Chapter One

INTRODUCTION
Background to the Inquiry

1.1   Teachers and education policy change

1.1.1   Purpose of the research

The purpose of this inquiry is to describe and explain selected primary school teachers' experiences and understandings of education policy change in South Africa. This introduction contextualises the inquiry, states the broad problem of interest, formulates the key research questions, and identifies the limitations of the study. Lastly, it presents an outline for this dissertation.

The general context for this inquiry relates to ways in which education policy is understood, experienced, and put into practice by teachers. According to Darling-Hammond (1998:647-648),

> In devising new policies for educational change, (we) need to understand that policy is not so much implemented as it is reinvented at each level of the system. What ultimately happens in schools and classrooms is less related to the intentions of policy makers than it is to the knowledge, beliefs, resources, leadership, and motivations that operate in local contexts.... In addition, policy makers need to understand that their intentions will land in an environment already constrained by geological layers of prior policies and local conditions that may be hostile to the desired changes.

The specific context shows teachers' experiences and understandings of education policy change – an understanding of both the macro education structure and context, and the micro dynamics of education policy change processes. Thus, in this study, education policy change is located in a wider social context as well as in a particular educational context which is constructed and shaped by teachers. This study places the teacher at the center, recognising that the processes in which the education system, education policy, and the roles and relations they encompass are implicated in education policy change and in educational reform efforts. The focus is on teachers' perspectives, experiences and understandings of education policy change. The importance of their experiences, I propose, cannot be underestimated. It is, after all, at the level of school and classroom practice that policy comes to life.

1.1.2   The context of education policy change

Inasmuch as the focus is on education policy change from the perspective of primary school teachers, the broader picture needs to be described and discussed in some detail, explicating the context of policy making and the integration of policy text into policy practice. Education policy is contextualised within the structures and boundaries of the education system, manifesting in collective and personal, individualised contexts. The latter are revealed in teachers' experiences and understandings, neither of which are usually articulated publicly. Such experiences and understandings may also inform the education policy process. Bowe and Ball (1992:22) argue that policy text is contested and interpreted by teachers in "relation to [their] own understanding, desires, values and purposes." Education policy initiatives inherently imply internal contradictions and tensions, which opposes the view that policy "gets done to people by a chain of implementors whose roles are clearly defined by legislation" (Bowe & Ball, 1992:7).

Education policy change signals educational change, and neither exist in a vacuum. For this inquiry I refer to "policy contexts" as developed by Bowe and Ball (1992:19-23) to explain the complexities of policy in terms of its influence,

production and implementation. Firstly, the *context of influence* refers to the context where public policy is generally instituted or conceived. Here policy discourses and discussions take place among interested groups of people who struggle to influence, ascertain and define the aims of social purposes of education. These struggles also involve debates concerning political issues from wider perspectives, which impact the dialogue for policy initiation and induction.

Secondly, the *context of policy text production* is related to the context of influence, in a complex and intricate manner. Policy texts are usually pronounced in a language of the general public good, which may relate to values of the future, appealing to political reason or symbolism (cf. Fullan, 1991:28). Hence, policy texts are often presented as official legal documents. These texts, however, may be intrinsically incoherent and unclear, sometimes leading to misunderstandings, generalisations, or even contradictions. Such texts need to be read in context – what Bowe and Ball (1992:21) refer to as intertextuality. In addition, Bowe and Ball (1992) contend that texts are outcomes of conflicts and negotiated compromises. Policies thus become textual interferences that bear substantial constraints, but also offer several possibilities or opportunities for educational practice.

Thirdly, the *context of practice* – where the particular focus of this study lies – is where reactions to the policy texts have genuine repercussions. If we concur with the notion of a contested terrain (Ozga, 2000:1), then education policy change is not simply delivered, received and employed; instead the policy text is interpreted, "re-created" and contested by various actors in the policy chain, the most important of which are teachers. This occurs from personal points of view, frames of reference, or personal value systems.

Participants in educational practice have vested interests in the meaning of policy, and certain parts may be rejected, disregarded or intentionally misunderstood. Ozga (2000:3) believes that teachers "have a strong influence on the interpretation of

policy, and they engage with policy at a number of levels, from the national level of formal policy making through to the informal arena of pupil-teacher relations." Interpretations of policy text and the constructed meaning may be a process of struggle, since interpretations too are contested. The process of contestation does, however, have a productive element in the sense that creative and innovative ideas can come to the fore.

My view on this is that policy is often composed without teachers' voices. This may contribute to teachers experiencing policy as a prescriptive device that is based on rules of conduct and implementation decided by "the others". Teachers elucidate or interpret education policy into educational practice and implementation. According to Fullan (1992:vii), this may often fail in the implementation phase, because adequate implementation depends on how policy changes are perceived, particularly by the teachers who translate educational policy change into educational practice. Kerr (1976:iii) correspondingly argues that "the quality of our making and implementing of educational policies (as initiatives to educational change) depends, in large measure, upon the quality of our individual maps", which encompass experiences, understandings and constructs of their meaning. These individual maps evolve through the human perceptions, meaning, understanding, experience, and values which co-create human behaviour.

In this study, I claim that teachers view themselves as cogs in a large bureaucratic machine. Teacher training occurred mostly in a non-critical manner – they were literally trained not to question, but to be obedient rote-learners and practitioners of a centrally-decided curriculum. It is very optimistic to expect teachers who were educated to believe that they are recipients of information rather than innovative thinkers, to see new policy as anything more than procedures to be memorised and reproduced in practice. This inquiry seeks to explore and explain how a group of teachers engaged with policy, and aims to capture the dynamic of the policy change

process – either submissive copying and reproduction at one end of the continuum, or critical interaction at the other end.

In the past decade, extensive research has been conducted on the subject of education policy change – for example, Ball and Bowe (1992), Berkhout and Wielemans (1999), Bowe and Ball with Gold (1992), Corson (1995), Fullan (1982, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1997), Hargreaves (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1997), Harley *et al.* (2000), Jansen and Christie (1999), Nolan and Meister (2000), Ozga (2000). In the main, this body of research seeks to understand the sources, processes, and outcomes of education policy change.

Despite the growing literature on education and policy change, relatively little research has been done on the experiences of primary school teachers and policy change in the context of developing countries. Literature on teachers' experiences of policy change relates mostly to Western educational practices that are usually well-resourced, where teachers are highly qualified, and teacher-pupil ratios are low. It appears reasonable to assume that teachers' experiences and understandings of policy change in a changing South African would be influenced and constructed by the contexts in which they work.

1.1.3   Teachers' roles in education policy change

From the previous section, there is little doubt that it is a complex task to put into operation education policy initiatives which aim at effective implementation and practice through programmes, processes and human participation. This inevitably implies a long-term commitment from teachers to education policy change in order to complement and enhance educational practice. Teachers are counted upon to contribute to sound policy practice by being committed to executing the policy change in order to facilitate the educational process and to improve their students' capacity to learn. Fullan (1991:xiii) suggests that

> … if a healthy respect for and mastery of the change process does not become a priority, even well-intentioned change initiatives [i.e. policy] will continue to create havoc among those who are in the firing line. Careful attention to a small number of key details during the change process can result in the experience of success, new commitments, and the excitement and self-satisfaction of accomplishing something that is important.

One such important detail, which appears to be missing, relates to the teachers' worlds, their perspectives of this complex process of education policy change and the consequences thereof. This signifies a need for a conception of their understandings and perceptions, an appreciation of their experiences, feelings and emotions, and how these in turn may influence educational practice. Fullan (1991:4) emphasises that the meaning of educational change is a central issue, because "… people do not have a clear, coherent sense of meaning about what educational change is for, what it is, and how it proceeds". He elaborates:

> … the problem of meaning is central to making sense of educational change. In order to achieve greater meaning, we must come to understand both the small and the big picture. The small picture concerns the subjective meaning or lack of meaning for individuals at all levels of the educational system. Neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is, how people actually experience [education policy] change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms (Fullan, 1991:4).

However, within developing countries – including South Africa – not many attempts have been made to inquire into the teacher's world in the educational and transformational contexts, which we have witnessed in the past few years. Qualitative inquiries could disclose teachers' responses, subjective meanings (Fullan, 1991:32-36), and their experiences of the processes of policy change. Such knowledge might inform policy makers, administrators, and school managers towards more efficient and effective implementation.

With reference to the "contested terrain" and the context of practice (cf. Bowe & Ball, 1992) of education policy change, values also play an important role. Unless new values are adopted, no visible change will take place. In simpler terms, education policy change does not take place only in what teachers *do* but also in what they primarily *value*. Put differently, valuing without doing will not bring about change. This assumes a change in values which, according to Fullan (1991:8), is difficult to assess in education due to differences between rhetoric and reality. Such rhetoric is important considering that education policy constitutes a process that strives to impose values and to allocate values for the future (cf. Berkhout & Wielemans, 1999). The imposition and allocation of values for the future are evidently part of the process of education policy development and change, which are clearly interwoven and interdependent.

I have decided to employ qualitative research into education policy change from the perspective of teachers and their subjective realities. Such an inquiry into experiences and understandings embodies these contestations, the vested interests in the meaning of policy, the interpretations, the emotional processes (cf. Fullan, 1997:216-233), and sometimes the unconscious dynamics (cf. Halton, 1994:11-18).

These insights may inform the dynamics of education policy change and new understandings may foster more meaningful and constructive educational change. On the macro level such insights may be helpful particularly in the planning phase of education policy making. On the micro level, findings may inform school management and human (teacher) resource development programmes including change management programmes.

Understanding the micro perspective of policy change cannot be complete without mentioning the context of the macro or national level, which is imperative for studies in comparative education and education management (cf. Crossley & Vulliamy, 1997:8-9). A holistic contemplation of a national education system,

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particularly in the context of policy change, and an attempt to understand this process from the local perspective is also relevant. Furthermore, the context at the micro level is significant, for precisely at this level direct linkages between qualitative research and comparative education have become increasingly evident in recent years. Comparative education can make important contributions to understanding schooling through qualitative research, which can bring together macro and micro level analyses by recognising the interrelationships between the different levels. According to Crossley and Burns (1983),

> such combinations of macro- and micro-level studies, both being contextually grounded, accord well with both the traditions and the emerging trends of comparative and international education; and offer ways of more effectively linking policy and practice (cited by Crossley & Vulliamy, 1997:10).

Furthermore, Crossley and Vulliamy (1997:7-8) argue that the issue of constructing meaning appears to be a preoccupation of the postmodern era. The infinite variety in how people interpret the world and choose to engage with its challenges is recognised and seen as legitimate and also as inevitable. They quote Kandel (1993:XIX), who says:

> In order to understand, appreciate and evaluate the real meaning of the education system of a nation, it is essential to know something of its history and traditions, of the forces and attitudes governing its social organisations, of the political and economic conditions that determine its development.

This section has provided the background for the inquiry, and a brief introduction to the investigation of teachers' experiences and understandings of education policy change. The choice for a qualitative inquiry is positioned in the field of comparative education; feasible macro-micro linking within the policy practice debate is presented. I will now narrow down the inquiry and situate the problem in its particular South African context.

1.2   Refining the context of education policy change

1.2.1   Locating the problem

It is widely accepted that the South African education system is still in a process of far-reaching restructuring and comprehensive transformation and reform (cf. Hartshorne 1999, Sayed & Paterson, 1997). In the *South African Schools Act* (Act 84 of 1996) the constitutional rights of learners were defined, an admissions policy was determined and the rights and powers of governing bodies were stated. In addition, a process was launched to restructure the curriculum, which resulted in the report, *A Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training*. This document delineates the broad implications of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and an outcome-based approach for the different phases of the General and Further Education and Training Bands (*Government Gazette,* 6 June 1997). In 1998, Curriculum 2005 – based on the tenets of outcomes-based education (OBE) – was inaugurated in South African schools at Grade 1 level. This I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two.

More specifically, it is important to note that in order to creatively reorient the education system through the education policy process, it is necessary to involve formal structures and teachers. The often-neglected teachers in the education system are precisely the ones who must meet the demands of the transforming education system. More often than not, policy makers expect co-operation and changed attitudes and demand effective implementation of policy, ignoring the human dimensions and the individual interpretations of the meaning of policy. In terms of personal meaning, the co-creating, and the re-creating of cognition plays an important role in the actual implementation of policy text into policy practice. This construction of meaning and the renegotiation of meaning requires an inquiry into teachers' experiences and understandings of education policy change, as well as an exposition of the context in which the interactive (social) and individual (human) constructs of meaning take place.

While education policies may be intended for implementation, Eisner (1998a:117) offers a word of discretion:

> ... policies are guidelines intended to enhance organizational effectiveness by setting limits, providing direction and incentives ... But policies, like intentions, do not always lead to the desired ends, and their formulation is not always based upon adequate understanding of the problems they intended to address.

This is of course one point of view of what education policy is about. Jansen (2000) argues that policy has symbolic value, often at the cost of practical implementation and delivery. Worthy of note, he argues, is that "the over-investment in political symbolism at the expense of practical considerations largely explained the lack of change in South African education six years after legal apartheid" (Jansen, 2000:94).

On the one hand, there is this lack of attention to the implementation of policy and, on the other hand, teachers are "policy illiterate" in the sense that the symbolism of education policy change is not part of their discourse. Although teachers' thinking, their beliefs, and their assumptions have serious implications for the implementation of policy change (cf. Sparkes, 1991:4ff), they do lack the skills to decode policy or to engage critically and dialectically in policy discussion. This exclusion and non-invitational policy language yields difficulties in translating policy into practice.

Education policy change in South Africa, particularly after 1994, was introduced and enforced through new laws and structures utilising a top-down, centralised approach. From this position, teachers' participatory roles appear rather vague, evidently as mere passive recipients in the process of educational change. We need to recognise that teachers are the ultimate implementors and their participation and commitment in education policy change processes is a prerequisite for effective educational practice. In addition, it needs to be considered – particularly on the personal level – that teachers interpret, act as filters, influence, affect, mediate and

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relate to educational change, individually and collectively. Notably, it would appear that sustainable education policy change partly depends on the input and contributions of teachers. This suggests that the human experiences and meanings of the implementors of education policy change necessitate awareness, deeper understanding, and prior recognition thereof in order to facilitate a more effective policy change process.

This being the case, a qualitative inquiry into personal experiences and understandings provides a basis from which to begin to explore why teachers hold particular beliefs and values and why they do things in certain ways in given contexts. For the most part, however, pertinent research (Wells, 1994:1ff) indicates that

> ... traditionally, decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, and school organization have been made by theorists, researchers, and policy-makers, based in universities or ministry offices. Plans for putting these decisions into effect are then drawn up by senior administrators in each jurisdiction, who transmit them to the school administrators who are responsible, in turn, for ensuring that they implemented.

This clearly sets the parameters for additional inquiries into education policy change. In light of Jansen's (2000:102) argument, "it is unlikely that the widespread, sweeping changes predicted by policy will happen at all, and certainly not in the next 5-10 years."

1.2.2   Some hidden dimensions

In addition to the political symbolism, education policy change also embraces covert dimensions. Furthermore, emotions assuredly are at play in the implementation process. One usually does not equate emotional dimensions with education policy change. That is why this dimension is hidden from policy debates, despite that fact

emotions do play an integral role in organisations and institutions such as schools. Fineman (1993:1) contributes appropriately in this context:

> Emotions are central to the constitution of the realities that we so readily take for granted in our working and organizing. Once we strip the façade of rationality from organisational goals, purposes, tasks and objectives [policy], a veritable explosion of emotional tones are revealed.

This emotional revelation is significant in that teachers' experiences of education policy change may be comprehended more fully once they are recognised and identified in relation to the feelings that drive and shape them. Fullan (in Wells, 1994:viii) argues that effective policy implementation depends on what teachers think and do and on their personal disposition and feelings with regard to educational change or policies proposing educational change. Fineman (1993:3) argues that emotional labour is unavoidable, because the very nature of organisational life, which includes educational life, marginalises personal feelings. In short, feelings get in the way of organisational effectiveness, which would include effective policy change implementation. Also, the manner in which teachers mediate and act on educational change proposals has an impact on the eventual effects. Fullan (1982:120) sees cognition or comprehension and change to "understand the subjective world – the phenomenology – of the role incumbents, as a necessary precondition for engaging in any change effort with them." Teachers are simultaneously subject and object of policy change in terms of the role they play as implementors (cf. Nolan & Meister, 2000:ix, who cite Fullan, 1991).

In brief, teachers' roles in terms of their participation in education policy change processes, their experiences, and understandings impact ultimately on what transpires in the classroom. It is significantly relevant that their voices should be heard, inasmuch as they offer some valuable insights into the contested policy terrain and debate and contribute to the nuanced sensibilities of the often-sensitive educational context.

1.2.3   A political perspective of education policy change in South Africa

Education policy change in South Africa is no anomaly in the global educational context. Internationally, education policy changes are frequent and research extensive. The particular interest in the South African situation is closely linked to the major political changes; inevitably, our education system was inundated with an incredible amount of educational policy change. According to Hartshorne (1999:10), however, "until very recently the domain of education policy has received very little attention in South Africa." Also, "the concern of the majority of South Africans was not to 'improve' or 'reform' the apartheid education system, but to achieve a transformation of that system so that it served the interests of all South Africans in a democratic and equitable manner" (Hartshorne, 1999:11). Changing an education system does however not begin with a "clean slate". On the contrary, it is a slow, messy and time-consuming process, "punctuated by key policy moves that become the 'markers' of change" (Hartshorne, 1999:12). He proceeds and cites Lee (1990):

> Changes in education policy come about, not because of any 'logical necessity', but because of pressures from outside government – the power struggles between social groupings and the actions taken by individual people within a particular political, economic, and social structure and environment.

In sum, "most of the forms that education takes are the political products of power struggles" (Hartshorne, 1999:12), and therefore the process of mediation becomes an imperative process of educational change.

1.2.4   Some international research on education policy change

Research conducted in England and France on teachers and change compared the responses of British and French primary school teachers to educational policy changes (Broadfoot, Osborn, Planel & Pollard, 1994:1-13). Broadfoot *et al.*

established that regardless of the nature of the desired change, effective implementation inevitably depended on the ability of governments to influence what goes on in the classroom – that is to say, the micro level.

Research closer to home, conducted in Zimbabwe (Rowland, 1997), investigated teachers' views and understanding of schooling issues. This inquiry upholds the notion that teachers impact and influence the policy change process. The way in which teachers construct meaning and act with regard to education policy impacts on realising educational ideals, represented by policy change as a precursor to educational changes:

> … if students (and teachers) can see the areas of similarity between their personal view of education and the views of policy-makers, they will have a better basis for understanding the role of policy in shaping education systems. Instead of simply viewing policy as something distant and irrelevant to their own practice, they can become mentally connected to policy and thus begin critically (but as a critical friend) to examine policy and become involved in its generation (Rowland, 1997:1-10).

Education policy change and its constructed diverse meanings require an accurate positioning within conflicting and complex agendas before making useful proposals within the field of education. As stated earlier, in the education system teachers are the most prominent persons mediating education policy change, as they become part of an interactive process of reflection and action with regard to the contexts of intentions, inputs, processes and outcomes, as well as their personal responses within a particular context. This constitutes an important link for understanding the eventual effect of policy change. Unless teachers' perceptions and experiences are captured, one cannot fully understand their interpreted meaning of policy. In this context Fullan (1982:ix) argues that for attempts at education policy change to be successful, cognisance must be taken of what education policy change looks like from the point of view of the individual teacher, student, parent, administrator and the actions, reactions and responses of each.

Describing primary school teachers' experiences and understandings of educational policy change is, in broad terms, encompassing their perceptions, interpretations, emotions and understandings, both individually and collectively. The diverse layers of meaning of education policy change are complex and intricate, and feature on a variety of levels and stages within the education system. In the ensuing section these issues will be narrowed down into a statement of the problem.

1.3   Problem statement

As stated earlier, education policy change and the role of teachers are two important facets of the change process. Sound educational practice during times of transition depends on teachers to effectively implement policy. I have also referred to international research, which reveals that teachers respond in diverse ways to policy change, particularly to curriculum reform. There appear to be some limitations in the knowledge base with regard to the discernment of the experiences and understandings of education policy change, which could jeopardise effective educational performance and practice. It is likely that greater knowledge of the experiences and understandings of those who are expected to adopt and implement education policy change may provide some added insight into the complexities of putting education policy into practice. In South Africa, and in particular in Gauteng Province, limited qualitative research has been conducted to explore and describe how primary school teachers experience educational policy change (cf. Harley, Bertram & Mattson, 1999; Jansen, 1999; Chisholm, 2000).

Accordingly, the following key research question guided the identification and collection of data for this inquiry:

How do primary school teachers experience education policy change?

The subsidiary questions guiding this study included the following:

- To what extent are teachers conscious or aware of the policy changes facing them?

- How do teachers understand policy in the contexts of their classrooms?

- How do teachers experience policy change in their classroom practice?

- How do teachers feel about and respond to education policy change?

1.4   Research objectives

The broad purpose of this inquiry is to describe and explain the experiences of primary school teachers concerning education policy change. The immediate objective of the inquiry is to obtain new, deeper and more complex understandings of the less obvious issues that influence their roles as implementors of education policy change. Such an understanding is a matter of comprehending origins, relevance, and consequences of feelings and perceptions that may impact their educational practice. From the previous discussion I argue, therefore, that education policy change has corresponding human dimensions and perceptions, such as teachers' experiences and understandings, notably constructed, created, and modified meaning within an interactive and contested education policy process.

1.5   Some concepts

- *teacher versus educator*

I have opted for the traditional concept "teacher", which is more specific and relevant to this particular inquiry than the newer version of "educator". According to the *South African Council for Educators Act* (RSA, 2000), educator refers to any person "who teaches, educates or trains other persons or who provides professional

educational services, including professional therapy and educational psychological services, at an institution, … any school, further education and training institution or adult learning centre". I interviewed primary school teachers only, but refer to 'teacher/s' throughout the text.

- *education policy and education policy change*

According to Hartshorne (1999:5), "Education policy, like any other state policy, may be defined as a course of action adopted by government, through legislation, ordinances, and regulations, and pursued through administration and control, finance and inspection, with the general assumption that it should be beneficial to the country and its citizens. In practice, however, it is often more advantageous to the government which establishes the policy". This assumes that government has authority and the power to carry out the policy, which may be exercised through financial provision (Hartshorne, 1999:7). Hartshorne explains also that education polices are continually influenced by political and economic policies which exert pressures for change. Thus, it is important to realise that education does not and cannot function or operate in a vacuum (Hartshorne, 1999:8), but is contextualised in a particular political, economic, social and constitutional surround.

Therefore, it is important for the inquiry to keep in mind that, notwithstanding the power that a state may have or exert, it cannot completely control teachers or learners or what happens daily in classrooms. "Policy on paper as in political statements or even legislation is not always the same as 'policy in practice', for example the practices of teachers who are not in sympathy with government intention" (Hartshorne, 1999:8).

Hartshorne's reasoning is refined by Meighan (1996:401-2):

> Educational policy sounds like something administrators do in education offices and government departments but the concept of layers of meaning suggests that this is too limited in view, and that policy making (and policy change), implementation and review take

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place at all layers of meaning, from classrooms to staffrooms to education offices…. The recent stress on action, interactionist, interpretive, micro-phenomenological approaches has illustrated how educational policy is the concern of all educationalists at all layers of meaning.

There is a trend towards the exploration of micro-perspectives, focusing on the daily experiences and activities in schools and classrooms. This contrasts the structural-conflict and functionalist approaches, which tend to focus more on macro-sociological and educational issues (cf. Meighan, 1996:261-277 and Ozga, 1987:138-149).

I need to record that for the purposes of this study, teachers themselves selected the particular policy change that they experienced as relevant or otherwise. Addendum K offers a comprehensive list of policy documents dating from January 1996 to August 2000.

- *policy experience*

The concept "experience" is used more widely than was anticipated initially. Experiences embody abstractions such as meaning, perspectives, frames of thinking, emotions, and feelings. This takes place in different realms of educational contexts, and on diverse layers where meaning is created and constructed. While it is not the intent of this study to explore the search for meaning of self *per se,* teachers' experiences and understandings will impact on the search for meaning through the realm of work, particularly when the *status quo* feels threatening. Issues of worth, sense of belonging, contribution, and connectedness will influence how they relate to educational practice. Education work is an imperative realm for firstly deriving meanings about teachers' presence and belonging and secondly for deriving meaning through relationships with their colleagues. It is precisely here in the organisational-educational context where teachers' capacities for connectedness and relatedness to peers enables them to construct shared meanings (cf. Guevara & Ord, 1996:709-722). Such evidence is presented in Chapter Four.

1.6 Epistemology and methodology: qualitative inquiry, an emergent design

This inquiry is designed to explore, describe, and explain the experiences and understandings of education policy change of a small number of primary school teachers in Pretoria, South Africa. Since little is known in this specific and particular context, the elements of a qualitative design type are relevant since the research will be conducted in an unfamiliar field, where experiences and understandings are explored inductively. Put differently, teachers' voices may "offer various levels of knowing and thinking" through which readers can make their own sense (Lather & Smithies, 1997:xiv-xv). Furthermore, I do not claim to be a disembodied objective knower; on the contrary, I am very much part of the inquiry, and sometimes "getting in the way, and out the way" (Lather & Smithies, 1997:xiv-xv). "[G]iving voice" and presenting data through my "filter" is in itself a representation of a representation. Flick (1998:225) invites some provocative questions in this context. "Is the researcher's version grounded in the versions of the field?" I cannot claim an objective account *per se*, but I do intend to present the experiences and understandings of the participants in this study as accurately and truthfully as possible, while the validity of knowledge cannot be assessed with certainty. For this reason, "the validity of qualitative research turns into the question of how far the researcher's constructions are grounded in the constructions of those whom he or she studied and how far this grounding is transparent for others. Thus the production of the data becomes one starting point for judging the validity, and the presentation of phenomena and the inferences drawn from them becomes another (Flick, 1998).

Data – that is to say, information relating to the inquiry – are sought from teachers, using semi-structured and open-ended individual interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires. I posit that these selected teacher-respondents are the *primary* informants of this inquiry. I as the researcher am in a position of "not knowing", which is described in more detail in the methodology chapter.

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The literature review presents a framework to locate the focus of the inquiry, situating foreshadowed issues by identifying gaps or limitations in the knowledge base. This particular literature review serves to contextualise the problem of teachers and education policy change. The discussion of the empirical data offers a more complete inductive literary interpretation of the raw data, notably in an emerging and iterative design.

The choice for a qualitative study and the methodological design for this inquiry are presented in more detail in Chapter Three. There I have argued the case for my preferential choice, and stated baseline assumptions with regard to the epistemological and ontological issues, for often here lies the critique of non-qualitative researchers (Friese, 1999:4). Crossley and Vulliamy (1995:13) and Wolcott (1990:25-36) argue that there is a "growing emphasis upon the importance of qualitative researchers revealing the processes by which they have analysed their data." I have attempted to make the data analysis more visible in order to provide an audit trail (cf. Schwandt, 1997:6) of how the findings were derived from the raw data, and inductively interpreted from related literature. For this purpose, the attached CD-ROM contains all the data, either in an HTML document or within the same software package that was used for the analysis process. A variety of analytical steps is detailed in Addendum F.

I worked from a constructivist/interpretive perspective, aspiring towards grasping and interpreting teachers' experiences and understandings of the contested terrain of education policy change (Ozga, 2000:1), assuming multiple realities. According to Myers (1997:4), access to reality from an interpretive perspective is through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and meanings. Ozga (2000:3) in this context indicates that teachers "have a strong influence on the interpretation of policy, and they engage with policy at a number of levels, from the national level of formal policy making through to the informal arena of pupil-teacher relations." This implies that from an ontological point of view as researcher I do not assume from

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my perceptions that there is a single reality. On the contrary, I believe each teacher experiences and understands education policy change from his or her own point of view, and so encounters and conceives a different reality.

Finally, concerning the methodology, I will show that qualitative data, contrary to what often is believed, could add value to the "scientific" knowledge base. Some direct quotes from the interview data are presented in the hope that this may enhance our understanding of this topic, particularly from the perspectives and voices of teachers. Ozga (2000:xi) quite fittingly adds to my viewpoint:

> There is a need for rigorous research which does not ignore, but rather addresses, the complexity of the various aspects of schools and schooling: for research explores and takes account of different objective experiences and subjective perspectives, and which acknowledges that qualitative information is essential…

1.7   Potential significance, limitations and delimitations

The potential significance of this study is to extend the knowledge base through a more complex and nuanced understanding of education policy change from teachers' perspectives, by providing new empirical evidence. In addition, I wish to present a new methodological approach aided by technological developments. The final chapter deals in detail with a variety of potentially significant issues relating to this topic.

Limitations of this inquiry relate to the scope of the study – that is, the problem statement, the methodology, and the design. Methodological limitations refer to difficulties relating to the role of the researcher, interviewing processes and data analysis. There are several limitations relating to the generalisability, reliability, and internal and external validity of this study. Qualitative research designs are usually contextual, which implies that transferability is an important issue, rather than the generalisability of the findings as in quantitative research. Interviews were conducted until data was saturated as reflected in repeating themes. It is important to

note that the sample of primary school teacher participants in the inquiry is a purposive and self-selected sample in the Pretoria region.

Furthermore, the process of teachers' understanding also appears inadequate, particularly given the rapid and constant change and evolution not only in the educational realm, but also of the teachers themselves. Their understanding of meaning is seldom objective or finite, which also restricts the generalisability. Another limitation of teachers' understandings is that the process of understanding is either of present or of past realities and conditions. Understanding is not of tomorrow's reality or future conditions, which inhibits the predictive value of this study. Some directives or strategies, which may be derived from this descriptive inquiry, could be transferable to similar educational settings outside this particular study situation; this would be determined by the degree of similarity between the two contexts. This alone presents penetrating opportunities for extended qualitative and quantitative research. Such suggestions will be offered in Chapter Five.

In summary, limitations are those characteristics of design and methodology that set the parameters for the application of interpretations of the data. These are dealt with in Chapter Three. The most obvious limitation in this particular inquiry relates to the ability to draw descriptive or inferential conclusions from selected data about a larger group.

Delimitations of this inquiry are those characteristics that limit the scope or the boundary. I consciously made exclusionary and inclusionary decisions. For example, access to schools was rather complex; hence, I had a limited choice of interviewees. I also had to delimit this inquiry concerning the theoretical perspective that I adopted.

1.8   Outline and organisation of this report

In the remaining chapters I show how I have approached and addressed the research question that was posed in Chapter One. Chapter Two, the literature review of this

inquiry, contextualises education policy change process in general, and places it more specifically in the South African situation. In Chapter Three I outline the methodological strategies and the choice for a qualitative research design in order to complete this study. In Chapter Four I present the findings from the empirical data, and discuss and interpret four major themes of education policy change from the perspectives of the teachers. Contrary to a conclusion-oriented approach (cf. Wolcott, 1990:55), I wish to show in Chapter Five some significance as well as some limitations. I present how these findings may influence educational practice and then offer recommendations for the education policy-practice knowledge base. I offer some personal reflections, and invite scholars to participate in further investigations into this field of study. I have asked myself some hard questions about my research, and have long been interested in research *with* people instead of the more typical research *on* people. And finally, I am touched and moved by bell hooks'[1] (1994:90) writing:

> I am troubled by the term 'authority of experience,' acutely aware of the way it is used to silence and to exclude. Yet, I want to have a phrase that affirms the specialness of those ways of knowing rooted in experience. I know that experience can be a way to know and can inform how we know what we know.

All Addenda are contained in a second, separate volume, and are available on request.

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[1] bell hooks is correctly typed in lower case.