



3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter clarifies the study's research methodology. It begins with an explanation of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide this study. This is followed by a detailed description and a motivation for the research design, theoretical framework and methodological approach, including explanation on data collection, interpretation and analysis. This chapter also includes a discussion of my ethical stance and how validation measures were carried out for this study.

3.1 Epistemological assumptions

I utilised an interpretive/constructivism paradigm for this study because it resonates not only with my personal world view and belief in the interpretive and constructive nature of knowledge, but also with the research question of this study.

Interpretive/constructivism ontology acknowledges multiple realities. The corresponding epistemology purports that events are understood through interpretation, which is mediated by the social context. It sees reality as being constructed through human interaction. Reality is constructed, interpreted and therefore subjective (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Schwandt, 2000).

I myself also believe that there is no single reality. Rather, people construct their own reality through their individually lived experiences. I construct my own truth and others, including my participants, construct their truth as they understand it. I believe that reality consists of "people's subjective experience of the external world" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6) and there are different ways of constructing reality and making sense of it (Cohen *et al.* 2000). I expected that my participants' understanding and preference of the relationship may differ from my own. My role, as a researcher then, is to take a subjective and interactive stance and engage my participants both in the data collection and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Although I tried to remain true to the reality revealed by the participants, I was also aware that the reality revealed in this thesis is filtered through my own interpretation of my participants. This also predicts that the nature of knowledge revealed in this thesis encounter would be subjective, personal and derived from joint social constructions.



3.2 Research approach

In this study the emphasis was on the fact that reality is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by those experiencing it. It focuses on perception and its patterns, therefore it includes subjective experience and conditions influencing perceptions and experience (Carspecken, 1996). Therefore a qualitative approach is appropriate to this ontological understanding. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the ways in which participants make sense of a certain phenomenon, therefore allowing differences in terms of one's understanding (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

The qualitative approach does not predict or claim rigidity or complete objectivity, but acknowledges that research is value-laden (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). I concur with Henning *et al.* (2004, p. 25) who argue that there is no value free or bias free qualitative research. The main focus of this study was not to discover the universal, generalisable truth (Hammersley & Gomm 2000) that other researchers can reproduce. Instead it was to explore and understand how researchers and practitioners understand their researcher-practitioner engagement in the particular research study they conducted or participated and from their particular view point. The expectation that my participants' understanding and preference of the relationship may differ from my own is also in line with Schwandt's statement that qualitative research philosophy opposes the existence of universal truth (1997). In fact, as discussed in par 2.3.3, I held the view that seeking universal laws and universal generalisations is rather problematic, particularly in social science and more specifically education.

Furthermore, the research question of this study also suggests a qualitative approach since it demands an understanding of the complicated researcher-practitioner relationship. Not only did I expect that one's perceptions about a complicated issue such as researcher-practitioner relationship cannot be fully understood through simplistic questionnaires, I also believed that thoughts, perceptions and preferences would be too complex through numerical means in quantitative terms. This fit between the qualitative approach and a research topic of one's perception is also supported by Miles & Huberman (1994) when they describe one of the core reasons for choosing a qualitative approach:

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's 'lived experiences', are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process and structures of their lives: their 'perceptions, assumption, prejudgements, presuppositions', and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (1994, p. 10).



3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Paradigm & research design

Following the research philosophy (interpretive, qualitative paradigm) as explained above, the multiple case study method was chosen as the research design as it is commonly used in qualitative research. Data were obtained through face-to-face, in depth interviews and observations.

There are various kinds of research and the choice of what type of research to carry out is often determined by the purpose of research, the research question(s) and the kind of data required (Johnson, 2002; Scott & Usher, 2000). This particular study was descriptive and interpretative and involved the gathering of largely qualitative data.

The descriptive nature of this study involved rich and complex descriptions of meanings and feelings that the researchers and their participants experienced (Mouton & Marais, 1990). These descriptions were recorded and analysed so that “interactants as the interaction unfolded” could be determined (Denzin, 1989, p 101). In the process of interpretation, I read between the lines of what was said and interpreted the meanings as they were felt, intended, and expressed by the participants.

According to Ritchie (2003:28), a case study concerns itself with “identifying what exists in the social world”. In so doing, such research design focuses on:

- describing phenomena,
- identifying the different issues, and
- establishing how issues are understood.

This study is a multiple case study. Cohen *et al.* (2000:181) define a case study as “a study of an instance in action”. In this study, one case is one research project and as explained earlier, there were altogether 6 research projects that I investigated.

3.3.2 Theoretical framework

This study is informed by the *interaction model* of research utilization as the theoretical framework. As explained more in detail in Chapter 2.1, there are four models of research utilisation that aims at explaining why educational research often fails to inform classroom practices. The usefulness of *the interaction model*



is proved both from empirical works that such a model offers a better explanation than other alternative utilization models, including *science push model*; *dissemination model* and *demand pull model*, firstly identified by Weiss (1979) and then re-categorized by Landry, Amara, & Lamari, (2001) (Caplan, Morrison, & Stambaugh, 1975; Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001; Yin, 1981), and a theoretical observation that this model integrates the explanatory factors identified in other models.¹⁹

In summary, the main focus of this model suggests that knowledge utilization depends on various interactions occurring between the researcher and the users (participants). A lack of two-way interaction is identified in this model as the main reason for under-utilization (Huberman, 1987; Leung, 1992; Lomas, 1997; Oh & Rich, 1996). This model further points out that research utilization occurs best in a relationship based on familiarity and trust, built over time at different stages of research (Bogenschneider, Olson, Linney, & Mills, 2000). Therefore this model suggests giving greater attention to the relationships between researchers and participants at different stages of knowledge production, dissemination and utilization.

More specifically, I used Huberman's (1990) general model to inform the design of this study because his model does not only pinpoint the importance of viewing the researcher–practitioner relationship as a ongoing process, but also extends the interest of the relationship itself to a broader theoretical frame that seeks to explain the patterns and consequences of such an engagement. This provides not only a more holistic, but also a more realistic view of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

In short, Huberman's model views the researchers and practitioners as people from two organisations. According to him, the interaction between the respective organisational factors of these two groups of people (defined as *researcher/user context* in the model) informs the type and degree of the researcher–practitioner relationship (*linkage/network*). He also views this relationship not as a once off tie, but as an ongoing process that takes place "not only on completion of the study, but also during, and ideally, before the conduct of the study" (1990, p. 365). Furthermore, he claims that this relationship influences what happens after the research, namely, the dissemination effort resulting from the readiness on the part of both the researchers and the practitioners to embrace the research findings, and thus the concrete effects of the study (research utilisation, both *instrumental* and *conceptual*).

¹⁹ Particularly the importance of a match between the type/content of research and the interest of the user (from *science push model*, Dearing and Meyer 1994; Edwards 1991; Lomas 1993; Huberman and Thurler 1991, as cited in Landry, Amara, and



In light of this, this study focused on these three phases of how a research study unfold, namely pre-research phase, interim phase (also referred to as the data collection period) and post-research phase.

3.3.3 Data collection

Case study designs do not claim any particular method for data collection or data analysis (Merriam, 1998).

The aim in this study to collect people’s perceptions determined that interviews would be the most appropriate methods. By conducting interviews, I was exposed to the meaning that original researchers and their original participants attached to their understanding of the engagement. Slightly different schedules were used for these two groups in order to explore their specific areas of understanding and knowledge, but the gist was the same throughout.

The following table represents the interview protocol used in this study.

Table 5: Interview protocol

	Researcher	Practitioners
Pre-research phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What was the intention of doing this research? (theory/practice/degree) ➤ What were your expectations? ➤ Why do you think are the possible reasons why your participants agree to participate? ➤ Do you think that you have any responsibility towards the practitioners? Do you think they have any responsibility towards you? ➤ What do you think of the issue of benefit to the participants? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What is your general impression of academic research and researchers? ➤ Is that your first time to participate in a research study? Why did you agree to participate that research? ➤ How do you usually decide whether to participate or not? ➤ Were there any expectations? ➤ How do you think about benefits? Was covering identity important to you? ➤ Do you think that you have any responsibility towards the researcher? Or researcher towards you?
Interim phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How did you secure your participants? Any previous connections? ➤ How did you experience the relationship? ➤ Would you describe your relationship as research-based only or also friendship (formal/informal) involved? Which one you prefer? ➤ How do you balance involvement/detachment? ➤ Did you have critique to them? if yes, how did you handle it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do you know the researcher before? Were you contacted before the study? Through anybody? ➤ Do you think coming to you through the principal or somebody that you know makes any differences if the researcher comes to you directly? ➤ How did you experience the relationship? ➤ Would you describe your relationship as research-based only or also friendship (formal/informal) involved? Which one you prefer? ➤ If the researcher had been your friend,

Lamari 2001; Rich 1997) and the importance of a mechanism to facilitate the credibility of the researcher and research (from dissemination model, MacLean 1996).



		would you behave/respond differently? ➤ What do you think if the researcher comes back with critiques?
Post-research phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How did you retreat from the field? ➤ How did you handle the post-research relationship? ➤ How did you find the practitioner? ➤ Do you prefer continuity/closure? ➤ Do you feel powerful/empowered in anyway in the research process? Do you feel powerless in anyway in the research process? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Were you given a transcript? Analysis? Abstract? Did you ask for them, read them? Do you think it's important to do that? ➤ How did you find the researcher? ➤ Will you be willing to participate if another researcher approaches you in future? ➤ Were you contacted afterwards? ➤ Do you prefer continuity/closure? ➤ Do you feel powerful/empowered in anyway in the research process? Do you feel powerless in anyway in the research process?

This was supplemented by observation and intensive reflection, particularly for the last case of how my participants interacted with me as the researcher. I observed for example, how my participants reacted to the request of signing the informed consent. The focus groups were not used because the interest of this study was individual view, not group interactions and collective data, which is the most important advantage of using focus groups.

The interviews were intended to elicit information about understanding directly from those who were involved in research projects. Cohen *et al.* claim that face-to-face interviews are best suit for data related to experiences, opinions, values and feelings (2001) and Patton (2002) explains this fit as follows:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviour that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of the observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of the interview then is to allow us to enter into another person's perspective (2002, pp. 340-341).

I consulted interview protocols developed by Creswell (1998) for my own interview questions. A variety of probes were utilised to expand the participants' responses to the questions provided in the interview protocol. I also adapted changes and refinement found necessary and suitable from one interview into the next interviews.

Mason explains that interviews actually encompass a "rigorous set of activities." The interviewer must be able to "ensure that the interview interaction actually does generate relevant data, which means simultaneously orchestrating the intellectual and social dynamics of the situation" (2002, p.67). When combined with Riesman's conceptualisation of interviews as "conversations in which both



collaborators—teller and listener/questioner—develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerate freedom to both” (2002, p.248), the demands on the researcher are in fact quite high. Authors like Patton (1990), Fraenkel & Wallen (1993) and Fontana & Frey (1994) stress the importance of establishing rapport with the respondent during interview. The interviews employed in this research therefore strongly lean towards the interpretive pole of interviewing as indicated in the following table.

Table 6: The two ends of a continuum of interview forms (Plummer, 2001, p.411)

Positivist pole	Interpretive pole
Standardised through questionnaire	Flexible-shaped by guidelines
Mass — can be used for many	Idiographic — used for fewer people
Focused — planned answers	Open — follows hunches
Structured and hence easy to administer	Unstructured or semi-structured hence requiring more personal skills and sensitivities
More predictable	Less predictable
Objective — best for facts	Subjective—best for moods, thoughts, feelings
Sees interviewee as passive	Sees interviewee as active
Less prominent role for interviewer	More central role for interviewer
Less reflective/reflective	More reflexive/reflective

To be more specific, I did not avoid showing emotions and limit disclosure of my own views to the respondents if asked. This was done not only to gain their trust, to make them feel at ease and encourage them to talk freely and openly, but it was also done in order to present myself as a real, living person and to treat them in a similar manner. Nor did I deliberately avoid using leading questions or engaging into argument. Rather, I simply allowed the conversation to assume a natural dialogue style: flexible, spontaneous and more responsive to individual differences. Mouton (2001) supports this type of rather unstructured interview as good to capture textual data, rich in meaning.

The cases were selected as follows:

- One student-researcher case chosen from each of the categories classified in the document analysis database (three categories in total);
- Two experienced researchers cases (defined as those researchers who had completed their PhDs more than five years before this study);
- The interaction between the researcher and participants (Chapter 7).

A more detailed description of my sampling strategy, how each research project was selected, how the researchers and their participants were approached can be found in Chapter 7.



3.3.4 Data recording

On the agreement of the participants a tape recorder was used for the interviews in order to facilitate a smooth flow and a more reliable record of the conversation. All data were then transcribed and coded by myself. Furthermore, field notes was also employed as an important part of the data in order to record my judgment, decisions and experiences during the research process, as well as reflections on the interview questions, ways of phrasing, probes and casual conversations. Certain of these reflections were incorporated in the next round of interviewing, while others were used in chapter 7 to describe and analyse the ways in which the participants interacted with me as the researcher.

3.3.5 Data representation

Riessman (2002) explains that there are several levels of representation in the research process. These levels of representation present various levels of interpretation and representation of subjective realities. There are five levels of representation which follow on each other hierarchically. Each level builds its representation on the representation of the previous levels. The five levels are:

1. attending
2. telling
3. transcribing
4. analyzing
5. reading (Riessman, 2002, pp. 222-229)

Attending relates to the primary experience where the research collaborator reflects, remembers, and recollects specific aspects of the experience. The telling relates to the performance of a personal narrative of the experience to an audience. Transcribing is the process where one of the members of the audience tries to capture the telling in the linear format of written language. Analysis is the generation of themes and narrative elements from the written text, while the last level of reading adds the interpretation of the reader within her own context (Riessman, 2002, pp. 222-229).

On the surface, representation seems to be rather straightforward:

A commonsense answer to the question: 'how to represent?' is: faithfully. Reality should be re-created in the text. A scientific text should reflect what I describes, hopefully in a one-to-one correspondence. This should not be any problem as 'facts speak for themselves', and texts can be rendered loyally to the intentions of the authors (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 117)



However, this simplistic view is not compatible with the epistemological and ontological assumption guiding this study that acknowledges the existence of multiple realities which are interpreted and created. In fact, each of five levels identified by Riessman is endowed with some complexity. Even at the level of attending certain aspects of memory may be more significant to one than others. Authors such as Mason (2002) and Clandinin & Connelly (2002) draw attention that interpretation is already taking place at the level of transcription. In an effort to maintain rigor in this research process, Mason (2002, p. 78) suggests “read the interview both in an interpretive and reflexive manner. Thus reading both for inferred meaning and reading in order to try and determine my own role in the interaction.” This is a clear acknowledgement of the level of interpretation inherent at the level of transcription and then transferred to that of analysis and “we create and re-create voices over and over again during the research process” (Riessman, 2002, p. 229).

Czarniawska (2004, p.118) also mentions two major problems.

- The incompatibility of worlds and words. There is no one-to-one correlation between the world and words. Any representation is in effect a creation.
- The politics of representation. Who has the right to represent and judge?

I experienced difficulties in both. In terms of incompleteness of participants’ narrative, Altheide & Johnson suggest, “our subjects always know more than they can tell us, usually even more than they allow us to see” (1998, p. 296), and this results in the possibility that the final narrative is less rich than the actual experience. Besides, there is also the warning from Apple (1993) that the participant always tries to put his best foot forward, and therefore does not necessarily speak what truly happened, but what he thinks the researcher wants to hear. As a result of these considerations my initial reaction was to include more naturalised methods (a term used by Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, pp. 1281-1285), including context messages, such as involuntary vocalisations (laughing), response tokens (mono or bi-syllabic sounds; silence), non-verbal vocalisations (body language), even pronunciation (the use of slang, accent, diction), grammar and other nuances in the transcription and data analysis, but the realisation soon dawned that:

- such context messages seemed to bear very little relevance to enhancing the understanding of the inquiry;
- these details distracted the attention, both during the interviews and in the analysis, from the content of the conversation itself;
- the respondents seemed to be quite open and honest and did not seem to be particularly interested in portraying themselves in a favourable light (probably because this is not a very sensitive topic).



Since the study was more interested in the meanings and perceptions of the disclosure than to the way in the perceptions were communicated it was decided to adopt a more denaturalised method in order to focus on the content rather than on the mechanics of the conversation. To conclude the main mechanisms used to strive for the most possible true account in this study were, on the one hand, a concerted effort to make the participants relax and talk honestly, and, on the other hand, the use of probing and triangulation (researcher with practitioners, document with narratives, cases with cases).

The question of how to construct multi-voice, my participants', mine, also that of the potential readers, was also challenging. I realised that, as a qualitative researcher, there is a "commitment to obtain the members [participants]' perspectives" (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, p. 293), but, at the same time, the final dissertation is my product and my own signature is also important. Hence the decision was taken to state in interviews, as well as in cases descriptive and further analysis, where my voice was located in relation to the voices of the participants. As for the responsibility to reflect the voice of the audience the description of the context within which decisions were made, interactions among researcher and participants, methods, and settings etc were provided in detail, so that any potential readers might be able to formulate their own interpretation of the data and the applicability of the study.

3.3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative enquiry often produces large quantity of data and appropriate data analysis methods are necessary to ensure that this large quantity of data is properly been interpreted, analysed and reported.

I followed suggestions from authors like Charmaz (2000), Tesch (1990), and Miles & Huberman (1994) that the data analysis process should be done immediately after the first set data is gathered and further integrated with the forthcoming data collection process. Therefore, collecting, analysing and interpreting the data coincided as a process that unfolded as the research progressed.

In terms of the procedure for data analysis, different authors cite a variety of methods and steps to use in the analysis of qualitative data. For the purpose of this study, I integrated the suggestions of the simultaneous collection and analysis of data mentioned above and the analytic steps suggested by Terre Blanche & Telly (1999). The following diagram illustrates this integration:

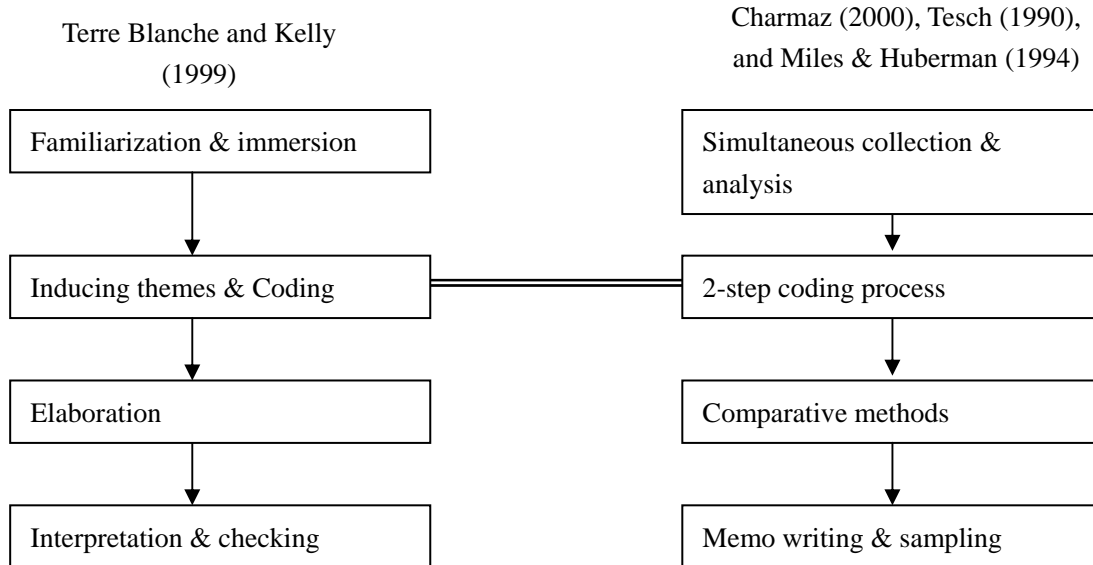


Figure 3: integration of strategies for data analysis

Noteworthy, however, is that these analytic steps were not treated as a fixed recipe, but served to “unpack some of the processes involved in immersing oneself and reflecting on the data” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 140).

To be more specific, after transcriptions were made of the tapes, I went through each transcript, firstly to gain an overall impression of the content, and secondly to explore what emerged from the text (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). Reflection and new strategies from these analyses were used to inform collecting forthcoming data.

Before coding, I first sorted the data into sections of the pre-research phase, interim phase and post-research phase, as informed by Huberman’s (1990) model. Coding in this research was a combination of the deductive method, using a codes based on literature review, and the inductive method, generated through a process which started with preliminary thoughts in the interview process and was revisited and refined through re-listening to the audio tapes and transcriptions (Seager, 2000). I first identified the data that could be coded by the pre-determined codes derived from literature review and then searched for codes that would best describe the uncoded data until I have every piece of data coded. Different codes were separated by different colour to aid visibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then re-organised data according to each code and searched for emerging meanings and patterns. To reach this stage, I engaged in the constant comparative method, going through the data over and over again to identify, revise, modify and amend new categories and families.



3.4 Methodological limitations

The main methodological limitation of this study is what positivist researchers call lack of generalisability. Qualitative data do not qualify for statistical analysis and therefore the extent to which the result can be confidently applied to context outside my samples is limited. Furthermore, the sample size was small and my participants only comprised a limited type of researchers and practitioners. All these made the generalisability from this study weak. However, as indicated earlier, to produce universal results was not the purpose of this study. Rather, the purpose was to produce an illuminating description and explanation of the researcher-practitioner relationship from the perspective of my participants.

The other limitation is the heavy influence from my own perceptions. Not only did my own understanding and expectation of what the researcher–practitioner relationship should be like influence greatly how I constructed the interview question, how I probed, how I analysed data, but I also allowed myself space to be subjective—not shying away from expressing my own view, arguing with my participants, using leading questions and so on. In order to address this, I built in this research report extensive reflection and detail description of how the conversation unfolded to allow readers to determine their agreement to my data interpretation.

3.5 The researcher as both an insider and outsider

I am aware of the extent to which personal history, biography, gender, social class, ethnicity and background influence a qualitative researcher, and thus the research. Accordingly I present briefly myself as a conflicting being who is often both an insider and an outsider (more detail is discussed in Chapter 7).

I have always had a critical mind. I don't accept things just because they are tradition. Rather I accept things only because they can sustain logic reasoning. I have many conflicting dimensions of my personality that often result in situations in which I am both insider and outsider. For example, I am interested in exploring people's perceptions (what they are), but at the same time, I also have my own strong ideological attachment (what it should be).

Aside from these conflicts my position in this research was even more complex because I was both a *researcher* and a *researched*. The *being researched* part of the data was important because what was related



in the interviews or documents was retold stories, at best good secondhand information. The study of the interaction between the participants and myself was my only opportunity to glimpse first hand the world of the *researched*. In practice, this meant that I sometimes placed myself in the position of *researcher* in order to listen to the stories, and, at other times, pushed myself into the position of the *researched* in order to reflect.²⁰

3.6 Measures of validation

As different terms and criteria swamp the field of validation any dispute about one's choice could easily evolve into an endless debate on its own. Hence I decided not to choose any particular term for this study, because to me, what was important was whether "it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 69), and not the terms per se. Therefore, this section presents only the following mechanisms that were used in the striving for validity:

Triangulation—this is the convergence and divergence among multiple cases, multiple sources and multiple methods. Triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding in participants' perceptions and preferences, bearing in mind that objective reality could never be captured. Especially relevant to my study were two sets of triangulation. The first set of triangulation included triangulation of methods, namely documents, interviews and observation. The second set of triangulation included triangulation of sources, including not only novice researchers, but also experienced researchers and practitioners.

Member checks—this involves taking data back to the informants, discussing with them whether the interviews reflected their attitudes and then incorporating their comments into the research. This validity check was in line with my epistemological belief that there were many truths and that these were relative to one's personal worldview. Moreover, member checking is also considered to be an ethical handling of the research findings as it allows informants to control what would be written about them (Walker, 1980). However, I also realised that not all participants would prefer member checks for various reasons. Therefore, upon finishing the interviews, I enquired of the participants whether they would like any feedbacks and, if so, which types of feedbacks they would like to have (to read/comment on the transcript, case description, analysis, or abstract). I then did what they had requested. This was also done to observe their reactions

²⁰ My interest and ability to examine and reflect on my own thinking and behaviour constantly made this feasible. Details

towards feedbacks and made this observation an item of analysis. Details were provided and discussed in Chapter 7.

Peer examination— this is a valuable procedure by which external observers review the data and the research process. It provides an additional, relatively objective, lens through which the research is able to reflect on the experience. For this study, besides my supervisor, I also shared the study process and report, in various stages, with other fellow students and colleagues, asking for comments or advices.

Thick description— each case was first presented with detailed description (Chapters 5 and 6), then data were cross-examined and further analysed according to the research questions and themes. This yielded thick and vivid information.

Bias—I entered the research with a certain worldview, understanding and expectation of the researcher–practitioner relationship and this influenced the research. For this study, I did not intend to guard against any possible bias on my part. Rather, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I chose to be constantly aware of it and recorded it in my fieldnotes. Altheide & Johnson (1998) describe the field note that records personal research diary as “validity as reflexive accounting”, a process that places the researcher, the topic and the sense-making process in interaction. According to them, researchers have to substantiate their interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of themselves and the process of their research. In other words, bias and self-reflection were recognised, clarified and discussed in order to ensure an openness and honesty. As I was aware of the way in which my own personal characteristics influenced the research process and analysis I also described in detail in chapter 7 reflections on my assumptions, premises and the decision making process throughout the inquiry. Therefore, chapter 7 also enables the readers to detect the possible role my bias had played in this research and therefore judge the validity of my conclusions.

3.7 Ethical issues

Besides the general call for qualitative research to be sensitive to human nature and to cultural/social contexts and the necessity to remain loyal to the phenomena under study (Altheide & Johnson, 1998) the

focus of this study brought the ethical concerns further into the spotlight.

As discussed and reflected upon in detail in chapter 7, I noticed two tendencies in the academic discourse – while the literature and most research committees tend to be overprotective, certain practices suggest an excess of ignorance. I agree with neither of these tendencies. My understanding of it is RESPECT – respect for my participants as people who are able to make sensible decisions and respect for their voices and their choices. Therefore, my overall strategy in this regard was to discuss various ethical issues with the participants and to act in accordance with their preferences.

The following specific strategies were adopted:

Information session — in order to ensure openness I informed my participants, before the main interview, of the overall purpose of the investigation, the main features of the design, their right to access to the transcription and interpretations (Kvale, 1996), their right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as other possible risks and benefits associated with the study. Ideally, I had wanted to present such information in person during a separate session prior to the main interview in order to allow the participants time to ask questions, digest the information and make decisions. However in certain cases, a separate face-to-face session was either not possible due to circumstances or not preferred by the participants. In these cases the information session took place either electronically, telephonically prior to the main interview, or shortly before the interview on the same day.

Informed consent — Although I considered the information session to be both important and necessary, I was not of the same opinion in respect of the issue of informed consent. In common with Rhodes (2005) I felt that such an exercise, especially in view of the fact that the practice tends to reduce the exercise to a mere formality, could be overemphasised and, indeed, provided more protection to the researcher than to the participants. However, I did realise that informed consent is usually a requirement and many participants are also used to the procedure. Therefore I did present an informed consent form at each interview, but also informed the participants that they needed to sign only if they wanted to (detail discussed and reflected upon in Chapter 7). Furthermore, out of concern that certain people could feel uncomfortable or stressed if asked to sign consent form (Lipson, 1994) – either because they felt such protection was not necessary, or because they did not like the idea of signing a pre-prepared paper that they had to accept as is, or because they were



illiterate and were embarrassed to admit it – I also considered other options, such as an oral agreement and continuity to participate, as possible ways of obtaining consent.

Confidentiality—originally, I planned to ask each participant whether they would like to have their identity concealed in this study and use pseudonym if any participant preferred so and use their real identity otherwise. This approach was based mainly on my own ethical stance that participants are capable persons who are able to make decisions based on adequate information. Hence what was important in this process is to provide adequate information rather than to make the decisions for them. Likewise, if they so preferred, direct quotes were sent back for member checks. Otherwise, the context of the interview, particularly the way in which our interaction had resulted in the flow of the conversation, was made available in case descriptive (Chapter 5 and 6) in order to render the quotes more understandable (Kvale, 1996) and the conclusions more transparent. However, despite that some of my participant did indicate their allowance for me to use their real identity, I was advised by the dissertation committee of university that I should protect all my participants by giving them full anonymity due to the university regulation. Therefore, all the participants reported in this dissertation were presented under pseudonym.

Beneficence—as I was fully aware of a long-standing history of “asymmetries in status, power and resources” (Little, 1993, p. 9) between the researchers and the practitioners, and because of my personal concern for the need to balance *give* and *take* I raised this issue of benefit to my participants, not only as relevant data for this thesis, but also as a practical issue on which to consult. In the information session I had tried to define my expectations of them, also what they could expect to receive in return (knowledge, other ways of empowerment, or merely a sympathetic ear) and also my limitations in terms of engaging in such *give* and *take*.²¹ I offered a small gift at the end of interviews, not with the intention of influencing their choice on whether or not to participate, but to show my appreciation of their participation.

Other protection from emotional harm— I come from a discipline that endorses a different paradigm, I did not inherit the traditions in education, or academic in general, uncritically. In fact, a critical attitude has always been an integral part of my personality. And this, together with my assumption that, academics are people who often criticise others and should therefore have a more open attitude towards criticism of themselves, means that my overall attitude towards academics is essentially critical. This, however, differs



greatly from my attitude towards the practitioners. Although I did not accept everything they said, I tended to be more sympathetic towards them, largely as a result of my previous business background which dictated that the customer is always right. Eventually the general guideline I used was to be critical but also to be sensible. I gave due respect and attention to the voices of my participants, but also did retain my critical attitude (more detail was reflected in Chapter 7).

²¹ For example, money was not an option because this study was not sponsored by any funders or bursaries.



4. THE WAY IN WHICH DISSERTATION WRITERS DESCRIBE THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP

As the attempt at a conventional literature review showed (see Chapter 2), only limited sources could be identified. As explained earlier I suspect that the limited scope could be due largely to limitations on publication space. As I had expected that dissertation writers would be less constrained by space, I conducted document analysis reported in this chapter in order to provide further empirically reported researcher–practitioner relationships. To this end I examined 28 Masters and PhD dissertations.

This chapter serves mainly two purposes, namely:

- a) to present a critical analysis of the researcher–practitioner interaction from the perspective of the researcher and to lay the foundation for further comparisons with empirical inquiries in which the views of the original participants were also included;
- b) to identify and classify the dissertations into groups, from which cases were selected for further empirical study;

The same boundary and questions that were used for the previous literature review were also used for this document analysis, although, in terms of the time relevance, this document analysis included only dissertations that were submitted in 2004.

The chapter starts with an exposition of the way in which the database for this document analysis was established, and this is followed by an examination of the three main sets of research questions. The chapter concludes with a synthesis.

4.1 Sampling frame

I had initially planned to use all the dissertations that were submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria (UP) in 2004 for this document analysis. Since the University of Pretoria is the university at which I had enrolled for my PhD, I had expected that access to the relevant documents would be relatively easy. This consideration was particularly important to me, as I am a foreigner in the country. The reason for targeting 2004 submissions only, and not submissions prior to 2004, was the heavy dependence of this study on retrospective recollection. My calculation was that the data collection period for 2004-submissions would be approximately late 2002 through 2003, and, if my own data collection started from mid 2005 to



2006 (it actually took place from late 2005 to mid 2006), this would leave a 2–3 year gap in which my participants, both the researchers and their original participants, would have to recall their experiences. If earlier submissions were to be included, the time lag could be too long for accuracy and lucid recollections.

Initially, I had also planned to include a fair representation in this database across different categories, such as Masters and PhDs, different departments within the faculty, different supervisors etc. However, when I started to search the university library catalogue for the hard copies of the dissertations which had been submitted, I found that it was not possible to identify a search via faculty or department, and, moreover, the existing database for hard copies dissertations seemed to be incomplete. I had participated in the Postgraduate Student Indaba in the faculty in 2004²² and therefore I came across some titles of the dissertations that had been completed in that year. However when I tried to conduct a search in the library catalogue either by thesis title or by author many were not listed. Following the recommendation of a librarian, I resorted to electronic submissions for my second run of searching. Fortunately this system (termed UPeTD) allowed me to search according to faculty. I carried out my first search on 7 April 2005 and it yielded 44 results.

Of these 44 results I excluded 17 for the following reasons:

Table 7: exclusions to the database

Category	Description	Number of exclusion	Reasons
1	Old completion date	6	The submission dates were before 2004.
2	Unfamiliar language	5	The dissertations were written in Afrikaans (another official language in South Africa).
3	Lack of link to the full text	1	The link to the full text was missing.
4	Non-South Africa focus	2	The empirical study was not done in South Africa.
5	Not done under the auspices of UP	1	Not done under the auspices of the University of Pretoria.
6	Pure quantitative study	2	Used questionnaires only as data collection techniques.
Total		17	

Since I am not able either to read or to understand Afrikaans and the full text was the only access I had to the dissertations the decision to exclude categories 2 and 3 was obvious. The exclusion of categories 4 and 5, however, was more out of a concern about the potential problems related with access to the participants. Since my empirical study samples would come from these dissertations, I excluded these two categories in

²² An annual student led conference hosted by the faculty, during which students present their completed or in-progress

order to guarantee that I would be able to access the researchers (UP researchers) and their original participants (South Africa participants).

After eliminating these 6 categories, the sample of dissertations stood at 27, among them:

Table 8: the representation of Masters and PhDs in the database

Masters	PhDs	Total
14	13	27

Although I was relatively satisfied with this representation across Masters and PhDs, I was still aware of the following problems associated with the sample:

- The sample was still not complete. At least one thesis that I knew of and which had won one of the two best PhD thesis in Indaba 2004 could not be found in the database;
- I had no idea how well the sample actually represented the total number of dissertations submitted. I had tried to access the full list of submission from the faculty administration but was informed that they were not allowed to release such information to students;
- Online database changes. I accessed the same resource again on 26 May. Four more results were yielded, but all four fell into the exclusion categories.

After a discussion with my supervisor, I decided to include the other best PhD dissertation in the database.

Therefore the final distribution of the sample for this document analysis was:

Table 9: the representation of Masters and PhDs in the final database

Masters	PhDs	Total
14	14	28

I was aware that, although my transdisciplinary interest and experience provided sufficient knowledge on a general basis, my lack of exposure to formal education constituted certain obstacles to carrying out such a document analysis as I was not familiar with many of the topics in the dissertations. As a solution, I started with the Masters dissertations, as I expected them to be relatively easier to handle, both in terms of length and level of difficulty, than the PhD dissertations. I also focused not only on the research design or methodology chapters for the description of the relationship, but also on the introduction chapters in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topics.

My assumption about the ease of understanding the Masters dissertations was proved to be relatively valid; however, I soon found that most of Masters dissertations writers did not seem to concern themselves much

research to their peers.



with describing the engagement with their participants in their dissertations and, in many cases, few direct disclosure could be identified. This forced me to carry out a more indirect check. Partly on the basis of the relevant debates presented in Chapter 2, the following items were thus added:

- Was improving practice a concern in the statement of purpose and did recommendations contain practical elements?
- In what way were potential benefits to the participants considered?

Likewise, my reading and reviewing extended to include the chapters on data analysis and conclusion.

I noted down all the relevant information in a separate document for each dissertation. In these documents, not only were the relevant original words or paragraphs noted, but also some of my perceptions or comments – I used a different colour or handwriting to distinguish these perceptions and comments of mine.

4.2 To what extent is the researcher–practitioner relationship revealed in the text of the dissertations?

To what extent was the researcher–practitioner relationship revealed in these dissertations? The twenty-eight dissertations displayed an extremely wide spectrum in terms of the extent of their disclosure of the relationship – ranging from almost nothing to page after page of descriptions and reflections. The format of the disclosure also varied, as certain dissertations provided direct descriptions, while others needed to be investigated thoroughly through the lines of writing.

In order to facilitate the selection of what I needed to follow up in the empirical study, I categorised the 28 dissertations into three broad groups based on the following two criteria:

- a) was the description indirect or direct; and
- b) was what was revealed substantial or limited.

Table 10: description of categories

Category	Characteristics	Number	Researchers
I	No direct descriptions, all disclosures were indirect;	13	Conco; Francis; Gamede; Machaisa; Mafuwane; Mampane; Mathekgga; Molale; More; Ngwenyes; Ramolefe; Senosi; Tlhagale
II	Direct descriptions existed, but relevant volume was limited;	12	De Wet; Du Toit; Griessel-Roux; Lauuwen; Mokoena; Moleletsane; Pienaar; Rampa; Simelane; Sooklal; Thabo; Viljoen;
III	Yielded direct references and volume was substantial.	3	Hariparsad; Herman; Sehlola

A cross-check of this categorisation with the Masters/PhD distribution also showed a pattern of difference.



Table 11: categorization as per Masters/PhD distribution

Category	Number of Masters	Number of PhD	Total
I	9	4	13
II	5	7	12
III	0	3	3
Total	14	14	28

Masters dissertations showed a clustering around categories I and II, with the majority (9 out of 14 or 64%) fell into category I. Meanwhile, half of the PhD dissertations clustered in category II, while the remaining dissertations showed an almost equal distribution between categories I and III. When the Masters and PhDs dissertations were combined, the majority (25 out of 28 or 89%) fell into categories I and II.

Assuming that my categorisation and judgment had been reasonably accurate, as well as the assumption that dissertations were by nature far less limited by space (pages) compared with published works, the interpretation of the above information could be either that the majority of these novice researchers had displayed a limited understanding of the researcher–practitioner relationship, or that they might had a good understanding of this relationship, but chose not to include descriptions in the dissertations due to the fact that descriptions were only remotely relevant to the main research topic. However, since a methodology section describing the way in which the research had been carried out was a prerequisite for the dissertations, I suspected that the explanation of a limited understanding was more pertinent. This question was examined in the empirical studies and the findings were reported in Chapter 5.

4.2.1 Purpose of the study, recommendations and beneficence as manifested in the dissertation

As stated above, one criterion of my categorisation was to check whether the description of the relationship was direct or indirect. While the analysis of the direct references in terms of the way in which the researchers experienced the researcher–practitioner engagement is presented in the next section, what follows now is a discussion on those two items which count as indirect reference: purpose of the study and recommendations, and a consideration of beneficences.

4.2.1.1 Purpose of the study and recommendations

By far the most frequently cited purpose for all studies is contained in the words “to address the ‘gap’ in scholarship” (Sehlola, 2004, p. 11), or “to describe, explain and theorise” (Herman, 2004, p. 158). Certain writers also mention a practical contribution and acknowledge this practical contribution as a secondary



purpose or indirect contribution. Typically this dual-purpose appeared as, firstly, to “enhance scholarly understanding ...” and, secondly “the findings of this study will be used to assist policy makers to ensure ...” (Simelane, 2004, p. 2, also see De Wet, 2004; Du Toit, 2004; Francis, 2004; Griessel-Roux, 2004; Machaisa, 2004; Mampane, 2004; Mathekga, 2004; Moletsane, 2004; More, 2004; Ngwenyes, 2004; Pienaar, 2004; Van Wyk, 2004).

Recommendations were proposed largely following the purpose of study. Those dissertations which focused on theoretical contribution typically provided implications for further research only, while those dissertations with dual-purposes usually provided both theoretical and practical recommendations. A further examination of the practical recommendations also indicated that there was no mention of whether any of those recommendations were followed up with the relevant people, possibly because these recommendations were beyond the scope of the dissertation, or else had been proposed only after the dissertation had been completed.

It did, however, come as a surprise that a cross-check of the theoretical-contribution-only dissertations and the three categories which I had earlier derived revealed that all the dissertations in category III aimed at theoretical purposes only, while Hariparsad stated specifically that her study did not aim at providing strategies in practice (2004, p. 3). Although both theory only and dual purpose appeared in both category II and I, in category I the majority aimed at dual purpose. This was surprising because my logic had predicted that a relatively comprehensive understanding of the researcher–practitioner issue, which had manifested in direct description and a substantial volume of description (category III), would result in a higher level of concern for the participants, and therefore in providing practical suggestions that could be of benefit to the practitioners. This question was examined in the empirical studies and the findings reported in Chapter 5.

4.2.1.2 Beneficence

The issue of beneficence had come to the attention of several researchers in the database (Griessel-Roux, 2004; Hariparsad, 2004; Mokoena, 2004; Sooklal, 2004; Sehlola, 2004). Hariparsad discusses her understanding of benefits under the topic of “unequal relationship between the researcher and research participants in terms of who benefits from the research study” (2004, p. 76). Surprisingly, however, she mentioned only the benefit to herself – “I was to benefit not only in advancing academically but also advancing the frontier of knowledge” (2004, p. 76), while there was no mention of any benefit to her



research participants

In accordance with his aim of making a contribution to theory only, Sehlola suggested that the empowerment of the participants with knowledge gained in the research would constitute an incidental benefit for his participants. Griessel-Roux also reflected that “participants (learners in her case) *might* have benefited from the focus groups in terms of giving voice to their experiences and sharing with other group members” (2004, pp. 92-93, explanation and emphasis added), although the word *might* could indicate uncertainty as regards to this statement. Furthermore, the statements of both Sehlola and Griessel-Roux were not supported by any acknowledgement on the part of their participants. And neither made any mention of whether they had indeed asked their participants’ opinion. This leaves one wondering whether the suggested benefits of the participants could be merely their aspirations. Overall, although a respect for the voices of participants was acknowledged, this voice seemed weak.

If the participants’ expectations regarding their participation had indeed been known to the researchers, then the issue of beneficence could also be understood in terms of whether the researchers lives up to these expectations. Sooklal recognised and honoured the fact that “my subjects urged me to convey to the national Department of Education (DoE) and to the Gauteng DoE [provincial department] that they had encountered several problems in implementing the merger. They also wanted their concerns to be addressed so that the next stage of policy implementation would be easier and more or less trouble free” (2004, p. 96). However, while he did acknowledge that his participants “were comfortable with the names of the colleges being disclosed... felt comfortably knowing that they could be identified” (2004, p. 96), he later used the issue of anonymity as the reason why he had experienced the dilemma of “where and how this [to convey the message to the DoE] would be appropriate” (2004, p. 96).

There were also incidents in terms of which the researcher clearly could have done more. In Mampane’s appendix she transcribed one of her interviews with one participant – a girl whose mother had died and who was staying with her aunt. On the day of the interview the little girl had told Mampane “My aunt has just told me to leave her house ... I have to leave by today” (2004, p. 143). She was thinking of going to stay with the uncle, but had not yet informed him of the fact. “I want to go tell him today and ask if I can live with him” (2004, p. 143). Mampane did show her sympathy, “Woe, you do have a lot of bad experiences (2004, p. 144) ... you have a tough life girl” (2004, p. 145). However, she did not offer any help and



concluded their interview with the words “thank you for your cooperation Girl, I really enjoyed the time we spent together. Good-luck with your education and with the visit to your uncle today. I pray to God that your dreams can come true one day” (2004, p. 150).

4.3 How did these researchers experience the researcher–practitioner engagement?

Many researchers recognised the need to establish rapport and a collaborative relationship with the respondents. Nevertheless, most of this recognition was nothing more than intention, and started with “I will ...; I must ...”, while what was actually done was not revealed in the text. Among those did reveal what had been done, Simelane’s simple statement that “rapport was established” (2004, p. 38) was typical. A more detailed statement read as follows, “I made time to establish rapport with the principals, demonstrated that their confidence would not be betrayed, their interest would be respected” (Rampa, 2004, p. 105).

Direct descriptions are also closely related with the research process itself. The following presents such direct description according to the way in which a research study usually unfolds: the accessing of participants, data collection and beyond the data collection period.

4.3.1 Accessing the participants

Access is the first encounter of the researchers with their potential participants. Strictly speaking, the majority of these descriptions reflect the difficulties or failures experienced in securing the participants, therefore does not come under the definition of *the researched* as used in this study. However, I have included this discussion not only because the low response rate itself could be an important indicator of the practitioners’ feelings of being *uncomfortable* and a *lack of interest* (Hunt, 1981), but also because the frustration experienced by the researchers could present further emotional obstacles in their researcher–practitioner engagement.

In common with much of the literature, the major shocks and knocks, as revealed by these student-researchers in their dissertations, involved the control of the gatekeeper and low response rates.

Although permission from the gatekeepers does not automatically guarantee participation, their role is often critical. Among the notable gatekeepers, the principal is usually the first hurdle that many researchers have



to surmount (e.g. Lewison & Holliday, 1997).

After I had explained the purpose of the call [to the principal], explaining the nature of my research study and requesting permission, all responded that they were very busy, but that I should call later... many unsuccessful attempts to gain access into the schools, filled with anxiety and despair (Hariparsad, 2004, pp. 50-51).

Sehlola also experienced similar difficulties although he tried to bypass the principals and asked teachers in person directly, “in many schools I did not even get past the principal’s office to speak to teachers personally” (2004, p. 58).

Numerous letters to different principals, requesting teacher participation, went unanswered. One principal unreservedly told me that he did not think that any principal in his immediate area would sanction this kind of intrusion into his school and into their poor teachers’ classrooms (2004, pp. 58-59).

The low response rate – an inability to secure officials as participants (policymakers or people in high positions in general) – does not come as a surprise, yet many researchers also alluded to “the reluctance of teacher to make themselves available as respondents” (Sehlola, 2004, p. 10).

With the departmental letter of approval in hand, I knocked on the doors of countless schools, marketing the value of the research, its highly confidential nature and my sincere intentions, but had little success... Two teachers agreed to serve as respondents, but when I tried to finalise the details of the project with them, a few days before the schools closed for the December recess, they withdrew... 4 teachers initially committed themselves to opening themselves and their classroom for this inquiry, but withdrew a few weeks later... The overriding response from the Grade 9 educators themselves was something akin to ‘I’m not ready for this, sorry’ or ‘I have too much on my plate, maybe next year!’ (Sehlola, 2004, p. 58)

Despite the assistance from the Quality Assurance Chief Directorate (QACD), teachers were still reluctant to participate in the study. (Mokoena, 2004, pp. 74-75)

Yet, not all researchers encountered this problem. Instead, some were quite successful in their recruiting. Among their successful experiences the most noteworthy was a current or previous personal relationship with the participants.

In Lauuwen’s case, although she left the DoE during the course of her study, “my [prior] connection to the DoE provided me with easy access to the relevant participants” (2004, p. 61). Sooklal also had worked in the Department during the period of his research.

Access to colleges is easy, as all the rectors knew me from my interactions with the colleges which time I had become acquainted with them. Rectors were willing to share documentations, records of deliberations and



discussions that had been held with their staff (2004, p. 80).

As a former school board member, Herman was also successful and “has long association with the schools and connections in the community. Since I was previously in a prominent position, many stakeholders knew my name even if they did not know me personally. This undoubtedly facilitated my access to information” (2004, p. 163). Sehlola’ experience was also interesting. He had three participants, one of whom manifested tremendous enthusiasm about his study that was not matched by the other two participants, but this happened after he had “discovered that we were from the same town and had been acquaintances as university students” (2004, p. 59).

4.3.2 The researcher–practitioner relationship during the data collection period

Most dissertations writers described the measures they had taken to accommodate their participants.

When the mother tongue of the participants was not English, Senosi translated the correspondence letter into Tsonga (local language) (2004, p. 66). Moletsane also told her participants to ask for translations into their mother tongue if they did not understand (2004, p. 122). The homes of the participants were used in some studies to heighten the atmosphere of an informal environment and to enable the participants to relax (Du Toit, 2004, p. 163; Sehlola, 2004, p. 61). “Due to the participants’ lack of financial resources”, Moletsane made transport arrangements, “supplying the necessary funds for the participants to be transported [back] to their individual homes” (2004, p. 120). Furthermore, “according to the information obtained from the guidance teacher, some of the children cannot afford to bring extra food so that they can eat after school”, Moletsane also provided refreshments to her participants (Moletsane, 2004, p. 120).

The dissertation authors also manifested a common awareness of not disrupting the learning and the teaching. Molale did not disrupt the timetables of each of the school he studied (2004, pp. 129-130). Mampane and Moletsane both conducted their interviews after school hours (Mampane, 2004, p. 121; Moletsane, 2004, p. 112). Likewise, Mokoena stated that “it was important that normal teaching duties and responsibilities of teachers were not disturbed” (2004, p. 75) and Griessel-Roux “restrict[ed] disruption of the flow of events at far as possible” (2004, p. 96).

Sooklal adopted the aim “to respect the rights, privacy, dignity and sensitivities of the researched population” as his main ethical principle (2004, p. 79). Most students from the education psychology



department in the faculty also combined this respect with an awareness of not being judgmental when they interacted with their participants. In many cases, they explained to the participants that the interviews or questionnaire were not being used as a test and that there were no right or wrong answers (Du Toit, 2004, p. 162; Moletsane, 2004, pp. 120-121; Senosi, 2004, p. 54). However, this awareness did not seem to extend to the students from other departments in the faculty.

There were also strategies recorded which were implemented to alleviate the nervousness experienced by some of the participants. In Senosi's case: "At first the learners and their educator were a bit nervous about the researchers' presence even though they were aware why she was present. To avoid being regarded a stranger, the researcher took part in some of the lessons" (2004, p. 59). Moletsane's participants were not familiar with the psychological test she used, so "I informally interviewed the participants about their families, friends, hobbies as well as future career. During these informal interviews, the role of a psychologist was also explained to the participants" (2004, p. 120). Hariparsad's strategy was even more simple – leave it to time, "at first each was nervous but gradually the nervousness gave way to candid responses" (2004, p. 63).

In terms of the involvement/detachment decision, many of the dissertation writers claimed that they "endeavoured to blend in with the setting" (Griessel-Roux, 2004, p. 96) or "became a part of the participants' world" (Viljoen, 2004, p. 16). However, a closer look reveals that most of these efforts were for the sole purpose of conducting the research.

To avoid confusion and possible problems I arranged an information session with all teachers before the interview phases began (Conco, 2004, p. 63).

Sufficient time was spent interacting with the respondents on their lived experiences so as *to enhance the authenticity of the data obtained* (Molale, 2004, p. 23).

My initial visits to the schools were to discuss my research plan with teachers and also to request the textbooks or texts *so that I could be familiar with these* before I began classroom observations (Gamede, 2004, p. 68).

The purpose of this relationship (interactive and empathetic) is *to better understand the experiences of learners...*I endeavoured to blend in with the setting and to structure my role in such a way as *to collect the information required* (Griessel-Roux, 2004, pp. 11, 96, original notes).

In this study's research design the researcher and participants work together to acquire insight into a real-life



problem...*the purpose of this study's second excursion is indeed to enhance the reliability of data* (Viljoen, 2004, p. 15, all emphasis added).

Molale also visited the school in his sample in order to introduce himself to the school principal – the reason for this was that “this is important because of my position as a senior manager in the DoE needed to be clarified so as to avoid confusion and the distortion of the information” (2004, p. 125).

Also significant was the fact that although Du Toit recognised from his pilot study that small talk was a successful tactic to establish rapport, he limited the use of this strategy in his main study because “small talk *took up too much valuable time*” (2004, p. 151, emphasis added).

Overall, extensive descriptions of participants’ engagement (even filtered through the perceptions of the researcher) were missing. It was, however, interesting to note that, those descriptions that were available generally described the participants as showing a positive attitude towards the researcher. Sehlola “detected an openness and excitement ... After classroom observation sessions, he would invariably ask me what I thought of the lesson, and how I thought he could improve it” (2004, pp. 73,75).

Herman’s observation was that the majority of her participants (the community members in her case) were really eager to participate. In fact, there were a lot of “spontaneous outbursts” (2004, p. 171) and “some would even telephone me after the interview to tell me that they had *‘something important for my research’*” (2004, p. 171, original emphasis).

To some stakeholders the interviews were ‘therapeutic opportunities’ in which they were given a space to reconstruct and deal with their experiences. In these cases my role as a researcher almost bordered on that of a therapist, even though I have limited experience in that regard... In other instances interviewees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss their experiences without being contradicted or silenced. (2004, p. 171)

There were even cases where she “received minutes or documents from stakeholders who wanted me to expose certain processes” (2004, p. 187) .

Griessel-Roux also revealed that “the learners opened up in the discussion. They could really voice their opinions and feelings openly and I found it easy for them to talk about parents and their relationship” (2004, p. 143).



Mokoena was among the few who experienced and revealed a negative attitude from the participants.

Despite the fact that I gave teachers guidelines and made follow-ups, the end result was that most teachers were not willing to cooperate...in addition, although I made follow-ups in order to further explore teachers' responses on how the Developmental Appraisal System (DAS) had influenced their professional learning, teachers were not really forthcoming in showing and explaining how DAS influenced them. They talked in vague (2004, pp. 113-114).

4.3.3 The researcher–practitioner relationship beyond data collection

The timeframe beyond data collection includes the periods prior to and post data collection.

Of the 28 dissertations, only one researcher had documented a six-week stay before she proceeded to her formal data collection (De Wet, 2004, p. 19). She lived with the people in their houses and interacted as a member of the families (2004, p. 9) and “I have been in the community over an extended period of time and I was able to establish and sustain relationships of trust with participants” (2004, p. 16). Nevertheless, she did not provide any further details of the way in which she had utilised these six weeks to establish relationships of trust.

Likewise, besides the existence of member checks used in many studies – which are mainly for purposes of validation, descriptions of post data collection relationships were also largely missing. As hypothesised earlier there could be three possible explanations for this phenomenon:

- The post-data collection relationship was carried out but it existed beyond the research report (dissertations). It may have happened after the dissertations had been finalised or else the researchers had regarded it as periphery to the report. As De Laine states, “exit from the field has not traditionally been considered data worthy of inclusion in the text, as the aftermath of relationships between the researcher and informants and other participants. Such matters have traditionally formed part of the ethnographer’s personal experience, to be resolved privately” (2000, p. 142).
- The researcher was not aware of such an issue or need.
- The researcher did not consider it necessary to continue with the relationship after data collection.

Although I suspected that many researchers may have fallen into the latter two categories, this question was posed in the empirical study and reported on in Chapter 5. One case was, however, clear as Viljoen specifically quoted Murphy and Dingwall’s warning that the researcher should not “create expectations of intense involvement in future follow-up excursions” (2004, p. 15), and if such need were necessary, it should “stem from the researcher’s own need for affirmation of collected data and not from the participants’

need to engage in action research” (2004, p. 15).

4.4 How did researchers reflect on their engagement with their participants?

What do the researchers describe is one issue, the way in which they go about is another matter altogether. In order to examine further the way in which the researchers viewed their engagement with the participants, this section reports the tones used by these dissertation writers when they were describing their engagement with the participants, and also the extent of self-reflection and self-criticism.

Superficially there did not seem to be many direct complaints. However, few researchers seemed able to maintain an appreciative or even neutral tone. Many were of the opinion that a commitment to teaching would naturally lead to a commitment to research participation. “Their [participants] desire to participate in the study came from their commitment as teachers” (Mokoena, 2004, p. 74). This expectation was sometimes even extended to blaming the participants when they were not very cooperative.

Hariparsad posed many questions as to why certain things had happened and this is a subtle of the fact that she had expected better cooperation from the participants. Although it could be viewed in the light of merely recording the difficulties which she had experienced in conducting her research, the number of pages she had used to describe her difficulties seemed somewhat extreme. Two examples of this endless reflection are given below.

The lesson for me here is that gaining access to schools that are willing to participate in research studies should not be taken for granted by researchers conducting school or classroom based research...the question is why were principals unwilling to allow me access to conduct research in their school. Was it due to subtle forces they only know? Was it because of the potential a research study has of revealing the workings of schools and holding it up for close-up scrutiny? Was it fear of research being a kind of inspection where their school and its practice would be observed and analysed by an outsider in ways that may be intimidating? Was it seen as threatening to the autonomy and professionalism of the school, especially in the controversial context of teacher and school evaluations? Why was promising anonymity and confidentiality not sufficient? (2004, pp. 50-51)

However, with Dinzi [one of her participants], from the township school, it was not possible to complete this interview before the classroom observations because she was unable to find the time to accommodate the interviews. The question is why? What was it about Dinzi in school A that prevented the completion of the interview? Were there inherently unique and complex contextual forces at play, and what were they?...this teacher [Dinzi] was unable to provide the time for the many interviews that I hoped to conduct to elicit her responses about why she practiced assessment the way I had observed. This resulted in limited post-observation data from this teacher. This raises questions: why was she unable to provide the time for the interviews despite



promising to do so? Was she unwilling to provide the time, and if so why? Did the relationship between the researcher and researched change, and if so why? Did I as a researcher play a role in this change if there was a change? Did she now view our relationship as polarised with different motives, priorities and perspectives, that is, me as a doctoral student-researcher focuses on making a scholarly contribution to knowledge, and her as teacher focused on the daily process of educating the youth? How could I know? How does a researcher address this issue? Will this compromise the integrity, rigour and confidence of the research study? (2004, pp. 64-65).

Mampane recorded the following as *practical problems* when conducting her research:

Less than 50% of the learners stayed behind for the research, *even* after an elaborate request by the teachers and the researcher. The school lacked a spacious room/hall to accommodate all the learners which resulted in the administration of the Resilience Scale taking 3 days to administer. The teachers requested the learners to clean the classrooms before they made the venue available for research, *this also prolonged the waiting period* outside the classrooms and resulted in most learners walking away (Mampane, 2004, p. 121).

The venues selected for interviews caused disruptions. At schools, the teacher's offices were used for interviews, and teachers *continuously disrupted* the interview process by coming in unannounced. The participants were not awarded the privacy they deserved at these venues. The interruptions disrupted the flow of the interview (Mampane, 2004, p. 122, both emphasis added).

In the first quote, not only does Mampane not show any appreciation towards those learners who had stayed behind, but the highlighted word also suggests that she had expected that all students should have participated upon the elaborate request of the teachers and the researcher.

In the second quote the teachers were blamed for disrupting the interviews. Although it was understandable that a quiet place in which to conduct the interviews would have been preferred, the selection of the interview venue could have been negotiated between the researcher and the teacher. It sounds strange that the teachers were accorded sole blame for a not so wise decision taken mainly by the researcher.

Other clues are even more subtle.

In addition, although I made follow-ups in order to further explore teachers' responses on how DAS had influenced their professional learning teachers were not *really* forthcoming in showing and explaining how DAS influenced them (Mokoena, 2004, pp. 113-114).

The interviewer *had to* move from Pretoria to Saulspoort [names for places] for this purpose because this was the most suitable time for the clubs to meet (Tlhagale, 2004, p. 124, explanation and both emphasis added).

Besides these subtle dissatisfactions, many of these dissertations writers revealed a low degree of



self-reflection, particularly self-criticism. Many simply described themselves as considerate, professional and appropriate.

I choose a research role *appropriate* for the purpose of data collection (De Wet, 2004, p. 25, emphasis added).

To counter this perception (that I am an unknown professional outsider, asking questions according to an agenda and audiotape the responses), I took pains to reassure the respondents that there were no ramifications for him/her beyond this single interview, no expectations of right and wrong answers and that their opinions and experiences were unique and respected for that reason. Certain insider perception of the interviewer may also have arisen since it became clear to the respondents that the researcher had sufficient knowledge of their environment to have understanding, if not empathy, for their experiences and points of views. Thus, the interviewees and researcher worked in an interrelated, dialogical fashion (Du Toit, 2004, p. 162 ,original explanation, emphasis added).

The vast majority of researchers simply lacked any form of self-reflection.

4.5 Synthesis

This chapter provides a document analysis of 28 dissertations submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria in 2004 in terms of their descriptions of the researcher–practitioner relationship. Initially, direct disclosure only of the content and the way in which the researcher–practitioner relationship had been documented in these dissertations were included in the analysis. However, I soon realised that the direct disclosure was limited and thus indirect disclosure, such as the purpose of the study, recommendations and considerations of beneficence, was added to the discussion.

The analysis of the indirect disclosure was reported first. As far as the purpose of conducting research is concerned, the intrinsic reason was clearly prevalent. However, since the majority of the dissertations have remained on a shelf in the university and have not been published, their value in terms of their contributions to theory contribution has certainly not been fully realised. The vagueness of the theoretic contribution notion itself (assuming that it would benefit society as a whole) has also never been challenged. Certain writers had considered a practical contribution as part of their motive in conducting their studies; however, this was recognised mainly as a secondary purpose, and, in certain circumstances, almost appeared more like a by-product of their primary aim of contributing to theory.

The cross-checking of the theoretical-contribution-only dissertations with the three categories derived of



various degree of understanding of the researcher–participant relationship further revealed the paradox that those who had demonstrated relative deep understanding of the relationship had all focused on theoretical purposes only, while, the lower the understanding of the researcher–participant, the more prevalent the practical consideration. In other words, a paradox existed in that a relative deep understanding of the relationship did not result in a concern about benefits to the participants, particularly in terms of practical suggestions; while those who had aimed at practical contributions demonstrated a very limited understanding of the relationship.

In terms of beneficence, while certain writers had recognised the unequal relationship between the participants and themselves, ironically they demonstrated such concern by discussing their own benefit only. More widespread was the trend of assigning certain benefits to their participants without acknowledgement from the participants. In many cases, the idea of asking what the participants thought about beneficence and what they needed in this regard seemed never to have occurred to these researchers. Furthermore, there were also incidents where the researcher could have done more to help the participants.

The analysis of the direct disclosure of the relationship started with an analysis of the initial encounter of the researcher with the participants—negotiating for access. Two main problems – control of the gatekeeper and low response rates – were reported. As regards the successful recruiting experience, the importance of personal relationships (prior or current) with the participants was highlighted.

The need to establish rapport and a collaborative relationship had been recognised by many researchers, although much of this recognition had either been shown as a plan or reported very briefly. The adoption of measures to accommodate participants was also mentioned in most studies and, indeed, many writers had described that they had blended in with the setting of their participants. However, further examination revealed that much of this effort had been made for the sake of facilitating the research only. The same could also be said about the interactions between the researchers and the participants prior to and post data collection. When a researcher perceived a time conflict, the research itself was favoured at the expense of building rapport.

In common with the findings from the literature review of the published articles in chapter 2, many of the dissertation researchers also did not describe their retreat from the field. Neither could one answer the

question of whether there had been any continuity in terms of the relationship after data collection from what had been described in the dissertations. The views of the participants were also largely missing.

Again in common with the findings of the literature review in chapter 2 was the tendency of the researchers to depict themselves as considerate and professional. Although they had not complained directly about the participants, few researchers seemed to have shown them appreciation and understanding. The insistence on justifying their studies on the basis of theoretic contributions, together with the sentiment of echoing altruism as the motivation to participate, were in some cases extended to subtle blame of the participants when they had not seemed to cooperate unconditionally.

Lastly, most of the researchers revealed very little self-reflection or self-criticism.