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## CHAPTER 6: INTEGRATION, LIMITATIONS, REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

As the final section of the research process, chapter six encapsulates the four aspects listed in the heading. This chapter has been preceded by an outline of the context in which research methodology training is currently positioned, the chosen theoretical framework, the research design and the results of investigations into the content of curricula and the beliefs of the academics that construct the courses. Thus far it can be said that alternate paradigms focusing on philosophies that dictate the use of qualitative methods are increasingly included in methodology courses and juxtaposed against traditional positivist approaches to research. Another influential factor is the new educational paradigm that prevails in South Africa, namely, outcomes-based education. This paradigm emphasises the importance of creating a learning environment in which context and relationships are acknowledged. A specific learning environment is created that is in contrast to the traditional environment. The latter environment encouraged rote learning where teachers dictate to students the different research methods and how they should be practised correctly to establish the truth about a phenomenon. Students memorise the methods and are able to repeat them (to a greater or lesser extent) on demand. The message that is communicated about research methodology in this environment is that it consists of separate parts that have no relationship to one another.

In an outcomes-based paradigm teachers and learners are provided the opportunity to be actively involved in the construction of the curriculum. The emergent education paradigm that encourages an environment of learning about alternate research paradigms and the politics of knowledge may be more viable in a learning context that stresses that “it is the *nature* of the *relationship* between the parts that *defines* the nature of a particular environment” (Lubisi et al., 1998, p. 75). This is the pattern that connects, the description of the relationship between different parts of a phenomenon that Bateson (1979) described. According to Bateson, the education system fails to teach students about the pattern that connects:

Why do schools teach almost nothing of the pattern which connects? Is it that teachers know that they carry the kiss of death which will turn to tastelessness whatever they touch and therefore they are wisely unwilling to touch or teach anything of real-life importance? Or is it that they carry the kiss of death *because* they dare not teach anything of real-life importance? (p. 16).

South African education policy reform has sought to address the issue of real-life relevance. Specifically, it has turned to proponents of Mode 2 knowledge to inform initiatives for change. These circumstances will form the background of the discussion that is presented in this chapter consisting of four sections. Firstly an integration of the literature, theory and findings will be presented. This assimilation consists of six parts: (1) a brief note on the content of under-graduate methodology courses, (2) the curriculum as a

dialogical activity *à la* Habermas, (3) the researcher as expert and the expert teacher, (4) social disregard, (5) normal and abnormal dialogues, and (6) the effects of current higher education policy on the curriculum. The discussion will not be dealt with in two parts as with the format of previous chapters, but will be structured in the six parts scheduled above with an emphasis on either the quantitative results or the qualitative results or both at times. The aim is not to present the truth, but to convince the reader that the researcher has “uncovered sufficient reliable indications that the knowledge claim is the best of the available alternatives” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 259) because, as Muller (2000, p. 163) stated “... some research findings tell us more than others do ... some claims to knowledge are less valid than others are ...”. Secondly, the limitations of the study will be exposed, such as the lack of participation of HBUs. Thirdly, some of the researcher’s personal reflections about the research will be expressed, mainly regarding the positioning of research methodology in the discipline of psychology and how some of the limitations of the study were due to factors such as insularity of tertiary institutions caused by historical separate development in South Africa. Lastly, suggestions are made for future and/or additional research on the topic of under-graduate research methodology courses in the social sciences based on the idea of academic communities of practice. The initiation of specific research projects arising from the findings of this study is anticipated. The discussion of these projects concludes this chapter.

## **6.2 Some notes on content: the quantitative-qualitative debate**

Tashakkori and Teddlie’s (2003) finding that research courses in the US are either quantitative or qualitative is not echoed in the data from this study at South African universities. In South Africa the majority of courses include quantitative and qualitative content. There is, however, a heavy reliance on the methods that are linked to the traditional scientific paradigm described in chapter 2. This seems to be because the content applicable to this approach dominates the curriculum and supplementary and/or compulsory modules are usually based on statistical and/or psychometric content. It is interesting that none of the interviewees that teach a mixed methods course explicitly stated that quantitative research is the most fundamental aspect of their curriculum, although the results from phase 1 could be interpreted in this way. The student is thus exposed to a specific system of doing research, namely, using quantitative methods and to a lesser degree, qualitative methods.

It also seems that methods courses are not integrated into substantive disciplines and some are even becoming interdisciplinary efforts. As argued by Williams (2000), there is no ontological foundation for social research methods, merely epistemological justifications of the methods that are used to study the social world. If students are trained only in these methods without a link to what Williams calls a substantive discipline, such as psychology, sociology and so on, a situation would arise where we “run the risk of producing technologists who are equipped only in investigative skills (and perhaps their methodological/philosophical foundations) and have little or no knowledge of sociological or political theory (etc.)” (Williams, 2000, p. 163). The interdependence between substantive disciplines and their fields of research is an important issue that should be investigated as it has implications for the way in

which students are trained in research. As Williams asks, should students be trained solely in tools for the investigation of the social world or should the training be linked to a 'non-investigative social science'?

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999b) have argued that following a strict methodological path leads to a methodolatory position where the context, within which knowledge is produced, is ignored. The role of context in social research has been discussed in numerous sources (see, for example, Firestone, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mouton, 1996; Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1983; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999a). One of the aspects that these discussions have in common is that the term 'context', in social research, refers to the background information that the researcher provides together with the findings from an investigation so as to allow the reader to understand the features that have shaped the particular human experience that was studied. This definition of context does not restrict itself to an interpretive approach as inferred by Kelly (1999), but can also be applied to positivistic research as described by Firestone (1990). Firestone uses the term 'contextualising' to refer to the procedure of providing the reader with the necessary information to make an informed decision about the applicability of the research.

The role that context could play in quantitative studies is not always conceptualised in the way it is described above. Mouton (1996) discussed possible sources of error in research that could originate from the context in which researchers find themselves and illustrated this by saying that "[s]tudies on the influence of the research setting have shown that the researcher's impressions of the participant's home or place of work frequently led to significant data bias" (p. 155). The context in which the research takes place is viewed as a possible source of error and this error is something that should be excluded from the results. Mouton further equates studies of a 'contextual nature' with qualitative research because, in his opinion, meaning and significance are taken into account when a qualitative strategy is followed. If context is as significant a concept as suggested by the literature, and if qualitative approaches can be equated to studies of a contextual nature, then the message about the meaning and significance of human experience is not being conveyed to students. The majority of students receive training mostly in quantitative methods with little emphasis placed on qualitative methods that stress change, context, meaning, significance, reflexivity, humanism, emancipation and so on.

Qualitative methods are, however, not excluded from the methodolatory position discussed above. They can also be learnt and used in a way that reduces them to mere practical techniques as opposed to acknowledging the more reflexive stance they encourage (Terre Blanche, 1997). Researchers who make use of qualitative methods may be just as guilty of ignoring the context of human experience that they are investigating. The inclusion of alternate methodological approaches in the courses implies that students have alternatives to choose from when doing research. Both quantitative (more) and qualitative (less) methodological knowledge (and some skills) are expected from students. It is assumed that the rationale for this structure is so that students will be able to choose the most suitable method for the situation within this given set of alternatives. There is little evidence from the content of the courses or from the statements made by the lecturers, however, that suggests that training in methods is coupled with an epistemological stance. The apparent lack of theoretical background that students are receiving in

research courses is a matter for concern. Whether students are able to make a link between paradigmatic stances and the methods they are using to do research is questionable. Whether students are able to acknowledge “the political processes involved in the fabrication of what passes for knowledge in psychology” (Terre Blanche, 1997, p. 60), which is on a higher level of cognitive functioning, is even more doubtful.

If students are made aware of alternative approaches<sup>1</sup> such as those described in chapter 2, with their own ontological, epistemological and methodological standpoints, a position of epistemological pluralism is thus adopted. Knowledge claims can be evaluated as to their acceptability within the community they represent. Results of research therefore become perspectival, that is, ‘true’ to the people that co-constructed the knowledge with the researcher. What may lie behind the retention of quantitative methods as the ‘correct’ way of producing knowledge for the social world is that the relationship structure between researcher and researched has been staged in a specific way. Changing this position would mean a change in the structure of knowledge production, one that quantitative researchers may not feel as comfortable with (Seel, 2000). That quantitative methods alone will not remain relevant to the practising social scientist, as discussed in chapter 2, is evident from the emerging shift in curricula content to qualitative approaches. The gap between academic research and practice-orientated research may be narrowed by the introduction of qualitative methods that Seel described as being better suited to the daily practice of psychology. Also, as academic researchers may struggle to let go of traditional paradigms, they may find a compromise in presenting both.

Presenting a research course that educates students in quantitative and qualitative approaches is not condoned by all academics. Lincoln (1990), for example, questioned her previous conviction that two-tracked research courses (her term) should be provided to students and called this approach ‘training for schizophrenia’. She advocated a commitment to either a conventional or an emergent paradigm and intensive training in the chosen model. This contradicts the argument in chapter 3 that it is the research question that should drive the choices made in research projects and not the epistemological standpoint of the researcher. Providing both methodological alternatives (quantitative and qualitative) in one course allows students to answer any research question that they might encounter, but silences the voice of a singular epistemology, meaning a theoretical framework that adheres to certain methodologies and excludes others as possible modes of enquiry. This creates a new hegemony (methodological plurality) that could possibly be based on the pursuit of fashion, illustrated in the fiction work cited at the beginning of this manuscript. Presenting both approaches to students seems to be a fad; this issue will be explored in various parts of this chapter.

Another possible reason for the curriculum being structured around one approach may be a capitulation to students’ perception that qualitative research is ‘easier’ than quantitative or that, as they are interested in researching certain topics and not others, it is not necessary to be literate in both methods. One of the respondents states this as follows: “*So as hulle [the students] kwalitatiewe navorsing doen, dan kom dit*

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<sup>1</sup> Eisner (1990) defined alternative approaches or paradigms as “... views of mind and knowledge that reject the idea that there is only one single epistemology and that there is an epistemological supreme court that can be appealed to to settle all issues concerning Truth” (p. 89).

*tog neer op kwalitatief, dan wil hulle nie eintlik nou op M-vlak - waar hulle klaar hulle onderwerp gekies het - wil hulle nie nou as hulle besluit het op een of ander navorsing oor life experiences (dan wil hulle kwalitatiewe navorsing doen), dan wil hulle nie vir twee tot drie dae luister na kwantitatiewe navorsing nie. So daar het ons gesien dat hulle wil graag 'n onderskeid tref dat ons sê hierdie is 'n werkwinkel vir kwalitatief of kwantitatief maar dit is in die geval waar 'n student reeds 'n besluit geneem het'.* A third basis for this trend in curriculum content will be discussed in section 6.4.

Silverman (1993) asked “Why should we assume ... that we have to choose between qualitative and quantitative methods?” (p. 23). A final word on whether or not to include quantitative and/or qualitative methods in the curriculum is necessary to suggest an alternative path for curriculum construction as well as to point out a false consciousness amongst academics that are involved in under-graduate (or any) research courses. Research courses were described by most of the respondents in terms of quantitative versus qualitative methods (or quantitative and qualitative methods) and are thus being constructed by making distinctions on a methodological level. These distinctions are not as clear-cut as some may think. Polkinghorne (1992), for example, described humanistic researchers in two ways: one group espouses numerical data and statistical analysis (using traditional methods in psychology) while another group views linguistic techniques as superior for understanding people. Researchers who class themselves in the same epistemological framework thus endorse different methods for researching human phenomena. This supports arguments for the epistemological and pragmatic influences on choice of research method described by various authors as follows:

There is no single method that is privileged in the production of knowledge about human existence. Each method, including those that employ numeric procedures and those that employ qualitative procedures, is a lens that can bring into focus particular aspects of human being ... Choice of method for a particular project depends on which is most useful for addressing the research question (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 233).

... in themselves techniques are not true or false. They are more or less useful, depending on their fit with the theories and methodologies being used, the hypothesis being tested and/or the research topic that is selected. So, for instance, positivists will favour quantitative methods and interactionists often prefer to gather their data by observation. But, depending upon the hypothesis being tested, positivists may sometimes use qualitative methods – for instance in the exploratory stage of research. Equally, interactionists may sometimes use simple quantitative methods, particularly when they want to find an overall pattern in their data (Silverman, 1993, p. 2).

For Unger (1983), quoted earlier in chapter 3, the danger lies in “our unawareness of the epistemological commitments we make when we use such tools unthinkingly” (p. 15). Also, Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999b) pointed out that “[b]ecause different paradigms exist simultaneously, it is possible for the same researchers to draw on more than one paradigm, depending on the kind of work they are doing” (p. 7), although most researchers prefer to work within one paradigm. Choice of research method is thus partly

epistemological and partly pragmatic. Students should be able to make decisions on these levels instead of on purely methodological grounds. An example of this approach is showcased in chapter 4 where the researcher presents her commitments and how they informed the rest of the study. The researcher thus strongly identifies with Silverman (1993) when he stated that “[t]he new generation of social scientists, I feel, need to be rather less smug about the rectitude of their affirmed belief in a non-positivistic research programme. Programmes are no substitute for lateral thinking and rigour” (p. 23).

### **6.3 Curriculum construction as a dialogical activity with the purpose of achieving consensus: communicative rationality**

Almost without exception, decisions about what to include in the under-graduate research methodology curriculum are made within a dialogical activity. This entails that the people responsible for the course sit down around a table or use a virtual mechanism such as e-mail to discuss content, structure, and so on. There does not seem to be much evidence for making a case that illegitimate compromises take place in curriculum construction. Communicating ideas to colleagues has the function of reaching a consensus (Habermas’s *Einverständnis*). Mourad (1997) summarised Rorty’s argument in this regard: “scholars should think of knowledge as simply a name or label for the subject of agreement among any group of humans concerning belief, values and action ...” (p. 118). It is, however, the person with the most persuasive argument whose ideas win the battle for dominance. Both Rorty and Habermas attempted to eliminate this dependence on the people who make up the membership of the group as relationships of power could determine the outcome of conversations about curriculum content. Fraser (1994) summarised Habermas’s view of autonomy that encapsulates the meaning of an ‘ideal speech situation’ as follows: “Autonomy refers ... to an ideal “dialogic” process wherein individuals with equal right and power to question prevailing norms seek consensus through conversation about which of their apparently individual empirical needs and interests are in fact generalizable” (p. 200).

The norm seems to be, however, that mostly younger members of staff are being tasked with presenting research courses. This may be due to more senior staff preferring to teach on a post-graduate level. Any power in terms of status of seniority is thus somewhat diluted and it could be argued that other factors are more influential in determining consensus such as gender, race and research knowledge. Habermas’s ideal speech situation thus seems to be achieved, although it will be pointed out later that this is not always the case. Heads of department are often the last barrier to finalising the course’s content and structure, which may indicate that power is not exercised within the speech situation where consensus is achieved, but externally by means of approval or disapproval of the outcome of the consensus.



#### 6.4 *The researcher as expert and the researcher as expert teacher*

Respondents position themselves as experienced researchers or people who are interested in the field and use this expertise to inform curriculum content. Not all of the interviewees perceive their colleagues as equally competent, however: *"We have many jokes, like when you get study material that is incomplete or incorrect, and the more ignorant facilitator may facilitate it as the truth"*. This respondent views this as a disadvantage to the student. A hierarchy amongst research lecturers exists, but it is not clear how this intervenes when academics are attempting to achieve consensus. One possibility is that the more 'expert' researchers adjust the material to reflect what they claim is correct or that they do not pay as much attention to the viewpoints of individuals that are perceived as non-experts and thus exclude them. In their study on research courses at tertiary institutions, Tothill and Crothers (1997) found that less than half of methodology lecturers were conducting research into issues of methodology and concluded that *"It would thus appear that the role of 'specialist' is defined by academics in terms of teaching areas, rather than research"* (p. 14). It seems that the lecturers use their own training in research and consequent experience in practising research to inform curriculum content.

Not only did the lecturers interviewed view themselves as expert researchers, but Bradley (1998) also argued that psychology is especially guilty of encouraging the separation of psychologists' own subjectivities from the topic that they are investigating. This feeds into the way in which psychology is taught. Students thus become the acted-upon objects that Bhana (1999) described. Bradley's (1998) assertions about the social scientist as expert and further as expert teacher are thus substantiated by the findings in this study. Two quotations from the protocols of respondents are illustrative of this:

*"Dit gebeur dat ons hulle partykeer heeltemal moet omswaai na 'n ander benadering of onderwerp. Studente is aanvanklik geneig om baie wyd te werk, om navorsing te wil doen. Mens moet maar die ouens rig"*.

*"En ek het studente van 27% na in die 80% omgedraai net omdat hulle daai logiese volgorde gevolg het en deur die proses gegaan en navorsing van die begin af te vat, want studente is geneig om te spot en 'hierdie lyk te moeilik, hierdie lyk nie belangrik nie' en dit te skip en dan verstaan hulle nie die volgende stap nie. Jy kan nie sampling doen nie as jy nie weet hoekom jy besluit het dit is 'n kwantitatiewe studie nie. So ek het baie sukses daarmee gehad"*.

A more detailed discussion of power will be presented in the section that follows.

#### 6.5 *Mißachtung*

Also relevant to the discussion of the findings of this study is Honneth's (1999) concept of *Mißachtung* or social disregard. As the reader will recall this refers to people being disrespected or not receiving recognition in social interactions. It is argued that the *Einverständnis* achieved regarding the curriculum



for a research course is the result of conversations held between academics in an ideal speech situation that excludes other significant voices. Power is thus not necessarily exercised in interactions between lecturers. It manifests in the curriculum that is presented to students as a taken-for-granted situation. Lecturers' dominance over the students is maintained in the dialogical activities that they undertake with colleagues that confirm their position of authority in the academic society. Students recognise this authority and consent to it. Kincheloe and McClaren's (2000) definition of power from a critical theory perspective, namely, as oppressive, is applicable here. The current manner of curriculum construction, as defined by the interviewees, results in a situation where the lecturer determines the content as well as the acceptable criteria for assessing students' competencies. If students achieve these competencies they can move to the next level of learning about research.

Disregarding students' needs may be an explanation for the negative attitudes they display towards research courses. Students could also experience powerlessness, which "arises from passive acceptance of oppressive cultural 'givens', or surrender to a 'culture of silence' " (Bhana, 1999, p. 235). Some of the ways in which students may react to this include more passive mechanisms of resistance, such as a dependency on lecturers and failing the research course many times. The quote below from an interviewee supports this conclusion:

*Toe ek die research aangebied het, het ek 'n remedierende program opgestel omdat ek verskriklik baie studente gehad het wat gesê het hulle kan dit nie doen nie, dis moeilik, en hulle probeer dit uitstel en uitstel tot heel aan die einde want dis is nie nodig om dit in hulle tweede jaar te doen nie. Daar was nie pre-requisites nie en daar's studente wat agt keer gedruip het. Al wat die program basies was, is dat hulle begin het met die eerste studie-eenheid, die basiese ding doen en dan beantwoord jy. Ons het selfevalueringsvrae en aktiwiteite in ons gidse (ook in die research) gehad, en dan het ek hulle deur die hele proses gevat van jy doen hierdie studie-eenheid, jy moet eers die basis kry, weet wat is die wetenskap, weet wat is tradisie en daai goeters, en die oefening te kan doen en dit te verstaan voor jy na die volgende studie-eenheid toe gaan, en so moet jy deur die hele proses gaan.*

A counter-argument could be that the way in which research courses are constructed is probably relevant to most other curricula. Research methodology is often taught separately from a substantive discipline, however, and may even be presented in an interdisciplinary model as evidenced at some universities such as Pretoria and UNISA. Extrapolating from the consequences of this situation, and following Williams (2000), it could be said that students do not understand the link between research and the profession that they are pursuing and therefore do not appreciate its relevance to their future undertakings. This sentiment is captured in one respondent's perception of students' attitudes towards research: "hoekom wil ek navorsing doen want ek is 'n nurse in 'n saal; wat wil ek met 'n vak soos navorsing doen? Ek is 'n sielkundige: ek wil terapie doen, hoekom moet ek navorsing doen?"

It could be further argued that the adoption of Mode 2 knowledge and its influence on curriculum content could exacerbate this problem as interdisciplinary co-operation is emphasised and general, transferable skills are *de riguer*. These post-modern ideas have already been rejected in chapter 2 in favour of a more conservative approach. This issue will be discussed in more detail in section 6.7.

## 6.6 *Normal and abnormal dialogues*

Another external factor effecting power over the curriculum is historical verification of the content. In other words, does the course adhere to traditions inculcated by experts over time (Lyotard, 1984)? Some of the respondents mentioned the role of tradition (what they had been subjected to in their own studies) in informing the choices they made in constructing the course. This tradition is held within the legitimated discourses of power that Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) identified as operating in academia and that dictate the content, teaching methods, materials and philosophies suitable for specific courses. Tradition is, however, often the focus of criticism and is blamed for the way that students perceive research methodology. A normal dialogue amongst academics that construct research courses is thus that tradition should be reviewed and replaced with new material if necessary so that students' attitudes towards research can change. New material is represented by qualitative methods as an improvement on having only quantitative methods present in the curriculum; the distinction between tradition and improvement on tradition is made on the methodological level, as discussed in the section on quantitative versus qualitative methods in the content. By acknowledging the limitations in curricula of the past, academics actively seek to change the discourses; but by doing so they may be instituting new hegemonies that may still limit students' success as researchers. This will be discussed further in section 6.7.

Perhaps because the research participants were so homogenous in educational background, age and race, not many abnormal ideas were evident. Most statements adhered to the same norms in terms of education and specifically research methodology courses, which may point to the extent to which tradition is still ingrained in the ideas of the interviewees. The most radical approach to curriculum construction that was mentioned was the idea of not teaching theory merely for the sake thereof. Unnecessary 'technical methodological details' are excluded from the curriculum and research is integrated into the modules instead of being a module on its own. For example, students are taught how to do research in their community project module. This structure counteracts William's (2000) fear that students are being taught to be technicians instead of researchers in a substantive discipline.

Another normal dialogue between academics, which is not expressed explicitly but is implied in their statements, is that academics are the only party that should be sitting around a table constructing the curriculum. When prompted by the researcher, one respondent did acknowledge that there are other role-players that need to be consulted and that she was in the process of developing a questionnaire to do a survey of former students' needs in the workplace to inform future course content. This is discussed further in the section that follows.

### **6.7 *The (non-)effects of Mode 2 research on under-graduate research methodology curricula***

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), researchers in practice demand 'research experts' that are capable in using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The implication of this for higher education is that "those who teach research methodology in the social and behavioural sciences have a responsibility to prepare their students for a professional world that is increasingly using mixed methods" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 61). This implies a scientist-practitioner model. It would appear that under-graduate social science students in South Africa are slightly better prepared for practice than their American counterparts, but that the motive for teaching mainly mixed methods courses can be questioned. The contention that providing a mixed methods research course prepares students for current practice and Lyotard's (1984) idea of performativity do not manifest in the viewpoints of the lecturers. Many interviewees stated that the under-graduate curriculum prepares the student for post-graduate research either through projects that the teachers are involved in or just to serve the achievement of a post-graduate qualification. The academics that were interviewed thus represent under-graduate students as future post-graduates. One implication of this could be that students should be proficient in quantitative and qualitative research so that they can address any academic question that arises. It thus seems that the pressures that academics face drives curriculum content: "[t]he production of scientific proof costs money, with the result that scientists who can maximize output (proof) while minimizing input expended in the process of proof (energy, and thus cost) get funded" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 21) and/or promoted and/or respected professionally. It is the current researcher's assertion that we are training under-graduate students for their possible future roles as post-graduates for the mileage that we can extract from them in terms of research outputs. Constructors of research methodology courses may thus be strategically structuring the under-graduate curriculum to suit their vested interests, that is, their own academic goals. Their false consciousness is based on their unquestioning beliefs that they are the sole stakeholder in determining how the knowledge that students gain should be constructed.

As academics believe that under-graduates should be educated so that they will be successful post-graduates, their courses are constructed to address this belief and train under-graduate students to become scientists for the practice of further science rather than becoming scientist-practitioners. Respondents described their courses as 'basic' and 'introductory' and it could be argued on this basis that as researchers ourselves we do not believe that students can be taught to progress beyond this level at an under-graduate stage. As stated in chapter 1, the focus of this study is on under-graduate courses as the vast majority of students exit tertiary education with a first degree and depend on this qualification to find work. As social scientists they will be expected to have a certain amount of competency in researching human behaviour and thus, to echo Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), it is important to prepare them for the contribution that the economy will demand of them.

One interviewee did acknowledge the needs of the workplace in informing curriculum content:

*Die terugvoer wat ek kry is vreeslik positief, byvoorbeeld mense van die regering sê hulle moet in hulle werksomgewing gereeld klein projekte aanpak en dit het vir hulle verskriklik baie riglyne gegee en hulle gebruik ons gids nogsteeds as 'n riglyn hoe hulle 'n navorsingsprojek moet aanpak.*

It could thus be concluded that although it is strongly embedded in South African higher education policy, the Mode 2 knowledge paradigm, discussed in chapter 2, is still in a fledgling stage in under-graduate research methodology curricula. The pressure from both the real world (research practitioners and business) and from government (in their policy and as an employer) to provide people who can answer key research questions is being ignored. Although some influence of the Mode 2 paradigm is evident in the way methods courses are being integrated into the content of substantive disciplines and interdisciplinary co-operation between departments, these activities are limited. When research methodology is constructed and presented as an integrated course across disciplines in a faculty, positive spin-offs such as the sharing of resources and diversity of training takes place. From the interviews with lecturers, some of the negative consequences of adopting a Mode 2 approach are also evident. One respondent reported that the voices of smaller or non-co-operative departments are silenced. Departments that might make a meaningful contribution to a research course because of their particular field of expertise (Polkinghorne, 1992) are excluded because they have less power in the faculty and course construction is left to larger departments such as psychology and sociology. The way that marginalised departments deal with this situation is by creating 'organisational niches' whereby they "bureaucratise knowledge by subject matter and stake a claim to research and train students in it" (Chubin, 1986, p. 4). In this way a department may see a certain research method as integral to their discipline and claim that they alone are experts on the topic and have the sole right to present related material. This may cause more conflict between disciplines and further marginalisation of small departments.

## **6.8 Reflexive occasions of this study**

In this section, the manner in which some of the issues of reflexivity discussed in chapter 3 manifested themselves, before, during and after the research, will be described. An attempt is made to provide "... a fully reflexive analysis ... asking not only how life experience influences research, but also how research feeds back into life experience ..." (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 494). The self-reflection advocated by critical theory that manifests in a goal, is discussed to an extent in this section with more concrete interpretations made in section 6.9.

### **6.8.1 The positioning of research methodology in the discipline of psychology**

The fundamental reason for including other social science disciplines in this study is the researcher's personal view of the position of research methodology in psychology, a view that has sometimes been expressed by similar-minded research-orientated colleagues. It is the researcher's experience that research methodology is not always viewed as an integral part of the discipline of psychology, but as a necessary evil that will allow academic psychologists to publish and therefore be promoted, or which allows psychologists in private practice to attain more academic qualifications. This viewpoint is supported by Tothill and Crothers' (1997) finding that in the rankings of academics specialising in methodology by discipline, psychology is positioned sixth after anthropology, history, industrial studies, social work and education. Certain observations that the researcher has made also highlight this point. These include the focus of psychology conferences such as the annual *PsySSA* congress. The majority of papers, although usually based on research undertaken, emphasise clinical aspects of psychology and mostly ignore the importance of methodological issues inherent in the designs. Hardly any papers focusing on methodology in itself are included. The argument could be made that conference participants do not submit such topics, but perhaps they do not feel that they have a sympathetic audience. This could be one of the reasons for the establishment of a separate and parallel conference (*Qualitative Methods Conference*) to the *PsySSA* event that concentrates on qualitative research methodology.

This trend is unlike other international events such as the annual congress of the *International Association of Sociology* that devotes entire sessions to methodology. The researcher prefers to attend sociology rather than psychology conferences, as they address specific methodological issues in the social sciences in a serious manner. Also, the Professional Board for Psychology, located within the structures of the *Health Professions Council of South Africa*, has made overtures about excluding research psychologists from the list of registered psychologists. Although this suggestion was made in 1996/1997, it nevertheless perpetuates an image of research as being separate from the discipline of psychology. It also sends the message that researchers in the field of psychology are considered as outsiders and as such they should be sidelined from the discipline. As a consequence, psychological researchers may feel isolated from the discipline of psychology and find comfort in the realm of research methodology as a technician (see Williams, 2000). A more current example of this attitude is the *Health Professions Council of South Africa's* (2003) latest restructuring of the discipline which relegates research to an "ability to conduct a research project and implement its findings" (p 9.) and which requires all students to show core competencies in therapeutic modules in order to register as a professional. Research psychology is not mentioned in the document as a particular domain of practice.

Although this study falls in the discipline of psychology, the researcher decided to include all social science research courses in this study to ensure interest from and applicability to a larger group of people. Although the issues addressed above have not received much systematic attention from

researchers in South Africa<sup>2</sup>, they have played a large role in determining the scope of the study and thus further research is necessary in order to investigate psychologists' attitudes towards research.

### **6.8.2 *The lack of co-operation from some respondents***

Most of the potential respondents contacted telephonically for face-to-face interviews reacted positively to the research and agreed to be interviewed. Despite some suspicious attitudes about the aim of the research - perhaps they wondered if I was judging their academic integrity by the quality of their teaching - the respondents seemed to co-operate very well and provided the researcher with a great deal of information. One respondent referred the researcher to the ethics division of the institution she works for in order to gain permission to conduct an interview. The researcher decided not to pursue this respondent as contentious statements had been made about institutional practices by some interviewees. The researcher felt that as she could not guarantee the anonymity of the respondent, because her interview would be vetted by the ethics division, and so the respondent may have been reluctant to speak openly and honestly about some of her experiences. Also, there were already enough respondents in the relevant category. Most academics contacted telephonically and asked to complete the e-interview were also willing to do this. Not all of them complied with this request, however. Very little response was received from individuals who were contacted by e-mail only. This could point to a methodological flaw in the research: not building a personal relationship with potential respondents or making the effort to meet them in person.

The researcher believes, however, that a more salient reason for this phenomenon is related to the legacy of Apartheid: different education structures and institutions were made available to different groups of people in South Africa, and relationships were not encouraged between institutions. Although Apartheid has been dismantled, the reluctance of institutions to develop closer relationships with each other remains. This point will be discussed in detail in the section on limitations of the study later in this chapter.

### **6.8.3 *The political dimensions of the research***

Being the researcher in this study of under-graduate research methodology courses, and at the same time being a constructor and teacher of such courses, placed me simultaneously in the role of outsider and insider to the people involved in this activity. Parker's (1999) relational approach to reflexivity is relevant here. Being an insider, that is, an academic constructing and teaching under-graduate research courses, probably gave me a greater degree of credibility than a person who does not take part in these activities, and allowed me easier access to the participants. Also, most of the interviewees were about the same age as myself and we could exchange stories about our own training and experiences within a

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<sup>2</sup> The Tothill and Crothers (1997) report did mention that their respondents at Afrikaans-medium HWUs "complained of a lack of research culture (and sometimes of outright hostility towards research)" (p. 26) although the research did not aim to investigate this issue.

certain generation of tertiary educational practice. This also made most of the interview situations more comfortable as power issues were not as prevalent as I had initially expected.

As an insider I could relate to many of the issues that fellow academics raised. I became aware that many of the aspects that I was questioning, based on current literature and critical theory, were things that I was guilty of myself. It was therefore difficult at times for me to ask colleagues to provide information about their courses and then critique the way they think about research and how this informs the way they construct their courses. This project placed me in the role of the expert voice and perhaps the question could be asked is: Who am I to pass value judgements on my colleagues?

As an outsider, that is, someone not directly involved in constructing and teaching the specific courses that I surveyed, gave me a more distanced perspective: the objectivating outsider's perspective to which McCarthy (1994) and Wedekind (1997) referred. It was easy to forget at times that the way I view research also influences the way I think it should be taught; I could thus critically reflect on what the participants were doing and use this knowledge to attempt to manage certain social processes. This contradicts Bohman's (1999) ideas on critical social enquiry and will be discussed further in section 6.8.4.

Not having received any formal training in critical theory I found it counter-intuitive at times to the epistemologies I had been exposed to. I had to become acquainted with past and present debates and find a methodological pathway that suited this theoretical position, while still allowing a pragmatic approach to the research design. If there are signs of a positivistic frame of mind in this manuscript then it is indicative of the contradictions within myself and the indecisive person I am. To be a positivist or not is a question I often ask myself and have yet to answer. Perhaps I never will decide. Not making a specific choice, manifested in the 'tolerant pluralism' (a term borrowed from Muller, 2000) advocated in this study, is potentially problematic in two ways. Firstly, this solution might not please the whole of the academic community and secondly it could result in the kind of slavery to fashion described elsewhere in this manuscript. As Muller (2000) put it "Must we then choose?" (p. 162). There is a paradox in choosing a relativist epistemology. Selecting to work from a relativist paradigm presupposes that it is a relativist theory that will provide the answers to the research problem, but relativism, as stated in chapter 2, does not adhere to this type of hegemony and thus contradicts itself (Blake, 1997; Muller, 2000; Scheurich, 1997). Additionally, opting for realism means accepting the kind of positivist arguments outlined in chapter 2 and places the selector at the mercy of criticism by the relativists. Muller (2000) resolved this paradox by accepting that statements made by researchers are not the last word on anything, but must be allowed to be judged as has been suggested in the introduction to this chapter and in other chapters. We are thus continuously adding to the knowledge that we have by allowing ourselves to be open to reflecting on our perspectives: "Thus we end up between relativism and objectivism, in a knowledge which is wavering, evasive yet at the same time at least temporarily valid" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 86).

Choosing critical theory as the framework for this study was a political and strategic decision that suited my needs in two ways. Firstly, it allowed me to expose the weaknesses of the current way of constructing



curricula and propose another way of doing it, which will be discussed in section 6.9.2. According to critical theory the criticalist may propose better ways of doing things and in this way I am able to make a standpoint for what I see as being the better truth, namely, my way. Secondly, very few theories make specific provision for using quantitative and qualitative methods in their research design, and as I was trained in both approaches and find it difficult to make a choice between the two, it was easier to find a theoretical framework that would allow me to exercise my personal preference. The older versions of critical theory especially those proposed by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, also appeal to my personal convictions, as a radical environmentalist, of the dangers of instrumental progressivism in the sense of relying on science and technological progress to control the natural environment<sup>3</sup>. Also its consequence for education by making “education increasingly more efficient in serving ... the economic, political or cultural needs of ... society” (Robins & Webster, 1999, p. 175) is cause for concern. As Dickens (1992) pointed out, however, trying to do away with current social, economic and political structures is not a solution: “... equally important are the relationships and structures which created this consciousness in the first place and which could become the means by which a new consciousness develops” (p. 193). These arrangements could be used towards more emancipatory ideals as discussed in later sections.

#### **6.8.4 Methodological considerations**

Although the methodological pluralism advocated by Habermas (1971) formed the basis of the research design of this study, a more pragmatic approach was taken. Methods were chosen that would create a context in which the research questions could be answered; this context allowed the researcher to systematise and control the situations of enquiry in an objectivating manner. Habermas (1971) described this process as follows:

The objectivations in which the active mind congeals in purposes, values, and meanings represent a structure of signification that can be apprehended and analysed independently of actual life processes, that is apart from organic, psychic, historical, and social developments (p. 147).

Using this approach might enable the researcher to fulfil the purposes of reflexivity, but this reflexivity remains at the level of understanding and insight. This does not achieve the critical reflection described in chapter 3, where the aim is to set a social goal where some form of action can be taken. Working from a critical theory perspective the researcher could have chosen a more appropriate methodology that “addresses the subjects of enquiry as equal reflective participants, as knowledgeable social agents ... by appeal to increasing [their] reflective knowledge” (Bohman, 1999, p. 79). An interviewee expressed this need by questioning my position (as expert voice) and requesting feedback about how I dealt with the information that he gave me. One of the outcomes of this study could therefore be to provide academics that construct under-graduate research courses with the knowledge and insights gained here, so that they

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<sup>3</sup> See also Bradley (1998).

can “see their circumstances differently, indeed to a point where they can see that change of some sort or another is practically necessary” (Bohman, 1999, p. 80). The manner of validating the themes that were generated, namely, checking them with the interviewees so that they could make comments, could initiate this process of self-reflection. The publication of the research findings in academic journals and participation at national and international conferences could further this aim.

The difficulties inherent in achieving a fit between theory and method were also influenced by another pragmatic factor, namely, doing what was practically possible under the circumstances. The individuals who were interviewed sacrificed a few hours of their time and the researcher did not feel comfortable demanding more from them. The ideal would have been to explain the aims of the study to the participants and involve them as co-researchers. This would have entailed a lengthy, complicated process and dedication to the study by all members that might not have been possible. This ideal could be better achieved by involving individuals in a later research project that is co-owned on a larger-scale and addresses more needs, in other words, a study which is not driven by one researcher for the purposes of attaining a qualification. As the aim of this study was to understand, describe and explain the phenomenon, the researcher feels justified in the methods that she used. Further research projects that could use a design more suited to critical social enquiry will be expanded on in section 6.10.2.

## **6.9 Limitations of the research**

The discussion of the limitations of the research is centred on the type of participants that agreed to be interviewed during phase two of the study. It is argued firstly that social and political factors had an influence on the limited participation of HBUs in that these institutions are far removed from the researcher in terms of both relationships and physical locations. Secondly, the research design did not take these issues into account.

### **6.9.1 Lack of participation by HBUs**

One of the glaring limitations of this study is the lack of participation by persons at HBUs. Although a concerted effort was made to incorporate HBUs, as specified in the sampling criteria in chapter 4, only one such institution was included. It is the researcher’s opinion that one of the reasons for the non-participation is the consequence of the Apartheid policy of separate development. Although the researcher studied at the time that Apartheid was being brought to an end, there were no structures to encourage the forming of relationships with students at HBUs. Interaction between HWUs and HBUs was not even promoted in the mid to late 1990s when the researcher became a full-time academic. This is, however, not only limited to HBUs, but can be generalised to other tertiary institutions, especially those that have used English as the language of instruction. It is indicative of the insular nature of Afrikaans-speaking universities as the bastions of Apartheid policies of tertiary education. As a junior academic the researcher could not tap into relationships formed with other institutions by senior colleagues and was

thus left to her own devices. Forming any kind of relationship takes time, effort and regular contact, which the researcher was not able to do during the process of this study.

The Tothill and Crothers (1997) report also stated a low response rate from HBUs. The researchers advised that “Historically White Universities should not be seen as the yardstick against which research methodology training should be measured” (Tothill & Crother, 1997, p. vi). Perhaps the individuals contacted at HBUs feared that the researcher would uncover the limitations of their courses and use this information to discredit them in some way. These academics may also be resistant to participating in these kinds of studies that tap their knowledge, but might do little to change the *status quo* at their institution.

### **6.9.2 Limitations of the research design**

The situation that HBUs were virtually non-existent as participants in this study could also have been due to the design of the research. As described in chapter 4, potential interviewees were contacted in two ways: telephonically for the purposes of a face-to-face interview and telephonically or via e-mail for the purposes of an electronic interview. This design was determined by the geographical location of the institution. Due to the Apartheid era’s Group Areas Act that segregated population groups according to racial characteristics and located non-white individuals in remote places, tertiary institutions that are categorised as historically black are not within easy physical reach. The researcher thus had to communicate via e-mail or telephone with the majority of HBUs contacted for participation in this study. It could therefore be argued that as most of the academics at these institutions do not have a professional or personal relationship with the researcher and could maintain a certain degree of distance from the researcher because of the medium of communication, the extent of participation was low. The research design was thus inherently flawed, as it did not take the specific South African context into consideration. The researcher could perhaps have made more of an effort to build prior relationships with academics in the social sciences at other institutions, she could have and/or physically travelled to the institution to conduct face-to-face interviews. This insight may contribute to the methodological body of knowledge about using e-interviews in practice.

### **6.10 Suggestions**

As Leedy and Ormrod (2001) stated: "Research begets more research" (p. 8). In the sections that follow suggestions are made for research in two ways. Firstly, in the researcher’s opinion, there are three more aspects concerning the topic of under-graduate research methodology courses that could be explored. These include the way in which research methodology is taught, teaching that innovates current practices in the classroom, and comparisons with international trends in curriculum and teaching. Secondly, this section explores possible research projects that could stem from this study.

### 6.10.1 *Suggestions for future research*

#### 6.10.1.1 The content of research methodology courses

Firstly, future research on the topic of under-graduate research courses at tertiary institutions in South Africa could focus on the initial idea for this study mentioned in chapter one, namely, issues surrounding how we teach research methodology. Although it is not the aim of this study to address these issues some thought on this topic is given below relating mainly to the level of learning in which students are engaged.

Students in research methodology courses may begin, after introductory topics have been dealt with, to learn about one research technique within a method that can be used to collect data, for example, self-administered questionnaires as part of survey designs. Students use the information they have available, for example, how to construct a self-administered questionnaire, and may implement this technique in the field. The fact that this technique can only be used to answer certain research questions has no bearing on the students' future behaviour. So “[w]hen the problem returns at a later time, he [or she] will *correctly* go through the same computations and reach the same decision” (Bateson, 1972, p. 286) because the students have only one technique available to use.

As students move to the next year of their studies, they are exposed to more research techniques, for example, instead of having knowledge of only questionnaire design, students also learn about structured (face-to-face) interviewing. These two techniques are still located in one method (survey research), but allow the student a wider choice. The transition can be framed as a mere deepening of complexity in the content of the work that students are exposed to. The stage, however, that students reach where they are able to enter into critical debate about the politics of knowledge cannot be achieved solely by presenting students with activities that involve rote learning, that is, memorising something in order to repeat it at a later stage instead of learning to understanding it. In this case the context in which learning takes place needs to change. Bateson (1979, p. 27) says “that all communication necessitates context, that without context, there is no meaning, and that contexts confer meaning because there is classification of contexts”.

What is essentially being argued is that there are two very different types of knowledge transition in the learning process. The first type is quantitative where students acquire more knowledge about research methodology as they progress through their qualification. Quantitative knowledge is easy to determine: the more knowledge students have, the higher the marks they are awarded on assessment. The second type of learning is qualitative and more difficult to define. It can only be assessed in a real-life situation to see whether students can apply the knowledge they have gained in a way that best serves the context. What ‘best serves the context’ is also perspectival, however, and therefore difficult to evaluate. It is not ‘what’ the student has done and how successful it is that is important, but ‘how’ and ‘why’ the student made certain choices. Allowing for a plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches also allows us to reflect the diversity of cultures in a society and creates an environment for innovative developments when research is implemented in practice (Seel, 2000).

This argument returns us to the debate (discussed in chapter 4) on deciding between research approaches based on pragmatism or epistemological ideals. If Lincoln's (1990) postulation about creating a schizophrenic mindset in students through plural training is true, then the majority of under-graduate research courses in South Africa are problematic. More recent research (see Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), however, points to the role of practice and the influence that real-life issues have on determining what students should be taught in a methodology course. As this study has argued that under-graduate courses serve the vested interests of lecturers, the interplay between practice and academia needs to be investigated further.

#### **6.10.1.2 Innovative teaching practice**

Future research could concentrate on identifying and assessing whether innovative teaching practices improve the outcomes of a methodology course. The design of such a project could involve classroom observations, for example, or could require academics to do research about their teaching. Dunn (2000), for example, required her students to choose a topic in the research course that affected them in some way and to write letters to fellow students about the topic. She found that this greatly enhanced the students' ability to understand complex material. Bradley (1998) has also described some radical pedagogies that he uses in psychology classes that could be adapted for research methodology lectures. His aim in introducing theatre into the classroom is to personalise or subjectify the experiences that students have, to eliminate the subject-object dichotomy, and to demonstrate that our behaviour also mirrors the social context in which we exist. Bradley (1998) portrayed this type of knowledge as "a process of learning together rather than one-way teaching. *It assumes that there is as much likelihood of the audience knowing the answers as the performers*" (p. 87). This addresses the need for a democratisation of the curriculum as required in outcomes-based and post-Fordist education.

#### **6.10.1.3 Comparative research**

Future research on the topic of under-graduate research curricula could include some comparisons to other countries along the lines of the attempts by Van Staden and Visser (1990, 1992). In the same vein that courses at HWUs should not be used as a yardstick to measure HBUs (Tohill & Crothers, 1997), international practice should not necessarily be seen as the ideal towards which South African education should strive. Nonetheless, it may be useful to examine how other tertiary institutions structure their under-graduate research courses as academic societies older than South African ones have had more experience in terms of time to implement curricula and assess their value. Benson and Blackman (2003), for example, restructured their research methods course at the Southampton Business School in the UK through a developmental and experiential programme with the aim of reviving students' interest in the subject. Lessons that are learnt by other academics in curriculum redesign could inform our attempts to do the same.

An added benefit would be that social science research curricula at tertiary institutions would be marketable to the international community. With the advent of globalisation many students are moving between institutions on a global scale. Developing courses that are similar to international practice would

allow for a smooth integration of these students into learning programmes. The need to solve local problems should not, however, be forgotten.

### **6.10.2 Suggestions for research projects emanating from this study**

The suggestions that are made below arise from imperatives in the literature on higher education and research methodology teaching to revise our practices as academics in the way that we construct our curricula. Central to this is the belief that the kind of knowledge and the way in which we teach it needs to be legitimated in a broader arena and not only amongst ourselves (Barnett, 1997; McNair, 1997). A new model for achieving this purpose is proposed by Brew (2003) who remarked that

[i]n an academic community of practice, students, academics, professionals and indeed anyone else who shares this site of practice, are responsible for the maintenance of the community of practice for inducting newcomers into it, for carrying on the tradition of the past and carrying the community forward to the future. Persons (students and staff) engage in legitimate peripheral participation in such communities of practice (p. 12).

This may sound like the type of post-modern university and mode 2 research and teaching model that is described and criticised by Muller (2000) and Robins and Webster (1999). It should rather be viewed as the type of university that Habermas would advocate, where there is open dialogue amongst different parties and the best argument is accepted as the consensus viewpoint: “[t]he social norms of such an institution would not be those of mutually hostile isolationism but those of an open, self-reflective and innovative community, whose members share these values” (Blake, 1997, p. 163). Logistically this pathway may seem daunting as one would need formal structures to ensure that enough time and space is provided for people to air their views. Brew (2003) concurred that this is a great challenge and that higher education has to be radically transformed to achieve this; however, she made some practical suggestions about how one may go about this. For example, graduate students could present some lectures, students could be rewarded by peers for their research work such as publishing articles in a student journal, and electronic formats for debates and conferences between students could be initiated. According to Brew, this also means that academics need to share power and be open to the challenges that they face such as negotiating what is accepted as knowledge and involving students in their research projects. Four ideas for carrying this concept over to the findings of this study are presented below.

#### **6.10.2.1 Involving students in curriculum design**

The discussion so far has only speculated in places about the reasons for the negative attitudes held by students towards research methodology courses. It is therefore suggested that a comprehensive study be planned and carried out to investigate students’ attitudes and the basis thereof. A qualitative methodology using techniques such as interviews and focus groups would be ideally suited to uncovering the meaning that students attach to social science research courses. The findings of the study that Tothill and Crothers (1997) undertook highlight the need for such research:

Academics surveyed frequently pointed to the need to train students to be critical and reflective consumers of *research*; being assisted to become reflective consumers of their own education and training may be seen as an important element of this process (p. 17).

Students who are currently registered for an under-graduate research methodology course would thus be targeted for insight into how they would like the curriculum to be structured. Most of the academics interviewed pointed to the essential role that experience played in the way they constructed their courses. It could thus be argued that students may need some degree of involvement in real-life research projects in order to contribute meaningfully to curriculum development. Once again, the researcher comes to the same conclusion as Tothill and Crothers (1997, p. 17): "... post graduation follow up would be a useful way of gauging student perceptions of the adequacy of their ... research training, and could also shed some light on employers' requirements". This is an empowerment strategy that will hopefully transform the oppressive interactions between lecturers and students. Determining the type of skills that graduates need and use in their daily work activities can be complemented by the views that employers hold. A discussion of this aspect follows in section 6.10.2.3.

The methodology for revealing graduates' needs should involve data gathering on a large-scale in order to make generalisations possible. Applying the findings from a representative sample to a larger population will benefit all students. This implies a quantitative design and specifically a survey using a self-administered questionnaire distributed through the post. Permission from the universities involved can be applied for to use the contact details that students provide to administration. The sample should limit itself to students who have completed their studies within one to three years so that efforts are not wasted due to changes in postal addresses. In keeping with the fit between the epistemology and methodology reasoned in this study, a second phase, in the form of a qualitative component, could be added by asking respondents whether they would be willing to participate in focus groups or be interviewed at a later stage. Participants in this phase could be selected and divided into groups according to type of employment to add a sectoral dimension to the results. Comparisons can be made between sectors to determine whether there are generic components to research skills in the workplace or whether different settings require different skills. These findings can be used to inform the content of the curriculum as well as the level of practical application graduates are expected to attain.

#### **6.10.2.2 Involving academics as agents of curriculum design**

Bohman (1999) emphasised that "[t]he goal of critical enquiry is not to control social processes or even to influence the sorts of decisions that agents might make in any determinate sort of way" (p. 79). Habermas (1974) envisioned critical enquiry as a route to self-contemplation. According to Habermas (1971, p. 90) "In self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility (*Mündigkeit*). For the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a moment of emancipation".

Such a process would promote the full development of human potential by bringing people to self-awareness of their role in society and how communication between them is actually or potentially



distorted. Hopefully this study will be useful in initiating some self-reflection amongst academics about the design of their under-graduate research methodology courses. Moreover, further studies can be conducted to involve academics as the 'equal reflective participants' described by Bohman earlier in this chapter. Such research would involve the researcher as an equal partner in the process or, put another way, perhaps the co-constructor that Kvale (1996) described.

### **6.10.2.3 Involving business and other role-players in curriculum design**

More than a decade ago Hoshmand and Polkinghorne (1992) argued that "the knowledge base of the profession [psychology] should be derived with diverse methods and from multiple sources, including the knowledge of practice" (p. 56). It would probably be useful to juxtapose the views of employees with those of employers and other role-players regarding the types of research skills needed in the workplace. For example, Smith and Dexter (2001) contribute seven pillars for a curriculum for market researchers that is relevant to the 21st century and based on the environment that graduates will be practising in. These pillars are radically different to the usual core curriculum of such courses as they reflect the changing world of information and knowledge management. To be effective in this new world, researchers will have to be skilled in discerning, amongst the masses of information, which information is valuable to their needs. This means that in practice research is becoming an exercise in information management that the current curriculum does not adequately address (Smith & Dexter, 2001). Given that societies are being profoundly affected by globalisation and that higher education often has to react to the economic imperatives that drive this era, graduates will need specific skills in order to cope. Business becomes a pivotal stakeholder in determining the relevance of the curriculum, a characteristic of mode 2 knowledge. This should be seen in the light of the holistic community of practice discussed above.

### **6.10.2.4 Disseminating information to authors through publishers**

Although the topics in the content lists of the prescribed texts was used as a basis for researching the content of research methodology courses in phase 1 of this study, no attempt was made to further examine the material. One of the questions that was not dealt with in this study is: to what extent does the content of research methodology texts dictate the content of a course? This enquiry is based on the assumption that textbooks reflect the topics that, in the author's viewpoint, should be dealt with in a research course. Although some editors send preliminary work to peer reviewers such as lecturers, this once again limits the design of the curriculum to specific interest groups. It seems that most of the lecturers interviewed preferred to prescribe more than one source, or to write their own material. The conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no single viewpoint on the knowledge that under-graduate students should have in research methodology. Further detailed research to establish an overlap in viewpoints between lecturers, graduates and business could prove valuable to authors who are planning to write a book for the under-graduate market or to revise their material. According to Smith and Dexter (2001, p. 322) "every profession needs a central core of principles and practices that are debated and discussed in its journal and at its conferences". This could also be applied to textbooks although this could result in another hegemony being placed on academics whose paradigms differ from the majority.

A book based on a widely accepted curriculum may find a larger market and prove more economically viable to the author and publisher.

Even though the process outlined above attempts to secure a more equitable distribution of educational power, Scheurich (1997) warned that unless attention is paid to some principles that will aid in democratising the situation, the powerful will remain the driving force behind curriculum reform. Schumaker's (1990) idea of 'critical pluralism' needs to be applied in this situation. It is pluralistic as it gives different people the authority to make decisions (which is distinct from mere participation in initiatives for change) and it is critical because participants are aware of strong differences in knowledge, power and resources of the various parties involved. Two suggestions for achieving such ideals are: proportional representation of all members on committees that recommend reform, and ensuring that all parties have an equal voice. Practical measures to implement these suggestions include active recruitment of certain groups of people previously excluded from decision-making (in this case probably graduate students), and holding "frank, in-depth discussions of the differences among individuals that make it difficult to share power" where participants are "encouraged to share their own backgrounds and biases and to each make a commitment to respect and consider each other's points of view" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 25). It should also be pointed out to members that power struggles need to be overcome in order to bring about curriculum reform. Furthermore, Scheurich suggested that decisions should not be subjected to reviews by experts or steering committees (although in this case academics will probably make final constructions of the curriculum: this needs to be considered in the process), and that all the principles above should be adhered to throughout the process.

## **6.11 Contributions of this study**

Two major contributions of this study are to the debates on the reconceptualisation of the discipline of psychology, specifically with regard to under-graduate research courses, and to the literature on methodological principles for a critical theoretical research project.

### **6.11.1 Contribution to the discipline of psychology**

It is necessary to conclude this chapter with a note on the contribution of this study to the discipline of psychology as the reader may argue that this aspect has been obscured by the inclusion of other social science disciplines in the sample. Reasons for this inclusion were, however, stated in chapter one. This does not detract from the location of this study in the discipline of psychology as an attempt was made to theorise the results from a psychological perspective. That the researcher felt the need to be inclusive and comfortable with blurring boundaries between disciplines perhaps points to the post-modern direction that universities will be taking in future (see for example Blake, 1997; Mourad, 1997).

As pointed out in earlier chapters, research methodology in the social sciences needs to adapt to the transformations taking place in society and the resultant effects this has on higher education in general (Brew, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Besides the political agendas outlined earlier in the chapter, the researcher also attempts to push psychology to the forefront of bringing about changes in academic society. Psychology, however, also needs change from within as this quote from Bradley (1998) illustrates:

If psychology is to reconstruct its relationship to the reproduction of the present, then psychology needs to change the way it reproduces itself. It needs to create a space for experience in which subjects can become aware of the obstacles that collectively serve to impede their development. No longer can the psychologist be 'the one supposed to know,' imposing knowledge from above. They must find a way of accessing the 'view from below'. Which means they must find a way of undoing the hegemony of the sublime, in pedagogy as well as research (p. 87).

This study could hopefully point to one path that could be followed to bring about a better curriculum for students. Some warnings should, however, be heeded. There is the danger, as Muller (2000) pointed out, that a critical analysis could result in promising too much and not being able to deliver on these promises. As Muller explained a researcher cannot deliver a critical perspective and expect the world to change on the strength of these 'new insights'. People are not always open to change for a variety of reasons, such as feeling content with their current viewpoints and actions or not wanting to admit to 'uncomfortable realities', as Muller puts it. Initiatives for change could thus meet with resistance. This study could therefore be rejected on the basis that academics do not want to be confronted with their problematic notions of how knowledge should be constructed (because of the specific way in which they develop curricula). Nevertheless, psychologists at universities in South Africa should take cognisance of the fact that methodological debates in the social sciences and current thinking about knowledge and learning are pointing to new directions in how we should train students to study the human realm. If we want to remain relevant to the social world in which we live we need to discuss these directions and forge a new way of acting in this world.

### **6.11.2 Methodological contribution**

Lakomski (1987), Scheurich (1997) and Willower (1985) have criticised researchers working within a critical theory approach for their lack of material based on research activities within the context they are examining. Reasons for critical theory's avoidance of empirical material were briefly mentioned in chapter 4. According to Scheurich, this *modus operandi* tends to dilute and undermine the efforts of researchers to analyse the situations they are interested in, as there may be difficulties relating the theoretical background on which the researchers base their evaluation to the practices that take place in everyday circumstances. Scheurich then highlighted the importance of grounding research on a concrete application of critical theory in relating it to the practices that take place in relationships where power is distributed unequally.

Chapter 3 discussed various methods for conducting this type of research from a critical theoretical paradigm. Arguments about the methodological basis of critical theory were also examined. As there are variants of critical theory and more current reconceptualisations of its tenets, this study attempts to contribute one methodological path that may be followed by a criticalist researcher. This is based on epistemological ideals and pragmatic considerations of the aim of the research and not on an *a priori* rejection of methodologies because of the epistemological foundations that they represent. A critical realist ontology remains the focus point of this type of research with the researcher interpreting different perspectives of the universe that people share and setting them in a wider social, political and economic context. A fusing of hermeneutics with a critical approach allows the researcher to comment on events at a higher level (triple hermeneutic) than mere understanding and interpretation (double hermeneutic).

## **6.12 Conclusion**

The aim of this last chapter was to integrate the information contained in previous chapters with the findings of the research. This was accomplished by comparing the results of phases one and two with applicable literature and attempting to find a theoretical explanation for the findings. Theoretical notions of the curriculum as a dialogical activity, the researcher as expert and the expert teacher, social disregard, normal and abnormal dialogues and the effects of current higher education policy on the curriculum were explored. Aspects of the content of the courses were examined, specifically the qualitative-quantitative divide being bridged with mixed methods courses. On the surface it seems as if the uneasy relationship between the two approaches has been mended, but detailed examination shows that more emphasis is still placed on quantitative research. It could be argued that presenting a mixed methods course is a new hegemony that is following the trend to train students for the workplace, as research practice demands researchers who are versatile in both approaches. It is more likely, however, based on the findings of this study, that this development is due to constructors of research courses making distinctions on methodological instead of epistemological and pragmatic levels. One alternative to the current way of constructing curricula is proposed within a framework of communities of practice. A community consisting of students, business, academics and authors of textbooks aimed at undergraduate research courses is a more ideal way of approaching this activity. Certain limitations are evident, however, specifically in the research design and the lack of participation by HBUs. The researcher reflected on other issues such as the positioning of research methodology in the discipline of psychology, the lack of participation by some respondents, the political dimension of the research and the methodology used in the study. Future research could also focus on the content of research courses, innovative teaching practice and comparative studies.