

CHAPTER 1: PREVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The Skills Development Act, Act No. 97 of 1998 (SDA) (Republic of South Africa, 1998b) has had various challenging effects since its implementation in the workplace of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 1999. Reiner and Botha (2000:2), Greyling (2001:3), Botha (2003b:1) and Van der Westhuizen and Maharasoa (2004:39) note the challenges pertaining to the integration of HEI staff development practices with the requirements of the SDA. Strydom (2004:292) and Van Niekerk (2004:111) and Govender (2003:8) comment that staff development in HEIs is being hampered by the lack of support and guidance from government *vis-à-vis* the Education Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), the statutory body to which HEIs are allocated. Fourie (2003:1), Botha (2003a:1-5), and Van Niekerk (2004:110), and Layton-Matthews (2004:1) are concerned about the extensive costs and the laborious process involved in registering the workplace learning programmes on the National Qualifications Framework,¹ (NQF). They are also concerned about the costs and the processes involved in the accreditation of workplace learning providers. The views of these authors, though rather brief, have presumably dictated the subjective interpretations made so far regarding the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs, since no reference is made in the literature to a public attempt to understand the intent of the SDA, and therefore to determine whether such an intent coincides with or differs from the view of staff development in HEIs. I do believe, however, that these authors' views are only the tip of the iceberg as far as the underlying problems associated with the implementation of the SDA in HEIs are concerned. A thorough review of the body of scholarship reveals that little is known about this particular issue in South African HEIs at present.

1.2 Problem statement

My desire to understand how SDFs perceive the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs, was the principal thrust behind the academic conundrum of this study

¹ “The NQF is a framework on which standards and qualifications, agreed to by education and training stakeholders throughout the country, are registered” (Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002:6).

(refer §1.3 below). The present study therefore endeavours to be a critical² interpretative study into the effects of the implementation of the SDA on staff development practices in HEIs. As such, it endeavours to draw on my personal experience of working in one of the HEIs (in my capacity as Learning and Development Manager) as well as on the experiences of the Skills Development Facilitators³ (SDFs) working at HEIs.

From the above it is clear that the intellectual conundrum that is being investigated in this research study focuses on the following main question:

How do the SDFs understand the effects of the SDA on staff development practices in SA HEIs?

1.3 Aims of the research

The aforementioned intellectual conundrum is operationalised in this research project in the following research aims:

- Research aim 1: To determine the nature and rationale of and reasons for staff development.
- Research aim 2: To determine the nature and rationale of and reasons behind the SDA.
- Research aim 3: To determine empirically how the SDFs perceive the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.
- Research aim 4: To develop an emancipatory critique of staff development in HEIs against the backdrop of the SDA.

1.4 Rationale for the study

It is important to note from the outset that I have deliberately interspersed my narrative with a number of critical questions at certain points. Although these

² Horkheimer (1972:14) describes the term “critical” as follows: “... to look behind the facts, to distinguish the superficial from the essential without minimising the importance of either.” Similarly, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:135) and Kim (2003:6) describe critical studies as the idea to go beyond surface meanings. Box (2005:11) postulate that the term “critical” associated with Critical Theory refer to: “seeks to give people knowledge about their situation...working towards the future that is peaceful...instead of aggressive and competitive”.

³ Compliance with the SDA requires employers to designate at least one person as the Skills Development Facilitator (SDF) to perform various tasks outlined in the regulations enacted under the Skills Development Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998b).



questions may, at first glance, seem purely rhetorical in their nature and intent, an attempt is made in the subsequent chapters to show that these questions do in fact represent critical navigational beacons in the search for an understanding of the SDFs perceptions of the effects that the implementation of the SDA has had on staff development practices in HEIs.

My interest in understanding what underlies the implementation of the SDA and how it affects staff development in the HEIs arose from my official job designation at a particular HEI. In 1999, while compiling this particular HEI's first Workplace Skills Plan (WSP), I informed the Skills Development Committee⁴ (SDC) that compliance with the SDA would mean that the University's WSP would also have to demonstrate that a concerted effort was being made towards the workplace learning of designated academic as well as support staff members. Furthermore, the planned workplace learning had to be provided by accredited providers and it had to provide for the awarding of academic credentials to the staff members who successfully completed their workplace learning programmes. Since the majority of the university's planned staff development activities did not meet these criteria, the university's first WSP was a sketchy reflection of its total staff development plan. Nor did it exactly meet the minimum government requirements for the submission of the WSP. The members of the SDC responded negatively, arguing that the result of a sketchy WSP would be that the University would receive a WSP grant that would be less than the amount to which the University was entitled. Furthermore, the SDC members stated that it seemed unjust that the SDA should focus on accredited workplace learning while ignoring the HEI's workplace learning initiatives that had not been accredited. I also recall them asking why the University should highlight workplace learning for designated staff members in particular, when achieving the institutional goals depended on enhancing all staff members' competencies?

When reflecting on the SDC members' responses, I realised that their judgements about the SDA had been shaped by the ideologies⁵ of the institution in which we worked (Horkheimer, 1972:213). This meant that the committee members felt comfortable about valuing staff development for its contribution towards institutional

⁴ The Skills Development Act recommends that a Skills Development Committee be established for the purposes of consultation on training matters (Republic of South Africa, 2004:26).

⁵ Ideology refers to the general beliefs that became norms and rules of justice (Crossley, 2005:147). Harvey (1990:23) notes that ideology is present "*from the moment that social relations take a hierarchical form*".



interests. This meant that they essentially opposed the SDA because of its perceived bias. By implication, this indicated that staff development in the University where I am employed was being viewed, at the time, as an institutional mechanism for socialising employees into learning new ways of working and regulating their behaviours for the benefit of that institution (Valentin, 2006:17). Staff members of the particular HEI are therefore torn away from self-preservation, only to be viewed mechanistically as units in the chain of production (Baptiste, 2001:184; Ritzer and Smart, 2003:182; Valentin, 2006:17). This obviously restricts human freedom, and prevents the institution from becoming a more humane and better place for all (Habermas, 1968:72).

Taking into account the SDC's opposition to the implementation of the SDA, the first critical question that should be raised is: What are the ideologies of staff development in this particular HEI and why do the SDC members openly convey an arbitrary judgement of the SDA before attempting to understand the SDA? Exploring the underlying dominant perceptions about staff development in this particular HEI and also in the SDA, could assist us in understanding what might have influenced the views that the SDC members held about the implementation of the SDA in this particular HEI. My desire to reveal the underlying perceptions of staff development in HEIs, and how they influence the implementation of the SDA in HEIs, inspired me to undertake this investigation. In addition, I had been nominated by the former SA Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA), which has since 2005 been replaced by the statutory body, Higher Education South Africa (HESA), to be involved in the establishment of the Education Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority⁶ (ETDP SETA) under which the HE sector falls (Republic of South Africa, 2000:8) and to represent universities as employers on the ETDP SETA Board between 1999 and 2004.

During the establishment of this SETA and at Board meetings, there was a constant and ever-present tension between the views of the employer representatives that the core aim of the SDA was to promote institutional interests, and the contrasting view of labour representatives on the Board that the core aim of the SDA was to redress the wrongs of those deprived of training in the past. At the Board meetings I noticed that the members sought a compromise solution to decision making, instead of exploring the reasons for the ever-present tensions. It is my belief that as a consequence of this approach, irrational decisions were made for the sake of

progress in the Board meetings, because the criteria used to decide or simply interpret decisions had either become irrelevant or had been lost along the way. Another question that remains unanswered is: What is the rationale for the implementation of the SDA? If understanding is not mediated by social experiences (interaction), it will remain idealistic (Habermas, 1968:72; Habermas, 1972:10). As the deliberations of the Board did not cloud my understanding of the purpose of the SDA, I felt obliged to undertake this investigation.

There is a relative dearth of research literature which deals specifically with the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HE in South Africa. Some of the literature notes various challenges, yet the writers do not necessarily indicate what these challenges are, or why they may occur. For example, Greyling (2001:3) argues that: “[most] institutions of higher education will battle with reforming and transforming staff development towards national imperatives since conflicts of interest are imminent between the focus of staff development in HEIs and that of national imperatives”. This opinion does not prevail solely in HEIs. Kraak (2004:4), and Barry (2000:22) contend that South African organisations are reluctant to integrate their developmental initiatives with the broader aims of the SDA, and that they prefer to focus on narrow company-specific needs for human resources development. Adeniji (2002:10) and Cloete (2001:8) are of the opinion that private and public organisations are considering the SDA as another form of taxation. From my own experience I would venture the opinion that the ineffective implementation of the Act could, furthermore, inhibit line managers from clearly understanding its intentions – especially as far as the identification of training needs in the context of the SDA is concerned.

Botha (2003b:2) and Le Grange (2004:1) argue that HEIs generally tend to recover rebates based on the skills development levies they have paid, and that they do not generally seek to further the aims of the SDA *per se*. Mapesela and Strydom (2004:3), Mofokeng (2002:9), Gilbert and Gibbs (1998:14-19) and Gibbs (1998:11-14) state that the majority of HEIs implemented a performance management system to manage the requirements for institutional staff development, yet they refrained from including the broader aims of the SDA as a staff development imperative.

⁶ The ETDP SETA is a statutory body which oversees the implementation of the SDA in the education, training and development practices sector (Republic of South Africa, 2000:8).

Despite the profusion of the aforementioned publications, no explanations for the social dynamic that underlies staff development in HEIs (in the context of the implementation of the SDA) could be found in the literature. Valentin (2006:17) postulates that where staff development issues in organisations are reported on, it is usually: “to consider how [staff development] ... can be managed towards organisational competitiveness” and “despite the increased use of qualitative methods of social enquiry in human resources development, the underlying methodology ... are essentially positivist”. She acknowledges the value of research aimed at refining staff development methods and learning styles, but suggests that it does not shed light on the underlying factors associated with institutional power, politics and social dynamics. This study is an attempt to address this gap.

Consequently, the rationale for this investigation, which evolved from an initially personal to an abiding academic interest,⁷ is to determine the social dynamics attached to the implementation of the SDA, and how and why these dynamics affect staff development in HEIs.

1.5 Contextualising the study

In order to place the present study in a broader context and relate how and why the SDA affects staff development in HEIs, a brief overview is given of the rise of the SDA in South Africa and staff development in HEIs. My intention is to illustrate that the proclaimed rationale for the SDA differs from that of staff development in HEIs.

1.5.1 The skills revolution in SA since 1994

After the first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994, it became a priority for the new government to transform and reform the education system of South Africa (Gibbon and Kabaki, 2006:125; Asmal, 2004:1; Govender, 2003:3; Coetzee, 2000:1). However, action aimed at the transformation of the education system had gained momentum since the 1970s (Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002:5). One of the government's visible steps to counter the social-economic deficit of South Africa is the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (African National Congress, 1994a). As such, Van Dyk *et al.* (2001:57-58), Genis (1997:2) and Cloete (2005:7) comment that the RDP serves as a blueprint for further growth and development policies in South Africa.



Another visible step towards transforming South Africa's education system was the implementation of the first National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) in February 2001 and the establishment of an integrated National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The principal aims of the NSDS are firstly, to invest in training and skills development and secondly, to equip South Africans with the skills that the country needs to compete in the global economy (Department of Labour, 2002a:1; Department of Labour, 2005:1; Coetzee, 2000:10). By contrast, the aims of the NQF are to provide a: "framework on which standards and qualifications ... are registered" (Department of Labour, 2002a:6).

The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) established on 20 March 2001, are primarily, in collaboration with the Department of Labour, responsible for the implementation of the NSDS (Department of Labour, 2002b:3; Coetzee, 2000:10). This is why the levy grant system outlined in the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999 (SDLA), a subsidiary act of the Skills Development Act of 1998, supports the pursuit of the aims of the NSDS (Botha, 2003a:3; National Skills Authority, 2003:3; Coetzee, 2000:10). As mentioned above, the aims of the NSDS are to increase investment in skills development in order to equip South Africans with the skills that the country needs to compete in the global economy. These aims are also reflected in the SDLA and SDA, as follows: "To increase the level of workers' skills" and "to address the challenges of an unequal society by making society more inclusive and promoting greater cohesion" (Republic of South Africa, 1998b). The government's policy documents therefore indicate a thrust towards the regulation of the structures and the quality of workplace learning⁸ in the South African workplace. The term "structure" refers, in this regard, to the investment in workplace learning and, as such, focuses on the development of previously disadvantaged employees. The term "quality" refers, in this regard, to the quality assurance of workplace learning provision and outcomes to meet the standards of the NQF. The SDA stipulates in Chapter 4 (Learnerships) and 5 (Skills programmes) that providers of workplace learning must be credentialed⁹ and accredited¹⁰ (Republic of South Africa,

⁷ Interest in this context refers to knowledge-forming interests (Habermas, 1971).

⁸ I prefer to use the term workplace learning, as an umbrella term to include all the modes of education, training and development interventions aimed at employee development.

⁹ The term "credential" refers to the "credits" *attached to a programme outcome that is pitched on a certain level on the National Qualifications Framework* (NQF) (Reid and Barrington, 1997:53; Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002:9). Credentialed refers to the value of the credits attached to learning (Fevre, 1997: 11; Mercorio *at al.*, 2000:157; Cloete, 2005:22).

1998b). As a result of this stipulation, the programme outcomes that are achieved should provide workers with qualifications that are recognised nationally on the NQF (Republic of South Africa, 1998b:1; Memorandum of SDA, 1998:1; Layton-Matthews, 2004:11; Erasmus and Van Dyk, 2004:39).

Against this background, it is argued that the theoretical underpinning of the SDA and the SDLA is that investment in workplace learning and the awarding of academic credits are instrumental to the socio-economic development of South Africa. In other words, academic credits are instrumental to the economic prosperity of the individual. This seems to have close ties with Human Capital Theory. This theory holds that investment in education *vis-à-vis* training leads towards the economic prosperity of the individual and the country at large (McIntyre, 2002:2; Baptiste, 2001:178; Livingstone, 1997:9; Fevre, 1997:11; Baptiste *et al.*, 2004:32; Carnoy *et al.*, 2005:4). In this regard, the third critical question that should be asked is: Why does the Skills Development Act support education and development as a basis for economic development yet simultaneously seems to prioritise education and training investment towards national imperatives and designated groupings in organisations? Prescribing the national education and training imperatives, as well as prescribing to whom education and training should be offered, deprives organisations and individuals of their rights to determine and invest in the kind of education and training that they perceive would best benefit organisational effectiveness.

Having placed the rise of national policy in perspective (which I discuss in Chapter 2) it is necessary to offer a broad outline of the distinction I draw between the broad aims of national policy (SDA, SDLA) and those of staff development, given the context of the present study.

1.5.2 Staff development in Higher Education Institutions

In an HEI, staff development¹¹ is a term that harbours a variety of semantic values. Some authors refer to staff development as an umbrella term, seemingly synonymous with terms such as in-service education, staff training or continuous professional development (Gall and O'Brien Vojtek, 1994:1; Greyling, 2001:38; Biggs,

¹⁰ The term "accredited providers" means "the formal approval and recognition of an education and training provider by an Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) body" (Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002:8 and 105).

¹¹ I use the term staff development at this stage since one of the first books published on staff development is titled *Staff Development in Higher Education*, edited by Teather (Teather, 1979).



1999:42; Webb, 1996a:59-66). Other authors refer to staff development from a structural perspective, in other words, in terms of who manages or co-ordinates staff development (Sorcinelli, 1991:17; Webb, 1996b:3-6), or even from a contextual perspective (Brew, 1995:1; Denton, 1995:30; Bitzer and Kapp, 1998:19; Kapp, 1995:9-12; Zuber-Skerritt, 1995b:103; Zuber-Skerritt, 1997b: 4-11). There are also other authors who refer to staff development from an approach perspective, specifically as regards the enhancement or generation of knowledge and skills so that employees perform their roles more effectively towards achieving the broader goals of HEIs (Brew, 1995:15; Harrison and Kessels, 2004:16; Moses, 1988:80; Ramsden, 1992:8; Nais, 1993:145; Zuber-Skerritt, 1997:5; Zuber-Skerritt, 1997b:201). Although the above-mentioned variety of semantic values is attached to staff development, Bitzer *et al.* (1998:11) point out that staff development in HEIs only started gaining momentum from the early 1970s. It later became institutionalised in the 1980s as part of the various institutions' missions.

Brew (1995:4 and 91), Webb (1996a:2), Zuber-Skerritt (1995b:14) and Le Grange (2004: 91) maintain that staff development involves the individual and the institution in a mutual process of change towards the growth and efficiency of the institution. In other words, the principal aim of HE staff development is to enhance institutional growth and efficiency, implying that staff development is vested in a work relationship or contractual agreement on labour and staff development between the employer and the employee. This implies that Human Capital Theory (previously discussed) underlies the intent of staff development in HEIs. The notion that the process of learning (especially interaction and debate) in HEIs is valued, seems to have close ties with Social Capital Theory. What seems to be a contradiction, in this regard, is that government's epistemological take on staff development in HE in South Africa is that it is best understood in the conceptual parameters of Human Capital Theory (where employees are seen as cogs in the institutional machinery).

The contemporary view of Human Capital Theory is that investment in education and training is not necessarily a yardstick for economic growth. It claims, instead, that education enhances people's abilities to cope with change, to think independently and to apply changing technologies in an organisational context as they deem fit (Baptiste, 2001:187; Wozniak 1984:71). It also shows a close resemblance to Social Capital Theory (refer Chapter 2, §2.5) in the sense that it emphasises staff development's close affinity with the processes of interaction in the quest for skills and knowledge (Burt, 2005:11 and 93; Svendsen *et al.*, 2004:11). In other words, the



spin-off, by-product or surplus value of interaction proverbially triggers the individual into action (to cope with change) (Crossley, 2006:286; Svendsen, 2004:11-13 and 18; Collier, 2003:20; Gabby *et al.*, 2001:6; Lin, 1999:32).

Knight *et al.* (2006: 313), Blackmore (2006:377), Shahnaz *et al.* (2005: 578), Clegg (2003:41), Nicholls (2001:10), Zuber-Skerritt (1997b:178 and 201) and Boud (1995:210), argue that learning occurs whether or not there is formal instruction. These authors by implication draw attention to the value of the learning process. Similarly, Knight *et al.* (2006:313), Steyn (2004:217), Cowan *et al.* (2004:448), Wexley (2002:2); Boud (1995), Nicholls (2001) and Clegg (2003) argue that most of the learning that occurs in HEIs¹² is informal and may even be incidental. In addition, Frick (2007:1), Knight *et al.* (2006: 317), Steyn (2004:217) and Boud (1995:219) emphasise that the means of learning acquisition in HEIs is fundamentally driven by the concept of self-regulated learning rather than being founded on learning enforcement which depends on facilitators. This is informative because, as Harrison and Kessels (2004:16) and Clegg (2003:40) argue, the autonomy that employees (in particular HEI's employees) have in determining their own learning activities, minimises the control that both central policies and assigned facilitators have over employees' learning activities.

Against this background, it is argued that staff development in HEIs is not only a historical practice but also a divergent practice. The rationale behind HEIs staff development practices is to further the interests of both the individual employee and the HEI concerned. Staff development practices are valued, among other things, for the process of learning. Its primary focus is, therefore, not on providing the individual with a credentialled certificate or qualification after the successful completion of a learning intervention. Although it is not my intention to downplay the value of credentialled learning, I nevertheless concur with Blackwell and Blackmore (2003:27) when they claim that credentialled learning is desirable since it: "add[s] to coherence and academic credibility". My intention is rather to highlight the fact that one of the predominant characteristics of staff development in HEIs is its focus on the process of learning (in other words the interaction and reflection that occur during learning) and not on the awarding of credentials. In Chapter 2 I elaborate on this point by following a thematic approach.

1.6 Explanation of key terms

The following definitions, which act as conceptual and theoretical guides to the researcher's scientific frame of reference, are provided.

1.6.1 Higher Education Institution

The Higher Education Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997:8) defines a Higher Education Institution as "any institution that provides Higher Education on a full-time, part-time or distance basis and which is –

- a) established or deemed to be established as a public Higher Education Institution under this Act;
- b) declared as a public Higher Education Institution under this Act".

1.6.2 Skills Development Act

The Skills Development Act, No.97 of 1998 (SDA) (Republic of South Africa, 1998b) was enacted in 1998 to bring about major improvement in the quality of skills development at a national level, to reform training initiatives and create greater access to learning; and to make the workplace arena an active learning environment (Republic of South Africa, 1998b; Layton- Matthews 2004:1).

1.6.3 Skills Development Levies Act

The Skills Development Levies Act, No 9 of 1999 (SDLA) (Republic of South Africa, 1999) serves as the funding mechanism for the SDA (Botha, 2003a:3; National Skills Authority, 2003:3; Coetzee, 2000:10). In terms of the SDLA, employers are liable with effect from 1 April 2001 for the payment of a skills development levy equal to 1% of the remuneration paid or payable by an employer to its employees during any month. The implementation of the SDA and SDLA is regarded as a fundamental step in the development of the government's overall human resources development strategy (Cloete, 2005:7; Van der Westhuizen, 2004:50; Van Dijk, 2003:2; Department of Labour, 2001a:4-9; Mercurio *et al.*, 2000:12).

1.6.4 Staff development in HEIs

One of the most commonly used definitions of staff development is the definition given by Warren and Glatter (1977:25), namely: "A systematic attempt to harmonise individuals' interest and wishes, and their carefully assessed requirements for

¹² Here, I refer to all learning that does not take place in structured study programmes and

furthering their careers with the forthcoming requirements of the organisation in which they are expected to work." Kapp (1995:11) broadens this definition of staff development by adding "... *all activities, actions, processes and procedures that an institution has developed or uses to enhance the performance and the potential of its human resources*". From the above it would seem that Kapp (1995:11) favours a Human Capital approach to staff development in HEIs, whereas Warren and Glatter (1977:25) favour a Social Capital approach to this.

1.6.5 Skills Development Facilitator

The regulations made under the Skills Development Act on funding and related issues state that employers must nominate a Skills Development Facilitator (SDF) who will be responsible for the development, planning and management of the organisation's skills development plan and report (Republic of South Africa, 1999:11). The role of the SDF is: "to assist [the] employer and employee in workplace skills development" (Bellis, 2000:166).

1.7 Scope of the investigation

This study spans the period 2004 – 2008 and focuses on the SDFs perceptions of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in their particular HEIs. The aim of this study, therefore, is to gain an understanding of the rationale for and the meaning of HEIs' employee staff development practices. It also aims to understand the rationale for and the meaning of the implementation of the SDA. In this regard it is important to investigate the match and/or mismatch between staff development practices on the one hand and the implementation of the SDA on the other. The intention of the study is not to take into account the visible changes that have occurred in HEIs since the implementation of the Skills Development Act, nor to make suggestions concerning the way in which HEIs should align their skills development practices with the SDA. The purpose is rather to identify and critique the underlying social manifestations (historical, structural and economic) of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.

Although South Africa as a whole is the domain of the implementation of the SDA, the scope of this study is limited to the meaning of staff development in public HEIs in South Africa. Accordingly, the literature review is limited to the rationale for and the meaning of the implementation of the SDA and those of staff development in SA

which does not end with the award of a formal qualification.



HEIs. Publications falling in the scope of staff development in SA HEIs are limited, however. I have therefore extended my literature review to cover the domain of staff development as it has evolved over time in national and international HEIs. The literature review on staff development was, therefore, not restricted to South African HEIs alone; it was also extended to include the historical rise of staff development practices in international and national HEIs in order to determine the critical features of staff development as these features emerged in SA and in other countries.

The domain of staff development in SA HEIs remains central to the present study, but the focus of this investigation is my endeavour to understand rather than generalise the participating SDFs' perceptions of the effects of the SDA on staff development in SA HEIs. Consequently, the aim of this study, as a critical emancipatory endeavour, is to understand the critical features of skills development in higher education and the critical features of implementation of the SDA by SDFs, including the match and/or mismatch between staff development practices on the one hand and the implementation of the SDA on the other.

1.8 Research design and methodology

I have adopted the approach of critical theory¹³ which posits that critique¹⁴ leads to understanding which, in itself, is emancipatory (Box, 2005:6; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:26-28; Lee, 2004:1; Morrow and Brown, 1994:7; Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 88; Habermas, 1984:1-17; Habermas, 1992:3-8). Critical theory furthermore suggests that in any society there will always be some form of dominance and repression (based on differences of interests). The reason for the dominance and repression can, however, only be understood when considering the particular context (Box, 2005:6). As a result, the propositional lens through which I seek to construct meaning is vested in my academic conviction that the SDA should not simply be accepted – out of hand – as an unproblematic, democratic and fair solution to South Africa's skills development quest. It is through this lens that I aim to construct meaning from my reading of the body of scholarship as well as to relay the spoken and unspoken voices of the participants in this study in order to understand the

¹³ Although the rules of grammar dictate that Critical Theory be written in capital letters, I do not do so in this study because Critical Theory is a widely known and widely accepted epistemological paradigm.

¹⁴ Critique in this regard refers to questioning the political and ideological context (Lee, 2004:1; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:26). Another dimension of critique is that it is associated with the: "self-reflexivity of the investigator" (Morrow and Brown, 1994:7).



SDFs' perceptions of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs' staff development practices.

The aim of the present study favours a critical ethnographic design that allows for a participatory, critical enquiry committed to social emancipation (Denzin, 2000:282-285; Patton, 2002:134; Henning *et al.*, 2004:43). Accordingly, I set myself the goal of immersing myself in the ways that people think about their own thinking. In a way, my intention strongly resembles a form of conscious self-criticism (self-reflexivity) in the sense that I am required to attempt to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform the present study, as well as of my own subjective and inter-subjective claims, and my normative frame of reference. My study is therefore a transformative endeavour, unembarrassed by political labels and unafraid to espouse emancipatory goals (Denzin *et al.*, 2000:291; Henning *et al.*, 2004:23).

The participants in this study are the seven Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs) of seven HEIs in the Gauteng region as well as two members of staff in HEIs (one of whom works in an HEI in the Limpopo Province) who specialise in staff development in HEIs. The two members of staff were selected to serve as a monitoring group to help validate the investigative process and to assist me with designing the questions that would help me to answer my research problem. These participants form part of a purposive convenience sample in the sense that they are all SDFs in HEIs in the Gauteng Province. They were also deliberately chosen because of their representivity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and geographic proximity to the place where the study was undertaken. I regard myself as the eighth member of the SDF group, as I was an active participant-observer, as described in paragraph 1.2 above. Since the research is epistemologically embedded in a critical interpretative approach, I worked qualitatively. It should, however, be noted that my justification for using qualitative methodology can be found in the fact that the data that were gathered and reviewed for this particular study provided clear, unrestricted access to the practices (words, beliefs, underlying reasons or grounds for actions, the personally appropriated signs that mark one's place in social space) of the SDFs (participants) in the study. The data were discussed in the public sphere so that access could be gained to the underlying issues. My choice of methodology and research design is explained and justified fully in Chapter 3.

The extensive literature study pertaining to the rationale for and aims of the implementation of the SDA as well as staff development in HEIs forms the theoretical framework within which this study is located. It also highlights the lacunae in the knowledge base. I made use of multiple data sources and collection methods so that I could penetrate the varied standpoints and experiences of the SDFs and also strengthen the reliability index of the study. The following data sources and collection instruments for this investigation were chosen:

- Case studies¹⁵ of HEIs regarding staff development. The case studies were analysed to determine how deeply historical inequities were woven into the fabric of staff development. The information given represents the larger context at a watershed point to confront the structures, policies, practices and relations that organise and ensure persistent inequality in staff development and the provisions of the SDA.
- An analysis of staff development policies and legislation on skills development. This allowed me to delve beneath the surface information to determine how certain ideologies privilege some and marginalise other employees.
- Semi-structured¹⁵ telephone interviews with the participant group.
- Face-to-face interviews with each individual in the participant group.

The views, responses and field notes obtained in the investigation were prepared for a computer-aided data analysis process. The computer-aided qualitative data analysis software identified for this particular study is *Atlas.ti*TM. *Atlas.ti*TM is a computer-aided qualitative data analysis program, which allows for the analysis of textual and audio visual data. *Atlas.ti*TM goes beyond coding and data retrieval to include "... visual displays of the hierarchical relationships between codes and the construction of conceptual diagrams or networks" (Willig, 2001:151). *Atlas.ti*TM facilitates the use of direct quotations to enrich the data representation. The use of computer-aided qualitative data analysis is specifically indicated when dealing with large amounts of unstructured textual material (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004:129). I envisaged a lengthy and intense process of coding, categorising and connecting themes in order to extract meaning from the selected data. The search for relationships, trends, spirit and values derived from introspection and self-reflection

¹⁵ "Case studies", in this regard refer to documentation pertaining to particular HEIs and what they did to manage staff development in their institutions. Here, it is not meant to refer to a particular research design type.

and placing these in the wider context of the investigation form part of the continuous critical interpretation process. The data have been presented in network displays and visually illustrate emerging trends, to enhance the understanding of these trends. It is envisaged that the outcomes of this study could contribute to a new understanding of SDFs' perceptions of the effects of the implementation of the SDA on staff development practices in HEIs.

1.9 Anticipated research constraints

At the outset of this study, some of the anticipated research constraints should be noted and means of circumventing or reducing their impact suggested. My main concern relates to the spirit of this study: a critique¹⁶ of contesting ideologies could easily set the tone of the study as negative critique simply for the sake of critique, eventually defeating the intention of the study. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000:279) and Kincheloe and McLaren (2005:304) postulate that any critical interpretative study is political in nature because it implicates the participant in moral questions about desirable forms of social relations. This means that the design of the study will stir emotions and therefore, to minimise the possibility of an emotionally aggravating tone, confrontational views were avoided at the start of the study. Instead, I preferred to explain the process and intent of the discourse in the hope that a relationship of trust would help me gain an insider's perspective of the working life of the participating SDFs. The point here is that critique is based on collaborative relations with the research subjects (Guba and Lincoln, 2005:201). I believed that if I did not proceed in this manner, I would defeat the aim of the study. Moreover, the knowledge that could be gained could easily turn into an account of the conflicts emanating from the implementation of the SDA, instead of focusing on the historical and socio-economic reasons for such conflicts. For this reason, I attempted to use a conversational style of interviewing, aimed at persuading the participants to produce a particular articulation of knowledge (Guba *et al.*, 2005:201). My reason for following a conversational style is that, apart from circumventing an anticipated confrontational relationship, I am a critical and curious person who tries to understand rather than to be understood.

Accessing information at the ETDP SETA and at the target HEIs could be a problem, since it is scarce and information might be classified or not available for public



scrutiny. Documentation pertaining to policy matters is traditionally not open to public scrutiny. SDFs or members of staff at the EDTP SETA might feel that disclosing information would jeopardise their position. This meant that permission had to be sought before releasing such information, and that this could be time-consuming. In any case, I preferred to seek the permission of the executive officer of the ETDP SETA and the human resources directors of the participant HEIs. At a national Higher Education Human Resources Directors Forum held in May 2005, the intention of this particular study was shared, although its aims were not disclosed. Since the directors were in principle not opposed to the study, this did in fact work to my advantage when I applied for permission to access information from the seven HEIs.

In conclusion, my research endeavour aims to understand rather than to generalise. As a consequence, I acknowledge that my study may have low transferability to other cases. I also acknowledge that I will be interpreting data from a Eurocentric point of view, when a deeper understanding of the current culture related to Skills Development in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa as experienced by existing (and racially transformed) HE governance structures may, in actual fact, be crucial.

1.10 Outline and organisation of the study

The study is framed as a critical interpretative approach to determine the perceptions of the SDFs with regard to the effects of the implementation of the SDA on staff development in HEIs. This chapter provides background information on the aims of the SDA and staff development in HEIs as well as a summary of what the study entails. The remaining chapters will endeavour to show how the research aim presented in the first chapter was approached and addressed. Chapter 2 contains a review of the body of scholarship in order to contextualise the present study in the knowledge domain of the SDA and staff development in HEIs. Chapter 3 gives an explanation and justification of the choice of research design, and outlines the methodological strategies used to achieve the aims of this study. This includes a detailed discussion of the instruments employed as well as strategies for enhancing their reliability. In addition, the software package *Atlas.ti*TM used for data analysis is explained.

¹⁶ Critique does not simply refer to mere "criticism"; instead it refers to a deep examination of the conditions under which any particular form of thinking could operate (Ritzer and Smart,



The fourth chapter consists of a discussion of the empirical data findings. Chapter 5 is devoted to critical interpretative commentary, resulting in a nuanced understanding of the findings of the study, namely as indicated by the research title, skills development in public higher educations in South Africa. It is in this chapter where I endeavour to associate the theory and the data with each other. Here I provide a synthesis or summary of the data presented in the previous data chapters. In Chapter 5, I furthermore interpret the data in the light of my theoretical or conceptual framework described in Chapter 2. This chapter is absolutely crucial to my study, since it aims to take the data beyond the specific case that I have studied, and interprets its meanings in the broader national context of scholarship on the subject.

The lack of knowledge with regard to the effects of the implementation of the SDA within HEIs that may be identified in this study might invite scholars to undertake further investigations in this field. All the captured data and transcriptions on *Atlas.ti*TM are provided on a compact disc for reference purposes.