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1 Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

This study aimed at investigating the affective experiences of students in an online learning environment.   The affective domain is known as the 'feeling' domain. Learning in this domain involves increasing internalisation or commitment to feelings

expressed as emotions, interests, attitudes, values, and appreciations (Bastable 2003:330). In this chapter, the reader is orientated with regard to the study.

1.2 Background to the study

One of the well-known facts with regard to all learning programmes and the students involved is that some students finish a course while others do not. Lecturers, who communicate with students face-to-face in an interpersonal situation, may be able to explain this phenomenon more easily than those who have no personal contact with students. Lecturers in the traditional education environment may even be able to predict with some certainty which students will discontinue a course because they cannot cope. They are able to converse with students on a one-to-one basis and, from time to time, some students may make appointments to discuss problems that they experience. This is true irrespective of the level or study year of students or the nature of the course. A large number of researchers have researched the reasons for students dropping out of courses. These reasons vary from financial considerations, not being able to cope with the academic demands, and even problems experienced with administration issues involved with student registration. However, knowing why students drop out is not enough to ensure that they stay on a course.

Some of the main reasons for students staying in a course can be found in the affective domain of education. Students stay because they receive proper support from their lecturers, or enjoy subject content.   However, the question is: *What are the factors that cause students involved in online learning to stay in a course, and what are the students' reasons for staying?* Should we determine the factors that made students stay in a course, we might be able to build such factors into future courses, and enhance the affective support of online students. The University of Pretoria deliberately attempted to expose students to a difficult and creative module. The module was active for six weeks. Twenty-four students started with the course and fifteen finished the course.

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1.3 Authorial representation

Note: Before the problem statement regarding this research study is provided, the following information is inserted in an attempt to explain to the reader the researcher's reasons for conducting this study.

I am a lecturer in Nursing Education and Advanced Dynamics of Nursing Sciences. In 1998, whilst doing an honours degree in Advanced Nursing Education, I attended a conference on multimedia. During this conference I realised the important role that information technology (IT) played in education, regardless of the discipline. Students doing master's degrees in Computer-Assisted Education presented some of the papers. I was impressed by what I saw and heard, and enquired about the programme. Up to that point, I had limited knowledge of computers. I used the software programmes Lotus Notes and Microsoft (MS) Word for typing tests and making graphs of student performance, and I knew that MS Windows operated my office computer.   That was the full extent of my computer knowledge and computing abilities.

I then applied to do the master's course in Computer-Assisted Education. I went through a selection process of first being selected on paper (when applications were assessed), and then doing a three-hour written aptitude and intelligence test. The minimum requirements were an honours degree, or a bachelor's degree in education, and familiarity with the "Microsoft environment". However, applicants' computer literacy or computer knowledge was not tested. As I did not realise the implications of the term "MS environment", I could not know what I did not know.

When the programme started, I quickly realised the extent of my ignorance. I decided to take some computer courses, including a MS Office course (MS Advanced Word, MS PowerPoint, MS Excel and MS Access), Netscape Composer (excluding hypertext mark-up language - HTML coding), and a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) course, so that I could do the assignments. I experienced a lot of anxiety and stress, as I was applying most of the information in practice for the first time when I did the assignments. I was a lecturer, an academic and a colleague to my lecturers, and I felt extremely inadequate.

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Seventeen students from over the country were registered for the master's programme. We were allowed contact with the lecturers as well as each other in any way and as often as we liked. We were all members of a listserv[1] through which we could communicate. An electronic bulletin board[2] was created where we could post something of value, such as how a specific problem could be solved. Communications were mostly about the problems that students encountered with assignments or technological aspects.   However, we did receive information from lecturers about future contact days, as well as feedback on assignments in a general format.

For each of the nine modules that we did, a contact day was arranged. During these contact days, we were orientated regarding the nature of the assignments and the specific requirements.   Usually, a contact day was eight hours long and during that time we received much information. Even though I did take notes, I 'forgot' most of what was said, and needed support from lecturers to complete the assignments.

Students supported one another, especially on contact days. However, support on contact days was limited, as we were in a 'class situation' most of the time. Even though time was limited, and even though much of the communication between students could have been described as complaints, knowing that I was not the only one finding things tough, did help. It was good not only to share frustrations, but also to receive help when it was needed. Students living close to one another communicated by telephone, and sometimes made arrangements to work together, but students living far from each had to rely on e-mail.

Unfortunately, we found it difficult to gain support from some of the lecturers. The student group received e-mail stating how 'simple' some of the things were what we could not do, and the nature of the feedback was such that it made us feel incompetent.   Some feedback could be described as patronising. I felt unsure and unsafe whilst doing some modules, and I had the impression that other students had the same experiences.

Having said all that, I had to admit that I did enjoy doing the master's course, however stressful, and I eventually gained knowledge and skills that I could apply in my profession. Still, I was convinced that my experience as a master's student would

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[1] Service on the Internet that provides an electronic mailing to subscribers with similar interests (Collins Concise Dictionary 2001:865)

[2] A facility on a computer network allowing any user to leave messages that can be read by any other user, and to download information (Collins Concise Dictionary 2001:195)

have been much more positive had I received from lecturers not only support on content and technology, but also moral support.

What I did experience during the course were feelings of loneliness and inadequacy, because I realised very early on that I did not know as much as was required of students as prior learning. Being an educator and knowing what the face-to-face support by a lecturer could mean to a student, I started wondering how lecturers provided for emotional support in online learning. Technologies, including IT, are 'prostheses' that people employ to accommodate their busy lives. Unfortunately, these prostheses alienate us from ordinary face-to-face contact. Students are more than just their physical, psychological, social and spiritual parts added together; they have to be approached holistically. Lecturers, therefore, should not only concentrate on the development of knowledge and skills, but also provide for the affective development of students. This aspect of learning has to realise, even if lecturers do not have personal contact with students.

The experiences that I had as a master's student led me to consider the emotional experiences of students engaged in online learning as a topic for research. The expectation was that this research would generate information that could be used to enhance not only the affective development of students but also the affective educational support of students in future online courses.

As my professional background is caring in nature, the affective (emotional) wellness as part of the holistic well being of people is important to me. It is also important that I convey this attitude to my students as well as serve as a role model to them in this regard. The lack of caring that I experienced gave rise to my interest in affective considerations in online learning.

Although my experience could be regarded as the personal account of one person, they highlighted the main problem, namely the lack of personal contact and encouragement in an online learning environment. This problem seemed to be universal and formed the basis of this study.

1.4 Problem statement

It is the faceless nature of the e-learning environment that is a matter of concern. Not only is the lack of face-to-face contact between lecturer and student a cause for

concern, but also the lack of face-to-face contact between students who are registered for an online programme. Understandably, personal contact is minimal in online learning. The question arises: *How do students make up, or compensate, for the lack of personal contact?*

Little attention is given to the affective domain in online learning. Lecturers focus their attention more often on cognitive processing and psychomotor functioning with little time set aside for exploring and clarifying learner feelings, emotions, and attitudes (Adkins 2004; Bastable 2003:332; Lee, Zeleke & Meletiou-Mavrotheris 2004; Murray 2002). A considerable amount of research has addressed the technology behind the communication; yet, research on students' affective experiences has lagged behind (Smith 2002).

The affective domain includes three levels that govern attitudes and feelings. According to Bastable (2003:333), they are the following:

- The *intrapersonal* level that includes personal perceptions of one's own self such as self-concept, self-awareness, and self-acceptance;
- The *interpersonal* level that includes the perspective of self in relation to other individuals; and
- The *extrapersonal* level that involves the perception of others as established groups.

One should consider cognition and emotion as two closely related, ongoing, changing streams of experience that interact with one another and influence overt behaviour in subtle complex ways (Cousin & Davidson [Sa]). Affective learning is part of every type of educational experience, even though the primary focus of learning may be on either the psychomotor or cognitive domain. It is inevitable that students' feelings or emotions will be aroused to some extent when they are exposed to different types of educational experiences (Bastable 2003:333). The feelings, the emotions and the affective experiences of students involved in online learning are investigated in this study.

1.5 Research question

In view of the above problem statement referring to feelings, emotions and affective experiences, the following research question forms the basis of this study:

What are the affective experiences of students in an online learning environment?

1.6 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and interpret the affective experiences of students in an online learning environment and to discover important categories of meaning (Marshall and Rossman 1999:33) about their affective experiences.

1.7 Objectives

Given the purpose of this study, the objectives were to establish:

- How online students cope in an online learning environment;
- Why online students ask for help;
- Why online students offer help;
- The principal causes of motivation and frustration;
- The nature of the cooperation between students (the nature of peer support);
- How (and to what extent) affective experiences of students contribute towards the successful completion of an online course;
- What could make a student drop off a course regardless of volition.

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1.8 The scope and context of the study

According to Huitt (1999a), the concept '*feeling*' can be defined as:

> '*An affective state of consciousness, such as that resulting from emotions, sentiments, or desires; an emotional state or disposition; (a) subjective human response.*'

This study focuses on the affective experiences of students who took a course by means of online learning. It specifically aimed at addressing the meanings that students attach to affective experiences during online learning.

The focus of this study is affective experiences such as *feelings* and not necessarily *emotions* or *attitudes* of students. It can be argued that these three concepts ('*feelings*', '*emotions*' and '*attitudes*') are interrelated but, for the purpose of this study, '*feelings*' are interpreted as *affective experiences.* The assumption is that students' affective experiences (feelings) are evoked by their emotions and influenced by their personal attitudes toward the different aspects of this unique learning situation.

1.9 Exclusions from this study

The study does not address the following:

- Aspects regarding the design and development of online course material;
- Aspects regarding the design and development of online games;
- The role of the course designer, course developer or lecturer;
- The selection and use of e-learning platforms;
- Computer infrastructure – hardware and software specifications;
- Academic backgrounds of the students or lecturer;
- Reasons why students drop out of online courses;
- Gender or race issues in online learning;
- Assessment in an online learning environment; and
- Issues of emotional intelligence.

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1.10 Limitations of the study

The study is about the personal experiences of study participants (online students) and the interpretation of their affective experiences. Transferability of the study findings might be problematic, because of the uniqueness of affective experiences. The applicability of the findings does not depend on the researcher who undertakes the study, but rather on the researcher who wants to use the study findings (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport 2002:352). As this study has a single system design, it will not be possible to draw generalisations from it. Single-group designs are very limited with regard to conclusions that may be drawn from them (De Vos *et al.* 2002:162). Gathering responses with regard to feelings is of short duration and this affects the quality and nature of data.

1.11 Significance and potential contribution of the study

As mentioned in section 1.4, researchers in the Information Technology and e-learning fields tend to ignore the affective domain as an area of research (Murray 2002). At the same time it must be noted that emotions and feelings of students undoubtedly affect the quality of their learning (Van der Horst & McDonald 2001:39). For this reason, it is important to consider the influence that the affective components of online learning have on overall learning and the professional and personal development of a student. Should it be possible to determine the affective experiences of students in an online environment, mechanisms could be built into future courses to improve the affective support of students in such an environment.

1.12 Definitions of key concepts

In the context of this study, the following definitions of key concepts will apply:

- **Affective domain:** This domain is characterised by learners' emotions, feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasm, motivation, attitudes and relationships. It includes situations in which students acquire, process and present information.
- **Asynchronous activities/communication:** Learners do not communicate with each other or the lecturer at the same time. They are therefore free to communicate when it is possible or convenient to do so (Gravett & Geyser 2004:171).

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- **Cognitive domain:** It involves the recall or recognition of specific facts, procedures and concepts that serve the development of intellectual abilities and skills as learners acquire, process and present information.

- **Contact situation:** Learners and the teacher are physically in the same classroom at the same time. It is in this situation that the student and lecturer are able to engage in face-to-face interaction.

- **Courses:** These are formal courses that serve the continuation of academic and professional development.

- **Electronic learning (e-learning):** It is the acquisition of knowledge and skill by using a computer and a network[3] to communicate. It is the "… way people communicate and learn electronically" (Roffe 2002:40).

- **Face-to-face interaction:** It is a situation where two people meet and talk directly. See 'contact situation' above.

- **Lecturer:** A lecturer is a person who has been assigned the responsibility of guiding students toward reaching outcomes/objectives (Phillips 1994:217). S/he is comfortable with an adult approach to learning (MacGill 1986:149-154).

- **Information technology (IT):** IT implies the use of computers and telecommunication systems for storing, retrieving and sending information (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002:592).

- **Internet:** According to Mouton (2001:205), the Internet is a '…global association of computers that carries data and makes the exchange of information possible'.

- **Learning environment:** This refers to a learning situation where the lecturer is purposefully involved with the student to ensure the attainment of learning outcomes by the student.

- **Online learning:** Online learning occurs when education and training is delivered and supported by networks such as the Internet. Learning may be synchronous or asynchronous, and learners are able to learn anyplace at any time.

- **Outcomes:** Outcomes are the objectives of a course that should be attained by students.

- **Psychomotor domain:** This domain includes the learner's physical movement, coordination, her/his use of motor-skill areas, as well as the manipulative or motor skills of the student in acquiring, processing and presenting information. It also includes the environment in which students work.

- **Student:** A student is registered for and engaged in continuing education by means of online learning/e-learning.

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[3] A network is a number of computers that are interconnected in some way or another. In a wide area network (such as the Internet) the terminals are linked by radio or satellite.

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- ❀ **Synchronous activities/communication:** Learners communicate at the same time. This is often referred to as 'real time' communication (Gravett & Geyser 2004:171).
- ❀ **Technology:** Technology is the systematic application of concepts of behavioural and physical sciences and of other knowledge and skills to the solution of problems.
- ❀ **Web:** According to Mouton (2001:205), the Web is a '…subset of the Internet; a collection of interlinked documents that work together using a specific Internet Protocol called HTTP (Hyper Text Transfer Protocol)'.

1.13 Research method

The affective experience of the online environment is of interest in this study (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves 2000:46). It is a single kind of human experience that was studied rather than a social process or a culture (Morse 1994:118). Considering the research objectives, it was appropriate to conduct the study by employing a *qualitative approach* within a *phenomenological paradigm*. The feelings and affective experiences of the students were *interpreted* (Holloway & Wheeler 2002:3).

Savenye and Robinson (1996:1172) describe qualitative research as research devoted to *developing* an *understanding* of human systems. For the purposes of this research, '*understanding*' implies interpreting the affective experiences of the participants (online students), while '*developing an understanding*' implies gaining knowledge from students about their experiences.

Hermeneutics were used as the words of students explaining their experiences were interpreted. The study focused on understanding or interpreting the meaning of the affective descriptions verbalised by students during focus group interviews. It was important to think about the meaning of a word because language is a manner of expressing experience (Cohen *et al.* 2000:6).

1.14 Research design

The research was conducted in the form of a case study. Merriam (1998:27) is quoting Miles and Huberman when she defines a case as '…a phenomenon of some sort occurring in bounded text'. The bounded nature of a case is reiterated by

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Creswell (1998:172) when he states plainly that a case study has boundaries. The boundaries of this study are the number of students who was involved in the module, the lecturer, and a time-span of six weeks during which the module was active.

A case study was chosen as a design for this study because it reflects *particularistic*, *descriptive* and *heuristic* characteristics. This study is particularistic because it focuses on a particular event. It is descriptive, as rich and thick descriptions were made of the data gathered. It has heuristic qualities, as the meanings that students attach to their experiences were discovered (Cresswell 1998:172; Merriam 1998:27). Authorial representation conveys the position of the researcher (Creswell 1998:172). Refer to section 1.3 and 1.17.

1.14.1   Population and sampling

The basis for this study is a two-year tutored master's degree in Computer-Assisted Education. The fifth module in the master's programme, with its focus on e-learning, was used for this research study. The module was hosted entirely online for a period of six weeks, and was presented in the style of a well-known game, namely that of the internationally acclaimed reality game show *Survivor*. In this module, the game is called *CyberSurfiver*, as it is played in cyberspace[4] and the learning experiences of participants are based on surfing[5] the Web. [Students who took the module that was presented from 18 July 2002 to 29 August 2002 were requested to partake in this study.]

Participants in *CyberSurfiver* were chosen as the population of this study because of the environment they had to proceed in. The population consisted of adult learners who combined part-time study with a full-time job.

A specific group of students was selected to verbalise their shared experiences. It was purposively decided to use this group of students, because they were forced to make meaning of their learning experiences (Cohen *et al.* 2000:50). Their participation was considered from the following perspectives:

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[4] Data stored in a computer or network as a three-dimensional model (an imaginary place or virtual reality)
[5] To move rapidly and easily through stored data

- Experiences of place;
- Experiences of events and time; and
- Ways of verbalising experiences.

The assumption is that these three perspectives cannot be seen in isolation (Cohen *et al.* 2000:46). Students experienced learning events at the same time, and were expected to communicate in a specified and prescribed manner.   Data was collected by transcribing the verbal accounts of the selected group of participants.

1.14.2   Data collection

Different data collection methods were used to obtain relevant data about the research topic. As the module under discussion was presented entirely online, and as all communication between students, and between students and their lecturer, had to occur online, a number of possible electronic data sources were available for analysis. These sources were available as the researcher had unlimited access to all online communication between participants, and between participants and their facilitator. This access was arranged, as it was expected that the e-communication would intimate the affective experiences of participants. These sources are the following:

- Electronic group messages;
- E-mail messages;
- *Yahoo! Messenger*[6]; and
- Individual home Web pages.

However, the main source of data was the participants' verbal accounts of their experiences as related during focus group interviews. The focus group technique was used as a data collection method because it can provide rich and thick data at a reasonable cost. The purpose of focus group interviews was to collect data about personal experiences of participants. A skilled person was required to conduct the interviews, as it can be expected that emotional responses may be provoked during these interviews (Morse 1994:226, 227, 229). Thus, an independent interviewer conducted the interviews and a second independent person took field notes. Field notes were taken by means of spontaneous observation. The purpose of using field

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[6] An Internet-based synchronous communication tool

notes was to assist in the interpretation of the experiences of participants and therefore to enrich the data analysis (Burns & Grove 1997:352, 359).

An interview protocol was designed, and the interviews were audio recorded by using a Dictaphone and then transcribed. Pilot testing was not considered for this study, as the study is interpretive in nature (Holloway & Wheeler 2002:80). Learning to do interviews or analyses is not piloting; it is, at best, training, and it may or may not be incorporated into the data set. Once a researcher understands what is going on and has verified analysis, the study is usually considered finished (Morse & Stephany 2001:1).

1.14.3   Data analysis

Data obtained electronically was analysed, but not coded. This afforded me a glimpse of the affective experiences of participants. It was also useful, as it served as orientation with regard to the participants' affective experiences and the nature and amount of information that was obtained during focus group interviews.

Rich and thick descriptions were obtained from the verbalised experiences of participants (Holloway & Wheeler 2002:140). These descriptions were analysed by means of a qualitative content analysis. The transcribed narrative descriptions obtained from the focus group interviews formed the units of analysis.   At first smaller parts of the data were examined, which ensured that the whole situation was eventually understood (Cohen *et al.* 2000:72, 73). Themes were searched for and clustered, and codes were applied. Coding is done to transform raw data into a standardised form (Polit & Hungler 1993:329). In this study, the main purpose of this exercise was to attempt an interpretation of the meaning of participants' experiences in online learning (Creswell 1998:51). The hermeneutic circle was used to guide the process of interpretation. The way the data was analysed and the process of interpretation contributed to the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research.

1.14.4   Authenticity and trustworthiness

The *authenticity* and *trustworthiness* of the research were enhanced by meeting evaluation criteria such as *confirmability, meaning in context, recurring patterning, saturation, credibility, and transferability* (Morse 1994:105-7). The realisation of meeting these criteria are explained as follows:

- ❧ **Confirmability** is evaluated by seeking repeated and documented evidence (Morse 1994:105).
- ❧ **Meaning in context** is ensured by analysing the meaning provided by the participants in the context of their experiences.
- ❧ **Recurring patterning** is searched for in the verbalised experiences of the participants.
- ❧ **Saturation** is attempted by making rich and thick descriptions in the data analysis (Morse 1994:106).

Rather than seeking internal and external validity, the focus was on the **authenticity** of data. To support the practice of bracketing, a second independent data analyst was employed to verify (authenticate) coded data obtained from focus group interviews. (Holloway & Wheeler 2002:173; Morse 1994:119.) This allowed for the process of inquiry to be open to outside scrutiny (Cohen *et al.* 2000:86).

Rather than focussing on reliability, the focus was on **trustworthiness** (Creswell 1998:197). The concepts *credibility, dependability* and *transferability* are used to describe various aspects of trustworthiness.

- ❧ **Credibility** of this study was ensured by seeing to it that the process of data analysis addresses the intended focus of the study (Graneheim & Lundman 2004:109; Morse 1994:105). Credibility was also ensured by employing an independent data analyst, and by allowing two other researchers involved with this group of students (see subsection 1.17) to read and comment on the field notes and the interview transcripts (Janesick 2000:393).

- ❧ **Dependability** received attention, as I am aware that the interpretation of the data may change over time. Data was presented in such a manner as to allow for alternative interpretations by readers (Graneheim & Lundman 2004:110).

- ❧ **Transferability** of the findings of this study may be problematic, as the applicability of the findings does not depend on the researcher who is conducting the study, but rather on the researcher who plans to apply the findings to another context (De Vos *et al.* 2002:352). Graneheim and Lundman (2004:109) state:

> *'The authors can give suggestions about transferability, but it is the reader's decision whether or not the findings are transferable in another context.'*

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The intended outcome of this study, because of its explorative nature, is a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants and not the generalisability of results (Maykunt & Morehouse 1994:44). A deeper understanding is reached when the findings of the study assume the form of a definite answer to the research question. Assuming a definite form is also implied by the term 'crystallisation'.

### 1.14.5	Crystallisation

For the purpose of crystallisation, information obtained from students was narrated. Literature specific to the findings was then used to confirm the study findings, and to identify unique findings (Burns & Grove 1997:118). Janesick (2000:379) is of the opinion that crystallisation offers a better lens through which to view qualitative research designs. The process of crystallisation ensured viewing the data from different perspectives. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:5), the central image of qualitative inquiry is the central image of crystallisation and not the concept of triangulation.

1.15 Literature control

Literature control was done to examine and verify trends and similarities in the data that was obtained. It is used to confirm the findings of a study, and to indicate deficiencies and gaps. Although evidence is sought, literature control can uncover presuppositions (Morse 1994:120). Literature was integrated into the study as the study developed. This was done by means of an ongoing literature search that was linked to the findings in the data (Holloway & Wheeler 2002:35). Thus, literature was sought to confirm the findings of the study, and to identify information that did not surface in the study (Burns & Grove 1997:118).

1.16 Ethical considerations

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to recognise and protect the rights of human research participants. During the course of this study, attention was given to the following human rights:

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- **Self-determination:** Participation was not forced on participants, and participants were not discredited if they choose not to participate.
- **Privacy:** No individual was identified by her/his real name.
- **Anonymity:** Personal information about the participants was not revealed.
- **Confidentiality:** When necessary, pseudonyms were used, e.g. for the purpose of the discussion of data.
- **Fair treatment and protection from discomfort or harm:** Participants were not discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, or religion.
- **Informed consent:** Students who intended to participate in this online learning module were informed that the module would provide the basis for three doctoral studies. At the first student contact session, the online lecturer and the supervisor of the module communicated this message verbally. Written consent was also obtained from participants.

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the supervisor who was responsible for the running of the module. An extensive ethical statement as required by the Faculty of Education within the University of Pretoria had been compiled, and was accepted. The proposal for this study was successfully defended before a panel of academics at the Faculty of Education in the University of Pretoria on 28 February 2003.

1.17 Role/s of researcher/s

Three researchers were directly/indirectly involved with the group of students who intended to complete this specific master's programme module with its focus on e-learning.   The three researchers were members of a collaborative research project. Our approaches to the project were based on three different foci, namely:

- The role of the facilitator in online learning (Adendorff 2004);
- Affective experiences of students involved in online learning (Salomé Meyer); and
- The interaction in an adult online learning community (Van Ryneveld 2004).

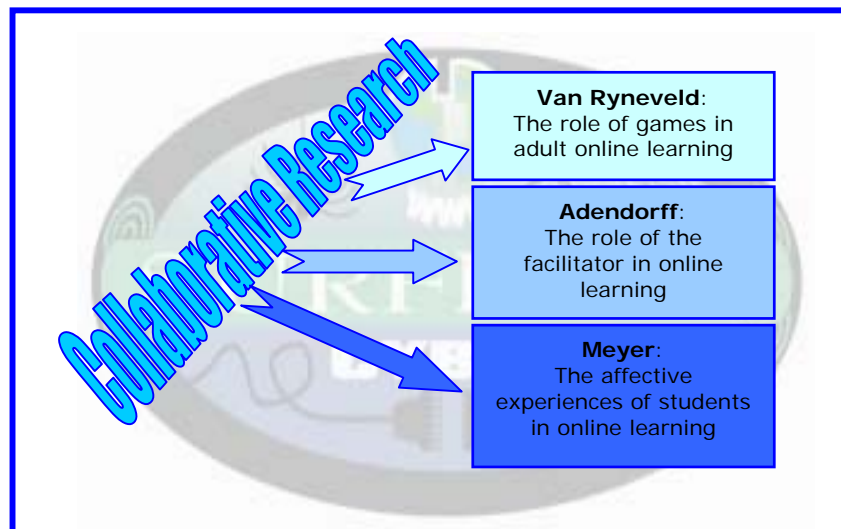The project is schematically depicted in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Collaborative Research

1.18 Outline of this study

⌾ **Chapter 1: Orientation to the study:** This chapter gives the background to the study and provides an overview of the research project. It includes authorial representation and mentions the lack of research on the affective components of e-learning, which prompted this research.

⌾ **Chapter 2: Literature in context:** This chapter provides an overview of available literature, and includes the conceptual framework.

⌾ **Chapter 3: Research methodology:** The methodology used is described and motivated. The chapter also includes a description of the data collection instruments. The research process is explained. The realisation of the data collection and the data analysis is outlined, and illustrated by means of figures and tables.

⌾ **Chapter 4: Curative factors:** The first category identified in the coding process is discussed by means of numerous quotations. The data are interpreted and the literature control is done.

⌾ **Chapter 5: Process of affective development:** This chapter contains the discussion on the process of affective development, which is the second category identified in the coding process. It also contains the literature control on the category.

⌾ **Chapter 6: Inhibiting factors:** The third category (inhibiting factors) is discussed and its accompanying literature control is done in this chapter.

❀ **Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations:** An overview of the research is provided and conclusions are drawn. Limitations of the study as well as areas for possible further research are addressed.

1.19 Summary

In this chapter, the following research question was introduced: *What are the affective experiences of students in an online learning environment?* In order to answer this question, a group of online students were interviewed. This study was undertaken in an attempt to understand the affective experiences of students involved in online learning. The expectation was that the study results would enhance knowledge and understanding of the affective domain in online learning. It was hoped that the findings would encourage lecturers to rethink traditional teaching practices, and to consider enhancing the process of learning with the assistance of technology, specifically, e-learning. In this chapter, the background to the study was discussed and the research design was introduced. Literature in context will be discussed in Chapter 2.