving the meal
- cleaning up properly after the meal
You have one class before preparing the meal in which to organize your group, locate and identify equipment and ingredients, and to clarify any techniques, terms, etc. that you do not understand about the recipe/assignment.
Evaluation will concentrate on:
Planning
Cooperation
Safety
Cleanup
Product and Presentation.

Sample of Response Journal to be used following the lesson.

Response Journal Starters to be completed with, "because," "an explanation," or "why"

I like
I don't like
I learned
I found it interesting
My favourite activity/part
This reminds me
I will
I would like
I wish
It is important to me that
I try
Interview Questions

Following Response Journal entries (20 -24) the opportunity, need may arise to conduct a semi structured interview with 8 students. The 8 students may possibly be identified and chosen through interesting, diverse, thoughtful responses to the activity. The interview would use questions such as those provided in the Sample Interview Questions and would most likely begin with discussion of their responses.

Sample Interview Questions

Interviews will take place as soon as permission is granted and will be done with a group of 4 students on Tuesday and the other 4 students on Friday. Interviews will be audio-taped and questions will emerge from response journals as well as some prepared questions to explore the thoughts, meanings and feelings students have about the practical.

1. What do you like about courses such as home economics?
2. What kinds of things do you like doing in this class?
3. Why do you like these?
4. What activities do you like the most?
5. What is "good" about this or that activity?
6. What is this experience like?
7. What are your feelings when you are doing this?
8. What is important to you about this activity?
9. Will you do or use this again?
10. Can you use something from this experience elsewhere in your life?
11. Is this like anything you do at home or out of school?
12. Are they the same? Are they different? How?
13. What do you see as the purpose of these activities?
14. What does practical mean to you?
15. What is practical about this or that experience?
16. What activities/experiences would you describe as practical? Why?
17. What is it about these activities/experiences that constitutes "practical."
APPENDIX G
CORRESPONDENCE
BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES SCREENING COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH AND OTHER STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

CERTIFICATE of APPROVAL

INVESTIGATOR: Peterat, L.
UBC DEPT: Math & Science Educ
INSTITUTION: Qualicum Beach Middle School
TITLE: Understanding student meaning of the practical
NUMBER: B92-132
CO-INVEST: McCaffery, J.A.
APPROVED: APR 30 1992

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. R.D. Spratley
Director, Research Services
and Acting Chairman

THIS CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL IS VALID FOR THREE YEARS FROM THE ABOVE APPROVAL DATE PROVIDED THERE IS NO CHANGE IN THE EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES
April 2, 1992.

Dear Sir:

As part of the requirements for a masters degree in education at the University of B.C. I am proposing to conduct research entitled "Understanding Student Meaning Of The Practical. I hereby apply to your School District for permission to conduct the study in my Home Economics 7 class. The proposal is for the Spring of 1992, and the data will be collected from the class during the months of April, May and June 1992.

I am enclosing a brief summary of the proposal to outline the purpose and procedures. Enclosed also is a draft of a parental permission letter.

Thank you for your assistance with this request. If further information is needed or if you have any questions, please ask me.

Sincerely,

J.A. McCaffery
April 24, 1992.

Dear Parent,

As part of the requirements for a masters degree in education at the University of British Columbia I am proposing to conduct research entitled "Understanding Student Meaning of The Practical". The purpose of this research is to come to a better understanding of what practical means to year 7 students and the significance of practical experiences in education. The focus of the study is on understanding a "student perspective" which will be very helpful in planning and implementing curriculum.

The research will not affect the course material that students will learn, nor will it affect the activities that they will participate in as a normal part of their course.

I am asking your permission to involve your son or daughter in this research. If you agree it will mean:

1. The use of student response journals—response journals are a part of normal classroom procedures at Qualicum Beach Middle School.
2. Student interviews—approximately 8 students will be interviewed by myself on 4-5 occasions following their home economics class at a time that will not affect their other classes.

The information gathered in this study will be confidential and students will not be identified in the final report of the research. Interview transcripts and audio-tapes will be destroyed as soon as my thesis is complete. The parent or student may withdraw from participating in this study at any time by a statement—oral or in writing. Refusal to participate or withdrawal at any time will have no consequences for the student.

My faculty advisor for this research is Dr. Linda Peterat, Department of Mathematics and Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia.

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of the project, the procedures to be used or the extent of your son's/daughter's involvement I would be happy to discuss these with you. I can be reached at Qualicum Beach Middle School (752-9212) or Dr. Peterat can be contacted at (822-4808). If you consent to your son's/daughter's participation please sign below, detach and return to me by May 4, 1992.

Sincerely,

Jill A. McCaffrey

I have received and read a copy of the parent consent form for the research project entitled, "Understanding Student Meaning of The Practical"

I consent

I do not consent to my child's participation in this study.

Date ___________________________ Signature ___________________________