CHAPTER 3:

DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN THE FIELD

CHAPTER 3 AT A GLANCE

TITLE
The relationship between coping with HIV&AIDS and
the asset-based approach

My purpose

- To explore and describe the manner in which a South African informal settlement community is coping with HIV&AIDS, by relying on existing assets and local resources (Descriptive)
- To explore how an activist intervention research approach might facilitate change in terms of the community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS (Intervention-related)

My epistemology

Interpretivism

My approach

Qualitative:
activist intervention research

My research design

Case study,
applying PRA principles

My participants

Members of an informal settlement community
in the Eastern Cape
Province of South Africa

My strategies

Intervention
(PRA focus groups/workshops)
Informal conversational interviews
Observation-as-context-of-interaction
Visual data
Field journal

My considerations

Ethical principles

My outcomes

Findings that are
credible and
trustworthy

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3.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter two provided a conceptual framework for my study. Based on the background provided in chapter two, I planned and conducted an empirical study, in order to explore the manner in which a South African informal settlement community is coping with HIV&AIDS, by relying on existing assets and local resources. Secondly, I aimed to explore possible changes that might be facilitated within the community by employing an activist intervention research approach. In this manner, my study can be regarded as both descriptive and interventionist by nature, during which PRA provided the necessary backdrop for research and intervention to collapse into one another.

Besides presenting and relating methodological choices to my study in this chapter, I justify the choices that I made in terms of the research questions and purpose of my study. After explaining the paradigm on the basis of which I approached the study, I describe the selected research design (*case study design applying PRA principles*), data collection and documenting strategies (*intervention in the form of focus groups and workshops, informal conversational interactive interviews, observation-as-context-of-interaction, visual techniques* and a *field journal*), as well as the process of data analysis and interpretation. I conclude the chapter with discussions on the strengths of my methodological choices, the challenges I faced based on the choices I made, the ethical guidelines I adhered to and how I aimed to improve the rigour of my study and enhance the trustworthiness of my findings and conclusions.

3.2   PARADIGMATIC APPROACH

Research paradigms are compiled of philosophical assumptions that guide the researcher's way of thinking about the phenomenon that is being researched, as well as the actions employed. As such, I (as the researcher) entered the research field with a set of ideas or blueprint of concepts, values and methods, based on my unique and specific history, background, gender, class and race, to name but a few determining factors with regard to my specific view on reality (Chambers, 2003;

Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Mertens, 1998). In order to best address the purpose of my study, I worked from the *interpretivist paradigm* (selected meta-theory), following a *qualitative approach* (methodological paradigm).

3.2.1   AN INTERPRETIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Interpretivism implies the interpretation of human behaviour on both a verbal and a non-verbal level, against the background of participants' life-worlds, as well as their past experiences and existing understandings thereof. Giving meaning always takes place within a particular context, implying that human behaviour, feelings and experiences can only be understood in relation to a specific context (in my study relating to informal settlement communities) (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002; Webber & Ison, 1995). As such, experiences are interpreted in a personal, unique manner, implying that reality within the context of my study is constituted of various interpretations, namely mine, and those of my co-researchers and the participants. I agree with others (Grant & Shillito, 1998; Webber & Ison, 1995) that, although individuals do not share a uniform view of their life-worlds, they use communication to share their experiences of their worlds. Chambers (2003) proposes the use of the term *personal*, rather than *subjective* interpretations – the latter being a value-laden word, implying biased and unreliable outcomes or results. As I support the use of the term *personal* as opposed to *subjective,* I shall use it as such throughout this thesis.

I aimed to gain understanding (*Verstehen*) with regard to the lived-experiences and *personal* worlds of participants, in terms of their perceptions and interpretations, but by acknowledging myself as co-creator of meaning. I aim to report on experiences and perspectives as understood in a particular context, thereby *working with data in context*. Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002:125) associate *Verstehen* with *empathetic reliving* – the attempt '*to imagine and try to understand texts in their context*'. I regard interpretivist research as a joint process, with different situations and effects being researched by various role-players. Besides data, interpretations and results being embedded in contexts and persons other than myself, I also acted as an instrument in the process, with my values inevitably impacting on the research process and findings, resulting in an end-product which is *personal* by nature (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Cohen *et al*., 2001).

My decision to employ Interpretivism can be related to the aim of my study, which focuses on a deep understanding of the *personal* perceptions and views of the community members of a particular informal settlement community. Conducting my study from an interpretivist paradigm enabled me to conduct a study amongst participants in their natural environment (the informal settlement community), in order to gain information and insight regarding their ways of coping with HIV&AIDS, in terms of aspects such as existing assets, local resources, support systems, facilities, knowledge base and skills. I attempted to understand the participants in terms of their *personal* experiences, perspectives, definitions and perceptions of their everyday lives, within the unique context in which they operate and against their own unique backgrounds. As such, I did not aim to describe a single truth and reality (as I do not believe that something like that exists) or to provide objective interpretations.

In addition to Interpretivism being a suitable option to address my research questions, the basic principles of this paradigm correlate with those of PRA, supporting the methodological approach that I selected.   Both PRA and Interpretivism propagate the idea that the people on ground level (the participants) are experts who hold the answers to their own, as well as other research questions. I pay heed to Chambers' (2003) recommendation not to enter the research field as a professional outsider, believing that I have the answers, as I may be influenced by my own methods, values, beliefs and attitudes, thereby preventing me from learning from local people. In my study, I further recognise the fact that a significant number of the participants are also outsiders to the community in the true sense of the word, but believe that they could share expert insight, based on their knowledge and daily involvement in the community. This also applies to data analysis, where I (as other researchers) may be prone to believe myself to be an expert – denying the abilities and creativity of people who actually understand the reality in question. Furthermore, such an approach correlates with my profession as scholar and practitioner in the field of Educational Psychology, more specifically with the theory of the asset-based approach, where emphasis is placed on the strengths and abilities of people with whom you work.   In this manner, the theoretical background to my study, the selected paradigm and the methodological approach fit well and support one another.

Besides assisting me in gaining knowledge, certain underlying philosophical beliefs or assumptions guided my research approach, actions, search for meaning, and understanding of reality. Following an interpretivist paradigm, I define the nature and content of the reality that I researched (the manner in which a South African informal settlement community is coping with HIV&AIDS by relying on existing assets and local resources), as multiple, personal and internal by nature (**ontological assumption**). I regard this specific reality as one consisting of the participants' subjective experiences of their external world, and therefore I aimed to reflect the participants' perceptions in my findings. As such, I include various direct responses of participants in my discussion of emerging themes in chapter four, reflecting the voices of the participants and providing a trail of evidence. With regard to my **epistemological assumption**, I adopted an intersubjective or interactional stance. In an attempt to narrow the distance between myself and the reality that I researched, I interacted and collaborated with the participants on a continuous basis, spent prolonged time in the field and throughout strived to obtain an *insider view* (emic perspective) (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Creswell, 1998).

In considering the role of values in my study (**axiological assumption**), I acknowledge the fact that my research is value laden and biased. Despite my attempts to authentically report on the perceptions of the participants, my interpretations cannot be regarded as completely free from my *personal* (subjective) voice, due to the fact that my (and my co-researchers') background differs greatly from those of the participants – us being white, Afrikaans speaking, graduate woman entering a black, Xhosa speaking and mostly illiterate community. In addition, working from an interpretivist paradigm does not require of me to provide value-free interpretations. With regard to my **rhetorical assumption**, I elected to employ a first-person and fairly informal writing style in this thesis, in an attempt to enable you – the reader – to *hear* my voice. I continuously strived to use language that typically relates to qualitative research. Finally, based on my **methodological assumption**, I selected inductive research methods (for data collection, analysis and interpretation), relying on interaction and a personal relationship between the participants and myself. I remained flexible concerning my choices and revised my methodology where needed (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002; Cohen *et*

al., 2001; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Creswell, 1998). Due to the fact that my methodology could only be finalised after completion of the data collection, interpretation and analysis, I regard my research design as emerging by nature. Detailed discussions of the research processes that I employed follow in section 3.3.

3.2.2   A QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Selecting a qualitative research approach implies that I collect data in a real-world setting (field focused), working inductively. Grounding my study in this approach I focus on the perceptions, meanings and understandings of participants, with the outcome being a process rather than a product. I aim to obtain insight into and provide in-depth (rich) descriptions of naturally occurring phenomena or lived-experiences in natural situations, making sense of and interpreting that which I am studying in terms of the meaning that is ascribed to it by the participants and not as predetermined or controlled by myself. As such, by endeavouring qualitative research I aim to develop an understanding of the manner in which reality (the world) is constructed by individuals in a specific social setting, in terms of symbols, structures and social roles familiar to them. Qualitative techniques may therefore provide me with the opportunity to share in the views and understandings of other people and to explore the manner in which others give meaning to their life-worlds, themselves and others (Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Woods, 2003; Patton, 2002; Mayan, 2001; McLeod, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In terms of the focus on life-worlds, I (as qualitative researcher) hold the belief that emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy and other subjective aspects are embedded in individuals' life-worlds and may, in turn, represent typical behaviour and experiences. I support others' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Berg, 1998) opinion that, even though I can observe some of these aspects directly, most elements of symbolism, meaning and understanding require my consideration of my own *personal* perceptions and ideas.

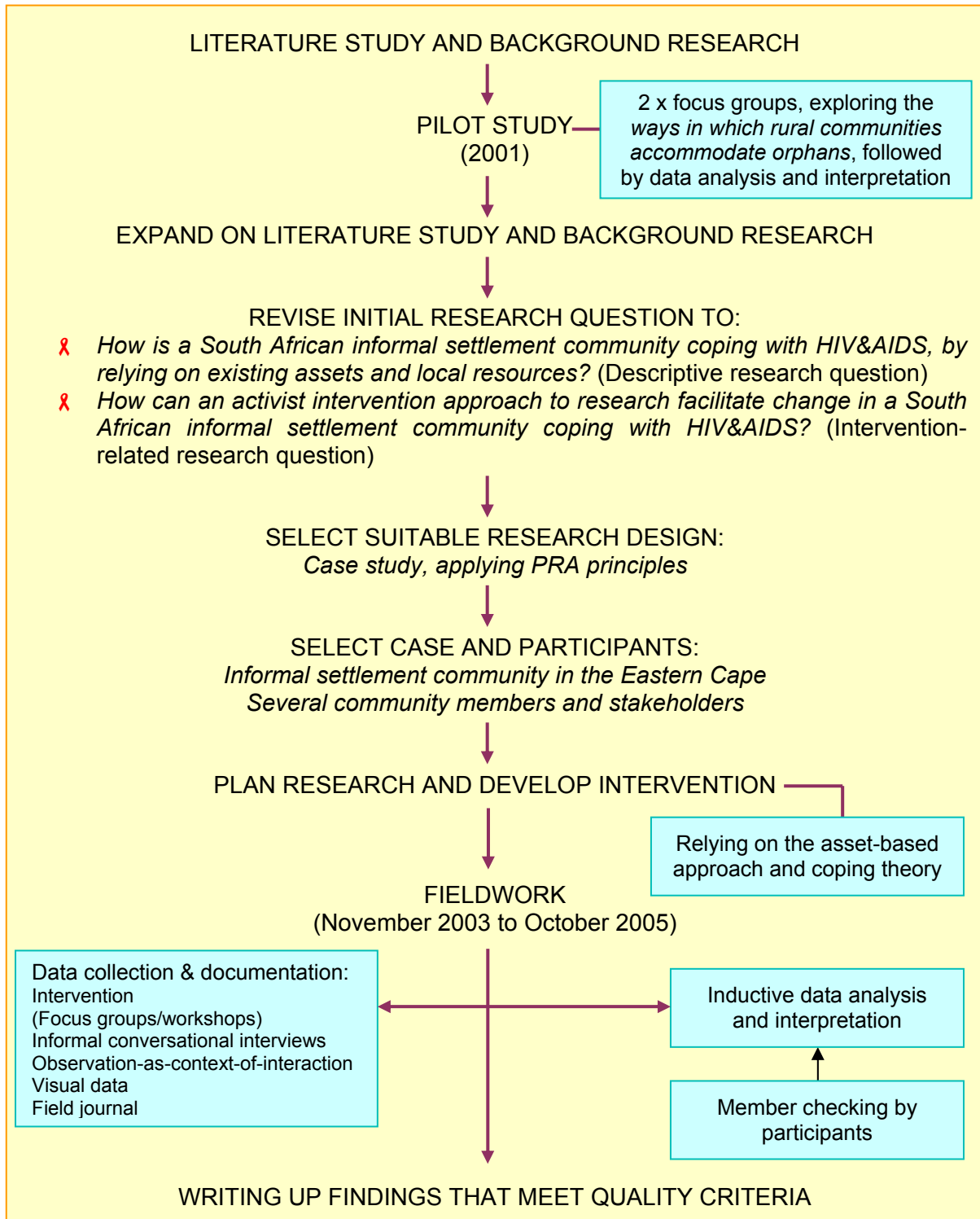In conducting qualitative research I aim to understand a phenomenon from an insider's perspective (emic perspective). This kind of research implies that I research a few cases and keep close contact with the field and participants – spending a lot of time in the field (gaining access, establishing rapport, collecting data), conducting the multifaceted, time-consuming task of data analysis, writing it up in an extensive

manner (including supporting quotations of the participants, in order for their voices to be *heard*), and being involved in a form of research that does not have set guidelines or procedures. It is like building a puzzle (Mayan, 2001), where I have to construct a *picture* that only takes form as the various parts are collected and studied. Employing such an inductive approach may enable me to be open in making sense of a situation by not imposing my pre-existing anticipations but allowing the relevant themes to emerge from raw data as the study and data analysis progress. My ultimate aim as qualitative researcher is to gain deep understanding of coping and not to generalise the findings to other populations or contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Mayan, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

Applying the foregoing discussion of qualitative research to my study implied a study amongst community members (participants) in an informal settlement community in their natural environment. I (supported by my co-researchers and field workers) conducted the study to firstly understand the manner in which a South African informal settlement community is coping with HIV&AIDS by relying on existing assets and local resources, and, secondly, to gain insight into possible changes that might be facilitated by employing an activist intervention research approach (Bhana, 2002; Lindegger, 2002; Patton, 2002). Firstly, I identified the community's current coping strategies by means of several intervention sessions (focus groups and/or workshops) with educator-participants, as well as informal conversational interactive interviews, supported by observation-as-context-of-interaction, my field journal and visual data. I then analysed and interpreted the raw data obtained during these sessions in terms of the asset-based approach and coping theory, after which I (in conjunction with co-researchers) developed and implemented follow-up intervention sessions focusing on the various aspects and steps of the asset-based approach, including the mobilisation of available but not yet utilised assets. During these sessions I aimed to gain insight into the manner in which participants interpreted and implemented newly acquired asset-based-related competencies in terms of their community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS, as well as the changes they experienced. I documented the sessions by means of a field journal, audio-recordings and visual data techniques (PRA informed visual aids, photographs and video-recordings). Throughout, I aimed to describe the world of the participants from the inside out, in an attempt to gain deeper insight into the social reality of coping (as

it relates [or not] to the asset-based approach), as employed in the selected informal settlement community. Figure 3.1 provides an outline of my research process.

LITERATURE STUDY AND BACKGROUND RESEARCH

PILOT STUDY
(2001)

2 x focus groups, exploring the *ways in which rural communities accommodate orphans*, followed by data analysis and interpretation

EXPAND ON LITERATURE STUDY AND BACKGROUND RESEARCH

REVISE INITIAL RESEARCH QUESTION TO:
- *How is a South African informal settlement community coping with HIV&AIDS, by relying on existing assets and local resources?* (Descriptive research question)
- *How can an activist intervention approach to research facilitate change in a South African informal settlement community coping with HIV&AIDS?* (Intervention-related research question)

SELECT SUITABLE RESEARCH DESIGN:
Case study, applying PRA principles

SELECT CASE AND PARTICIPANTS:
Informal settlement community in the Eastern Cape
Several community members and stakeholders

PLAN RESEARCH AND DEVELOP INTERVENTION

Relying on the asset-based approach and coping theory

FIELDWORK
(November 2003 to October 2005)

Data collection & documentation:
Intervention
(Focus groups/workshops)
Informal conversational interviews
Observation-as-context-of-interaction
Visual data
Field journal

Inductive data analysis and interpretation

Member checking by participants

WRITING UP FINDINGS THAT MEET QUALITY CRITERIA

FIGURE 3.1:   SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

My decision to approach the study qualitatively was primarily guided by the nature of my study, in terms of its research questions and purpose. Secondly, I feel comfortable applying the qualitative approach, based on my belief that the world exists of multiple realities which vary according to context and time (refer to Mertens, 1998). I wanted to explore and focus on the processes, meaning-giving patterns, as well as structural characteristics of a particular community, in order to address my research questions. I support the view of Flick, Von Kardorff and Steinke (2004:3), who describe this process as follows: '*It* [Qualitative research] *rather makes use of the unusual or the deviant and unexpected as a source of insight and a mirror whose reflection makes the unknown perceptible in the known, and the known perceptible in the unknown, thereby opening up further possibilities for (self-)recognition*'.

Mayan's (2001) criteria for phenomena and topics that are regarded as suitable to be researched qualitatively, apply to my study. Firstly, she regards phenomena with regard to which the existing knowledge base is limited as suitable to be researched qualitatively. Secondly, topics for which an insight into meaning is required are seen as appropriate, and thirdly, studies aiming to describe a process and not an outcome are typified as suitable. I undertook this study to contribute to the limited literature on the asset-based approach, as well as the knowledge base relating to community-based coping with HIV&AIDS. Thirdly, I aimed to gain insight into the perceptions, feelings and ideas of people, and did not merely focus on the outcome, but on their process of coping with HIV&AIDS on a daily basis. In addition, I relied on PRA – being emerging by nature – and explored the process of employing an activist intervention approach to research, in terms of the changes it facilitated amongst the participants, in relation to their coping with HIV&AIDS.

In addition to these criteria, Creswell (1998) describes a viable qualitative study in terms of certain characteristics. I present the manner in which I adhered to these guidelines in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1:   ASSESSING MY STUDY IN TERMS OF CRESWELL'S (1998) CRITERIA FOR A VIABLE QUALITATIVE STUDY

CRESWELL'S (1998) CRITERIA	MY STUDY
Rigorous data collection strategies, implying multiple forms of data collection and that the researcher spends sufficient time in the field.	I employed multiple data collection strategies and relied on crystallisation in an attempt to obtain a holistic perspective of the reality that was researched. I spent prolonged time in the field, undertaking nine field visits over a period of two years – varying in length between one and seven days each.
Framing the study within the basic assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach.	My study is characterised by typical trademarks of qualitative research such as an evolving design, myself fulfilling the role of researcher and acting as instrument for data collection, as well as my focus on the (multiple) perceptions of the participants.
Employing a tradition of inquiry.	My tradition of enquiry allowed me to become familiar with the participants' experiences and present a pure, concise study.
Starting the study with a single idea or focus.	Initially, my study originated from my interest in and motivation to understand how South African rural (and later informal settlement) communities are currently coping with HIV&AIDS, from an asset-based approach. Later on in the study, other areas of interest emerged, resulting in a research project with various secondary focus areas (described in chapter four) that were addressed by other researchers but simultaneously with and as part of my study, which I regard as the primary study.
Employing detailed methods and a rigorous approach to data collection, with data analysis and writing it up forming part of the study and the researcher verifying the accuracy of the account.	I relied on a variety of data collection methods and aimed to ensure rigorous data collection, analysis and interpretation. I attempted to provide a holistic reflection and representation of my study in this thesis, providing a trail of evidence and verifying my choices and conclusions by including relevant evidence where possible.
Writing up the study persuasively, allowing the reader to experience *being there*.	I attempted to provide detailed descriptions of the research process, relying on the participants' voices where possible, for the reader to follow my journey and share in my experiences, whilst constructing a personal experience.
Analysing data by using multiple levels of abstraction.	I actively worked from particulars to general levels of abstractions during data analysis and interpretation, as is evident in the examples included in the text and appendices.
Employing a clear and engaging writing style, filled with unexpected ideas.	I aimed to employ a clear and engaging writing style, yet you (the reader) ought to be the judge of this. I further attempted to provide believable and realistic findings, demonstrating the multi-facetness of the reality that formed the core of my study.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The focus of my study was twofold. Firstly, I focused on the exploration and description of a particular phenomenon, namely an informal settlement community's manner of coping with HIV&AIDS, by relying on existing assets and local resources.

However, based on my methodological choice to apply PRA principles, my involvement with the particular community (initially primarily aimed at research) inevitably implied active intervention. In this regard, Versfeld (1995:149) remarks that '*The PRA process creates opportunities to research intervention activity*'.

As such, I followed an intervention research approach (Bhana, 2002; Lindegger, 2002; Patton, 2002) – intervening with a selected community whilst doing research. I now discuss the methodological choices I made and justify them within the context of my study.   Themes with regard to the strengths of my choices, as well as the challenges I faced, based on the choices I made, are not included in the following sections, but addressed separately in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

3.3.1   RESEARCH DESIGN

I selected a *case study design*, *applying PRA principles*. For the purpose of this discussion these two components will be presented separately, despite the fact that they were integrated and applied as a single design.

3.3.1.1 Case study design

I support Creswell's (1998:2-3) description of a research design as '*the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing the narrative*', as I believe that the research design links the purpose of the study and initial research questions to other methodological components and ultimately to the findings and conclusions, in a logical manner. For the descriptive purpose of my study and in order to address my descriptive research questions, I selected a single, within-site, instrumental case study design. This choice enabled me to investigate one informal settlement community in the Eastern Cape (the *case*) instrumentally in an attempt to explore its manner of coping with HIV&AIDS in terms of relying on existing assets and local resources, and, secondly, to explore the changes facilitated by the intervention research approach that I employed. The selected community was of secondary importance, as my primary aim was to gain insight into ways of coping and changes that occurred (Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Stake, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

Selecting and investigating this particular community supports Creswell's (1998:61) definition of a case study as '*an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context*'. Case study designs imply a focus on a phenomenon which is characterised by specific boundaries in terms of context, time and place. A case study design entails a detailed description of a single or a few individuals (being an individual, family, community or unit), a set of documents, an event, a programme or an activity, described within its setting (physical, social, economical and/or historical), in order to provide the necessary context (Henning *et al*., 2004; Stake, 2000; Creswell, 1998).

Within the context of my study, I did not aim to gain generalisable knowledge, but rather to obtain a deep understanding of the perceptions of community members residing in a particular community (an informal settlement community) within a particular context (with a high incidence of unemployment, poverty and having to cope with the HIV&AIDS pandemic), environment (in the Nelson Mandela Metropole in the Eastern Cape) and time (November 2003 to October 2005). However, the possibility of certain tendencies being transferable to similar communities does exist, as other South African informal settlement communities might display a context and characteristics similar to the one described in detail in this thesis (Seale, 2000; Stake, 2000). Figure 3.2 provides a visual image of the selected community.

FIGURE 3.2:   THE SELECTED COMMUNITY (THE CASE)

I purposefully selected the community in which I conducted my research, as often implied by Interpretivism. I identified an information-rich case, to be able to gain a

deep understanding of my topic, namely the manner in which the community is coping with HIV&AIDS by relying on existing assets and local resources, and, secondly, the potential changes that might be facilitated by employing an activist intervention approach during research (Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Mayan, 2001; Hayes, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Jary & Jary, 1995).

I initially and indirectly gained access to the community *via* a gatekeeper (Creswell, 1998), whom I regard as an insider of the cultural group within which I conducted my study (being the Xhosa culture). This gatekeeper participated in the pilot study that I conducted in 2001 and is an educator at a school in the Nelson Mandela Metropole in an urban area. She liaised me with a person knowledgeable of schools in informal settlement areas in the region. Based on this person's recommendations, I selected a primary school through which I could enter the community. In doing so, I relied on *typical case sampling* to identify the case (community/school where I wanted to conduct my study), as that particular community (school) seemed to be an example of a typical average community in that region, meeting my criteria that it had to be an Eastern Cape community facing the challenge of HIV&AIDS and situated in an informal settlement area (criteria as identified during the pilot study). My selection of the case and participants is summarised in Table 3.2. My selection of participants is discussed in section 3.3.2.

TABLE 3.2:   SELECTION OF CASE AND PARTICIPANTS

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING STRATEGY	CRITERIA FOR SELECTION
Case	Informal settlement community (entry *via* a primary school)	Typical case sampling	A school in an informal settlement community in the Nelson Mandela Metropole, faced with challenges related to HIV&AIDS
Participants	Educator-participants	Random purposeful sampling	Educators of the selected school
	Other stakeholders and community members	Snowball sampling	Community leaders and members of the community who: ✗ have to cope with HIV& AIDS ✗ can be reached fairly easily ✗ would be open in their replies ✗ are able to communicate in English or through an interpreter

3.3.1.2 Applying PRA principles

I applied PRA principles in planning and employing data collection activities, as the PRA approach allows for research by means of intervention in communities, in an activist manner (Chambers, 2004). As such, I relied on PRA principles to address my intervention-related research questions, as formulated in chapter one. Due to the fact that PRA greatly determined my basic approach to the study, it seems appropriate to provide a brief overview of this relatively new and still emerging approach to research, before discussing the application of PRA principles, as actualised during my study. A discussion on the background and principles of the approach could provide you – the reader – with the necessary background against which the rest of my thesis might be read. I conclude the section on PRA by describing the way in which I relied on PRA to expand on good qualitative research within the context of my study – adding different nuances to it.

3.3.1.2.1 Development of PRA

PRA originated in the late 1980s/early 1990s in East Africa (Kenya) and India, initially in the field of Agriculture. It is often regarded as a *later manifestation* of rapid rural appraisal (RRA), being an alternative and rigorous learning experience facilitated in a community, usually by a multidisciplinary team that includes community members. I do not regard PRA as a *static methodology* but as a *philosophy, orientation* or *flexible approach to research*, in which various data collection strategies might be employed to uncover indigenous people's knowledge and skills, in order to learn about their local conditions, identify challenges and plan how to address them. The development of PRA was influenced strongly by the concepts of capacity building and empowerment of people, by means of their own active participation and involvement in their own development. As such, I regard **intervention**, **activism** and **change** as central constituents of the approach (Leach, 2003b; Cornwall *et al*., 2001; Percy, 1999; Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998; Absalom & Mwayaya, 1997; Binns *et al*., 1997; Lelo, Ayieko, Makenzi, Muhia, Njeremani, Muiruri, Omollo, & Ochola, 1995; Leurs, 1995; Chambers, 1994a; Chambers, 1994c; Mukherjee, 1993; Chambers, 1992; Heaver, 1992; Kabutha, Thomas-Slayter & Ford, 1990).

PRA is currently applied in numerous settings and across socio-economic strata. Over the last two years, researchers (although in the minority) have increasingly displayed a preference for the use of *Participatory Learning and Action* (PLA), or *Participatory Reflection and Action,* as opposed to the initial *Participatory Rural Appraisal* (Chambers, 2004). Within the context of my study, I support the use of *Participatory Reflection and Action*, despite the limited use and familiarity thereof. My preference is based on the fact that my study involved continuous reflection, followed by action, in turn leading to reflection. Secondly, I did not conduct my study in a rural area, nor did I limit it to a mere appraisal of the community's way of coping.

3.3.1.2.2 Core principles underlying PRA

In selecting PRA principles, I adhere to a bottom-up approach, emphasising the interest of a regional community, the capabilities of local people and the development of their decision-making powers. My basic point of departure lies in the recognition of the facts that poverty-stricken communities have survived under difficult conditions and faced difficult challenges over the years, in spite of limited resources; and secondly, that they possess a wealth of indigenous social and technical knowledge. Hence, the approach is based on three basic beliefs, to which I ascribe. Firstly, I assume that there are *no experts*, appealing to me as researcher to be humble, to respect multiple perspectives and to be willing to learn from others. Secondly, I emphasise the notion of *local problems requiring local solutions* by relying on local materials and representations, accepting diversity, differences and complexities and continually keeping in mind that no single truth exists. In the third instance, by applying PRA principles I assume that development necessarily implies a change for the good and that it may result in the *empowerment* of local community members (as was indeed evident in my study) as well as *long-term and sustainable self-help initiatives* in communities. From a PRA perspective I regard the participation of community members as crucial to any development initiative, as it implies that community members themselves set priorities and work towards their own goals, as they are enabled to relate the identified needs and challenges with available resources, not only in the community itself but also in the wider context and on a macro-level. In doing so, a feeling that they are the owners of the process and the information that have been generated, is established (Bhandari, 2003; Percy, 1999;

Grant & Shillito, 1998; Binns *et al*., 1997; Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Jijiga, 1994; Schönhuth & Kievelitz, 1994; Thompson, Shah & Foellmi, 1994; Wallace, 1994).

In applying PRA principles, I relied on participation, teamwork, interactive learning and shared knowledge during my study. I used joint analysis and reflections to raise local community members' awareness of their existing situation as well as their own abilities, in the process empowering them to move into action. I facilitated the process in the research field (an informal settlement community) and collaborated with local people (the participants), with the aim of uncovering information on the community's realities, challenges, opportunities and priorities, in order to identify, plan and design ways of more effectively coping with the challenges implied by HIV&AIDS. I employed PRA principles in order to initiate and sustain development in this informal settlement community, in terms of community members managing their own development by identifying challenges, followed by them planning solutions, carrying them out and evaluating them regularly. This resulted in the people facing the challenges being actively involved in making decisions, planning and implementing their own initiatives, in terms of the three projects reported on in chapter four (Chambers, 2003; Percy, 1999; Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998; Absalom & Mwayaya, 1997; Chambers & Guijt, 1995; Lelo *et al*., 1995; Webber & Ison, 1995; Chambers, 1994b; Jijiga, 1994; Wallace, 1994; Mukherjee, 1993; Chambers, 1992).

During my study I had to continually adhere to the core of PRA, being *changed roles and reversals*. As a result I (and my co-researchers) as outsiders could not enter the field as experts who knew what to convey and how, but merely as initiators and facilitators, seeking collaborative inquiry and defining what was important to know as the research context was created and defined. I (and my co-researchers) did not transfer knowledge and technology, but merely introduced them to the participants and facilitated them to use newly introduced methods and resources to do their own planning and initiate such plans, as well as monitor and evaluate them. Instead of imposing my (our) reality on the participants, I encouraged and allowed participants to express their own reality. As such, I regard myself as an *enabler* – who assisted and guided local community members (participants) to plan, employ and manage their school(community)-based projects, whilst learning from one another. However, I was occasionally required to provide information and experience from an external

context on possible strategies, based on the access I had to resources from the wider (different but also valid) context that could be employed to the benefit of the community (Chambers, 2004; Chambers, 2003; Grant & Shillito, 1998; Webber & Ison, 1995; Chambers, 1996; Chambers, 1994a; Wallace, 1994; Chambers, 1992).

In summary, I was required to implement four primary reversals during my research – both in thinking and in doing. A reversal of *frames* implied a movement from an etic to an emic approach, and from closed to open methods, focusing on discussions and open questions. With regard to the reversal of *modes*, I had to shift my focus from individual-focused modes of inquiry to group-focused activities, and from verbal to visual modes. The reversal of *power/dominance* implied a shift from merely gaining information to empowering participants and facilitating or starting a process of community development. Lastly, the reversal of *relations* required of me to move from being suspicious and reserved to displaying confidence and good rapport, and from focusing on the experience of frustration (and sometimes tension) to having fun (Chambers, 2003; Chambers, 1994a; Chambers, 1992).

Reflecting on my application of the *principles of PRA*[6] I (and also my co-researchers) focused on being relaxed and not rushing the process; listening instead of lecturing; probing instead of dominating, not suggesting answers or moving on to another topic too quickly; and being unimposing instead of the central figure (*principle of offsetting biases*) – not interrupting participants or interfering with the process. As these principles correlate with the guidelines of my training as psychologist and facilitator, I did not experience difficulty to adhere to them. In addition, I was open about what we were doing in the community, by clearly informing the participants about the purpose, background and process of the sessions. I consciously aimed to let go of the power (*handing over the stick*) and facilitate a *'they do it' approach*, by encouraging and facilitating participants to investigate, analyse, generate and take ownership of the outcomes of the process. This resulted in them learning from one another and feeling empowered as the study progressed. Although I allowed the participants to determine the process, I attempted to provide some degree of structure in order to avoid unnecessary detail and irrelevant information (*optimal ignorance/optimising*

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[6] *Please consult the appendices (both hard copy and compact disc) for a trail of evidence in this regard*.

trade-offs). I strived towards self-awareness and being self-critical, in order to learn from the participants (so-called *failing forwards*) and continually reflected on my own behaviour and skills, in order to improve where needed (Chambers, 2004; Bhandari, 2003; Chambers, 2003; Grant & Shillito, 1998; Absalom & Mwayaya, 1997; Thompson *et al.*, 1994; Mukherjee, 1993; Singh, 1993; Chambers, 1992).

As sound relationships and trust are regarded as prerequisites for successfully applying the PRA approach, I focused on initiating and establishing good rapport with the participants. Sound relationships encouraged their participation, especially with regard to the discussion of content which is sensitive by nature. Concerning personal demeanour, I aimed to display respect, humility, patience and interest in the participants and what they had to say. I paid attention, listened and did not interrupt, also paying attention to my own body language. I constantly conveyed the messages of '*You can do it'* and '*You are the experts'*, and facilitated activities that participants could enjoy, own and thrive on. Furthermore, I encouraged participants to experience a sense of ownership over the information that was revealed. Besides following up on community issues where possible, I updated the participants on the progress of the process during visits (Chambers, 2004; Grant & Shillito, 1998; Absalom & Mwayaya, 1997; White & Taket, 1997; Chambers, 1996; Chambers & Guijt, 1995; Chambers, 1994a; Mukherjee, 1993; Singh, 1993; Chambers, 1992; Heaver, 1992).

With regard to the *reversal of roles and learning,* I learned from and with community members, by spending time with them and applying face-to-face interactional methods. I was flexible in my application of methods and adapted my strategy throughout the process – improvising and innovating where needed (*learning rapidly and progressively*). I also included various time frames, methods, people (participants as well as researchers) and places, in order to ensure constant cross-checking (*triangulating [as per PRA terminology]*). I aimed to keep a balance and maximise diversity and richness of information, by looking for diverse events, different processes and contradicting opinions, in the process of seeking multiple perspectives (*seeking diversity*), and in accordance with my belief that a community is not a solid entity but represents a collection of perspectives. Concerning the principle of *personal responsibility*, I did not rely on manuals, but applied PRA in the form of creative adjusted methods (Chambers, 2004; Bhandari, 2003; Chambers,

2003; Absalom & Mwayaya, 1997; White & Taket, 1997; Chambers & Guijt, 1995; Chambers, 1994a; Jijiga, 1994; Mukherjee, 1993; Singh, 1993; Heaver, 1992).

In conclusion, I adhered to the following practical guidelines, which reflect the basic principles underlying PRA, in undertaking my study (Chambers, 2004; Chambers, 2003; Leach, 2003a; Absalom & Mwayaya, 1997; Wallace, 1994):

- I read up on PRA prior to undertaking my study.
- I spent quite some time on introductions, building relationships and learning about the community.
- I informed participants at the start that we did not propose to train them, but that they would provide the answers and determine the process.
- In introducing the process I informed participants of potential benefits for them.
- I selected concrete, visual and colourful methods and activities, to which the participants could relate and with regard to which they could feel comfortable.
- I followed a '*Go with the flow'* approach, being flexible, open to change, willing to learn from my mistakes and to make adjustments when needed.
- We worked in a safe environment where the participants felt comfortable to discuss sensitive content.
- I continually watched, listened and learned from the participants – keeping in the background and allowing them to do the work.
- I respected the participants and their contributions. I was sensitive to their needs and ideas, and relied on my own better judgements at all times.
- I was prepared to deal with sensitive issues or emotions when they arose.
- I did not attempt to do too much in too little time. Instead of rushing, I allowed enough time to discover and learn with the participants.
- I facilitated and introduced my ideas and perceptions whenever appropriate.
- I made room for participants to have fun and enjoy the process.

3.3.1.2.3 Adding unique nuances to qualitative research by relying on PRA

Applying PRA principles to my study enabled me to add unique nuances to qualitative research, as it is traditionally practised. As PRA seeks empowerment of participants and change in the form of community development, applying PRA

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principles allowed me to take qualitative research one step further. Whereas qualitative research usually focuses on an in-depth exploration and understanding of a phenomenon, I extended research to intervention (in accordance with the PRA approach), doing research *via* intervention and intervention *via* research. As a result, my research did indeed facilitate change within the selected community.

Although the baseline data that I obtained during the first session with the participants indicate that they were to a certain extent coping with the challenges of HIV&AIDS when my study commenced, their way of coping changed towards the end of my study. By being involved in planning and implementing the intervention research process, participants took ownership and co-determined the progress and outcome of the process (basic PRA principle). High levels of participation and contributions by participants in this manner differ from participation and contributions in traditional qualitative research, where participants are seldom involved in the planning and progress of the research process. The role that I fulfilled further implies a different slant to qualitative research, as I served as initial catalyst for the process of change to occur, and then as facilitator, researcher, developer of the intervention and mentor throughout the study, being constantly involved in facilitating change.

By being actively involved and upon taking agency, participants were empowered to take charge, plan and initiate three school-based projects in order to assist the community in coping with HIV&AIDS. As such, their involvement in the research process served to enable them to initiate community development. Whereas (qualitative) research usually implies knowledge generation by the researcher, the participants in my study actively participated in the process of knowledge generation, due to their high levels of involvement. The manner in which I integrated research and intervention subsequently resulted in them coping with HIV&AIDS differently, and even improving in this regard towards the end of my study, by developing different approaches to enhance the community's way of coping with the pandemic.

3.3.2   SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

I purposefully selected the participants in my study. Subsequent to my initial identification of the school, I networked with the school principal, in order to gain

access to the school (educators) and eventually the community. I requested him (in collaboration with the deputy principal) to select ten educators to participate in the discussions and intervention sessions, upon which he *casted lots*, by putting the staff members' names in a hat and pulling out ten names, thereby employing simple *random purposeful sampling* (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Patton, 2002; Mertens, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After the initial stages of my study I identified and purposefully sampled other community members (participants) to conduct informal conversational interactive interviews with. I relied on my own networking abilities, as well as the educator-participants (a few self-appointed key informants) for recommendations on and access to suitable community members who were regarded as knowledgeable and able to supply rich information concerning my area of research, thereby employing *snowball sampling*. One of the key informants (educator-participants) was of particular benefit, as she had access to stakeholders and community members, managed to establish networks and enjoyed a high status in the community. She could thus bring me into contact with other stakeholders of the community and guide me towards suitable participants. In this manner, she (in a certain sense) also acted as gatekeeper for me to enter into the wider community, with specific reference to families residing in the community. She further acted as guide and informant during some of the interviews that I conducted, as well as interpreter when needed. In addition to guidance by the educator-participants, community members who were involved as participants in turn identified others to be involved – constituting *snowball sampling* (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Patton, 2002; Wengraf, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2001; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Mertens, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Although the participants in my study represent only a small section of the people to whom the study might possibly apply, I aimed to select participants that are reasonably typical of the bigger group of people that I focused on, being South African people residing in informal settlement communities (Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen *et al.*, 2001; Mayan, 2001; Hayes, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Jary & Jary, 1995). ***I acknowledge the fact that several of the participants in my study might be regarded as outsiders in the true sense of***

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the word, due to them working in the selected community but residing in adjoining communities. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the participants, including community members that I informally encountered and with whom I conducted *ad hoc* conversations, as documented in my field journal (refer to Appendix F).

TABLE 3.3:   PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANT	(ASSUMED) LITERACY LEVEL	RESEARCH ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN
14 x primary school educators	Tertiary education	Intervention sessions (focus groups/workshops) Informal/*ad hoc* interviews Observation-as-context-of-interaction
2 x school principals	Tertiary education	Informal/*ad hoc* interviews
1 x social worker employed by the Department of Health	Tertiary education	Informal conversational interview
2 x social workers employed by the Department of Social Development	Tertiary education	Informal/*ad hoc* interviews
2 x social workers employed by NGOs	Tertiary education	Informal conversational interviews
HIV&AIDS co-ordinator at the Department of Social Development	Tertiary education	Informal conversational interviews
1 x nurse at provincial hospital	Tertiary education	*Ad hoc* conversation Observation-as-context-of-interaction
2 x employees at children's hospice	Literate	*Ad hoc* conversations
1 x ex-employee of the South African Police Department	Literate/tertiary education	Informal conversational interview Observation-as-context-of-interaction
3 x employees at NGOs	Tertiary education	Informal/*ad hoc* interviews Observation-as-context-of-interaction
1 x catholic sister (nun) at community care centre	Tertiary education	Informal conversational interview Observation-as-context-of-interaction
1 x employee at community care centre	Literate	*Ad hoc* conversation Observation-as-context-of-interaction
1 x church minister	Tertiary education	Informal conversational interview
1 x employee at a faith-based organisation	Literate	*Ad hoc* conversations
1 x volunteer community worker	Literate	Informal conversational interview
2 x HIV infected community members	Literate	Informal/*ad hoc* interviews
3 x HIV infected children	Primary school	Observation-as-context-of-interaction
2 x caregivers (aunts) of children infected with HIV	Low level of literacy	Informal conversational interviews
4 x family members of people infected with HIV or who have AIDS	Literate / low level of literacy	Informal/*ad hoc* interviews Observation-as-context-of-interaction

I regard the sampling strategies that I employed as appropriate for my study, for several reasons, including the sensitivity of the HIV&AIDS topic and the associated limited insight into communities' perceptions of HIV&AIDS-related issues. Despite potential participants having to be fairly representative of the community in general, other criteria for selection include that I had to be able to reach them quite easily, that a high probability for them to be open in their replies was required (specifically important due to the sensitive nature of HIV&AIDS), and that they had to be able to communicate their perceptions, whether they were able to speak English or communicate *via* an interpreter (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Although Webber and Ison (1995) propagate an open invitation to any community member (by implication any educator at the school) who would like to be involved, I limited the educator-participants by selecting only ten. Apart from the potential benefit of gaining more in a smaller group during discussions, I based my decision to limit educator-participants on the fact that they were initially reimbursed for their time during intervention sessions (focus groups and/or workshops). I am of the opinion that an open invitation might have resulted in the majority of staff wanting to participate, due to the financial implication of participation. I was, however, flexible and welcomed another staff member as part of the team, upon her request to participate due to her interest in the field of study. At a later stage another staff member also joined the team. No volunteer was refused participation at any stage. As my study progressed, two educator-participants terminated their involvement with the project (discussed in more detail in 3.3.3.2). With regard to the other participants (community members), I continued purposefully sampling participants for informal conversational interactive interviews until the raw data became saturated.

I based my decision to provide reimbursements (on a minimal scale) on my belief that educators are professionally trained people whose time is valuable. I regarded reimbursement of the educator-participants as the ethical thing to do, paying them in order to compensate for their time (Oliver, 2003). Being a funded project[7] I also had limited funds available. Furthermore, coming from a lower income group and participating in discussions after hours and over week-ends (specifically during the

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[7] *Study partially funded by ETDP SETA, ABSA Foundation and M&SST Trust.*

first few field visits), reimbursement enabled the educator-participants to cover additional costs caused by the process. With regard to reimbursing focus group participants or not, Patton (2002) reports on the observations of Reed, who indicates that the reimbursement of participants did not have an influence on their responses. Apart from financial incentives and gifts like T-shirts and nametags for the educator-participants, I handed out gifts of appreciation to other participants, in the form of fruit parcels (on recommendation of the educator-participants), as well as HIV&AIDS pins. Although some of the educator-participants initially seemed to be driven by inducements, their participation later solely relied on them taking agency and believing that they could make a difference in the community. Consequently, financial inducements were only included during the initial phases of my study.

3.3.3   DATA COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

According to Flick *et al*. (2004:7):   '*…, background assumptions of a range of qualitative research approaches are that reality is created interactively and becomes meaningful subjectively, and that it is transmitted and becomes effective by collective and individual instances or interpretation*'. Communication constitutes a crucial part of qualitative research, implicating communicative data collection strategies like individual and group interviewing, focus groups and workshop discussions. Furthermore, a case study design implies extensive data collection, utilising multiple sources of information. My choice of data collection strategies was further influenced by the PRA principles that I applied. As such, I selected open-ended methods which are visual, flexible and creative by nature (Chambers, 2004; Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998; Grant & Shillito, 1998; Thompson *et al.*, 1994; Singh, 1993).

I implemented planned intervention sessions (consisting of focus groups and/or workshops), informal conversational interactive interviews, observation-as-context-of-interaction, audio-visual data and a field journal as data collection and documenting strategies. In addition, I engaged in *ad hoc* informal conversations with members of the community, whenever the opportunity arose. My data collection and documentation involved a cycle of interrelated activities (Creswell, 1998), as illustrated by the following statement by Chambers (2004:7): '*Good facilitation and empowering others demands action, reflection, learning and change, which are*

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continuous and have no end'.   Before discussing the various strategies as utilised during my study, an overview of the process is provided.

3.3.3.1 Overview of data collection and documentation processes

Table 3.4 provides a summary of the various field visits. I include detailed explanations of the various phases of my study in chapter four.

TABLE 3.4:   SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

FIELD VISIT	DATE	RESEARCH TEAM AND RESPONSIBILITIES	PARTICIPANTS	ACTIVITIES
1	14-17 Nov 2003	*2 researchers*[*]*:* ⚥ Interviewers ⚥ Facilitators ⚥ Observers *2 field workers:* ⚥ Observers ⚥ Makers of audio-visual recordings	11 educator-participants, working in two groups of five/ six participants each Several community members during *ad hoc* conversations	⚥ Informal interviews ⚥ Focus group-workshop-sessions ⚥ Visits to institutions in the community ⚥ Observation ⚥ *Ad hoc* conversations
2	23-26 Jan 2004	*2 researchers*[*]*:* ⚥ Interviewers ⚥ Facilitators ⚥ Observers *2 field workers:* ⚥ Observers ⚥ Makers of audio-visual recordings	11 educator-participants, working in two groups of five/ six participants each Several community members during *ad hoc* conversations	⚥ Informal interviews ⚥ Focus group-workshop-sessions ⚥ Visits to institutions in the community ⚥ Observation ⚥ *Ad hoc* conversations
3	17-23 Feb 2004	*2 researchers*[*]*:* ⚥ Interviewers ⚥ Facilitators ⚥ Observers ⚥ Makers of audio-visual recordings	8 educator-participants, working in two groups of four participants each 11 participants involved in individual interviews Several community members during *ad hoc* conversations	⚥ Formal and informal interviews ⚥ Focus group-workshop-sessions ⚥ Visits to institutions in the community ⚥ Observation ⚥ *Ad hoc* conversations
4	3-8 June 2004	*3 researchers*[*]*:* ⚥ Interviewers ⚥ Facilitators ⚥ Observers ⚥ Makers of audio-visual recordings	10 educator-participants, working in three groups of three/ four participants each 6 participants involved in individual interviews Several community members during *ad hoc* conversations	⚥ Formal and informal interviews ⚥ Focus group-workshop-sessions ⚥ Visits to institutions in the community ⚥ Observation ⚥ *Ad hoc* conversations

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[*] *Indicating my role during field visits.*

5	19 Aug 2004	**1 researcher:**
		ೱ Interviewer
		ೱ Facilitator
		ೱ Observer
		ೱ Maker of audio-
		  visual recordings
			9 educator-
			participants, working
			in three groups of
			three participants
			each
			2 community
			members during *ad
			hoc* conversations
				ೱ Informal interviews
				ೱ Focus group-workshop-
				  sessions
				ೱ Observation
				ೱ *Ad hoc* conversations

6	29-31 Oct 2004	**2 researchers***:**
		ೱ Interviewers
		ೱ Facilitators
		ೱ Observers
		2 field workers*:
		ೱ Observers
		ೱ Makers of audio-
		  visual recordings
			9 educator-
			participants, working
			as a group
			Several community
			members during *ad
			hoc* conversations
				ೱ Informal interviews
				ೱ Focus group-workshop-
				  sessions
				ೱ Observation
				ೱ *Ad hoc* conversations

7	28-31 July 2005	**4 researchers*:**
		ೱ Interviewers
		ೱ Facilitators
		ೱ Observers
		ೱ Makers of audio-
		  visual recordings
			8 educator-
			participants, working
			as a group
			Several community
			members during *ad
			hoc* conversations
				ೱ Informal interviews
				ೱ Focus group-workshop-
				  sessions
				ೱ Visits to institutions in
				  the community
				ೱ Observation
				ೱ *Ad hoc* conversations

8	15 Sep 2005	**2 researchers*:**
		ೱ Attend school
		  celebration
		ೱ Observers
		ೱ Makers of audio-
		  visual recordings
			No group work
			involved
			Several community
			members during *ad
			hoc* conversations at
			the school's official
			celebration
				ೱ Attendance of school's
				  official celebration
				ೱ Informal interviews
				ೱ Observation
				ೱ *Ad hoc* conversations

9	14-18 Oct 2005	**4 researchers*:**
		ೱ Interviewers
		ೱ Facilitators
		ೱ Observers
		ೱ Makers of audio-
		  visual recordings
			10 educator-
			participants, working
			as a group
			Several community
			members during *ad
			hoc* conversations
				ೱ Informal interviews
				ೱ Focus group-workshop-
				  sessions
				ೱ Observation
				ೱ *Ad hoc* conversations

3.3.3.2 Intervention (focus groups/workshops)

For the purpose of my study, I integrated focus group discussions and workshop activities during intervention sessions with the selected educator-participants (transcripts and visual images included in Appendices B, C and D), relying on a combination of the advantages of these methods. Berg (1998:100) describes *focus group interviews* as '*either guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher.*' Implementing this approach, I (supported by co-researchers) facilitated discussions and interaction in small structured groups as a way of exploring and gaining insight into the views and

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[*] *Indicating my role during field visits.*

experiences of the life-worlds of a small group of participants. Due to the non-threatening and informal atmosphere of the focus group interview, participants could speak freely and openly about their personal attitudes and opinions, sharing their views, ideas and perceptions with regard to their community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS. Within the context of my research problem, and due to the sensitive nature of the topic under discussion, I took particular care to establish a relaxed and open atmosphere (Litoselliti, 2003; Berg, 1998).

Workshops are regarded by Leach (2003b) as a popular way of implementing participatory principles, emphasising the importance of participants being involved in determining and formulating the aims and outcomes of the process – thereby taking ownership. In this regard, I was guided by the process and information obtained during discussions with participants, especially during the initial phases of my study, despite the broad structure and planning I had in mind prior to any contact with participants. The flexible and adaptable nature of workshop sessions supports the basic underlying principles of PRA.

Combining focus groups and workshops during intervention enabled me to observe and note the process of interaction between participants, as meaning is often formed relative to other people's beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, it enabled me to gain access to the verbally expressed opinions, ideas and experiences of the participants. Due to the specific structure and give-and-take nature of the intervention sessions, meanings were socially constructed rather than individually created and possibly represent a diversity of experiences and opinions. During intervention, I had the opportunity to explore any contradictions and uncertainties in order to clarify them, whenever they occurred. In addition and due to the dynamic and interactive nature of group work, experiences, ideas and perspectives might have been shared that probably would not have been shared in another setting (Litoselliti, 2003; Mayan, 2001; Berg, 1998; Morgan, 1997).

Combining focus groups and workshops (in the form of intervention) enabled me to collect data relatively quickly from various educator-participants. As intervention implies a certain dynamic quality, which was evident in the group interaction, debates and disagreements, the intervention sessions represented normal everyday

conversations to a great extent, resulting in lively discussions and the generation of rich data[8]. In participating in intervention sessions, participants could elaborate on the information provided by co-participants, enabling me to understand their ongoing experiences. In that sense, these sessions focused on the interaction between the participants, rather than the interaction between the facilitators and participants (Wilkinson, 2004; Wilkinson, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Millward, 2000; Morgan, 1997).

Furthermore, focus groups, in combination with workshops, enabled me to address the sensitive topic of HIV&AIDS with people of a different background and culture, according to whom this topic is still stigmatised – as was evident during the various phases of my study in participants' avoidance of the use of the terminology *HIV&AIDS*. By conducting intervention in the way that I had selected, I aimed to provide the educator-participants with multiple lines of communication and a safe environment for them to share their views and perceptions, in the company of people coming from the same background and culture. Although they appeared to be reluctant at first, sound rapport (based on the time spent to establish rapport, as well as the number of sessions with mainly the same group of people) encouraged participation and honest contributions. Besides the well-established relationship of trust between myself (and my co-researchers) and the participants, regular sessions brought about firm relationships amongst participants – possibly indirectly motivating them into action, working together as a team. In addition, regular contact in an atmosphere of trusting relationships provided a safe environment in which some of the participants disclosed the HIV status of family members, despite their initial fear concerning the possible reactions of group members regarding such disclosures and the stigma still attached to HIV&AIDS-related disclosures. During later stages of the process, one of the participants herself even disclosed her positive status in an informal conversation (Wilkinson, 2004; Leach, 2003b; Litoselliti, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Madriz, 2000; Millward, 2000; Morgan, 1997).

I conducted the intervention myself, in collaboration with my co-researchers (often my supervisor). As facilitators (or moderators), we were guided by a brief outline of

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[8] *Refer to verbatim transcripts of focus group discussions included in Appendix B as illustration.*

possible questions (topic guide – refer to Appendix B) during sessions, but remained flexible to be steered by the group discussions, complying with the basic principles of PRA. We attempted to keep discussions alive and flowing, encouraging the participation of participants, and more specifically interaction between participants, eventually aiming at participant empowerment. We constantly encouraged the participation of quiet participants, managing the talkative ones and self-appointed experts in a non-threatening manner. Furthermore, we addressed the challenge of confidentiality by urging group participants to adhere to confidentiality and not discuss or convey any information outside the context of the group. From time to time, participants tended to wander off the topic. Sporadic incidents were, however, valuable when, for example, a participant disclosed a family member's HIV status (Wilkinson, 2004; Litoselliti, 2003; Wilkinson, 2003; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2001; Van Dyk, 2001; Millward, 2000).

In order to optimise the contributions of the participants, I (in conjunction with the participants) formulated a code of conduct for intervention sessions. At the start of the first session, I conveyed the message that participants ought to speak openly as everybody's opinions are important, I emphasised that there are no right or wrong answers and that both positive and negative remarks would be valued, as well as that consensus was not important. I requested the participants to respect others, allowing others to speak without interrupting them. I relied on thorough observation to identify participants who did not contribute spontaneously but gave non-verbal cues that they had something to contribute. In such cases I would look participants in the eye and redirect the same question or point of discussion to them, mentioning their names after initial responses by others. If dominators continued to interrupt I requested them to allow the other person to express an opinion before allowing them another turn. From time to time I would also ask a question and allow everybody to provide their answers on the same question. By moving the tape-recorder around from one to another the usually silent participants also got an opportunity to contribute, as the others respected the individual turns. In addition, better sound recordings could be obtained (Leach, 2003b; Litoselliti, 2003; Wilkinson, 2003; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2001; Mayan, 2001; Van Dyk, 2001).

Litoselliti (2003) suggests that the various focus groups in a series of discussions ought to be facilitated by the same person. I fulfilled the role of primary moderator for the discussions during intervention sessions, being assisted by various co-researchers. I am of the opinion that my constant presence at discussions positively impacted on the group dynamics and relationships maintained within the group, as well as between the participants and the researchers. Although Mayan (2001) propagates that the facilitator and the researcher are not supposed to be the same person, this method worked for my study, as we could support one another, elaborate on each other's ideas and be present to experience the information shared first-hand. As we (the co-researchers and myself) are trained psychologists who are currently employed as lecturers at a tertiary institution/psychologists-in-training, we have been trained in basic facilitation skills and facilitate group discussions on a regular basis. In addition, we possess basic interviewing and interpersonal skills, approach group work in a non-judgemental manner, are able to adapt during group work and have the ability to summarise group dynamics when working with groups (Wilkinson, 2004; Litoselliti, 2003; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2001; Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Intervention sessions commenced with an informal session during which lunch was served. In this manner, I tried to honour and respect an embedded tradition of not rushing participants and showing interest in their life-worlds at large. At the beginning of the sessions I thanked participants for their contributions and distributed informed consent forms. I emphasised confidentiality and anonymity throughout, recapped and summarised the purpose and proceedings of the previous session, and then outlined the session to follow. In addition, I communicated the draft structure to the principal of the school, as well as the deputy principal (one of the participants and contact person between me and the other participants), prior to the sessions. Participants were free to ask questions at any time during any session. I video-taped and/or audio-taped the sessions (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed the recordings after field visits. I ended most intervention sessions with an informal discussion, focusing on the participants' experiences of the process and thereby guiding future planning and discussions. At the end of each session, I provided further information when needed, debriefed participants when necessary, requested them to complete expense claim forms, and outlined and planned the next

session in terms of a suitable date and time, in collaboration with the participants. My co-researchers and I participated in a reflection and debriefing session after each session, providing me with the opportunity to formulate preliminary interpretations and proposed changes where necessary. I often used the information shared during these discussions to plan follow-up sessions and formulate questions for further pursuance (Litoselliti, 2003; Wilkinson, 2003; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2001).

During intervention, I adhered to the basic guidelines for planning and facilitating focus groups and/or workshops in the following way (Leach, 2003b; Litoselliti, 2003; Wilkinson, 2003; Mayan, 2001):

- **Session length:** Sessions lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. I attempted to keep discussions focused and included activities instead of solely relying on discussions. Regular breaks were also planned.

- **Venue:** The sessions with the educator-participants were conducted in the staff room at their school, as this venue appeared to be logistically suitable. Furthermore, the door could be closed and confidentiality maintained – supported by the fact that sessions were conducted in the afternoons, with learners no longer at the school.

- **Language, cost, duration and materials for sessions:** Sessions were conducted in English, as both the participants and I (and my co-researchers) are able to communicate in English (although it is a second language for all of us). However, participants sometimes spoke other languages in private asides during sessions. Although I tried to limit such incidents and requested participants to translate such commentaries, the possibility exists that I might have lost some meanings communicated in this way.

- **Number of participants:** Sessions were conducted with ten educator-participants (average). I attempted to include all participants throughout the proceedings, but not to the detriment of spontaneous contributions.

- **Purposeful/theoretical sample:** I selected educators as participants in group intervention sessions, based on my belief that they are experienced members of the community who possess expertise on the topic that I researched.

- **Careful selection of participants:** I decided to involve ten educator-participants, in order to compile a manageable group. I relied on the school principal for

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identifying participants. Although he did initially involve the two educators who had been trained in HIV&AIDS, and are involved in the Life Skills programme at school, both of them decided not to participate (one before the study commenced and the other after the first phase of the study). Despite the fact that both of them ascribed their decision not to participate to their busy schedules, I wonder whether or not their decisions cannot also be related to the fact that they had already received training in HIV&AIDS-related matters.

- ✗ Composition of the group: The group was homogeneous in terms of the educators working at the same school, as well as being from the same ethnic background. Although the initial group consisted of nine women and one man, the latter withdrew from the study after the first field visit, resulting in homogeneity in terms of gender. Despite the fact that this probably had a positive impact during discussions on gender structures, the question has to be raised whether or not I obtained a balanced view. However, individual differences and contradictory opinions often occurred.

- ✗ Number of groups: I involved only one group of people in the series of intervention sessions and could therefore not verify the data with another group. Based on my selected paradigm this was, however, not what I had aimed at. Furthermore, I regard the educators who were involved as being representative of the rest of the staff at the school.

- ✗ Segmented sample: During workshop activities, the group was divided into two (sometimes three) smaller groups, which enabled me to compare the data provided by each group during feedback sessions. During discussions, the group was involved as a unit and not divided into smaller segments.

- ✗ Over-recruitment: I did not recruit more participants than the ten that I had planned for. Before the first contact session started one more individual requested to participate, which I allowed. During the second field visit, one of the eleven educator-participants did not return and as my study progressed, one more educator-participant withdrew, but arranged for someone else to take her place. Upon enquiry for the reasons for their withdrawal, participants cited that the first participant had to take care of his children in the afternoons (when most sessions were conducted), whilst the other participant became involved in extra-mural activities that took up her time during afternoons.

✂   Incentives: I offered financial incentives to the educator-participants during the initial phases of the project, due to them being professionally trained people who shared their knowledge and experiences after school hours, despite busy schedules and a lot of work to do during afternoons and evenings. Secondly, with the study being a funded study, I had access to a limited amount of money which made it possible for me to include incentives. Besides financial incentives, I provided participants with items like photographs, T-shirts and certificates for their participation.

✂   Planning follow-up sessions: Follow-up sessions were planned in collaboration with the school principal and educator-participants throughout the process.

✂   Continuous reflection on the role as facilitator: I involved co-researchers during the various phases, in order to support me as facilitators and obtain different views of the sessions and discussions that transpired. Despite my efforts not to steer the process of events, I occasionally tended to guide, specifically during initial sessions. However, I focused on not doing this during follow-up sessions.

During intervention, group discussions and PRA-related techniques were employed to generate data. I employed *do it yourself* techniques, by relying on participation-based activities, guided by probing questions. I used *group meetings and discussions* (both casual and planned/structured by nature) to facilitate brainstorming activities and discussions on the community's way of utilising assets and resources, in order to cope with HIV&AIDS. In addition, informal interaction (for example during lunches) often focused on related discussions. *Participatory mapping, diagramming and modelling* formed an essential part of intervention sessions, during which participants were facilitated to create maps and spatial diagrams. In PRA, common forms of maps include social, resource and mobility maps, representing people, resources and outlets where people obtain services. For the purpose of my study, participants compiled maps to illustrate the layout of their community, as well as the nature and extent of the challenges, resources and potential resources in the community. In addition, the utilisation of resources and the extent to which resources are available and accessible to community members were explored through mapping exercises (refer to Appendix C). Furthermore, intervention sessions included *participatory analysis, presentations, planning and monitoring,* especially during

advanced stages of my study. Concerning the use of *time-lines and trend and change analysis* (adapted format), participants reflected on and discussed events of the past towards the end of my study, as well as changes that had taken place in the community, with regard to the community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS (Chambers, 2004; Chambers, 2003; Binns *et al.*, 1997; Chambers & Guijt, 1995; Shah, 1995; Chambers, 1994c; Jijiga, 1994). More detail on the specific activities included during intervention (focus groups and/or workshops) follows in chapter four.

3.3.3.3 Informal conversational interactive interviews

In addition to intervention, I conducted informal conversational interactive interviews (reflected in Appendix E) with key informants/stakeholders in the community, such as health workers, spiritual leaders and other community members, in order to gain insight into the community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS. Some of the interviews included personal stories (PRA technique), during which participants (both individually and in small group context) described families or households from the community who are coping with HIV&AIDS, by dealing with a relative/friend living with HIV&AIDS, or with children orphaned due to the HIV&AIDS-related death of a parent (Chambers, 2004; Chambers, 2003; Binns *et al.*, 1997; Chambers & Guijt, 1995; Shah, 1995; Chambers, 1994c; Jijiga, 1994). Interviews were audio-taped, and this was supported by observation and my field journal, as additional accounts of what transpired. I selected **qualitative interviewing** to explore the participants' experiences and perceptions of their community's efforts of coping with HIV&AIDS by relying on existing assets and resources available to them, based on my view that qualitative interviewing is an interactive process of meaning making. Being a two-way communication process whereby I, as the interviewer, attempted to make meaning of what was said by the interviewee (participant), as well as how it was said, factual information and meanings could be provided in the form of rich descriptions, experiences and personal points of view. Conducting individual interviews in this manner enabled me to gain insight into the community's challenges, practices and responses to the HIV&AIDS pandemic (Baker, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Miller & Glassner, 2004; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Kvale, 1996; Mascarenhas, 1990).

My decision to rely on *informal conversational* (also referred to as unstructured) *interactive interviews* enabled me to accommodate individual differences, to be flexible and to adapt when needed, whilst participants could be spontaneous and respond according to their own familiar frames of reference. In accordance with this unstructured, open-ended approach, I was led by the interviewees and discussions that arose, in addition to my research questions and overall purpose guiding me and serving as broad interview schedule. In this manner, interviews were characterised by a thematic as well as a dynamic dimension, where the latter kept the conversation going and ensured positive interaction, within the basic outline of my specific purpose and structure (Wengraf, 2002; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Kvale, 1996).

Although I usually started interviews by requesting the participants to share their views or tell their stories, I focused on addressing the question as to how the particular participant, close family members, or other community members are coping with HIV&AIDS during interviews. In this fashion, I followed a general plan or broad interview schedule (refer to Appendix E) but was not guided by a specific set of questions or particular words or phrases. I based follow-up questions on the replies by interviewees, as well as previously conducted interviews, allowing me to elaborate on perceptions shared by the participants and themes that emerged (Baker, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Miller & Glassner, 2004; Patton, 2002; Wengraf, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; May, 2001; Breakwell, 2000; Kvale, 1996).

I focused on asking open-ended, singular questions put in a clear and understandable manner. I aimed to respond in a neutral way, depending on good rapport between the participants and myself. I avoided leading and biased questions, in order to gain insight into the perceptions of the participants without predetermining their points of view in terms of pre-set categories or contaminating their responses. As such, and due to me treating responses as accounts rather than reports, my questions merely guided the participants as to the aspects or categories for discussion. I regard this type of non-restrictive interview as being suitable to explore the sensitive topic of HIV&AIDS, as it allowed the interviewees freedom to respond in a way with which they felt comfortable. Although my conceptual framework served as theoretical background in planning the interviews, I did not include any theory-based questions in the interviews, as the purpose was not to determine the

participants' knowledge about existing theory. Instead, I used informant-questions to explore the personal perceptions of participants and focused discussions on their perceived strengths, possibilities and challenges as experienced in their community, thus their current coping. In turn, the content of the interviews assisted me in my formulation and elaboration of existing theory (included in chapters five and six) (refer to Baker, 2004; Henning *et al.*, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Patton, 2002; Wengraf, 2002; May, 2001; Mayan, 2001; Mertens, 1998).

In conducting informal conversational interactive interviews, I employed active listening as a way of encouraging extensive discussions, in order to gain in-depth replies. I fulfilled the role of being sensitive, listening and interpreting – not only to what was said, but also to what was communicated on a non-verbal level, thereby relying on thorough observation. Where appropriate, I remained silent to allow interviewees sufficient time to formulate answers, or for whatever other reason they required time. Although I refrained from giving advice or interpreting the participants' perceptions, I occasionally employed summarising and paraphrasing in order to make sure that I had heard them correctly. I used process feedback to maintain the interviewing process and ongoing rapport, by thanking the participants and indicating from time to time that I was obtaining helpful information from them. A few interviews necessitated mirrored empathy with interviewees who displayed strong emotions. I found this to be a challenge, as I constantly reminded myself that I was undertaking the interviews as researcher and not as psychologist. However, such instances tended to steer me into the direction of psychological interviewing, resulting in me tending to take up the role of empathetic listener and facilitator of solutions, as opposed to that of researcher focusing on the exploration of perceptions (Baker, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Miller & Glassner, 2004; Patton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Wengraf, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Mascarenhas, 1990).

3.3.3.4 Observation

Adler and Adler (1994:389) describe observation as the '*fundamental base of all research methods*'. In support of this statement, Baker (2004:163-164) views researchers using interviews as '*competent observer-analysts of the interaction they are involved in*'. Observation formed an essential part of the research that I

conducted – both on an individual level and in group context during intervention. During interviews, observation served as validation measure, enabling me to validate what I had heard in terms of, firstly, the participants validating the observations, but also in terms of my own judgement and personal stance. However, as I observed across cultures, I had to guard against observation bias and aimed not to overly or incorrectly interpret non-verbal communication such as body language. In addition, I had to be sensitive concerning factors that might have influenced informal conversational interactive interviews, for instance the context or setting in which the interviews were conducted, as well as the interaction and relationship between the interviewees and myself. As I was aware of these potential challenges during the course of my study, I could rely on reflexivity in an attempt to monitor myself and address the challenges (Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1994).

I employed *observation-as-context-of-interaction*, by developing a *membership* role in the selected community, in order to observe interactions and participations in dialogue with the participants (whom I regard as research partners) (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). I relied on both casual and formal observation. During intervention sessions (focus groups/workshops) and informal conversational interactive interviews, I used *formal observation* (supported by audio-visual recordings and documentation in the form of a field journal) to gain insight into the dynamics of the group, messages conveyed by means of non-verbal communication (keeping in mind the cultural difference between the participants and myself) and topics of discussion during informal occasions of interaction (like during lunches). In addition, I relied on *casual, unobtrusive observation* to gain insight into the context and setting of the research field, with regard to aspects such as the environment, community, families and caregivers in the community, school, living conditions and interactions between community members (Chambers, 2004; Reddy, 2003; Patton, 2002; Shah, 1995; Jijiga, 1994).

I documented my observations in the form of a field journal and photographs, wherever possible. I observed external physical aspects, such as resources, consumables and services (for example churches, medical services and support services) in the community, residential facilities, clothing and living conditions of

community members, as well as the availability of basic living requirements (such as running water and electricity). Secondly, I observed the physical location and environment of the community, as well as community members' personal living space. Thirdly, in casually observing participants, I paid attention to expressive movement, in the form of posture, body language, facial expressions and eye movements. I also paid attention to language behaviour (such as topics of discussion, stuttering or so-called *slip of the tongue* incidents), although this aspect proved to be difficult, based on the language differences between the participants and myself. During later stages of the study I relied on observation-as-context-of-interaction to establish what had been accomplished (in terms of the vegetable garden that was initiated, for example, including observing the community members involved in the garden project). In this way, I observed as an outsider, but aimed to gain insight into the insider's view by interacting with participants and community members and spending time in the field in which they performed their daily tasks. Lastly, I observed time duration in terms of the length of time that participants and other community members spent in what they were doing. By attending to these aspects, I was not only able to observe aspects such as knowledge base, skills, resources and support systems in the community, but could also pay attention to any non-verbal signals during verbal conversations with participants and other community members. Furthermore, I was able to observe people's feelings, in cases where they expressed their emotions non-verbally. Apart from observing others, I observed myself throughout the process – my background and approach to the field, as well as my interaction with the participants and co-researchers, by means of self-reflection (examples included in Appendix F) (Chambers, 2004; Reddy, 2003; Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fox, 1998).

By conducting selected informal conversational interactive interviews at the homes of the participants, I could gain insight into the actual environments in which participants fulfil their daily tasks and capture lived visual data. I was able to observe the participants in their own time and space – interacting with other family and community members and allowing me insight into their life-worlds. Emmison (2004) calls this process *direct observation of the social contexts of participants*.

3.3.3.5 Visual data collection techniques

PRA often relies on visual and concrete material, based on the belief that visualisation promotes participation. By using mapping, diagramming and ranking exercises (refer to Appendix C), I could encourage participation that did not depend on the literacy levels of the participants, but on the representation of ideas by means of symbols, drawings or concrete objects. These exercises were amplified by discussions, in an attempt to gain insight into the meanings represented by the participants (Archer & Cottingham, 1996; Shah, 1995).

In addition to visual PRA techniques, I used photographs and video-tape material to supplement data generated during intervention, informal conversational interactive interviews and documentation of observations-as-context-of-interaction (Appendices C and D). Apart from documenting interactive data generating sessions, I used visual material to document the context of the research field, in terms of assets, resources, services, challenges and structures in the community. Although I did not use transect walks in its original form, I employed an adapted form thereof, by accompanying stakeholders and key informants through the community environment – observing, listening, asking questions and identifying challenges, as well as possible solutions thereof. Visual data were created in the immediate community as well as on the school premises, photographing the setting, facilities, resources and strengths (such as informative posters in the staff room). Furthermore, I employed *photo elicitation*, by requesting educator-participants to take photographs and discuss the contents thereof with me and the other participants. Involving participants in generating visual data gave them the opportunity to provide me with insight into their life-worlds and immediate community (Chambers, 2004; Emmison, 2004; Chambers, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Binns *et al.*, 1997; Chambers & Guijt, 1995; Shah, 1995; Chambers, 1994c; Jijiga, 1994).

3.3.3.6 Field journal

I made use of a field journal (refer to Appendix F) to include field notes and reflective thoughts. I used *descriptive field notes* to keep record of the research process, enabling me to re-visit the process when needed. Notes were made on the dates,

schedules, locations and length of intervention sessions and informal conversational interactive interviews. *Descriptive field notes* further enabled me to document my observations during field work, to keep record of the participants and of any resistance to participation. In addition, I used *reflective field notes* to document my own personal reflections, emotions, experiences, successes and areas for improvement throughout the study. I included my own preliminary interpretations, findings, insights, ideas and changes in schedule whenever it occurred. By making field notes and including reflective thoughts, I employed *reflexivity* – one of the key principles of PRA (Patton, 2002; Mayan, 2001; Percy, 1999).

Despite my intentions to write extensive field notes, I occasionally became so involved and *lost in the moment* that I forgot to make notes whilst being engaged in the field with participants. In addition to this and based on personal preference, I am not comfortable with compiling extensive written notes while engaging with people. This might be ascribed to my preferences as psychologist, according to which I regard note-making as a potential barrier between the client and psychologist. In an attempt to address my tendency not to make sufficient field notes often enough, I wrote down my observations and incidents that I could recall as soon as possible after each session. Although it is possible that I might have lost some detail information by doing this, sessions were audio-taped and most of the intervention sessions video-taped, enabling me to revisit the process at later stages and elaborate on my field notes (Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fox, 1998).

In compiling field notes and reflective thoughts, I adhered to Mayan's (2001) guidelines with regard to reflexivity. I throughout allowed myself sufficient time to do reflections and recorded my notes in privacy as soon as possible after each session. Although the discussion of observations before recording them is discouraged, the fact that I (we) conducted field work in a community several kilometres away from where we resided, resulted in us travelling a distance before having the opportunity to reflect independently. We spontaneously engaged in debriefing sessions once alone whilst on our way back after sessions (especially after long and emotionally laden sessions), inevitably discussing the day's activities as well as our experiences.

I did, however, pay attention to recording my initial thoughts and avoided changing my reflections on the basis of discussions with my co-researchers.

3.3.4   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I employed *inductive thematic analysis* (also referred to as *content analysis* or *pattern analysis*), often associated with a case study design (Creswell, 1998). I focused on making sense of the raw data, by working with large amounts of detailed qualitative information, in order to identify core meanings in terms of themes, patterns, categories and interrelationships, working inductively and moving from detailed themes to more general ideas and a holistic perspective on the phenomenon that was being researched, namely coping with HIV&AIDS by relying on existing assets and local resources. In this manner I was able to summarise and systematise the data, by placing specific sections of the data within the wider context of other gathered data (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Wilkinson, 2003; Patton, 2002; Mayan, 2001; Mouton, 2001; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Creswell, 1998).

My data analysis commenced with the first step of data collection, which inevitably led to ideas for directions of analysis, patterns and themes taking shape, and hypotheses and new ideas and questions emerging and in turn impacting on the field work that followed, in turn leading to further analysis and interpretation in terms of sorting, questioning, thinking, constructing and testing preliminary ideas, followed by a repetition of the first step of the process. Initial stages of data collection provided me with new insights and guidance on where to go, whilst later stages served to deepen my insights and confirm or contest patterns that seemed to have emerged (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Mayan, 2001; Morse, 1999).

As I was involved during the entire research process, both as primary data collector and data analyst, I could start with data analysis whilst still collecting the data. In addition, being involved throughout the various phases resulted in me gaining insight into the context and interactions that took place, providing me with a basis to interpret raw data. My study involved repeated visits in order to generate and collect data, with periods of data analysis and further planning in between. Applying PRA principles necessitated such an approach, as I had to be guided by the participants.

However, I continually had to guard against hasty conclusions, as the process of final data analysis commenced only after I had completed my data collection activities, based on my preliminary understanding of the raw data, as formulated during data collection (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Litoselliti, 2003; Patton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

In applying the basic guidelines for inductive thematic analysis and interpretation, I analysed and interpreted the raw data obtained from intervention sessions (focus groups and workshops), individual interviews, observations, my field journal and visual data, in relation to my conceptual framework. I firstly *reviewed the data* by perusing the raw data collected, thereby *working with the text* (namely transcripts, my field journal and visual data) in order to become familiar with the text, to obtain a general idea of what might be found and to develop a manageable classification system or categories for coding, which I discussed with my supervisor. As I was fully acquainted with the raw data, I found the generation of open coding codes fairly easy. During my initial reading I started making brief notes in the margins, serving as *initial sorting process*. I organised raw data and possible topics, identified related themes, patterns, similarities and differences, which later needed to be named and listed. I also employed member checking (also known as *mirroring*) by presenting the participants with my preliminary findings in terms of emerging themes and sub-themes (and as far as possible applying the terminology used by the participants), in order to provide them with the opportunity to confirm themes, correct me, elaborate or clarify where necessary, encouraging further discussions on the already created data base (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Patton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Webber & Ison, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After the *initial phase of identifying possible themes*, I conducted *independent data analysis*, before having it checked by my supervisor. I read through the data for a second time, in order to systematically start with the *formal coding process*. I followed a bottom-up approach in order to reach conclusions from specific consistent incidents, by identifying organising principles underlying the data and re-arranging possible themes and categories. I re-read sections of the raw data, up to the point where I was satisfied that the raw data were indexed, sorted and coded and thereafter grouped into suitable categories under appropriate code headings. This

step of *category formation* required of me to develop a classification system in terms of families of themes that consist of sub-themes, this process resulting in an interpretation based on my views and on information that I had acquired from relevant literature. I occasionally gained new insight, upon which I had to regroup codes. I continually aimed to identify relationships between the categories in order to *identify emerging thematic patterns and develop analytical frameworks*, thereby transforming my initial notes into phrases that could capture the essence of what had been established. Where necessary, I had to revisit identified categories, codes or even raw data. After identifying the emerging themes, I listed them in order to elaborate by *identifying any connections*. I focused on the refined nuances of meaning, attempting to make sense of the connections between themes and provide an interpretation of the lessons learned (reaching so-called *assertions*, as defined by Creswell, 1998). As a result, I was able to summarise and present the identified themes, consisting of relevant sub-themes. During this entire process of data analysis, I *constantly reflected* on my personal involvement and influence on the results, looking for and explaining any contradictions. I also referred back to the raw text regularly, in order to ensure that the structure and identified themes and sub-themes do indeed reflect the words and meanings of the participants (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I analysed *visual data* in an *open investigative manner*. I followed the guidelines with regard to repeatedly spending time with the images, discussing the images (such as asset maps and photographs of the community) with the participants (and co-researchers), simultaneously making use of other sources of information and the themes presented by them, as well as discussing my preliminary interpretations with my supervisor and other colleagues and fellow students (Kelly, 2002b).

In line with the underlying principles of PRA, the participants in my study were involved not only in data collection activities but also during data analysis. Firstly, participants were involved in checking my preliminary results in terms of identified themes and sub-themes (as described above), during focus group discussions. Secondly, they were involved in *participatory analysis* during participatory mapping activities, where they continually elaborated on and analysed the maps that they had

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constructed. Participants revisited their original maps of the community during several sessions throughout the study, analysing and elaborating on each occasion. Throughout this process, participants provided feedback on preliminary themes and contributed to data analysis and interpretation by means of discussions, focus groups, workshops, group-based activities and presentation of ideas, as well as visual representations of progress made in the community (Chambers, 2004).

My decision to conduct independent data analysis (refer to the various Appendices) and interpretation, instead of relying on the software programme Atlas.Ti, was mainly based on my training as a psychologist and my feeling equipped and comfortable with analysing and interpreting data manually. Secondly, the fact that I completed the process of data analysis on a continuous basis throughout the study – even at times when I was in the field – influenced my decision. Thirdly, my experience, when I employed Atlas.Ti in analysing the raw data obtained during my first field visit, resulted in my preference for conducting data analysis manually. My preference was based on the fact that I had obtained similar themes analysing the data manually to those that I had obtained with the aid of Atlas.Ti (done by an external coder), as well as on my personal preference, experience and confidence with regard to manual analysis. Although I am aware of the potential advantages of implementing a software programme (such as Atlas.Ti) when elaborating on the results by illuminating links, similarities and contradictions, I regard my results as rich by nature and reflecting the voices and perceptions of the participants (refer to Creswell, 1998).

3.4   STRENGTHS OF MY METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

Selecting a *case study design* applying *PRA principles* implies certain advantages. Firstly, focusing on only one community (the case) enabled me to establish sound rapport with the participants, resulting in the possibility of gaining in-depth insight into their personal experiences and opinions (Merriam, 1998). Deciding to apply PRA principles further supported this advantage of a case study design, as one of the advantages of PRA lies in the rich contextual data provided by the approach, reporting on participants' own perspectives and points of view, with regard to existing challenges and opportunities. As an approach that focuses on the generation of

information and on the identification of challenges in order to address them, I could guide and facilitate participants to plan ways of addressing challenges and to put their plans into action, by planning and initiating three school-based projects (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998; Versfeld, 1995).

Another advantage of applying PRA principles lies in the fact that the participatory activities that I selected required limited and inexpensive resources. The selected activities can further be regarded as relatively cost-effective in terms of time, as extensive information could be constructed and obtained within a relatively short period of time. Due to their nature, the selected activities were not experienced as intrusive and can therefore be regarded as suitable for people with different degrees of experience, not intimidating those with limited self-confidence. Furthermore, the activities centred around concrete and interesting actions which were fun to perform, encouraging the enthusiasm and participation of the educator-participants. It focused on the life-worlds of the participants and therefore addressed their interests. The fact that the educator-participants enjoyed the activities, further improved the relationship between the participants and myself and served as preparation for discussions of a sensitive topic. Frequent monitoring, contact with participants and follow-up sessions prevented them from losing enthusiasm after a PRA session, and encouraged them to move into action when back in the *real world* (Leach, 2003b; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2001; Thompson *et al.*, 1994)*.*

My decision to use ***intervention*** (combining ***focus groups*** and ***workshops***) with the educator-participants enabled me to obtain extensive information from ten people (on average) during a relatively short time of one or two hours during each contact session. Facilitating group activities and discussions resulted in group members checking and balancing one another, thereby enabling me to fairly easily determine the extent to which their perceptions were consistent and shared amongst each other. Furthermore, the educator-participants seemed motivated and enthusiastic about the form of intervention activities and discussions, namely focus groups and/or workshops. They seemed to enjoy this format, possibly due to the social nature of the human being. Finally, by fulfilling the role of facilitator during intervention sessions, I was able to focus discussions and activities on the topic under investigation (Wilkinson, 2003; Patton, 2002).

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3.5   CHALLENGES IMPLIED BY MY METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

Based on the methodological choices that I had made, I faced certain challenges. However, I was aware of potential challenges; reflecting on them in my field journal and attempting to address them, I could use such challenges to my advantage. I forthwith discuss the challenges implied by my methodological choices, as well as my attempts to address them. A discussion of general limitations of my study (not specifically applying to methodological choices) is presented in chapter six.

By choosing a *case study design,* I faced the challenges of identifying a suitable case and deciding whether to include a single case or multiple cases. I identified a suitable community based on the pilot study that I conducted in 2001, being a community facing the challenge of coping with HIV&AIDS in a region in South Africa that is characterised by high incidents of HIV&AIDS, as well as by the need for intervention. With regard to the second challenge, I did initially consider two cases, with the aim of comparing the research findings and conclusions, but eventually decided to focus on only one community (case). Amongst other considerations, I based my decision on the possibility of reducing the level of deepness of findings when reporting on two cases instead of one. Furthermore, due to the intensity of PRA-related research activities and involvement in the field in the form of intervention, an in-depth investigation of only one case probably provided a deeper reflection of an informal settlement community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS, resulting in layered texts to interpret in terms of existing literature. Although more cases usually imply a greater chance of addressing the challenge of limited generalisability potential, this was never my purpose, based on the interpretivist paradigm that I had selected (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

I did not find the challenge of including enough information, in order to provide an in-depth view of the selected case, difficult to address. On the contrary, I had to remind myself that data had been saturated towards the end of the study, preventing me from planning additional return-visits. Although I relied on guidance from the participants, as well as saturation of the data, concerning when to terminate my visits, I undertook a few more field visits after I experienced saturation of the data,

possibly due to my attachment to the community[9]. By regularly returning to the community, my process of data collection might be regarded as time-consuming. I did not perceive this as a challenge though, as I ultimately aimed to gain in-depth understanding of the specific community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS, framed by the asset-based approach (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

With regard to data analysis, I indeed faced the challenge of lengthy and time-consuming analysis activities, due to the amount of data that I had collected. With regard to potential limitations in terms of time, events and processes, I was guided by the school principal and educator-participants. As I am flexible by nature, and due to my study not being set in specific timeframes, I did not experience this as a challenge.   I was, however, frustrated at times when tentative dates and appointments were cancelled at the last minute, usually due to school-related responsibilities and activities. In an attempt to deal with such frustration, I relied on reflection, as well as debriefing sessions with my co-researchers (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

In **applying PRA principles** I faced several challenges. Firstly, I faced the challenge of earning the trust of the participants, in order for them to not regard us as outsider experts, but to be comfortable in taking ownership of the process and allowing '*us*' insight into '*their*' perceptions and experiences. I aimed to establish firm relationships of trust and to get the various participants involved in discussions on the sensitive and stigmatised topic of HIV&AIDS. I addressed this by spending extensive time on introductory sessions, relying on social interaction over lunch times, wearing appropriate clothes and communicating with participants in accordance with the level of communication that they determined. Although I continually strived to maintain a balance between being an outsider and acting as researcher aiming to gain an insider perspective, I could never assume that I understood everything about the community or the participants' perceptions. In addition, I constantly had to address the challenge of *othering*, by being aware of, acknowledging and respecting the differences between the participants and myself, and continuously striving to decrease any power differences (Reddy, 2003; Christians, 2000; Versfeld, 1995).

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[9] *In addition, I wanted to maintain a good relationship with the participants, as I am considering a follow-up study on sustainability after completion of this study and thesis.*

Applying PRA principles secondly implied the potential challenge of ignoring certain social relationships within the selected community, by implication excluding certain voices which were not heard. As the PRA activities that I selected involved only selected educators (who in fact are also outsiders to the community) at one particular primary school in the selected community, this potential limitation is a reality within the context of my study. I am aware of the fact that no community can be regarded as a homogeneous entity and that consensus cannot be reached by involving selected community members in participatory work. In an attempt to address this potential limitation, I encouraged diverse contributions during group activities. In addition, I conducted informal conversational interactive interviews with a variety of stakeholders and community members, attempting to obtain a balanced view of community members' perceptions (Leach, 2003b; Cornwall *et al.*, 2001).

In the third place, PRA poses the challenge of sufficiently assessing the quality of the outcome of the process, facilitating sustainable change and determining whether or not success will generate future success (Versfeld, 1995; Webber & Ison, 1995). In my study, community empowerment implies a degree of capability, which cannot be measured with pre-determined criteria or conventional modes of assessment. The success of the study rests on the participants feeling more empowered to cope with the HIV&AIDS pandemic than before the study commenced, and on their enthusiasm to sustain their ideas and initiatives, which could merely be determined by means of observation, analysis of the raw data and discussions with participants towards the end of the study. An analysis of the data indicates progress from a '*We're glad you are here to help and train us'* attitude at the onset of the study, to one of '*We are going to make a plan and put systems in place to cope with this challenge',* after completion of the project, implying that the intervention had been successful and that participants did in fact feel more competent to cope with the challenge at the end of my study. However, in order to reach a level of empowerment, I had to undertake several field visits over an extended period of time. With regard to verification of the results, I relied on member checking by insiders. Although my findings can only be applied to the selected community and cannot be generalised to other communities, I did not aim at obtaining generalisable findings, based on my interpretivist stance. Rather, findings of this study might be transferable in that trends might be

understood in similar contexts or settings, based on the substantial information I provide concerning my research setting (Seale, 2000; Jijiga, 1994; Mukherjee, 1993).

On a practical level I faced the following challenges in planning and applying PRA principles (Leach, 2003a; Cornwall *et al.*, 2001; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2001; Leurs, 1996; Thompson *et al.*, 1994; Mukherjee, 1993):

- As the implementation of PRA requires training, I had to gain sufficient knowledge on the approach prior to me implementing the principles. I experienced difficulty in easily accessing PRA sources and had to apply various methods to obtain literature. In addition, I consulted with international experts in the field of PRA, in an attempt to become knowledgeable.

- As the process and pace of PRA are determined by the participants, I could not plan the sessions in detail but had to approach them merely with a basic outline and proposed structure in mind. I could not follow any standard practices, as each PRA experience is unique. Consequently, I had to think on my feet and approach sessions with a sense of discovery, innovation and a willingness to adapt my ideas. Although I am flexible by nature, I at times experienced frustration when the process progressed slower than planned, and constantly had to remind myself that PRA takes time and that I must not rush or try to do too much in too little time. The fact that the process required lengthy involvement in the field might actually have been an advantage in my study, as it allowed sufficient time for participants to become committed and take ownership, by implication improving the possibility of sustainability.

- I had to address the challenge of *changing attitudes and behaviour*, allowing the educator-participants to determine the process and sensitising them to the idea that they themselves could come up with solutions, as opposed to receiving answers from outside *experts*, thereby addressing power differences. Initially the educator-participants appeared to be sceptical about the process of them doing the work instead of receiving training from outside experts. Although I did not find it difficult to adapt to these changed roles by relying on reflexivity, self monitoring and self improvement, I did at times experience some anxiety and frustration when participants altered logistics of meetings.

✗ I had to address cultural barriers, as my experiences, values and language differed from those of the participants. I continuously had to guard against bias, respected and rejoiced in the differences between the participants and myself, and on occasion had to rely on an interpreter to overcome language barriers. I specifically became aware of the reality of this potential challenge during a later stage of the study, when a Sepedi post-graduate student acted as co-researcher and could elaborate on a discussion in mother tongue during an intervention session. Based on the sound relationships between the participants and myself, I do, however, believe that I obtained an understanding of their views.

✗ The educator-participants faced the challenge of sustaining their enthusiasm and moving into action with their plans, after my return from field visits. In an attempt to encourage them to do so, we constantly kept in touch. The process suggested that participants took ownership of the three identified projects, which possibly motivated them to sustain their efforts.

Successfully managing and facilitating the group during *intervention sessions* (*focus groups* and/or *workshops*) was challenging at times, mainly due to the presence of a few dominant speakers. I constantly aimed to keep discussions balanced and to involve quiet participants, as well as those who seemed uncertain about their viewpoints and did not participate spontaneously. In addition, I had to monitor the time spent on discussions and sessions. Upon reflection I am however satisfied that the sessions came to a logical closure with no need to have continued after they had been terminated. Despite the challenge I faced in handling dominant speakers, their presence also implied certain advantages for my study, such as their valuable contributions, the fact that they (especially one) can be regarded as leaders in the community, and that they acted as key informants – allowing me access to other community members. In this way, I did not have to identify and select key informants – they appointed themselves and once again determined the process, as proposed by PRA (Chambers, 2004; Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004; Litoselliti, 2003; Patton, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Fox, 1998).

During facilitation of *focus groups* and *workshop activities*, I faced the challenge of limiting the potential impact of bias and manipulation. I attempted to approach

intervention sessions with an open mind and to convey this message to the educator-participants. I told participants that I would value an authentic reflection of their experiences, encouraging them to differ from others and to provide frank contributions instead of reaching (enforced) consensus or merely saying what they thought I would like to hear. Although I could not guarantee that the participants did indeed convey their own beliefs, the fact that the participants knew each other and are colleagues on a same level (except the deputy principal), as well as their strong and dynamic personalities, probably contributed to them making confident contributions, whether they differed from their colleagues or not. During the sessions and the process of data analysis and interpretation, I did, however, face the challenge of distinguishing between individuals' perspectives and the perspective of the group. In the case of differing opinions, the educator-participants occasionally tended to become overly involved in interaction, making it difficult to steer the discussions. In addition, participants sometimes turned to their mother tongue (Sterk & Elifson, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004; Litoselliti, 2003; Patton, 2002; Fox, 1998).

Dealing with a sensitive topic *in a group* context posed yet another challenge, as some participants initially experienced difficulty to share sensitive information. However, repeated sessions with the same group of people, as well as firm relationships, the safe environment of trust and the flexible nature of discussions (within the necessary perspective) allowed participants to overcome their hesitancy. As a result, educator-participants started sharing sensitive information early on in the process and became even more comfortable in doing so during later stages, allowing for more individual perspectives and an even deeper understanding. Ensuring the confidentiality of discussions amongst educator-participants was another challenge I had to address, the outcome of which I cannot comment upon. In an attempt to ensure confidentiality I stressed the importance thereof and, prior to the first session, requested the educator-participants to deal with information confidentially (Wilkinson, 2004; Litoselliti, 2003; Patton, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Fox, 1998).

Although Berg (1998) is of the opinion that *focus group interviews*, as opposed to face-to-face interviews, are limited in the sense that a group format implies limited possibility to produce in-depth data, my decision to combine focus groups and workshops, as well as the activities that I selected during intervention sessions,

allowed for detailed discussions. In addition, based on the underlying principles of PRA, participants were allowed to determine the process, allowing for enough time to explore whichever topic was under discussion. Berg (1998) further regards the fact that focus group interviews mainly rely on verbal data, as a potential challenge, and states that field notes might represent only a small portion of the verbal data collected. Once again, I addressed this potential limitation by combining focus groups with workshops, and by using PRA activities to collect data, which are often concrete and visual by nature, and usually initiate lively and extensive discussions.

With regard to my decision to use **informal conversational interactive interviews**, Patton (2002) identifies two potential challenges, namely that this type of interview greatly depends on the conversational skills of the interviewer, and secondly that it requires a '*go-with-the-flow'* approach. As a trained psychologist I do regard myself (and my co-researchers) as skilled interviewers, being able to interact with a variety of people in a variety of settings, arriving at insights easily and being able to formulate and put questions quickly . Furthermore, I am able to avoid any questions that might lead to interpretations by the interviewees or introduce any assumptions before posing the question (Patton, 2002, Breakwell, 2000). However, I did face the challenge of constantly reminding myself that I was not approaching interviews as a psychologist, but as a researcher. Therefore, despite the fact that I found this type of interview easy to conduct, I had to restrain myself from relying on psychological interpretations and interviewing skills. Furthermore, I had to revise the terminology that I employed to ensure that I was understood correctly by interviewees.

I further faced the challenge of conducting cross-cultural **interviewing**. According to Patton (2002:391), '*Cross-cultural inquiries add layers of complexity to the already-complex interactions of an interview*', as miscommunications and misinterpretations might occur, due to language differences as well as differing norms and values. In my study, discussing a sensitive topic that is often still regarded as taboo to talk about in certain cultures, posed a definite challenge. I strived towards being a *culturally competent researcher,* by being aware of this challenge and guarding against any misinterpretations. Besides being constantly aware of the cultural differences between the participants and myself, as well as how such differences could affect the research process, I strived to understand the dynamics of difference

(as both the participants and I brought our own unique history to the research interactions). During data collection I relied on firmly established relationships, a flexible approach, as well as sound interviewing skills to address this potential challenge. In addition, I employed an interpreter when necessary or mobilised other sources of information for the sake of clarification, such as the interviewees themselves or the educator-participants. As I cannot be certain that I addressed this challenge sufficiently, the possibility of misinterpretations remains. Adding to this, qualitative interviewing and the interpretation of qualitative interview data inevitably lead to *personal* interpretations, thereby implying *personal* impressions, regardless of efforts to obtain objective views (Blumenthal & Yancey, 2004; Kvale, 1996).

Miller and Glassner (2004), May (2001) and Breakwell (2000) emphasise that the responses of interviewees are based on the person of the interviewer, as well as on the social category of the interviewer (so-called *researcher/interviewer effects*). Therefore, being a white, graduated, middle-aged woman and conducting the interviews with community members of an informal settlement (of various levels of literacy), posed distinct challenges. As mentioned, I spent extended time on establishing sound rapport and communicated openness, interest, respect and understanding of the participants' situations and backgrounds in a non-judgemental manner. I also tried to dress in a way similar to that of the participants, thereby narrowing the gap between us with regard to the differences in our backgrounds. However, the possibility of participants responding to my age, gender and status cannot be disregarded, and this might have influenced the progress and outcomes of the interviews (Oliver, 2003; Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000).

I experienced ***data analysis and interpretation*** as challenging. Due to the open-ended nature of the intervention sessions (combining focus groups with workshop activities) as well as the informal conversational interactive interviews, I had to inductively work with extensive raw data without starting with a theory of themes, but rather identifying themes that emerged. With regard to the potential challenge of not being able to generalise the findings of my study, the same comments apply as formulated for the selected case study design, applying PRA principles (Litoselliti, 2003; Patton, 2002; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Breakwell, 2000; Kvale, 1996).

3.6   MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

During my study, I fulfilled the dual role of researcher and interventionist. I aimed to integrate these roles in terms of the methodological choices that I had made. Although I am also a scholar and practitioner in the field of Educational Psychology, I did not enter the research field as such. However, this does form part of my identity and approach to life and to people. In negotiating my roles as interventionist and educational psychologist within my role as researcher, I relied on continuous reflexivity by means of my field journal, as well as discussions with my supervisor.

As I entered the research field as a person coming from a different background than that of the participants, I had to constantly reflect on the potential influence of my status on the knowledge and meaning that took shape. As a result, I paid intensive attention to interactions with participants, in order to gain insight into their views. However, I had to maintain a balance between becoming too involved (with the implied danger of subjectivity and influencing judgment) and being too distant (which might have harmed relationships and inhibited understanding) – utilising so-called *empathetic neutrality.* The representation of what transpired and was found implies yet another challenge, as I am the one determining what is represented in this thesis and how (Patton, 2002; Mertens, 1998).

I support the opinion of Kelly (2002b), who proposes that interpretivist studies imply both an insider and outsider perspective. I followed an insider (emic) approach whilst collecting data and spending time in the field, trying to understand and express the perceptions, views and values of insiders (the participants) within their unique contexts. However, my study did not end with the mere understanding of the participants of their reality, but proceeded to an interpretation, thereby employing an outsider (etic) approach in order to express the interpreted perceptions, views, categories and concepts of outsiders (me and my co-researchers). As such, I did not simply aim to *understand*, but to also actively *interpret* the voices of the participants – trying to be truthful to the voices of the participants (insiders) but also attempting to address my research questions (outsider). On an even wider level, my participation

in the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation, as well as my writing up of the findings, are in turn interpreted by others (Chambers, 2003; Kelly, 2002b).

As the perceptions and contributions of the participants remained my main focus, I aimed to attend to their voices throughout, supporting their voices with my own field journal and observations, and deriving meaning from an understanding of the phenomenon in question in their own terms (emic approach). I attempted to put myself in the shoes of the participants, in order to understand their practices and perspectives (Henning *et al*., 2004; Kelly, 2002b; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I do realise though that the interpretations carried my *personal* voice, based on my own experiences and unique background. I am fully aware of the fact that the differences in language, culture, worldviews and beliefs between the participants and myself posed a distinct challenge. Furthermore, as I could only rely on the data that were reported during field visits, I do not truly have an insider view of the day to day living of the particular community. As such, I can only present my attempt to represent multiple perspectives – one of a possible many.

My role as researcher can be summarised in terms of certain specific functions that I fulfilled (refer to Henning *et al*., 2004; Mertens, 1998). After *exploring possible research sites*, I *obtained the necessary permission* and *negotiated entry* into the community (*via* the school that I selected). Throughout the study, I networked with the principal and deputy principal (contact between the educator-participants and myself), to keep them informed of the visits, that were confirmed in writing to the principal prior to each visit. I aimed to *enter the research field* in the least disruptive manner possible, conducting meetings after school hours, when most of the learners and other educators had left. During the first meeting I focused on establishing firm rapport, in order to gain educator-participants' trust and enthusiasm to participate.

Furthermore, I fulfilled the role of *acting as research instrument*, being the primary instrument for data collection, analysis and interpretation. I had to continually reflect on who I am, as well as what the assumptions, values and biases were with which I entered the research field. I relied on a field journal and regular debriefing/reflection sessions with my supervisor and co-researchers, in order to identify changes that needed to be made. I had to cross certain boundaries, like class, race, culture and

often age. From time to time, I had to rely on an interpreter to overcome language barriers. With regard to the role of *speaking for the other*, I tried not to speak on behalf of the participants, but merely report their perceptions. Finally, I had the responsibility to *focus on my area of inquiry*, a role that I experienced as challenging. Although I was flexible and open to changes (adhering to PRA principles), I constantly had to remind myself to stay focused and not allow my exploration to spread beyond my research focus area. As I gathered such rich and extensive information, this was not always an easy task (Henning *et al*., 2004; Mertens, 1998).

3.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to entering the research field (*via* the selected primary school), I obtained the necessary **permission to conduct research** from both the Department of Education (region Eastern Cape) and the principal of the school (refer to Appendix A). I obtained **voluntary informed consent** (Appendix A) from the participants prior to their participation in the study, in terms of both their participation and the recording of discussions. Consent was obtained after providing the participants with the necessary information to decide whether or not they wanted to participate. During initial contact sessions I focused on the nature, purpose and process of my study, as well as the data collection strategies that were to be employed. I also emphasised the fact that the confidentiality and anonymity of participants as well as that of the data would be respected, and that participants could withdraw (themselves or their contributions) from the study at any time if they wished to do so. Two participants did indeed withdraw from the study (based on valid reasons – as mentioned earlier), but arranged for other participants to replace them. No participants withdrew their consent or any raw data provided by them (Oliver, 2003; Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Christians, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Punch, 1998).

In order to ensure **confidentiality, anonymity** and **respect for the privacy** of the participants, I do not include any identifying information with regard to the exact setting and school in which I conducted the study in this thesis, protecting the identity and privacy of both the participants and their location. I omitted or changed the names in raw data, and will destroy the recordings and transcripts after completing

the study. I undertook not to invade any participant's privacy, despite the fact that I employed observation-as-context-of-interaction during data collection. In the cases where I conducted interviews at the homes of participants (a highly private setting), I gained their consent for visiting them prior to my visits and conducted the interviews in a place of their choice, where they allowed me to observe them. My relationship with the participants and the interpreters that accompanied me might have positively impacted on the participants inviting me into their personal spaces and natural environments (Oliver, 2003; Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Barrett, 2000; Christians, 2000; Punch, 1998).

I paid attention to the ethical principle of **debriefing subjects**, by inviting participants to ask questions or pose requests for more information whenever they experienced the need to do so. As visits and meetings commenced with lunch and informal discussions, participants had ample opportunity to clarify whatever they were uncertain about, on a regular basis. Apart from inviting them to ask questions in order to clarify uncertainties, I explained the potential outcome and benefits of the study to the participants and their community at the beginning of the study, and also throughout the entire process, namely that their participation might enable them to reflect upon a challenging issue with which they are confronted in their daily lives, resulting in their insight and understanding of a relevant dilemma and eventually empowering them in terms of their own abilities and skills. During the process, they had the opportunity to clarify their own thoughts and learn from the process (Oliver, 2003; Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002; Barrett, 2000; Christians, 2000; Punch, 1998).

I adhered to the ethical guideline of **protecting the welfare** of participants to the best of my ability, by preventing them from harm (so-called **nonmaleficence**). No participant was exposed to *physical risks or harm* other than those faced during their normal day to day living. However, I had to pay attention with regard to *emotional* and *psychological harm*, due to the sensitivity of HIV&AIDS. I was open and honest about the fact that we were dealing with a sensitive issue and that it needed to be respected as such. I relied on firm relationships of trust, as well as skills, such as active listening and empathy, to keep participants from harm or to stabilise them in case they experienced discomfort, for example due to the content discussed or them being personally threatened by HIV&AIDS. During group activities I had to be

sensitive and debrief some participants after they had disclosed the HIV status of family members, resulting in them experiencing discomfort. As I dealt with such incidents immediately, I did not experience the need to refer any participant to another professional. Finally, the possibility of participants being *harmed by data analysis and the reporting of data* when reading reports on the study, and being able to identify themselves, does not apply to my study, as the outcome (namely the empowerment of the participants) can be regarded as positive and might probably result in them feeling proud of their participation (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Barrett, 2000; Hayes, 2000).

With regard to the **use of deception***,* I did not withhold any information from participants pertaining to my study, neither did I mislead them in any way. By employing PRA principles, I followed an open approach during which participants were involved and informed about the purpose and process of the research throughout (Oliver, 2003; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen *et al*., 2001; Barrett, 2000; Christians, 2000; Hayes, 2000; Punch, 1998). Finally, I paid attention to the principle of **accuracy**, reporting on and including accurate data. In reporting on my study in this thesis, I did not falsify or fabricate any data, neither did I omit any data obtained. I continually guarded against manipulating the data and reflected on potential challenges. I believe that the research team of this study (being trained psychologists) is competent with regard to the functions that they fulfilled and the procedures that they followed. Besides facilitating group activities, observing, conducting interviews and dealing with emotions and sensitive issues, we were constantly on the look-out for available resources in the community to which we could refer participants, for example with regard to questions on disclosure or the application for government grants. As such, we identified hospitals, clinics and social services during the study – based on the contributions of the participants, but also on our own exploration of resources (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002; Christians, 2000).

3.8   QUALITY CRITERIA

I support Patton (2002) and acknowledge the fact that the quality of qualitative data analysis can be enhanced by means of rigorous methods, the credibility of the

researcher and an underlying philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, thereby valuing qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive analysis and a holistic way of thinking. This implies that I (as qualitative researcher) need to reflect upon my own voice and perspective, in order to maintain a balance between a self-analytical and reflexive approach on the one hand, and an authentic understanding of the phenomenon under study in its complexity, on the other. The ultimate aim of producing a rigorous study lies in the value of trustworthiness, in other words whether or not the research audience can be convinced that a study is worth taking note of and that the findings do indeed represent reality (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Trustworthiness can be enhanced by the actions of outsider-researchers (how they interact, facilitate, deal with biases, react to empowerment and apply the principles of PRA), by continuous observation (of the process, interactions, cross-checking and adjustments that take place, whether information is distorted and whether participants are committed or not), and by reflective judgement (being self-critical, sceptic and self-aware but also sharing with peers and local people, inviting critical reviews). Within the context of PRA, the quality of qualitative studies further relies on *relevance*, which refers to the practical usefulness of a study in terms of learning and action. Relevance implies that personal responsibility and optimal ignorance be combined, by employing appropriate processes and focusing on what is relevant. Secondly, a commitment to *getting it right* is required, by relying on the purpose of and the dynamic process itself to maintain the enthusiasm and motivation of participants and to facilitate their commitment. This process requires continuous reflection and often implies a spiral, as participants are energised by fun activities, resulting in them moving into action, reaching success, becoming more energised, and so forth. In order to meet the criteria of *trustworthiness* and *relevance*, I relied on critical self-awareness, not regarding myself as the expert, but being open to listen, learn and facilitate rather than to speak, teach and control. I was also aware of the potential biases and thoughts throughout my study, reflecting in my field journal and having discussions with my co-researchers. I focused on not wanting to achieve too much in too little time and supported participants to bring their plans into action (Chambers, 2003; Thompson *et al.*, 1994).

In an attempt to add *rigour* to my study, I applied certain strategies propagated by Mayan (2001). In an attempt to *ensure investigator responsiveness* I aimed to remain flexible and sensitive, continually striving to be responsive during data collection, analysis and interpretation activities. I employed ongoing analysis, in order to plan follow-up sessions. During data analysis I aimed to stay open and revise poorly supported ideas, despite any initial potential value. Secondly, I attempted to *enhance methodological coherence* by selecting data collection and analysis methods that would best address my research questions. My selected paradigm, context, purpose of the study, research design and data collection strategies support one another and correspond logically. I was, however, flexible and open to changes when needed. Concerning the strategy of *effectively sampling participants*, I believe that the participants in my study represented the perceptions of the members of the community, possessing the necessary knowledge on the topic that I explored. Saturation of data supports this belief. I followed the strategy of *collecting and analysing data concurrently,* conducting these two processes simultaneously, in order to enable me to check data, maintain focus and monitor and confirm my conceptual task of analysis and interpretation.   I also aimed to *think theoretically*, thereby constantly reconfirming emerging ideas. I checked and re-checked my data according to existing literature (chapter five) and aimed to explain correlations and contradictions. As such, I could build on existing theory but also develop new theory where appropriate. I henceforth further discuss the quality of my study in terms of the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity thereof.

3.8.1   CREDIBILITY

The qualitative concept *credibility* is used in parallel with the (positivist) quantitative term *internal validity*. Credibility implies that I feel confident that my observations, data interpretation and conclusions are supported by raw data, thereby corresponding with the perceptions of the participants. Credibility answers to the question as to what extent the findings are truthful, in other words whether or not the trail of evidence is persuasive. Credibility implies professional integrity, intellectual rigour and methodological capability (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Patton, 2002; Mayan, 2001; Seale, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

I employed certain procedures and strategies in order to meet the criteria of credibility (Oliver, 2003; Woods, 2003; Kelly, 2002a; Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Mayan, 2001; Seale, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998). Table 3.5 provides a summary of the strategies that I employed.

TABLE 3.5:   STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE CREDIBILITY

STRATEGY/PROCEDURE	MY STUDY
Prolonged and extensive engagement, supported by continual observation in the field.	I undertook nine field visits over a period of two years, supporting my primary data collection activities with a field journal and observation, as well as audio- and video-recordings. I guarded against hasty conclusions and continued with field work until data saturation occurred. I placed high priority on a firm relationship of trust between the participants and myself, attempted to learn about the community and not be misinformed. I constantly reflected, in order to make decisions relevant to my study and its purpose.
Clarifying researcher bias and progressive subjectivity.	I was aware of and continually reflected on my subjectivity and biases, attempting to remain open-minded and gain insight into my personal orientations and prejudices that might influence my research and interpretations. I monitored my developing interpretations and kept record (in a field journal) of the process of change that took place.
Crystallisation/triangulation.	Discussed in more detail below.
Using a field journal and extensive field notes.	I used a field journal to describe the research context and environment, as well as document observations. In addition, I reflected on my own experiences, feelings, competencies, biases and assumptions about the research, with the aim of making adjustments where needed.
Providing rich and thick descriptions.	I aimed to provide rich, thick descriptions of the case, participants, setting and research process. As a result, the findings of this study might be transferred to other communities with similar characteristics.
Peer review or debriefing.	My initial ideas were reviewed and commented on (both informally and at more formal forums) by colleagues. During the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation, my supervisor and co-researchers served as reviewers, critical thinkers and people who guided me and allowed me to reflect and debrief, especially after sensitive and emotionally laden sessions with participants.
Member checking.	I verified emerging themes based on data collection and preliminary analysis with the participants throughout the study, by reflecting on the themes and my interpretation of the previous visit at the start of each following visit, inviting participants to verify, correct and/or elaborate. Participants were therefore involved to reflect on the accuracy and credibility of my account of their perceptions. I did not provide the participants with detailed data transcripts, analysis and interpretations to read and edit or confirm – I verbally requested their input on my report of preliminary findings and interpretations. Occasionally I summarised sessions at the end, in order for participants to correct what I may have misinterpreted or perceived incorrectly.
Providing an audit trail.	I include examples and evidence of aspects such as my ideas, field notes, raw data, data analysis and interpretations in this thesis, thereby providing a trail of evidence of the research process that I followed. This might enable any reader to gain an understanding of my decision trail whilst undertaking my study.

With regard to *triangulation* of the data, Janesick (2000) proposes the use of the term *crystallisation* in qualitative research, as this concept '*recognizes the many facets of any given approach to the social world as a fact of life'* (Janesick, 2000:392). Although both of these two terms imply a process of relying on multiple perspectives by involving various methods, participants and data analysts with the aim of clarifying meaning and obtaining a deep understanding (Chambers, 2003; Stake, 2000); Richardson introduced the concept *crystallisation* in 1994, alluding to the characteristics of a crystal, namely that it '*combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach… Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves …*' (Richardson, 2000:934). According to Richardson (2000:934) crystallisation '*provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic*'. Therefore, whilst triangulation aims at getting at the '*truth*' from various perspectives, crystallisation aims at viewing one phenomenon from various perspectives in order to obtain layered, multiple views or meanings.

I used various forms of *crystallisation*. *Crystallisation* is evident in my variety of data collection strategies, in order to gain manifold views of findings by obtaining verification from diverse sources. In addition, I used the same methods with multiple sources of information (participants) and on different occasions, in order to confirm findings, thereby using *crystallisation of sources*. Thirdly, I relied on *theory/perspective crystallisation* by approaching the data on the basis of various theories and perspectives (refer to chapter two) to interpret my raw data. By conducting the data collection activities in collaboration with either my supervisor or a co-researcher, in an attempt to balance out *personal* influences and be able to identify researcher effects, I employed *investigator crystallisation*. Finally, *analyst crystallisation* was actualised as my supervisor assisted and monitored me during data analysis and interpretation, although I was primarily responsible for doing the analysis (Flick, 2004; Kelly, 2002a; Patton, 2002).

In addition to crystallisation, I aimed to be accurate and provide detailed descriptions of the research process and context, as an attempt to ensure credibility. I identified factors that might challenge my conclusions throughout my study and while in the field, in order to reach conclusions that can be believed and taken as accurate, by

truly reporting on the experiences and perspectives of the participants. I engaged in reflection and documented personal and professional information that might have had an influence on data collection, analysis and interpretation in this thesis, as well as on my field journal (Appendix F).

3.8.2   TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability (the qualitative parallel for the quantitative [positivist] concept *external validity*) refers to the *dependability* (parallel to the quantitative term *generalisability*) of the findings of a study, in other words whether or not the findings are applicable and can be transferred to other contexts. This relies on the possibility of the data being representative of the wider population (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Patton, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Seale, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

As my study focused on a specific informal settlement community, involving only selected community members whose voices do not necessarily represent those of the total community, my results and findings cannot be generalised and applied to other settings. However, generalising the findings of a qualitative study is not the explicit aim of Interpretivism. Furthermore, not presenting transferable findings is in accordance with the underlying principle of PRA, namely that different communities are unique and characterised by their own unique resources, features, challenges, priorities and preferences, and that findings are not required to be applied to other communities (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Janesick, 2000; Mukherjee, 1993).

It may be true that other researchers or readers of this thesis may feel that the findings can be transferred to similar contexts, settings and/or participants, but the onus of determining the extent of similarity between the research field and the identified context then lies with such external parties and not with the researcher (being me). As findings may help us to understand trends, it could be possible to apply them in similar contexts or communities. As such, as researcher, I include substantial information for the reader to be able to decide whether or not the findings might be transferred to a similar setting (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Patton, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Janesick, 2000; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

In an attempt to enhance the possibility of other researchers indeed being able to apply the findings of my study to other settings – based on their knowledge of my study as well as that of the other settings – I endeavoured to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, background, place, culture, time and process, with the aid of descriptions and visual aids (photographs, included in Appendices C and D). As a result, other researchers (readers) may compare my research site to potential sites of their choice, thereby regarding my findings as possible answers in other contexts (so-called *representativeness*) (Kelly, 2002a; Janesick, 2000; Seale, 2000; Mertens, 1998).

3.8.3   DEPENDABILITY

Dependability (or auditability) is the qualitative term used in parallel with the (positivist) quantitative term *reliability.* It considers whether or not the same findings would emerge if a study were to be repeated, in other words whether or not the findings could be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Seale, 2000; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

Dependability implies a certain degree of consistency with regard to the measuring instrument, which is usually the researcher when conducting a qualitative study. In theory, dependability requires of various researchers to reach the same conclusions. However, in reality qualitative research (such as mine) acknowledges a naturalistic paradigm and the fact that social reality is constantly changing. As opposed to reliability which implies stability over time, this qualitative study implies change. In addition, the fact that I, as a researcher (in the roles of observer and interviewer, for example) had a significant influence on the process and outcomes, results in the fact that the same findings cannot be guaranteed on other occasions. Furthermore, as PRA implies creative interaction and diversity, the outcome of similar studies will inevitably be different every time, resulting in the limited possibility of reproducing my study (Chambers, 2004; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

In an attempt to meet the criterion of dependability (thereby making it possible to obtain similar findings when conducting my study in a similar way with the same or similar participants), I aimed at providing extensive documentation of my data,

methods and decisions, as well as predicting possible changes that might occur in my descriptions and reports in this thesis. This provides a so-called *dependability audit*, identifying possible changes that would need to be investigated in any future attempt to repeat my study and obtain similar findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Seale, 2000; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

3.8.4   CONFIRMABILITY

The criterion of *confirmability* (with the quantitative parallel being *objectivity*) answers to the question whether or not researcher bias can be ruled out, with regard to the findings of the study – or, in terms of Interpretivism, be monitored and reflected upon. As such, confirmable findings imply data and interpretations that can be related to its sources, rather than being mere fabrications of the researcher (being me) (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

Observer and researcher bias can be regarded as a given during any qualitative study, as our values inevitably influence the way in which we interpret data during qualitative analysis. In an attempt to answer to the criterion of confirmability of my findings, I acknowledged such bias from the outset and involved others throughout my study. I employed the strategy of reflexivity by constantly reflecting in my field journal. I relied on co-researchers during data collection and involved participants during data analysis and interpretation, by reflecting preliminary interpretations to them, for their views and further elaboration. In addition, my supervisor supported me in ensuring that my interpretations and conclusions are indeed supported by the data. Lastly, I aimed to provide extensive detail and examples of the logic that I employed to interpret raw data in this thesis. I include a chain of evidence (so-called audit trail), as illustration of my interpretations and the processes that I employed to reach conclusions (refer to chapters four and five, as well as the various appendices) (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Seale, 2000; Fox, 1998; Mertens, 1998).

3.8.5   AUTHENTICITY

The criterion of *authenticity* is used to determine whether or not a balanced view of the various perspectives, views, beliefs and values of the participants is provided by

the researcher. Authenticity of a qualitative study is determined in terms of fairness and implies ontological, catalytic and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Mertens, 1998).

I tried to meet this criterion by including a range of different perspectives (realities) and contributions obtained during my study, also reporting on contradictions and conflicting values – thereby adhering to the criterion of *fairness*. In addition, *ontological authenticity* was obtained by the participants' views and experiences of their life-worlds becoming more enriched as the study progressed, resulting in their better understanding of the community's way of coping with HIV&AIDS. In order to enhance *ontological authenticity* and report on changes in the constructions of participants, I employed member checking and an audit trail. Furthermore, my study was characterised by *catalytic authenticity*, as the research initiated action, as well as *tactical authenticity*, as community members were empowered to take action (being an underlying principle of PRA) (Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Seale, 2000).

3.9   CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review in chapter two, I planned and conducted an empirical study in an informal settlement community in the Nelson Mandela Metropole, in order to explore the community's manner of coping with HIV&AIDS, by relying on existing assets and local resources. Subsequently I also explored possible changes that might be facilitated by the activist intervention research approach I followed. This chapter focused on a detailed description of the research process that I employed.

I described and justified my research methodology in terms of my research questions and the purpose of my study. In addition, I paid attention to the strengths of my methodology, as well as the challenges that I faced. I also reported on the ways in which I attempted to address such challenges. Furthermore, I described my role during the study, as well as the manners in which I adhered to ethical principles, and persistently attempted to obtain trustworthiness. In chapter four, I report on the results of my study, followed by a discussion and interpretation of the findings in chapter five, against the background of existing literature.