

## Chapter 3

### *Walking a mile in the other person's shoes: The method*

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I explain the journey that led to finding, contacting and meeting my research partners. I use the language of research partners to emphasise my aspiration for a collaborative inquiry. I move on to locate myself and the context that shaped my intellectual journey and authorised my point of view. I declare my positionality from the outset because I want to be clear that it is from this standpoint that I embarked on the study. I seek to acknowledge that my values, feelings, culture, history and experience shaped and defined the inquiry (Evans 2002). My purpose is to unpack the connections between my own positionality and the research process. In doing so, I take Code's (1991:55) argument that "knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its constructors and the more explicit a researcher is about those marks, the more the readers are able to evaluate it fairly".

I argue that the narrative research method is a powerful and suitable tool which aims to understand complex educational processes in which the meaning for those involved is given a central role (Geert 1999). In explaining my choice of narrative inquiry as a research method, I detail my experience with narrative inquiry and my attempts to see life through the eyes of my research partners, assuming a posture of indwelling, or what Maykut and Morehouse (1994) referred to as "walking a mile in the other person's shoes".

I present a reflexive account of the inquiry, critically reflecting on the knowledge produced as well as on the process of knowledge production (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). I make explicit and account for the specific procedures that I used for data collection and analysis. I maintain that I was able to strengthen my research through this methodological explicitness and through acknowledging the role that my

emotions – not separating my ‘human self’ from my ‘researcher self’ (Rager 2005) – had on the process of inquiry.

## **Finding my research partners**

The purpose of my study was to deepen understanding of the dynamics concerning policy – how it is translated at individual and group levels, and how it is translated into action in the real world. I wanted to explore how HIV-positive teachers within a specific social context understand, interpret and act on HIV and Life Skills policy. The aim was to gather subjective accounts that revealed how the world was experienced and constructed by a group of people with similar experiences. The exploratory nature of qualitative research offered me the scope to understand how a particular group of people construct meaning from the way in which they perceive their lives. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007:43), qualitative researchers seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are. Using qualitative research would enable me not only to see the social world from the point of view of the teachers living with AIDS, but to produce a text that gives voice to the subjects of research: the teachers.

In electing to study the lives of teachers living with HIV and AIDS, I was vaguely aware that I had chosen a very sensitive and emotional subject area. I am now cognisant of the fact that during the research proposal phase I was oblivious of the challenging and emotionally draining task that lay ahead of me. This started becoming clear to me as I progressed with my research, moving beyond the research proposal phase. I began to realise that I might have underestimated the enormity of the challenge that lay ahead, the complex ethical issues involved, and the fact that the research would require a great deal of emotional labour and personal reflection from myself as a researcher and from my research partners.

All the comments from my supervisor and lecturers who read my proposal had carried the warning that I needed to be careful as I was asking people to recount very deep, potentially painful and traumatic events in their lives. At the same time, I was warned that the topic was likely to arouse very deep emotions in myself as the researcher. And it did. I will explore the emotional journey that I took later in this chapter.

Through my readings of various texts on doing research on sensitive topics, I became aware of the need for a careful selection of participants (Lee 1993; Lubbe 2005; Bogdan and Biklen 2007). The respondents had to be prepared to disclose their HIV status and be willing to share their personal experiences, feelings and emotions with a stranger. Given that the interviews took place over three months, the respondents had to be able to afford the time and this called for commitment on their part.

I intended to select my sample from a population of primary school teachers in Zimbabwe. I wanted to look only at primary school teachers because they all have the responsibility to teach HIV/AIDS and Life Skills programmes. At primary school level, each teacher is assigned to one class and they teach all subject areas. At secondary school level, the situation is different, mainly because the teachers are subject-specific. Not all secondary school teachers teach HIV/AIDS and Life Skills. This responsibility is left to guidance teachers only.

Another criterion that I used for the selection of the participants was their accessibility. Because of the intense interactions that were required with the participants, I selected respondents from the Harare region where I could easily reach them. The effect of using this as a selection criterion was that it narrowed the selection of teachers to those primary school teachers working in an urban setting.

I used purposeful snowball sampling for the selection of the participants. I chose this sampling method because I wanted to select information-rich cases for an in-depth study. Patton (1990) defines snowball sampling as an approach designed to identify people with particular knowledge, skills or characteristics; it makes use of community knowledge about those possessing the skills or experiences in question (Patton 1990). In snowball sampling the researcher starts from an initial set of contacts and is then passed on by them to others, who in turn refer to others and so on. Snowball sampling has the advantage that people who form links in the referral chain are known and trusted by the potential respondents, and they are able to vouch for the researcher's bona fides (Lee 1993).

In choosing purposeful snowball sampling, I was fully aware that my sample was not representative of the wider population. I wanted to choose participants, not because they are representative of a population but because they possessed distinctive

characteristics. I was not interested in generalisation; I was interested in participants who could give me rich, in-depth field texts that would give me an insight into the experiences of teachers living with HIV and AIDS.

I was aware that such teachers could be reached through support organisations or networks. I approached the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA), who referred me to one of their members who was living positively with HIV. This teacher, whom I call Hope, belonged to the Development of Antiretroviral Therapy for Africa (DART) programme.

With the contact details I had been given by ZIMTA, I got in touch with Hope. I introduced myself and asked to meet her about some research I was conducting. We agreed to meet in my office the following Saturday morning. I suggested the first meeting in my office because I felt that meeting in her home would be inappropriate at that point as she had not yet consented to take part in research. My office seemed to be a central and neutral location, as opposed to either of our homes. She came in and I introduced myself and the purpose of my research. When she introduced herself, I was immediately confronted with a dilemma because she was a secondary school teacher. In my selection criteria I had wanted to interview primary school teachers only because in Zimbabwe they have the responsibility for teaching the subject HIV/AIDS and Life Skills. Hope told me that she was a Home Economics and English teacher.

Shelving my preferred criteria, I gave her a copy of the consent form (Appendix Three) to read in her own time. I took time to reflect on the situation. I was not sure interviewing Hope would answer the research questions that I had because she was not involved in teaching Life Skills programmes at her school. At the same time, a part of me wanted to interview her in order to explore her experiences with HIV in the school context. While I was not sure this could answer my research questions, I felt that the interview could open up new insights that I had overlooked. After thinking through my dilemma, I decided to go ahead and interview Hope. I made the decision to take her interview as a pilot so that I could refine my research instruments, while at the same time generating data that could illuminate Hope's experiences with HIV in the school.

I kept a personal diary which I completed after each interview session. Having a diary allowed me the space to record my feelings, reflections and observations that I made during the sessions, which could not be captured on the tape recorder. My research diary emerged as a very valuable source of information, as I later struggled to explore and interweave my own story with those of my research partners (see Appendix Four).

I recorded the following in my diary the day I was to meet Hope:

### **HOPE (14-03-06)**

*Today I will have my first interview with Hope and I am nervous. I do not know what to expect. My anxiety increases as the time of the meeting comes closer. My particular anxiety comes from the worry that maybe I have not read and planned for the interview adequately. I feel that I might go through the process and realise that I might be missing essential information.*

*We had arranged that I would pick her up from her school in the morning as she had excused herself from school to go for her monthly visit to the hospital to collect her medication. I would then take her back into town with me after the interview so she could go to the hospital.*

*I have decided to use this first interview as a pilot so I can get a chance to pre-test my data collection instruments. I plan to go through the whole process of interviewing with one participant before I identify the other research participants. I hope I can learn from the pilot and then adjust my data collection tools where necessary.*

*I started off by explaining to her about the research and what she was expected to do and asked her if she had gone through the consent form. She had read it, and she indicated that it was acceptable for her and she was happy to sign it.*

*The first interview was all about knowing more about Hope. I deliberately avoided asking any personal questions because I wanted to establish rapport between us. After her initial nervousness she relaxed as she talked about her family and how she grew up. She shared photographs of her family with me. It was an enjoyable time for both of us. I found talking to Hope very refreshing and, as we finished the first interview, I looked forward to the next one.*

I met Hope for a total of five times between February and April 2006. The interviews varied in length but none exceeded ninety minutes. Each session corresponded to a

category in the interview schedule (see Appendix Two). I used the categories as a road map for the interviews, although I did not strictly adhere to them. I was flexible to the other ways in which she chose to share her story, and I also looked out for other emerging issues. I started each session with a casual conversation to break the ice before we got into the substantive issues. Most of my interviews with Hope took place in her Mabvuku house, and I remember being very nervous before each interview. I was not sure if she would open up to me or whether she would be offended by my line of questioning. I found Hope to be a soft-spoken, gentle person, and she made me feel welcome in her home.

After I completed my interviews with Hope, I had collected very rich contextual data on her life. However, the information she gave me was missing the policy-specific information that I would need to answer my research question on the experiences of HIV-positive teachers in implementing HIV policy. Hope was not involved in the implementation of the HIV/AIDS and Life Skills policy because she taught English and Home Economics at her secondary school. I decided to keep her data and not to exclude her from my sample in case I would need to refer to her interview data.

Interviewing Hope had two advantages. First, it allowed me to reflect on my questionnaires and my own interviewing technique, enabling me to revise my questionnaires after each interview. Second, Hope was able to introduce me to two other teachers living with HIV and AIDS whom she knew through the DART programme. Gift and Ruva were both primary school teachers. I interviewed them over the course of the next six months.

I can describe the six months I spent interviewing Gift and Ruva as the most emotionally intense period of the whole research process. As primary school teachers, I found that their stories touched the nerve of the matter and they adequately described the challenges that they faced in the implementation of the Life Skills policy. Unconsciously I stopped worrying about whether I would get enough data to answer the research questions. Instead I concentrated on the emotions that the process roused in me as a researcher. This is reflected by the entries I made in my diary.

My interviews with Gift took place between April and June 2006. All three interviews took place at the University of Zimbabwe Campus, in Gift's office at the

Student Services Centre. Each interview started with the research formalities and then went on using the interview schedule as guide. Below is a diary excerpt from our second interview:

## **Gift**

### **Interview 2 (30-04-06)**

*Gift went into an emotional state as she chronicled the unfolding of events after Ruth's death. It seemed nothing was going right for him, and this was exacerbated by his own test results coming back positive. By mutual consent, we ended the interview at the point when Gift received his test results. It was an intensely emotional session for both of us. For Gift, telling the story brought back the pain and the feelings of loss. I simply needed a break. I felt emotionally drained. During that second interview I realised that it was not possible for me to go into another person's life story and come out unchanged.*

*After the interview I wanted a way of letting out the emotions bottled inside me. I decided to write down my reflections of the interview. Many questions came to mind: Who gets infected with HIV? Would Gift have been infected if he had made different choices in his life? Who is responsible for what happened in his life? Would his life have been different if he had not grown up in an orphanage? If I had been in his position, how would I have dealt with the situation?*

*As much as I tried to get out of Gift's story and back into my own life, I failed. The emotion I felt was too intense; I kept reflecting on our interview. The more I thought about it, the more I began reflecting on my own place in the research. I felt this dull, nagging concern: Was it my place to peer into the lives of others? Did I have the right to venture into the private spheres of other people lives?*

I met Ruva four times between July and October 2007. Like Hope and Gift, I started with the research formalities and then went on to the interview. I found Ruva very cheerful and willing to share much more information than my interview schedule required. I adopted a flexible stance and allowed her to share her story in the way she chose. Below is an excerpt from my last interview with Ruva:



## **Ruva**

### **Interview 4 (28-10-06)**

*Today is my last interview with Ruva. The journey we have been through has been emotional for both of us. Over the weeks of the interviews, I feel we have become close and I am grateful to Ruva for having shared an important part of her life with me. Part of me feels guilty for just being on the receiving end of the relationship. While I have empathised with her, I feel that I have not given anything of myself. I am troubled by this.*

*As Ruva spoke, she sat across the table from me, with her head to one side and her voice lowered. Her eyes had that far-away look of someone remembering past times. I could see pain etched on her features; I could detect it in her voice and from her posture. I felt my own tears burning the back of my throat. As a woman and mother, I could relate to her pain. I understood her worries about her children and their future, her decision to hold back the sad news from her husband. For a brief moment I felt the line between the researcher and the researched become hazy and disappear. In its place was two women united by their love for their children, and by the need to protect their loved ones from pain.*

*As I mull it over in my head I come to the realisation that there is no such thing as being outside of the epidemic; we are all a part of it one way or the other. Ibanez-Carrasco's (1993) words came to mind; he states that, culturally speaking, everyone is at risk and we are all involved because sexuality is a collective phenomenon. I conclude my interview with Ruva filled with admiration for this woman who is very loving, who has managed to bury the past and look to the future. I admire the fact that she is very willing to share her life story 'if will help others in my situation'. Part of me feels sad that my interactions with her are coming to an end. I had started looking forward to our interviews.*

Several months later, when I reread my diary entries, I relived the intense emotion that I had felt during the data collection phase. Fortunately for me, I had come across a number of writings on the effects of conducting emotionally laden research (Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Lather and Smithies 1997; Rager 2005). I also took the time to discuss the personal and emotional impact of the research with one of my supervisors, and this helped enormously.

After completing the interviews with Hope, Ruva and Gift, I realised that I had a more or less homogeneous sample whose attributes were remarkably similar because they all belonged to the same social networks. Continuing with this particular network would tempt one to assume that this selection was a typical



reflection of teachers living with AIDS in Zimbabwe. I knew from my experience working in the field of HIV and AIDS and from talking to critical readers that my sample was biased and that there are teachers living with HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe who are not part of any social support networks and whose stories would offer different insights to those of Ruva, Gift and Hope.

According to Lee (1993), bias is an inevitable feature of snowball sampling because the networks tend to be homogeneous in their attributes rather than providing linkages to others whose social characteristics are different. In order to increase the variability of my sample, I made a conscious effort to exercise more control over the referral chains. I did this by using other starting points so as to ensure better coverage of the population under study. I followed up referral chains on the basis of their ability to give me a more balanced view on the experiences of teachers living with AIDS. That is what led me to contact Johanna.

I had met Johanna in the days when I worked for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Towards the end of 2004 I was working as a programme officer with the UNESCO Sub-regional Office in Harare. We hosted a colloquium on HIV/AIDS, and we invited HIV-positive teachers to tell their stories in the presence of key policy makers from the various Ministries of Education from the sub-region. We formed a panel which was moderated by an HIV and AIDS activist. From that panel discussion, there was one female teacher who was very articulate in sharing her experiences, and she talked about how her openness had paved the way for other HIV-positive teachers in her school to open up to her. I took down her contact details as I thought that one day I might want to work with her in my research. I contacted her and she consented to taking part in the research. However, with Johanna I faced the same dilemma I did with Hope, in that she was a secondary school Geography teacher.

Like I did with Hope, I felt an ethical obligation to interview her even if she did not fit the research profile. She was my fourth contact. I met Johanna three times in October 2006, and all our meetings took place in her house.

Next I approached the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) and explained that I was looking for an HIV-positive primary school teacher who was not a member of any support group and who was not getting any support for anti-

retroviral therapy. The officer that I talked to showed an interest in my research. The PTUZ had also been trying to assess how their HIV-positive members were coping with HIV and AIDS. They knew a number of teachers who had come to them asking for help with medication. They agreed to contact them on my behalf to see if any of them were interested in taking part in the research. That is how I met Edwin, who would be my fifth contact.

Getting hold of Edwin proved very difficult as he was frequently away from school because of illness. My frustrations in trying to get an interview with Edwin are reflected in the following diary entry:

### **Edwin (13-11-07)**

*I am hoping to finally meet Edwin today, after weeks of fruitless searches. Edwin's story is different in that it chronicles a lone struggle to cope with HIV/AIDS. It is one of despair and loss of hope compared to that of Gift and Ruva. After interviewing Gift, Ruva and Hope, who are members of support groups and whose stories reflect hope and victory against HIV and AIDS, I realised that this was just one side of the coin. I needed to look at the other side of the coin, at teachers who are fighting and in some cases losing the battle against the disease. I knew such teachers were in the majority, and I also knew that gaining access to them would be difficult for many will not come out in the open, preferring to struggle in silence.*

*As per Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture regulations my first port of call was the school administration block. I went to the headmaster's office, presented my research clearance and explained the purpose of my visit. I requested to see Edwin but was told that Edwin had not reported for duty that Monday. In fact, the school headmaster was worried about Edwin's erratic attendance and the effect it was having on the pupils and other teachers. When I asked for Edwin's home address, I was told that it was against school policy to disclose personal details of staff members. It was clear from the way Mr Musa spoke that Edwin's absenteeism had become an issue of concern in the school. I went back home feeling frustrated but more curious about Edwin.*

*On the whole, interviewing Edwin proved to be a frustrating experience. Understandably, because of his deteriorating health he often did not keep appointments. I was not able to conclude my interviews with him because on the last day we were supposed to meet, he was not at the school. The school head informed me that Edwin had stopped coming to work, and they were not sure what had happened to him. I suspect that he had gone to his rural home to be near his parents, as he had hinted during one of our sessions. During the time of*

*the interviews, Edwin's health had been deteriorating rapidly and his disappearance, while frustrating for my research, is understandable.*

My last contact was Grace, whom I also met through the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe. Grace was a secondary school teacher who had encountered so much tragedy in her life that talking to her broke my heart. Grace had lived through the death of her husband and teenage child, and the sickness and paralysis of her son. Although she had tested positive, Grace had not disclosed her status in the workplace for fear of victimisation. She was my sixth and final contact.

The timetable of the contact sessions I had with the teachers is represented in Table 3.1.

I recorded all the interviews on my tape recorder. I found that the tape recorder worked very well in that it allowed me time to listen and ask questions without feeling the pressure to record what was being said. I also found it useful during the data analysis phase, when I could always refer back to the interview to listen to points that I might have missed when doing the transcriptions.

I personally transcribed all the interviews that I recorded, and I tried to finish transcribing each interview before starting another one. I found the process of transcribing very time-consuming. Even when the sound quality of interviews was good it took me about four to five hours to transcribe a one-hour interview, and up to seven hours in cases where the sound quality of interviews was poor. The advantage in making my own transcription is that it made me more familiar with the data. I was able to recall the atmosphere, the events and in some cases the tone of voice that was used by the research participant.

The personal diary which I completed after each interview session allowed me the space to record my feelings, reflections and observations that I made during the sessions and which could not be captured on the tape recorder. My research diary emerged to be a very valuable source of information as I later struggled to explore and interweave my own story with that of my research partners.

After I had completed each set of interviews, I took the stories back to my research partners for member checking. In doing this I was not only interested in checking

the accuracy of the stories; I was also interested in questions of identity. I was interested in whether that was how the teachers saw themselves, and if that was the character they wanted to be when their story was read by others.

**Table 3.1 Timeframe of contact sessions with research participants**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Research Participant</b>	<b>Purpose of Meeting</b>	<b>Venue of Meeting</b>
28 February 2006	Hope	Initial meeting	My office, Five Avenue
14 March 2006	Hope	First interview	Hope's house, Mabvuku
21 March 2006	Hope	Second interview	Hope's house, Mabvuku
28 March 2006	Hope	Third interview	Hope's house, Mabvuku
13 April 2006	Hope	Member checking	My office, Five Avenue
30 April 2006	Gift	First Interview	University of Zimbabwe, Student Services Centre
5 May 2006	Gift	Second Interview	University of Zimbabwe, Student Services Centre
10 May 2006	Gift	Third Interview	University of Zimbabwe, Student Services Centre
4 June 2006	Gift	Member Checking	University of Zimbabwe, Student Services Centre
5 July 2006	Ruva	First interview	Ruva's house, Norton
16 September 2006	Ruva	Second Interview	Ruva's house, Norton
21 September 2006	Ruva	Third Interview	Ruva's house, Norton
28 September 2006	Ruva	Member checking	Ruva's house, Norton
2 October 2006	Johanna	First Interview	Johanna's house, Glen Norah
15 October 2006	Johanna	Second Interview	Johanna's house, Glen Norah
30 October 2006	Johanna	Member checking	Johanna's house, Glen Norah
9 November 2006	Edwin	First Interview	Edwin's school, Epworth
16 November 2006	Edwin	Second Interview	Edwin's home, Hatfield
18 December 2006	Grace	First Interview	Grace's home Marondera
22 January 2007	Grace	Second Interview	Grace's home Marondera
18 February 2007	Grace	Member checking	Grace's home, Marondera

## **Ethical considerations**

In electing to do narrative research on the lives of teachers living with AIDS, I was aware that I would be dealing with intimate material that would carry a high ethical load. Qualitative research in general and narrative research in particular has a clear ethical dimension (Bogdan and Biklen 2007).

As I entered the field I was confronted with my first ethical dilemma in the question of intrusiveness. How deep could I dig into the personal life of the respondents without penetrating their private sphere in an improper way (Geert 1999)? I needed to collect sufficient information to meaningfully reconstruct each teacher's story, while at the same time respecting their privacy. I found myself walking on a very thin line between collecting enough in-depth information and respecting the individual teachers' privacy. I tried to deal with this by relying on my own social sensitivity. I found that in most instances the teachers were willing to share their personal stories without holding anything back. If a respondent was not willing to share personal information, I did not push them; I allowed them to share only as much as they were willing to.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) advise that the data provided by the respondent has to be handled with discretion. I emphasised to the respondents that the data would be treated anonymously and confidentially, and as a result I made special efforts to ensure that the identity of the respondents would not be released. I asked each of my research partners at the start of our interviews to give me a pseudonym. All teachers selected pseudonyms except Gift, who insisted on using his real name because he wanted his story to be known as his and not to counter his efforts with the Shedding of Stigma Campaign that he was running. We also agreed to use pseudonyms for the other people in their stories – for example, husbands, siblings, children – to protect their anonymity. When I returned the stories for member checking, one of the teachers asked me to remove references to context, places of work and residential locations that could reveal the identity of the respondent or that of the partner and children.

The problem of exploiting the respondents was avoided by informing the participants at the beginning of the study about the aims of the study and the

concrete research procedure (Plummer 1983). By using member checking, I allowed the research partners a chance to control the stories written about them.

The final dilemma arose during the data analysis phase. My initial inclination was to present the stories as given to me by the teachers, to let the raw details be accessible to the reader. At the same time I acknowledged that there were a number of language issues in the texts, since English was not a first language for the teachers. After reading through literature on representing the voices of 'Others' (Alcoff 1991; Lather 1997; Lyons 2001; Sullivan 1996), I made the decision to make modifications so that the stories are coherent and understandable. I came to this decision because I realised that using the exact wording of the participants would make them appear inarticulate, whereas the teachers were very intelligent individuals.

## **Situating myself in the study**

I think it is important to find a place for myself within the parameters of the study because my background and personal interest have been instrumental in my desire to study the lives of teachers living with AIDS. I am a black Zimbabwean woman in my early 30s studying for my doctorate. For the past ten years I have worked as a development worker in the field of HIV and AIDS and education. During these years I developed a particular interest in the area of policy development within the field of HIV and AIDS and education. I followed closely the development of HIV and AIDS policies aimed at harnessing the huge potential of the education sector to prevent HIV infection.

My work as an associate expert with UNESCO from 2002 to 2005 brought me into contact with teachers living with HIV and AIDS through the HIV and AIDS teacher training programmes that I was in charge of. My interactions with the teachers and teacher trainees aroused an interest in the experiences of teachers living with HIV and AIDS. I became interested in exploring the qualitative context within which HIV-positive teachers negotiate meaning in the routines of teaching and learning inside schools and classrooms.

As I reflected on the policy on one hand and the HIV-positive teachers' experiences on the other, a disjuncture between the policy visions and images of teachers, and

the teachers' realities became apparent. There was a discrepancy between the recognition of teachers' reality and the levels of responsibility given to them in the implementation of school-based HIV and AIDS policies. Clearly lacking was the consideration of teachers, their identities and the contexts in which they did their work. I took an interest in this seeming disjuncture between policy intentions and practice of teachers implementing HIV policy. I wanted to explore the extent to which the official images and expectations of teachers, as captured in the education policy on HIV and AIDS, matched HIV-positive teachers' personal identities of themselves as classroom practitioners. Thus I found myself drawn to exploring the experiences of teachers living with HIV and AIDS.

Another factor propelling me to study teachers living with HIV and AIDS was the fact that the research on HIV and AIDS that I had read rarely contained individual voices or stories of those who bear the burden of the disease. A lot of the research reduced and amalgamated the humans in question (pupils, parents, teachers, orphans) into statistics or lumps of data to be studied (Deutsch 2004). I was inspired and challenged by the powerful and disturbing words of Freema Lebaz-Luwisch (2004): How is education possible when there's a body in the middle of the room?

In her view, teaching and learning has to take account of the emotions, fears, vulnerabilities and anger of teachers and students before any dialogue is possible within the classroom about difficult subjects. Moreover, teaching must account for "the body that carries these feelings and experiences" (Lebaz-Luwisch 2004:9). I wanted to do a study that would capture the unique nature of the experiences of the 'body' living with HIV and AIDS. I wanted to enter the meaning-making world of the teachers to see how they made sense of their day-to-day struggles with HIV inside real school environments.

When I developed the first draft of my PhD research proposal, one of my supervisors, while showing interest in my idea, was quick to inject a note of caution; HIV/AIDS is an emotionally charged subject and he wanted to be sure that I knew what lay ahead and that I would be able to handle the emotions that arose during the process. I remember agreeing without hesitation for I felt that the process would engage me personally and professionally, and that the benefits would outweigh any reservations I had on the emotional costs of the subject. As I look back now, I realise

that at that time I was totally unaware of the extent of the emotional and intellectual challenges that would be involved in undertaking such a study for my dissertation.

And so I embarked on my study, unaware of my HIV status, unaware of the impact that my HIV status would have on my interactions with my research participants. I had last had an HIV test in 2003 when I was pregnant with my second child. I did not know at that time that my own HIV status would be an important factor in my positioning in the study. Fortunately, as part of my literature review, I read the work of Lather (1997), who spoke of how her status was a marker of her positioning in the study of women living with HIV/AIDS. My HIV status gradually emerged as one of the issues central to my positioning in the study. I decided to take Lather's advice and get tested for HIV. It took me a long time to bring myself to do it; I did not want to know if I was positive. What would it mean for my study, my family and my future? I realised that a positive test would alter the perspective that I would bring to the study.

The impetus to get tested came after interviewing Hope, the teacher who I used to pilot my research questions. I sat with her for one and a half hours, and for that short time shared her experience with HIV. As I drove home, reflecting on our interview, I began thinking about how brave Hope was. She knew her HIV status and she was doing something about it. This thought kept nagging me until a week later I went to take my own test. As I reflect on this now, I realise that going through the process and through the emotions of testing helped me to enhance my connection with my research participants when they spoke about their own experiences with HIV testing.

If this study is about teachers living with HIV and AIDS, why then did I feel compelled from the outset to share something about myself? Why do I want to reveal a part of my history? The answer came to me after reading Evans (2002), who says that we share something about self because we want to be explicit that it is from this standpoint that we embark on the research project. According to Evans, to reveal these lenses is not to claim a researcher's essentialist qualities but rather to be explicit about the markers that point to a researcher's values, background and experiences. This is taken further by Code (1991), who makes a case for revealing the researcher's context because knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its



constructors, and the more explicit a researcher is about those marks the more the readers can evaluate it fairly.

In the past, research has failed to acknowledge the researcher's influence on the research process. The assumption has been that researchers can occupy a neutral, unbiased position (Cylwik 2001). And yet Harding (1991) reminds us that, as researchers, our social and political locations affect our research. She argues that our research interests and the research questions we pose, as well as the questions we discard, reveal something about who we are.

Others have suggested that all researchers are positioned but that disclosure of that positionality has not always found its way into the text (Chiseri-Strater 1996; Deutsch 2004). Chiseri-Strater (1996) makes the point that, whether they write about it explicitly or not, all researchers are positioned by virtue of their age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical personal circumstance and intellectual predisposition. It is the paradigms under which we train, write or publish which determine the extent to which we reveal the influences on our positioning. The researcher's positionality is also shaped by subjective personal and contextual factors such as personal life history and experiences. The challenge that I faced as a researcher was one of making transparent who I am given that much of my sense of self is taken for granted, and then to use this self-knowledge to show how I enter the field and manage the data that I collect and disseminate.

Finding out that I was HIV-negative awakened in me various emotions. First was joy and then relief that comes from letting go of a heavy burden. However, while I was very happy with the news, I also became more aware of the distance this created between me and my research partners. In my view, I was now confirmed as an outsider. Reading through the work of an HIV-positive gay man, Ibanez-Carrasco (1993), on the lived experiences of men who have sex with men, I became more aware of my outsider status in the study. Because Ibanez-Carrasco was HIV-positive, he could talk about 'us' and not 'them' and he could speak with authority as one who had walked and was walking that road.

As a researcher I came to the inquiry living my own story, with my own experience, history and values. I was not HIV-positive and I had no teaching experience, and this led me to wonder if I could find a point of connection with the teachers living with

HIV/AIDS. I struggled with the question: did I have to be one of them to do the research (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:66). Given my own background, could I meaningfully connect with the teachers? What competencies would I need in order to be able to narrate the lives of others in a more or less unmediated way? My own status as a non-HIV-positive woman led to an internal conflict regarding my own place in the inquiry. Did I have a place in analysing the lives of HIV-positive teachers? Did I have the right? In my mind I was not comfortable with being invasive and with my own role of producing knowledge from other people's life experiences. Like Lather (1997), I was aware that my non-HIV-positive status positioned me as an outsider in the research.

I took time to seriously reflect on my insider/outsider dichotomy, questioning who I am and, by association, whether it was my place to carry out this research. To resolve the question of my positionality, I read the work of others who discussed the issue of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider, and I realised that nobody can be socially marked in only one way (Fine 1994; Bloom 1996; Deustch 2004; Pillay 1995). I found comfort in the words of Bloom (1996) who claims that all human relationships encapsulate multiple subject positions that take on different salience and meaning in various contexts, thus yielding multiple ways in which we can be both part of and excluded from almost any social situation. I stopped concentrating on a fixed identity and I began to interrogate the spaces of interaction between my researcher self and the researched others. It was only as I began to reflect on what I shared (and did not share) with my respondents that I began to let go of my fixed identity of being an outsider to the lives of those living with HIV and AIDS.

While I was aware of the differences that separated me from the teachers, I realised that my position was much more complex – although I was in some respects an outsider, yet I was also an insider in some respects. I found my HIV status to be the most defining characteristic for my outsider status. As I had never worked in the Ministry of Education in any capacity, I also found myself an outsider in that respect. However, being an outsider to the school system meant that I was not in any way a threat to the teachers, so they were able to trust that the information they gave me would not be released to the school authorities.

I considered myself an insider when I began to ask myself: where is the outside of this pandemic (Lather 1997)? Living in a high-prevalence country such as Zimbabwe, I

found it difficult to imagine a space outside of the pandemic; everyone's life, including my own, had been touched by HIV. In this respect I considered myself an insider. Through race and social class I found a point of connection with the participants. As a middle-class black woman and mother of two, I found a point of connection with my female participants.

I followed Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who advocate acknowledging the researcher's own narrative of experience, telling stories of my past that frame my present standpoints. This helped me to deal with questions of who am I in the field and subsequently who am I in the text. I became more aware of the many layers that were at work in the narrative inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

## **Emotions and the research process**

In conducting the research I took the advice of Maykut and Morehouse (1994:2), who advise qualitative researchers to assume a posture of indwelling which they define as "being at one with the persons under investigation or walking a mile in the other person's shoes". By confronting the experiences of the 'Other' I embarked on an emotional journey during which I explored and unveiled my own experiences.

While I was aware at some level of the emotional and intellectual challenges of undertaking to study the lives of teachers living with AIDS for my dissertation, I was not prepared for the emotional journey that I embarked on the moment I entered the field. I remember the twelve months it took me to complete the interviews as being an intensely emotional period. The journey back home after each interview was always troubled as the full impact of the interview hit me. I suffered bouts of depression, anger and helplessness as I played back the interviews in my own mind. I found myself crying during an emotional interview, on my way home and, at times, after I got home. Many times I felt guilty – guilty for invading other people's private lives and guilty for wanting to produce knowledge from other peoples' misfortune.

As a woman and mother of two, I found that I could relate to Ruva, Hope and Grace's pain, not just for their HIV-positive status but for the fate of their children. I felt for Ruva when she talked about asking God what she could have done differently not to have her son be born disabled. I understood the pain she lives with every day for not

being near her son and not knowing his status. I felt Edwin's loneliness each time I interviewed him. To me his story spoke of someone who is alone in a world where no one understands him. In the days that I interviewed him, I started unconsciously following with interest press reports on the availability of anti-retroviral therapy on the Zimbabwean market. I got excited each time I saw a headline with positive news on ARTs, only to be disappointed after reading the fine print, which often talked about the long waiting period for free treatment.

After I finished transcribing all six interviews I felt emotionally drained; I simply needed a break. For over a year I had been immersed in the process of collecting heartbreaking data and engaging intellectually and emotionally with my participants. I was not the same person who had embarked on the study sixteen months earlier; it was simply not possible to come out unchanged after that experience. These feelings and emotions all came back to me during the process of writing up the material. I found that even in the process of writing about another's life, I often found myself overwhelmed with the story.

In the initial stages of my research I struggled to remove my emotionality from the research process, as this seemed to me to be the appropriate action for a researcher. I found myself torn between recognising my own role in the lives of the teachers I was studying and presenting myself as an objective researcher who is detached from the situation. I did not allow space for reflection on the researcher-informant relationship or to include my own subjective reactions to the interviews. Although I was confronted with various emotions in and out of the field, I did not want to acknowledge my emotions for fear that they would contaminate the research; I felt that by acknowledging my emotions I would obscure the experiences of my study participants. Like Deutshe (2004), I was unable to allow the connection between me and my research partners to become a valid site of study and knowledge. I easily stepped back into the role of an observer.

Fortunately, I came across the works of other writers who made me realise that keeping my emotions at bay was not only impossible but also undesirable. These authors advocate for the researchers' awareness of their own subjective experiences in relation to that of their participants as being key to acknowledging the limits of objectivity (Chiseri-Strater 1996; Cylwik 2001; Deutshe 2004; Rager 2005). They stressed the importance of acknowledging the researcher's emotions as being

critical to recognising the bidirectional nature of research. Cylwik (2001) argued that rather than being ignored or marginalised, to be added as an afterthought, emotions should occupy a central position in the research process. Rager (2005) suggested that qualitative researchers should take steps to deal with the stress that can accompany doing research on emotionally laden topics.

Taking a cue from Rager (2005), I actively sought ways to deal with my own emotions that arose during the research process. I found diary writing a useful tool to promote reflexivity. I recorded my thoughts, feelings, anxieties and biases in my diary after every interview. This allowed me the space to step back and take a critical look at the research process and my role in it. These notes became invaluable in the construction of my own story of the experience.

As I progressed with my work, my supervisor became key in ensuring quality of the methodology of my study. Fortunately she had just completed a book using narrative methodology and which was also an emotionally charged venture. I shared with her all my concerns, emotions and stresses of conducting the research, and especially my struggle with my emotions and my own place in the research. She was very supportive, and since she had just gone through a similar experience we found a connection. We established a very good working relationship where we had a mutual understanding of the path the study could take. Working with her I realised personal growth that I had not anticipated with my PhD.

I also engaged my husband, a medical doctor, to be a critical reader of my work – in particular to look at the teachers' stories from a medical perspective. I found this very helpful in that I was able to verify the medical facts with a professional. He also listened sympathetically as I explained my experience with the interviews and recounted how emotionally drained I felt after the interviews. However, because he was trained under the positivist medical paradigm, we always argued about my degree of involvement as a researcher. He advocated maintaining researcher distance and thus objectivity in the research; I argued that removing my own values and empathic reaction from the research process was unnatural in qualitative research and that I needed to turn in upon myself so that I could look subjectively and reflexively at how I was positioned in the study (Chiseri-Strater 1996).

Being with my family while I conducted fieldwork helped me to maintain a balance in life. My husband and children and my sister always helped to keep my spirits up, especially during the period when I was writing up my thesis. By keeping track and taking part in events in their lives, such as supporting my husband through his own Masters dissertation and my sister's departure for the United States, I was able to shift my focus for some time and concentrate on something other than my dissertation.

From my experience in conducting this research I am now aware of the impact on the researcher of conducting emotionally laden research. I found the process of completing my dissertation to be the most intellectually and professionally challenging work that I have done professionally. I realised a level of personal growth that I had not anticipated.

### **My paradigmatic perspective**

As a researcher I am aware that I speak from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural and ethnic community perspective (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). As a result I entered the research scene with my own interpretive frame of reference, my own belief system or world view (paradigmatic perspective). This paradigmatic perspective played an important role in guiding my research. My philosophy of reality (ontology) and how we come to know that reality (epistemology) was an important factor in guiding how I would go about finding out what I believe can be known (methodology).

My epistemological view is that knowledge is a creation of the interaction between the researcher and the researched. I found myself identifying with the constructivist paradigm, which views knowledge as being established through the meaning attached to the phenomena being studied. The theory assumes a relativist ontology which claims that there are multiple realities, thus making each individual's perception of reality valid. The concern of the constructivist paradigm is to discover and understand meanings as they are experienced by those who are subjects of the research. In my study I wanted to explore the teachers' subjective experiences and how these are mediated by their interaction with the reality of their everyday lives, their contexts and their frames of reference (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999).

In my struggle to ascertain my speaking position (whether I would speak *for* others or speak *about* others), I found parallels with feminist theories which emphasise problems with text, its logic and its inability ever to represent fully the world of lived experience. Feminist scholars have long been interested in the politics of speech acts. Speaking about others would be an act of representation while speaking for others would be a process of appropriation. I concluded that what I wanted to do was to participate in the construction of the teachers' subject positions and not to take on aspects of their identity or experience. I was also drawn to feminist methodologies because they acknowledge the role of the researcher's emotions in research. Feminist researchers reject distance and objectivity in the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Rager 2005). I chose narrative inquiry because it would allow me to participate in the construction of the teachers' stories.

### **My journey of/with narrative inquiry**

In this study I wanted to explore people's experiences, and thus *experience* was a key term in my choice of methodology. In line with the constructionist view, I worked on the premise that people's experiences can best be understood by interacting with them and by listening to them. Constructionists assume that individuals actively construe their own social realities and that the researcher is able to understand this by interacting with the interviewee (Lubbe 2005). I wanted to select a method that would allow me to discover and understand meanings as they are experienced by those who are the subjects of the research. I chose the narrative research design because it allowed me to explore and understand the perceptions and complexity of my research partners' experience. Like Lubbe (2005), I found myself drawn to the narrative approach because of its acceptance of pluralism, relativism and the validity of individual subjectivity.

In my literature search I found that even if narrative inquiry is still a relatively new field within the qualitative research tradition, much has already been written about it. I was attracted to the definition used by Clandinin and Connelly (1997) because it related to my own approach to narrative inquiry and it reflected my own epistemological and ontological assumptions. Unlike Polkinghorne (1995), who uses the term narrative inquiry as a covering concept for both analysis of narratives and

narrative analysis, Clandinin and Connelly see narrative inquiry as the study of the ways humans experience the world; it covers the entire research process, including the researcher's narrative or interpretation of the story. Like Clandinin and Connelly, I consider the narrative as a frame of reference, a research method and a way for representing the research study.

According to Creswell (1998), narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience; it attempts to understand and represent experiences through the stories that individuals live and tell. This is echoed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who note that humans are storytelling organisms who individually and collectively lead storied lives; thus the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. They argue that people are individuals and they need to be understood as such. However, they cannot be understood only as individuals, for they are always in a social context.

In this study I used narrative inquiry to assist in understanding the subjective world of the teachers and to see how they think about their own experiences. Second, I used it to convey to the reader what it must be like to be a teacher living with HIV and AIDS. Finally, I used it to illuminate the causes and meanings of events, experiences and conditions of the teachers' lives. I try to present the teachers' stories in such a way as to allow the reader some insight into what it is like to be a teacher living with HIV and AIDS. While I focused on the personal experiences of the teachers, I was conscious of the fact that narratives reflect not only the individuals' own meaning making but that of the society they live in.

One of the main characteristics of narrative research is the collaboration process between the researcher and the research participant. For this study I chose to use the term research participant rather than informant or subject, to emphasise my aspiration for a collaborative inquiry. Like Moen (2006), I regarded my research subjects as collaborators rather than informants who would be guided by my research agenda. I elected to adopt a non-judgmental attitude and a sense of equality as I knew this was particularly important in narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) suggest that the ideal is that the participant and researcher have a joint inter-subjective understanding of the narratives that occur during the research process.



I went into the field with one goal: to record in depth the experiences of teachers living with AIDS. I was not prepared for the reality that awaited me. I became fully involved with my research partners' stories in my quest to truly understand their experience with HIV and AIDS. I was not going to be a sole recorder of someone else's experience because I too had an experience, in that I became part of the experience. But how could I study an experience of which I am a part? How could I step back and see my own story in the inquiry as well as to situate the teachers' stories in the larger landscape in which we all lived? I experienced a dilemma as I tried to move back and forth between full involvement in the teachers' stories and maintaining distance.

### **Narratives and the concern with the 'truth'**

The question about the truth in narratives is a recurring theme within the literature on narrative research (Phillips 1993; Verhesschen 1999; Moen 2006; Hendry 2007; Polkinghorne 2007). Phillips (1993) argues that often (although not in all cases) a narrative must be true to be considered acceptable. For him narratives have to be 'epistemically respectable'. He argues that criteria suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1990) like 'adequacy', 'plausibility' and 'an engaging plot' are scientifically and epistemically irrelevant (Phillips 1993:7). However, if one takes Phillip's argument that the narrative researcher has the task to tell the truth, one needs to engage with issues of what counts as truth, whose truth, and from what context?

I take the view of Moen (2006) who argues that there is no static and everlasting truth, just different subjective positions from which we experience and interpret the world. Bakhtin (1986) reminds us that there is no single, dominant and static reality but rather a number of realities that are constructed in the process of interactions and dialogues. Narrative research thus aims to understand how humans experience their social circumstances, and it rejects the belief in a potential attainment of an objective reality or truth.

Narrative researchers analyse storied texts for the meanings that they express. The evidence that comes from storied texts differs from that derived from the traditional positivist methods. According to Polkinghorne (2007), this difference is where the strength of narrative lies because it allows for the meaning that life events have for

people. To that end, storied evidence is gathered not to determine if the events actually happened but are about the meaning experienced by people, whether or not the events are accurately described. Thus the truths sought by narrative researchers are 'narrative truths' as opposed to 'historical truths' (Polkinghorne 2007).

I concur with Lubbe (2005) when she argues that narrative is not meant to be read as an exact and quantitatively precise record of what happened, nor is it a mirror of any world out there. Instead of revealing the past as it actually was, narratives give us instead the truth of our experiences. Although the stories of the teachers are personal constructs, Geert (1999) advises that we treat them as personal accounts of how past experiences and events have been perceived and experienced by the narrator. The research does not concern facts as such, but the meaning the facts had for the person involved.

Verhesschen (1999) reminds us that even research that does not belong to the positivist paradigm must still give answers to epistemological concerns. In order to claim the status of 'proper scientific research' narrative research has to account for its methods and procedures. According to Geert (1999), in scientific studies the quality of a study is normally assessed in terms of reliability, validity and generalisability. The question then becomes whether criteria such as validity, reliability and generalisability, traditionally used for positivist research, should be used to criticise narrative research?

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) argue that criteria other than validity, reliability and generalisability should be used in narrative research. They argue that it is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that establishing the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability. They suggest that concepts such as credibility, dependability and transferability be used to describe various aspects of trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Jane O'Dea (1994) puts forward a notion of truth which she suggests can help narrative research gain 'epistemic respectability'. She argues that narrative research can gain epistemic respectability if criteria such as an engaging plot are viewed within the context of authenticity. It is by espousing the notion of authenticity that

narrative researchers can speak truths: "... they need to situate their stated criteria clearly within the confines of 'authenticity', connecting them thereby to that notion of truthfulness and honesty that authenticity entails" (O'Dea 1994:169). This is supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who state that authenticity is demonstrated if researchers can show that they have represented a range of different realities.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria that they believe should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These issues correspond to the criteria of validity, generalisability, reliability and objectivity employed by positivist researchers.

According to Shenton (2004), credibility deals with how congruent the findings are with reality. This is in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) who argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. I used member checking to establish credibility of the constructed stories. In member checks, I sought the teachers' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations of their stories (Miles and Huberman 1994). I took the stories back to the teachers so that they could judge the accuracy and credibility of the accounts. During the writing of the stories I had tried to stay as close as possible to the research partners' spontaneous narrative talk (Geert 1999). In cases where research partners did not agree with the text, we worked together to come up with an alternative formulation. For example, when I took Hope's story back to her, she felt that her mother was not given enough prominence in the story given the role that she had played in her life. She shared with me incidents that she felt could give her mother a more active role in the story, and I inserted this information into the story.

Throughout the inquiry, I used various tactics to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing data. I was aware that the relationship between me as the researcher and my research participants pervaded every aspect of the research, thus determining the quality and quantity of information gathered. I reflected deeply on the verification procedures that I would use to ensure the quality of my study. Moen (2006) stresses the importance of establishing trust with respondents, arguing that only respondents who feel safe and perceive the researcher as trustworthy will be prepared to share their stories. From the outset I explained to my research partners how the process would evolve and what was expected from them. I also took the

time to listen to their stories and to be flexible in allowing them to share their stories. Throughout the process I maintained a reflexive attitude where I critically reflected on the research process and my role in it.

To further enhance credibility, I interviewed every research partner over a period of at least three months. During this relatively long period I was able to collect data in several sittings. In this way I was able to control for reactivity and researcher effects. Besides the lengthy interview period, researcher effects were also controlled through systematic reflection in the research diary (Denzin 1970).

Another factor I used to enhance the credibility of my study was by having frequent debriefing sessions with my supervisors. These sessions served to widen my vision, and my supervisors were able bring my attention to flaws in the proposed course of action. I used the meetings as a sounding board to test developing ideas and interpretations, and they helped me to guard against bias (Shenton 2004).

In quantitative work, the concern often lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand can be applied to a wider population. In contrast, findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of individuals, and it is not always possible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the notion of transferability, which refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups. To ensure transferability, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) emphasise the importance of clear and detailed description as a means of allowing the decisions about the extent to which findings from one study are applicable to other situations.

I sought to increase the transferability of the study by conveying the scope and the boundaries of the study. As advocated by Shenton (2004), I supplied a substantial amount of information about the teachers and their settings, so that the reader can make a judgement about whether conclusions drawn from my study are useful for understanding other studies. I gave information on the number participants involved in the study, the data collection methods employed, the number and length of data collection sessions, and the time period over which the data was collected. Shenton (2004) advises that, ultimately, the results of any qualitative study must be

understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the people and, perhaps, geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out.

Denzin (1989) advocates the use of thick description in narrative studies. The narrative has to represent both the context and the web of social relations. Taking my cue from Denzin, I described in detail my research partners and the settings of the study. In this way readers can transfer the information to other settings and they can determine whether the settings can be transferred because of shared characteristics (Creswell 1998).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose dependability as a replacement for reliability. Dependability refers to the repeatability of the study and to the degree that the research outcomes are independent of the research procedure. In order to address the dependability issues, I reported the processes within the study in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. Shenton (2004) argues that such in-depth coverage allows the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed, and enables readers of the research report to develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness.

The concept of confirmability is used to replace the conventional criterion of neutrality or objectivity (Seale 1999). Shenton (2004) advises that steps must be taken to ensure as far as possible that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions. As a researcher I was aware that I am the most important research instrument and that my subjectivity was an inherent element in the research. I tried to minimise my researcher subjectivity by systematically documenting the process that I went through. I recorded my activities and my reflections in a research diary. I acknowledged the beliefs underpinning the decisions I made and the methods adopted.

## Data analysis and interpretation

I divided my data analysis into two stages, the first of which was the process which sought to increase understanding of the subjective experiences of teachers living with HIV and AIDS. The second stage of the data analysis sought to explore themes and patterns that would emerge from the teachers' stories. This section describes the data analysis process that I followed.

In order to make sense of the world of teachers living with HIV and AIDS, it seemed logical to represent each teacher's interview transcript in the form of a story. In this way, writing the narratives became part of my analysis as I sought to construct a narrative version of each teacher's story (Lubbe 2005). Using narrative analysis would enable me to organise the various data elements into a coherent story. Polkinghorne (2007) defines narrative analysis as a type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives into a thematically unified, goal-directed process. The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, which links past events together to account for a final outcome.

Following Woods, Priest and Roberts (2002), who describe a procedure that can be used to transcribe interview data to arrive at a story, I read and reread my field notes. I realised I had recorded powerful and moving stories on the lives of teachers living with AIDS. A part of me did not want to touch the stories; I wanted to let the raw details be accessible to the reader. I felt as if in touching them I would be distorting the teachers' experiences. After rereading the interview transcripts, I deleted all interviewer questions and comments and any words that would detract from the key idea of each sentence (Woods *et al.* 2002). I arranged the data chronologically, identifying elements that would contribute to the outcome of the story. As I set out to write the stories, I became conscious of the real power I had as the one wielding the pen. I became aware of the power that Newkirk (1996:3) referred to when he said, "Those who turn other people's lives into texts hold real power."

I realised and sometimes 'feared' this power and authority that I had in constructing the stories. I could decide what to tell and how to tell it, what stories I wished to relate about my research partners and about myself (Lubbe 2005). I was aware of

the fact that my own construction of the narrated events shaped my research partners' stories.

I began questioning my own right to appropriate an 'Other' for the sake of knowledge, and to speak for another without compromising the Other's own powers of representation (Lyons 2001). I searched and read other researchers and authors who write on the subject of 'telling the lives of others' (Alcoff 1991; Sullivan 1996; Lather 1997; Lyons 2001). As I struggled with this "crisis of representation" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), I found parallels with Sullivan's struggle:

*How could I conceive and reflect the 'Other', the not me, in the process of inquiry such that I would convey otherness in its own terms? How could I adequately transcribe and represent the lived experiences of others in a text that is marked through and through by my own presence (Sullivan 1996:97)?*

It was this intellectual need to bring the Others into account, to understand the Others on their own terms, that situated me in the problematic of subjectivity and representation. I knew that I had to make a conscious and reflective choice about how to represent the teachers as well as myself in the text. Like Geertz (1988), I found it difficult to sort out my own presence in the text. Was I speaking for the teachers (representation) or about them (appropriation)? I found myself struggling to express my own voice in the text. I worried that too loud a voice would run the risk of obscuring the field and participants, while too subtle a voice had the risk of acting as if the text speaks from the point of view of the research participants (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). In my struggle with representation, I also found parallels with Edwards and Ribbens (1998) who emphasise the dilemmas and ambiguities of simultaneously speaking in an academic voice and producing academic public knowledge while retaining the participant's own personal private voices and knowledge.

Given the assumption that reality is socially constructed, it follows that the world is a negotiation between the participants and context. I sought to have a study that would represent the negotiations among the diverse voices, and to describe their interplay and mutual influence (Mortensen and Kirsch 1996). As a researcher, I acknowledge my influence on the study; I wanted my study to be reflexive, to reveal

my own voice and biases as an investigator. As a methodologist writing for other researchers, I wanted to describe an emerging research design (Lubbe 2005).

I wanted to write stories that captured the teachers' experiences while at the same time looking inwards at my own experience during the process of the inquiry. Like Lather (1997), other than only giving voice to the stories of others, I also wanted to tell my story of listening to them and retelling their stories. I made a decision to write the teachers' stories as a paraphrase of the teacher's voices because I wanted to allow Gift, Ruva and Edwin the space to tell their own stories. I did this as a way of drawing them into the telling of their stories. At the same time, using the teachers' voices allowed me to step in and out of the stories.

Following Lather (1997), I decided to split my page into two, making room for a column on the left side of the page where I recorded my inner reactions on how I experienced the experience. Presenting the story in this way allowed me to slide back and forth between the records of the experience under study and my own reflections of the process. I found myself satisfied with this way of presentation because it gave me a voice while capturing the participants' experiences. In gaining a voice and a signature, I realised that I was taking responsibility for the stories and putting my own stamp on my work (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). This way of representation can be found in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Many researchers have responded to the crisis of representation by taking steps to place themselves explicitly in their texts. This self-reflexivity has been lauded by postmodern and feminist scholars as an antidote to the issue of representation (Brueggemann 1996; Sullivan 1996; Lather 1997; Tierney 2002). Sullivan (1996) advocates the dispersion of authority across the various voices and points of view encompassed in a text. By calling for self-reflexivity, she argues for the explicit rendering of one's own theoretical and political assumptions and beliefs as well as one's experiences and emotions in the process of fieldwork.

While the proponents of self-reflexivity call for the presence of the author in the text, they also warn against that presence looming too large. Tierney (2002) cautions against the dangers of the author's voice overwhelming the text, while Lather (1997) calls on a decentring of the self to avoid the risk of essentialising the text and the writer. Brueggemann (1996) warns us, "For in being self-reflexive, we turn the lens



back on ourselves, and put ourselves at the centre of representation” (Brueggemann 1996:19).

My reading of the various texts and my own experience suggests that what is required is for the writer to strike a balance between the self and the Other. According to Brueggemann (1996), self-reflection poses the risk of rewriting ourselves to the exclusion of our subjects on the one hand and remaining silent on the other. I interpret this to mean not making myself central in the text but continuously seeking ways of narrowing the gap between the teachers’ voices and my own presence in the text. I realised that I could neither be exclusively participant nor wholly observer. My frames must always be ready to shift, and I should be ready to traverse the terrain of what is happening between participant and observer, what Fine (1994:72) refers to as “working the hyphen”.

In writing the stories I did not want to merely report the facts of the research; I also wanted to construct interpretations. I was interested in finding out what could be extracted from the teacher narratives; in other words I wanted to find out what new knowledge would emerge from the experiences of teachers living with HIV and AIDS. I used inductive analysis to make sense of the field data. Instead of starting with a theory and then seeking data to support the theory, I accumulated data on the teachers’ experiences and then searched for patterns and thematic connections between the respondent cases (Goetz and LeCompte, 1981). In using the inductive approach, I wanted my research findings to emerge from the dominant and significant themes inherent in the raw data without imposing any preconceptions on the data (Thomas 2003). Thomas (2003) argues that one of the purposes of inductive analysis is to establish clear links between research questions and the findings from the raw data and to ensure that the links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research).

Before I began the process of inductive coding I closely read my research questions so that they acted as a guide to my analysis. I used generative or open coding to separate the data into groups that share common aspects while missing others (Goetz and LeCompte 1981). The units of analysis in open coding depend entirely on the focus of the study and the data collected. Using open coding, I engaged in an exploration of the data without making any prior assumptions about what themes or

patterns may emerge. I proceeded by closely reading the transcripts while considering the multiple meanings inherent in the text. I then identified specific segments of information that directly responded to the research questions and labelled them to form categories. I also derived more specific categories from multiple readings of the data, a process referred to as “in vivo coding” (Thomas 2003). Strauss (1987) describes in vivo codes as those terms used by the actors in the field which have two main characteristics: analytic usefulness and imagery.

Using the copy and paste function, I manually coded marked text segments into each category (see Appendix 5). I combined categories that had similar meanings and put aside the text that did not seem to fit into any of the categories. I also selected appropriate quotes that conveyed the core theme or essence of a category.

I analysed data from the different data collection instruments to come up with the themes and categories. While the bulk of the data was obtained from interviews with the three teachers, I also used data derived from an extensive desk analysis of the relevant policy documents from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in Zimbabwe.

The outcome of the inductive analysis was the development of categories into a model or framework that summarised the raw data, conveying the key themes and processes. The themes and categories resulting from the coding process are shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Summary of themes and related categories**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>1. Conflict between teacher as role model and ideal citizen, and teacher as HIV-positive person</b>	<b>2. The impact of HIV illness</b>	<b>3. Teachers as emotional actors</b>
<b>Category</b>	1.1 Policy images of the ideal teacher	2.1 Absenteeism and the response of the school community	3.1 Dealing with a positive test result
	1.2 Teacher as HIV positive	2.2 Illness and its impact on teaching HIV/AIDS and Life Skills	3.2 Taking into account the body that carries the feelings and emotions
	1.3 Teachers as a high-risk group	2.3 Stigma and discrimination	3.3 Coping with illness and death

In seeking to elucidate the exclusion and inclusion criteria for presenting evidence which emerged from the study, I concentrated on the experiences of teachers living with AIDS. I used data from the teachers' stories and from key policy documents. I deliberately focused on teachers living with AIDS and not on other important stakeholders such as other teachers, parents, pupils and school management. This was done because the purpose of my study is to extend the existing research by exploring how HIV-positive teachers view their role in the implementation of HIV and AIDS policy. I excluded the experiences of school management and pupils, and I also did not differentiate the experiences of the teachers by gender as this was not within the scope of the study.

In order for my findings to be usable, I selected the key aspects of the themes which I assessed to be the most important given my research questions. As I sorted and analysed the data, I was aware that the findings were shaped by my own assumptions and experience, that I had the power to decide what to include or exclude from the data. Aware of the subjectivity inherent in such an approach, I took deliberate steps to enhance the trustworthiness of my findings. In order to increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis process, I openly sought opportunities for other stakeholders to comment on the categories and the interpretations that I made – a process referred to as stakeholder checks (Thomas 2003). I shared my data – including categories, themes and analysed text – with my two supervisors so that they could comment. In order to increase the credibility of my research findings, I shared my findings, interpretations and conclusions with my research partners.

Once I had constructed an outline of the analysis, I moved on to the discussion and interpretation of the data. The outline of the analysis served to remind me of the themes and categories emerging from the data. I used extracts from the transcripts to illustrate the themes and categories that I used. In my discussion and interpretation of the themes and categories, I used experts from the literature that might support or contradict my findings. The discussion and interpretation is contained in Chapter 7.