

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Efforts to involve participants as research partners build on well-established participatory research (PR) methods. New spaces and opportunities are emerging for locals to engage in research partnerships PR at a variety of levels (Gaventa, 2006). Such efforts create opportunities both for promoting community development and for improving the scientific study of issues affecting the lives of people in communities. PR projects have recently addressed several international development issues (Chambers, 1997), organisational change (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), community development and advocacy needs (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Horton & Freire, 1990), and healthcare and community health promotion (Schulz, Israel & Senk, 2006a; Schulz, Gravlee, Williams, Israel, Mentz & Rowe 2006b; Srinivasan, O’Fallon & Dearry, 2003).

Research approaches such as PR, and community action research in particular, have challenged some of the traditional positivist approaches in social research, as PR purports that the community of interest engages in the research process as a full partner in the development and implementation of a project (Green, 2001). Traditionally, qualitative research is done in communities with human participants, in which research seeks to describe social issues as scientific research (Dickson, 2000). A conventional approach to community research generally views community members as subjects of a research project instead of as partners in research (Israel, Schulz, Parker & Becker, 1998). However, some evidence indicates dissatisfaction with the typical relationship between communities and researchers where research is conducted (Amen, 2001; Maurana & Goldberg, 1996; Rappaport, 1997; Roesch & Dion-Stout, 2003).

The philosophy of PR is that the researcher is expected to acknowledge and appreciate that participants possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be viewed as partners in the research process (Maalim, 2006). PR is meant to provide local people with the necessary space to make their voices count. This research orientation requires a style of interaction and approach that is conducive to people’s initiatives and thus opens up transformational possibilities (Cornwall, 1995).

Based on my readings on participatory methodology, I concluded that an upsurge of interest in PR and its methodological problems has been evident over the last decades, particularly in case studies that add insight into the process. To be specific, several case studies have been conducted on the experiences of researchers carrying out PR (Kniefel, 2000; Maguire, 1993). For example, the case studies conducted by Kniefel (2000) and Maguire (1993) are process studies of undertaking PR, exploring what may be learned from such experiences. Although some case studies focus on collaboration between universities and communities (Savan & Sider, 2003; Santelli, Singer & DiVenere, 1998; Benson, Reardon, 1995), these studies often emphasise the research that has been conducted rather than the process of collaboration from the perspectives of academic research partners. They do not look into power, politics and partnership issues as experienced by co-researchers. Furthermore, the need for continued research on issues of power and relationships in PR still exists (Chambers, 2004).

Power and relationships have become a pervasive theme in PR in the 21st century (Chambers, 2004; Groves & Hinton, 2004; Archer & Newman, 2003; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). Some researchers have opened new ground in exploring power and how it can be transformed in PR. For example, Kakande (2007) has written on the effects of donor harmonisation and power. Therefore, power relations involved in interaction was central to the current study, treating participating teachers as co-researchers and equal partners in research. Such interaction and power relations involved in partnerships have not been examined specifically within the remit of a process of partnership with academic researchers, from the perspective and experiences of co-researchers as a potentially marginalised group. Co-researchers might be seen as partners who come from the margins, who organise and act collectively, as compared to academic researchers. Reid (2004) argues that research participants interested in social change, action research, or emancipation, regardless of theoretical frame, may be marginalised to some degree within the academy. Some academic feminists have tended to maintain control over research projects and knowledge creation as have conventional non-feminist researchers, rarely empowering the women they study (Maguire, 1987). In my study, teachers as co-researchers were not marginalised, however I did acknowledge and appreciate that teachers participated as change agents and that they are not on the same level of research capability as academic researchers.

A distinct division exists between academic research and the needs of communities beset by poverty. Researchers have generally conducted research that has been influenced by academic disciplines (Greenwood & Levin, 2000; Ansley & Gaventa, 1997) or designed within the

context of university departments (Checkoway, 2001), with the quest of adding to existing knowledge in a particular field of research. To that end, the products of research are typically of primary interest to the researchers within the discipline and not to communities who act as research participants (Sclove, Scammell & Holland, 1998). Even though some researchers conducting conventional academic research believe that the information they produce might lead to change, change is generally merely incremental (Greenwood & Levin, 2000), and may not necessarily benefit underserved communities. As Stoecker (2003:2) says: ‘Being truly useful, and being part of real social change, is something too few of us academics get to experience on a regular basis’. Nyden, Figert, Shibley and Burrows (1997a:3) introduced the idea of ‘opposing orientations to research’, specifically research that is designed for empowerment versus research that is created to further an academic discipline agenda. These seemingly opposing orientations have created a gap between academics and community leaders who otherwise might work together. Based on the insights gained from opposing orientations, researchers have reorganised their efforts into a PR process in which the community becomes a partner in research, planning and decision-making. In just two short decades, colleges and universities have begun to transform themselves, moving from isolation to becoming integrated into the community and engaging their faculties and students to collaborate with groups outside the academy (Chambers, 2004; Stoecker, 2003).

Nyden *et al.* (1997a) view collaboration in community-based research as a process that has the potential to bring together academic researchers and communities to partner in research that may be relevant to the lives of community members and bring about social change. McAllister (1999) argues that the rationale for using PR may be functional, to encourage community participation in order to improve the usefulness of research to local people. Another reason for using PR may be for empowerment or social transformation to strengthen local people’s capacity in decision-making in research, in order to improve their awareness of options and to strengthen their ability to act on and respond to local needs.

While literature describing community/university research partnerships and/or the outcomes of these research collaborations abounds, little has been done to study the actual process of collaborative research (Buckeridge, Glazier, Harvey, Escobar, Amrhein & Fran, 2002), specifically in terms of power relations as experienced by co-researchers who are viewed as equal partners. The few studies that describe community/university research partnerships have noted that, as organisations and individuals are brought together to form research partnerships, differences in their organisational cultures are often apparent (Ferman & Hill,

2004; Lerner & Simon, 1998; Stoecker, 2005). These differences relate to issues of power, expertise, and control; and are exacerbated by communication problems and discrepancies in resources (Barnsley, 1995, 1996; Bickel & Hatrup, 1991; Ferman & Hill, 2004; Peterson, 1993). Yet, the question remains as to how co-researchers (fulfilling the role of partners in research) experience their role in a seemingly different hierarchy; and secondly, how power relations might affect their experiences.

There is no reason to assume that power relations will not influence even the most carefully designed PR. Though everyone possesses and is affected by power, the meaning of power and ways of understanding it are diverse and often contentious. Theorists concerned with power can be grouped into two categories. Firstly, there are those who take a structural conflict approach, such as Gramsci (1957), Lukes (1974) and Marx (1959). This position contrasts with that of Bourdieu (1977), Foucault (1977) and Taylor (2008), who view power in more fluid terms, seeing it everywhere and as something that everyone can aspire to and grasp by deciding to participate, learning the rules of engagement and becoming empowered. These theorists include the role of agency in the overall dynamics of power relations.

Some researchers (Berger, 1974; Dahl, 1957; Foa & Foa, 1974; French & Raven, 1959; Gaventa, 2006) see power as held by actors, some of whom are powerful while others are relatively powerless. Others (Lukes, 1974, 2005) view power as more pervasive, embodied in a web of relationships and discourse which affects everyone, but is held by no single actor. PR has emphasised abdication of power and passing much of the initiative and control to local people, using a metaphor of ‘handing over the stick’ (Chambers, 2004:29) According to Chamber’s reasoning, ‘handing over the stick’ implies that the researcher will let go of the power s/he has in terms of claiming to know it all or be an ‘expert’. The researcher’s role is rather one of facilitation and allowing the co-researchers to take the lead of investigating the problem, do analysis, generate information and take ownership of the outcome of the process. The thrust of PR is to reverse domination, to empower more than to extract. The question that remains, however, is: How much ‘handing over the stick’ actually occurs as experienced by co-researchers?

1.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In this study, I set out to investigate the experiences of teachers as co-researchers who have collaborated with university researchers in an asset-based intervention project known as

STAR¹. The STAR intervention is a longitudinal project that commenced in 2003. The goal of STAR is to establish collaboration and partnerships with teachers in order to promote resilience in schools by means of supportive networks. The STAR intervention further underscores the importance of capacity development to provide intervention for communities at risk (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012). The STAR intervention adopts an asset-based approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) using Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA) principles, where teachers use existing resources, assets, skills and abilities to address community challenges and bring about social change.

STAR rests on the belief that teachers are well positioned to understand the challenges faced by the communities they work in (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011). The STAR intervention is implemented during four sessions of two to three days each. After mapping the community and identifying challenges, assets and potential assets, teachers develop action plans that could address challenges through the identified resources and potential resources. Teachers continually provide progress reports on the implementation of the planned initiatives, serving as a strategy for monitoring and evaluation (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012).

In this study, the community partners participating were teachers (referred to as co-researchers), from two of the STAR schools, located in Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. These teachers have been collaborating with researchers from the University of Pretoria since 2003/4, to mobilise existing assets and potential resources within the community, in order to provide school-based psychosocial support to school communities (Ebersöhn, 2006; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012; Ferreira, 2006). Through the collaborative efforts of teachers as co-researchers and academic researchers, the project has brought about social change in school communities. Against this background, I set out to explore power relations or the so-called ‘handing over the stick’ as experienced by these teachers in the role of co-researchers. The ‘handing over the stick’ idea is characterised by how co-researchers, who can be regarded as marginalised people, experience a sense of capacity to act, and how they might mobilise assets for capacity building.

The word participation may mean different things. In this study, I focused on participation with particular reference to the experiences of co-researchers (teachers) as research partners

¹ STAR (Supportive Teachers, Assets and Resilience): Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012.

who have been actively engaged in the STAR intervention. I attempted to explore various facets of participation by asking questions such as: How do people participate? Who participates? Why do they participate? How much power do participants have? How do outsiders and local people view participation? How much do participants gain or lose by participating (or not)? The answers to questions like these (articulated in specific research questions, section 1.5) may add to findings related to the legitimacy, efficiency and efficacy of PR.

1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In terms of my personal motivation to undertake the study, a research opportunity to explore the experiences of teachers as partners in research opened up to me during a presentation on PR methods by Ronél Ferreira in April 2008, when I attended a doctoral support session at the University of Pretoria. During this presentation, she shared with doctoral students her use of participatory methods in research, inspiring me to further explore the use of this methodology that typically results in social change. I expressed my interest in the method to her after the session. Subsequently, she invited me to join her and Liesel Ebersöhn in STAR. Ronél had done her PhD research under Liesel's supervision, exploring and describing the manner in which a South African informal settlement community coped with HIV and AIDS by relying on existing assets and local resources (Ferreira, 2006). This initial study extended to involve several postgraduate student studies (Loots, 2010; McCallaghan, 2007; Mnguni, 2006), collectively constituting the STAR intervention. Based on these interrelated research studies and the development of the broad research project, I chose to explore teachers' experiences of participating in this asset-based intervention project as partners in research, specifically in terms of power relations to engage partners in research.

PR encompasses a variety of approaches that directly engage those who are typically 'participants' of research in some aspect of developing or implementing research activities (Boser, 2006). Participatory researchers work 'with' rather than 'for' the researched, breaking down the distinction between researchers and the researched while legitimising the knowledge people are capable of producing (Fals-Borda, 2001). Consequently, participatory researchers outline and utilise explicit processes to facilitate 'ordinary' people's reflections on and analysis of their realities. They attempt to involve participants in the entire research process (Fals-Borda, 2001). Participants make decisions about the study format and data analysis.

This approach is designed to create social and individual change by altering relationships in research projects (Reinhars, 1992).

PR approaches share the practice of engaging those whose lives are affected by research into research with members of the local community, typically shaping the research questions to address locally defined concerns. PR espouse that through a dialectical process of collective reflection and action ‘conscientisation’ (Freire, 1987) the community and its constituent organisations and individuals may foster a sense of identification and shared fate. Through developing the skills and resources to engage in the cyclical process of diagnosing and analysing problems, they plan, implement, and evaluate strategies aimed at meeting identified needs (Israel, Checkoway, Schulz & Zimmerman, 1994). Community members, organisations and the community as a whole typically gain increased influence and control that can in turn be associated with improved quality of life. In this manner, participatory researchers and community members strive together to facilitate increased knowledge and understanding of a given phenomenon, and taking action to change the situation (Israel *et al.*, 1994).

PR typically operates in a complex, dynamic social milieu and seeks to share the power inherent in knowledge generation with community partners (Boser, 2006). Power relations and power dynamics in research are concepts that have been widely and extensively written about (Gaventa, 2006; Minkler, 2005; VeneKlasen, 2005). In the field of PR, power and power dynamics are highly acknowledged and actively addressed. Furthermore, in PR, it is widely recognised that a study of partnerships must always analyse the power dynamics within systems (Lister, 2005). PR projects are typically conducted with the belief that the very process of participating in constructing knowledge about one’s own context has the potential to equalise asymmetrical power relations.

Assuming that knowledge is power, PR seeks to redirect power imbalances by sharing the power inherent in the knowledge generation process. In other words, the researcher seeks to form a ‘power with’ relationship with co-researchers in the community. Because of this, PR brings a different set of social relations into the research processes. Participatory projects are unique and highly context-specific, and the social relations among those involved in a research project are naturally complex. Power is an important aspect of all relationships, especially close personal relationships, and is conceptualised based on the belief that when people are in close relationships they are likely to depend on one another to attain their goals (Burgoon & Hale, 1984). When people’s goals are in conflict, power may be exercised to

achieve one's own objectives at the expense of those of the other partner. However, power has important implications in PR even when conflicts do not occur (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005).

This study explored how power relations among participants (co-researchers and university researchers) are both revealed and concealed in participatory reflection and action, focusing specifically on forming partnerships. The framework for understanding power relations and power dynamics involved in research is predicated according to feminist standpoint theory, as this theory may provide insight into power, knowledge and social structures (Brookfield, 2001; Jacques, 1992; Ritzer, 1992). Such understanding can in turn shed light on the understanding of the 'inside' beliefs, desires, and thoughts of the co-researchers.

Terms like 'community engagement,' 'partnership' and 'collaboration' mean different things to different people. Because of this ambiguity, expectations about the purpose and nature of community involvement vary substantially among participants and are often not met (Israel, Eng, Schultz & Parker, 2005). Collaboration in PR has the promising potential to give voice to people in communities and to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of achieving challenging community problems. At a practical level, many of the problems that affect the well-being of people in communities, such as substance abuse, poverty, environmental hazards and inadequate access to care, cannot be solved by any person, organisation, or sector working in isolation (Novick, 1995; Reason, 1994; Stringer, 1996). By combining the knowledge, skills, and resources of a broad array of people and organisations, communities can understand the underlying nature of these problems and develop effective and locally feasible solutions to address them (Minkler, Blackwell & Thompson, 2003; Nyden, 2003).

Different stakeholders participate in collaborative efforts to bring about social change in the community in different ways. PR involves a variety of different approaches to community participation, such as consultative participation in which researchers consult with local people in order to make decisions about community needs and to design interventions, hence actively involving communities (Minkler *et al.*, 2003).

1.4 PURPOSE AND POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe (Maree, 2007; Babbie, 2005) partnership dynamics to elucidate power relations and dynamics, as experienced by teachers as co-researchers, in an attempt to inform PRA methodology. The purpose of exploratory

research is to explain a social phenomenon, to predict and describe it (Babbie, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore and provide insight into the process of partnerships in a community asset-based project by teachers as research partners in order to understand how partners' experiences may depict processes and inform methodology.

Despite an understanding of the importance of partnerships in community asset-based projects and existing knowledge on practical issues that emerges during the process of community research collaboration (Baptiste, Paikoff, McKay, Madison, Bell & Coleman, 2005; Secrest, Lassiter, Armistead, Wyckoff, Johnson, Williams & Kotchnick, 2004), limited research incorporates issues of power relations. I thus set out to explore power relations in terms of the dynamics of partnerships as experienced by non-researchers in order to inform participatory methodology.

As a descriptive study, the inquiry describes (Babbie, 2005; Jansen, 2007) partnership dynamics in PR, specifically how co-researchers have been collaborating with institutions of learning to bring about social change in the lives of marginalised people. Descriptive research is meant to describe a situation or event (Babbie, 2005). In essence, this study aimed to describe what transpired when co-researchers, who can be viewed as marginalised people, were brought together to explore the problems they face as a community, working as partners in PR with university researchers. As such, the study may add insight to the field of PR methodology, particularly within an asset-based intervention approach, by explaining power relations in partnerships. Subsequently, the findings of the study may inform best practices and future participatory projects. Central to any development process is an understanding of power relations embedded in the culture and social structure within local communities. The working assumption of the study was therefore that co-researchers could provide insight into the collaboration process of participating as partners in research that may help to make changes for the better in their communities.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question was:

How can insight into teachers as co-researchers' experiences of power relationships broaden knowledge about partnerships in participatory methodology?

In order to answer the primary research question, the following secondary questions were addressed:

- *How do teachers perceive themselves as co-researchers in a collaborative research project in terms of power relations?*
- *How do teachers conceptualise power and partnership in participatory partnership?*
- *How can power be expressed by teachers as co-researchers within a participatory process?*
- *What are the relations of power at play in the specific activities of the STAR intervention?*
- *In which manner might teachers as co-researchers benefit from participation in an asset-based intervention?*
- *Which factors can facilitate or hinder the process of partnership between teachers as co-researchers and university researchers in a research partnership?*

1.6 KEY CONSTRUCTS

In this section, I briefly define the key concepts of this study, to represent my understanding and interpretation of the concepts.

1.6.1 PARTNERS IN RESEARCH

Partners in research refers to members of a partnership, who participate in research. A range of stakeholders can be included, such as institutions, corporations and/or communities (Minkler *et al.*, 2003). In this study, partners in research refers to teachers (n=15: 14 females and 1 male) from the two mentioned participating schools in the STAR project, who have collaborated with researchers from the University of Pretoria, Educational Psychology Department, since 2003/4.

In defining ‘partnership’, I support the following definition by Sanginga (2006:115): ‘A collaborative arrangement between organisations to plan by engaging rural people and other stakeholders in a circular process of analysis, reflection, and action, in which human capacity can be built and prospects for greater innovation can be achieved’. In this definition, partners contribute their expertise and share responsibilities and ownership to increase an understanding of a given phenomenon, and incorporate the knowledge gained with action for capacity building.

Using a community development approach, partnerships imply working together towards a common goal. Partnership is equated with equal participation. Therefore, partnership is about all partners being fully and equally engaged in decision making in terms of the what, when and how work will be done. Beyond consultation, all partners share power equally (Wass, 1994).

1.6.2 POWER

Literature on power is mostly concentrated on the notion of power as dominance. Among the key theorists of power, Lukes (2005) views power as an instrument wielded by one party over another to influence the latter's actions, to prevent participation, or to shape the wants, desires, and interests of the powerless. Lukes (2005) focuses on ways in which the powerful secure the compliance of those they typically dominate, with particular attention to the imposition of internal restraints. However, Taylor and Boser (2006) challenge the way Lukes (2005) views power and state that power involves the focus on power as a function of a dyadic relationship. Other theorists (Lukes, 2005; Karlberg, 2004) contend that power is not limited to a dyadic relationship, as Taylor and Boser (2006) view it, and does not even necessarily require a link between the two parties. Rather, some suggest that power can exist in multidimensional ways, such as among multiple players and in complex roles or embedded within structures (Christians, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Karlberg, 2004). For example, Hayward (1998:9) argues for an understanding of power as 'the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible action' allowing for multiple and nuanced relational possibilities, including the view that power inequities are inherent in a given structure. Foucault's (1980) conceptualisation of power is evident in this radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power. For Foucault (1980), power is diffuse/fluid rather than concentrated. Power is embodied and enacted rather than possessed. Power is discursive rather than purely coercive, and power constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them.

Another theorist, Karlberg (2004), supports Taylor and Boser (2006) by arguing that the focus of theoretical attention on power in domination is limiting. Karlberg (2004) sees power as a capacity, neutral in itself but existing within two critical dimensions: the relational context and the degree to which an imbalance of power exists. Regarding the nature of the relationship, Karlberg (2004) argues that social relations among agents might be characterised by the degree to which those relations demonstrate either adversarial or mutualistic qualities. In adversarial relations, two or more social agents seek to adversely affect the interest of

others. Conversely, mutualistic power relations would reflect those in which two or more social agents are working in cooperation with each other (Karlberg, 2004).

Regardless of the nature of the relations, power, as capacity, may be balanced and equal among social agents (partners), or it may be asymmetrical (Karlberg, 2004). This gives rise to multiple potential sets of relations. For example, in a situation in which parties experience a power imbalance but also mutualistic relations, a cooperative set of social relations can exist in which all parties experience the capacity to act on behalf of their own interests.

Understanding the meaning of power and its implications for participation in partnership is at the core of this study. However, a specific definition of power is deeply contested; depending on which angle and context one perceives it from.

Power is regarded by different scholars as among the fundamental dimensions of human relationships (Dahl, 1957; Lukes, 2005; Gaventa, 2006; Lister, 2005). This study explored how power relations among teachers (participants) were both revealed and concealed in PR. For the purpose of this study, I thus primarily relied on the following definition: 'Power is the capacity to produce intended effects and in particular to influence the behaviour of another person' (Lukes, 2005:128). This definition emphasises the capability to make decisions, act, lead and achieve social change.

1.6.3 TEACHERS

In this study, teachers refer to the teachers from the two schools who have been participating in the STAR intervention project since 2003/4, namely a primary school in the Eastern Cape and a secondary school in Mpumalanga. These teachers are referred to as co-researchers, who are then the partners in research.

1.6.4 EXPERIENCE

Experience refers to a series of events participated in or lived through. It includes people's perceptions on which their own states of reality are based in interaction with the environment (Collins Dictionary, 1998). Habermas (1971) states that 'life world' as a totality of experience includes daily living and concrete value contexts. Hence, the concept of experience according to Habermas (1971) is complemented to allow one to see for whom knowledge is intended.

In this study, experience refers to the co-researchers' knowledge and experiences gained through their involvement in the STAR intervention. Co-researchers shared knowledge and information on how they experienced power relations and being partners in research, and further how they experienced being treated as experts throughout the research process.

1.6.5 COLLABORATION

According to Seaburn, Lorens, Gunn, Gawinski and Mauksch (1996), to collaborate is to create conversations where people are joined together, meanings are fashioned, purposes are defined, roles are clarified, goals are established and action is taken. Together the participants create a culture in which everyone involved contributes to achieve the whole.

Furthermore, collaboration implies a shared decision-making process (Marlow & Nass-Fukai, 2000). It is a co-generative process that makes community-based research dynamic. In this study, the co-researchers as partners in research collaborated with academic researchers from the University of Pretoria, to work together, sharing decisions to bring about social change in the lives of community members.

1.6.6 PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH (PR) PROJECT

PR projects refer to approaches that aim to overcome barriers that researchers face in the economically and socially disadvantaged communities they work in. It engages a variety of role players in the collaborative identification and study of local problems, with the ultimate aim of taking action to improve local conditions (Chambers, 1997). In this study, PR project refers to STAR, where co-researchers and academic researchers have been working together, using an asset-based intervention, to assess and address the needs of school communities.

1.7 PARADIGMATIC ASSUMPTIONS

I conducted the study by using feminist standpoint theory as guiding epistemological paradigm, Gaventa's power cube as theoretical framework and participatory research as methodological paradigm. In the following sections, I provide a broad overview of these choices. Detailed discussions follow in chapter 3.

1.7.1 METATHEORETICAL PARADIGM: FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

Feminist standpoint theory is premised on the notion that individuals are socially constituted as they stand within a social location that is predominated by a particular stance of thinking. Therefore a feminist standpoint stance could reveal insights into power, knowledge and social structures (Brookfield, 2001; Jacques, 1992; Ritzer, 1992). This is further premised on the basis that the production of knowledge is political and that it emerges under conditions that are enmeshed in relations of power between knowers and knowledge itself (Ali, 2006; Campbell, 2004). As the concept of power is the bone of contention in feminist standpoint theory, I am of the opinion that it was appropriate for me to rely on feminism, in my attempt to explore and understand the experiences of teachers while unveiling issues of power relations and partnership dynamics, from participants' own perspectives and local knowledge.

The core of feminist standpoint theory focuses on local sites of power and knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The location of power discourse includes and excludes privileges and issues of knowledge (Halbert, 2006). The interest in power relations, partnership and feminist theory led me to investigate what might become visible if a feminist lens were applied to partnerships and power relations in PR. I used feminist standpoint theory as a possible avenue to obtain an understanding of power dynamics and relations in PR partnership. Feminist standpoint theory provides an approach for overcoming some of the limitations in theorising about diversity. This theory has developed from the Marxist tradition, and provides a systematic approach for theorising the complexities of the lived contexts, experiences and perspectives of women (Harding, 2004; Adam, Howcroft & Richardson, 2001; Haraway, 1991). The theory stresses the importance of acknowledging societal positioning and the ways in which it serves as a subjective vantage point from which persons interact with themselves and the world (Orbe, 1998).

Feminist standpoint theory is generally used to support two research goals. First, the theory is used to foreground the political, social, and material contexts of women's experiences and situated knowledge. Second, this situated knowledge is enlisted for social change. I was able to use the standpoint stream of feminist theory to interpret the experiences of teachers in a world where both men and women's experiences and voices can be fully represented, based on their own perspective. I believe that feminism provided me with a vehicle for gaining insight into the participants' experience of social reality in terms of power and partnerships.

I thus selected a feminist framework for the current study as it could assist me in exploring and highlighting the potential values associated with teachers as partners in research through their collaborative experiences in terms of power relations and partnership. I found it appropriate to utilise a feminist perspective as a tool to understand the complexity of teachers' experiences of partnership, and to obtain an in-depth understanding of the related issues of power relations, knowledge, authority, voice, and empowerment. In line with this, I selected PRA as research design. Both feminism and PRA emphasise relationship building based on reciprocal empowerment and the value of multiple ways of knowing.

1.7.2 THEORETICAL PARADIGM: GAVENTA'S POWER CUBE

For this study, I used Gaventa's (2006) 'power cube' as analytical framework to analyse three dimensions of power: spaces, forms and levels. Gaventa (2006) states that each side of a cube's dimension may be used as the first point of power analysis. He argues that any successful change in power relations requires each of the pieces on each dimension of a cube to align with each other simultaneously (Gaventa, 2006). In order to understand power relations, one should first ask how the spaces of power for participation were created, with whose interests in mind and with what terms of engagement (Gaventa, 2006). In terms of the space dimension, three types of space exist on a continuum. First, there are 'closed spaces' in which one asks if the decisions are made by a set of actors behind closed doors. That is to say, do researchers make decisions and provide services 'to the people' without the need for consultation or their involvement (Gaventa, 2006)? Secondly, 'invited spaces' is concerned with the type of people invited to participate by various authorities (Gaventa, 2006). Invited spaces can either be ongoing or more transient as one form of consultation (Gaventa, 2006). Thirdly, 'claimed/created spaces' are claimed by the less powerless actors from power holders (Gaventa, 2006).

The second dimension of power (Gaventa, 2006) concerns 'forms' of power, which is also referred to as the dynamics of power that shape the inclusiveness of participation within each space. Forms of power involve three dimensions, namely 'visible power', 'hidden power' and 'invisible power'. Visible power refers to observable decision-making, viz. strategies that entail the 'who', 'how' and 'what' (Gaventa, 2006). Hidden power refers to certain powerful people and institutions that maintain their influence by controlling who makes decisions and what is included on the agenda (Gaventa, 2006). Lastly, invisible power is the most insidious form of power as it shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation

(Gaventa, 2006). In this case, certain issues are kept away from the decision-making table and the minds of the people. As a result, it might influence how people think and thus shape their beliefs (Gaventa, 2006). With invisible power, the construction of ‘voices’ in invited spaces is influenced, as participants may merely echo what the power holders who shape the places want to hear (Gaventa, 2006).

Gaventa’s (2003a) power cube lastly emphasises levels of power as a significant dimension. To understand the interaction between levels of power and the ‘places of engagement’, Gaventa particularly distinguishes between international, national and local levels or places of power (Gaventa, 2003a). The concern with how and by whom the spaces for participation are shaped intersects with debates on the places or levels where critical social, political and economic power resides.

1.7.3 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM: PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

I used a PR approach in this study as methodological paradigm. PR involves inquiry based on the existential concept of experience, as proposed by Ortega-Gasset (cited in Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). PR is premised on the core philosophy of inclusivity and of recognising the value of engaging in the research process those who are intended to be the beneficiaries of the research (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Green & Mercer, 2001; Israel, 2003). Therefore, PR is generally defined as ‘systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change’ (Cargo & Mercer, 2008:326). At the heart of PR is the inclusion of marginalised people to take responsibility for researching the problems they face, in a partnership with outsiders (researchers) and to take action for advancing their lives and ultimately reflect on their ongoing experience (Rahman, 2008). The ultimate goal of PR projects is to bring about social change, based on the belief that the process of participating in constructing knowledge about one’s own context could result in equalising the asymmetrical power relations that are often present in social science research (Rahman, 2008).

A basic principle of participatory inquiry approaches is that it reduces the ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ distinction and the assumed unequal power relations concomitant with a traditional research stance (Tinkler, 2004). It is therefore assumed that through PR, implicit knowledge and multiple perspectives will be integrated, which might result in more authentic research. Equal participation of both partners is the ideal for many PR approaches. It has a

number of advantages: to help partnerships balance scientific excellence with social and cultural relevance; foster ownership, capacity building, and empowerment of nonacademic partners; and translate research knowledge into action (Israel *et al.*, 1998). This democratic ideal emphasises the unique strengths, complementary expertise, and shared responsibilities of academic and nonacademic partners who are engaged in a partnership whereby each contributes equally (Israel *et al.*, 1998). PR assisted me in understanding the dynamics of power relations as experienced by teachers participating in a participatory study (STAR intervention).

The concept of power relations is central in PR. Therefore, PR addresses the notion of relationships between power and knowledge. PR argues that its ‘strategies can challenge the deep rooted power inequities’ (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008:172). They (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008:176) further reason that in PR, the goal is to reduce ‘some of the different ways in which power is conceptualised and their implications for research’. It is the goal of this study to view power from a position aspect, where both parties benefit. Chambers (1997:45) succinctly argues that PR is a process that recognises the importance of bringing in the voice of marginalised people’s realities as a ‘basis for action and decision-making, rather than those of the ‘upper’’. In other words, PR allows the diversity of knowledge from different social groups.

1.8 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

Based on the selected paradigmatic approaches I relied on, as well as the chosen theoretical framework, I conducted the study against the background of the following assumptions:

- Some interpretations of power recognise the liberating potential of power. When linking the forms, spaces and levels of power theory with the concept of agency, power can result in a positive connotation that refers to the capacity to act, to exercise agency and to realise the potential of voice, own experience, leadership and the ability to be in charge.
- In PR that recognises the standpoint of participants and is guided by the principles of PRA (Chambers, 1994a), the forms, spaces and levels of power could result in power that finds common interests and builds collective strength based on the synergy which can emerge through partnerships and collaboration.
- The interactions of the positive forms, levels and spaces of power in PR could enable partners to ‘realise an individual’s or group’s goals and to change the world’

(Crocker, 2008:56), so that partners recognise their interdependence and see each other as a community of practice.

- The ultimate goal of leveraging on positive forms, levels and spaces of power that are inclusive in PR is to expand collective agency and promote social change.
- Through PR, the dynamics of power in different arenas will be leveraged by actors through a collective, deliberate planning process, in an enabling environment that results in all actors finding the partnership mutually beneficial.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

In the next section, I briefly introduce the methodological choices I made. Detailed discussions on these aspects follow in chapter 3.

1.9.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

PRA is a methodological design that allows people to come together and learn from each other. PRA is both a methodology and change of attitude technique that combines a number of approaches to enable local or indigenous people to obtain, share, and analyse their knowledge of life and living conditions (Chambers, 1994a; Chambers 1994b). PRA methodology provides a means of increasing the space for participants to express and control the knowledge being created (Goebel, 1998). In this study, I believe that a PRA design provided the participants with the necessary space to express the knowledge being created.

PRA uses a set of principles, a process of communication and a menu of methods for engaging local people to participate by putting forth their points of view (Chambers, 1994b; Mukherjee, 1993). PRA relies on visual, flexible and creative data collection methods such as Venn diagramming, direct observation, and focus groups. The use of PRA lies in pursuing selected objectives through application of its principles, processes and methods. Some of the objectives of PRA; are to attain greater and better involvement of participants by learning about their perceptions, experiences and capabilities; to generate ongoing research on the use of PRA and to suggest improvements for this methodology (Mukherjee, 1993).

The core philosophy of PRA is that the researcher is required to acknowledge and appreciate that the research participants possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be partners in the research process. I took cognisance of the fact that teachers did possess the knowledge and

skills to be partners in the study as they participated in getting answers to the research questions. In order to fully benefit from the selected PRA design, I adhered to its guiding principles as cited by Chambers (1994b), namely 1) reversal of learning, 2) following a ‘they do it’ approach and 3) sharing information and ideas between participants and outsider facilitators.

1.9.2 SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

I conveniently chose (Nieuwenhuis, 2007) two sites (schools) to partner as the unit of analysis. The rationale for convenience sampling is that the study forms part of an ongoing intervention study, STAR (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012). I thus applied convenience sampling to select information-rich sites for an in-depth study. The sites that I chose were a primary school in the Eastern Cape and a secondary school in a remote area in Mpumalanga.

I purposefully selected (Nieuwenhuis, 2007) fifteen participating co-researchers (teachers) from the participating schools in the two provinces, based on the criterion that they had been participating in the STAR intervention project, and acted as STAR facilitators in the dissemination research phase of the STAR project (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012). More detail on the participants and selection procedures are included in chapter 3.

1.9.3 DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION

I relied on crystallisation and employed multiple data generation techniques (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2003). Furthermore, I utilised PRA techniques with direct participation, many of which involve visual activities as an integral part of the study, correlating well with the feminist standpoint epistemology.

I utilised visual representations in the form of drawings and poster photographs as one of the sources of data collection. Additionally, I utilised observation to augment other data collection methods. I observed all the activities and interactions of teachers during data generation activities, thereby becoming a participant observer (Merriam, 1998; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). I employed participant observation, specifically observation-as-context-of-interaction (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000).

In an attempt to obtain in-depth insights into how teachers experienced power and partnerships in the STAR project, I also made use of focus groups. Focus group interviews allowed me to obtain a range of responses and activate details of experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In addition to focus groups, I employed semi-structured interviews with teachers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002), allowing me to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study ‘through the eyes of the participant’ (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87).

I relied on field notes, in order to document what I observed and transpired during PRA-based activities, by using both descriptive and reflective notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the descriptive aspect, provided a word picture of the setting, participants, actions and conversations observed. For the reflective aspect, I captured my own ideas, concerns and thoughts. Field notes thus supplemented other data collection techniques. Additionally, field notes allowed me the possibility of documenting observations as accurately as possible, hence making it possible to establish context and meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The entire research process of data generation was documented in both audio and video recordings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Through audio and video recordings, I was able to add the nuances of people’s voices. Additionally, I transcribed conversations verbatim in order to aid in data analysis. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the data generalisation and documentation procedures I employed.

1.9.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

For data analysis, I made use of some aspects of Charmaz’s (2000) theory to conduct thematic analysis and interpretation, to interpret verbatim transcripts of focus groups, interviews, visual data and observation notes in my research journal. Thematic analysis and interpretation is a systematic inductive method for analysing and interpreting data. This process is interactive as it takes into consideration the co-creation of knowledge and meaning by both the researcher and the participants, and attempt to make an interpretive understanding of participants’ meanings. I engaged participants in the interpretation of data using member checking (see Appendix H).

I was the primary data collector and analyst. I was engaged throughout the research process, giving me the advantage of gaining further insight into the context, which helped me with

interpreting the data. I had large volumes of data to analyse, both in the form of visual data and text. I had to make sense of the raw data in order to identify core meanings in terms of patterns, themes, subthemes, categories and interrelationships, working inductively. I was able to do this by using some aspects of Charmaz's (2000) grounded theory to inform my thematic analysis and interpretation of verbatim transcripts of focus groups, interviews, visual data and observation (refer to section 3.6 for a detailed discussion on data analysis and interpretation). In addition, I regularly consulted with my research supervisors to discuss the data analysis process, particularly the codes and themes that emerged. I thus had the opportunity to go through the process of coding and re-coding with the assistance of my supervisors (Charmaz, 2000). After reaching saturation in terms of the coding process, I finalised the themes and subthemes, by relying on member checking (Charmaz, 2000).

1.10 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY

I aimed to maintain a balance between flexibility and creativity, yet conduct a study in a professionally sound manner that could ensure rigour. Rigour in qualitative research assumes that research findings accurately reflect 'an external objective world' (Essy, 2002:51). Rigorous research also implies that the values, interests and hopes of the researcher do not influence the research. I aimed to enhance trustworthiness in terms of how I interacted, facilitated and applied PRA principles. I continually observed all processes and interactions, making adjustments where needed. I strived to meet the quality criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (2005) in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity.

Polit and Beck (2008:751) define credibility as 'a criterion for evaluating integrity and quality in qualitative research'. Throughout the research process, I attempted to maintain credibility by representing the perspectives and experiences of participants as holistically as possible. I employed the strategy of prolonged and extensive engagement in the field. Peer review and debriefing, as well as an audit trail, were utilised in this study. I also relied on crystallisation, in order to obtain multiple perspectives about the phenomenon under investigation. I subsequently used member checking to enhance all accuracy of the interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Transferability is about the extent to which data may be generalised and the findings be transferred to other research settings (Polit & Hungler, 1995). The aim of this study was not to

generalise but rather to transfer the findings to other research sites and settings (Merriam, 2002). I therefore have provided a thorough, detailed, rich and thick description of the research process, which I anticipate could allow for readers to decide on the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts.

The equivalent of dependability in quantitative research is reliability. Dependability is therefore concerned with consistency of the data collected. Attempting to replicate the study and ultimately get the same results will be a challenge because the outcome of other studies will be different. In an attempt to reach dependable findings, I used an audit trail (Creswell, 2002), where I provide a detailed account of the methods, procedures and decision points in carrying out the study. All data collected from discussions were audio and video recorded and the use of verbatim transcriptions as well as a field journal added to the depth and rigour of the study.

Ladkin (2005:110) asks, ‘is it possible that subjectivity can lead to knowledge which might be valid outside of one’s unique subjective experience?’ Therefore, confirmability is concerned with the possibility of the findings and interpretations being confirmed, reflecting the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Crystallisation reduced the potential effect of bias and enhanced confirmability. I acknowledge the possibility of my own bias, as my values might have had an effect on the way in which I interpreted data. However, in order to guard against bias I employed reflective commentary, in a field journal. To acknowledge my own bias, I also involved others throughout my study, particularly during data analysis and interpretation.

Authenticity refers to the true description of people, events and places. Authenticity within qualitative research therefore indicates whether descriptions and explanations correlate with each other. It refers to the degree to which different points of views are fairly and equally represented (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I attempted to achieve authenticity by using a range of different perspectives (realities) as well as reporting on contradictions and conflicting values, as a result addressing fairness. In order to enhance the authenticity of the research study, I asked the participating teachers to verify the identified themes for authenticity and make sure that their perceptions were understood correctly and accurately captured and reported, hence enhancing ontological authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I also included member checking and an audit trail.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding and accounting for the power dynamics involved and present in the processes of social research is necessary. Power operates at many different levels, both implicitly and explicitly (Alldred, 1998). This has particular resonance for my research which is primarily based on the theme of power.

What is understood as ethical PR has been influenced by debates around feminist methodology. Feminists often engage in debates on reflexivity, positionality, difference and representation in research (McDowell, 1994; Nast, 1994; Staeheli & Lawson, 1994). Several scholars have debated at length about undertaking reflexive research while still engaging in material and political struggles that have meaning and relevance (Mounts, 2002; Nagar, 2002; Raju, 2002; Staeheli & Nagar, 2002). Many feminist methodologies emphasise non-hierarchical interactions, understanding, and mutual learning, where close attention is paid to how the research questions and methods of data collection may be embedded in unequal power relations between the researcher and research participants (Bondi, 2003; Moss, 2002). In this study, I relied on reflexivity to obtain more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content may otherwise get blurred (Sultana, 2007).

I abided by the ethical guidelines stipulated by the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee. Principles relating to ethics include respect for the rights of the participants, participants not being exposed to harm, and voluntary participation (Welman, Cawthorne & Barraclough, 2005). In terms of informed consent, participants were requested to participate in the study of their own free will (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2002). In order to respect their rights, I explained informed consent and the purpose of the study to them before requesting them to sign consent forms. I adhered to the principle of safety in participation (protection from harm) by not exposing participants to physical, psychological or legal harm. I thus ensured that participants were not subjected to unnecessary stress or embarrassment (Sarantakos, 2005).

As participants were sharing their experiences and views, confidentiality and sensitivity was important throughout the study. Mouton (2001) mentions the so-called epistemic imperative, which refers to the moral commitment of researchers in search for truth and knowledge. In order to respect the views of the participants I treated information with the utmost

confidentiality and applied limited anonymity as participants in this study agreed that their faces might be shown through PRA visual activities. The participants were assured of privacy and anonymity, and reminded of their obligation to respect the confidentiality of any information shared by others during the study. In order to maintain rapport, I applied the principle of trust throughout my research process. Participants were not misled in any manner.

1.12 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This thesis comprises of six chapters.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and background to the study

Chapter 1 provides background information on the study and the origins of the idea of the study. The chapter includes information on the statement of the problem, aim of the study, research questions and potential contributions of the study. I also clarified key concepts and provided a brief introduction to the research methodology and the organisation of the study.

CHAPTER 2: Exploring existing literature as background to the study

In this chapter, I explore relevant literature in an attempt to explain the theoretical conceptualisation of the study. I base my discussion on the following aspects: constructs of partnership; power and empowerment; and participation. I conclude the chapter with the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER 3: Research methodology and strategies

In chapter 3, I discuss the selected epistemology, research methodology, data generation and documentation, data analysis and interpretation employed in the study. I also discuss quality criteria and the ethical guidelines I considered.

CHAPTER 4: Results of the study

In this chapter, I present the results of the study in terms of the themes and subthemes that emerged. I provide examples of contributions to enrich the discussions of the results.

CHAPTER 5: Relating research findings to existing literature

In chapter 5, I relate the findings of the study to the literature I reviewed in chapter 2. I highlight similarities and differences between the findings of the study and the existing body of knowledge. I also highlight silences that I identified.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, I draw conclusions in terms of my research questions, based on the findings I obtained. I reflect on the study in terms of the challenges I faced and the potential value that the study holds. I conclude by making recommendations for future research, practice and training.

1.13 CONCLUSION

In this introductory chapter of the study, I presented the background and problem statement of the study. Additionally, I included information on the aim of the study, research questions and potential contributions thereof. Furthermore, I presented a brief description of the research design, data generation strategies and analysis.

In chapter 2, I present the literature review that guided me in planning and conducting an empirical study (chapter 3), and interpreting the results (chapter 4 and 5) I obtained.

