

Chapter Three

Though there be madness, yet there is method¹⁴!

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Elliot

3.1 Introduction

By way of recollection, this study set out to answer two main research questions. First, I was interested in how the various stakeholders in the school context understand WSE. This was deemed important because stakeholder understandings of the WSE policy will influence the way that policy is implemented in the school context. Second, I explored how schools implement WSE policy given the presence of other evaluation-related policies in the school environment.

I have arranged the discussion in this chapter into three sections. In Section One of this chapter, *Setting up the research design*, I provide a narrative account of how the research design of this study unfolded. I provide a brief description of case study methodology and present my reasons for choosing case study methodology as well as present the ethical considerations in conducting the research.

In Section Two, *Data collection plan*, I focus on how the research choices I made attempted to answer the two critical questions of the study. I also attempt to record the nature of doing research in a complex, unstable and rapidly changing context such as that of the post-apartheid educational terrain in South Africa. In addition, I present a description of the sources of data, the sample, the design and kinds of instruments that were used to access the data in five phases of one year: during the preparation phase for WSE; during and shortly after the self-evaluation phase; during and after the external evaluation; before and after the school development planning phase and before and after the implementation of the

¹⁴ Inspiration for title from unpublished PhD dissertation of S.Singh (2000): "Intruders in the Sacred Grove of Science"? A Critical Analysis of Women Academics Participation in Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

school development plan. Finally, I provide details of the strategy employed to answer each of the critical questions as well as the methods employed to enhance the validity of my data.

In Section Three, *Analysing the data*, I present decisions made about how the textual as well as statistical data was analysed and presented.

Section One

3.1.1 Setting up the research design

The changes and adaptations in the research process were due mainly to various contextual factors that emerged during the setting up of the research process and specifically the execution of the data collection and analysis. This is different from an “emergent design” methodology of research where there is a deliberate decision to allow the process of the research methodology to unfold in the course of doing the research (Vital 1998). Before entering the field, I had already formulated the kind of key questions and research strategies that I intended using in my study. I had also commenced with an already clearly formulated plan for data collection. Nevertheless, I was open to the possibility of being influenced by the specifics of enacting the research design.

My research plan to collect data in the Gauteng¹⁵ province (the province I currently reside in) changed for the following reasons: The sampled schools in the Gauteng area were confined only to the two nodal areas¹⁶, that is, Alexandra and Kathlohong. These education areas have been identified by the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, in conjunction with the Members of Executive Council for Education for intersectoral, integrated, sustained and focused development. These two areas are part of the Government’s overall Integrated Rural Development Strategy (IRDS) and Urban Renewal Strategy (URS). Very low literacy levels, high unemployment, exceptionally low matric pass rates and lack of infrastructure for basic teaching and learning to occur characterise both these areas. According to the Education Atlas of South Africa (Bot et al 2000), School Effectiveness District Profiles (DoE 2001c) and the School Register of Needs Survey (DoE 2000d), 10 percent of the population in the Alexandra district is illiterate and a staggering

¹⁵ One of nine provinces in South Africa

43 percent of the population is unemployed. About 65 percent of the population have water supply in their own dwellings, 12 percent depend on public taps and the remaining population still depend on boreholes and natural sources. A large percentage (86%) of the population have flush toilets, approximately 7,1 percent depend on pit latrines, 4,42 percent still depend on bucket latrines and 1,50 percent have no facilities. This situation almost mirrors the picture in Katlohong, that is, 12 percent of the population is illiterate and 47 percent of the population is unemployed. About 68 percent have water supply in their own dwellings, 13 percent depend on public taps and the remaining population depends on boreholes, tankers and natural sources. As regards sanitation in the district, 83,57 percent of the population have flush toilets, 10,44 percent have pit latrines, 1,01 percent have bucket latrines and a significant percentage (5%) have no sanitation facilities.

One of the basic criteria in my research plan was that the school selected for my research had to be enthusiastic and willing to implement the policy as I wished to cancel out resistance to policy as a reason for failed/poor implementation. It was highly unlikely to find a willing school in either Alexandra or Kathlohong given the staggering statistics I have cited above. Unsurprisingly, all the officials that I had interviewed with regard to the choice of a suitable school were reluctant to recommend any one school within the two nodal areas for the purposes of my research, citing that schools in the Katlohong and Alexandra areas were resistant to the WSE policy. Several of the officials suggested that, in view of the fact that enthusiasm to implement the policy was one of the key criteria for selection of my case study school, I therefore target a school outside the nodal areas, even if it meant conducting the research in another province. Many of the officials were of the opinion that these schools would definitely be more willing and enthusiastic to implement the WSE policy as they generally produced better matric results and are situated in more affluent areas. Furthermore, at the time of data collection, teachers in Gauteng (many of whom belong to the South African Democratic Teachers Union), were resisting the entry of evaluators into schools. It was thus desirable to use a school within the North West province since this was the only other province that was forging ahead with the implementation of WSE. I was informed that two secondary schools in the North West were selected by the National Ministry for the first phase of WSE. I decided to pursue this option of conducting the research in the North West province.

¹⁶ Nodal areas are characterised by low literacy levels, high unemployment and high poverty.

3.1.2 The case study approach

Qualitative research, in particular the case study method, which concerns itself with the natural context in which the research is conducted, was used to gauge how stakeholders understand and implement the WSE policy. According to Guba and Lincoln (1981:124) “human behaviour unlike that of physical objects cannot be understood without reference to meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities”. My decision to choose a research design such as qualitative case study depended on consideration of the fact that I was investigating questions which are appropriate for case study (Yin 1994) as well as the fact that my desired end product was to be a holistic, intensive description and interpretation of how stakeholders understand and enact WSE policy in the school context. I was precisely interested in insight and discovery. This is referred to as “interpretation in context” (Cronbach 1980). A fourth and probably deciding factor is that I identified a “bounded system” as the focus of the investigation. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (“the case”), the case study approach aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. Yin (1994) observes that case study design is particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context.

My rationale for qualitative case study methodology is also linked to what Merriam (1988:20-21) describes as personal characteristics of this type of research. She refers to personal, people skills such as tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity, sound communication skills, empathy and good listening skills as essential for qualitative research. I have as a teacher, researcher and policymaker worked towards refining and developing my skills in these areas in order to pursue this kind of study as an instrument of discovery.

Perhaps at this stage it would be congruent with this discussion to also consider definitions of case study advanced by other writers. Walker (1983) describes case study methodology as “the science of the singular,” whilst Cohen and Manion (1994:106-107) describe the aim of case study as being:

To probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with the view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belongs.

According to Merriam (1988), the four characteristics, which are essential properties of a qualitative case study, are particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive. Particularistic means that the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, programme or phenomenon; whilst descriptive means that the end product is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. It also means, “interpreting the meaning of demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and mores, community values, deep-seated attitudes and notions, and the like” (Guba & Lincoln 1981:119). Heuristic means that the case study illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study thereby bringing about the discovery of new meaning, extending the reader’s experience and confirming what is already known. Inductive means that, for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. This simply means that generalisations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of data, which is grounded in the context. My research study on exploring and elucidating stakeholder understandings and implementation of WSE policy in the school context is characteristic of these four properties.

Returning to reasons for my choice of research design – this was also prompted by the fact that case study research has several advantages. Case study data is “strong in reality” but may be difficult to organise. Case study allows for generalisations either about an instance or from an instance to a class as well as recognises social situations and can represent conflicts between viewpoints held by participants and offer support to alternative interpretations. The data may form an archive of descriptive material, which can be interpreted at a later stage. Insights from case studies may be directly interpreted and put to use. The research data may be presented in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research reports. A wide variety of methods of gathering data can be used. Case study also offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its reader’s experience. Case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base.

Yin and Stake (1995) claims that knowledge learned from case study is different from other research knowledge in four important ways. Case study knowledge is:

- more concrete – resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete and sensory than abstract.
- more contextual – our experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies.

- more developed by reader interpretation – readers bring to a case study their own experience and understanding, which lead to generalisations when new data for the case are added to old data.
- based more on reference populations determined by the reader.

Notwithstanding all the advantages of case study research, the drawbacks should also be acknowledged. There is difficulty of generalising from a single case especially when the researcher uses small and unrepresentative samples; also with the issue of reliability and validity. For case studies involving detailed descriptions time and money may be a constraint. Furthermore, the product may be too detailed, too lengthy for policymakers and educators to read. The researcher may also oversimplify or exaggerate the situation leaving the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs. The reader may be seduced into thinking that the case study is an account of the whole when it is but a part of the whole. The case study is limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher who has to rely on his/her own instincts throughout the research. Finally, the researcher could select from the data anything he/she wished to illustrate (problem of ethics).

My role as primary instrument played an important part in terms of interacting with participants' backgrounds, values and biases that may affect the data. Negotiating my role as researcher was thus a challenging one. Being aware that human interaction is intricate and complex, I had to have a great deal of self-awareness when communicating with respondents. This self-awareness included my emotional reactions, thoughts and habitual responses. I aimed for establishing feelings of trust, ease of communication and maintenance of a sensitive and conducive rapport with the various stakeholders.

Merriam (1988:23) describes empathy as "the foundation of rapport". Empathy and openness was maintained with the different stakeholders during the interviews. I attempted to understand "the other" as if I was "the other", considering that I had also been a teacher for several years. I needed to understand the factual content of what was said in addition to the emotional undertones. I also reflected on my own thoughts and feelings throughout the study so that I would be unlikely to bring distortion to the interviews.

Throughout the research I was aware of my personal limitations as researcher, which could influence my study. Therefore, my personal assumptions, viewpoints, biases and beliefs were available to the various respondents.

By using qualitative case study research I attempted to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole. The assumption here is that there are multiple realities – that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception (Merriam 1988:17). The aim of case study as Bromley (1986:38) argues “is not to find the ‘correct’ or ‘true’ interpretation of the facts, but rather to eliminate erroneous conclusions so that one is left with the best possible, the most compelling interpretation”.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) support this notion when they suggest that the aim of the naturalist inquirer is not to present a single inquiry asserting itself as the “truth”. Naturalist inquirers should aim to discover the multiple realities that co-exist within any research context. My role as researcher is to present this messiness after having been thoroughly immersed in the thickness of the context. The respondents of the research should judge the value of the research itself to gauge whether their realities have been accurately represented. Therefore, the trustworthiness of the research derives out of whether the respondents find the data credible rather than whether the data proclaims an eternal truth.

3.1.3 Ethical considerations

Having conducted the research with a broad array of stakeholders it was of paramount importance that I respect the rights, privacy, dignity and sensitivities of the research population and also the integrity of the institution i.e. *Wagpos* High. The decision to retain the original name of the school was taken after much deliberation and discussion with the school. Pseudonyms were used in cases where individuals were not comfortable with the use of their names. I reported my findings in sufficient detail to relevant stakeholders, consciously refraining from withholding or selectively communicating my findings.

Section Two: Data Collection Plan

3.2.1 Access and acceptance

In November 2001, whilst I was still in the DoE, I received documentation relating to the North West Provincial Department's plan for WSE scheduled for April 2002. In March 2002, by which time I was already employed in the Department of Science and Technology, I received a composite list of the schools in the various districts where WSE was to take place. It was apparent from the documentation that a maximum of two schools was being targeted in the chosen districts. I clarified the selection criteria for my case study school with provincial and district officials before I sought their opinions on a suitable choice of school for the research. Given the background that I have already sketched the decision was unanimous that I consult with *Wagpos* High School in the Brits district.

I was concerned about whether I would be easily accepted into *Wagpos* High, which I believed, from the name alone, to be a conservative Afrikaner and predominantly white school. However, negotiating my role as researcher within the school did not prove to be as difficult as I anticipated. I contacted the principal of the school, to inform him that both the district and provincial offices had highly recommended *Wagpos* High for the research study. I fortunately obtained verbal consent from him as well as his pledge to provide all the support and assistance that I required for the study. Thereafter it was necessary to obtain official permission from the North West Provincial Department of Education. This was arranged through a fellow PhD student who occupies a senior position at the provincial office. If normal channels of protocol had to be followed I expect that this process would have taken at least three to five months. Letters containing details about the topic I was researching, as well as an undertaking to disseminate the findings on completion of the study, were faxed both to the Brits District Office and to *Wagpos* High (Appendix A). In my subsequent correspondence with the principal he indicated to me that the staff had consented to participate in the research and were willing to provide insights into their understanding and implementation of the WSE policy. I am not sure whether my confession to the principal about my no longer being with the National Ministry made him more comfortable and willing to allow me to conduct the research study at *Wagpos* High.

I soon came to realise that my two years of having worked at the National Ministry of Education had distinct advantages when it came to arranging interviews with national officials. Due to my familiarity with the national officials, all interview arrangements except one, proceeded smoothly. The exception was the interview with the Chief Director of Quality Assurance at the National Ministry, who refused to participate in the research study by politely suggesting to me that I should rather investigate the WSE process retrospectively, that is, ten years after implementation since, according to her, there were too many problems with WSE at that time. The other national officials who were directly involved with the rollout of quality assurance initiatives, that is, the Acting Director and later the newly appointed Director, Deputy Chief Education Specialists, Chief Education Specialists (in fact all of the WSE Directorate) as well as the Director (Systemic Evaluation) were interviewed.

Interviews with the provincial co-ordinator, evaluation team and union officials¹⁷ were very easily arranged. However, negotiating interviews with the district officials and the circuit manager proved to be a little more challenging as the officials were often out of office visiting schools in the district.

3.2.2 Collecting data in disruptive contexts

One of the characteristics of doing research is that the researcher is often expected to fulfil several roles simultaneously. On certain days I found it impossible to get away from my obligations at work and sometimes found myself observing lessons or attending a meeting at school for a few hours in the day. The “luxury” of being able to focus exclusively on my research project independent of other work commitments was rarely afforded.

My data collection plans were disrupted and had to be rescheduled due to strong resistance from the teacher union, SADTU, to the implementation of the WSE policy. Valero and Vithal (1998) suggest that “disruptions to carefully conceived plans” may take on more dramatic alterations within a rapidly changing context. They suggest that “disruptions to carefully conceived plans are the norm rather than exception” (p9) in research contexts that

¹⁷ I had known many of them as a result of my strong union activities whilst I was a teacher in the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Department of Education.

are undergoing fundamental transformations of their educational, social and economic contexts. For example:

- Researchers may be simply unable to gain access to schools within which research was intended to be conducted. This may be as a result of class boycotts, student or teacher strikes, unscheduled closing of schools owing to political or social problems. The school context is merely a microcosm of wider social changes, and therefore, a variety of macro- and micro-level factors come to be played out within the school context. As educational researchers, the clearly laid plans of data collection are often unable to be carried out.
- The research subjects within the context of a rapidly changing society are also characterised by a kind of evolutionary (if not radical) transformation of their own personalities, ideologies and beliefs. The evolutionary status of such change entails that data collected from subjects about their beliefs, ideologies, attitudes, etc are potentially subject to a range of fluctuations. These fluctuations do not (as to be expected) progress in neat trajectories.
- Researching the subjective interpretations of research subjects may alter significantly in relation to time, place and context during the data collection process.
- The researcher is likely to find that research subjects often offer contradictory subjective interpretations about the same events. Research subjects may profess one set of claims on “Day One” and a completely different set of claims about the same issue a few days or weeks later.
- As a researcher one may also find wide gaps between what the research subjects say (for example, about their classroom practice) and what they actually do (in their classroom actions).

Also, in my initial plan I intended to select a school where all three policies, that is, WSE, DAS and SE were being implemented simultaneously. It then became apparent to me that both the schools in North West would not be implementing SE as they were secondary schools and SE targeted only primary schools at that stage, that is, Grade 3 learners. Although SE was not being implemented in the case study school, I did, however, elicit responses from the interviewees in order to gauge their understanding about the SE policy.

It turned out that the case study school was unaware that they were expected to nominate an evaluation co-ordinator who would serve as the link person between the school and the external evaluators. My original plan was to elect the evaluation co-ordinator to keep a diary of all events as they unfolded in the school. I therefore had to ask for additional nominations from the teaching staff for the purpose of keeping diaries. Furthermore, writing of diaries was not an exercise that most teachers were comfortable with. Writing of reflective diaries seemed to be within the cultural experience of only one of the three teachers selected, probably because she was a language teacher. Although the teachers were willing, two of them saw this activity as an alien one since one was a specialist in the technical field and the other in the sciences. This resulted in several hours of direct one-to-one consultation with those who had no experience in this mode of writing. I made regular telephonic contact with the teachers to establish progress and to offer guidance and support.

In the initial diary entries I found that the teachers were prone to producing data that they thought I would like to hear about. In my interactions with the teachers I found it essential to create the necessary kind of open critical discursive space within which they were able to freely produce comments (data) without fear of intimidation or repercussion. I did provoke the teachers into alternative ways of viewing or reviewing any event. This strategy was crucial to authentic data being collected. The teacher diaries, nevertheless, surprised and fascinated me.

The teachers even chose to ignore the guidelines that I had set with regard to the length of diary entries. The events they wrote about were detailed and insightful (in most cases). It was clear that they themselves soon saw the value of doing such an exercise.

My initial plan was to interview as many school governing body officials as possible. I realised that only the chairperson of the governing body was forthcoming but even after he realised that I was English speaking he was not really eager to participate even though I indicated that the interview would be in Afrikaans. My contact was thus limited to the school governing body chairperson only and my conversations were extremely brief, often unrelated to WSE.

My original plan did not indicate that I would interview the evaluation team as I believed at that stage that it would have been impossible to do so owing to many logistical difficulties.

However, my plan changed and I was able to interview all the evaluators as well as the monitor. Surprisingly, the entire team agreed, suggesting that WSE is a transparent process that we should all be able to learn from.

3.2.2 Instrumentation

Focussed group interviews with district officials proved difficult to conduct as there are few officials and it was difficult to arrange so that all could be present at the same time. I therefore resorted to only one focussed group interview with the district officials.

3.2.3 Research strategy

I conducted a pilot study on the implementation of WSE in one school where this policy had already been implemented. The pilot study served to identify the practitioners as well as provincial and district officials' policy implementation concerns, validated the research instruments to be used, and informed the overall research design strategy. A full-scale case study investigation was undertaken within a school where there was, *prima facie*, a readiness to receive and manage change. A single case study was selected because I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of policy implementation.

Data was collected over a period of one year using a multi-method approach to data collection so as to overcome the limitations of case study research. Multiple methods of data collection included using in-depth, semi-structured *interviews* (both individual and focus group sessions) with stakeholders, identification of *critical incidents* in the policy implementation process, *observations* of key school meetings related to WSE, the analysis of WSE-related *documents* in the school environment, photographs, diaries, field notes, free writing schedules, questionnaires and observation schedules.

Although this is a highly qualitative case study there is also an element of quantitative research. The quantitative focus of the research manifested itself by the codification of teacher responses and the subsequent generation of frequency tables from the data in the questionnaire. The highly qualitative focus of the research was evident in the use of open-ended questions in parts of the questionnaire, the use of semi-structured interviews, diaries and free writing schedules. A more illustrated account of the features of this study will surface in the descriptions of the methodologies associated with each of the critical questions that I discuss later. Before describing the research strategies employed in relation

to each critical question, an overview of the research instruments is provided next followed by a discussion on the sample.

3.2.4 Instrumentation

The development of the instrumentation was a deeply iterative process. The supervisor inspired some questions in the instruments used. There were several versions of the instruments, which were reviewed jointly by the supervisor and my fellow doctoral students. The reviews ensured that the instruments were clearly focussed to collect only data that was necessary to answer the critical questions. All the instruments were piloted prior to use and responses were used to refine the instruments.

The instruments used for data collection are represented in Table 3.1.

	Type of instrument used
Visits to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview schedule for focussed group/individual interview with teacher/s • Semi-structured interview schedule for principal • Teacher diaries • Free writing schedule • Observation checklist • Questionnaire
Visit to provincial office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview schedule for provincial co-ordinator • Semi-structured interview schedule for evaluation team
Visit to national office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview schedule for national officials
Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview schedule for policymaker
Visit to district office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview schedule for district officials • Free writing schedule

Table 3.1: Types of data collection instruments

Use of “empty table shells”

I also designed “empty table shells” to assist in the data collection activity. According to Yin (1994), these table shells forces one to identify exactly what data are being sought; it ensures that parallel information will be collected at different sites where a multiple-case design is being utilised and it aids in understanding what will be done with the data once they have been collected.

Although these “table shells” helped save time and energy there was at least one caution that I had to note. According to Miles and Huberman (1984b), entering the data to a set format as collected can get rapidly defeating and displays will probably have to be redone at least once. Thus, I generated some of the formats near the end of data collection when they could be more contextually and empirically grounded.

Use of a contact summary form

After every intensive field contact had been completed and field notes were written up in a systematic form, there was a need to reflect on what were the main themes, issues, problems and emerging questions during that contact. I therefore reviewed the written-up field notes and wrote up answers to each question briefly to develop an overall summary of the main points in the contact. For this purpose I made use of a contact summary sheet (i.e. a single sheet containing a series of focussing or summarising questions about a particular field contact).

Use of a document summary form

I also made use of a wide range of documents (e.g. evaluation reports, meeting agendas, newspaper articles, minutes of meetings etc) to supplement and corroborate the data from interviews. Some of these documents were lengthy and typically needed explaining or clarifying, as well as summarising. Therefore, in order for me to have a clear awareness of the document’s significance, it was imperative that I fill out a document summary form which I attached to the document it referred to. This form helped me to put the document in context, explained significance, and gave a brief content summary (Miles & Huberman 1984b).

I used several methods to develop a detailed profile of the case study school. Firstly, I made use of documentary evidence, which I gathered during school visits. The following variety of documents were collected for this purpose: memoranda, letters and other communiqués; administrative documents – organograms, proposals, business plans, budgets and other internal documents; agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, written reports of events related to the WSE process; newspaper clippings, and school annual reports spanning over eight decades.

Secondly, I conducted direct observations of the “site” and an observation checklist (Appendix P) which focussed on issues such as the type of school building, the condition of the building and furniture, safety, access roads to the building etc, was completed. All these issues related to the indicators on functionality as noted in the WSE policy. To increase the reliability of observational evidence, a common procedure is to have more than a single observer making an observation – whether of the formal or casual variety (Yin 1994). Thus, one teacher was also asked to complete the observation checklist that was designed.

Thirdly, I also took photographs of the school and the various stakeholders, which helped to convey important case characteristics to outside observers (Dabbs 1982).

3.2.5 The sample

National Department

The following individuals from the National Department of Education were interviewed: two Directors, two Chief Education Specialists (CES) and one Deputy Chief Education Specialist (DCES). The biographical details of these officials are provided in the table below:

Official	Area of expertise	Age	Gender	Years of experience in education
Director	WSE	49	Male	24
Director	Systemic evaluation	42	Male	15
CES	WSE	45	Male	17
CES	WSE	49	Male	23
DCES	WSE	49	Male	22

Table 3.2: Biographic data on National Department of Education officials

The policymaker/consultant

The policymaker who was interviewed is a United Kingdom based consultant who has over 20 years of experience in working on policy development and implementation in the area of school inspections, in both developing and developed country contexts. His experience includes being an inspector on Her Majesties Inspectorate (HMI) and developing the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) Framework for school inspections in England.

Provincial Department

The sample at the provincial level comprised of the provincial co-ordinator of WSE and the WSE external team. The co-ordinator in the North West province is a black male, with 25 years of experience in education. His diverse experiences as a teacher, principal, district manager and initiator for the establishment of the Quality Assurance Directorate in the province have put him in a favourable position to lead and manage the WSE unit. His undergraduate and post-graduate studies have been in the area of education – he is currently completing a doctoral degree.

In the table below I reflect the biographical details of the external evaluation team.

Member	1	2	3	4	5	6
Name of participant	Annamarie	Derrick	John	Lebo	Letupu	Mokgadi
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age	53	38	38	40	43	45
Professional status	DCES	DCES	DCES	DCES	DCES	CES
Qualifications	Degree + diploma	Diploma + other	Degree + diploma	Degree + other	Degree + other	Degree + other
No. of years in education	30	15	10	12	14	16
No. of years in WSE	1	1	1	1	1	1
Area of expertise	Languages/ Arts & Culture	Technical subjects	Biology/ Agriculture	Maths/ Physical Science	Maths	Monitor

Table 3.3: A comparison of the general profile of the external evaluation team members

The data from the table reveals that the team is mainly male dominated, that is, four of the six members are male. Also, that experience of evaluators in the field of education varies from 10 years to an overwhelming 30 years. English is a second or third language in the case of all the evaluators.

Unions

A total of three union officials, that is, one from the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), one from the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) and one from the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwyserunie (SAOU) were interviewed. I knew the NAPTOSA official and she pointed me to the two other officials, whom according to her, were the respective union representatives for the WSE policy formulation and implementation process. Biographical details of the union officials are provided in the table below:

Official	Gender	Age	Experience in education
NAPTOSA official	Female	51	28
SADTU official	Female	38	16
SAOU official	Male	39	16

Table 3.4: Biographical details on union officials

District

The district manager, deputy district manager and circuit manager were interviewed. In addition a total of four other district officials, that is, subject advisors and district support staff were also interviewed and were requested to complete the free writing schedules. Respondents at district level were chosen by two methods. First, I identified individuals occupying key positions, such as the District Manager of the Brits district. My reasoning here was that they would be able to furnish information from a management viewpoint. Second, I used a snowballing technique by which respondents were asked to identify others I should see and the sample was thus expanded. This sort of selection seemed more appropriate to my purposes than some statistical sampling procedure. Biographical details only of the three senior officials are provided in Table 3.5.

Official	Gender	Age	Experience in education
District manager	Male	54	30
Deputy district manager	Male	49	26
Circuit manager	Male	54	29

Table 3.5: Biographic details on district officials

At the case study school

The *interviews* targeted all the academic staff at the school. Staff was involved in individual and sometimes focussed group interviews. There were different waves of interviews with the staff. Hence in some cases individuals would have been interviewed at least on three different occasions. In some cases there may have been as many as five interviews per person, sometimes informally. In the case of informal interviews only handwritten notes were taken. In the main, I kept the interviews concentrated on the subjects of prominence. But I also encouraged respondents to discuss any general reflections they had on the WSE implementation process, and these reflections sometimes contributed to my thinking in interesting ways.

The *questionnaire* targeted the principal, management staff and teachers (academic personnel) at *Wagpos* High. The questionnaire was completed by twenty-seven respondents (of the total of thirty two) at the school (i.e. 87% response rate).

The biodata reveals that twenty (74%) were Level 1 teachers (ordinary classroom teachers) and the remaining seven (26%) comprised the school management team, that is, the principal, deputy principal and Heads of Department (HODs). The main teaching areas/subject areas for the respondents is as follows: eight (29,6%) teach Maths/Science; seven (25,9%) Technical Skills; eight (29,6%) Languages; one (3,7%) Humanities and three (11,1%) Agriculture.

In terms of gender of the respondents, 59,3 percent is male and 40,7 percent is female. A vast majority of the respondents (59,3%) are between 40-49 years of age. Only two (7,4%) of the respondents were between 25-29 years of age. The teaching experience of the respondents varied widely. A small percentage (11,1%) has between 6-10 years experience; 22,2 percent have between 11-15 years experience and 29, 6 percent have more than 20

years experience. An overwhelming majority (37%) of the individuals have 16-20 years teaching experience.

The qualifications of the respondents also varied, with only a small percentage holding a three-year diploma (3,7%). An equal percentage of the respondents are in possession of a degree and diploma (29,6%); more than one degree (29,6%) and a four-year diploma (29,6%). A small percentage (3,7%) holds a National Education Diploma and the remaining 3,7% of the respondents have other qualifications.

In deciding on the teachers for the keeping of *teacher diaries* I used the technique of “purposive sampling” which Cohen and Manion (1994:89) describe as follows:

In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgements of their typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs.

The teachers were selected based on three criteria: firstly, they were willing to keep a diary for the stipulated timeframe, secondly, they had adopted the WSE process and were enthusiastic about it and, thirdly, they had been actively involved in planning and preparation for the evaluation process.

One of the teachers selected is a male, 43 years old with 19 years of teaching experience, ten of these are at *Wagpos*. He is in possession of both a degree and diploma and has experience of teaching Grade 12 as well as of being an examiner at this level. He is an active union representative. The other teacher is female, 42 years of age, with only nine years of teaching experience. She is new to the *Wagpos* community and has only taught in the school on a full-time basis for the last three years.

3.2.6 Research strategy for critical question one

How do various stakeholders (education planners, union officials, teachers and principal) understand WSE policy in the school context?

In my attempt to answer critical question one, I conducted interviews with policymakers and implementers (the principal and teachers, union officials, provincial co-ordinator;

external evaluation team, national officials, the consultant and district officials) who were involved with the implementation of WSE policy in order to gauge their understanding of the policy.

Individual interviews were conducted with policymakers/implementers in order to establish the rationale of WSE policy, the explicit and implied goals of the policy, similarities and differences to other policies, and challenges facing implementation. Individuals who were interviewed included the United Kingdom based consultant who drew up the policy; the Director of SE, the Director of WSE, co-ordinators of WSE at the National Department of Education (i.e. Deputy Chief Education Specialists and Chief Education Specialists), the co-ordinator of WSE in the North West province, the external evaluation team members and individuals from three different unions (i.e. SADTU, NAPTOSA and SAOU).

Interviews were also conducted with the principal, teachers and district officials to gauge their understanding and their enactment of the WSE policy. Interviews with the principal were to provide insights into the school's preparation for the process, the external support received, training that he had received, challenges and successes experienced during the school self-evaluation process, the overall unfolding of the external evaluation and the post-evaluation process. Teacher interviews were conducted to provide rich insights into individual understandings of the WSE policy, their preparations for the process, views on the self-evaluation process conducted by the principal, challenges and successes as experienced by them during and after the evaluation.

The provincial co-ordinator provided details about the training received by the principal to conduct school self-evaluation when the school was informed about the evaluation, what documentation were provided, what support was to be provided by the district officials, what his role as provincial co-ordinator entailed, and finally what his understanding of the WSE process was. Interviews with evaluation team members provided information on their understanding of the policy, preparations they were engaged in for the evaluation, challenges and successes that they were facing during implementation, and their ideas on how the policy should be implemented. Interviews with the district officials provided information into their understanding of WSE, the type of support provided to the school and the challenges and successes experienced before, during and after the evaluation process.

The spread of officials interviewed served to reduce bias as well as allowed the different officials an opportunity of presenting their unique understandings and experiences with the WSE policy from their various portfolios. Each interviewee was faxed a copy of the questions to be asked so as to ensure a comfortable and transparent interview.

Individual interviews were conducted with the principal, provincial co-ordinator, district managers, some teachers, all the evaluation team members and the union officials. Focussed group interviews were conducted with teachers and district officials to establish their understanding and enactment of the WSE policy.

I used mainly semi-structured interviews since this format allowed me to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam 1988:74). However, in the case of some of the interviews, I combined all three types of interviewing so that some standardised information was obtained, some of the same open-ended questions were asked of all participants, and some time was spent in an unstructured mode so that fresh insights and new information could emerge (Merriam 1988:74).

The interviews (with policymakers and implementers) were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provided the database for analysis. Words or phrases or entire sentences were quoted exactly so as to provide the reader with the nuances of the interviewees. Handwritten notes were also taken as a contingency plan in the event of something going wrong with the tape recorder.

Free writing

Before commencing with focussed group interviews, I requested teachers and district officials to write down their responses to specific questions appearing on a free writing schedule (Appendix J and G). In this way each individual was afforded the opportunity to express his/her views which individuals sometimes find difficult to do in a focussed group interview especially if they did not agree with the views of the majority of the group. These schedules were used mainly for triangulation purposes.

Thirdly, I used *questionnaires* to elicit the principal's and teacher's views and understandings of WSE policy. The questionnaire has eight parts (i.e. part A to H) and each part has either open- or closed-ended questions. Part A related to biographical data of the respondent and the remaining seven parts, that is, Part B to H, was to capture the respondents' understanding of WSE policy.

I also sought answers to the following sub-question 1 (a): *What are the continuities as well as contradictions between WSE and related education policies of government, and how are these tensions reflected in stakeholder understandings of WSE?*

This question was answered by firstly conducting an in-depth policy *document analysis* (this included analysis of the responses/comments from the public when the WSE document was released; review of comments raised at the Minister's launch of the WSE policy and a review of three evaluation policies). Secondly, *interviews* were conducted with selected policymakers and implementers (principal and teachers, the consultant, national, provincial, district and union officials).

Document analysis

I first conducted an in-depth literal analysis of three key policy documents, that is, WSE, DAS and SE to establish what the continuities and contradictions between WSE policy and related government policies are. I generated a series of analytical questions (Annexure M), which were used to interrogate each of the policy documents with the goal of establishing the political and bureaucratic origins of each document; clarifying the explicit and implied policy goals articulated for evaluations in South African schools; noting the intended theory of action and the continuities and contradictions between the policies. Data were presented in a detailed narrative form for each policy analysed. The coherent and contradictory goals of all three policies were summarised.

According to Merriam (1988), documentary data are particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated. Analysis of this data source lends contextual richness and helps to ground an inquiry in the milieu of the writer.

Interviews and focused group interviews were held with teachers. They usually lasted roughly an hour, rarely under half an hour, sometimes up to two hours. These interviews I used the data extracted from document analysis as the basis for more in-depth questioning of policymakers and implementers through semi-structured interviews to elicit from them what they saw as the contradictions and continuities between WSE policy and the other related education policies of government. I also used the data gleaned from the document analysis together with data from interviews to highlight the differences in understanding of stakeholders as compared with the intentions of policy obtained from the literal analysis.

3.2.7 Research strategy for critical question two

How do schools implement WSE policy given the presence of other related evaluation policies in the school environment?

I gathered data on the implementation process in the school by making use of interviews, teacher diaries, observations, documents and photographs.

Interviews

I interviewed the principal, teachers, provincial and the district officials in order to elicit their roles in the implementation process within the school environment. I used carefully worded semi-structured interview schedules with the intention of permitting more latitude than in a structured interview. Interviews were recorded so as to provide a more accurate rendition of the interview. I also took notes by hand as a contingency plan in the event of something going wrong with the tape recording.

I allowed certain sections of the interview to be non-directed and this proved to be advantageous because the respondents revealed aspects about the WSE process, which was crucial for understanding the linkage between understandings and enactment of policy. The interviews proved to be extremely rich in perspectives on the processes I was studying, in information on the substantive policy implementation issues and in a blend of general reflections on understanding of policy.

Individual and focussed group interviews were held with teachers. They usually lasted nearly an hour, rarely under half an hour, sometimes up to two hours. These interviews remained open-ended and assumed a conversational manner, but a predetermined set of questions was followed. The focussed group interviews served two specific purposes, that is, to simply corroborate certain facts that the principal's interview had highlighted and secondly to allow the teachers to provide a fresh commentary about specific issues from their points of view.

Several informal discussions were held with teachers in the staffroom and on the sports field about how the implementation of policy was progressing. In these instances extensive field notes were taken.

Teacher diaries

Three teachers from the case study school were requested to keep diaries documenting the WSE process as it unfolded in their school context. Eventually only two of the three diaries were used because at the time of final submission of diaries one of the teachers became seriously ill and was unable to provide the completed document.

Observations

I played the role of observer in staff meetings, parent meetings and union meetings, which focussed on WSE, noting the critical incidents as they occurred. I also conducted classroom visits during which time I observed how the external evaluation process occurred. Throughout the implementation process I recorded notes about specific events, classroom behaviours and contents of bulletin boards. Notes were taken when staff members were speaking explicitly about WSE and its effect on either teaching or their personal lives. These notes were kept in a notebook and were used to provide quotes to illustrate points in the narrative that I constructed.

All the data collection methods mentioned above were used to find answers to four broad questions viz.;

(a) *What were the expectations of all those involved in the evaluation process?*

- Expectations of the principal and teachers about two weeks before the evaluation.
- Expectations of the principal and teachers a day before the evaluation.

(b) How well were they prepared for the process?

- What were the contacts between the external evaluation team and the school before, during and after the evaluation? (Study school correspondence; ask questions of principal and teachers).
- How training was done in preparation for the process (principal, teachers, evaluation co-ordinator).
- District support before the evaluation.

(c) What actually happened during the process? Conduct brief interviews with notes written during discussion.

- Report on the pre-evaluation visit.
- Description of the evaluation process in detail.
- Views of teachers and views of the principal.
- What events during the inspection week surfaced in staffroom discussions? (Observe and participate in conversations in staffroom before school, during breaks and lunch times, and after school-notes written as a four-day journal by the researcher.).
- Ask three key teachers in the school to keep a detailed journal.
- What was the principal's account of the evaluation day-by-day? (Record brief interviews around 10 a.m. or 2 p.m. each day.).

(d) What were the effects of what happened during the process?

- What was said at the oral report stage at the end of the week? (Record the principal's account in an interview.).
- What were the views of the principal and teachers during the week following the evaluation? (Conduct recorded interviews.).
- What issues are raised by the formal report? (Read the evaluation report.).

- What are the views of the principal and classroom teachers on the issues raised by the external evaluators? (Conduct brief recorded interviews.).
- What happens to the school development plan?
- What are the views of the district officials about the school development plan?

Data gathered through these four questions provided a broad overview of the implementation process and outcomes within the school environment.

3.2.9 Establishing validity

Instead of being preoccupied with the representativity of research (external validity), Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest the use of the construct “transferability”. The naturalist inquirer should be concerned with describing as “thickly” as possible the specificities of the research context under review.

I established credibility of the study by describing the setting (supplemented by photographs and data from the observation checklist), the participants and the themes of the study in rich detail so as to produce a feeling to readers that they have experienced or could experience the events being reported on. In the narrative I provided slices of interactions, experiences, actions (extracted from the teacher diaries and my observation notes), located people in specific situations, brought interactions alive between two or more people as well as provided a detailed rendering of how people felt (extracted from interview transcripts and teacher diaries). By providing vivid detail the readers are helped to understand that the account is credible. This also enables any reader of the research report to choose the degree of distance between the context being described and his/her own context. The choice is left up to the reader to decide whether to transfer ideas, insights or interpretations across into their own contexts.

I employed several other strategies to enhance the validity of my case study. Firstly, I conducted a pilot study on the implementation of WSE in one school where this policy has already been implemented. The pilot study identified the practitioners as well as the provincial and district officials’ policy implementation concerns, validated the research instruments to be used, and informed the overall research design strategy.

Secondly, I made use of multiple sources of evidence, which allowed me to address a broader range of attitudinal and behavioural issues. However, the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence was the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation. According to Cohen and Manion (1994) triangulation techniques in the social sciences attempt to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint. Exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality she is investigating. Furthermore, the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies (Denzin cited in Merriam 1988:69). Thus by using this particular research design the findings or conclusions are likely to be more convincing and accurate since it was based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode.

Thirdly, I took the data and interpretations back to the participants so that they could confirm the credibility of the information and the narrative account that I presented. With the lens focused on the participants, I systematically checked the data and the narrative account. This was done by requesting the participants to view the raw data (i.e. transcriptions and observational field notes) and to comment on the accuracy. Participants were asked to comment on firstly, whether the themes were applicable, secondly, whether they were developed with sufficient evidence and, thirdly, whether the overall account was realistic and accurate. I then incorporated these comments into the final narrative. Hence the credibility of the overall study was enhanced by welcoming participants' reactions to both the data and final narrative.

Fourthly, I requested a colleague who was involved with WSE and who was familiar with the research to serve as a sounding board for ideas as well as to provide written feedback after reviewing the data and research process. The main functions of the peer reviewer was to provide support, challenge my assumptions and ask hard questions about the methods and interpretations I used during the entire duration of the study.

Fifthly, I provided clear documentation on all research decisions and activities undertaken during the course of the dissertation in line with the notion of the *audit trail* suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984b). I kept a record of the procedures used for sampling,

development of instrumentation, data collection and data analysis. I also requested a colleague to conduct periodic external audits of the documentation. This auditing model was useful in that my *modus operandi* was made more explicit but did, however, prove to be a time-intensive exercise.

Section Three: Data processing, analysis and re-presentation

Approaching the data analysis from an interpretive perspective, I offer some insight into how I had conducted both surface-level and deep-structure analysis.

The propositions (see section on conceptual framework in Chapter Two) assisted me with both data collection and data analysis. The propositions were used to direct my attention to what should be focussed on, that is, look for relevant evidence and stay within feasible limits.

I transcribed all interviews. Responses to particular questions were transcribed in brief narrative form. Responses from various interviews were also compared and categorised as well as patterns and trends were identified, divergent responses and possible explanations recorded. This information was cross-checked with data generated through the analysis of documents, observation notes, free writing schedules and diaries. The qualitative data was analysed manually.

I also made use of computer-based analysis for the principal and teacher questionnaires. Prior to data reduction, that is, coding data in preparation for analysis, the questionnaires were edited. Three tasks central to editing, which Moser and Kalton (1977) refer to, were carried out: firstly, completeness (a check to make sure that there is an answer to every question); secondly, accuracy (as far as possible, a check to ensure that all questions have been answered accurately); and thirdly, uniformity (a check to ensure that all respondents interpreted the questions uniformly).

Next, all the data from the questions in the questionnaire were coded. The answers in the questionnaires are referred to as post-coded answers since the coding was developed after the questionnaires had been administered and answered by the respondents. A coding frame was also devised to accommodate the responses to open-ended questions. This was done by

selecting 10 percent of the questionnaires randomly and generating a frequency tally of the range of responses as a preliminary to coding classification. Having devised the coding frame, I made a further check on its validity by using it to code up a further sample of the questionnaires. All the coding frames covering information to be abstracted from the questionnaires are contained in a code list.

Thereafter, the data from the questionnaires were captured onto SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, Bent & Hull 1970). This package allowed me to conduct routine frequency counts, cross-tabulations and to present the data in the form of tables and charts.

The *data displays* included many types of graphs, tables, figures and charts. All these were designed to assemble organised information in an immediately accessible, compact form, so that the reader will be able to see what was happening in order to draw justified conclusions.

I have provided what I have called a *progress gradient for WSE policy implementation* (reflecting time on the y-axis in months; phases of WSE on the x-axis). This provides the reader with a graphical representation of how the implementation of the WSE policy progressed (see Chapter Six).

In this study, one of the issues that I looked closely at was to establish what the various sources of assistance are to the principal and teachers at the school in implementing the WSE policy. Since assistance occurs in an organisational context, this is represented on what I have called a *context chart with assistance flows*, with arrows showing where assistance comes from and who receives it (Miles & Huberman 1984b:88). Such a chart shows the organisational position of givers and receivers of help (see Chapter Six).

3.4 Chapter summary

This inquiry is designed to explore the understandings and enactment of WSE policy of various stakeholders in the school environment. I have worked from a constructivist/interpretative perspective aspiring towards grasping and interpreting stakeholder understandings and enactment of WSE policy, assuming multiple realities. I do

not assume from my perceptions that there is a single reality. On the contrary, I believe that each stakeholder experiences and understands education policy from his/her own point of view, and so encounters and conceives a different reality.

The Inquiry Context

This chapter opened the window into the research practices I engaged in during the course of my study. The reasons for my choice of sample were presented, together with demographic data pertaining to the sample. The data collection instruments and procedures for data collection were described in detail followed by an in-depth presentation of data processing, analysis procedures and data display.

Chapter Four will begin by identifying the social and historical research context. A brief overview of the state of education in the North West province followed by details about education in the Brits district, that is, the district in which the case study school is located, is presented. The focus of attention will then shift to the development of a historical portrait of the school. In this section I provide snapshots of critical incidents in the life of the school. This chapter is loaded with highly visual material (photographs) with the sole purpose of providing the reader with as clear a picture of the inquiry context as possible.

education provision for learners and the capacity for educational change (Pinar, 2002). There are also various expectations of provincial officials and district officials in implementing W&E policy at the school therefore it is important to explore the contexts in which officials operate, noting both factors that facilitate and hinder their daily activities.

This chapter, which focuses on the inquiry context, comprises of two sections. In the *First Section* I provide a detailed background to the social context, that is, the province and the district in which the case study school is located. In *Section Two* I trace the historical development of the case study school providing snapshots of critical incidents in the life of the school. This discussion culminates in a detailed description of the current culture and organization of the school – culture and organization of the school will also influence implementation of policy.