

TURNING RESOURCES INTO ASSETS: IMPROVING THE SERVICE DELIVERY AND  
RELEVANCE OF A PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING CLINIC THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

BY  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the inception and evolution of a combined collaborative action research project and living theory action research project. Six academic staff members attempted to improve our practice of generating locally relevant research in a university psychology clinic. This process impacted not only on the lives of the participants, but facilitated the enactment of the three tasks of universities and so influenced the lives of the student and residential communities to whom we had a responsibility. This thesis explores two research questions that formed the first part of the study, namely: “How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?” and “How can we increase our research output?” The second part of the study was a self-study action research project in which I examined my attempts to improve my academic practice by inquiring into my practice of facilitating the collaborative action research project as a peer support initiative. In the form of my living theory, this thesis therefore also explored my answers to the questions: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” and “How can I improve my academic practice through facilitating such an initiative?” I take a macro-level view of the relationship between a university and surrounding communities and discuss within the South African context three discernable mandates or tasks that universities fulfil: teaching, research and community engagement. I discuss the relevance of this study to psychology and specifically university psychology clinics as potential interface between the university and the surrounding community when enacting community engagement as the third academic task. I also discuss the implications of this study to action research methodology and the concept of transformation in emancipatory research. The main argument of my living theory of my academic practice is that the formation and nurturing of a regular, supportive and critical audience in the form of peer support research meetings contributed to the transformation of resources into assets when we worked towards improving the service delivery and local relevance of a university psychology clinic.

**Key terms:** Action research, living theory, higher education, transformation, emancipatory research, university psychology clinic, three tasks of universities, local relevant knowledge, improving service delivery, academic practice, South Africa, Mamelodi



## DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to my two very special children, Maya and Max, who waited patiently for so many years for their father to “finish his thesis” – you are very dear to me.

This thesis is also dedicated to Gerhard, who brought me “songs from the wood, poppies red and roses filled with summer rain”.

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To all the friends, both near and far, who tolerated my regular absence at social gatherings, babysat my children generously and often, and endured the phrase “it’s very nearly done” for many years.

“Hallo!” said Piglet, “what are *you* doing?”

“Hunting,” said Pooh.

“Hunting what?”

“Tracking something,” said Winnie-the-Pooh very mysteriously.

“Tracking what?” said Piglet, coming closer.

“That’s just what I ask myself. I ask myself, What?”

“What do you think you’ll answer?”

“I shall have to wait until I catch up with it,” said Winnie-the-Pooh.

*From Winnie-the-Pooh by A.A. Milne*

If you come here to help me, you're wasting your time. If you come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

*Lilla Watson (Australian Aborigine Organiser,  
quoted from thesis of Radermacher, 2006)*

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

*William Carlos Williams*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The rhetorician, Cicero tells us, obeys three imperatives: what he writes or says must (1) be truthful, (2) be pleasing, (3) move us to action.” (*The Idea of a University*, Newman, 1852/1999, p.xii)

Ten years after South Africa embraced democracy, the higher education landscape is beginning to show signs of transformation. The wheels of change that seemed slow to get moving are by now acquiring momentum and direction. But all is not well. The year is 2004 and six academic staff members, working on a campus in a dusty South African township are concerned that not all change is for the better, and that the way things are changing will negate the original purpose for change. Will their campus be closed down because it is too African? Will it only stay open if there is no trace of its African identity left?

Everywhere the staff members hear and read of mergers and incorporations of black universities into white universities with the aim of removing inequalities. This seems absurd to them. Based on their experience of the unique learning needs of their students brought on by decades of apartheid, suddenly placing their students in the same lecture halls and social spheres as wealthy and previously advantaged students might mean their needs are further disregarded. But what can six people do? And who will listen to them?

On this campus is a university psychology clinic with an African name. It is visited by African people who live in the communities surrounding the campus – people who are uniformly poor, underprivileged, and unable to access psychological services elsewhere as a result. They are seen by postgraduate students (African and other) who offer assessment and counselling services (Phala, 2008). The clinic has so much promise and potential, but it is not without its frustrations and challenges. For the six staff members, who supervise and oversee the clinic, the challenges sometimes feel too overwhelming to address. Besides, they have courses to teach, exams to set, scripts to mark, and a host of other pressing concerns to attend to. What will become of the clinic?

There is a further concern. The incorporation of their campus into a historically white university, with its western models and philosophy, threatens not only the teaching programmes and the continued existence of the clinic, but also demands that the six staff members prove their worth. They must claim legitimacy and authority in the new organisation or lose their agency, voice and the unique perspectives offered by their dedication to an African psychology. The only way to do this in an academic context is to publish. And how will the staff members find the time for research on top of all that they already have to juggle?

This document is a story of how we, the six colleagues, lived, worked and faced some of the challenges we experienced as South African academics during the period of higher education transformation following the end of apartheid. In another way it is my personal story of finding and co-creating my identity as an academic in living through and responding to this event-shape in time-space (Auerswald, 1985). It is also a story of my learning in the context of our learning as a response to our changing campus, where the rich, red township dust was beginning to make way to sculpted, irrigated lawns, the spreading acacia trees were being clipped and manicured, and the ever-present speckled African chickens were disappearing.

To tell this story in a scholarly way, I present it in the form of a thesis. This thesis is my living theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006; Whitehead, 1989; 2008b) of how I improved my practice as an academic staff member initially in the Psychology Department at Vista

University, South Africa (Mamelodi Campus), and then following its incorporation, in the Psychology Department of the University of Pretoria. In line with the three tasks of universities (Brulin, 2001; Krücken, 2003), I saw my academic duties as including teaching, research and community engagement.

Mamelodi is a township outside Pretoria almost exclusively inhabited by previously disadvantaged African people representing socioeconomic levels ranging from extreme poverty to lower income. During the apartheid era, a branch of a nationwide university called Vista University was established here for the tertiary education of black students. In 2004 the Mamelodi campus of Vista University was incorporated into the larger, wealthier, and historically white University of Pretoria. The incorporation process brought with it much uncertainty and change; and prompted us to examine our practices and *raison d'être*. It is against this backdrop that in the period May 2004 to March 2006, I facilitated a collaborative action research project aimed at establishing a research centre<sup>1</sup> on what was now the Mamelodi campus of the University of Pretoria. We named the research centre *Research@Itsoseng* (R@I) after our university psychology clinic (Itsoseng Clinic) and we referred to the collaborative action research project as the R@I project. I explain the meaning and significance of the name Itsoseng in chapter two, where I also introduce the geographical and sociopolitical context of Mamelodi and describe the incorporation process in greater detail.

The establishment of the research forum was an attempt to facilitate a peer support structure that would enable my colleagues and me to critically engage with the three academic tasks of the university, namely, research, teaching and community

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<sup>1</sup> The word *centre* in the use of the term “research centre” requires clarification as a *centre* in some university contexts is generally understood to be a particular entity that needs to conform to specific requirements. My original aim was not to establish such an entity, but rather to create a semi-formal hub of research activities. As the project evolved we did consider registering the R@I initiative as a “centre of excellence” – but this never realised. The term “research forum” is therefore a better description of the structure that we eventually co-created. In this thesis the words *centre* and *forum* are used interchangeably. Although I have attempted to mostly use the word *forum*, I have not changed the text in the original records for the sake of authenticity and consequently the word *centre* appears frequently in these records (Appendix E).

engagement (Brulin, 2001). It would also enable us to address practical concerns in our everyday professional lives. These concerns initially related to the functioning of our university psychology clinic and our productivity in conducting locally relevant research. Consequently the core aims we set ourselves in the R@I project were (1) to improve the functioning (and by extension service delivery) of the psychology clinic; and (2) to increase our output of locally relevant psychological research. Our hope was that by striving towards our second aim we would indirectly improve the relevance of our psychological service to the local communities we served through the clinic. Hence, the two important elements contained in the name of the R@I project are *research* and *psychology clinic*.

Four of the five colleagues who participated with me in the R@I project gave their consent for me to use their real names in this thesis and I introduce them in chapter two. One of my colleagues requested to remain anonymous and I refer to this colleague as Member 6.

### **Philosophical commitments and conceptual frameworks**

I situate this thesis within the qualitative field of practitioner research. I justify this position in chapter three, where I also provide a description of my ontological (holistic, relativistic), epistemological (action research or AR) and methodological (living theory) commitments. In chapter three I further discuss the relationship between universities and surrounding communities as a conceptual framework to define our university psychology clinic as an important interface between university and surrounding community, and an ideal site for community engagement (Brulin, 2001; Krücken, 2003).

### **A collaborative action research project and a self-study**

In addition to facilitating the R@I project, I also inquired into how I can improve my own academic practice as a result of my facilitation of the project. I explain in chapter four how I conducted two research processes that were intertwined and developed in parallel. The first was the R@I project (a collaborative action research project) in which I was both a participant and facilitator. This is also known in the literature as complete-member research (Adler & Adler, 1987) where researchers “are fully committed to and immersed



in the group that they study...[and] where the emphasis is on the research process and the group being studied” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.741). Two research aims revealed themselves in this first process:

- How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?
- How can we increase our research output?

The second research process was a self-study action research project in which I attempted to improve my academic practice by inquiring into my practice of facilitating the collaborative action research project. In the self-study AR project I utilised a living theory action research methodology (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006; Whitehead, 2008b). In this thesis, which encompasses both the collaborative and the self-study AR projects, I inquire into my educational influence (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003; Whitehead & McNiff, 2005) on my colleagues’ and my own learning; and highlight the reciprocal nature of educational influence in the context of complete-member collaborative action research with colleagues. Towards the aims of this second process, the following research questions emerged:

- How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?
- How can I improve my academic practice through facilitating such an initiative?

### **Living theory action research**

My research design is based on Whitehead and McNiff’s (2006) living theory action research. Living theory action research is different from more traditional and mainstream AR approaches in the sense that the standards of judgements by which the claims of knowledge are evaluated are provided by researchers themselves in addition to normative criteria from the awarding institution (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). These standards of judgements are articulated in terms of the unique values of the researcher as they are relevant to the research project. Researchers of living theory AR projects make certain claims that they were successful in living in accordance with their values, and provide reasonable evidence to this effect. This claim is submitted to a critical audience (e.g., peer review, examiner, etc.) to judge whether this claim is valid based on the declared standards of judgement. I explain in chapter four how I employed this

approach in inquiring into how I can improve my academic practice by facilitating the collaborative action research project.

### **Experiencing myself as a living contradiction**

To give an account of my living theory, I share my personal experiences of my academic existence as a living contradiction which is described by McNiff et al. (2003, p.59) as “feeling dissonance when we are not acting in accordance with our values and beliefs.” Whitehead (1989) refers to the “I” of the researcher existing as a living contradiction in the sense that the “I” contained two mutually exclusive opposites, the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation” (p.43). My own living contradiction manifested in the sense that what I believed was possible to achieve (synergistic action in collaboration with committed colleagues to create locally relevant knowledge in a context of socioeconomic deprivation) and what I lived (an academic practice that consisted almost entirely of lecturing and supervising therapeutic practice) contradicted each other. I explain this contradiction by describing the values that provide purpose and meaning to my life in chapters two and three. I contextualise these values in terms of my psychotherapeutic identity and my worldview in chapter three. My experience of myself as a living contradiction acted as a catalyst for the establishment of the R@I initiative. In chapter two I provide more detail on the contextual factors that I believed were influential in the establishment and continuation of the R@I project.

### **Prior experience with self-study research**

I initiated the R@I project with some knowledge of action research that I acquired in conducting a self-study AR project into my developing practice as psychotherapist during the period 1998 to 2000. I submitted a report on that research as a dissertation in partial fulfilment of my Master’s degree in clinical psychology (Louw, 2000). In this current research, which I submit for a doctoral degree, I expanded the self-study method to a living theory action research method, which included a collaborative AR project in which I facilitated 17 discussion meetings (of about three hours each) over a two-year period (May 2004 to March 2006). In these meetings we reflected on various ways to improve both our individual practices as academics as well as the service delivery and functioning of our university psychology clinic.

### **Turning resources into assets**

One of the major themes present throughout this thesis, and which emerged from my inquiry into my facilitation of the R@I project, is the concept of *turning resources into assets*. I explain in chapter three the origin of this phrase from the work of Brulin (2001). In the context of this thesis, *resources* refer to any people, relationships, information or material goods that are deemed valuable and which could contribute towards reaching a desired goal, but which have not been utilised or engaged for this purpose. I use the word *assets* to refer to resources which have been utilised or engaged towards a desired goal. I argue in this thesis that as individual academics we remained resources (potential assets) to each other until an opportunity was created in which we were transformed into assets for each other in order to reach our goals. These goals were defined as improving the service delivery of our university psychology clinic and increasing our output of locally relevant research. I argue that the R@I project provided regular and consistent opportunities for nurturing these goals and for generating creative and critical thought; and therefore enabled us to transform from resources into assets both for ourselves and for each other.

### **Living in the direction of my values**

With regards to the place of the researcher's values in action research, McNiff et al. (2003) state that

action researchers...use their values as the basis for their action. Because this is such a massive responsibility they always need to check whether theirs are justifiable values, whether they are living in the direction of their values, and whether their influence is benefitting other people in ways that those other people also feel are good. This involves highly rigorous evaluation checks and restraints, to make sure that action researchers can justify, and do not abuse, their potential influence. (p.15)

In this thesis I provide evidence of how I have lived in the direction of certain core values (self-determination, synergistic action and creating locally relevant knowledge) as well as the evaluation checks and restraints I put in place to guard against the potential abuse of

my influence as facilitator of the R@I project, including how I ensured transparency in my record keeping (chapter four).

In chapters five to seven I show the progression of the new knowledge that my colleagues and I created, and track how this was influenced by my enactments of these core values. In chapter five I present the results of the R@I project in the form of answers to the questions: “How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?” and “How can we increase our research output?”

In chapter six I present the results of the self-study project in two sections. In the first section I deal with the progression of my own learning in facilitating the R@I project as a response to the question: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” In the second section I discuss my team members’ evaluation of my facilitation and the value of the R@I project to each of them. In chapter seven I present a meta-analysis of both the collaborative and self-study projects that culminates in my living theory of the transformation of my academic practice as a result of my facilitation and participation in the R@I project. I also discuss in chapter seven the potential significance of this study to the fields of action research, higher education, psychology in general and university psychology clinics in particular.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I introduce the study and briefly sketch the context within the transformation of higher education in South Africa in the early to mid 2000s. I situate the study in terms of my role, values and approach, and provide an outline of the seven chapters in this document. Specifically, I present my thesis as being concerned with my living theory of how I improved my academic practice in the context of a collaborative action research project with five of my colleagues on a South African university campus. In the following chapter, chapter two, I describe the contexts and evolution of the research questions within the larger context of higher education transformation in South Africa ten years after democracy.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTEXTS AND EVOLUTION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they have done and why. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.19)

This chapter provides an overview of the sociopolitical, educational, geographical and interpersonal contexts in and from which this study evolved. This is followed by a more comprehensive distinction between the two research projects and a description of the research aims and questions. Towards the end of the chapter, I briefly locate the two projects within my value set as a researcher.

Mamelodi is a large urban settlement east of Pretoria in South Africa, and is populated predominantly by people of African ethnicity. The psychology training clinic, Itsoseng clinic, is also located on the Mamelodi campus and serves both students and members of the communities around the campus. The core action research project took place during the first two years (2004-2006) of significant transformation in the South African higher education landscape<sup>2</sup>. As part of this transformation process, the Mamelodi campus of Vista University was incorporated into the University of Pretoria. To situate the study in context, a brief description of the psychology clinic and the township of Mamelodi follows in the next section.

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<sup>2</sup> Even though the principles and architecture of this transformation process had already been decided in a government white paper in 1997, its implementation by means of mergers and incorporations only formally took place from the year 2004 onwards.

## The context of the research projects

### *The South African sociopolitical landscape in 2004*

In 2004, ten years after the country's first democratic elections in 1994, the South African sociopolitical landscape was dominated by uneven and complex transformations, with developments largely characterised by the introduction of multiparty politics and regular elections (Institute for Democracy in South African [Idasa], 2004). A new political arena made new socioeconomic developmental agendas possible and provided hope. Some of the challenges that South Africa faced during this time included living up to the ideals of the newly written constitution, constant reinterpretations of human rights, dealing with the ever-growing HIV/AIDS pandemic, and addressing educational and socioeconomic inequalities created by the previous apartheid regime (Alternative Information and development [AIDC], n.d.; Idasa, 2004). Regular public debates and political promises without real changes to the lives of people in desperate poverty-stricken situations sometimes led to despair and loss of confidence in governance (AIDC, n.d.).

The impact of globalisation was felt in the increasingly assertive role that South Africa was expected to play in the region of Africa known as the Southern African Development Community (SADC). South Africa had started to accept and redefine itself as an African country, with developmental goals and responsibilities shared with its African neighbours; and the ideal of an *African renaissance* (renewal in cultural, economic, scientific and other arenas) was popularised by the then South African President, Thabo Mbeki (Vale & Maseko, 1998). Global conditions and relations between developing and developed countries were undergoing a rapid change, often to the disadvantage of poorer countries (Idasa, 2004). There also existed an expectation among the majority of South Africans that the transition should not only be smooth but also swift (Gourley, 1999).

On a national level, the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), was beginning to be criticised for failing to deliver the post-apartheid South Africa (popularly referred to as the "new South Africa") from an historical racial divide in terms of class and wealth. It was instead accused of reproducing a form of apartheid:

One of the most serious consequences of the nature of the transition to a liberal democracy in South Africa is that the ANC ironically has to preside over a period that is reproducing inequality along racial lines as effectively as apartheid legislation and institutional apparatus did. (AIDC, n.d.)

What was evident in 2004 was that ten years after the end of apartheid, “race” was still a present, central and controversial signifier in public discourse, which elicited either a defensive or antagonistic response. As the then Principal and Vice chancellor of the University of South Africa pointed out,

In truth, the fault line created by a history of racial discrimination and prejudice has sunk very deeply into the South African consciousness... the reason that it is important that this situation be adjusted is that it bears the seed of revolution. It causes despair and alienation. It is evident that South Africa has not changed. It is a white country. But it goes deeper than that. It says that the identity of South Africa as an African nation, its self-understanding, its consciousness, remains determined by a world-view and culture with very shallow roots in the continent. (Pityana, 2004, p.2)

There was pressure to compete and survive in a global market, and to live up to the ideal of a peaceful and miraculous transition to democracy (AIDC, n.d.). This, together with the growing dissent expressed by neo-liberal intellectuals and academics, provided the political background for transformations planned and executed in the higher education landscape of South Africa.

*The changing landscape of higher education in South Africa in 2004*

The higher education system in South Africa needed to reflect the recent political changes. Consequently, a transformation process was initiated to “overcome the fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency which are the legacy of the past, and create a learning society which releases the creative and intellectual energies of all our people towards meeting the goals of reconstruction and development” (South Africa, 1997, p.3).

Prior to 2004, higher education institutions in South Africa reflected the history of segregation (Barnard, 2007). This was visible in terms of the different purposes for which they had been established and the ethnic groups they served (Barnard, 2007; Council on Higher Education, 2003). On 24 June 2002, the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, announced his intention to incorporate the eight campuses of the historically black Vista University into various historically white universities (HWUs), also known as historically advantaged universities (HAUs) (Bakker, 2004; Barnard, 2007; South Africa, 2003). This incorporation process was in accordance with the transformation of the higher education landscape in South Africa as outlined in the *Education White Paper 3: A framework for the transformation of higher education* (South Africa, 1997). In brief, the objectives of the transformation related to the need to:

- a) redress social and structural inequalities that have resulted in a fragmented higher education in which some institutions are better resourced than others and in which race and ethnicity continue to define and limit access into some institutions;
- b) address challenges associated with globalisation, which include the role and capacity of the higher education system in the long-term to meet the human resource and knowledge needs of the country; and
- c) ensure that limited resources are utilised effectively and efficiently (Mangena, 2002, p.1)

#### *Vista University prior to 2004*

Vista University was established in the early 1980s, during the apartheid era (1948-1994), to provide university education to urban black African students (Bakker, 2004). It was one of several historically black universities (HBUs), also known as historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs). Vista University comprised a central campus, a distance education campus and seven contact campuses situated in urban black townships throughout South Africa (Bloemfontein, Daveyton, Mamelodi, Sebokeng, Soweto, Port Elizabeth and Welkom). These townships originated under the rule of the apartheid government when African people were evicted from designated “whites only” areas and subjected to forced relocation outside established cities and towns (Bakker,



2009). Housing in these townships ranged from medium and low-cost brick houses to shacks constructed from recycled wooden planks, odd pieces of iron and corrugated iron sheets, plastic bags and any other recycled material that could function as a roof or wall. Mamelodi became established as a black township during the early 1960s (Bakker, 2009; Walker, Van der Waal, Chiloane, Wentzel & Moraloki, 1991). The photographs of Mamelodi presented below provide an idea of the type of housing, the density of living in some parts, as well as the general socioeconomic status of the residents.



**Figure 1 Mamelodi indicated as a blue square in the province of Gauteng (indicated in red in the inset). Adjusted from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamelodi,\\_Gauteng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamelodi,_Gauteng).**



**Figure 2** Aerial view of a section of Mamelodi.  
From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamelodi>,  
Gauteng.



**Figure 3** A school in Mamelodi. Used with  
permission from Linda Blokland.



**Figure 5** Hair salon operating from a residential  
outbuilding in Mamelodi. Used with permission  
from Linda Blokland.



**Figure 4** Mamelodi informal settlement.  
Photographed by the author on 27 May 2005.

## The University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria is regarded as an historically white or historically advantaged university (Mabokela & Wei, 2007). It originated in 1908 as the Pretoria branch of the Transvaal<sup>3</sup> University College, with English as the medium of instruction (History of the University of Pretoria, n.d.). By 1930 the institution had 900 students, making it the largest tertiary institution in South Africa at the time, and its name was changed to the University of Pretoria. In 1932 the University Council decided that Afrikaans<sup>4</sup> would be the only medium of instruction (University of Pretoria historical overview, n.d.). During most of the twentieth century, only white students were admitted, in keeping with the University Act of 1916 that provided for separate universities for “non-whites” (Mabokela, 1997). In 1989 the University of Pretoria changed its segregation policy to admit all races (History of the University of Pretoria, n.d.). However, Afrikaans remained the only medium of instruction until 1994, after which English was reintroduced as a second medium of instruction. The University of Pretoria is one of the largest tertiary institutions in Africa and currently enrolls in excess of 50 000 students each year (Introduction to University of Pretoria, n.d.).

### *The incorporation of Vista (Mamelodi) into the University of Pretoria*

On 2 January 2004 the Mamelodi campus of Vista University was incorporated into the University of Pretoria. The reasons stated for the incorporation were (De Beer, 2005, p.3):

- a) to bridge the gap that apartheid caused between historically white and historically black institutions
- b) to promote equity with regard to students and staff
- c) to ensure effective and efficient use of resources through eliminating overlaps and duplication of academic programmes

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<sup>3</sup> Transvaal is the name of a former province of South Africa that corresponds to the current provinces of Gauteng, Limpopo, North West Province and Mpumalanga. The literal meaning of the name Transvaal refers to the crossing (trans) of the Vaal (Afrikaans for “grey”) river that separated it from the Orange Free State province to the south.

<sup>4</sup> Afrikaans is a daughter language of Dutch, also referred to as “kitchen Dutch” or “Cape Dutch”. It originated from 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch dialects. It is mostly spoken in South Africa and Namibia. Afrikaans was also generally considered to be the language of the apartheid regime (Giliomee, 2003; Vice, 2010).

- d) to consolidate existing academic programmes in order to present a wider range of academic programmes in response to regional and national needs

By the end of 2004 all eight campuses of Vista University had either been incorporated into different historically advantaged universities or had merged to create new institutions (Bakker, 2004). The psychological effects of this process on staff and students are documented in Fourie (2008), and reflect the struggle to conserve a coherent sense of self when familiar professional contextual markers are absent or devalued.

*The Psychology Department of Vista University, Mamelodi campus*

The Psychology Department of Vista University had a common curriculum for seven contact campuses and an adjusted curriculum for a distance education campus. Each campus contained a sub-department for psychology, and in the period just prior to the incorporation (2002 to 2004), the Mamelodi campus employed six staff members. These staff members (five of my colleagues and myself) formed the research workgroup of the core action research project (Research@Itsoseng or R@I) described below. I provide a short introduction to each of the participants later in this chapter.

At the time of the incorporation in 2004, the six positions of the Mamelodi campus psychology sub-department were all filled by white South Africans, although previously there had been a mix of staff representing many groups and races; and the Vista University staff as a whole was represented by most ethnic groups (T.M. Bakker, personal communication, March 25, 2011). For a variety of reasons (e.g., language barriers, limited educational resources and scarce basic living resources), many of the students presented with significant learning needs that required a sensitive responsive and dedicated teaching approach (Bakker, Eskell-Blokland, May, Pauw, & Van Breda, 1999; Bakker et al., 2000). Vista University appeared to attract and retain staff members of all ethnic groups that were committed to meeting the challenges of providing tertiary education to mostly black students from South Africa and other African countries (Bakker, 2007; Fourie, 2008).



The Vista Mamelodi psychology sub-department offered an undergraduate curriculum, directed Honours and Master's degrees as well as research supervision of doctoral students. Unlike the undergraduate student population who were almost exclusively of black African ethnicity, the Vista Mamelodi psychology sub-department was one of the few academic departments with postgraduate (Honours and Master's level) students of mixed ethnicity.

In addition to being lecturers, all six staff members were registered psychologists, four holding registration as clinical psychologists and two registered in the counselling psychology scope of practice. All of us were involved in the Master's counselling psychology training programme (that led to professional registration as a counselling psychologist) as well as the BPsych (Honours level) programme (that led to professional registration as a counsellor). These two postgraduate training programmes used the Itsoseng Psychology Clinic on the Mamelodi campus as an important practical training site.

#### *Some effects of the incorporation process*

The differences in the institutional cultures of Vista University and the University of Pretoria, as perceived by the members of the core action research project, are particularly relevant to the core action research project. From my own perspective, prior to the incorporation I experienced autonomy and self-determination in contributing to strategic decisions for how psychology was taught and practised on the Mamelodi campus. As a satellite campus, we were part of the larger Psychology Department of Vista University, but because we were also separate, the formation and maintenance of a group identity for the psychology staff on all of the campuses was encouraged (Bakker et al., 1999). As mentioned above, each of the various Vista campuses hosted a psychology sub-department, and the Vista Psychology Department comprised these various sub-departments. Once a year, all the sub-departments would meet for two days to discuss strategic issues relevant to all sub-departments.

My most enduring memory of working for Vista University prior to the incorporation was the feeling (and narrative) of *abundance* in terms of resources and opportunities for

curriculum development, innovative teaching and research. In contrast, after the incorporation into the University of Pretoria, the six faculty members on the Mamelodi campus suddenly became members of one large psychology department with no separate but equal sub-departments – even though we had not physically changed our location and continued to work in our Mamelodi offices. As a group, we still worked on the same campus, but received no recognition from the larger department of our autonomy or any commitment to maintaining this. As a consequence of the incorporation, we lost our right to self-determination and were expected to act as representatives of the University of Pretoria offering lectures in psychology on the Mamelodi campus. Over time, the Vista University psychology curricula were phased out and replaced with the University of Pretoria curricula. My experience of the institutional culture of the University of Pretoria was an overwhelming sense of *scarcity* of resources, and numerous bureaucratic processes that curtailed autonomy.

Immediately after the incorporation in January 2004, our physical work environments remained virtually unchanged. We were all working from our original offices on the Mamelodi campus, offering the same modules as before to the same student population as before. Yet, change was inevitable. We were in a transition period and wanted to preserve those things we considered valuable into our new roles as University of Pretoria staff members. One of the achievements that we wanted to preserve and further develop was Itsoseng Psychology Clinic.

#### *Itsoseng Psychology Clinic*

Itsoseng is a Tswana<sup>5</sup> word that is used as a call to proactivity in improving your own circumstances. Its literal meaning translates to something like “uplift yourself” or “get up and do it”. Itsoseng clinic on the Mamelodi campus has been in operation since 1995, and originally offered a free psychometry service, providing intelligence, personality and aptitude testing to aid in career guidance decisions. As such, it served as a practical training site for psychology Honours students working towards professional registration as psychometrists. When the Vista Mamelodi psychology sub-department initiated a

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<sup>5</sup> Tswana is one of the indigenous African languages spoken in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

directed Master's programme in counselling psychology, the clinic broadened its services to include supervised individual, couples and group psychotherapy. By 2004, in addition to these forms of psychotherapy, the services offered included psychoeducation sessions; pre-and post-test HIV counselling; liaison and consultation with schools and NGOs; as well as opportunities for collaborative research with other agencies.

Itsoseng has become a phrase that encapsulates a philosophy of commitment to service and care for the community it serves. This community comprises both students on the Mamelodi campus as well as members of the wider Mamelodi community. The clinic can be regarded as one interface or relationship between the university (academia) and the surrounding local community, who benefitted from the services provided by supervised trainee therapists. Itsoseng Psychology Clinic further represented a potential hub in which teaching, research and community engagement activities could be integrated. Offering a psychological service to the communities surrounding the campus was envisaged as a form of community engagement. We were also able to conduct research on issues directly relevant to the functioning of the clinic and its community of stakeholders; and our experience in both research and community engagement practices could inform our lecturing and professional training content. All of the psychology faculty members on the Mamelodi campus lectured on the various programmes, supervised students working in the clinic, and participated in operational decisions pertaining to the day-to-day running of the clinic. These six members formed the workgroup of the core action research project and are more fully introduced in the following section.

*Introducing the participants of the core action research project (R@I)*

I invited each member of the workgroup to provide me with a written autobiographical introduction and photo of their choice. As a member of this group, I also include my own photo and introduction. These short autobiographical sketches provide some indication of the mix of experience, interest, and expertise that was present in this group of people. Four members of this group gave their consent to be presented by me in this chapter in this way and their photos to be used in this manuscript. One member of the team requested to remain anonymous, as explained in chapter one. I refer to this member

throughout this document as *Member 6*. I furthermore provide a short description of my experience of our collective values and aims in the R@I group – a personal view of the R@I group identity.

***Mr Willem Louw***



Apart from authoring this thesis, I acted as the facilitator and team member of the collaborative action research project. Among others, my academic interests include the creation of locally relevant knowledge, critical community psychology, systemic family therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and the training of psychologists and psychotherapists. By the year 2004, life had afforded me many opportunities: I was married to Penny (a clinical psychologist and language editor), I was parent to my fast-growing three-year-old girl Maya, practised Zen Buddhism and tai chi, and worked in academic and psychotherapeutic contexts. Towards the end of 2005 my son Max was born, and my life felt abundant in many ways. During this time action research always presented me with a profound dilemma. It appeared in texts almost always too good to be true, and I felt somewhat like a traitor to humanity merely for entertaining this thought. The availability of a small and cohesive group of like-minded and eager colleagues, and the presence of significant and practical work life issues during a transformational period and in a context that cried out for socially responsible engagement, similarly appeared to be an opportunity too good to be true. An action research project seemed the obvious response, even if only to finally discover its shadow side. As a psychotherapist and a toastmaster, I have always felt that conversational spaces need to be carefully prepared and actively nurtured – the presence of people in roughly the same spot is necessary but not sufficient. In this respect, the R@I meetings were no different; and as a consequence this thesis could as equally be titled “The Importance of Coffee, Muffins and Undisturbed Conversation”.



### ***Dr Gerhard Viljoen***



Gerhard Viljoen was closely involved in this project, not only as a workgroup member of the core action research project, but also as the promoter of this study. Gerhard was committed to egalitarian and social justice issues, displayed a passion for action research and favoured emergent and open-ended research designs.

Gerhard was also an artist (painted and sketched) and musician (guitar and singing) with an appreciation for the classics and a leaning towards the bohemian. He was a registered clinical psychologist for 21 years and had worked in the South African Defence Force and various universities (Vista, University of Pretoria, and Girne American University in North Cyprus). Gerhard's doctoral thesis (Viljoen, 2004) explored from a social constructionist position the well-being of young psychotherapists. Gerhard was diagnosed with cancer in 2008 and finally succumbed to it in April 2011. He desperately wished to see the completion of this project and worked tirelessly on the various drafts of this manuscript until his passing in March 2011. Gerhard handed over his role as promoter for this PhD to Terri Bakker shortly before his passing.

### ***Professor Terri Bakker***



Terri Bakker has worked for many years on the Vista Mamelodi campus, and became involved in the incorporation process through representing the campus in various incorporation negotiations, which coincided with the time that the Research@Itsoseng project was running. She was working on a research project on the

incorporation process at the time. She is interested in research at the margins of established methodologies and research traditions, within a postmodern paradigm, and is committed to values of social justice. Her professional and academic background and interests have evolved through the fields of family and ecosystemic therapy, social constructionism, narrative therapy, qualitative research, discourse analysis, and African perspectives in psychology. Her doctorate was concerned with the issue of the relevance

of psychology in African contexts and involved a Foucauldian archaeology of the power of various discourses in African contexts. She is registered as a counselling psychologist. Terri Bakker took over as promoter for this PhD from Gerhard Viljoen in March 2011.

***Dr Linda Blokland***



Being born into a nomadic family, moving between cultures became a survival technique for Linda. It also taught her the ephemeral value of stability and confirmed the trite adage that the only real constancy is change. The wonderful illusion that the grass is greener on the other side serves only to distract from the treasure buried at one's feet. True to these life revelations she stays committed to the rich context of Mamelodi and indeed finds that her working life there is filled with a continuous stream of new ideas, inspirations and valuable discoveries. This makes her own life meaningful and her work and research of enormous personal worth.

***Ms Ilse Ruane***



Ilse Ruane is passionately committed to issues of social justice and community mental welfare, and is enthusiastic about change. She is a self-proclaimed social activist and community psychologist. As a registered counselling psychologist since 2003 and lecturer at Vista University, Mamelodi campus and the University of Pretoria, Mamelodi campus has made her develop a keen empathy for township communities. Ilse is involved in postgraduate training and the supervision of trainee psychologists. In research she is currently exploring how the profession of psychology is responding to the diverse multicultural nature of the SA context in the training of postgraduate students. Other research interests include the praxis of community psychology, obstacles to the utilisation of mental health resources in township communities, traditional versus western knowledge systems, local knowledges, challenging the frontiers of community psychology, and multiculturalism.

### **Member 6**



This team member has been a part of the core action research workgroup from the start of this project, has attended most of the R@I meetings and other connected events and has made many valuable contributions to the process and outcomes of the project. This member expressed a wish to remain anonymous.

### ***The R@I working group***

The R@I working group comprised the six members introduced above. As a member and facilitator of this group, I experienced a strong group identity defined by our quests. These included a striving for relevance to the communities we served; a need for recognition from the academic fraternity (including the university into which we were being incorporated); and a drive for excellence. We wanted to be recognised for successfully conducting and publishing locally relevant research, and for providing an accessible and competent psychological service to clients at the Itsoseng clinic. We also wanted to offer potent learning and training opportunities for students enrolled in our programmes. I experienced a strong camaraderie and sense of belonging, especially during and after the incorporation of the Mamelodi campus of Vista University into the University of Pretoria. I remember many humorous and entertaining interjections threading through serious discussions.

### **Distinguishing the core action research project from the thesis project**

#### *The core action research project: Research@Itsoseng*

Prior to working in an academic institution, I worked in the clinical settings of a South African military hospital, a community mental health clinic and in a part-time private practice. None of these contexts required me to conduct and publish research. The sum total of my research experience was the completion of a dissertation of limited scope

submitted for the research component of my Master's degree. As a result, by the time I was appointed as university lecturer, I had no publication record and no experience in producing articles. My professional identity centred mainly on my role as a clinician and psychotherapist.

In my practice as an academic faculty member at Vista University and then the University of Pretoria, I experienced the familiar pressure to publish and the conflict of too little time to do both teaching and research. This is not an unfamiliar struggle for academics, judging by the frequent and regular laments on this topic in the literature (e.g., Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1998; Colbeck, 2004; Felder, 1994). The “publish or perish” culture of academia was daunting as I had no prior experience in the practice of writing or publishing. The further challenge of independently producing publications as a result of the higher value placed on sole authorship led to an increase in anxiety and decrease in confidence.

Working in close collaboration with my colleagues on the Mamelodi campus, through informal and often animated conversations I gradually discovered that we shared a commitment to innovative teaching practices, the generation of locally relevant research and community engagement initiatives. We would spend hours trying to rewrite study guides to make them more accessible to our student population; we brainstormed creative ways of examining students who came from impoverished educational backgrounds and were second- or third-language English speakers; and in designing and facilitating psychotherapy skills training modules we constructed progressive skills matrices that we thought we might publish, given the right opportunity. Some of the members published research in this regard (e.g., Bakker, 2004). We also constantly invited or visited community organisations to foster better working relationships between the clinic and the community. These commitments likely developed as a result of the unique context in which we worked, but did not lead to flourishing. I noticed that my colleagues shared my frustration at this inability to translate our values and commitments into our everyday practices, and to fit research into our daily schedules of training and teaching.

The impetus for the core action research project came from a personal recognition that I was not alone in my desire to flourish in my academic position. From several conversations with my colleagues, I furthermore realised that we all yearned for a structure of some kind that would make it easier for us to thrive as academics. During this time I was reading in the fields of action research (e.g., McNiff et al., 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and emancipatory research (Boog, 2003; Robberts & Dick, 2003), and started to imagine the possibilities of a peer support workgroup that might meet regularly to research issues relevant to our daily practice.

I invited my five colleagues to establish an action research project to work towards resolving everyday practical work life problems. From this the Research@Itsoseng (R@I) project was born. The daily operation of Itsoseng clinic presented us with many challenges (discussed in more detail in chapter five) and as the clinic was central to our postgraduate training programmes, internship positions and community engagement efforts, we deemed it a practical and relevant collection of “work life problems” to focus on in a collaborative action research project. Two research questions emerged in line with these goals: (1) how can we improve the functioning of the Itsoseng Psychology clinic?; and (2) how can we increase our research output? In chapter five I discuss our collective learning process, a raised awareness of resources and the co-creation of identities as researchers as we progressed through our collaborative attempts to continually find answers to these two research questions.

*The thesis project: My living theory of how I aimed to improved my practice as an academic*

The thesis project consists of descriptions and explanations of my facilitation of the Research@Itsoseng (core action research) project (described in depth in chapter seven). I used a living theory action research approach (more fully explored in chapters three and four) to reflect on how I developed my academic practice, both in the R@I conversational spaces and relationships and as a result of being both facilitator and collaborator of the R@I project. In chapter seven I describe my evolving academic practice as it emerged from the interrelation between my professional identity, the members of the workgroup, the core action research project, as well as the sociopolitical,

historical, geographical and educational contexts in which I worked. From the outset of the R@I project, I indicated to my colleagues that I intended to submit a thesis based on the work we did (Appendix E, Record of the 1st R@I meeting held 2004/05/26):

I see this project as varying in size for each participant. I myself am interested in the project as a whole (establishing an action research forum at the Mamelodi Campus that is able to do research on various focus areas [or practical problems] with the aim of producing research products that are relevant and useful to the participants of each of the research projects.) This I plan to document in the format of a PhD research report.

It is important to mention that I did not draw a distinction between the Research@Itsoseng venture and my thesis project until after it was completed (the project took place between May 2004 and April 2006). Initially most of my energy and focus went into the facilitation of the core action research project. This entailed a great deal of logistical preparation and many motivational conversations outside of the actual meetings, practical activities such as recording and transcribing our discussions and decisions during meetings, and critical reflection on the content and directions of the discussions. Without a distinction between the thesis and core project, I was plagued by the question of authorship of new knowledge and the distinction between research and problem solving (Zuber-Skerrit & Perry, 2002). To progress with the thesis, it seemed imperative to define a clear relationship between the core research project (R@I) and the thesis project.

*The relationship between the core action research project and the thesis project*

As the R@I project came to an end in April 2006, I started to critically engage with the records of our reflections and actions and started writing multiple drafts of my thesis manuscript, with each subsequent draft representing a new or different understanding. During this period Whitehead and McNiff (2006) published *Action research: Living theory*, which provided me with a first frame to distinguish the R@I project from my thesis research – my own learning as a result of facilitating the core action research project. The distinctions provided by McKay and Marshall (2001) on problem solving interest and research interest (more fully described in chapter four) and Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002) (on distinctions between a core action research project and a thesis project)

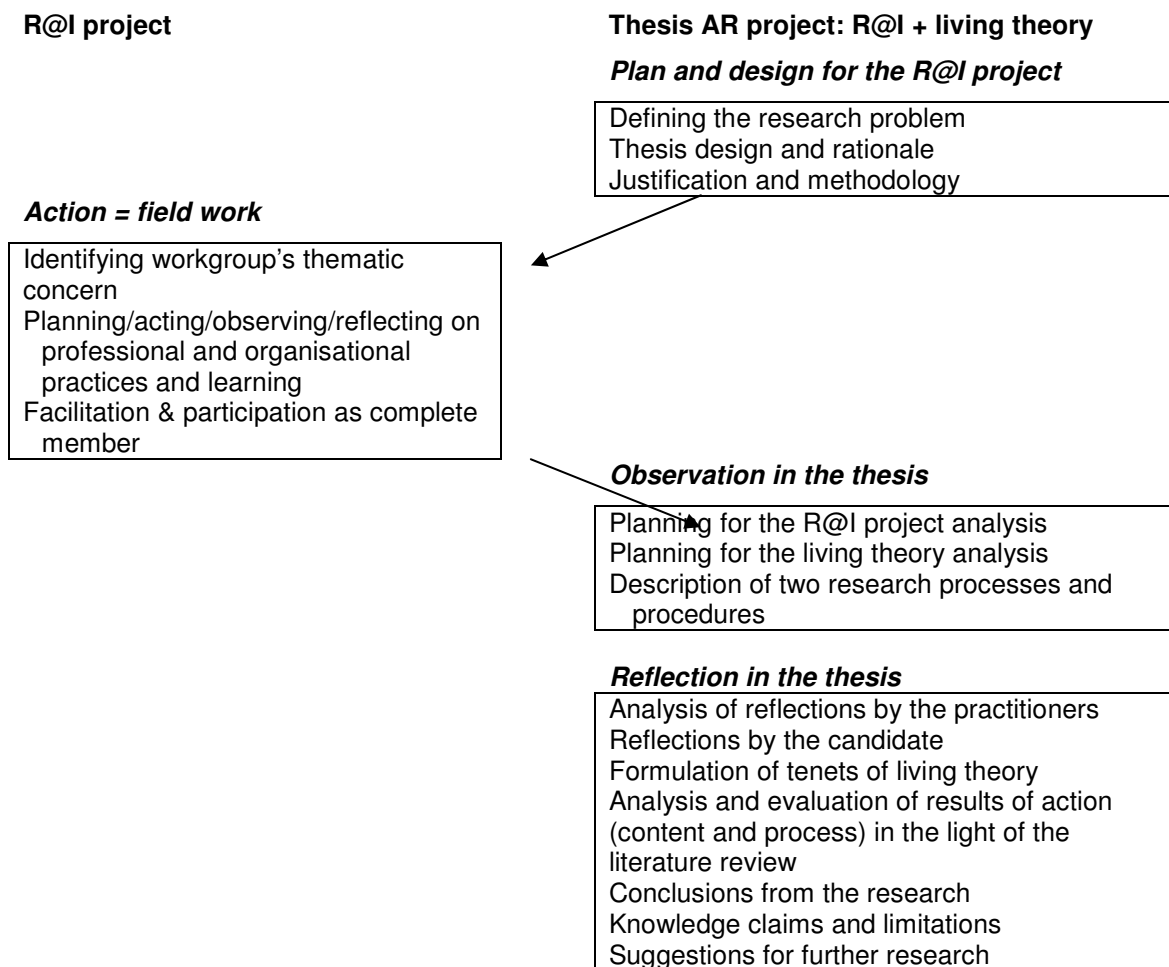
further usefully augmented my ability to analyse my own learning as discernable from the collective results of the core action research project. When an action research project is undertaken in collaboration with work colleagues to solve practical work life problems for the purposes of a dissertation or thesis, Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002) note that it is not unusual for a dilemma of ownership of the theory building to arise: “Most students find it difficult to distinguish between the collaborative project work with their colleagues, and their thesis work which has to constitute their individual, original contribution to knowledge in the field” (p.171). As a solution to this dilemma they propose a clear distinction between the core action research project and the thesis project, with the relationship between them visually represented in Figure 6 below.



**Figure 6 The relationship between core and thesis action research (Zuber-Skerrit & Perry, 2002, p.176).**



The relationship between the R@I project and my living theory action research project follows a similar pattern to Zuber-Skerrit and Perry's (2002) diagram above. The R@I project is represented by the core action research project and my living theory action research project forms part of the thesis action research project. However, during the *observation phase* of my project, I did more planning for the thesis design, which was not originally a living theory project. The following diagram adapts Zuber-Skerrit and Perry's (2002) version to reflect the place of the various research processes in this study.



**Figure 7 The relationship between the R@I project and my thesis project (adapted from Zuber-Skerrit & Perry, 2002, p.176).**



The relationship between the core action research project and the thesis project can therefore be summarised as follows. In the thesis project I explore my actions, reflections and changes in academic practice as a result of my participation in and facilitation of the core action research project. The thesis project contains the R@I project, but focuses on my professional development as a result of my dual role of facilitator and member of the R@I project within the particular sociopolitical, geographical, educational and chronological contexts mentioned above.

### **The research questions within the larger contexts**

The impetus for initiating the action research (R@I) project was rooted in certain values I held. These values are the co-creation of locally relevant knowledge; self-determination; and synergistic action. These personal values became more visible to me in the relationships, contexts and maturing of the R@I project. In chapter three I describe these values in more detail. I discuss how my values found expression in my academic practice, and how, as a result, they informed the thesis project and eventually my living theory of how I improved my academic practice in collaboration with the other members of the R@I project.

The R@I project took place during a period of higher education transformation in South Africa in which our department was incorporated into the University of Pretoria. The R@I project partly came about in reaction to this process. The incorporation threatened our experience of agency as well as our identity as academics who were dedicated to providing quality tertiary education to a segment of the South African population that had unique learning needs rooted in disadvantage under the apartheid system. Although the government's goal with the incorporation process was to improve educational opportunities for previously disadvantaged South Africans, our fear was that the opposite would happen. Our fear was that with incorporation, the specific learning needs of our students would be ignored, their local campus closed and their physical access to higher education facilities hampered, and their classes relocated to a distant (and deeply Eurocentric) setting where they felt out of place and inferior in terms of socioeconomic status, social privilege and educational background. We feared, too, that the Vista modules would be summarily discarded and replaced with UP modules without

consideration for the potential value and relevance to Africa of the Vista curricula, and without concern for the students who might struggle to adapt to a strongly Eurocentric focus and style of learning.

The future of the Mamelodi campus after the incorporation was uncertain. Consequently, the functioning and continued existence of our psychology clinic was at stake. As the R@I workgroup, we were convinced that our campus, curriculum and clinic were adding value to our local community. We were furthermore convinced that the incorporation provided the University of Pretoria with the potential of becoming more socially relevant to the broader South African public and its needs. In addition, there was an increased incentive for us to “prove” our value to the incorporating institution in a bid to keep the campus from being closed and all staff moved to the main campus in Pretoria (Bakker, 2007; 2009).

It was during our discussions at the time of the incorporation that the idea emerged of a research forum at the psychology clinic; one that could produce research reports about the needs of the local community (students, stakeholders, members of society living around the campus), and how we were endeavouring to serve those needs. We envisioned such a research forum as our best possible response to the threat to our collective identity and autonomy (see Appendix E for the records of the monthly meetings). We pictured such an action research forum as forming a backbone to the Itsoseng Psychology Clinic, where staff members and students could conduct research (as practitioner-researchers), and where the research questions arose from the training issues and unique service delivery requirements. In this way, teaching/training, community service and research outputs could be integrated rather than being performed as three separate activities, a goal strongly advocated by researchers such as Brulin (2001). The integration of these three university tasks had been a general principle of our academic philosophy, but became a much more prominent operational goal after the establishment of the R@I project. We believed that the knowledge created through these integrated activities would be automatically locally relevant, valid and valuable (Greenwood & Levin, 2000) since it was created by the very people who longed

for this kind of knowledge – indigenous knowledge (Eskell-Blokland, Bakker, Louw, Ruane & Viljoen, 2007) in the making, as it were.

Thus the Research@Itsoseng project came into being as a means for us to overcome some of the negative effects of the incorporation. It acted as a forum for us to increase our awareness of hidden and untapped resources, to synergise and integrate the three core tasks that made up our academic practices, and to preserve and co-create locally relevant knowledge to serve the communities in which we were embedded.

My additional involvement as facilitator allowed me an additional level of reflection: how did my academic practice improve as a result of my participation and facilitation of the Research@Itsoseng project? The thesis project contains my answers to this question in the form of my living theory (Whitehead, 1993; 2008b) of how my academic practice improved in the many interrelated contexts of the R@I project.

A discussion of my research within the context of similar research projects is presented in chapter seven, together with an overview of the contexts of relevant and related academic debates. In the latter chapter I also address the potential significance of my research outside of the boundaries of the R@I project, and explore the contribution of my research to the field of psychology.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I distinguished between the core action research project (the Research@Itsoseng project) and the thesis project (living theory action research project). I explained how the thesis project contains the core action research project. I situated the research projects and corresponding research questions within the sociopolitical and geographical context of South Africa at the time and briefly described how the transformation in higher education influenced the research projects.

In chapter three I discuss the philosophical underpinnings of this research and provide a reflexive account of how my values and other biographical factors likely influenced and informed the nature and directions I took in this research. I also provide a framework for

a discussion of my academic practice by looking at the three tasks of universities (Burlin, 2001).

## CHAPTER 3

### PHILOSOPHY AND FRAMEWORKS

*By taking action to change conditions, one is personally changed in the process*  
(Marx, 1963).

In this chapter I describe my study as self-study practitioner research within the context of a collaborative action research project. In so doing, I provide a reflexive account (acknowledging my influence on observations and descriptions) of the philosophical (ontological and epistemological) and methodological underpinnings of this research; and I show how my values are central to my inquiry into my practice as an academic. More specifically, I show how my practitioner research conforms to the characteristics of a living theory action research project, which is described by Whitehead and McNiff (2006) as a form of self-study practitioner research. A detailed discussion of the research design (which contains both the R@I project as well as the self-study research) appears in chapter four. I furthermore discuss the concepts of identity and agency as they relate to my role as co-researcher and facilitator. Towards the end of this chapter I consider the possible relevance of this study within the academic debate on the relationship between universities and local communities. I do this by discussing the R@I project in terms of the three generic tasks (teaching, research, community engagement) of universities and explain the concept of *turning resources into assets* as a central theme in this thesis.

#### **Practitioner research**

This research can be regarded as practitioner research (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Bruck, Hallett, Hood, MacDonald, & Moore, 2001; McAllister & Stockhausen, 2001; Sankaran, Dick, Passfield, & Swepson, 2001; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001) in that I inquire into how my academic practice as a university lecturer and faculty member changed during my membership and facilitation of the R@I project (described in chapter two). I draw three distinctions in examining my academic practice: my research practice, teaching practice

and community engagement practice. These distinctions are based on the three core tasks of universities (Brulin, 2001), which I discuss in more detail toward the end of this chapter.

McWilliam (2004) cautions against efforts to reduce practitioner research to the level of method as it tempts the researcher to choose a particular method (i.e., action research *or* discourse analysis *or* case study *or* ethnography) and then look for a problem to apply the method to: “Thus the overwhelming tendency remains that of working backwards from a method (‘I’m going to do a case study on something’) to a do-able problem as defined by that method” (McWilliam, 2004, p.120). My research of my academic practice (practitioner research) developed out of my involvement in the R@I project (collaborative action research) rather than the R@I project growing out of my attempts to research my own practice. In this study I report on the results and process of the R@I project as well as the development of my own academic practice within the context of this project. Where I report on the R@I project, it is from my perspective as a member and facilitator of the R@I workgroup. Therefore this study can also be seen as self-study research (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Lasonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009; Middle State Commission on Higher Education, 2007) in that I studied myself in relation to the other R@I workgroup members. The specific relationship between self-study research and action research as forms of practitioner research is clarified in the following section.

### **Self-study research and action research**

Foucault (in Collin, 1977) offers a rationale for self-study work: “If one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question” (p.64). Feldman, Paugh and Mills (2004) suggest that the *self* as a focus of the study is a “distinguishing characteristic of self-study as a variety of practitioner researcher” (p.953). In this vein, Feldman et al. (2004) offer three identifying criteria for self-study research: (1) the importance of the self of the researcher; (2) the experience of the researcher as resource for the research; and (3) a critical stance by the researcher towards his or her role. Self-study researchers “problematize their selves

in their practice situations” with the goal of reframing their beliefs and/or practice (Feldman, 2002, p.971).

Self-study research has a close relationship with action research (Samaras & Freese, 2009): in both genres of research, the researcher “inquires into problems situated in practice, engages in cycles of research, and systematically collects and analyzes data to improve practice” (p.5). Action research can be distinguished from self-study research by virtue of the focus being on *action* rather than *self* (Feldman et al., 2004). An action research project therefore focuses on reflections and decisions that led to certain actions as well as the intended and unintended consequences of these actions taken.

I report on the actions we took as an R@I team to improve our situation as well as the personal transformations that took place as a result. This action research perspective is presented in chapter five. In chapter six, I focus and report on my own role as facilitator and member of the R@I workgroup and the personal transformations that took place in my identity as researcher and academic. The latter process conforms to the genre of self-study research. There is therefore a constant movement between the self-study and the action research project – the personal and the interpersonal. This requires a framework to set out what the subjects of study are and how knowledge can be gained about these.

To answer the question, “how have I as a researcher influenced and been influenced by the research process?” requires a focus on this influence process and an ontological definition of self vis-à-vis this study. In the following section I discuss a reflexive process as a means to inquire into the influence that my ontological and epistemological assumptions had on my facilitation and participation in the R@I project. I also outline how I defined the *self* when inquiring into my practice as researcher and reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983), both in relation to the other workgroup members and in relation to the context in which this study took place.

## A reflexive process

The reflexive process involves an in depth look at how *you* (the researcher) are influencing what you are observing, how you are making sense of what you are observing and how you choose to report on what you have observed and come to know (Nightingale & Crombie, 1999; Ryan, 2005). Gergen (2000) notes that the particular importance of reflexivity derives from the recognition that “because observation is inevitably saturated with interpretation, and research reports are essentially exercises in interpretation, research and representation are inextricably linked” (p.1027). Reflexivity allows researchers to reveal their work as ‘historically, culturally and personally situated’ (Gergen, 2000, p.1028). The presence of a reflexive process (reflexivity) is valued in qualitative research, as indicated by Sandelowski and Barroso (2002, p.216):

Reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research and it entails the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge. Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share.

A *reflexive process* can be distinguished from *reflection* (verb) or a *reflective process* (noun). Ryan (2005) describes a reflective process as involving a focus on the various elements (e.g., verbal, nonverbal, feelings, thoughts) following action. Therefore, this process of reflection can be said to involve thinking about how various elements of an observation are related to each other. Furthermore, reflective knowledge (knowledge as a result of the reflective process) has to do with “a vision of what ought to be” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p.7) and how the actions of the researcher and participants contribute towards this vision. A *reflexive process*, on the other hand, implies that the *influence* of the many facets of the observer (on that which is observed) is included among the elements to be reflected on. Nightingale and Crombie (1999) distinguish between *epistemological* and *personal* reflexivity. They regard epistemological reflexivity to involve reflecting upon “the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings” (p.228). These authors consider



personal reflexivity to involve reflecting upon the “ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research...[and]...how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers” (Nightingale & Crombie, 1999, p.228).

Reflexivity may therefore be construed as a second-order process of reflection – it entails reflecting upon the recursive and personal influence of our reflections upon themselves. Reflection is one of the steps in the action research process. Reflexivity introduces an additional element that acknowledges the influence of the values and biases of the researcher, and represents the principles inherent in a social constructionist epistemology. In the following two sections I engage in a reflexive discussion on how my previous experience, interests, beliefs, political commitments, social identity as well as my ontological and epistemological assumptions may have shaped this research. The change that this process effected on my self is explored as part of my living theory in chapter seven.

## **Personal reflexivity**

### *Prior experience*

The research I conducted for my Master’s dissertation (Louw, 2000) was a self-study (first person) action research project on the development of my identity as a psychotherapist and psychologist. This experience predisposed me to choosing action research as research approach for the current study. I received my training as a psychologist and psychotherapist at the University of South Africa, in a psychology department that strongly favoured “new paradigm” research (defined in Bond, Harvey & Salvin-Baden, 1999; Reason, 1988). As such, for two years I was immersed in a training programme based on a postmodern paradigm and ecosystemic epistemology (Auerswald, 1971, 1985; Flood, 2006; Keeney, 1979, 1983). This had a significant influence on my view of relationships of any kind and what can be known of these.

### *Professional interests*

Two main professional interests significantly influenced the shape of this research project. The first relates to action research as an emancipatory exercise, where the ultimate goal is not an increased understanding or resolution of a practical problem, but a “raised awareness in people of their own abilities and resources to mobilise for social action” (Bhana, 2004, p.235). Learning about my own resources and abilities, and facilitating this learning (in the form of my educational influence) in order to mobilise us to social action, became a focus of the research project.

A second professional interest is the idea that universities have an obligation to serve their local communities and that this calls for a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship. (The origins of this interest are explored in the following section.) According to Greenwood and Levin (2000), universities continue to serve only the social elite, and state resources are spent on creating knowledge that does not benefit the large majority of society. They advocate a reconstruction of the relationships between societies and universities and suggest action research as one way to do it. Brulin (2001) advocates similarly that universities serve their communities and encourage academics to form networks that will enable resources to be turned into energising assets. These networks could act as a form of social glue that “facilitates access to important resources and it turns such resources into energising assets” (p.441).

### *My political background and commitments*

I grew up as a white<sup>6</sup> South African during the last decades of the apartheid era. I am a descendant from Dutch and other European ancestors who settled in South Africa in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and my mother tongue is Afrikaans – commonly considered the language of the oppressive regime that institutionalised apartheid in South Africa (Giliomee, 2003; Vice, 2010). As a result I declare a certain amount of ‘white guilt’ – the sense that belonging to an ethnic group that oppressed another ethnic group makes you responsible by association and bestows on you an imperative to contribute to redress of past wrongs in some form or other (Vice, 2010). Vice (2010, p.323) refers to the “taint” of

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘white’ in the South African context usually refers to South Africans who are descendants of European settlers and European immigrants.

the Afrikaner identity, and her article speaks eloquently of the complexity of being a white South African in the post-apartheid era. My cultural and political heritage is particularly relevant to this study in that the research problem is contextualised in a historically black<sup>7</sup> university embedded in a community (Mamelodi) that consists mainly of African people. My commitment to *community engagement* and the *creation of locally relevant knowledge* is perhaps at least in part motivated by my experience of ‘white guilt’ and the consequent responsibility to contribute to redressing the wrongs of apartheid. This is balanced by a commitment to self-determination of all people and awareness that the so-called ‘empowerment’ and ‘upliftment’ of the ‘previously disadvantaged’ are fraught with issues of maintaining power and elitism and the temptation to decide for others what is good for them and how they should live. I resolved this dilemma by suggesting that the R@I project focus on improving Itsoseng Clinic (which served the local African community) and increasing the local relevance of our research. My commitment to community engagement was in part also elicited by the apparent disparity of the geographical context. This context included the Mamelodi campus, populated with students from socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, which was surrounded by communities of people living in sometimes abject poverty and deprivation. Less than fifteen kilometres from the Mamelodi campus one enters the affluent eastern suburbs of Pretoria, where abundant, elegant and world-class shopping, housing and infrastructure can be found. This contrast elicited an awareness of privilege and a value dissonance in me. The idea of creating of locally relevant knowledge in partnership with community members went some way towards addressing this dissonance. As a result the R@I project became a vehicle for me to generate opportunities for local knowledge creation, in part to address my awareness of privilege and social disparity.

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<sup>7</sup> In South Africa, the term ‘black’ usually refers to descendants from the Bantu and Khoi San people living in the southern African region long before the time of European settlers. Black is also divided into ethnically black and black by virtue of the fact that you were excluded from political life e.g. Indian or mixed-race (Coloured) South Africans. It often referred to anyone who was classified as belonging to a race other than white (otherwise known as ‘non-white’, the latter being a term used by the apartheid machinery).

### *My beliefs*

The Oxford dictionary (2010) defines belief as “something one accepts as true or real; a firmly held opinion”. There are at least two personal beliefs that strongly influenced this research project. The first is the relativistic and socially embedded nature of reality, reflected in the social constructionist tradition (Gergen, 2003). This belief allowed me to imagine and nurture opportunities for the social creation of alternative realities in conversation with others (the participants in my study) who shared a common concern. Secondly, I believe that we all have the right to decide for ourselves what it means to live in a good way. In the context of the R@I project, I believed that we were able to co-create our future on the Mamelodi campus by engaging with the challenges as we understood them. This entailed nurturing and encouraging efforts to design and deliver presentations to the senior management of the incorporating university of our vision for the Mamelodi campus. In this way we exercised our right to decide as a group of academics what it meant for us to live and work in a good way.

### *My values*

Tim May (1999) asserts that any judgement or decision on a course of action that a researcher takes is based on the values of that researcher (May, 1999). During my participation and facilitation in the R@I project I became aware of three values that likely had a significant influence on my judgements and decisions.

The first value relates to *self-determination*, based on my belief that we all have the right to decide for ourselves what it means to live in a good way. Self-determination necessitates a defining of the “self” as a distinct entity that is able to express agency. I use the term “self” with the understanding that it is a socially contextualised and relational self (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Gergen, 2006), but is nevertheless a self that is able to contribute to and make decisions as well as act on these decisions. For me, to value self-determination means to value open, active, reciprocal and circular opportunities for conversation between the self and the contexts of influence so that one’s identities can continually be created and recreated through this process; and so that movement can occur towards what we regard as good. I deal with the concepts of self, identity and agency in more detail in the section on ontology below.

The second value relates to the *synergistic combination of individual efforts towards a common goal*. Synergistic action refers to the notion that the effect of our combined individual efforts exceeds the effect of our separate individual attempts. In the context of the R@I project, I valued conversations in which we combined dreams, ideas and plans in a synergistic manner as opposed to conversations in which we shared ideas and dreams for the sake of sharing and for the sake of a feeling of community and belonging only (with no visible actions resulting from the discussions). The common goal does not refer merely to the solution to our practical problems, but also to a process of transformation. This transformation relates to an increased awareness of hidden and untapped resources (interpersonal, intrapersonal and contextual resources) available to us. For me, to value synergistic action means to nurture opportunities for combining dreams, ideas and efforts in a manner that increases the potency of our individual efforts.

The third value is the generation of *locally relevant knowledge*. I regard this knowledge as the product of synergistic action (my second value) in the service of self-determination (my first value). In the context of the R@I project, locally relevant knowledge refers to knowledge about how we could improve the functioning of the Itsoeng clinic and how we could increase our research output. Knowledge is not only an answer to these “how to” questions; it has a further emancipatory quality in that we also gained additional knowledge about our abilities and resources that mobilised us to action (Bhana, 2004) towards what we regarded as a good way of living. In the project and in our understanding of the term, “locally relevant” refers not necessarily only to our hopes and dreams as academics, but also to the needs of the community – that knowledge is not merely created to help us be more relevant to the community, but to help the community answer questions they themselves may have.

My values are in constant interaction with my assumptions about my being in and toward the world (ontology); my assumptions about what counts as knowledge (epistemology); and my assumptions about how knowledge can be acquired (methodology). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) define these terms as follows:

Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it. Epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known. Methodology specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known. (p.6)

In the following section I articulate these assumptions.

### **Ontological assumptions**

Ontology can be described as a theory of being in the world, which influences how we perceive ourselves in relation to our environment and other beings in it (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). It refers to “the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.6). This theory of being can also be described as *the stance we take towards* what we regard as the nature of the world (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). As such, two central elements of ontology appear to be (1) our interpretations of the world we live in; and (2) the stance we take towards these interpretations. The focus on our interpretations of the nature of the world and our stance towards our interpretations in itself shows a particular ontological orientation – namely, that we only have access to our interpretations of the world.

From a social sciences perspective, the researcher’s ontological assumptions are said to influence how the researcher views people and their relationships with each other and the world (Susman & Evered, 1978). A first distinction can be drawn between reductionism and holism (Smuts, 1926) as two distinct and dichotomous ways of studying phenomena. From a reductionist perspective or ontology, the world is regarded as a complex system that consists of nothing more than its constituent parts with each phenomenon to be studied in terms of a linear cause-and-effect equation between the simplest constituent parts of the phenomenon (Flood, 2006; Willig, 2001). The assumption is that phenomena can be fully understood once the nature of the constituent parts and their relationships with each other part are known (Auerswald, 1985). Holism, on the other hand, proposes that the world as a complex system is an integrated whole that is more than the sum of its parts (Willig, 2001). Holism is a central tenet of systems thinking. Phenomena cannot be understood by reducing them to their

smallest constituent parts as every definable system has some influence on each other definable system. Instead, “phenomena are understood to be an emergent property of an interrelated whole” (Flood, 2006, p.117). How these separate systems which emerge from the whole are defined becomes a question of the boundaries that the observer draws. The effect of the observer on drawing the boundaries of the phenomena under investigation reveals a second ontological dichotomy, namely the relativist and realist ontological positions (Willig, 2001). A researcher operating from a realist ontology would maintain that the ‘external world’ (a world that exist independently of the observer) contains objects, structures and systems with knowable natures and cause and effect relationships between them. A researcher operating from a relativist ontology questions the existence of an external world that can be known and emphasises the multiple interpretations that are dependent on the observer. This is the link between systems theory and constructivism: what Anderson and Goolishian (1988) call human systems as linguistic systems. Language is central to a relativist ontology: texts can only refer to other texts (Derrida, 1997). Precisely because the researcher can make varied interpretations of the same phenomena, it begs the question: why this interpretation? My solution to this problem is a reflexive account of what influenced the researcher during the processes of observation, reflection, planning and action. This reflexive account does not provide an ‘essential truth’, but rather the possibility of multiple truths that are constructed within relationships.

*My ontological assumptions: A holistic, relativist position*

In my invitation to my colleagues to join me in an action research project to establish a research forum with the aim of synergising our daily work activities, I held certain assumptions about the world we live in, what we as people are capable of as well as the effects we could have on our world. My ontological position can be summarised as a relativist, systemic position in that I acknowledge the subjectivity of my observations and interpretations in collaboration with others. I view the outcome of this study, my living theory, as emerging from the sum total of all the known and unknown influences present during the study and acknowledge the influence of my role as participant and observer on that which I claim to improve – my academic practice. My assumptions flowing from this position align with the ontological assumptions of action research as outlined by



McNiff and Whitehead (2006), which are that “action research is value laden and morally committed” and that the action researcher “is in constant relation with everything else in the research field” (p.26). Consequently I assume that my research project is influenced by my *core values*. It is *morally committed* in that my own learning with others is to improve my practice and ultimately my ability to provide a better quality teaching, research and community engagement. Also, as a researcher I perceive myself to be in *constant relation with reciprocators*<sup>8</sup> and self-determining<sup>9</sup> agents as well as with the social contexts in which we live (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). As a result, I describe my evolving academic practice as it emerges from the interrelation between myself, my reciprocators, the action research project, as well as the sociopolitical, historical, geographical and educational contexts.

Reason (1994) sees people as self-determining, meaning that persons have the potential to be the cause of their own actions. I regard myself and my co-researchers / reciprocators as agents who are able to take active decisions in matters that influence us directly. The term “self-determining” is potentially problematic in that it fails to appreciate the mutually reciprocal nature of influence, and suggests a linear process rather than a collaborative one. However, it is used here with the understanding that although no individual is fully able to determine any outcome, they are able to set out in a chosen direction. Reason (1994) asserts that we “can only truly do research *with* persons if we engage with them *as* persons, as co-subjects and thus co-researchers” (p.10). Steier (1991) suggests the term *reciprocators* as an alternative to participants or respondents, for he argues that it is in the act of reciprocation – them hearing and responding to me – that a “me” can emerge as an “I” who does research. The R@I project can be viewed as a regular meeting of six (or sometimes fewer) persons, who each reciprocated with and towards each other, allowing multiple “I’s” to emerge – an “I” with identity, agency and voice.

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<sup>8</sup> This term is explained further on in this section.

<sup>9</sup> A better term might be “self-constructing”, as “self-determining” recalls a linear, “deterministic” relationship. Here, however, I have used the original term as referred to by Whitehead and McNiff (2006).



McNiff and Whitehead (2006) emphasise relational and inclusional values (defined below) in describing the ontological assumptions of action research. In this respect I investigate my own practice in relation with others, their ideas and practices and in respect of the shared environment we live and work in. I neither regard myself as a researcher who conducts experiments on other people, nor as a passive observer of my own and other people's behaviour. I acknowledge the constant mutual influence that happens between me and the reciprocators of my research project. This speaks to the transformation of my identity as researcher in relation to what I study. Although the focus of my self-study inquiry is on my own development, it relies on and confirms the importance of other people's perceptions and reflections on my influence on their lives. In this way **interrelatedness** (Flood, 2006; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) is inevitable and forms a core ontological assumption. I have furthermore made every effort to develop an **inclusional** (Polat & Kisanji, 2009; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) methodology that nurtures respectful relationships and values a process of egalitarian communication and joint decision-making power in every step of the research process.

#### *The "self" and identities*

The concepts of self and identity are by no means uncomplicated. The existence of the International Society for Self and Identity (ISSI), complete with its own journal (*Self and Identity*; see <http://issweb.org/default.aspx>) dedicated to interdisciplinary debates and research on the concepts of self and identity, attests to this. Identity is defined by the Dorland's Medical Dictionary for Health Consumers (2007, no page) as the "aggregate of characteristics by which an individual is recognized by himself [sic] and others". Whether this aggregate of characteristics exists within the person or in the socially constructed space between people is one of the psycho-philosophical debates about identity. Some social constructionist theorists (e.g., Gergen, 2006; McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Sampson, 1993a) question the existence of a self that is located within the individual. As early as 1934, Herbert Mead suggested that personal identity is constructed through social relationships (Borchert, 2006). Gergen (2006) offers rather the concept of a "relational self" or "socially contextualized self" (p.119). In a similar vein, Stead and Bakker (2010) and Sampson (1985; 1993b) refer to the construction and fabrication of selves within a complex matrix of social discourses. In the self-study aspect of my

research, I focus on the development of *my* academic practice as it unfolds and is constructed in the company (matrix and social discourses) of my workgroup and in the time and places of the R@I project. In my discussion of my research practice (as one of the aspects of my academic practice) in chapters six and seven, I specifically comment on a transformation that took place in my socially constructed *identity* as researcher within the social matrix of my workgroup, but also within the larger academic context. In the context of this research I use the concept of identity as a subset of a socially constructed self, so that when I refer to my research identity, I mean those aspects of myself that relate to my experience of myself as a researcher. Although it might be suggested that ‘identity’ has more to do with a social role such as gender, race, et cetera, it cannot be seen to be separate from ‘self’ because the self is also considered to be socially constructed (T.M. Bakker, personal communication, July 8, 2011).

### *Agency*

Ansoff (1996) argues that an ontological commitment is necessary in order for any discussion of agency to take place:

Where there is no ontological commitment to divide the whole...into parts, there can be no agency. Put differently, without an ontological commitment to partition, there is no way for the whole universe of “whatever is” to move and thus exhibit agency, because by definition the whole universe of “whatever is” has no place else to go. (p.541)

An ontological commitment allows me to draw the boundary between myself and the rest of humanity and thereby make possible a description of movement between myself and humanity. My ontological commitment to a systemic worldview is further refined by the notion that whatever I regard as real is socially constructed in language and constituted by history, culture and relationships – a position also known as social constructionism (Gergen, 2003). When a systemic and social constructionist view is applied to my research, I acknowledge the interrelation between the various members of the workgroup and context, and that “whatever is” is a negotiated reality in language. I further regard the ideas we hold of ourselves as academics and researchers as socially constructed and situated within a historical, cultural and interpersonal context.

Practitioner research is often conducted in an attempt by practitioners to improve their learning and ultimately their practice (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). This improvement could only be possible if practitioners regard themselves as distinct selves able to relate to and with each other and with the context. This assumes an element of personal agency, which had been a problematic concept in social constructionism debates (see for example Ansoff, 1996; Fisher, 1999; Kenwood, 1996). However, Gergen (1999) states that social constructionism does not abandon the concept of agency or self-determination, but merely questions the taken-for-granted assumptions about agency. Gergen adds that “agency... is neither ‘in here’ nor ‘out there’ but is realized within the doing of a relationship” (Gergen, 1999, p.114). For the purpose of this research I clarify my view of agency as the display of intention and volition through purposeful action. I acknowledge that how I comment on my own and other’s intentions, volitions and actions is influenced by my multiple personal, interpersonal and contextual factors. I therefore offer my comments as my version, for which I stand accountable.

### **Epistemological assumptions**

A discussion about epistemology usually centres on what counts as knowledge, and how we can acquire knowledge (Edwards, 1967). Epistemology concerns itself with the nature, sources and limits of knowledge (Klein, 2005). Of the many forms of knowing, this thesis is most concerned with knowledge as relativist, socially relevant and socially constructed. This resonates with recent developments in philosophy that acknowledge contextualism as an alternative to normative and naturalistic epistemologies (Klein, 2005; see this author for a more in-depth discussion and definition of these concepts). This epistemology is aligned with my ontological assumptions of relativity, interrelatedness, and inclusion.

I discuss knowledge resulting from a self-study research in the context of a collaborative action research project, where timely action was primary. I comment on the nature of knowledge and the knowledge creation process as well as the requirements for the validity and legitimacy of knowledge in self-study action research and collaborative action research.

### *The action turn*

Reason and Torbert (2001, p.1) argue for an “action turn” to complement the “linguistic turn” in the social sciences. They identify and discuss four important epistemological dimensions of transformational action research, namely, the primacy of the practical; the centrality of participation; the requirement of experiential grounding; and the importance of normative theory (theory that guides inquiry and action in present time and offers a vision of a better state). In order to achieve transformation by utilising the four key dimensions mentioned, Reason and Torbert (2001) suggest three broad strategies for action research. These are: first person research or practice to encourage a practitioner to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life; second person research or practice to engage a face-to-face group in collaborative inquiry; and third person research or practice to establish inquiring communities which reach beyond the immediate group to engage with organisations, communities and countries. They furthermore suggest an integration of first, second and third person research in ways that

increase the validity of the knowledge we use in our moment-to-moment living, that increase the effectiveness of our actions in real-time, and that remain open to unexpected transformation when our taken-for-granted assumptions, strategies, and habits are appropriately challenged. (Reason & Torbert 2001, p.2)

This is sound advice: the three broad strategies espoused here are in line with the values that drove me to initiate and facilitate the R@I project, and, I believe, were shared by my team members. This was evident in the excitement and vigour with which the aims of improving our practice and producing locally relevant knowledge through collaborative and creative work were pursued. The spirit of open enquiry and tolerance for debate and difference indeed created possibilities for what Reason and Torbert (2001) refer to as ‘unexpected transformation’ – it transforms not only our work, but also turns what may often be dry research into an opportunity for enchantment and surprise.

### *The nature of knowledge and the knowledge creation process*

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) identify three key epistemological assumptions of self-study action research that rests on the values of interrelatedness and inclusion. Firstly, *the object of the inquiry* is the “I”; in other words, *the kind of knowledge* that is sought is

knowledge about one's developing sense of the self as a responsible and accountable person in relation to others and one's environment. The challenge here is how to distinguish between one's own accountability and that of the team members in a collaborative research endeavour, where ideas are generated in a collective context; a kind of primal matrix where influence is not only mutual but recursive. Within a relativist, socially constructed epistemology, the focus is on the "knowledge community" (Warmoth, 2000) which holds the authority and the authorship (even ownership) of knowledge. An example is the initiation of the R@I project. Prior to inviting my colleagues to the first meeting, I had several conversations with all or some of them (and they with me) in a variety of contexts. These conversations led me to believe that such a project would be possible, and the idea germinated and developed in this shared linguistic reality. Consequently, at the first meeting it was very easy to "sell" the idea of an action research forum because it had already taken some form and come into being, albeit only in thought, through our conversations. In this instance I consider myself accountable in that I called the first meeting and first proposed the idea; however, I cannot claim to take sole responsibility for what arose as a result of the events and ideas that grew from my participation with others. And so, in describing how I developed as an accountable and responsible person – and about how my practice and thinking developed – I consider my best effort as being to account fully and comprehensively for my records and my interpretation of this process, and for checking this with my colleagues as I go; as well as to account for my contributions to the conversations.

Secondly, McNiff and Whitehead (2006) posit that *the nature of this knowledge* is uncertain, meaning that this knowledge is tentative, open to modification, and represents one possible answer out of many. Furthermore, this knowledge is created and not discovered. These authors add that this knowledge also contains the possibility of paradoxes and dissonance. These notions fit with the relativist ontological position of social constructionism. The nature of the knowledge that I collected in this study evolved continually. I kept records of our intentions, actions and plans without any idea of where this might lead to. I submitted the records to my colleagues after every meeting and asked for corrections, amendments and feedback. I still see the results as only one

representation of what happened during these meetings, rather than an absolute truth, even if it is a co-constructed truth.

Thirdly, McNiff and Whitehead (2006) state that the *creation of knowledge* is a collaborative process. Even though the object of the inquiry is the “I”, it is an “I” in relation to others and the environment (see also Bradbury-Huang, 2010; Heron & Reason, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). I stand accountable to what I could unravel as far as possible as being my contribution to the socially constructed reality; and in my report I make an artificial distinction between the self-study aspect (living theory action research) and the collaborative AR project. The effort of creating these distinctions is expressed in the methodological assumptions I adopted. These are explained in the following section.

### **Methodological assumptions**

Methodology refers to a general approach to research and should be distinguished from method which refers to techniques of data collection and analysis (Willig, 2001). Methodological assumptions are usually informed by, and logically flow, from the researcher’s values, ontological and epistemological assumptions. Indeed, another term for methodology might be applied epistemology (Agassi, n.d.). They represent assumptions about what attitudes, actions and methods will best lead to the kinds of knowledge that are sought.

In this section I discuss how the R@I project reflects characteristics of action research and how the self-study aspect of my research conforms to a living theory action research approach. I begin this section by introducing key features of action research as presented by some of the eminent authors in this field (e.g., Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003; Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Dick, 2004; Fals Borda, 2006; Greenwood, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). I conclude the section with the methodological assumptions of living theory action research as discussed by Whitehead and McNiff (2006).

### *Action research*

Action research is described as an approach to research rather than a single academic discipline (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). It is an approach where the “dichotomy between theory and practice is mediated, in which multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder teams are central, and in which objectivity is replaced by a public commitment to achieving liberating, sustainable, and democratizing outcomes” (Greenwood, 2002, p.125). Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) regard the common themes and commitments found among action researchers to be a shared commitment to democratic social change; the integration of theory and practice; the importance of creating and maintaining relationships for learning and action; transforming educational practices to incorporate democratic, participatory and experiential methods; and the tendency of action researchers to be hybrid scholar/activists who do not avoid messy situations (complex, multidimensional, intractable dynamic problems) and are prepared to face the challenge of improving social practice. According to Chandler and Torbert (2003), social science research conducted in the present and for the future by co-participants (second person voice and practice) is a critical kind of research that remains largely unexplored. The R@I project can be considered an action research project that was conducted in the present and for the future by the members of the workgroup. In discussing how I have improved my own academic practice (first person practice), I use the first person voice to report on my facilitation of and participation in the R@I project (past actions).

Psychology as a discipline has largely ignored action research, with most psychological research based on experimental or quasi experimental and quantitative survey designs (Dick, 2004). The R@I project can be seen as action research within the discipline of psychology as we (the workgroup) attempted to increase our (psychological) research output. This project embodied principles of critical psychology, which challenges psychologists to make psychology more active in responding to grassroots needs in South Africa (Hook, 2004a). Tolman and Brydon-Miller (1997) further support participatory models of psychological research in the pursuit of goals of social transformation. In the R@I project, we attempted to improve the interface between the psychology department and the local community. We did this through providing free psychological services to the community and collaborating with a community agency on



a locally relevant research project. I discuss this interface in more detail later in the section on the relationship between higher education and local communities.

Fals Borda (2006) calls on action researchers to give greater account and regard to “grassroots groups, the excluded, the voiceless, and the victims of dominant systems” (p.358). He furthermore cautions against activism for the sake of being different: “The Greeks have given us a good rule for this: direct praxis should be complemented by ethical phronesis. That is, simple activism is not enough: it needs to be guided by good judgement in seeking progress for all” (Fals Borda, 2006, p.358). These sentiments are frequently promoted as an approach to research in the field of critical psychology (see for instance Hook, 2004b). Borchert (2006) pulls together theory and praxis by noting: “When epistemologies are deeply social, recommendations for inquiry will often be applicable to communities or institutions rather than to individuals” (p.86).

The R@I project was situated in a third world setting (Mamelodi township) in South Africa. In some respects, the incorporation of the Mamelodi campus into to the University of Pretoria introduced the possibility of feeling excluded from important decisions about our future, with a resultant loss of voice. The R@I project provided an opportunity for us to counteract these feelings or experiences by providing a forum for inclusion and allowing a voice. In addition to these benefits, we not only sought to improve our research output, but strove also to ensure the local relevance of our research and enhance service delivery of our psychology clinic. These goals can be regarded as praxis complemented by ethical phronesis.

Greenwood (2002) strongly criticises certain kinds of action research practice in terms of the complacency of some action research practitioners towards fundamental issues of theory, method and validity. He argues that “‘doing good’ is not the same as ‘doing good social research’” (p.117). Greenwood gives his view of the essential elements of research, and measures action research against these criteria:

Going out to collaborate with a group of people in solving an important problem is not by itself tantamount to doing research. Collecting and analysing data by itself is not research; it is just collecting and analyzing



data. To my mind, conducting research means *developing habits of counterintuitive thinking, questioning definitions and premises, linking findings and process analyses to other cases, and attempting to subject favourite interpretations to harsh collaborative critiques. Throughout these processes the collaborative process of reflection* is the guiding thread that integrates the work. (Greenwood, 2002, p.130; my emphasis)

The R@I project was not merely an attempt to improve our individual and collective situation; it was also an attempt to do valid research that contributes to the field of psychology and/or higher education in some way. This thesis both represents and reflects our attempts at collaborative reflection. Some of this process is visible in the meeting records (see Appendix E); further reflections and my analysis is presented in chapter five; and a meta-analysis of the research process occurs in chapter seven.

Several common themes run through all these descriptions of action research. First is that knowledge is created with others through carefully considered actions and reflections upon these actions in order to bring about a change in an immediate concern. This knowledge creation process happens in recursive cycles of reflection and action. The knowledge that is created is acted upon to test its usefulness and the results are fed back into the knowledge creation process. The process is an emergent one, meaning that the outcomes (changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, structures, policies, commitments, etc.) and direction of the research process evolve and cannot be predicted. The ownership of the knowledge created is negotiated among the participants; however, the ultimate outcome is not abstract knowledge about a process, but a change in practice as a result of learning with others. When writing about action research projects to an academic audience, various distinctions can be drawn to illuminate the particular aspects of the process that were emphasised in the project.

My research falls within the ambit of action research because I set out to create knowledge with others through carefully considered actions and reflections upon these actions. I did this in order to bring about a change in an immediate concern, which was the improvement of my practice (community engagement, teaching and research) as an academic. This knowledge creation process happened in recursive cycles of reflection

and action. The knowledge created was acted upon to test its usefulness and the results were fed back into the knowledge creation process. This process was emergent, meaning that the *outcomes* (changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, structures, policies, commitments, etc) and *direction* of the research process evolved in ways I could not have predicted.

The ownership of the knowledge created was negotiated among the participants; however, the ultimate outcome is not abstract knowledge about a process, but rather a change in practice as a result of learning with others. I provide evidence of this change in practice in chapters six and seven. In writing about this action research project to an academic audience and submitting it to examiners to be evaluated for a PhD thesis, I have chosen to draw various distinctions to illuminate the particular aspects of this action research process in line with the standards of judgement required for a PhD as well as self-established criteria of judgement outlined in chapter four. One prominent aspect of this research is the self-study of my academic practice. In the next section I discuss how my inquiry into my academic practice conforms to the characteristics of a living theory action research approach.

#### *Living theory action research*

The self-study aspect of this thesis relates to my inquiry into my academic practice in the facilitation of the R@I project. In particular I address the research questions “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” and “How can I improve my academic practice?” I provide an answer to the first self-study question in chapter six. The second self-study research question represents a meta-question; the answer to this is presented as my living theory in chapter seven.

Whitehead and McNiff (2006) articulate a particular approach or model to first person action research or practitioner research in which the research results are expressed in the form of a living theory (Whitehead, 1989; Wood, Morar & Mostert, 2007), which represents the practitioner’s account of what happened when a serious attempt was made to answer the research questions. Living theory action research has become a recognised means for practitioners to research their own practices with a view to

improving it as well as present the knowledge gained in the form of doctoral dissertations (e.g., Charles, 2007; Lohr, 2006; Spiro, 2008), Master's theses (e.g., Mc Ginley, 2001; Roche, 2000; Shobbrook, 1997) or articles (e.g., Levy, 2003; Whitehead, 2008a, 2008b; Wood et al., 2007).

Living theory action research was originally developed by Jack Whitehead (1989) to explain the educational influences on a person's learning. The learning of the practitioner is aimed at improving a situation where the actions of the practitioner are in contradiction to her or his values. In such situations the practitioner is likely to experience themselves as a living contradiction. McNiff et al. (2003) conceptualise the impetus for beginning a personal study as coming from experiencing oneself as a living contradiction. Whitehead (1989; 2006) describes a living contradiction as the experience of containing two mutually exclusive opposites within oneself. It is the experience of holding certain values that give meaning to one's existence as well as the experience that these values are being negated in practice. This experience acts as a creative catalyst to activate a practitioner's imagination to find ways to address this contradiction. The living theory approach is an attempt to resolve this living contradiction through cycles of action research processes aimed at producing a 'living theory' of how the practitioner was able to increasingly practise in accordance with their values. A living theory is therefore the product of responding to this experience of oneself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2006). Such a living theory is heavily bound to context, situation and practitioner; consequently, it is open to constant change due to continual shifts or transformations in the context, situation or learning of the practitioner. Because of this, the living theory is regarded as living in that it transforms and grows with the practitioner.

Action research provides a means to generate living theories by virtue of the fact that the actions taken to improve situations are *informed* by an understanding (as a result of continual reflection) of that which would most likely lead to an improvement of the situation. Praxis represents *committed* actions in the sense that the values underlying the decisions taken during the project are examined and declared. Praxis is further defined by McNiff et al. (2003, p.13) as "informed, committed action that gives rise to

knowledge as well as successful action”. A living theory therefore represents personal, embodied and context specific knowledge that was gained as a result of informed and committed actions with the recognition that this knowledge is open to refinement and reinterpretation (Levy, 2003). Whitehead (2008) describes the key qualities of a living theory methodology:

There are ... distinguishing qualities of a living theory methodology that include ‘I’ as a living contradiction, the use of action reflection cycles, the use of procedures of personal and social validation and the inclusion of a life-affirming energy with values as explanatory principles of educational influence. (p.9)

In this research I inquire into my academic practice by looking at what happened when I tried to improve my academic practice. My facilitation of the R@I project stemmed from my experience of myself as a living contradiction as my values of locally relevant knowledge creation, synergistic action and self-determination were contradicted by my everyday practice as an academic. My academic practice did not reflect my values relevant to my academic practice. In my facilitation of the R@I project I made use of action reflection cycles, a social validation process (member checking) and used my values as explanatory principles for the decisions I took during the research. In this way the self-study aspect of my research conforms to the characteristics of a living theory action research approach.

My living theory of how I improved my academic practice did not develop in a vacuum. It evolved within the context of the R@I project as much as it contributed to the R@I project. My living theory grew in the interactional and conversational spaces between the rest of the R@I workgroup members and myself. The R@I project and my living theory unfolded in the geographical context of a university campus psychology clinic in Mamelodi during a particular sociopolitical period in South Africa (with particular reference to the transformation of higher education). The potential significance of my living theory therefore reaches beyond solving my living contradiction and improving my own academic practice. The R@I project and my living theory developed in the interfaces between academic-and-university and university-and-surrounding-community. As such, a further potential significance of this research is a commentary on the social responsibility of universities to their local communities.

In the following section I provide a framework for discussing the relationship between universities and surrounding communities, which I refer to again in chapter seven when I discuss the potential significance of this research in more detail.

### **The relationship between universities and surrounding communities**

In this section I take a macro view of the relationship between a university and surrounding communities and discuss three discernable mandates or tasks that universities fulfil: teaching, research and community engagement. I provide a brief overview of the origin of the three tasks and discuss the third task (community engagement) within the South African context in more detail, as it pertains to the potential significance of this study.

#### *The university: Its mission and three tasks*

Universities have been part of western societies since the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Fallis, 2004; Greenwood & Levin, 2000), and originally specialised in a single field: for instance, Salerno was known for medicine, Bologna for law, and Paris for theology (Fallis, 2004). Gradually the numbers of universities increased and new faculties were added. Eventually a typical structure emerged with four faculties: arts, law, medicine and theology. Study in the arts faculty was regarded as necessary preparation for later study in the latter three faculties, which were regarded as the higher faculties (Fallis, 2004). The *teaching* of knowledge can be regarded as the first and original function of a university, as explained by Cardinal J.H Newman (1852/1999):

The view taken of a University...[is that it]... is a place of *teaching* universal *knowledge*. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science.  
(p.xvii)

Research or knowledge generation based on the scientific method was subsequently added as a second function or task for universities, leading to universities that offered

both teaching and research opportunities for students and staff. This form of the university, which is most familiar to us in the present time, was designed and championed by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Von Humboldt is credited with the union between research and teaching: “University faculties were able to both study and conduct research because university teaching was to be based on research, rather than on untested doctrines” (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p.87). The ideal was one of “a remote, socially disembedded community of students and professors, happily bound together in a unity of teaching and research” (Krücken, 2003, p.19). The attainment and teaching of knowledge (even in the absence of an application for knowledge) was seen as a worthy task of universities: “Knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that any kind of knowledge, if it be really such is its own reward” (Newman, 1999, p.94). Universities were not initially tasked with a social responsibility other than to create citizens and to be centres of advanced knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2000).

The university and society are both parties to a social contract and in each era, this social contract must be renegotiated (Fallis, 2004). Many parents want their children to simply receive a professional qualification that will ensure employability and financial self-sufficiency. Professors and lecturers want to minimise teaching responsibility to allow time for research and publication. As a result, knowledge can become fragmented, esoteric and unconnected to the needs of society (Fallis, 2004). For universities to adapt their mission and tasks in order to stay relevant to the society they form a part of, a certain amount of continual change is necessary. Change, however, seems to come slowly to universities:

About eighty-five institutions in the Western world established by 1520 still exist in recognizable forms, with similar functions and unbroken histories, including the Catholic Church, the Parliaments of the Isle of Man, of Iceland, and of Great Britain, several Swiss cantons, and seventy universities. Kings that rule, feudal lords with vassals, and guilds with monopolies are all gone. These seventy universities, however, are still in the same locations with some of the same buildings, with professors and students doing much the same things, and with governance carried on in much the same ways. (Kerr, 2001, p.115)

Each university negotiates its own mission and core tasks to fulfil this mission. Fallis (2004) evaluated universities from different continents and different eras and found that it is possible to formulate a “general mission” of universities:

It is the mission of all universities to provide liberal education for undergraduates, to conduct research, and to contribute to society including the economy and culture. It is the responsibility of all professors to teach, to conduct research, and to provide service to their university and to society. (p.14)

But what exactly does “service to society” mean for each university and for each society? According to Brulin (2001), a university has three tasks to fulfil its mission, namely, to educate; to conduct research; and to serve the local community *through collaboration with practitioners in the community near the university* to support development processes. In order for a university to serve its local community, universities should enter into joint knowledge creation partnerships – partnerships between university research staff and practitioners in the surrounding community. For Brulin, the crucial factor to enable universities to serve their communities, other than recruiting and nurturing local students, is the development and shaping of joint knowledge creation partnerships with practitioners. Mutuality, however, is not easily achieved, as Brulin (2001) states: “It is a very banal fact that universities and their nearby communities first have to learn to know each other; some sort of ‘social glue’ has to be shaped between the two spheres” (p.441). This social glue is described by Porter (1998) as personal relationships, face-to-face contact, a sense of common interest and ‘insider’ status. It is furthermore this social glue that facilitates access to important resources and “turns such resources into energizing assets” (Brulin, 2001, p.441).

#### *Turning resources into assets*

To take this further, the idea that important resources can be *turned into* energising assets implies that knowledge of and access to resources is not enough. A transformation of resources has to occur to enable them to become assets. When relationships and conversations with people are seen as important resources, then the ‘social glue’ – the quality of the relationships forged along a common interest – facilitates the transformation of resources into assets, or put differently, transforms *contact with*



*community members into knowledge creation partnerships.* In the context of the R@I project, it was not enough to meet once a month to discuss our ideas about the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic or our research output. The meetings can be seen as a resource that required the forging of knowledge creation partnerships to turn the resource into an asset. The same principle applied when we worked towards forming a knowledge creation partnership between the R@I team and staff members of the SOS Children's Village to conduct a programme evaluation in the year 2005 (see chapter five).

#### *Community engagement as the third task of a university*

Greenwood and Levin (2000) note that, apart from strategic industry partners, many community groupings do not have any significant impact on the focus of university research and have no easy access to universities for assistance with solutions to their most pressing problems: "Community members, small-scale organizations, minorities, and other powerless or poor people who want assistance with broad social change issues are looking for solutions to everyday problems in particular contexts: poverty, addiction, racism, environmental degradation and so on" (p.90). These authors believe that social research that is not applied cannot rightfully be called research.

On their website, the Council on Higher Education of South Africa released a document titled "South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy" (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Among other things, this document discussed the need for community engagement that "implies a less paternalistic, more mutual and inclusive community-higher education relationship" (Council on Higher Education, 2004, p.130) than that implied in the historical term of "community outreach". The following excerpt on *service learning* has a direct bearing on community engagement as a third academic task. It also illustrates the South African Council on Higher Education's vision in the year 2004 for the future of the higher educational landscape in South Africa.

#### ***Service-learning***

South Africa's Joint Education Trust (JET) has defined service learning as 'a thoughtfully organised and reflective service-oriented pedagogy focussed on the development priorities of communities through the interaction between and application of knowledge,



skills and experience in partnership between community, academics, students, and service providers within the community for the benefit of all participants’.

Service-learning programmes (also called academic service-learning, academic community service and community based-learning) engage students in activities where *both community and student* are primary beneficiaries and where goals are to provide a service to the community and, equally, to enhance student *learning* through provision of this service. Reciprocity, mutual enrichment and integration with scholarly activities are central characteristics of service-learning.

Unlike other categories of community service, service-learning is entrenched in a discourse that proposes the development and transformation of higher education in relation to community needs. Proponents of service-learning argue that it reconnects higher education to society by making its academic mission more responsive and relevant to the pressing contemporary problems of society.

(Council on Higher Education, 2004, p.132)

South Africa’s move to align academic aims with community needs was not a new idea in the international community. In 1997 Sweden passed a law stating that the knowledge production of universities (as a result of research) should be relevant to the community in which the institution is embedded (Brulin, 2001). This is known as the third task of universities. Although the idea of community service is not a new one, the general practice seems to have been that the extent of one’s research obligation to communities is to share what one has (supposedly knowledge and expertise) with the have-nots. This is often done through the dissemination of knowledge at conferences – not exactly places frequented by the have-nots. Other forms of giving back to the community occur, for example, through various intervention programmes such as life skills programmes or support groups. Such programmes aim to uplift communities but, without an invitation or participation from the target community, community members remain effectively disempowered and unemancipated as the university retains ownership of knowledge, resources and skills. The implication here, as Brulin (2001) points out, is that cooperation between universities and communities has hitherto been seen as a linear transfer of

scientific knowledge, while current practice is becoming more aware that research should be organised as joint knowledge formation processes. As such, universities become partners in developmental processes and knowledge creation endeavours (Brulin, 2001). This is a process that is vastly different from the much-criticised “giving to the poor” heritage and hegemonic stance of tertiary institutions. In South Africa, “community service” had become synonymous with charity-like interactions in a rural or township setting between “advantaged” and “disadvantaged” people. In contrast, to become a collaborative research partner implies a relationship in which the contributions and benefits derived from the interactions are more or less equally distributed between the partners (university researcher and community member/co-researcher). Such an endeavour seems both necessary and desirable, and exemplifies McNiff et al.’s (2003) observation that “life is a process of constant learning, being in touch with what might be possible and daring to find ways to do it” (p.41).

#### *Contributing to social and economic development*

The relationship between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their surrounding or local communities is by no means a simple one. Developing and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship has not always been a key mission for HEIs (Brulin, 2001; Fallis, 2004; Greenwood & Levin, 2000; Humphreys & Conlon, 2003). What further complicates this relationship is that it is subject to transformations on the global economic market (Humphreys & Conlon, 2003). High speed communication, rapid transportation and open global markets should in theory allow any company in any local community to source anything, from any place at any time (Porter, 1998). In practice, however, economic prosperity still seems to happen in what Porter (1998) calls clusters: “critical masses in one place of linked industries and institutions – from suppliers to universities to government agencies – that enjoy unusual competitive success in a particular field” (p.77). In addition, worldwide economic decline in capitalist countries has given rise to local and regional development programmes thanks to a growing awareness that local municipalities can no longer depend solely on national growth to sustain themselves. Rather, the economic success of a nation now depends upon the aggregated successes of local development activity (Kanter, 1995). Success, it seems, depends on how well

institutions (like universities) can enter into mutually beneficial relationships with strategic partners in their locality:

Geographic, cultural, and institutional proximity provides companies with special access, closer relationships, better information, powerful incentives, and other advantages that are difficult to tap from a distance. The more complex, knowledge-based, and dynamic the world economy becomes, the more this is true. Competitive advantage lies increasingly in local things - knowledge, relationships, and motivation - that distant rivals cannot replicate. (Porter, 1998, p.77)

The incentive for HEIs to positively influence the social and economic development within their local communities seems linked to benefits they will enjoy as a result of being part of this economic region or locality. In order to best achieve this, HEIs can play three key roles in the social and economic development within their local communities (Humphreys & Conlon, 2003): firstly, as a *stakeholder* in the local economy (employer, landowner, consumer, supplier); secondly, as a *strategic partner* in local economic development by contributing knowledge of local industry sectors and timely human resource development; and thirdly, as a *service provider*, building intellectual capital (skill development and new knowledge creation).

## **Conclusion**

The R@I project and my living theory (self-study) project are intimately interwoven. I studied myself in my role as facilitator and at the same time participated as a team member in the project that I facilitated. The directions that the R@I project took were the result of a co-constructed and emergent process, rather than the result of my choreography of the project alone. My values of creating locally relevant knowledge, synergistic action and the expression of agency (self-determination), my beliefs, prior experience, and political commitments all influenced my facilitation of the R@I project and my learning about my academic practice as I set out to improve it.

In this chapter I provided a philosophical basis (ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions) for the collaborative action research design of the R@I

project and the living theory action research design for the self-study project. I also discussed the relationship between universities and surrounding communities as a framework for evaluating the potential wider significance of this research. In chapter four, I discuss the research method as it evolved throughout the duration of the R@I project and beyond.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD

He may be mad, but there's method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It's what drives men mad, being methodical.

G.K. Chesterton (*Author, 1874-1936*), *The Man who knew too much* (2003/1922)

In this chapter I provide a description of the method behind the madness of a collaborative action research project (which I also refer to as the core action research project or the R@I initiative); and the larger thesis project which comprises my living theory of my developing academic practice. I stated our research questions in the core action research project in chapter two as follows:

- (1) How can we improve the functioning of the Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?
- (2) How can we increase our research output?

In the sections that follow, I describe the action research process that included data recording and analysis relating to our attempts to answer these two questions.

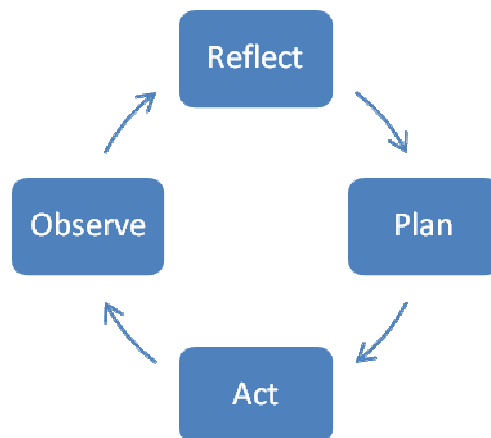
In my construction of my living theory I focused on my facilitation of the R@I initiative. I used a meta-analysis to examine our collective and my personal transformation as a result of the process in which we participated and reciprocally influenced each other's development in the R@I initiative. In particular, I focused on my role in facilitating a research process that allowed for more than just arriving at answers for the research questions. This additional process entailed an inquiry into my developing ability in facilitating opportunities for personal and collective transformation as a form of learning and improving my practice. In line with living theory action research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), my living theory research question is: "How can I improve my academic practice by facilitating and participating in the core action research project?" In this chapter, therefore, I also discuss the method I employed to arrive at my living theory of how I improved my academic practice in facilitating the R@I initiative.

## The core action research process (R@I)

In chapter two I drew a distinction between the core research project and the thesis project in line with Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002). In this chapter and throughout the rest of the document the core action research project refers to the R@I project and the thesis project to my meta-analysis of the R@I project and my examination of how I developed my living theory of my academic practice.

### *Cycles of action and reflection*

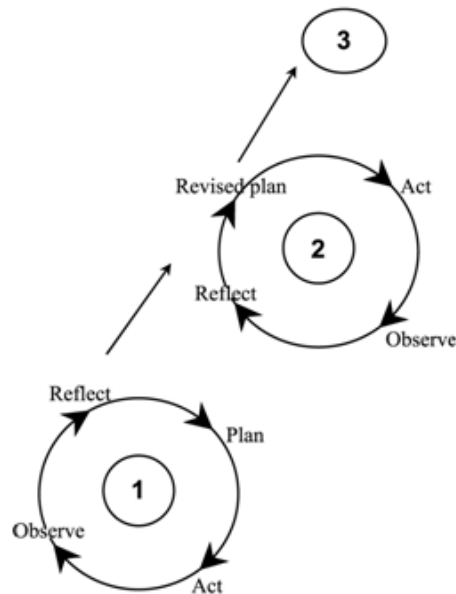
The dominant model of the action research process described in the literature (see, for instance, McNiff et al., 2003; Susman & Evered, 1978; Zuber-Skerrit, 2001) takes the form of a recursive cycle of steps with the last step (observing the outcomes of actions taken) feeding back to the first step (reflecting on what is the most suitable course of action to address the research question or original concern). A simplified version of this process is represented in Figure 8.



**Figure 8 Basic action research cycle.**

The individual and collaborative construction of meaning in an action research project is ongoing, and is perhaps more likely to happen (although not always) during the reflection phases of the action-reflection cycles. Action researchers often organise their work and research reports as a cycle of steps (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). When the outcomes of actions are evaluated against their original purpose during a reflection

phase, the researchers have an opportunity to revise their plan and start a second cycle of recursive steps with the benefit of knowledge gained from the first cycle, and so on. This evolving process of action research is visually represented in Figure 9.



**Figure 9 Evolving action-reflection cycles (Zuber-Skerrit, 2001, p.15).**

In representing the outcomes of the R@I project in the form of action reflection cycles (in chapter five), I show how our actions were informed by our reflections on how we attempted to improve our collective practices. I also use the action reflection cycles to indicate where certain key transformations in our knowledge and identities as researchers occurred as a result of answering the four research questions.

*One set of action-reflection cycles or two?*

Action research aims to be a method for problem solving as well as generating and testing theory (Elden & Chisholm, 1993; Greenwood, 2002). According to McKay and Marshall (2001), these dual imperatives can be distinguished as a problem solving interest and research interest:

Conceptually at the very least, there appears to be two AR cycles, one overlaid on the other, and operating in tandem with one another. The first cycle relates to the researcher's problem solving interests and responsibilities, the second to the researcher's research interests and responsibilities. (p.50)

These authors further argue that the method or strategy employed to address the stated problem necessarily differs from the method or strategy employed to answer the research question. In this chapter I discuss the methods I employed to facilitate the problem solving interests our workgroup shared collectively in answering the questions pertaining to the improvement of the functioning of the clinic and our output of locally relevant research. I also discuss the method of data collection and analysis I employed to serve my living theory research interests and responsibilities as facilitator of the R@I project.

As the core AR project came to an end in April 2006, I started to critically engage with the records of our reflections and actions and started writing multiple drafts of my thesis manuscript, with each subsequent draft representing a new or different understanding. During this period Whitehead and McNiff (2006) published *Action research: Living theory* which provided me with a first frame to distinguish the core research project from my thesis research - my own learning as a result of facilitating the core action research project. The distinctions provided by McKay and Marshall (2001) (problem solving interest and research interest), and Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002) (core action research project and thesis project) further usefully augmented my ability to analyse my own learning as discernable from the collective results of the core action research project.

### **Data recording**

The core action research project took place from May 2004 to March 2006 and involved monthly workgroup meetings to increase our research output and improve the function of Itsoeng Psychology Clinic. The central data set relevant to the core action research project as well as (but to a lesser degree) my living theory project comprise the typed records of the 17 monthly R@I meetings attended by the R@I workgroup (Appendix E). These records contain *descriptions* of our actions as well as our *explanations* (based on observations, reflections and planning) for our actions.



*Seventeen meetings (May 2004 to March 2006) as data*

I arranged 17 meetings during the period May 2004 to March 2006 and went to considerable lengths to find dates and times that suited every team member's schedule. The meetings were well attended as can be seen from Table 1, where the number 1 reflects the presence and the number 0 the absence of the R@I team member at each of the 17 meetings.

**Table 1 R@I Members' Attendance of the 17 R@I Meetings**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
<b>Willem</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
<b>Terri</b>	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
<b>Linda</b>	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
<b>Gerhard</b>	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
<b>Ilse</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
<b>Member 6</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	15

As can be seen from Table 1, Ilse and myself (R@I facilitator) attended every meeting, Terri and Gerhard missed only one meeting each and Linda and Member 6 missed two meetings. The regular attendance of these meetings over a two-year period attests to the value that each of the members derived from these meetings. It also reflects my persistence in scheduling the meetings with enough notice and regular reminders and encouragement (well-organised, refreshments provided, etc.) to attend.

I took notes during the first and second meetings and found that it interfered with my own active participation. From the third meeting I therefore recorded our discussions on audiotape with permission from the workgroup members. After each meeting I typed up a record of our discussions in summary form and emailed a copy to every team member. I ensured that I provided a record (via email) of every previous meeting prior to the following meeting. I also encouraged regular feedback on the process and structure of the meetings themselves so that the structure would adapt to our purpose rather than the other way around.

After the sixth R@I meeting, we reflected on the value that the R@I meetings held for us as a creative forum that encouraged experimentation, and decided to open up the meeting to other interested members of the psychology department. I sent an email to the rest of the psychology department staff on the Hatfield campus, inviting them to attend the R@I meetings, which were held on the Mamelodi campus. We received supportive emails from some of the invited staff members and one or two of our meetings were attended by the head of the department and one other Hatfield staff member. As we were newly incorporated into the University of Pretoria, we were still regarded and often referred to as “the Vista colleagues” by the other members of the psychology department based on the Pretoria (Hatfield) campus. This likely contributed to their perceived lack of interest in this project. Our experience was one of being perceived as ‘other’ (Bakker, 2007), and hence this notice was an indication of our attempt to stimulate interest from our new colleagues in our work. This invitation forms part of the data set (see Appendix B).

Sometimes during meetings we reflected on conversations that were held outside of the scheduled meetings. In this way some of the ideas were also recorded in the minutes of the actual meetings. Discussions that took place between meetings either in direct conversation or via email and for which records exist were also included in the data set.

In keeping a record of our reflections, plans, decisions and actions in the R@I project, I followed the recommendations by McNiff et al. (2003) to monitor and document as clearly as possible (1) my own actions as well as my motives and intentions for my actions; (2) other people’s actions and stated intentions and motives for their actions; and (3) monitoring critical conversations about the research to show significant moments of change in practice, change in thinking over time and to provide “information that the validation process has been continuous and formative” (McNiff et al., 2003, p.102). I envisioned that the records of the regular meetings would be a source of data from which articles and other research products (web blogs, dissertations, PhDs, etc) could be crafted. I also imagined that discussions about the functioning and management of the psychology clinic could serve as a starting point to create new knowledge that would be immediately useful and beneficial to the participants. I furthermore acted as a

collector and archivist of records of every meeting, correspondence, research idea and collective working document. In the section on validity through craftsmanship (Kvale, 1995) below, I further discuss the value of transparent record keeping of discussions to encourage continuous feedback from participants and to test whether interpretations were reasonable made.

According to Kvale (1995), validation through craftsmanship resides in built-in quality control procedures that happen throughout the knowledge creation process. This is done through various checking processes (e.g., if interpretations were reasonably made, getting feedback from participants, etc.) and continually questioning the intent of the study and actions during the study.

#### *Presentations about our work as data*

During the R@I project we delivered presentations about our work in various forums. These included presentations to various members of the executive management team of the University of Pretoria on three separate occasions to explain our vision of the potential value of the Mamelodi campus as an integrated research, teaching and community engagement campus. This is an indication of the advocacy or activist function of AR (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Radermacher, 2006). This was at a time when the University of Pretoria (as incorporating institution of the Vista University Mamelodi campus) appeared to be strongly considering closing down the Mamelodi campus. We delivered another presentation to our psychology colleagues at the main (Hatfield) campus during a departmental research day. The final presentation that forms part of the data set was delivered at a Symposium on Indigenous Knowledge during the International Society for Theoretical Psychology conference in Cape Town in 2005.

#### *R@I team member evaluation of the value of the R@I project*

Action researchers use their values as a basis for actions and decisions during the research project and therefore bear a responsibility to check whether their values are justifiable and whether their influence is benefitting the participants of the study (McNiff et al., 2003). I made it a priority that the contexts in which these meetings were held would be conducive to a more relaxed style of interaction than would be the case in

usual staff meetings. My intention was to choreograph a conversational space that was distinct from everyday work conversations or meetings, where time was at a premium and the schedule of the meetings often did not allow for in-depth discussion. In addition, I enjoyed the company of my team members on social occasions and hoped to invite those other sides and aspects of them into the R@I meetings. To do this I employed the time-honoured social lubricants of food and drink, and spread the boardroom table with a bright cloth to help redefine the space as something more inviting. I further scheduled three-hour meetings (typically 9-12am) to allow for conversations to unfold and evolve. Although I organised refreshments for most of the meetings, team members also spontaneously contributed to these.

It was sometimes difficult to prevent these meetings from becoming only a pleasant social gathering of like-minded people, without any “research” being done. My worries were unfounded, however, since even the most raucous and “disorganised” meetings yielded inspirational ideas when I transcribed the audio recordings. The general format I tried to keep to when facilitating each meeting was to start with a reflection process on gains made, which then gradually moved into a planning session for action, and finally, decisions about who will do what by when. This format reflects the general action research cycle (Zuber-Skerrit, 2001) of reflect-plan-act-observe referred to above. On some occasions I circulated a task list between meetings as a reminder to every participant what actions they committed to prior to the next meeting.

What is not clearly visible from the written transcripts of the meetings is the mood in which these gatherings were held and the value they have added to individual members’ lives during those two years. Education is defined by McNiff et al. (2003, p.19) as “the interaction between people (and other beings) which enables them to grow in life affirming ways”. In order to evaluate my educational influence on the participants of the study, in July 2006 I circulated a set of questions (Box 1) to each of the participants. I interviewed one member (Ilse) on audiotape and the rest of the team members provided me with a written essay. These testimonials are included in chapter six and form an important part of the validation process, in addition to forming part of the data set for my

living theory. It is in these testimonials that the value of the project for each of the participants is explicated.

*Box 1. Questions to participants to evaluate my educational influence*

<p>What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative? In answering this question: Please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of: Your values (what is important about research for you) Your way of working (how you approach your research projects) Your identity (how you think about yourself as a researcher) Your own unique abilities and preferences Resources available to you as researcher What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you? Any other comments about R@I you feel is important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)</p>
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**Making sense of the data**

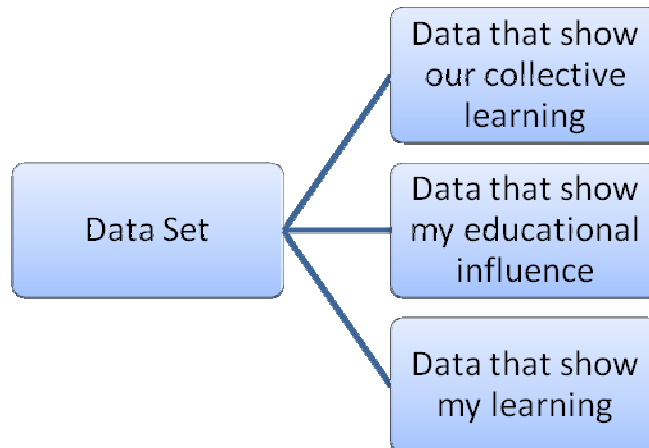
*Sorting and categorising data*

The first stage of working with the data involves sorting the data into categories and subcategories (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). I used all the available records of discussions (observations, reflections, planning) and actions (research products, presentations, meetings) as data sources and sorted them into categories (based on the event that gave rise to the record), and indicated their date of origin (Table 2).

**Table 2 Data Set Organised in Terms of Events and Dates**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b><i>Invitation to first meeting</i></b>	Invitation notice to colleagues	25/5/2004
<b><i>Transcripts of meetings</i></b>	R@I meeting 1	26/5/2004
	R@I meeting 2	9/6/2004
	R@I meeting 3	16/7/2004
	R@I meeting 4	6/8/2004
	R@I meeting 5	27/8/2004
	R@I meeting 6	8/10/2004
	R@I meeting 7	10/11/2004
	R@I meeting 8	25/1/2005
	R@I meeting 9	21/2/2005
	R@I meeting 10	25/4/2005
	R@I meeting 11	23/5/2005
	R@I meeting 12	19/9/2005
	R@I meeting 13	18/10/2005
	R@I meeting 14	21/11/2005
	R@I meeting 15	20/1/2006
	R@I meeting 16	28/2/2006
	R@I meeting 17	29/3/2006
<b><i>Invitation to rest of psych department</i></b>	Invitation notice to colleagues from receiving institution (Univ of Pretoria)	26/10/2004
<b><i>Presentations</i></b>	Presentations to Univ management	July 2004
		October 2004
		November 2004
		January 2005
	Departmental Research Day	30/5/2005
	International Society for Theoretical Psychology (ISTP) Symposium	15/6/2005
<b><i>Participant research ideas</i></b>	Gerhard	29/6/2004
	Gerhard	5/8/2004
	Ilse	20/7/2004
<b><i>Email conversations with participants</i></b>	Task list based on R@I meeting 3	20/7/2004
	Responses to Task list (R@I 3)	Multiple dates
	General	Multiple dates
<b><i>Participant evaluation of my educational influence</i></b>	Ilse	16/3/2006
	Terri	26/6/2006
	Gerhard	11/7/2006
	Linda	23/5/2008
	Member 6	26/5/2008
<b><i>SOS Research project</i></b>	Proposal	12/8/2004
	Research report	17/5/2005
<b><i>Indigenous psychology discussion</i></b>	Joint meeting between UP and UNISA psychology lecturers on the Mamelodi campus facilitated by the R@I team	3/6/2005

McNiff & Whitehead (2006) propose further sorting data into (1) data that show the practitioner-researcher's own learning; and (2) data that show other people's learning. I organised the records (data set) into three data sets: (1) data that showed our collective learning; (2) data that showed my educational influence; and (3) data that showed my own learning as a result of facilitating and participating in the R@I initiative. This is visually represented in Figure 10.



**Figure 10 Data set organised in terms of our collective learning, my educational influence, and my learning, adapted from McNiff & Whitehead (2006, p.146).**

I selected data that showed our collective learning based on statements in the R@I records, which reflected improvements, new insights, increased awareness of resources and transformations (e.g., group identity or ways of working). I chose data that showed evidence of my educational influence based on responses to explicit questions in this regard (see Box 1 above) as well as other recorded statements made by group members on separate occasions. To select data that reflected my own learning I searched for evidence of my changed academic practice over time which could be attributed (at least in part) to my facilitation and participation in the R@I initiative.

### *Analysing for meaning*

In an action research study, analysing the data for meaning implies the construction of particular meaning from the data set (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Indeed with reference to action researchers constructing meaning from data, McNiff et al. (2003) point out:

The social intent of your research was to improve your particular situation. Improvement would probably have occurred because you, working with other people, improved your understanding of what you were doing. You were working collaboratively, so you were clarifying for one another what this meant for you and your work. You were negotiating and constructing your own meanings out of your shared practices. In this way you were advancing your individual and collective knowing. (p.132)

Analysing the data therefore entails identifying which meanings were generated throughout the project that led to an improvement to our and my particular situations. This identification process could in itself be seen as a particular meaning generating exercise – an exercise to construct an account of our collective and individual understandings that led to an improvement of our situation.

### *Analysing the data for the core research project*

Two data analysis exercises were used for the core AR project. The first analysis occurred as a result of the action research process during the lifetime of the R@I project in which the workgroup members collectively examined the outcome of our previous plans in service of previous questions, generated new questions and new plans for finding answers, and so on. This process happened during each of the R@I meetings and can be seen as a continuous implicit collective data analysis that is part and parcel of the AR process.

The second type of analysis happened after the R@I project had come to an end and involved my scrutiny of the records of the 17 R@I meetings and other records of communication or actions directly related to the R@I project. In this second analysis exercise I looked specifically for evidence of collective and personal transformations that took place. The results of the second analysis appear in chapter five. These results form part of my thesis project in that they represent my analysis of the collective gains (based



on evidence from the records of the R@I project) that were made as a result of our participation and continuous joint co-creation of the R@I initiative.

### *Analysing the data for my living theory*

Generating a living theory involves a value identifying exercise by the researcher when scrutinising the data. In the words of Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p.81): “This (analysing the data for meaning) means you will look for those things that you consider worthwhile.” In my case, I carefully scrutinised the data for records of any actions, relationships or transformations in skill or knowledge that I deemed of particular value to me, as they related to the research questions. I furthermore looked for change (transformations) in my own and our collective theories or understanding of our work as a result of what we were learning during the research project. In this regard, Punia (2004, p.2) notes: “A living educational theory is living in two ways: people and their theory change as a result of learning and they are living what they learn.” Lastly, I looked for evidence that I was more able to live in the direction of my values (McNiff et al., 2003) and in so doing have found a resolution to my living contradiction (outlined in chapter two). My living theory therefore provides an account of the transformations that took place. In addition, it tracks the movement during the research project towards what we considered worthwhile as the project evolved from the research questions. One way of representing the movement in the direction of what is considered good is by means of action-reflection cycles.

### ***Identifying standards of judgement***

By identifying “good” or “valuable” situations from the data, the researcher is operating from implicit standards of judgement that are used to make these identifications. In this vein, Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p.82) state:

This idea is core to action research, which is itself premised on the idea of taking action in order to improve a situation, that is, move it in the direction of what we consider is good. Generating evidence involves identifying standards of judgement, which have their basis in what we consider is good. Standards of judgement enable us to make value judgements, from a reasoned position.

Standards of judgement can be distinguished from criteria of judgement. Criteria can be expressed as minimum targets to be achieved in order to complete a task (e.g., to obtain a degree), and are usually discreet in the sense that you either fulfil them or you do not. Standards express the quality or relative value with which the targets need to be achieved (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). In analysing data for the generation of a living theory, the researcher needs to indicate not only what was done, but also *how* it was done. Furthermore, he or she must justify why that represents evidence of *good* or *bad* practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

In looking through the data, I made a deliberate attempt to identify evidence of good (and bad) practice. In order to do this I made use of my own standards of judgement, which I articulate in the following way (adapted from Hartog, 2004):

- Evidence of transformation: how our collective and my own understanding and practice as academics have changed over time, based on the four research questions
- Evidence of an ethic of care and commitment to inclusion, creative ideas, and respect for individual contributions in my facilitation of the Research@Itsoseng project
- Evidence that as a researcher I have shown commitment to a continuous process of practice improvement through the establishment and maintenance of an action research initiative (R@I project)

Apart from these living standards of judgement that provide a valuable means to judge my research practice, I include in the next section additional criteria and measures that I used to ensure the validity of the research findings.

### **Validity of knowledge claims**

This thesis contains knowledge that was co-created in a collaborative group context during the lifespan of the R@I project, as well as knowledge created in the period after the R@I project and based on my reflections and interpretations about our and my learning and transformation as a result of the project. I provide in this section a brief description of my understanding of validity and explain the criteria I used and measures I have employed to assure the validity of the knowledge claims in this thesis.

Traditionally validity referred to the accuracy or truthfulness of findings (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). With the linguistic turn in the social sciences came the question of how to establish accuracy or truthfulness if objectivity is not obtainable:

One of the most catalytic influences on the qualitative domain has been the lively dialogue on the nature of language, and particularly the capacity of language to map or picture the world to which it refers. Developments in post-structural semiotics, literary theory, and rhetorical theory all challenge the pivotal assumption that scientific accounts can accurately and objectively represent the world as it is. At a minimum such work makes clear the impossibility of linguistic mimesis; there is no means of privileging any particular account on the grounds of its unique match to the world.... If there is no means of correctly matching word to world, then the warrant for scientific validity is lost, and researchers are left to question the role of methodology and criteria of evaluation (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p.2).

The crisis of validity (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994) in the social sciences, and in particular the field of qualitative research, is a much discussed and ongoing debate (Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993; Whitemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). Kvale (1995) seemingly sidesteps this crisis and refers to validity as simply “whether a study investigates the phenomena intended to be investigated” (p.26). In order to make this judgement, he recommends paying attention to (1) the quality of craftsmanship in an investigation; (2) testing the validity claims through dialogue (communicative validity) that allow arguments for and against interpretations; and (3) the pragmatic value of the knowledge which raises the issue of who has to the power to decide the desired results, direction of change and underpinning values of action (Kvale, 1995).

Whitemore et al. (2001) view the validity of a research project in terms of certain agreed upon “standards of quality” (p.531) present in the qualitative research literature. They provide a synthesis of contemporary validity criteria in qualitative research and distinguish between criteria and techniques of validity: “*criteria* are the standards to be upheld as ideals in qualitative research, whereas the *techniques* are the methods

employed to diminish identified validity threats” (p.528). They make a further distinction between primary and secondary criteria of validity:

Credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity are considered primary criteria, whereas explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity are considered secondary criteria. Primary criteria are necessary to all qualitative inquiry; however, they are insufficient in and of themselves. Secondary criteria provide further benchmarks of quality and are considered to be more flexible as applied to particular investigations. (Whittemore et al., 2001, p.529)

In the following section I discuss primary and secondary validity criteria as explained by Whittemore et al. (2001) and show how these criteria apply to this study. In addition I discuss the three domains of validity judgements (craftmanship, communicative validity, pragmatic validity) from Kvale (1995) to explain which measures and techniques I have used to further ensure the quality of the research results.

### *Primary validity criteria*

#### ***Credibility***

Credibility refers to whether the results of the research reflect the experience of participants and/or the context in a believable way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Whittemore et al., 2001). In order to pay attention to the credibility of the knowledge claims in this thesis I have situated the R@I project within the sociopolitical, geographical and historical context of our work on the Mamelodi campus during a period of higher education transformation in South Africa. Throughout the results chapters I include excerpts from the R@I meeting records in an attempt to adequately represent the various experiences of the team members as well as the influence of the context.

#### ***Authenticity***

Authenticity is closely linked to credibility (Whittemore et al., 2001). According to Sandelowski (1986), authenticity involves the representation of research in such a manner that it reflects the meanings and experiences that are lived and perceived by the participants. Whittemore et al. (2001, p.530) state that because of the “multivocality of an interpretive perspective, authenticity of the person, phenomenon, or situation become important criteria for validity.” Lincoln (1995) advises an awareness of the subtle

differences in the voices of others in order to produce authentic accounts. In this respect the involvement of the researcher can affect his or her ability to speak authentically for the experience of the participants (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). In my presentation of this research I have included many verbatim responses from the R@I team members and made an effort to represent the differences in the voices of the R@I team members where I became aware of these differences. I also regularly invited the R@I team members to amend the R@I records in order to reflect their lived experiences and meanings more accurately.

### ***Criticality***

Criticality refers to a critical stance of the researcher towards alternative explanations and the researcher's own biases (Marshall, 1990). In addition, Maxwell (1996) proposes that a critical approach involves the presentation of evidence that substantiates the researcher's interpretations in order to guard against conjecture or distortion. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) suggest that in an award-bearing programme (e.g. a PhD degree study), the researcher may be assigned a supervisor or promoter to offer additional critique on the research. In the course of this study I have had the benefit of two supervisors. Each of them extended my thinking in different ways and encouraged me to substantiate my interpretations with evidence. I also presented part of this work at an international conference in 2005 (this paper was published as part of the proceedings; see Eskell-Blokland et al., 2007), which provided a further opportunity to expose my work to a critical audience. I also ensured that the chapters (five to seven) in which I offer my interpretations include excerpts of data that substantiate my interpretations.

### ***Integrity***

In interpretive research the subjectivity of the researcher is valued in that data may be interpreted uniquely (Johnson, 1999). Integrity in the process of interpretation is necessary to ensure that the researcher's interpretations are valid and grounded within the data (Whittemore et al., 2001). In order to ensure integrity of the interpretation process, I provide a reflexive account of my involvement in the research process and made recursive and repetitive checks of my interpretations. Throughout the interpretation process I used the theoretical themes of *turning resources into assets* and *personal and*

*collective transformation* as well as the stated research questions, and looked for evidence in the data that could substantiate any presence of these themes. In this way, my interpretation process achieved a degree of integrity.

### *Secondary validity criteria*

#### ***Explicitness***

Explicitness refers to the presence of an audit trail which allows the reader to follow the interpretive effort of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Whittemore et al., 2011). An explicit presentation of the methodological decisions, research biases, interpretations and research results allows the reader insight into the research judgments that were made (Ambert et al., 1995; Marshall, 1990; Sandelowski, 1986). This manuscript contains explicit presentations of my methodological decisions (chapters four and six), researcher biases (chapters two, three and seven), and interpretations (chapters five to seven). The inclusion of the complete R@I records of the 17 meetings further allows for a comprehensive audit trail.

#### ***Vividness***

According to Whittemore et al. (2001), the quality of vividness allows the reader to “personally experience and understand the phenomenon or context described” (p.531). To provide a vivid account of the research, thick and faithful descriptions (Geertz, 1973) are required. They should be presented with artfulness, imagination and clarity (Whittemore et al., 2001). These rich descriptions should highlight the salient themes or features of the research (Ambert et al., 1995), and in this way show the essence of the research. Vividness also entails carefully constructing rich descriptions in order to avoid overwhelming the reader with unnecessary detail (Sandelowski, 1986). In each chapter I endeavour to provide thick descriptions of the various process of the research to highlight the essential features, and have sought creative ways to present with clarity my interpretations of the salient issues in our and my personal transformations.

#### ***Creativity***

Creativity as a criterion of research quality refers to imaginative methodological designs to answer specific research questions (Whittemore et al., 2001). Creativity is also visible

in the flexibility of the researcher to respond to the changing demands of the inquiry process (Chapple & Rogers, 1998). My use of an emergent research design required a creative and flexible approach to respond to my understanding of the group process as it evolved over the course of two years. In chapters five and six I have sought to highlight certain strategic (creative) decisions I took to gently direct the research process.

### ***Thoroughness***

Thoroughness involves “attention to connection between themes and full development of ideas” (Whittemore et al., 2001, p.532). Similar terms such as saturation (Leininger, 1994) and completeness (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992) have been used to refer to this quality criterion of research. Thoroughness implies that the research questions are convincingly answered (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Thorne 1997) and that the full scope of the phenomenon is explored (Marshall, 1990). My attempts to be thorough are reflected in the way I looked for connections between themes; by answering the four research questions as fully as possible; and remaining true to the data in my attempts to do so.

### ***Congruence***

The Oxford dictionary defines congruence as “agreement or harmony; compatibility” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2010a). Whittemore et al. (2001) argue for congruence between “the research question, the method, and the findings; between data collection and analysis; between the current study and previous studies; and between the findings and practice” (p.532). Congruency as quality criterion in this study can be judged by how well the research questions reflected our and my concerns and how well the method and outcomes of the research were related to and addressed these concerns.

### ***Sensitivity***

Sensitivity implies consideration for the human, cultural and social contexts in which the research took place (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Munhall, 1994; Whittemore et al., 2001) and requires that ethical considerations be made explicit (Whittemore et al., 2001). In this respect, Lincoln (1995) advises that the researcher demonstrate respect for participants and concern for human dignity, and be mindful that “research serves the purpose of the community in which it was carried out rather than simply serving the community of knowledge producers and policymakers” (p.280). For instance, Member 6,

who experienced some discord with members of the team (for reasons not related to the R@I project) provided feedback in a testimonial that acknowledged my attempts to recognise this group member's needs and efforts to include this member in the group. Member 6's feedback suggests that my engagement was experienced by this group member as sensitive and considerate. I consciously assumed an attitude of respectful engagement with each of my R@I team members and made efforts to include team members' contributions. As the project was explicitly designed to serve the purpose of the R@I community, I engaged with my interpretations with regards to my personal research questions only after the completion of the project. This further ensured that the focus remained on the immediate benefit of the research to the community of R@I team members and other stakeholders.

#### *Validity measures through quality of craftsmanship*

According to Kvale (1995), validation through craftsmanship resides in built-in quality control procedures that happen throughout the knowledge creation process, through various checking behaviours (e.g. if interpretations were reasonably made, getting feedback from participants, etc.) and continually questioning the intent of the study and actions during the study.

Some built-in checking measures in my study included obtaining regular feedback from participants and testing my interpretations. I did this through transparent record keeping, distributing the records detailing the content of the R@I meetings, sharing my reflective summaries of some of the nodal points of knowledge creation, and inviting feedback and corrections. With regards to evaluating my educational influence, the set of open-ended questions (Box 1) served as another procedure to obtain feedback from my team members. This was important to avoid merely relying on my perception of my educational influence on the members of the core action research workgroup.

The pragmatic intent of both the core AR project as well as the thesis/self-study project was to improve a certain aspect of practice. This is implicitly expressed in the research questions (how do I improve my academic practice? How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng clinic?). Kvale's (1995) recommendation to question the intent of



actions resonates with the idea of praxis in action research as “informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge as well as successful action” (McNiff et al., 2003, p.13). In further support of this line of reasoning, Reason and Torbert (2001) state that the “action turn” that followed the “linguistic turn” of postmodernism allows for a re-examination of the purpose of human inquiry in the social sciences:

We argue that since all human persons are participating actors in their world, the purpose of inquiry is not simply or even primarily to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field, to deconstruct taken-for-granted realities, or even to develop emancipatory theory, but rather to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes *directly* to the flourishing of human persons, their communities and the ecosystems of which they are part. (pp.5-6)

The purpose of the core action research project (the R@I project) can be framed as an attempt by the members of the R@I team members to link personal and collective knowledge with individual and collaborative action to contribute directly to a greater sense of flourishing as academics within our professional communities of belonging. We communicated our account of these forged links by means of the various presentations we delivered. Providing an account of this to a critical audience forms part of the measures of communicative validity.

#### *Communicative validity measures*

One form of communicative validity resides in submitting research reports to a critical audience such as an examining panel for a degree or for professional peer review at conferences or in journal publications (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Validation through review by the academic community has been in place for a long time, but a relatively new development in qualitative research is “the extension of the interpretative community to include the subjects investigated and the general public, with the emphasis upon truth as negotiated in a local context” (Kvale, 1995, p.32). According to Whitehead and McNiff (2006), validity is about establishing the trustworthiness of knowledge claims and entails “showing the authenticity of the evidence base, explaining

the standards of judgement used, and demonstrating the reasonableness of the claim” (p.98).

This study can be classified as practitioner action research, and as such there are two processes that are regarded as acceptable forums for validation, namely, personal validation and social validation (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Personal validation resides in my own conviction, based on my own critical reflection, that my interpretations, evaluations and resultant claims are valid. Submitting this work to the process of social validation assumes that it has already passed my personal validation process in the sense that I am content that I have provided sufficient evidence that my evidence base is authentic, that I have clearly articulated my standards of judgement, and that I have met the institutional criteria of judgement as well as my own articulated standards of judgement. Social validation involves submitting the criteria and standards of judgment together with my claims to my team members for a critical appraisal and evaluation in terms of the trustworthiness of my claims. Social validation in this instance also involves institutional validation by submitting this work to external examiners in a tertiary education context. In this research project I facilitated an internal social validation process of my educational influence in the R@I project by using the R@I team members as a critical group and asking them to respond to a set of open-ended questions (Box 1).

#### *Pragmatic validity measures*

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999),

if we are deliberately looking to achieve an end, and we are looking via our research to find ways to do it, the extent to which the actions indicated by the research bring about the desired results is a measure of the truth value of the research. (p.432)

Kvale (1995) states that pragmatic validity of interpretations goes beyond the aesthetic dimension of communicative validity. It shares closer ties with the ethical dimension of interpretations by taking decisions on how and when to act in response to interpretations. The individual and collaborative decisions I took in facilitating the core AR project were constantly informed by an evaluation of what would be the most useful action at any given point in time. In this I am supported by Reason and Torbert (2001, p.4) when they

state: “the question is how to act....in a timely, idiosyncratic, ecologically sensitive fashion that catalyzes self or other transformation when appropriate. And when is this *not* the question?”

Kvale (1995) furthermore discerns two types of pragmatic validation: (1) claims of knowledge or transformation that are accompanied or followed up by action; and (2) interventions based on the researcher’s interpretations that appear to act as a catalyst for a change or transformation in behaviour or towards the research goals. In a collaborative AR project such as the R@I project, the research team or workgroup “together develop knowledge of a social situation, and then apply this knowledge by new actions in the situation, thus through praxis testing the validity of the knowledge” (Kvale, 1995, p.34).

### **Ensuring ethical practice**

A social science researcher can face many dilemmas throughout the research process. For instance, Miles and Huberman (1994) mention the following: validity versus causing harm; anonymity versus visibility; scientific understanding versus individual rights; detached inquiry versus help; help-giving versus confidentiality; freedom of inquiry versus political advantage. In addition, ethical practice in action research projects is considered to be more complicated than in traditional (outsider) qualitative research projects (Barazangi, 2006; Morton, 1999; Zeni, 2010). The added complexity is related to (among others) issues of authorship of collaboratively created knowledge (Morton, 1999) and balancing the interests of the researcher with the interests of the collaborators (Zeni, 2006). McNiff and Whitehead (2006) recommend three key ethical aspects to be taken into consideration when other people are involved in research: (1) negotiating and securing access; (2) protecting your participants; and (3) assuring good faith. Throughout the research project and in this document I have taken steps to minimise any potential harm; and where known risk for harm existed, that every participant was aware of this risk and consented to it.

### *Negotiating and securing access for the R@I project*

Prior to commencing the R@I project I scheduled a meeting with each of my five colleagues and discussed the potential value of the R@I project as well as my role, what information I intended to document and who would have access to the data. This could be seen as a negotiating and securing of access exercise with the primary group of people who were going to be involved as collaborators. The clinic director (Linda) was one of the R@I team members and as such she had a direct influence throughout the R@I project in terms of what information relevant to the clinic we would access and how that information would be presented. I nevertheless requested and received written permission from Linda in her capacity as Itsoseng clinic director to conduct the R@I project and use the Itsoseng clinic as a research forum. I submitted a written proposal to the University of Pretoria's ethics committee, detailing every research procedure planned. I also requested and received written permission from the Mamelodi campus principal to conduct the R@I project on the Mamelodi campus. My application to the University of Pretoria's ethics committee, detailing all procedures and permission letters was approved.

### *Protecting the participants*

Zeni (2006) advises that ethical practice involves our examining the impact of our research on the people whose lives we document, and offers the following questions to aid this examination:

What negative or embarrassing data can you anticipate emerging from this research? Who might be harmed (personally, professionally, financially)? What precautions have you taken to protect the participants? Might your research lead to knowledge of sensitive matters such as illegal activities, drug/alcohol use or sexual behaviour of participants? How do you plan to handle such information?  
(Zeni, 2006, p.14)

In this research report I only named or identified participants, stakeholders or people named in meetings with their specific permission. The benefit of naming participants is to fully credit their ideas and contributions. One of the R@I team members preferred to remain anonymous and I therefore refer to this person as Member 6. This proved to be particularly challenging as the collaborative action research project was conducted with a

small group of people within the physical context of the Itsoseng Psychology clinic on the Mamelodi campus. The collaborative action research project furthermore took place during a transformational period in South Africa – ten years after democracy. As the details of the sociopolitical, geographical and historical period are highly relevant to understanding the impetus and development of this study, providing anonymity to the role players was almost impossible. Member 6 gave consent to be part of the study with the knowledge that the data would be used towards a PhD thesis. I have made a considerable effort to ensure that I included Member 6 in such a way as to protect identity as far as it is in my power, as well as to acknowledge this member's contributions, which I deemed valuable throughout the project. Omitting Member 6 altogether by erasing this member's contributions from all records would present a greater ethical concern as it would amount to an inaccurate picture of both the process and content of the project.

Member 6 expressed discomfort on three occasions during the research project. As the project sometimes involved a personal scrutiny of our individual academic practice in the presence of others, it had the potential to be an emotionally threatening environment. Most of the conversations were also audio recorded (with the permission of all participants). This possibly increased the likelihood that participants would restrict the early expression of discomfort (when it arose) at the risk of appearing out of kilter with the dominant positive atmosphere present during most discussions. Several attempts were made by myself and other members of the workgroup to address the concerns that Member 6 had both during and between meetings. This member made the following comments in response to my request for an evaluation of my educational influence (these comments appear in a fuller context in chapter five):

*Honestly Willem, I know you did a lot and tried with all. However with regard to me, an immense amount of dynamics happened between me and the rest of the Mamelodi personnel in the last 2 to 3 years... For this reason I saw the meetings we had as more of a further possibility, that would have been used to belittle me by some of the members of staff on Mamelodi, and chose not to participate.*

*I truly appreciate the fact that you did try to pull me into the group, to participate. That is an integral part of any group functioning and I know you did a wonderful job with all.*

Prior to this research project, each of the six faculty members had an existing role and a relative amount of influence in the decision making process regarding the functioning and management of the Itsoseng clinic. The core AR project involved using Itsoseng Clinic as an experimental nucleus to integrate research, teaching and community engagement, thereby improving the functioning of the clinic and increasing our collective and individual research outputs. Prior to the first R@I meeting, a concern was expressed by two workgroup members regarding my role as “primary” researcher and R@I facilitator, and how that would influence the relative power I suddenly was perceived to have acquired in terms of the management of the Itsoseng Clinic. It is important to stress that these perceptions of my sudden apparent power over the management of the clinic were not anticipated, nor did I perceive myself to have acquired any additional power. These two workgroup members were functioning in a capacity as operational clinic managers who reported to Linda as the overall clinic manager. This concern was expressed in an email (dated 19 May 2004) to me by the then clinic director (Linda) in response to my invitation to participate in this research project:

*Dear Willem, I fully support this meeting and especially the venue. One point of concern is that [two of the members] feel undermined with Itsoseng and I think you should discuss your intentions with them first.*

In response to Linda’s suggestion, I held discussions with both operational clinic managers prior to the first meeting. My dual role as research team member and project facilitator was discussed and clarified in some detail during the first and second R@I meetings. I made every effort to constantly assure members that I had their best interests at heart and presented them with an ethics statement which appears in Appendix C.

### *Assuring good faith*

Assuring good faith involves doing what you said you were going to do (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). I made every effort to keep to all agreed arrangements and to be open to ideas and suggestions of every member. In the interests of transparency, I provided all members of the core AR workgroup with copies of the transcribed and typed meeting records prior to the next meeting. I also regularly encouraged amendments and refutations to the records, as indicated in Box 2 and Box 3.

#### *Box 2. Invitation to amend the typed records of the R@I meetings*

**Invitation:**

This document serves as my recollection of some of the main ideas expressed during the meeting held on 2004-05-26 at Sammy Marks museum. I invite you to add to this document:

- ideas that you remember that were expressed but which are not reflected (or not adequately reflected) in this document
- new ideas that came up for you while reading this document and which relate to the general topic
- other crazy ideas which are not really related to the topic of the meeting but which you feel could add value to future meetings or reflection on this meeting
- process comments on the meeting – perhaps you noticed something in the way we communicated or dealt with contributions that influenced the discussion.

From Record of 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting (26/5/2004)

#### *Box 3. Second invitation to amend the typed records of the R@I meetings*

**Authorship of this document**

This again is my recollections aided by my notes taken and writings on a flipchart during this meeting. Comments, refutations, amendments and enhancements are always welcome to these records.

From Record of 3<sup>rd</sup> R@I meeting (16/7/2004)

In addition to doing what you said you were going to do, Burns (2007, p.154) proposes that “good facilitation of action research depends on mobilising passion and building trust. It encourages emergence rather than pushes for solutions, and it sometimes requires the action research facilitator to go out on a limb and make strategic challenges.” Looking back over the evolution of the core AR project, I am able to see that my focus during the first ten R@I meetings was on preserving a record of as many contributions from each workgroup member as possible, rather than on keeping the direction of the conversations strictly focussed on the initial research question. I found myself often frustrated with this state of affairs, being concerned that the conversations would evolve into nothing more than collective complaining sessions of how difficult the challenges we faced were. However, I believe that my attempts to engage with each member’s contribution (by means of challenging or supporting it) possibly had the effect of affirming and encouraging passion already present in each participant. I provide evidence of some strategic challenges I made during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> R@I meetings in chapter five where I present certain key reflections that likely contributed to the transformations that I regarded had taken place during the core action research project.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I provided a description of the research process as well as the data gathering and analysis methods I used in order to answer the research questions and to present evidence of our collective and my personal transformation as a result of our participation in the R@I project. I explained how finding answers to the research questions may not only benefit the R@I group as a whole but may also inform into my living theory of how I improved my practice as an academic. I discussed criteria and measures of validity and reported on how I used these to ensure the quality of the results. I also discussed ethical practice and provided an account of actions I took to ensure proper negotiation and securing of access to research contexts, protection of the participants, and assurances of good faith. In the next three chapters, I present and discuss the results of the study organised in terms of the transformations that occurred through our attempts to answer the research questions.



## CHAPTER 5

### CORE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT: RESEARCH@ITSOSENG

This chapter contains the results of the data analysis of the core action research project, Research@Itsoseng. Analysing the data entailed identifying which meanings generated throughout the project led to an improvement of our situation. The core action research project was based on two main research questions: “How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?”, and “How can we increase our research output?”

The Research@Itsoseng project is distinguished from the thesis project in which I address the questions: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?”, and “How can I improve my academic practice?” The data analysis results for the first thesis project question are presented in chapter six. The second thesis project research question is presented as my living theory in chapter seven.

#### **Action research cycles**

Our efforts to answer the two research questions of the core action research project ranged across 17 meetings and over a period of two years. From this process, three action research cycles are discernable.

#### *The first cycle (R@I meetings 1-10, 26/5/2004 to 25/4/2005)*

During the first ten R@I meetings our focus was on the establishment of a peer support research initiative and practical improvements to the functioning of the Itsoseng Psychology Clinic. We attempted to link the research activities and joint solving of practical problems in our day-to-day activities. We also felt the impact of the incorporation process on our day-to-day work and developed strategies to deal with this

impact. By the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting we were satisfied with how the clinic was functioning and we were ready to redirect our energy elsewhere.

*The second cycle (R@I meetings 11-14, 23/5/2005 to 21/11/2005)*

The 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> meetings saw a refocusing of our energy on some research initiatives and some significant insights in terms of community engagement. During the second cycle a drive to sell our collective vision for the future of the Mamelodi campus to the management of the University of Pretoria also emerged.

*The third cycle (R@I meetings 15-17, 20/1/2006 to 29/3/2006)*

The 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meetings saw the most significant shifts in terms of our efforts to increase our research output and in terms of our understanding of what needed to change in order for this to happen.

**The core action research project: Research@Itsoseng**

**Research question: How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?**

This research question forms one of the two main questions asked as a result of the core AR project. We (the workgroup) expressed concerns about several aspects of Itsoseng Clinic that we felt could benefit from a collaborative attempt to improve its daily functioning. To understand the context of the day-to-day running problems of the Itsoseng clinic, an overview of the clinic functioning and the community of role players is briefly outlined in the next section.

*Cycle 1*

***Reflection***

When a client was referred to the clinic by someone outside of the Mamelodi campus boundaries (e.g. community-based general practitioner, nurse or social worker) and arrived at the campus, they would be directed to the Mamelodi campus security office. When they asked a security officer for the Itsoseng clinic, they would be directed to the relevant building on the campus.



This photograph shows the path from the main gate to the building from which the clinic operated. This photograph was taken from my office window, which overlooked the clinic building.



This photograph shows the building from the front with the sign advertising the clinic.

**Figure 11 Photos of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic. Photographed by the author**

Once inside the building, signs on the wall would direct clients to the office of two counselling psychology interns who would attend to them by finding out the reason for their visit and scheduling an assessment session. There was no fee charged for services or appointments at the clinic. The duties of psychology interns included clinic reception, triage, running the psychometry library, keeping records and statistics, marketing the clinic, and allocating psychotherapists (MA Counselling psychology students) or counsellors (BPsych students).

The R@I team members provided training and supervision to the MA and BPsych students, but did not take on psychotherapy clients themselves in the clinic. Linda Blokland acted as clinic director and as such was responsible for ensuring that the interns met the requirements of their internship programmes, for the funding of the intern salaries and promoting the Itsoseng clinic externally to other agencies and internally to the University of Pretoria as our incorporating institution. Linda delegated the operational management of day-to-day running of the clinic to the interns, who reported to two clinic managers (Ilse and Member 6). The role of the clinic managers was to oversee the operational functioning of the clinic and deal with any issues that the interns could not resolve. It is important to note that the clinic had no allocated staff funding. All time and

energy spent in or on the clinic was in addition to all our other regular academic duties. The following role players were involved in the day-to-day functioning of the Itsoseng clinic:

#### *Psychotherapy lecturers / supervisors*

The six full time lecturing staff were all involved in the Master's and BPsych students' theoretical and practical therapeutic training. These individuals were briefly introduced in chapter two as they constituted the workgroup of the core action research project.

#### *Clinic managers*

Two fulltime lecturing staff members (Ilse Ruane and Member 6) were responsible for assisting the interns with whatever support was needed in their day-to-day running of the clinic. The clinic managers met formally with the interns once fortnightly, but were available on email or in person to address any urgent issues.

#### *Twelve-month fulltime counselling psychology interns*

Itsoseng Psychology Clinic offered two counselling psychology internship positions. The tasks of the interns were outlined in the previous section.

#### *Master's (Counselling Psychology) students*

A directed Master's programme in counselling psychology was offered on the Mamelodi campus. Ten students were selected each year, and part of the training entailed undertaking psychological assessments and treatment in the clinic. Students worked one afternoon a week in the clinic and a second afternoon at an off-campus psychology service.

#### *Bachelor of Psychology (BPsych) students*

A four-year Bachelor of Psychology degree was offered on the Mamelodi campus. This was a directed programme which led to a professional qualification as a Registered Counsellor, and was considered the equivalent of an academic Honours degree in Psychology. Approximately 20 students were selected for the BPsych programme each year. The students received theoretical and practical training in the practice of

counselling and each student was required to work one afternoon in the clinic conducting intake interviews, psychometric assessments and providing counselling services.

### *Clients*

Clients who made use of the psychological services of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic comprised students on the Mamelodi campus as well as people living in Mamelodi. They included individuals who were unable to afford private psychology services as well as those who preferred to attend the clinic for other reasons. A demographic profile analysis of the client population of Itsoseng Clinic in 2005 and 2006 indicated that clients ranged in age between seven and 30, and presented most commonly with the following five complaints (in order of prevalence): learning difficulties, relationship problems, depression, career concerns and HIV-related issues (Phala, 2008).



Two Master's students with R@I member Ilse in the rear. The clinic building can be seen on the right. The tree and chairs in the foreground provided a shady spot for a discussion meeting with faculty of the University of South Africa (Unisa) psychology department on indigenous psychology (3 June 2005).



A glimpse of the inside of the building, which contained a big lecture room, two meeting rooms, two therapy rooms and the interns' office. Here participants share tea during the discussion meeting on indigenous psychology with Unisa. R@I members Linda and Gerhard are shown (front centre and right).

**Figure 12 Activities at Itsoseng Clinic.**

### ***Initial concerns regarding the functioning of the clinic***

Our initial concerns centred on communication between the various role players, the level of engagement and ownership each of the role players appeared to display, resource management (marketing, security, record keeping), quality of interactions with

clients, and addressing the increasing demand for assistance with learning problems. Some of these concerns appear in the following excerpts from the record of the first R@I meeting (Box 4).

*Box 4.* Some initial concerns about the functioning of Itsoseng Clinic

Member 6:

....our problem is Intern A<sup>10</sup>; she does not do what we tell her to do. We (Member 6 and Ilse) have a clear idea of what should be done to improve the functioning of Itsoseng, we communicate these ideas to Intern A and Intern B but I feel that Intern A just does not cooperate. A meeting is scheduled with Intern A and Intern B for 2004-05-27 to address this concern. This meeting should be more effective than previous ones since our authority as clinic managers has recently been communicated to the interns very clearly.

Ilse:

There are a lot of things not working and that is a great concern for me. The following are a few of the many areas I see that need improving:

- Case management and client distribution
- Marketing of Itsoseng
- Intern interactions with clients especially on the first contact
- Security (of valuable assets, e.g. psychometry)

I would like to reiterate what Member 6 has said; we have put all the procedures and systems in place, but the interns, especially Intern A, are just not following them.

From the record of the 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-05-26, p.2-4 of 5

### ***Interpersonal conflict pattern played out on various levels in the clinic***

#### *Clarifying my role and the purpose of the R@I meetings*

Some members felt that the R@I meetings had the potential to give me, in my role as the research facilitator, the power to question the management decisions of the Itsoseng clinic. A need to clarify my role as the research facilitator (myself) as well as the purpose of the R@I meetings thus emerged. This was particularly relevant as the workgroup

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<sup>10</sup> Names removed to protect privacy.



decided to take the improvement of the functioning of the clinic as our first action research project. Some evidence of this process (the concern and how we addressed it) appear in the following excerpt from the 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting (Box 5).

*Box 5. Clarification of my role and purpose of R@I meetings*

*A shift in focus*

One of the first issues that was raised was the importance of making a clear distinction between a management focus and a research focus of the R@I meetings. Since we tackled the issue of improving the service delivery and efficient functioning of ITSOSENG as a first action research project the danger existed of seeing these research meetings as an attempt to exercise control over the clinic management team (Member 6 and Ilse).

*Clarification of my (Willem) role*

I see myself as the research facilitator or primary researcher. I have taken it upon myself to set up a research wing at Mamelodi campus (psychology sub-department), with a core aim to make it easier to publish the work that we do anyway. I believe that action research is ideally suited to this purpose and that we are surrounded by relevant research questions that would be beneficial to find answers to.

From the record of the 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-06-09, p.1 of 3

*Conflict between two members of the workgroup*

During the second R@I meeting, Member 6 reported that the meeting with Intern A had gone very well and Ilse mentioned that Intern A seemed a lot more open and relaxed. Member 6 stated that she felt that Intern A's new position as administrator was possibly partly responsible for the shift. A pattern of interpersonal conflict between Intern A and Intern B was mentioned by Member 6 and Ilse. I started to draw an ecological map on the board to aid exploration of the effect this pattern of conflict might have on various other role players in the clinic. This ecological map appears in Appendix E as part of the record of the 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting. After completion of the ecological map, someone remarked that three dyadic relationships between female role players in the clinic seemed characterised by a less-than-comfortable relationship between them. At this point an intense vocal exchange erupted between Member 6 and Ilse after which the

meeting was ended with a suggestion that Ilse and Member 6 work together to find ways of resolving their conflict outside the R@I meetings.

By the end of the second R@I meeting we had identified a number of areas for improvement, including the need to address some of the relational dynamics between various role players in the clinic. These areas can be summarised as follows:

1. Concerns about the **quality of training and service provided** at Itsoseng clinic
  - a. Client numbers – marketing
  - b. Quality of first contact with clients
  - c. Responding to the increasing number of “learning problem” referrals
  - d. Finding ways to increase the level of engagement from students and interns
2. Concerns about **resource management** at Itsoseng
  - a. Security of the clinic – recent thefts of equipment
  - b. Therapy rooms not optimally used
3. Concerns about the **management of staff and students** at Itsoseng
  - a. Lack of proper communication flow between clinic managers – trainers – interns – Master’s students – BPsych students – clients
  - b. Low client numbers – insufficient to provide adequate practical experience for all students
  - c. Incomplete or inaccurate statistical records of clients presenting at Itsoseng Clinic
4. Concerns about **interpersonal conflict** between three sets of role players in the clinic

### ***Attempted solutions***

From the record of the first R@I meeting a list of tasks was drawn up to address some of the above concerns. From this list (Box 6), it is clear that we had no idea yet of the relational tensions that existed.



*Box 6. Our first imagined solutions to the clinic functioning*

*Priorities that emerged during the conversation*

- Involve the Master's students more
- Engage Intern A – increase a sense of ownership
- Address the issue of “learning problems” – Gerhard and Linda to organise a work session in combination with somebody from main campus educational psychology.

*Preferred outcomes*

1. Friday 28 May – deadline for clinic stats to be submitted by the interns to Member 6 and Ilse.
2. Friday 28 May – deadline for psychometry inventory to be submitted by the interns to Member 6 and Ilse.
3. Ideally a working relationship be fostered between clinic managers and interns as opposed to an adversarial relationship

*Agreed upon action before next R@I meeting*

Gerhard and Ilse:

Conversation with Intern A to engage her in the “learning problem” workshop

From the record of the 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-05-26, p.4 of 5

After we became aware of some of the strained relational dynamics present among role players in the clinic, our attempted solutions to address the above areas included a differentiation in the roles of the clinic management team (Ilse and Member 6). It was suggested that they compile an exhaustive list of areas under their control and divide them into two portfolios, with each member of the clinic management team taking ownership of one portfolio (Box 7). This was suggested partly because of the effect of diffusion of responsibility that took place when they had joint responsibility for a certain area. It was understood that once they had taken primary responsibility for each of their portfolios, they could then delegate certain tasks to the rest of the clinic team, although they would remain primarily responsible for overseeing each area.

*Box 7. Proposed differentiation in clinic management team*

**Clinic management team**

It was decided that Member 6 and Ilse would draw up a job description of the clinic

management team, in other words a list of areas that need to be managed or controlled. Based on this list two portfolios would be decided on. Member 6 to serve as a clinic manager with a specific portfolio which would give her control of various areas that need to be managed; the individual areas can be allocated to other staff members. The same counts for Ilse.

From the record of the 3<sup>rd</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-07-16, p.1 of 6

### ***Evaluating improvements and emergence of new concerns***

During the fourth R@I meeting Ilse and Member 6 reported their enactment of the proposed differentiation in clinic management (see Box 8), with Ilse taking responsibility for everything connected to the psychometry store (referred to as “test lab” in the records) and Member 6 taking responsibility for redesigning the monthly statistics forms and ensuring that they were punctually completed.

#### ***Box 8. Clinic management team differentiation***

Ilse informed us that she took responsibility for the **test lab** and that Member 6 took responsibility for the **monthly clinic statistics**. They have started to sort out these two issues first as a matter of priority, but are still open to receive ideas of what else can be included on a “job description” of the clinic management team.

From the record of the 4<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-08-06, p.1 of 3

After the first six R@I meetings several improvements to the functioning of the Itsoseng clinic were reported. The first set of improvements related to the immediate results of the differentiated clinic management. Ilse reported better control of and increased security measures over the psychometry library, while Member 6 discussed some of the finer details of refining the monthly statistics forms (Box 9). These improved monthly statistics forms were later used by a Master’s student to complete a dissertation of limited scope on the service delivery of the Itsoseng clinic (Phala, 2008).

*Box 9. Improving psychometry library and statistics forms*

*Clinic functioning*

Ilse reports that no items were reported stolen since more rigorous security measures have been put in place. She reports that the interns are much more strict with the control of the psychometry lab key and that seems to have made the vital difference. There seems to be overall happiness with the psychometry lab at present.

Member 6 is busy designing a new stats form. She expressed her disdain at the current description of *presenting problems* on the stats forms (e.g. “psychological problem”)..... It is envisioned that the new stats form should enable us to use the info for meaningful and hopefully insightful research into the functioning and possibilities for improving service delivery at Itsoseng.

From the record of the 6<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-10-08, p.1 of 7

The second set of improvements related to the improved communication and relationships between the various role players within the clinic and the overall improvement in service delivery to clients. This is evidenced by this excerpt from the record of the seventh R@I meeting (Box 10).

*Box 10. Overall improvements to the functioning of Itsoseng Clinic*

*Clinic*

What has been improved?

- Communication and relationships within the clinic
  - Evidence: stats forms are being filled in by Intern A and others
- Service delivery
  - Better service to clients
  - More accountability on all levels of the clinic
  - When problems come up – more aware of them
  - Clinic runs more ethically (Member 6: When something happens Intern A now writes incident reports)
  - Terri & Ilse: The communication between training and the clinic better,

next year want to take it further. There should be less distance between the training and the interns

- Gerhard: The disconnected complaint processes have been changed
- Linda: I receive far fewer problems regarding the clinic that I need to address – this used to happens lots
- Ilse: Delineation of clinic areas is much clearer – in terms of which problems are dealt with by Ilse, Member 6 and Linda.

From the record of the 7<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-11-10, p.2 of 3

The day-to-day functioning of the Itsoseng clinic required ongoing conversations and decisions as issues arose. However, after the seventh R@I meeting the communication processes and boundaries between the management structures seemed to have been sufficiently developed to manage issues. For example, problems such as the poor punctuality of student psychotherapists (who repeatedly failed to arrive on time for their scheduled client sessions) and uneven client allocations to the different student psychotherapists were reported during the sixth R@I meeting. These and other ongoing issues were then resolved by the various structures now in place.

At the outset of the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting I reflected on our work during the first ten meetings. I noted that we had spent a great deal of time in the meetings trying to improve the day-to-day running of the clinic and less time on research support, teaching innovation or community engagement. During the course of that year (2004) we also became aware that the campus may be closed down, and so we also focused on what we could do to keep the Mamelodi campus operating. We took on the enormous additional project of selling a vision for the Mamelodi campus to the top management of the University of Pretoria. This additional project developed as our response to the uncertainty we felt about the future of the Mamelodi campus, with the first traces of our concern expressed in the sixth R@I meeting in October 2004. I felt that the focus on ourselves as researchers had been lost, together with a focus on how we could provide support to each other in producing a higher research output and get involved in projects that would not necessarily take up more of our time. During this meeting, one of the members of

the workgroup made the following comment (Box 11) in response to my concerns about the focus of our discussions.

*Box 11. Using ten R@I meetings to improve the functioning of the clinic*

**Ilse:**

Just to respond to what you said at the beginning of this meeting; for me it was very useful to use ten of the meetings to get the clinic back on track because that opens up a lot of research opportunities – we needed to sort out a lot of things before the research data could become available – so I don't think all was lost, I think we have got to a space now where a space is created where we can use what we did to get research products out of it. It has helped me also to focus my ideas a lot more on how to get going with research.

From the record of the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-05-23, p.3 of 8

Linda, Terri and Gerhard disagreed that the focus had been lost, noting that we had also worked on our seminar for the International Society of Theoretical Psychology conference that was to be held in June 2005 in Cape Town. From these team members' responses it appeared that my concern was perhaps unjustified. However, my motivation to structure the R@I meetings with a closer focus on our research output remained.

***Defining community in “community engagement”***

Our original plan in improving the functioning of Itsoseng clinic was to conceptualise the clinic as an entity with three distinct but interwoven aspects. We referred to the three aspects as the three legs of Itsoseng Clinic, namely, research, teaching and community engagement. These aspects are also referred to in the literature as the three tasks of universities (Brulin, 2001; Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Our thinking was that to improve Itsoseng meant that we would attempt to improve all three aspects of the clinic. To achieve this, we wanted to integrate the three aspects, with the clinic forming the hub of research activities, teaching innovation and the articulation point of engaging with the community. This line of thinking is evident in an excerpt from the 3rd R@I meeting (Box 12):

*Box 12. The three legs of Itsoseng Clinic*

The main aim of this project is to evaluate whether ITSOSENG is running to capacity or whether it is underutilised. We ask ourselves, what can be done to improve the functioning of all three legs of ITSOSENG?:

1. Teaching

(e.g. live supervision, assessments better suited to content)

2. Research

- ITSOSENG library of contextually relevant knowledge
- Web site accessibility
- Publishing of articles

3. Community involvement

- Under capacity? – create mutually beneficial partnerships (eg SOS, Stanza Bopape, Mamelodi Day hospital, Kalafong Hospital, 1 Military Hospital, Dept of Health, Faculty of Health Sciences

**NB to define “community” – What or who can be regarded as the ITSOSENG community or the community that ITSOSENG serves?**

From the record of the 3<sup>rd</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-07-16, p.4 of 5

Already present in the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting were the idea of creating mutually beneficial partnerships as part of our community engagement function, as well as the question of how to define community in community engagement. The list of possible partners included the following:

- SOS Children’s Village in Mamelodi, who requested a programme evaluation of their day care mothers’ project
- Stanza Bopape Community Health Clinic in Mamelodi, who often referred clients with mental health needs to Itsoseng Clinic
- Mamelodi Day Hospital, which serves patients who are well enough to return home at night. Itsoseng Clinic received regular requests from the day hospital for assistance with HIV pre- and post-test counselling

- Kalafong Hospital in Atteridgeville (a predominantly African township west of Pretoria), which provided some of our counsellors-in-training with a six-month counselling internship
- One Military Hospital in Pretoria West, which provided opportunities for our intern psychologists to work additional hours in a setting besides Itsoseng Clinic (in accordance with the internship programme requirements stipulated by the Professional Board of Psychology)
- The Regional Department of Health, who operates mental health clinics in central Pretoria. We considered these clinics as potential practical sites for our trainees
- The Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria, who expressed an interest in developing Itsoseng Clinic into a general health clinic by converting one of the rooms into a nursing station and examination room and providing a part-time nurse on weekdays

Our ideas about what “community” meant to us as a workgroup evolved during the course of the R@I project in many conversations with many people. The clearest expression of our latest understanding is expressed in the record of the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting. During this meeting, Linda mentioned how difficult it was in our new context of an incorporated department to keep the three branches (teaching, research and community service) integrated. This was because our experience was that the University of Pretoria did not view the three branches as integrated tasks. The following excerpt (Box 13) from the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting reflects some of this frustration:

*Box 13. Difficulty in keeping the three tasks integrated*

**Linda:** One of the difficulties that we face is trying to keep those branches integrated given that the pattern here is that really they are three very separate activities – so we get pulled into the separate branches and it is then difficult to bring them back into the others.

From the record of the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-05-23, p.2 of 8

During the same meeting I presented initial ideas (Box 14) to the workgroup that I had prepared for the 2005 International Society of Theoretical Psychology conference. These pertained to the definitions of ‘communities’ and ‘community’ in community psychology, and how they relate to our attempt to integrate community engagement with research and teaching.

*Box 14. Redefining teaching, research and community engagement*

**Willem:** Some wild ideas about integrating research teaching and community engagement:

1. How we define these three terms is important.
2. If we define **teaching** as imparting knowledge or making available to a group of people a specific set of knowledge, then to integrate research and teaching would be to make our findings available to a group of students we feel should get access to these findings – **so** research informs our teaching. Teaching brings us into contact with a subset of the immediate community as well as the market needs and should inform our research focus.
3. **Community engagement** could imply a charity-like engagement with a group of people we envision to be less than us in some ways and our engagement with them makes them more. It could also be conceived as engaging with a group of people we perceive to be more than us, so that we seek out people we anticipate to benefit from. A third option is to form a partnership with a community of people and that we define and create the partnership in such a way that we derive mutual benefit. This community is invoked around an opportunity for mutual benefit and does not exist independently from “the presenting problem”.
4. What counts as **research** for us? Is it only research if the results or findings are captured in a research product format (e.g. article) that is peer reviewed and accepted by an accredited journal? Or can the knowledge that we generate (and have generated) in our own archives also be considered as research?

From the record of the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-05-23, p.3 of 8



After some rigorous discussion we arrived at the collective understanding that, for our purposes, a community is formed around a certain common purpose or common sense of belonging; and that its membership is fluid. A member of one community can also belong to another, and indeed many others. As the staff members primarily involved in the research initiative to improve the functioning of the three legs or branches of Itsoseng Clinic, we regarded “a community” as a collection of people that form around us as a result of our engagement in a shared purpose or common concern. As such, we could refer to the Research@Itsoseng community and also the Itsoseng community. These two terms would not necessarily refer to people found in any geographical location, but rather to people who have an association with the purpose of Itsoseng and a sense of belonging to it. This idea was a liberating one, not from a sense of social responsibility, but from a desire to uplift the poor and unfortunate through psychology. Box 15 offers evidence of the evolution of this new understanding from a later point in the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting.

*Box 15. Defining community in community engagement*

An ecosystemic constitution and defining of community. One should make it as wide as possible, e.g.:

- The geographical community around the campus
- The people who come to the campus from all over the world
- The places where interns and students go out to work at as part of their practicals
- The main campus
- Any possible stakeholder that feeds information into the system (and out of the system)

Community therefore is not a word describing a homogenous, geographically bounded group of people that we do a project on, but rather a word for everybody we engage with and from whom we derive value; and perhaps (and hopefully) our contact is also beneficial to them. This begs the question of how teaching differs from community engagement; or can teaching be done in such a way or looked at in such a

way that it can be regarded as community engagement? What makes something teaching, research and community engagement? Can they not overlap and is it useful to distinguish so clearly between them?

Events do not have an essential nature that can be classified into either teaching, research or community engagement; rather each event can be described from either a teaching angle, research angle or community engagement angle. Our language makes it so. Ad hoc communities form around a research question – question determined systems (à la Goolishian and Anderson’s problem-determined systems). The community dissolves again after completion of the project.

**Is the university embedded in a larger community or does it grow from within a community – is it the fruit on a tree or the carving on the tree?**

From the record of the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-05-23, p.6 of 8

The reference to problem-determined systems as a simile for research question-determined systems comes from the work of Anderson and Goolishian (1988) where problem-determined systems are temporarily formed as a result of a group of concerned or involved people in social conversation about a common problem. The nature and boundaries of the problem are negotiated and constructed in language. The process of being in conversation about a problem defines, organises, and determines membership of the problem-determined system (Daniels & White, 1994).

### ***Transformations of and insights into the functioning of Itsoseng Clinic***

In attempting to answer the research question “How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Clinic?” we engaged in one action reflection cycle that stretched across 11 meetings and 12 months (2004-05-26 to 2005-05-23). In the following section I describe what I regard to be the main outcomes of our attempts to answer this question in terms of the transformations and insights that occurred during this period. I regard transformation as a change in the usual way of doing things and insights as a difference in our understanding about a certain area of our work. Based on the argument outlined above, and supported by the evidence presented in the previous section, I discuss three discernable transformations that took place in response to our attempts to answer the

research question. We came to important insights regarding the process of communication as a work team, the necessity of differentiation in management functions, and our evolving definitions of research, teaching and community engagement.

The first transformation relates to the regular meeting of the full (all six) staff complement of the psychology department on the Mamelodi campus to discuss the functioning of the clinic with a focus on joint problem identification and solution construction. Prior to the R@I initiative, the discussions of the clinic's functioning never reached this level of depth or collaboration. This created the opportunity for greater continuity of discussions and learning from our attempted solutions. The increased level of intensity might have contributed to a certain amount of discomfort for some members who perhaps felt under the spotlight, as they held portfolios as clinic managers.

An ecological map of the effects of communication between the various role players indicated some strained relationships. These seemed to be the catalyst for the second transformation in the differentiation in the clinic management team. This appears to have been a beneficial change in terms of the improvements in the functioning of the clinic that followed.

The third transformation relates to the improved functioning of the day-to-day running of the clinic. This change can be summarised as improved communication and service delivery and more rapid resolution of day-to-day management issues.

The first insight relates to the importance of a non-blaming approach (Cameron, 2003; Mearns & Flin, 1999) and vocabulary in identifying and exploring practical, everyday problems in an organisation. This is needed to prevent people using this process to identify culprits or scapegoats. It is particularly relevant if the current state of affairs is framed with a negative bias towards "what is not working".

The second insight relates to the definition of community as a fluid collection of people that form around us as a result of our engagement around a shared purpose or common

concern. This was a particularly important insight when we had to decide how to conceptualise community engagement as one of our tasks as academics.

### **Research question: How can we increase our research output?**

This research question forms the second of the two main questions in the core action research project (as distinguished from the thesis project). The workgroup expressed a concern about our individual and collective research output, which was visible in our low publication rate. As the name implies, one of the core reasons for the existence of the Research@Itsoseng project was the production of research. However, we were not content only to conduct research for the sake of research. Given our embeddedness in a geographical and social community of diverse and complex social needs, we wanted to produce research that reflected our values of social responsibility and informed committed action. Action research seemed an appropriate vehicle to realise these values, as Wood et al. (2007, p.68) point out: “Action research also provides the ideal platform to realize transformative values, while simultaneously increasing research output. Education, and educators, can thus be transformed through research.”

In this section I provide evidence of progression in our individual research identities. We started as individuals (with no identity as researchers) who desired to produce more research (and so increase our number of publications). From this, we established a collaborative research support initiative and developed a group identity as researchers on the R@I project. Following our acceptance of this identity, we then evolved further to develop separate identities as individual and differentiated researchers.

#### *Cycle 1*

#### **Reflection**

The incorporation of Vista University into the University of Pretoria heralded a threat to our *identity* as lecturers committed to working in a historically black university with previously disadvantaged students. It further challenged our *autonomy* with regards to curriculum development based on our teaching experience with this student population. In addition, we felt pressure to publish more in accredited journals to affirm our legitimacy and competence as academic staff within the incorporating institution. The

establishment of an action research project was therefore our first attempted solution to retain some autonomy, and to develop and affirm our identities as researchers both to ourselves and to the University of Pretoria. Finding ways to increase our research output was thus also in part a quest to survive. As such, the research question: “how can we increase our research output?” was a complex and multifaceted one.

The section that follows outlines the evidence of our attempts to answer the second AR research question: “How can we increase our research output?” These processes are presented linearly in separate sections in this report. In reality, however, they were intricately interwoven and developed as parallel processes.

### ***Attempted solutions***

To increase our research output, we decided to link our research activities with practical problem-solving relating to our day-to-day work activities. To do so we established the R@I forum, which we envisioned as a monthly meeting where we could discuss our pressing concerns, and use our understanding of AR to resolve them in such a way that we could also publish our efforts as research. Any concern or creative idea that was raised in these meetings could potentially become a spin-off research project. During the first R@I meeting I proposed that we take as our first collective research project improving the functioning of Itsoseng clinic, although other ideas were not excluded. This proposal was based on prior conversations with team members and was not uniquely mine; I was merely summarising what I perceived to be the logical step forward, based on the discussions we had. This is illustrated in the excerpt below (Box 16).

#### ***Box 16. Defining the Research@Itsoseng initiative***

I [Willem] see us starting with a core team, testing our wings in true AR style on a problem that has practical relevance for each of us – the efficient running of Itsoseng clinic. From this many other smaller projects can fit into the original problem (improving Itsoseng clinic) or we could work on other projects concurrently. The specific problem that we tackle can be regarded as content and our progressing competence in applied research can be seen as the process.

From the record of the 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-05-26, p.1 of 5

This proposal was accepted and during this first R@I meeting each of the participants contributed several areas of concern regarding the functioning of the Itsoseng clinic. During the second R@I meeting, we generated a collaborative list of research topics (Box 17) that fell within the larger definition of our work as psychology lecturers on the Mamelodi campus.

*Box 17. Research questions and topics generated during 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting*

1. The link between qualitative research methods and psychotherapy training (exchange of metaphors, hermeneutic circle – move from local to general and back)
2. Class participation – what contributes to the status quo?
3. Class participation – what is the reality? What categories of explanation (e.g. white lecturer, black students) are used and by whom to explain the reality?
4. Assumption that the Mamelodi campus is busy moving from an African mindset to a western mindset. Common frame of looking at people who are different from the norm.
5. “The oppressed majority” – a concept that is uniquely South African?
6. Transport of University of Pretoria students between Mamelodi campus and Hatfield campus – what is the sentiment among students about this?
7. What do students on the Mamelodi campus feel and think about the vision and happenings around the incorporation?

From the record of the 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-06-09, p.2 of 3

I regard the most important step towards eventually increasing our research output to be the *establishment of our research identities*. The team was comprised of two experienced and published academics (Terri and Linda), one experienced but relatively unpublished academic (Gerhard), and three fairly inexperienced and unpublished academics (Ilse, Member 6 and myself). Prior to the R@I project, we did not have a collective identity as a group or team of researchers. However, this started forming as a result of our joining together in this venture. I submit that this transformation from a individual identity as a researcher (or not) to a unifying group identity represents a first

shift in identity as a result of the R@I project. This group identity (belonging to the R@I project) also allowed us to shift our perceptions of ourselves from being primarily lecturers who did research on the side when time allowed, to thinking of ourselves as researchers who also lectured. I maintain that organising and attending these meetings to talk about “our research” as if it already existed helped to create this identity. Already in the record of only the third meeting there is evidence of this shift taking place:

*Box 18. Accepting the establishment of a research centre*

It was decided that we are now no longer *in the process of establishing* a centre of excellence or *in the process of establishing* a research wing. We are doing it and living it and can make it known to the world. Possible forums to introduce R@I could be the following....

From the record of the 3<sup>rd</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-07-16, p.2 of 5

Establishing our research identities provided us with some legitimisation for our struggle to convince the receiving institution that we were able and willing to make the Mamelodi campus a successful venture for the University. We dreamed big dreams of the kind of valuable social research we could do. Perhaps this became more possible when some of us became more comfortable in our identities as researchers. This is evident in the following excerpt from the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting:

*Box 19. A quest for recognition and identity*

**Gerhard:** This is actually the whole drive with what we are busy with (R@I) - a quest for recognition, identity, relevance, for keeping something that is potentially very worthwhile for the community and hopefully in the end for the whole university.

From the record of 8<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-01-25, p.4 of 11

We created a context where we could develop our identities as researchers together. The development and acceptance of this group identity (a research team) had unexpected but welcome benefits. For instance, Gerhard attended a university organised research day, at which he engaged in a discussion with a research psychologist and spoke about the “group of researchers” at the Mamelodi campus who

might be interested in becoming involved in a research project that was being planned in Mamelodi. This suggests that he attended the research day in his capacity as a researcher representing a research team rather than a lecturer interested in research. This shift in identity allowed him to offer his and his colleagues' expertise as researchers when the possibility of participating in a research project arose. This conversation eventually led to two members of the R@I team (Gerhard and Willem) conducting a formal programme evaluation project for SOS Children's Village in 2005. I am doubtful whether any of us would have had the courage to accept the request for a project of this nature without some kind of confidence derived from an (albeit new) research identity. The following excerpt (Box 20) is from a record of the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting in which we acknowledged the power of our research identities:

*Box 20. Engaging from a research identity*

The SOS project came as a direct result of establishing R@I. Gerhard met KM<sup>11</sup> at some research day and mentioned the R@I initiative to him, to which KM responded with a proposal that we do a small research project for them. We then met with KM and D<sup>12</sup>, got a sense of their need, wrote a proposal which was accepted, conducted the research, wrote a budget or invoice and got paid for a job well done. All this was possible because we had established research identities for ourselves and engaged from that position.

From the record of the 11<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-05-23, p.5 of 8

*Cycle 2*

**Reflection**

Most of our reflections and actions during the first ten meetings were centred either on the logistical support we felt was necessary to improve the functioning of the clinic, or on making sure that the efforts we made to establish the research support initiative and to improve the clinic would not be in vain. Towards ensuring the latter goal, we offered

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<sup>11</sup> The name of the research psychologist was kept private to ensure confidentiality.

<sup>12</sup> The second person referred to in this excerpt is the social worker employed by SOS Children's Village at the time, with the name kept private to ensure confidentiality.



presentations to various levels of top management in which we tried to sell our vision for the future of the Mamelodi campus.

In every R@I meeting I was confronted with the creativity and enthusiasm of my colleagues regarding research projects we might get involved in. I also got the idea that individually, my colleagues were working on their own research projects outside the collective awareness of the monthly R@I meetings. Notwithstanding the apparent development of our research identities, I was still left with an uncomfortable perception that our research output had not really increased from when we started. We were preparing several papers to present at the International Society for Theoretical Psychology conference; we called our R@I meetings “research” meetings and I studiously recorded these discussions as data to be used by team members; and we advertised ourselves to the world as researchers – but where were the goods? Where were our publications?

During the eleventh meeting I invited my colleagues to reflect on our focus during the meetings. I asked whether they shared my concern that our focus on the functioning of the clinic and the future of the campus was at the expense of finding innovative ways to increase our publications. From their responses, it appeared that it was only me who was concerned about the pace of our progress and the lack of a visible increase in publications. Terri reminded me that we were preparing several papers for the ISTP conference and that the R@I project was a useful forum for the papers to later develop into publications. Ilse responded by referring to increased research opportunities as a result of the better functioning of the clinic and Gerhard stated he felt optimistic about the fact that his mind had slowly been populated with ideas for publications. This served as a valuable reminder to me of the generative and unpredictable nature of action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Notwithstanding everyone else’s satisfaction with the evolution of the R@I project, after this reflection in the eleventh meeting, the records of the R@I meetings slowly began to reflect more discussion on research support and less on issues related to the clinic. This possibly also reflected the improved functioning of Itsoseng Clinic following the first ten meetings.

### ***Attempted solution***

The next three meetings (12, 13 and 14) were far more focussed on plans to turn research ideas into research opportunities and eventually publications. These plans included investigating funding possibilities so that we could pay guest lecturers to teach, thereby freeing us to write articles; co-publishing with Master's students; appointing research assistants; and using a buddy system to motivate us to dust off and finish half-completed articles. For each of these ideas there was some mild support and often some counterargument about why it would not work. It seemed easier to identify and talk about what makes it difficult for us to do research rather than addressing what we could do to make it easier. The following excerpt (Box 21) from the record of the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting provides an example of identifying obstacles rather than resources.

#### *Box 21. Identifying obstacles rather than resources*

The University of Pretoria promotes the principle of individual promotion and individual achievement and NOT teamwork. So for everybody in the department to agree to help one person to become a *National Research Foundation* (NRF) rated researcher will work against the whole current philosophy of the university.

From the record of the 13<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-10-18, p.2 of 7

### *Cycle 3*

During the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting I suggested that we redirect our focus and energy from fighting “the outside world” to providing support and ideas for each other in order to start turning ideas into research products, including publications in accredited journals. It was a call to get on with it and just do it. I suggested an individuation process where we could stand accountable to our individual research projects, rather than talking about “our” research. The shift to “my” research would make it possible to talk to each other and ask each other for help. As long as our group identity was too strong during the meetings, we had to create an “other” with whom to engage. If a new meeting culture could be created where we interacted as “I” with each other, we would start becoming available to each other and also had to assume personal responsibility and accountability for our own projects. The following excerpt (Box 22) from the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting illustrates this:

**Box 22.** Shift from group identity to individual identity as researchers

**Willem:** Our group identity as researchers from R@I has formed sufficiently so that we are comfortable with running a research centre and we have engaged in many actions to live out our sense of belonging to a research centre on the Mamelodi campus. My concern is that our current direction and volume of energy is directed towards the outside to “prove” that we have a right to exist. My proposal is that we redirect our energy inwards towards ourselves and use that energy to improve our skill at publishing our work. I propose that we individuate within the group identity, declare our current work – our joys and struggle and make use of each other as resources to improve our own competence level.

From the record of 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2006-01-20, p.1 of 6

During the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting we drew up the following table (Table 3) as an attempt to encourage us to become visible to each other and to ask for assistance from each other in a differentiated way.

**Table 3 Individual Research Projects Declared and Needs Expressed in 16<sup>th</sup> R@I Meeting**

	Projects	Goals	Needs	Comments / Concerns
<b>Gerhard</b>	1.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme	Middle April	Possible places for publications	* dissertation articles
	2.Translation article	End of May		
	3.Social construction methodology: a compendium of games	End of May		* AR journals at wshop
<b>Member 6</b>	1.Draft PhD proposal	End of July	Ideas and suggestion wrt proposal	I'm quitting smoking soon, be patient with me
<b>Terri</b>	1.Incorporation article	End of April	A kick every now and then	Report on each project
	2.Indigenisation article	Middle March		next time
	3.Testimonio	End of April		
<b>Ilse</b>	1.Article on C's dissertation: Forgiveness in HIV/AIDS	End of Sept	Permission from C	Pregnancy & baby now
	2.Awaiting feedback on submitted article			a high priority
<b>Linda</b>	1.The ghetto is in the eye of the beholder	End of April	Keep nagging me	Invite Unisa
	2.Globalisation & Indigenisation		Visual reminder in Tea room	
	3.Local knowledge & theory around research - critical perspective		Invite Unisa crowd	

	4. Therapeutic development in indigenous contexts			
	5. Two chapters on trauma counselling in Africa			
	6. Co-editor of counselling book			
	7. Section editor for counselling book			
	8. Involved in chapter of MV's book			
<b>Willem</b>	1. PhD: Integrating Research, teaching and community engagement:		Keep doing what you are doing	
	Permission from Mamelodi campus principal	End of March		Tearoom lists
	Consent from participants	End of March		Website
	2.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme	Middle April		Invite Unisa

From the record of the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2006-02-28

### ***Further implementation and evidence of greater individuation of research identity***

In the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting I challenged members of the R@I team to start giving accounts of their research projects in more detail, and so making their work visible to the rest of the team members. Using the completed table from the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting, I constructed another form that required more detailed information with regards to (1) the main argument, statement or question of each project; (2) the paradigm (e.g. positivist, interpretive, constructionist, etc); (3) the method; and (4) possible journals that might be interested in publishing research in this field of study. In going through every team member's lists of projects in this way, I hoped to facilitate more critical thinking and questioning among ourselves. We did not have enough time in the meeting to do this exercise with every team member, nor did it prove necessary. Gerhard and Terri volunteered to give accounts of their work and we completed this exercise for each of their projects (see full record of the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting in Appendix E). I include here excerpts (tables 4 and 5) from the record of the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting detailing a small section of Gerhard and Terri's more detailed accounts of their own work. This serves as an example of the result of my challenge, which I believe to be further evidence of differentiated research identities:

**Table 4 Evidence of Differentiated Research Identity: Gerhard**

Gerhard	<p><b>1.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Main argument, statement or question</b> In Evaluating SOS Mamelodi’s presentation of the <i>Educare</i> programme we discover complex definitions of vulnerable children in a township context and we give a critical reflection on trying out an action research approach in programme evaluation.</li> <li>➤ <b>Paradigm</b> Critical psychology Constructionist Action research (critical look at this) Explorative, political</li> <li>➤ <b>Method</b> Action-reflection cycles (we take a critical look at this) (need references/ AR according to whom?) Focus groups, interviews, policy scrutiny</li> <li>➤ <b>Possible journals that might be interested</b> AR websites, Research Psychologist from SOS Children’s Villages could recommend some</li> </ul>
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From the record of the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2006-03-29, p.2 of 9

**Table 5 Evidence of Differentiated Research Identity: Terri**

Terri	<p><b>1.Incorporation article</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Main argument, statement or question</b> The implication of the incorporation process is that the psychological knowledge base (content and process, epistemology) of the psychology department was threatened with extinction and the purpose of this study was to find a way to conserve some of those knowledges and processes. Purpose of the article is not a claim to knowledge, but a form of activism – giving a voice to the disenfranchised and marginal – it is to document a process and a testimony. Witnessing as outcome. To document knowledge that can be taken forward.</li> <li>➤ <b>Paradigm</b> Postmodern, social constructionist paradigm Action research, Narrative therapy, Oral history Research as conversation and dialogue and recognition of voices Research is a political process that has been institutionalised in favour of the privileged</li> <li>➤ <b>Method</b> Created a community from the marginal Concerned with oral, particular, the local and the timely (Toulmin, 1990) Individual interviews (conversations better describes this process), written documents</li> </ul>
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	(emails), focus groups, transcribed tape recordings ➤ <b>Possible journals that might be interested</b> ?
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From the record of the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2006-03-29, p.4 of 9

## Conclusion

The 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting was the last formal R@I meeting that I facilitated and recorded. Soon thereafter I went on a six-month sabbatical to reflect on what we had achieved in the two years of the project's lifespan and to start writing the draft thesis manuscript. At first I noticed the transformations in our understanding of the clinic functioning, community engagement as well as the transformations in research identity, all as a result of the core action research project. I have reported on these in this chapter. The thesis project – “how can I improve my academic practice?” – turned out to be more than merely an attempt to increase my own research output in collaboration with others. It evolved into a project that addressed my living contradiction with regards to my academic practice. In the next chapter I discuss my learning when I attempted to answer the research question: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” I also report on my educational influence as perceived by my five colleagues.

## CHAPTER 6

### REFLECTIONS ON MY FACILITATION OF THE R@I PROJECT

Writing about action research...is much more than mere writing. It is about constructing a language for reporting on collaborative knowledge creation activities in which the first person voice is primary and in which process is as central to the research story as are the results.

(Greenwood, 2002, p.132)

This chapter deals with the results of the thesis project in which I analyse the data and provide evidence of transformations pertaining to the research question: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” I provide evidence of what I regard as pivotal moments that show how I have lived in the direction of my values (inclusion, creativity and respect for individual contributions) during my facilitation of the project spanning the period May 2004 to March 2006. The evidence is presented in two sections. In the first section I select excerpts from the records of the R@I meetings that demonstrate a progression in my own learning of how to facilitate the R@I project in response to its development. The second section contains the verbatim responses from the five team members regarding the educational influences they experienced as a result of their participation in the R@I project. These are organised in terms of possible shifts that occurred in their values; identity; way of working; and perception of resources.

My answer to the research question lies in the insights I derived, personal development and transformations that took place in my own learning, and the evidence that suggests that I have had an influence on the learning of the other five team members as a result of my facilitation of the R@I project. Whitehead (2008b) uses the term *educational influence* in describing living theory as “an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work” (p.104). The R@I group can be regarded as one such social formation. Within a systemic ontology, unidirectional

influence is problematic as it assumes linear causality in which A causes (or influences) B. Bateson (1970) states that “any complex person or agency that influences a complex interactive system thereby becomes part of that system, and no part can ever control the whole” (p.362). Since I convened, coordinated and facilitated the R@I meetings, nurtured the project as a whole and participated fully as an equal member in the group, it becomes very difficult to isolate and evaluate *my influence* in this complex interactive system. Becvar and Becvar (1996) describe reciprocal causality as alternative in which people and events are seen in the context of mutual interaction and mutual influence. Causality, and by association influence, is regarded as reciprocal and only to be found in the “interface between individuals and systems as they mutually influence each other. Responsibility or power exists only as a bilateral process, with each individual and element participating in the creation of a particular behavioural reality” (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p.64). Being a member of the group meant that we both contributed and were subject to a process that reciprocally influenced us and changed the process in turn. As we changed, so the process changed.

I focus therefore in this chapter on my own learning and the learning of others as a result of our participation in the R@I project. I also reflect on decisions I took related to my facilitation of the R@I meetings, based on my values. Consequently, when I refer to *my educational influence*, it is to punctuate any actions on my part that likely contributed to the R@I project being a space that enabled learning and development of each of the participants, myself included. This punctuation is undertaken for the purpose of inquiring into my academic practice. It is furthermore done with the acknowledgement of the many actions from each of the other participants that contributed to the same outcome: co-creating the R@I project as an environment for personal and group development and transformation.

### **Progression of my own learning in how to facilitate the R@I project**

#### *At the outset*

My intention in establishing a research forum was to create an opportunity where my five colleagues and I could attempt to integrate our research, teaching and community engagement practices, and in the process generate locally relevant knowledge that



would be immediately useful to the co-creators of this knowledge. My invitation to my Mamelodi campus colleagues to join me in establishing a research forum also involved my offer to organise and facilitate regular monthly meetings, and to record our discussions in terms of the plans we made and the reasoning that supported these plans. I suggested that our research forum take the form of an action research project and I offered to facilitate the project. I also stated my intention to submit a research report on the process and content of the project as a whole towards a PhD degree. Evidence of my offer to facilitate this project and declaration of my intent with the project appears in the record of the first R@I meeting (Box 23).

*Box 23. Offer to be the facilitator of the R@I project*

I convened this meeting in an attempt to formalise some of the ideas that were expressed in conversations that I have had the privilege to share with most of you on various occasions around the research potential and opportunities at Itsoseng. I have a passion for action research and believe that if we pool our unique creative resources and apply this to practical problems/opportunities that we see at our place of work (passion), that this could lead to many benefits for all of us.

I see this project as varying in size for each participant. I myself am interested in the project as a whole (establishing an action research centre at the Mamelodi Campus that is able to do research on various focus areas (or practical problems) with the aim of producing research products that are relevant and useful to the participants of each of the research projects.) This I plan to document in the format of a PhD research report.

A key aim for me is to record the work that we do and problems that we deal with everyday in such a format that we can publish this as legitimate research – whether in accredited journals or other archives, which keep records of meaningful events/actions/processes that took place.

I undertake to arrange the logistics/pragmatics of the meetings and to make available and distribute my documentation of the process.

From the record of the 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-05-26, p.1 of 5

As all of the members of the R@I team were involved with Itsoseng Psychology Clinic, we decided to take the functioning of the clinic as our first project. My first strategic challenge to the R@I team was to ask each member: “What is your most important or urgent concern regarding Itsoseng Clinic?” (Appendix E, Record of the 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting, p.2). I recorded in as much detail as possible every member’s response. This way of facilitation and recording allowed me to match ideas with their authors, but prevented me from joining in the conversation and hampered the natural flow of the conversation as I sometimes asked speakers to slow down and repeat ideas that I had not managed to pen. For the second R@I meeting I decided to let go of the idea of recording individual contributions linked to their authors and as a result the conversation flowed more freely. In the third meeting I started using flip charts in our discussion to take down main points as well as writing down some ideas in more detail. The focus of the discussions was improved by using the flip chart, but trying to facilitate a discussion by writing main points on a flip chart and jotting down detail in a notebook proved too arduous and again prevented me from actively contributing to the discussions. In discussions with my promoter (Gerhard), he suggested that I use audio or video recording equipment for the meetings with every team member’s consent. After doing this I audiotaped our R@I meetings from the fourth meeting onwards. This allowed me much more freedom to actively participate in the meetings. I could therefore attend to both the content of the conversations as well as the nonverbal communications present in the interactions between people and the group process as a whole, without fear that I would fail to record the content accurately. I could also concentrate on how our discussions linked with our original goals and other related processes. The freedom to participate fully further allowed me to subject myself more completely to the transformative potential that participation in this group offered. The decision to audio record our conversations rather than taking notes freed me to learn and develop in a more equal relationship in the company of others.

*Experiencing the dual role of an insider action researcher*

When I asked “what is your most important or urgent concern regarding Itsoseng clinic?” during the first R@I meeting, I did not realise that the mere fact of asking this particular

question placed me in a critical relationship *vis-à-vis* the two operational clinic managers, both of whom were members of the R@I team. One of the operational clinic managers made the following comment: “First of all I get defensive when you start asking about what is not working at the clinic because [the other manager] and I have done everything that is necessary to ensure the efficient running of the clinic” (Appendix E, record of 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting, p.2). This sentiment was not shared by the other operational clinic manager who stated that: “I do not feel defensive when we talk about what is not working at the clinic. There are a lot of things not working and that is a great concern for me” (Appendix E, record of 1<sup>st</sup> R@I meeting, p.2). Notwithstanding their respective stances towards my question, I sensed the importance of clarifying and being sensitive to my dual role as facilitator and team member. This is an issue that is germane to insider action research projects (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan, 2007). Indeed, as Coghlan (2007, p.298) points out:

Undertaking an action research project in one’s own organization is political and might even be considered subversive. Action research may be considered to be subversive because it examines everything. It stresses listening. It emphasizes questioning. It fosters courage. It incites action. It abets reflection and it endorses democratic participation. Any or all of these characteristics may be threatening to existing organizational norms.

To acknowledge my dual role and in an attempt to make it transparent and subject it to regular scrutiny, in the second R@I meeting I made the following remarks (Box 24):

*Box 24. Acknowledging my dual role as insider action research facilitator*

**A shift in focus**

One of the first issues that were raised was the importance of making a clear distinction between a management focus and a research focus of the R@I meetings. Since we tackled the issue of improving the service delivery and efficient functioning of Itsoseng as a first action research project, the danger existed of seeing these research meetings as an attempt to exercise control over the clinic management team.

**Clarification of my (Willem’s) role**

I see myself as the research facilitator or primary researcher. I have taken it upon myself to set up a research wing at Mamelodi campus (psychology subdepartment), with the core aim to make it easier to publish the work that we do anyway. I believe that action research is ideally suited to this purpose and that we are surrounded by relevant research questions that would be beneficial to find answers to.

From the record of the 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-06-09, p.1 of 4

In a further attempt to explain my critical and strategic questions as originating from my role as action research facilitator, I presented my understanding of action research and the AR process during the third R@I meeting (Appendix E, record of the 3<sup>rd</sup> R@I meeting, p.3).

The concern expressed by Member 6 about my questions on the functioning of the clinic led me to consider that the privilege (i.e., more freedom to ask critical questions) attached to my role as facilitator could inadvertently lead to some perceived advantage (i.e., the liberty to question another colleague about their practice) in my role as colleague; and that this advantage might not be favourably regarded by all participants. In other words, my role as facilitator of the R@I project provided me with more legitimacy to ask and encourage potentially uncomfortable questions about the functioning of clinic, which could be perceived as veiled criticism of the clinic operational managers. Coghlan (2007) refers to the insider action researcher's dilemma of augmenting your normal organisational membership roles with a researcher role: "Insider action researchers are likely to encounter role conflict in trying to sustain a full organizational membership role and the research perspective simultaneously" (p.339). I was fortunate, however, in that three of my colleagues were more senior faculty members and frequently asked critical and challenging questions themselves, so that within a short period of time a culture of asking challenging questions was established in the R@I meetings. Their relative seniority (measured in terms of the years they had dedicated to develop learning content relevant to the unique needs of the student population, as well as their role in establishing the clinic) lent them, in my opinion, more legitimacy to question the management practices relevant to functioning of the clinic. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter three, the practice of action research necessitates the development of "habits of

counterintuitive thinking, questioning definitions and premises, linking findings and process analyses to other cases, and attempting to subject favourite interpretations to harsh collaborative critiques” (Greenwood, 2002, p.130). Therefore, while encouraging the hard questions in my facilitation of the R@I meetings, I also made an effort to regularly acknowledge and affirm each participant’s contributions in an attempt to protect their dignity (Tuhuwai Smith, 2005). Some evidence of these efforts appears in an excerpt from the record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting (Box 25) where I encourage one of the members of the team to share more of her research ideas with us:

*Box 25. Evidence of respect for individual differences and contributions*

**Member 6:** I want to register and start working on my PhD this year. I have some ideas in place but my focus now is not there, I’m going on leave next week. But when I get back from leave I am keen to start on it.

**Willem:** I would be keen to hear about it – maybe discussing it here could be helpful to you and us.

**Member 6:** That would be nice but not likely because you do qualitative research and I cannot stand qualitative research and you do not like quantitative research.

*Ilse, Linda, Terri assured Member 6 that they are not against quantitative research, they just don’t do it.*

**Gerhard:** I am scared of quantitative research maybe, but not against it at all.

**Member 6:** That is so weird for me, for in my mind quantitative research is the easiest thing in the world.

**Willem:** Well, it would be great if R@I could have a research output that is balanced in terms of quantitative and qualitative research. At present our focus is heavily biased towards qualitative research as you rightly pointed out.

**Gerhard:** I would be keen to see if we could do quantitative research that is not trying to be value-free but fully declaring our values and biases in doing it.

From the record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2006-01-20, p.4 of 6

### *Initial insights and transformations*

In facilitating the R@I meetings, I had to develop a style of recording the discussions that would allow my own active participation as well as provide me with documentation not only of the content of our plans and actions, but also the process of our and my developing understanding. As an insider action researcher, the challenge to participate as a team member and to facilitate an emergent process was significant. It took me about four to six meetings to develop a style of facilitation that also allowed me to participate with some spontaneity. My sensitivity to the dual role (Coghlan, 2007) I assumed as an insider action researcher was further developed as a direct consequence and in response to one team member's expressed discomfort with my questions about what was not working in the clinic.

As the R@I project fell within a larger thesis project, I also had to learn to document my own role in the process in order to provide an account not only of our learning, but also my learning as well as my educational influence. This required the production of documents that recorded the meeting agenda, the reflections and plans made as well as reporting on progress from previous plans made. At times it was useful to record ideas independently of their authors, particularly when it was important to form a group identity and to record "our learning". At other times it was useful to have a record showing the development of an idea in dialogue with particular members. The style and content of the records of the meetings held some power to mobilise passion, build trust, convey strategic challenges and encourage emergent outcomes (Burns, 2007). Apart from the letterhead that changed relatively little, at a glance, it is apparent that the records of the 17 R@I meetings vary significantly in terms of structure and type of content. This variability in structure reflects not only the difference in the structure of the various meetings but also my experimentation with the document as both a record and a strategic catalyst to most effectively mobilise our collective and individual action.

### *Adjusting to the implications of the incorporation*

After the fourth meeting, the team agreed that we had established a research support forum. I was keeping record of our efforts at improving the functioning of the Itsoseng clinic. We had already experienced some success with issues relating to the clinic

functioning (see chapter five), but now a new concern surfaced. We were confronted with the need to adjust to and consider the implications of the incorporation of the Mamelodi campus into the University of Pretoria. The challenge of facilitating the R@I meetings now became one of maintaining momentum while allowing the direction of our focus to develop naturally in response to the daily challenges we faced.

*Facilitation of R@I during an uncertain future for the Mamelodi campus*

During the latter part of 2004, all staff members from the various faculties on the Mamelodi campus were invited to discussion meetings on the potential future of the Mamelodi campus in its new position within the University of Pretoria. One of the future scenarios discussed was closing down the campus and moving all the students to the main campus of the University of Pretoria.

Having recently established a research forum committed to creating locally relevant knowledge, we experienced intensely this first threat to our continued existence. The campus might be closed down, and with it, Itsoseng Clinic and our psychology training programmes, which had been developed and refined specifically for the educational needs of the student community that the Mamelodi campus attracted (i.e., African students from an impoverished educational background). The potential closure of the Mamelodi campus was a significant threat to our identity as lecturers working in a historically black university, as well as a threat to our sense of self-determination and agency. In response to this threat, the R@I team decided to approach selected members of various levels of university management with our vision (in the form of presentations and discussions) for a potential future for the Mamelodi campus. This included using the R@I initiative as an example of a “centre of excellence” that could produce locally relevant research, teaching innovations and serve as a flagship for the University of Pretoria’s community engagement projects. Some evidence of this decision is reflected in the record of the 6<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting (Box 26):

Box 26. Presentations to various levels of University of Pretoria management

*Presentation to the Dean*

Terri expressed again the urgency with which we have to act in this matter, especially considering the uncertainty about the future of this campus and the continual decisions that get taken in ignorance of the potential that exists. By doing this presentation it is assumed that we will give some people with executive power some info to act on.

This is our hope anyway, and perhaps the best we can do so far. It was agreed that by Wednesday 13 October 2004 we would send a one-page letter summarising our main arguments and attractions to:

- Psychology Department, main campus (Head of Department)
- Head of the School of Social Sciences
- The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
- Two Vice Chancellors of the University of Pretoria)

From the record of 6<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2004-10-08, p.3 of 6

By the end of 2004 we had done more than send one-page letters; we had delivered Powerpoint presentations and attended various meetings with people we had identified as important decision makers. A great deal of our energy and focus during the R@I meetings in this cycle went into designing presentations to sell our vision to the incorporating institution. The record of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> R@I meetings reflects some of the content and outcomes of the total of six meetings and presentations we were involved in towards the end of 2004 and in the beginning of 2005. What is perhaps not clear from our reflections in Box 26 is that we planned these interventions in the context of feeling disempowered and marginalised; yet we still had the courage to take our ideas to this level of management in an institution where we were the outsiders, and which had an extremely rigid hierarchical order where ordinary lecturers seldom met the people in the upper echelons. In the words of one of the R@I team members: "I am not sure if we were stupid or brave but I do believe the R@I initiative contributed largely to our confidence to attempt this! I wonder if this has something to do with the clinic still surviving today?" (T. Bakker, personal communication, March 26, 2011).



According to Burns (2007), the key principles of good action research facilitation are mobilising passion, building trust, strategic challenges and the encouragement of emergent outcomes rather than pushing for a predetermined solution. To adhere to these principles requires a flexible facilitation process, as the directions to take are neither set nor random:

We can never predict the detailed outcomes but we can make judgements about the direction of travel when we can see more of the picture. Despite this, things will not happen as we expect, so we need a process that allows us to change course flexibly and quickly. (Burns 2007, p.39)

My flexibility as facilitator was tested with regards to our drive to sell the R@I initiative, which did not feature in the original purpose of our meetings. In my role as facilitator I sometimes experienced frustration in this regard and during the 8<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting I started to question whether we really needed anybody's support for our initiative. The response I received from some of the team members (Box 27) made me realise that this drive to sell ourselves was part of the process and that as a facilitator of the R@I meetings I needed to respect this.

*Box 27. Questioning whether we really needed anybody's support*

Willem: ... why can't we just live our solipsistic existence on this campus? Why do we need any support from the top to do what we are doing here?

Ilse: We want to engage in something that is going to last and not just terminate after a year or two.

Terri: It is also about marketing and making visible what we do. We want to influence the decision makers that decide on the future of this campus.

Record of the 8<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-01-25, p.3 of 11

Our focus was no longer primarily on finding ways to integrate research, teaching and community engagement, nor was it solely on increasing our research output or improving the functioning of Itsoseng clinic. By presenting our vision and work to others, based on an urge to survive the incorporation, we were forced to continually define our intentions and values, not only to others but also for ourselves. In this way the R@I meetings

became a place for self-preservation of who we wanted to be amidst the threats of becoming “other” or different. This context of self-preservation likely contributed to a sense of belonging and building a group research identity, which, looking back, seems to me to have been a necessary precursor to our further evolution into individuated researchers.

### *Maintaining a research focus*

In my facilitation of the R@I meetings, one of the challenges was to allow for the natural development of one of the foci we had as a team (i.e., the emergent drive to sell our vision), while at the same time co-creating a context in which we could discuss and develop our research initiatives, teaching innovations and community engagement projects. Amidst our work on the various presentations and meetings which happened in addition to our daily teaching and administrative duties, we were also busy with research projects that came into being as a result of earlier R@I meetings. Two of these projects were a programme evaluation of the SOS Children’s Village Educare programme for daycare mothers, and a research project involving using third-year psychology students as receptionists for Itsoseng Clinic. The record of the 9<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting contains feedback provided by three members on some of the research projects that were current at that time. An excerpt of this is presented in Box 28.

#### *Box 28. Feedback on research projects in early 2005*

##### *Feedback on current research projects*

- SOS Educare project: Last Thursday & Friday (17&18 Feb 2005) Willem and Gerhard conducted focus groups with the 36 daycare mothers. A critical question that came up for us during the process was “how is what we do action research – what elements are present to make this action research?” “Do we structure our questions in the later focus groups based on our conversations in the first couple of focus groups?” – “not sure whether the repetition of information is due to the specific spaces the facilitators open up through the questions or whether there is a sameness inherent in the respondents’ experience.”
- SLK 391 project: Ilse: 3<sup>rd</sup> year students have to volunteer as a receptionist and

to observe over a couple of months what sort of clients come in and decide for themselves what type of problem is prevalent at Itsoseng and then design an intervention according to that.

Record of the 9<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2005-02-21, p.4 of 6

### *Strategic challenges*

One strategy I used to ensure we maintained our original focus albeit in a flexible manner was to structure the meeting agenda to allow for emergent and developing foci, as well as to maintain our research focus. In addition, I needed to manage the time spent on each discussion in such a way that we could have meaningful discussions on each agenda point without feeling restricted. As the meetings also functioned to offer peer support, it was often difficult to punctuate animated and lively discussions in the interest of moving on to the next agenda point.

After I completed typing up the record of the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting based on the audio recordings, I noticed on the first page that Terri was the only person whose research was specifically listed in the agenda (Box 29):

*Box 29. Agenda showing Terri's research in addition to general topics*

#### **Discussion points / Agenda:**

1. Taking stock
2. Unisa partnership
3. Itsoseng clinic
4. Book chapters
5. Terri's study – the Testimonio
6. Conferences in 2005
7. The next meeting

Record of the 14<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 21-11-2005, p.1 of 5

It seemed to me that Terri was defined as an individual researcher within the larger group (whose junior members especially defined themselves in terms of a group

researcher identity). This focus on individual projects and progress struck me as something that might be useful to the rest of us too. In preparation for the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting therefore, I structured the agenda (Box 30) in a way that might facilitate greater individuation in terms of research involvement and experience between the various team members. My motivation was firstly, to allow us to use each other's research experience and creativity as a resource; and secondly, to gently redirect our energy towards one of our aims, namely to increase our research output.

*Box 30.* Agenda of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting

**Discussion points / Agenda:**

1. Revisiting the original focus of the R@I and redirecting our energy flow
2. Gerhard's research
3. Member 6's research
4. Linda's research
5. Ilse's research
6. Willem's research
7. General comments
8. Completed dissertation at Vista Mamelodi
9. Some good ideas to be followed up
10. Itsoseng Clinic

Record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 20-01-2006, p.1 of 6

As can be seen from the agenda, each R@I member was encouraged to discuss their own research as distinct from the group projects. As Terri's research was discussed during the 14<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting, I decided to also put the rest of us on the spot during the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. During this 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting I invited each team member to provide the rest of the team with an overview of any research projects that they were working on at the time. As is evident from the record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting (Appendix E), each member provided very different presentations. Some provided a list of articles and book chapters they were working on, some a list of finished articles they had submitted and were awaiting feedback on, and some members discussed their plans for future research. One team member reflected: "I wonder why one of the goals, namely, to help us to

publish, has not happened for me yet? A need for me is to look at why that has not happened for me yet.” (Appendix E, Record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting, p.2). This member used this opportunity to start a reflection process on why the R@I process had not yet helped him to increase his publication record. A perusal of the notes suggests that the conversation that followed this critical question had a significant influence on the direction that my facilitation of the R@I project took. On the last page of the record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting, two short notes (Box 31) reflect some of my own learning as a facilitator of the R@I project.

*Box 31.* Two notes to myself, reflecting my own learning

Notes to myself:

- I was tempted to write “what prevents us from publishing” and what “enables us to publish” – the decision to differentiate this brings to life for me the fact that different things enabled and prevented each of us this far.
- Shift from our research output to my and each of your research output – *differentiation* and *individuation* facilitates personal responsibility.

From the record of the 15<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 20-01-2006, p.6 of 6

The first note reflects the awareness that my facilitation of a peer support initiative necessitated sensitivity to each member’s individual needs versus a collective need only. What would have enabled or prevented one team member to increase their publication record might not have had the same effect on the next person. The first note furthermore contains a subtle commentary on the difference between asking “what *enables* me?” versus “what *prevents* me?” The first question requires an identification of obstacles and assumes that the removal of obstacles will lead to a better outcome. The second question requires an identification of resources and assumes that the presence and utilisation of resources will lead to a better outcome.

We had spent a significant amount of time discussing perceived collective obstacles to publishing as a group (e.g., the incorporation process and uncertain future of the campus, limited or no research funding and support, high volume of teaching and administrative duties, etc.). We had also discussed, albeit less rigorously, what we

regarded as collective resources (e.g. the Mamelodi campus and the psychology clinic as a rich source of locally relevant research questions, our network of like-minded academics from neighbouring universities, etc.) that enabled us as a group to publish. What we had not yet explored by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting was how we could act as enabling resources to each other, based on an awareness of each other's individual needs and obstacles.

The second note makes a commentary on personal versus diffused responsibility. A critical shift in the question from “what enables us?” to “what enables me?” could allow each member to become aware or discover his or her own individual resources and obstacles to publishing. By individuating and differentiating within our team, we could also become available to each other as resources and request help from each other. It moved the question from “how can we improve our research output?” to “how can I increase my own research output?”

Following up on this reflection, in the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting, I designed a table with columns for projects, goals, needs and comments (Appendix E, Record of the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting). We spent the whole meeting filling in the blank spaces in this form. This was done on a laptop computer connected to a data projector that allowed all members to view the screen. I asked each member to provide me with a list of their projects, including intended completion dates and what they needed from the rest of our team to make it easier to complete the project. There was also a space for any comments on this project to provide additional information to the rest of the team. The completed table prepared the ground for the 17<sup>th</sup> and final R@I meeting of the core AR project. Facilitation of this 16<sup>th</sup> meeting required non-judgemental questioning and affirming responses to each team member's sharing of their current research projects. An example of this facilitation process appears in dialogue form on page three of the record of the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting. I transcribed some of the dialogue between Gerhard and myself, in which I invited Gerhard to state what he needed from the R@I team members in order to get his articles ready for publication. I reproduce an excerpt of this dialogue in Box 32.

Box 32. Origin of the four strategic questions of the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting

**Willem addressing Gerhard:** Okay, how I have divided this form is in four columns: projects, goals, needs and comments/concerns. Is there anything you need from us that would make it easier for you to reach your goals with each project?

**Gerhard:** What I would need to do is to approach you and talk about possible places for publications, but I think maybe the social constructionist paper would be good in the SAJP<sup>13</sup> for two reasons: the fact that M is the editor means that that kind of article would probably be considered and secondly I think it is good in South Africa – it is very popular in South Africa (social constructionism), everybody applies it willy-nilly – so, I think it might be a useful article in a South African context. The translation article I am not sure at all. Maybe it could be published in some kind of interdisciplinary language based sort of journal.

**Willem:** Okay, so for you to finish this by the end of May, if I understand you correctly, you will have had to select a couple of journals to see how to write this article, because from our discussions last time, it sounds like that is where you start. You start with this is the idea that I have, this is the journal where this idea would get accepted, so in what format would they want the article.

**Gerhard:** Okay, so what you are saying is that I must actually, now, before I take those rough drafts and put them in the shape of an article, I must identify the journals.

**Willem:** And it would work well then, because you are also facilitating and coordinating the list of journals in which we can publish, you already have two then. So this is a list that can grow as we submit. It need not start out as a list of 20 journals.

**Gerhard:** Okay, well, this is helpful to me now, because I still had it in the back of my mind that I must have a finished article and then go shop around for a journal.

**Willem:** Yes, it makes sense to know your audience so that you can write for them. Would it be possible for you in future R@I meetings to discuss these three articles as research projects and say “this is my research question, this is my design” that

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<sup>13</sup> South African Journal of Psychology

kind of thing, just to share a bit of what you do and how you conceptualise your research project?

**Gerhard:** Okay.

**Willem:** That would be valuable for me. Would it be possible and valuable for you?

**Gerhard:** Yes, I think this is an interesting thing. I think it will be valuable for me, because we always in the research committee look at the specific format in which something is presented such as the research questions, what is the methodology, how are you going the answer the research questions, what is the theoretical base and so on. If I have to sit here and say these are my questions, this is my method and this is my theoretical base, I think it will be useful to reflect on what am I actually doing, and what makes it research, that it is not just an opinion piece.

From the record of the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting, p.3 of 5

After typing up this dialogue I decided to structure the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting by inviting each of the team members to answer four questions on each of the projects that they had listed in the previous meeting: (1) the main argument, statement or question of the project; (2) the research paradigm; (3) the research method; and (4) the names of journals that might be interested in publishing this research. These questions had their clear origin in the dialogue between Gerhard and myself in the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting.

The results of asking these four questions appear in table format in the record of the 17<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting (Appendix E). Examples of the responses from two R@I team members (Gerhard and Terri) appear in chapter five in the section on the individuation of our research identities (tables 4 and 5). The structure of this table developed in an emergent fashion over 16 meetings and enabled us to critically engage with each other on these four and other questions. We were now more able to be available to each other as resources, and as a result, we become assets to each other.

### **Evaluating my educational influence in facilitating the R@I project**

I discuss my educational influence on my own learning and the educational influence of the R@I project on my learning in chapter seven. In this section I provide another form of evidence of the educational influence of the R@I initiative on my colleagues and team



members in the R@I project. I present this evidence in the form of the verbatim responses I received from a member check that I performed using a list of questions that I emailed to every member. This member checking process represents an important part of establishing the validity and legitimacy of the knowledge created in this project, as explained in chapter four. As such, it represents validation through second person evaluation. I present the responses of each of my five colleagues on their experiences of being part of the project and their experiences of my influence in this project.

*Invitation to team members to evaluate my educational influence*

Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting I discussed conducting semi-structured individual interviews with each of the R@I team members to discuss their individual perceptions of the value of the R@I project to them. My question to each member was: “What do you gain and have already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?” I broke this question down into subsections (Box 33) so that I inquired specifically about any increased awareness and/or shifts that occurred for each member as a result of their participation in the R@I initiative in terms of their values, ways of working, identity, abilities and preferences, and resources.

*Box 33. Semi-structured interview questions to evaluate my educational influence*

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (30-50 MINUTES)

Dear colleagues,

The purpose of your response is to get evidence from everybody participating in the R@I initiative regarding my educative influence and the value that this initiative held so far for everybody individually.

My main question to you is:

What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?

In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:

Your values (what is important about research for you)

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

Your identity (how you think about yourself as a researcher)

Your own unique abilities and preferences

Resources available to you as researcher

What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)

I will greatly appreciate your willingness to contribute in this way.

Kind regards,  
Willem Louw

From the record of the 16<sup>th</sup> R@I meeting held 2006-02-28, p.5 of 5

By the end of June 2006 I had managed to conduct an audio recorded interview with only one team member (Ilse) and had spent a significant amount of time transcribing the entire interview. In a discussion with the remaining four team members I proposed that it would be more time efficient if I rather emailed each of them a list of the questions and they would then answer these questions at their leisure. By the end of June 2006 I received Terri's response, by middle July I received Gerhard's. With some gentle reminding, Linda and Member 6 sent me their responses by March and May 2008 respectively. I present below the responses from the five R@I team members to the questions that appear in Box 33.

*Responses from my five team members*

***Ms Ilse Ruane (transcribed interview, conducted 16 March 2006)***



*What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?*

For me the biggest thing was being the most junior lecturer, coming into R@I, it's the first time that I actually saw that, even though I was the most junior one, everyone else is in a similar boat. Even though they've published and one assumes they know exactly what's going on, they actually feel the same fears that I'm feeling. Which I think, in any academic setting where you're a newer person, it's nice to know. Because it's overwhelming when you get told you are a researcher – who me?... It's nice to know people who can tell you. People who have been 18 years in the field and are as scared as I am. It's comforting.

*Your values (what is important about research for you)*

One of the values is feeling I can belong here. And it makes me feel closer to the rest of the department, not only the six Mamelodi people, because I am assuming that similar feelings will be there [on main campus] also. Chances are they're in the same situation, with the same fears and worries. It's nice to feel less intimidated by others' supposed research competence. It's nice to have a possible link to colleagues. I don't feel I'm so behind, or so different from my colleagues.

*Your identity (how you think about yourself as researcher)*

I've started feeling more like a potential researcher, for the first time ever. Before, research was the furthest thing on my mind. I regarded myself firstly as a psychologist, then as a lecturer – not even an academic. Maybe not even an academic yet now. The researcher [identity] comes even before that of 'academic'. I would only feel like an academic when I have some research output. That I feel that I've achieved something within the researcher identity and have the output as proof.

*Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)*

Before I didn't have a research identity, so I had no way of approaching research; there was just fear of involving myself because I didn't know where to start. Whereas now, if there is a project, I would first take the idea to a few people and discuss it with them: it's given me an avenue to start research. Before, even if I had an idea, I wouldn't take it anywhere because it just wasn't part of who I was. It's great to have ideas, but it's taking the first step that's the big thing. What is the first step to making something happen? I

battle to do this on my own. R@I gives me the space to take it and first have a chat to see what everyone else thinks, whether it's a valuable idea, and decide how to start. It was also nice to have the ISTP<sup>14</sup> deadline, because it forced us to find time for research. And once you've done that, and have the time and space in your week to do research for a deadline, then that time is there and you can keep it open afterwards for other projects. But for me the big shift was a sense of belonging, or developing an identity of a researcher, because I can be confident that I can do it. Before, it wasn't really that I didn't have the time. I just didn't know where to start.

#### *Your own unique abilities and preferences*

I prefer locally relevant research, things that influence me on a daily basis. I see I don't have the same interests, say, as someone like Gerhard. In that way, my preferences have crystallised, and R@I helped me to do that. Although even last year I knew that I preferred locally relevant kinds of topics – I think all of us working here in this environment do so – but I wonder if it weren't for R@I whether I would have had the opportunity to think further and say okay, take what you have here and publish. I don't think so. Because only the academic articles get published, no one writes about little community clinics and counselling and whatever, so I think that was a great encouragement, and something that was unique; I don't think it would have happened otherwise.

#### *Resources available to you as researcher*

Firstly, it's the people. But that's a personal thing for me, with anything: it's the people as resource. In terms of physical resources like books and stuff, I think we still have a long way to go. But that might change in future, what with the Internet having been down the last while and so on. The Internet is great, especially for community-based things: overseas they've done a lot, there's a lot of great ideas to be found there. In terms of the people again, on main campus and that group of people, I don't feel I can phone one of them up and ask my questions; so the people I'm referring to are the R@I people. You [the R@I team] have more experience in research and starting projects, in finding that

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<sup>14</sup> International Society of Theoretical Psychology Conference in Cape Town, 2005.

initial foot in the door. I don't have a problem once I'm in, but to get going, to take that initial step – how to do it, when to do it, what's the appropriate way, what's needed, all of that. And I think here [on the Mamelodi campus], a lot of projects have been done over the years. And you can link with others who are busy with a project, and that makes it easier.

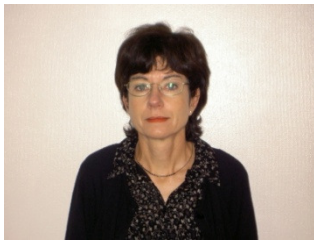
*What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?*

Just starting it. That's why I said last year that I hope it's not going to end with your doctorate, because I think it gives a platform for finding out where other people are at and also for putting yourself in the spotlight, in the hot seat. Because otherwise you could get away with speaking about your publications once a year with the head of the psychology department at the performance management meeting and then you can get away with it by saying, 'No I'm too busy, I have too many lectures' and this and the next, but now it's a case of once a month it's, 'Ok, how far are you? Where are you going? You're not publishing right now, but have you found out which journals interest you? Have you found out what to do with the stuff that interests you?' It's not necessarily just stimulating publication, it's stimulating you to find out more about research as an academic. For example, I'd never considered finding out what journals are out there. Before you would write the article and see who wants it, now you actually think: what is out there, who is the audience that will read it; and that is very valuable. And that wouldn't have been done if you don't think of all your ideas. And that you [Willem] have facilitated. And it's a comfortable hot seat. But there's still the expectation from all members that you've committed to doing something, and by the next meeting you should have done it. It's not like sitting with management. But it's a motivating hot seat, it's good. Otherwise most of us would just not get around to it. Well, I wouldn't. It's not a case of it being another boring meeting – it's a meeting where you get a lot out of it personally, which I don't think happens in many meetings. And it's stimulating. It's a luxury. It's okay to bring an idea that doesn't amount to anything, and bring it and get the criticism. And it's okay to take the criticism, maybe it's not a good idea, but maybe there's a spin-off that would work, that you didn't think of on your own.

*Any other comments about R@I you feel is important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)*

The only frustration was last year when we went off on a bit of a tangent, when there were personnel issues that weren't actually part of it, and then it wasn't so much about research. But this year especially it's been a lot more research-focussed, and not so much linked to other issues. To me it's exciting to make this more part of my research identity than my other identities as a lecturer, clinic supervisor or all of that out there; and to only come in as a researcher and talk about how research is done. And that to me is very scary and very exciting as well. Now the true doors open.

***Professor Terri Bakker (email, 26 June 2006)***



*What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?*

I have gained mostly community-in-research – a support structure and forum for validation and energising research efforts. I was busy with my research project already, before R@I, and would probably have completed it on my own anyway, but enjoyed the joint efforts and our conversations. Also the confirmation of our work together and strengthening the clinic and our image in the university during a time of adversity and when messages from outside were very disconfirming of us.

I also would probably not have been as involved in the Cape Town ISTP conference if we had not decided to offer the joint symposium on Itsoseng. I would have anyway been involved in the other symposium with a colleague from the University of South Africa (UNISA). This involvement as well as the meetings with Unisa were valuable, again in terms of forming part of a validating and challenging community to exchange ideas that are relevant to our context here.

*In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:*

*Your values (what is important about research for you)*

I did not really shift from my initial position as activist-in-research (for lack of a better word) but received much confirmation (and enrichment in terms of thinking things through and being challenged to substantiate) of it.

*Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)*

Not really a big change because I was involved in my project already. However, it helped to see it through and get an article out.

*Your identity (How you think about yourself as researcher)*

More confirmation than change (am I rigid?).

*Your own unique abilities and preferences*

Same.

*Resources available to you as researcher*

Lists of journals to publish in were welcome. Mostly the discussion forums as resource. Sounding of ideas. Being able to share and talk (a luxury in our current context).

*What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?*

I liked your insistence on the regular meetings and your facilitation of these sessions. There was space for us all to develop. I also think you raised the level of functioning of the 'subdepartment'<sup>15</sup> as a whole - in terms of functioning also in the clinic<sup>16</sup> for example, and in general, beyond the research focus.

*Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)*

I am still looking for a website that is regularly updated and has our work displayed on it. Maybe in future we could take this up again?

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<sup>15</sup> Psychology subdepartment on the Mamelodi Campus as part of the larger University of Pretoria Psychology Department

<sup>16</sup> Itsoseng Psychology Clinic

***Dr Gerhard Viljoen (email, 11 July 2006)***



*What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative? In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:*

*Your values (what is important about research for you)*

I have always felt that South Africa is too small and too troubled to have space for ‘pure’ or basic research. In some ways R@I confirmed this view for me: research should be useful to someone somewhere. (This argument is complex and I hear the knowledge-for-knowledge’s-sake voices, but they do not sit easily with me as a person). This value of usefulness is bigger than saying it should be useful in promoting the researcher’s career. Because of the great need in our communities it needs to be useful to people who are downtrodden, disenfranchised, disadvantaged and in need for change. Change or transformation therefore is a core value for me in research. This also means that research should primarily be an ethical endeavour. (This resonates with values found in AR and critical psychology like distributive justice. To claim neutrality is unethical!). A constant investigation into and reflection on one’s own values and ethics as a researcher is thus needed. It is interesting that I do not experience myself as having these values upfront, but they come out in conversations such as the dissertation supervision meeting you and I had with one of the Master’s in Counselling Psychology students. I sound more and more like an activist to myself in meetings like that and I am even considering joining some activist group like the TAC<sup>17</sup>.

*Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)*

My way of working is still wayward. I still need to structure and focus more. It’s a little like knowing what the problem is, but not really knowing what to do about it or how to resolve it. This is probably the aspect of research that needs the most attention now. At the

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<sup>17</sup> Treatment Action Campaign: A South African AIDS activist organisation



moment I feel like a disorganised intellectual pretending to be an anarchist (maybe this is answering the next question?).

*Your identity (how you think about yourself as researcher)*

Through supervising your thesis, I think more and more about how my (our) identity (-ies) as a therapist(s) inform my (our) identity (-ies) as researcher(s). Important here is the kind of therapists we are – reflexive practitioners with a political awareness. So, does the kind of therapist you are influence the kind of researcher you become? I think this will inevitably happen if one follows a synthetic process where different identities (perhaps linked to the three tasks of the university) are to be skilfully integrated. If one sees these tasks as separate, well, then you will become either a technician or a bureaucrat. I suppose one can look for cues for this identity much further (deeper) just than to look at professional contexts that shape us.

Let me tackle this question from a different perspective. When things do not go well in an organisation, it is quite easy to respond outwardly to those things that one perceives as hampering you. One loses sight of one's own identity, whatever that may be. Perhaps more in keeping with what I believe, one constructs one's identity in terms of the problem-saturated context in which one functions – a context, by the way, that also came about as a result of one's own construction through language. R@I was to me useful in challenging that construction of my identity. Once that was challenged, I had to ask more 'me' questions and less system questions. In some way 'I' could not hide anymore. (I know I'm walking in an epistemological minefield here.) I have to now challenge my constructions of my identity as researcher by artificially separating that from the construction of a hampering context.

*Your own unique abilities and preferences*

I am, as usual ambivalent about this. Although I am a supporter of applied research, I am not a very practical or hands-on person. I think that I'm good at generating ideas, but I am not good at following these through. I'm not a good finisher. I must find a way in which my abilities can be harnessed as part of a bigger process that will lead to the production of products (published articles). To do this I will have to challenge my world

champion ability for ambivalence that inevitably leads to over inclusion and sometimes over complication of issues. I need to become more minimalist in my approach to academic writing.

On the other hand, I am interested in how one can translate complex theory and philosophy into praxis. Perhaps my contribution should be to work on the conceptual level and to let others apply the ideas – not because I’m a better thinker, but because I believe they might be better doers. For me to sit on the behind and write is difficult. My thoughts are too divergent all the time. I must learn to use that ability in the part of the process where it is useful and develop through discipline and practice abilities (e.g. reading literature, writing the actual article) that would serve the bigger purpose better at other times.

In summary, my preference would be to work alongside other people where the combination of strengths can result in products.

*Resources available to you as researcher*

I think that the phrase, “Turning resources into assets” represents a changed mindset. It makes one realise that there are very many resources available, but that the trick is to activate them and let them work for you. If one adopts this attitude, it becomes more difficult to mope and complain about not getting support from anywhere. I think that more than the minimum amount of resources necessary for publishing is available. It does put a huge responsibility on me if I accept that I can’t blame the system.

*What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?*

Structuring our talking around these issues. One can think about these things endlessly, but when there is a shared forum in which knowledge can be created through conversation, something might, in the end, actually be done. It would have been nice if you could have written a few articles on my behalf though.

*Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)*

I am putting out feelers for overseas posts and sometimes I have to submit what they call a statement of research and teaching interests. R@I helped me to formulate these statements.

How can R@I be improved? It may be easier if we have more formal recognition from the Department, Faculty and the University for the work done here and the potential that can be developed.

In the words of Jethro Tull:

"This was how we were playing then, but things change, don't they."

***Dr Linda Blokland (email 23 May 2008)***



*What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative? In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:*

*Your values (what is important about research for you)*

With the R@I initiative I appreciated and came to value the community holding of our team. Teamwork is something I have always valued and striven to create. I find that I need other creative ideas to fire my own creativity and it is in the dialogue that I discover the joy of working and the worth of working.

*Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)*

I don't know that I can say that working communally (as a team) is a shift for me in terms of preference but R@I endorsed this way of working for me in the team. I came to see overlaps in research projects and started to see research as no longer individual

separate entitled projects, but as defined and focussed efforts in a landscape of possibilities.

*Your identity (How you think about yourself as researcher)*

I think more of my work as valuable and worthwhile. That's not identity, I know. If I can do worthwhile work of shared interest to my colleagues then it must be valuable to the participants, too. And yes, my sense of myself as a researcher is more prominent – I'm no longer a clinician only. So the two aspects (three actually, if we count community work) become integrated. This is more congruent with who I want to be.

*Your own unique abilities and preferences*

I like the way I have been thinking as a researcher and the freedom I have found in creative thought around research. I do believe that the R@I initiative has facilitated this process. I used to think that it was not possible to be creative and allow my thinking to stretch as it has done in research. I feel encouraged to challenge the boundaries further for worthwhile purposes. I do believe that it was not only the group comprised of the persons it was, but also the context in which we worked and dialogued – dialogued with each other and with the context itself. This has been tremendously exciting for me.

*Resources available to you as researcher*

The most valuable resource by far has been the collegial contact, the dialogues. No amount of material resources, fancy PC programmes, smart laptops or data analyses at my fingertips could approach the value of the dialogues in the context. It has really been for me living research leading to living theory. I do not think that I could ever revert to writing research from the confines of a remote office. It has been a privilege to live in the context of my research.

*What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?*

Convening the meetings. Facilitating the discussions. The coffee and goodies to eat creating a comfortable and nurturing context.

*Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)*

Yes. That possibly it started too late to gather enough momentum to ensure its growth and continuation. I do believe that it will continue but it feels as if the momentum is weak right now and some of us will have to drag it through to the other side. I said to my class today (Master's students): "I'm not very good at keeping rules". They all burst out laughing.

***Member 6 (email 26 May 2008)***



*What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?*

Honestly Willem, I know you did a lot and tried with all. However with regard to me, an immense amount of dynamics happened between me and the rest of the Mamelodi personnel in the last 2 to 3 years, where I was not made to feel part of anything, and was broken down on every possible level. For this reason I saw the meetings we had as more of a further possibility that would have been used to belittle me by some of the members of staff on Mamelodi, and chose not to participate.

*In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:*

*Your values (what is important about research for you)*

What is important to me as a researcher and person - more ethical behaviour to the whole field, especially research, as it feels terrifying to think that if they can treat colleagues the way they do, how will they treat patients or research participants?

*Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)*

My way of working, how I approach research projects - at the end it caused me to lose faith in myself and my abilities, however I'm stronger than that and will always overcome, and started with my own PhD now.

*Your identity (How you think about yourself as researcher)*

A newbie again.

*Your own unique abilities and preferences*

The whole experience made me see my own abilities again and I know I prefer to work on my own.

*Resources available to you as researcher*

Unfortunately I have not gained anything in regards to knowing more about the resources available to me.

*What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?*

I truly appreciate the fact that you did try to pull me into the group, to participate. That is an integral part of any group functioning and I know you did a wonderful job with all.

*Overview of the R@I members' responses*

From the team members' responses, the R@I project had been a positive experience for all but one member (Member 6), who nevertheless indicated an appreciation of my attempts to include her and an increased awareness of her own values related to research. There were certain commonalities, as well as unique aspects, in what the rest of the R@I team expressed in terms of an increased awareness or shifts they noticed as a result of their participation in the R@I project. I discuss these briefly below.

The first theme refers to a sense of belonging or community-in-research in a time of adversity (incorporation of Vista into the University of Pretoria), when we were subject to disconfirming discourses about our value as academics to the receiving institution. Belonging to a group of people in a similar situation (other like-minded academics who also struggle to conduct research) provided opportunities for normalising experiences, to

feel less intimidated, and as a result, to dare to do research. Belonging to a research group invited the formation of a group research identity – we were more comfortable in calling ourselves researchers by virtue of our membership of a research group. In this way a sense of belonging to the R@I group also facilitated the first step towards developing a research identity for some of us, or for affirming or refining this identity, for others.

A second theme relates to the value of critical dialogue where ideas or ideological positions can be challenged and where creative ideas expressed within the group inspire more creativity. As we strove to find solutions to *our* concerns with the clinic and *our* research output, I believe that we put more energy and creativity into our discussions than would have been the case had we tried to come up with solutions for others. As such, the critical and creative dialogue was more in service of survival and moving towards flourishing than of the intellectual pursuit of clever ideas.

A third noticeable theme was the absence of any changes in values, ways of working and abilities and preferences. Rather, most team members developed an *increased awareness* (Bhana, 2004) of what they value. Similarly, the R@I project seemed to provide an opportunity to develop a preferred way of working as a result of this heightened awareness of one's own abilities and preferences. In particular, Gerhard and Linda expressed a preference for working alongside other people where the combination of strengths can lead to better results than working by themselves – a concept also known as synergy.

Where shifts were expressed by the R@I members, it was in the formation of individuated research identities and the utilisation of resources. With regards to identity, most members reported the development and crystallisation of a research identity alongside other more established identities like lecturer, psychologist, clinician, practitioner. Gerhard went further in mentioning how he was challenged in the R@I project to ask more probing questions of himself as a researcher than questions about a hampering context.

Concerning the utilisation of resources, most members regarded the group members as their most important resource. Interestingly, prior to the R@I group, we had also worked alongside each other and had always potentially been available to each other. However, the R@I group provided a forum or social formation (Whitehead 2008) in which we became more available to each other as resource than we had been in our individual capacities. The idea of transforming resources into energising assets (Burlin, 2001) led to another shift. This was expressed by Gerhard when he stated that his heightened awareness of the multiple resources available for publishing made him realise that he could no longer blame “the system” for his research output, and had to take more personal responsibility.

With regards to my influence on the learning of others in the R@I project, most members regarded my coordination and facilitation of the regular meetings as well as providing a physically nurturing space (good coffee, fresh muffins, undisturbed meeting time and space) as being the main contributions that set in motion a process in which each member could influence and be influenced in their own and others’ learning. This perception is illustrated in phrases such as “*just starting it*” (Ilse), “*convening the meetings*” (Linda), “*facilitating and structuring our talking*” (Gerhard, Linda), “*providing a space for us all to develop*” (Terri), “*trying to include me*” (Member 6), and “*creating a comfortable and nurturing context*” (Linda, Terri). These comments resonate with Tuhiwai Smith’s (2005) discussion of the concept of “community-up” (p.98) approaches to researcher conduct, where the researcher creates opportunities to discuss and negotiate respectful conduct, and allows participants to “define their own space and meet on their own terms” and enacts “sharing, hosting and being generous” (p.98) which enables collaborative knowledge sharing and knowledge creation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented my response to the research question: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” This response was presented in two sections. The first section dealt with the progression of my own learning in facilitating the R@I project. The second section presents the evaluation of the five other R@I team members in terms of their perception of the value of the R@I project, and their view of my role in this process.



In the next and final chapter, I revisit my living contradiction and provide my own testimonial of the value of the R@I project. I develop my living theory of how I improved my practice as an academic by facilitating the R@I project. Finally, I discuss the contribution of the study to the fields of higher education, action research and psychology.

## CHAPTER 7

### MY LIVING THEORY OF MY ACADEMIC PRACTICE

*By taking action to change conditions, one is personally changed in the process.*  
(Karl Marx cited in Susman & Evered, 1978, p.595)

My living theory (Whitehead, 1989; 2008a) is about my personal transformation in the context of transformations in our collective understanding, knowledge, and heightened awareness of resources available to us, as well as in the context of higher education transformation in South Africa. As I explain in chapter three, I use the word *resource* in this thesis to indicate a potential asset, and the word *asset* to indicate a resource that has been used to the benefit of someone. Arguably the greatest resource available to the R@I workgroup was our regular and reliable availability to each other as both a supportive and a critical audience. As a group, this potential resource existed in the relationships between us, which were available to be transformed into an asset for a particular purpose. The formation and nurturing of a regular, supportive and critical audience in the form of the R@I meetings represented a transformation of our potential availability to each other as a resource into a valuable asset. My thesis is an account of my own learning in the form of my description of how, through my facilitation of a collaborative action research project, I contributed to the transformation of resources into assets when we worked towards improving the service delivery and local relevance of a university psychology clinic.

#### **My living contradiction revisited**

In this study I conceptualised improving my academic practice as resolving my experience of my academic self as a living contradiction. As explained in chapter three, this contradiction existed in holding certain personal values (creating locally relevant knowledge, working in synergy with my colleagues, and self-determination) and seeing very little of these values expressed in my academic practice prior to the year 2004. In

this thesis, I use these values to explain the decision I took to initiate and nurture the R@I project.

My living contradiction resolved as a result of my facilitation of and participation in the R@I project. My experience of myself as a participant in this project was one of working in synergy with my colleagues to create locally relevant knowledge. My experience of myself as the project facilitator further allowed me to live my value of self-determination, not just in seeing the project unfold, but also in creating opportunities for others to co-determine conversational spaces for discovery, experimentation and learning. In this sense then, the R@I project evolved into more than the resolution of my living contradiction. It acted as an important catalyst for the R@I project, and provided me with an opportunity to live in the direction of my values (McNiff et al., 2003).

### **Towards my living theory - what I have learned and gained from the R@I project**

My living theory of how I improved my academic practice includes my explanation of my living contradiction as well as descriptions of the actions I took with my team members to respond to this contradiction. My living theory also includes descriptions from my team members of the educational influence the R@I project held for each of them. In constructing my living theory of how I improved my academic practice, I answered the same questions that I posed to my team members on the value of the R@I project as a framework for my reflection on my own learning. I then summarised the results of my learning in the form of *tenets* of my living theory.

#### *What have I gained from participating in the R@I initiative as a team member?*

Overall, I have shared in the overt outcomes of the R@I initiative in terms of the improved functioning of the Itsoseng clinic, the development of an individuated research identity and an increased ability to define community in the practice of community engagement. I have also shared in the protective aspects afforded by belonging to a cohesive group (the R@I team) during the process of our institutional incorporation and associated stresses. Apart from sharing in these collective gains, I also made some personal and idiosyncratic gains which are expounded in the answers to the remaining questions below.

*What increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) did I notice in terms of my values (what is important about research for me)?*

Reflecting on my facilitation of the R@I project involved responding to the critical questions of my promoters (Dr. Gerhard Viljoen and Prof. Terri Bakker). During this process I became aware of a previously unacknowledged personal value: the co-creation of nurturing and creative conversational spaces. I believe that this value had a significant impact on the educational influence of the R@I initiative. This was perhaps the biggest discovery for me in terms of my values. Prior to the R@I initiative, I had very little awareness of how important it is for me to be a part of such contexts and to what lengths I would go to co-create them.

Like Gerhard, I experienced an increased awareness that I value locally relevant research conducted *with* community members, especially in the context of the high level of social need in many South African communities. In this respect, the Educare programme evaluation research project that Gerhard and I conducted was an opportunity to live this value. In this project we evaluated the feasibility of the continuation of a local daycare programme by integrating information from policy documents, assessing funding implications and incorporating focus group information. This was a research project conducted in partnership with an NGO and its direct stakeholders (the daycare mothers) located in the community surrounding the Mamelodi campus.

The R@I initiative also increased my awareness of the relationships between universities and surrounding communities; and made me question whether we do enough in South Africa to promote and encourage research that is useful and liberating to marginalised and disenfranchised people. Like Linda, I became more aware of how much I value community-in-research and working in a cohesive team.

*What increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) did I notice in terms of my way of working (how I approached research projects)?*

The biggest shift occurred in my thinking about the preparation of a journal article for publication. Prior to my participation in the R@I initiative, I assumed that a researcher

completes a research project, proceeds to write an article and then send it to a random journal hoping that it will be accepted. The idea that there is a process in which one evaluates which journals to approach had never crossed my mind. During the period of the R@I initiative, Gerhard attended a workshop that aimed to prepare postdoctoral academics for the professoriate. During a R@I meeting, Gerhard shared with us that the presenter of this workshop asked each academic to name their field of speciality within their discipline, as well as the ten leading journals in the world that publish articles on cutting edge research in these fields. The idea that particular journals focus on publishing articles related to particular fields of knowledge seems obvious to me now, but it was definitely a new idea for me at the time.

Related to this idea, was Linda and Terri's disclosure of the experience of having submitted articles only to have them rejected by journal reviewers who provided contradictory and confusing feedback. This prompted me to consider that I should not only inquire into which journals publish research similar to mine, but also that I should pay attention to the style and format of the articles in each journal. In short, my awareness of the role of the journal editor and peer review panel as a first audience grew immeasurably. As a result, my way of working in preparing a manuscript for publication shifted.

*What increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) did I notice in terms of my identity (how I think about myself as a researcher)?*

Being a member of a group of researchers was instrumental in helping me to see myself as a researcher. The R@I team was formed by six lecturers around a common purpose – research. Our purpose defined us as a group of lecturers doing research. Our name reflected this purpose: *Research@Itsoseng*. Our actions in the direction of this purpose also redefined us in these terms. From there it was a smaller and more manageable step to see myself as a researcher by virtue of my membership of this group. Therefore a shift and definite gain in this regard was the development of a researcher identity in a social formation (the R@I team) that nurtured and encouraged this identity.

*What increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) did I notice in terms of my unique abilities and preferences?*

My unique abilities as a facilitator of a creative and nurturing conversational space were highlighted to me. I also learned that I am able to participate and facilitate at the same time and that I am able to tolerate the messiness and unpredictability of an emergent research process. In terms of my preferences, like Linda, I have learned the value of regular, focussed collegial contact and dialogue with each other and with the context in which I work; and that I prefer to live and work in the context of my research. I also learnt that I was able to create opportunities for collegial contact that was not confined to my five colleagues, but also to a larger and more diverse group of like-minded (or perhaps like-valued) colleagues. In this respect I organised a meeting to discuss indigenous psychology that was held on the Mamelodi campus on 3 June 2005. I invited colleagues from the psychology departments of the Universities of Pretoria and South Africa (Unisa) who were interested in the concept and practice of indigenous psychology. The meeting was defined by the context: we sat and talked in a circle outside under a large acacia tree – a fitting setting for our musings on indigenous psychology in a South African context.





**Figure 13 Creating an opportunity for discussing indigenous psychology in an indigenous context. Mamelodi campus, 03-06-2005. (Eventually we adapted to the context and moved into the shade of the tree.) Photographed by the author.**

*What increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) did I notice in terms of the resources available to me as researcher?*

As an R@I member I experienced an increased awareness of how we can become valuable resources to each other and to ourselves in circumstances that allow for this to happen. I was often amazed by the generosity, richness and complexity of the contributions that we made to each other. In talking about how to improve the functioning of the clinic in a regular, sustained and structured way over several months (May to November 2004), we became more aware of “our own abilities and resources” (Bhana, 2004, p.235). I posit that we transformed these resources into assets, using the R@I meetings as forum. From our attempts to improve the functioning of Itsoseng Clinic, I learnt that the development of relationships and the capacity of people to address issues is a more valuable use of time than merely resolving the concerns. I was also at times surprised by the contributions I made during some of the R@I meetings, which showed to me a level of understanding about a topic under discussion that I had no previous awareness that I possessed. My experiences of the R@I meetings as a conversational space in which my colleagues and I were transformed from potential resources into assets to each other not only increased my awareness of this potential, but also alerted me to the value in creating and participating in such conversational spaces.

*What did I do that made the R@I project valuable to me as a team member?*

In facilitating the R@I project, I not only attempted to create a space in which my colleagues could flourish, but one in which I could do so too. When I entertain friends at my home, I play my role as host with diligence and attentiveness to their needs, and when my guests appear at ease and well cared for, it transforms my house into a welcoming space for myself also. The R@I meetings were no different in this respect. Not only did I schedule the meetings, prepare the recording equipment and take the minutes, I also played the role of host to my conversational guests. By so doing, I transformed our common meeting room into a welcoming space for myself and others. I did this through attending to small details such as baking fresh muffins, ensuring that we had plenty of good coffee and tea, laying the table in a way that defined the space differently, and by being attentive to my team members’ (guests’) emotional and practical



needs. In this way I created the most ideal way for myself to be in conversation with my colleagues about the things that mattered most to us in our day-to-day working lives.

### **My living theory of my developing academic practice**

My membership and facilitation of the R@I initiative has helped me to form my living theory (Whitehead, 2008b) of my developing academic practice and what it means to me to be an academic. In this section I provide my living theory in the form of basic tenets derived from what I have learnt in the R@I project.

- (1) My living theory is informed by my understanding of the three tasks of universities (Brulin, 2001), namely, teaching, research, and community engagement. I extended this conceptualisation to a consideration of the three core tasks of my academic practice. My original understanding of these three tasks was that they co-existed as separate activities. This view was transformed as a result of my involvement in the R@I project, and I now regard these tasks as interrelated and often co-occurring in various combinations and to various degrees. This is particularly the case if I regard teaching as not merely delivering a lecture, but as the facilitation of opportunities for others and my own learning in the presence of others. My academic practice is therefore at heart a practice of learning with others, in the company of others.
- (2) By creating a research forum, I was able to make use of the creative potential and passionate commitment present in my work colleagues as social formation (Whitehead, 2008b) at my place of work. I facilitated the creation of R@I as a temporary community (another social formation) around two common aims. In striving together with my colleagues towards these aims, I claim that I have improved my academic practice on three systemic levels: a personal level; the level of immediate community (my five colleagues); and the level of local community (the people living in the university's immediate surrounds).
- (3) On the personal level (first person action research, see Chandler & Torbert, 2003) my individuated research identity developed out of a group research identity, and I regard the group research identity to be a valuable precursor in my eventual

individuation as a researcher. I furthermore shared in the knowledge we created in the group pertaining to the definition of community in the context of community engagement and the resolution of key aspects of the clinic's functioning. This contributed to my academic practice in that I am more able to create and engage with communities of inquiry.

- (4) The second systemic level relates to improvements in my academic practice of facilitating transformational opportunities for myself and others in a communal conversational space (first and second person action research). On this level my academic practice as a facilitator improved due to the reciprocal influence we as team members had on each other; and how the group process shaped me in turn as I responded to this process. In this way I acquired embodied knowledge of educational influence as a reciprocal process, in that we mutually influenced each other. As a result, and as I inquired into my academic practice in order to create my own living theory, I developed a concept of personal agency within the context of reciprocal influence.
- (5) The third systemic level of improvement in my academic practice pertains to my increased awareness of the relationship between my academic practice and the local communities surrounding the university (second and third person action research). In this respect I claim an improvement in my academic practice in that I developed my ability to create inquiring communities within an ethic of care and respect, together with people from organisations in the local community surrounding the university where I worked.
- (6) My academic practice also improved in terms of my understanding of the unique potential of a university psychology clinic as an interface and integrating agent between the three tasks of universities and the three systemic levels described above. A psychology clinic provides opportunities for research, teaching and community engagement both as separate tasks and also for bringing these tasks together in an integrated whole. It further provides an opportunity for engaging with self and other, with existing or created communities of inquiry, as well as for thinking

about larger societal issues such as indigenous psychology and locally relevant psychology.

- (7) Lastly, my academic practice improved as a result of my becoming aware of valuable resources within myself and others, as well as because of an increased awareness of the processes by which I could turn these resources into assets. In addition, I realised the value of choreographing creative and nurturing conversational spaces. My co-creation of such conversational spaces is as much for my own benefit as it is for that of my conversational partners, and aims to contribute to the flourishing of thought and relationship.

The development of my living theory of my academic practice represents an important contribution of this study as well as an important influence on my own professional life. In the following section I provide my thoughts on the wider contribution of this study to action researchers, academics, people involved in university psychology clinics as well as psychologists interested in the emancipatory and transformative potential of action research.

### **Contributions of this study**

The R@I project provided a means to multiple ends – some anticipated and hoped for, and others unexpected. We aimed to improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic and started with a list of concerns that we hoped to address. In the process of addressing these concerns, we discovered that the solution lay in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the people involved, as well as establishing processes for dealing with daily and ongoing concerns. We also became aware of the impact of the quality of the relationships between the role players in the clinic on our ability to deal with issues germane to clinic operations. These two discoveries were unexpected. We furthermore aimed to increase our output of locally relevant research and discovered the value of establishing a researcher identity from which to act with creativity and confidence. The formation of a researcher identity happened in stages, from first belonging to a research initiative, to collectively contributing and co-creating that initiative, to developing individuated researcher identities that were able to respond in a supportive, creative and

also critical manner toward each other. The importance of individuated research identities was another unexpected discovery. In striving towards both our aims we experienced transformations in our understanding of our challenges, in our awareness of external and internal resources available to us, and in our identities as psychology academics in South Africa.

The contribution of this study therefore extends beyond solving my living contradiction and improving my own academic practice. The R@I project developed as a collaborative action research project in the interfaces between academic-and-university and university-and-surrounding-community during a period of transformation in South African higher education. I discuss in the following section the contributions this study makes to the relevant academic fields.

*The relevance of the study to community engagement as an academic task*

A first contribution this study makes is to the debate on the social responsibility of universities to their local communities, which I discussed in chapter three. In this study I demonstrated how we acknowledged our responsibility to the local community surrounding the Mamelodi campus and created opportunities for local knowledge production. This study confirms that academic staff members in psychology departments are well placed to engage with communities surrounding the university as one of their academic tasks (Brulin, 2001; Greenwood & Levin, 2000). University psychology clinics are ideal sites for community engagement initiatives as they form a readymade interface between the university and its surrounding community. The types of services that university psychology clinics offer (e.g., individual psychotherapy, family therapy, relationship counselling, psychometric assessments, etc.) are likely determined by the assessment and treatment skills that psychology departments want their postgraduate psychology students to develop. If the university psychology clinic is seen as an interface between the university and community rather than as a service only, more aspects of psychology (e.g. community psychology, research psychology, etc.) could be utilised in a collaborative way that could benefit people in the surrounding community and other community stakeholders. In the R@I project we approached the running of a psychology clinic as a task that was not only oriented towards training students and providing a

service to individuals or groups, but also as a *responsibility* of the university towards the local community. This represents a particular focus in attitude or vision, and as such incorporates an additional element to the tasks of teaching or service delivery that are usually referred to in the literature (see for instance, Brulin, 2001; Greenwood & Levin, 2000) and in research in fields concerned with the relationship between universities and communities (such as community psychology).

The community engagement focus is different from contemporary research into university psychology clinics (see for instance Babbage, 2008; Borkovec, 2004; Gonsalvez, Hyde, Lancaster & Barrington, 2008) in which the researchers focus on the operation of the clinic itself rather than the relationship between the university and the surrounding community, with the clinic as an interface between the two. In the context of community psychology, Oosthuizen (2006) defines community as “the evolution of relationships” (p.283), a conceptualisation of community engagement that resonates with our approach. Oosthuizen (2006, p.283) further states that “community psychology is no more a case of ‘visiting communities’ but one of ‘co-creating communities’”. This belief echoes our approach to creating temporary and fluid communities of enquiry around a common purpose, and recalls also Anderson and Goolishian’s (1988) notion of problem-determined systems (see chapter five).

#### *The relevance of the study to psychology*

Dick (2004) laments that psychology has largely ignored action research. Some authors (Boyd & Bright, 2007; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 1997) have argued that action research is ideally suited for research in psychology. This study makes a contribution to the field of psychology in that it demonstrates the possibility of combining a self-study project with a collaborative action research project. There are clear examples of this combination in the academic fields of education (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) and nursing (Burgess, 2006).

This study involved an inquiry into my practice as an academic in psychology (my living theory) as well as the improvement of the functioning of a psychology clinic and enhancing the local relevance of our psychology research as a group of psychologists

employed by the University of Pretoria (the collaborative action research project). As such, there were several outcomes at various stages of this study. This study contributed to our sense of belonging during the incorporation of our campus. This sense of belonging not only contributed to our flourishing (Reason & Torbert, 2001) as academics in psychology, but also likely increased our confidence as the R@I group to sell our vision for Itsoseng Clinic and the Mamelodi campus to the senior management of the University of Pretoria, which in turn may have contributed to the continued existence of the clinic on the campus into and likely beyond 2011. Another outcome was the resolution of our concerns regarding the functioning of the clinic. In this way, this study has directly contributed to the practice of psychology and service delivery at Itsoseng Clinic. Babbage (2008) conducted a survey among directors of clinical psychology training and psychology clinic directors in Australia and New Zealand. This author found that the greatest dissatisfaction was expressed in research productivity, and that “a more even balance between clinical service, training and research is desired” (Babbage, 2008, p.257). This study may be of particular relevance to university psychology clinics that are managed by academic staff members who are committed to addressing issues of pressing concern, and who use the psychology clinic as a research site. I envision a further application of this study to directors of psychology programmes who wish to encourage greater community engagement in a way that integrates this function with research and teaching activities.

This study furthermore informs our ability to live our values of social justice as psychologists by mixing our politics and psychology. This is advocated by Brydon-Miller (1997), who states that participatory action research:

demands greater involvement and commitment on our parts to our own communities and to addressing issues of social justice around the world. At the same time, it will allow us to place our skills and training as psychologists in the service of our personal and political values, giving our work new energy and meaning. For those of us with a commitment to addressing social issues in an open and democratic fashion, it will provide a way to integrate our politics and our psychology-to the benefit of both. (p.664)

The R@I project contributed in this respect by allowing us to use our commitment, creativity and psychological skill in service of our values of social justice and social responsibility.

*The implications of the study to the concept of transformation*

Reason and Torbert (2001) argue that

a transformational science needs to integrate first-, second- and third-person voices in ways that increase the validity of the knowledge we use in our moment-to-moment living, that increase the effectiveness of our actions in real-time, and that remain open to unexpected transformation when our taken-for-granted assumptions, strategies, and habits are appropriately challenged.” (p.1)

In addition, Tolman and Brydon-Miller (1997, p.598) point out that “transformation is always in some way personal, political, and psychological”. In relation to collaborative action research projects, Bhana (2004) states that “the ultimate goal of a collaborative relationship between researchers and participants is **structured transformation**, and the improvement over a broad front of the lives of those involved” (p.235).

In essence, this study is about transformation: my personal transformation as an academic-psychologist; our collective transformation as members of the R@I project; and the transformation of resources into energising assets. In discussing the relevance of this study to the concept of transformation, I share what I have learnt in my facilitation of the R@I project regarding transformational processes. When personal and collective learning is directed by an open question in the form of “how can I...?” or “how can we...?” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006), the ground is prepared for a transformational process in which resources related to one’s purpose can be pursued to be discovered or identified; and actions can be taken to utilise these resources as assets in order to answer the stated questions. The question prepares the ground, but in itself is not sufficient. I argue that it is necessary to co-create a particular conversational space which nurtures creativity, experimentation, critical self-reflection and respect for each other’s views and contributions. I believe this conversational space cannot be provided; it can only be co-created by whoever is involved. This co-creation process might not occur by itself and may require a facilitator. Therefore a third element completes the picture, namely, a guardian (research facilitator) who keeps the question a living one, allowing it to evolve



while facilitating the co-creation of a particular conversational space. If the facilitator remains aware and respectfully attends to the collaborators' contributions, this may contribute to the development of a conversational space that allows for transformation to occur. In much the same way that happiness cannot be pursued and only opportunities for joy created, so transformation cannot be assured, although opportunities for transformation can be created and nurtured. Arranging a comfortable, safe space, providing refreshments, and overseeing administrative tasks such as record keeping, scheduling, reminders, and encouraging emails, may help remove barriers to engagement and transformation and communicates the esteem in which you hold your team members. I further argue that opportunities for transformation cannot be instituted by management structures, but only created on the micro level by people committed to transformation. Wood, Morar and Mostert (2007, p.68) contend that "sustainable transformation can only take place at the micro level". I argue that this study contributed directly to the micro level transformation of academic practice in the psychology department on the Mamelodi campus of the University of Pretoria.

#### *The implications of the study for action research methodology*

This study conforms to the characteristics of action research as defined by Reason and Bradbury (2001, p.1):

Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

Using this definition, the R@I project involved a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of improving Itsoseng Clinic and our research output (worthwhile to us). In the R@I project we sought to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with each other, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to us, in pursuit of the flourishing of each of us both individually and collectively, and in pursuit of the flourishing of the communities in which we were embedded. This study contributes to the field of



action research by demonstrating within a South African context the practice of action research in psychology and higher education.

With regards to living theory methodology, I experienced significant difficulty in identifying and isolating my educational influence in my own learning and the learning of others in the context of a collaborator team of professional peers. This was further complicated by the co-existence and intertwining of essentially two parallel research projects – a collaborative action research project and a living theory (self-study) project. Linked to this dilemma was my personal value of self-determination and the expression of this value in my experience of *agency*. I furthermore declared a social constructionist ontology. Personal *agency* and *my educational influence* represented concepts that did not fit well with a social constructionist ontology but are very much part of the living theory vernacular (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Consequently, in chapter six I introduced the term *reciprocal educational influence* to highlight the reciprocal nature of educational influence in collaborative learning groups, especially ones that are made up of professional peers. In this way this study contributes to the development of the concept of practitioner-researcher’s “educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work” (Whitehead, 2008, p.104).

Action researchers often have an emancipatory aim in that one of the purposes of the research is “the flourishing of people, their communities and the larger ecology” (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p.99). This study further contributes to the body of action research studies with a strong emancipatory aim, in which we as the R@I team strove to flourish in the contexts of higher education transformation in South Africa where we were vulnerable to an incorporating institution that questioned our value. I have learnt that a collaborative action research project (such as the R@I initiative) holds within it the potential not only to transform but also to preserve, guard and further develop that which members collectively value. I envision the value of this aspect of action research in contexts of transition or rejuvenation of existing business or other groupings of people. Our emancipation resided in our ability to collectively resist the invitation or injunction to cease our existence as “Mamelodi campus academics”. Belonging to the R@I group

helped us preserve our identity as academics committed to teaching, research and community engagement with the students and people of Mamelodi. In this way we were temporarily emancipated from the pressure we experienced to lose or denounce our valued unique identity.

### **Limitations of this research**

The first limitation of this research refers to the dual relationships of both my promoters (Gerhard and Terri), who were also R@I team members. This likely had an influence on their supervision and direction in the writing of this manuscript. I experienced both Gerhard and Terri as very mindful that their R@I membership might make them less critical than someone who was not part of the R@I initiative. However, their immersion in the R@I project afforded them an advantage in that they were more able to question my assertions of influence, being participants and co-influencers of the process. Nevertheless, I consider the relative absence of additional “critical colleagues” (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003, p.38) as a limitation. I state this as a *relative* rather than an absolute absence, as some attempts were made to seek feedback. The R@I group presented our vision and values to several critical audiences including University of Pretoria management, Hatfield campus psychology colleagues, UNISA colleagues and at an international conference. In addition, even though it was intertwined with the R@I project, the living theory aspect of this thesis was also separate enough that I believe it allowed my promoters a critical perspective on it.

The second limitation of this research pertains to the length of time it took to complete the several layers of reflections on the content and process of the R@I project and my living theory project. Life did not stand still and I experienced several major life events during the writing of this manuscript (notably, emigrating to New Zealand and two new career directions) as well as the deteriorating health and deeply mourned death of Gerhard, my dear friend, colleague and promoter, over the period 2010 to 2011. As a consequence of the time it took, I developed a living theory of my academic practice after I had already left the typical academic setting of the university to take up employment first as a forensic psychologist (September 2008) and most recently (March 2011) as a clinical psychologist in a community mental health clinic. I therefore had

limited opportunity to apply the fruits of my labour in a purely academic setting following the establishment of my living theory. I acknowledge, however, that my living theory is not necessarily limited to my academic practice and is applicable to my general practice as psychologist, especially in a community mental health setting. As such, at the time of writing, I am facilitating a workgroup at my place of work that shares some characteristics of the R@I project. I work at a community mental health clinic that provides specialist mental health services exclusively to adult Maori people. Most of the staff at this clinic identify themselves as Maori and there is a particular emphasis on providing a mental health service from a Maori worldview and adhering to certain core values that are considered typical of traditional Maori communities. It is probably not coincidental that I find myself working once again with marginalised, disadvantaged people, and in a setting that acknowledges and values indigenous perspectives on psychology. The overarching aim of the workgroup I am facilitating is the alignment of our clinical practice with the core values that distinguish our mental health clinic from other mainstream mental health clinics in South Auckland, New Zealand. In essence we want to improve the functioning and service delivery of this clinic – and so it begins; or rather, so it continues. Even though the context is different in many ways, the process remains the same, being one of establishing a group with committed people, willing to explore and learn as we tackle issues of pressing concern.

Lastly, by virtue of the research design (collaborative action research and living theory action research), this study is limited in the readymade generalisability of the results and will require of practitioners and readers to “extract what is relevant and transferable to their own settings” (Lothian, 2010, p.68). In order to assist with this process, I have taken care to provide detailed and rich descriptions of my practice in the company of others as well as of the unique contexts and social relationships that contributed to the reciprocal influences on our learning. I have also presented my views on the contributions this study makes to the operation of university psychology clinics by academic staff and to action research within the field of psychology.

### **Considerations for future research**

Research initiatives by academic psychologists that explore creative and novel uses of their university psychology clinic could further develop the idea of the clinic as an interface for creative community engagement rather than as a training and service delivery point only. One such initiative that has operated for more than twenty years is the *Agape Healing Community* (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001; Buchanan, 2008). This project is a joint initiative between the psychology departments of the University of South Africa and the University of Johannesburg that not only offers training opportunities for students, but embraces the principles of community engagement and ownership. However, despite its novel and relevant approach, too few such ventures are reported in the South African literature.

The gap between a newly appointed academic staff member and a publishing academic in a psychology department in South Africa is likely a formidable one for many new recruits. The establishment of peer support research groups that include experienced staff and involve collaborative projects may be beneficial in reducing this gap, as belonging or membership to such a group may facilitate the adoption of a research identity. In this study I regarded the formation of a research identity as a crucial step in improving our individual and collective research output.

### **Conclusion**

Seventeen years into South Africa's democracy the higher education landscape has changed. Historically white universities and historically black universities have merged and technikons have been reinvented as universities of technology. In 2011, South Africa boasts 11 universities, six comprehensive universities and six universities of technology (Council of Higher Education [CHE], retrieved August 13, 2011, from <http://www.che.ac.za/heinsa/overview/>). Seven years after the inception of the R@I project, the Mamelodi campus of the University of Pretoria has also changed. It has not closed down, although the chickens are gone, and so are many of the students. Those who do attend are all enrolled for special programmes and represent many races. Itsoseng Psychology Clinic has not only survived; it has grown and provides work and training for Clinical and Counselling Master's students, five interns, trainee occupational

therapists and student and community volunteers. Art and music therapy classes run every week, and collaborative relationships exist with special education departments, NGOs, research organisations and youth programmes. Three of the original six staff members continue to work there, and although the conflict with the main campus has largely abated, they still identify themselves as 'other': "The Mamelodi Three" (personal communication, L. Blokland, August 13, 2011). One of the younger and previously unpublished R@I researchers (Ilse) has also gone on to publish articles as a single author, which, significantly, relate to the functioning of psychology in an indigenous setting (see Ruane, 2006; 2008).

This study traced the inception and evolution of the R@I project, a collaborative action research project that attempted to improve our practice of generating locally relevant research in a university psychology clinic. In so doing, it impacted not only on the lives of the participants, but allowed us to start to enact the three tasks of universities and so influence the lives of the student and residential communities to whom we had a responsibility. This thesis provides an exploration of the two research questions that formed the first part of the study, namely, "how can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?" and "how can we increase our research output?"

The second part of the study was a self-study AR project which examined my attempts to improve my academic practice by inquiring into my practice of facilitating the collaborative action research project. This thesis explored my answers to the questions: "how can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?", and "how can I improve my academic practice through facilitating such an initiative?" in the form of my living theory.

My living theory is my evidence that I have gained living and embodied knowledge of how I have improved my academic practice. I presented in this thesis my story of how I understand that this new knowledge has come into being, the nature and content of this knowledge and why this knowledge is valuable to me. The essence of this study remains for me one of transformation. So how did I improve my academic practice? In short, I did this by creating a space for the transformation of resources in myself and others into assets.

## EPILOGUE

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 2011, I wrote an email to Linda, Terri and Ilse asking them about the state of the Mamelodi campus and Itsoseng Clinic in 2011. I was hoping that they could provide me with an insider perspective, as I had not been on the Mamelodi Campus since 2008 and was wondering what happened to the students, the clinic, the trees, grass and the chickens. They each responded generously in their emails and gave permission for me to include their responses verbatim.

*Emails received from Linda*

**13 August 2011**

Dear Willem

Seven years have passed since you wrote the introduction I read at the beginning of your writing process for this document. I sometimes reflect on the changes and more recently the nature of the event-shape in time-space has been on my mind. Yesterday Rosemare called me to tell me that Kyknet wants to do a programme on the clinic with Kyknet's focus on Afrikaners who are engaging in ground-breaking work. As you can imagine this sent me into a spin of questions around how we got to this perspective of the work done at the clinic. I recalled how we found ourselves back in 2004 as a fringe community seen as radical activists whose opinions held threat to established institutions holding power and authority over the education system at least at tertiary level. Now we are sought out by church groups and vroue federasies (women's leagues) and other mainstream groups who extol our virtues as do-gooders. At least this was my initial cynical feeling. I have since given it more reflection and describe some of these thoughts below.

Since 2004, the radical movement was adequately quelled. We persevered, despaired, resigned, and announced we would close shop and move on - conform. At that stage, clients were barely trickling in. We had no Master's students to provide a service. Support from the University was invisible and un-felt and there was nothing on the horizon. In response to our announcement to close shop was a resolution from the senior executive of the University that they would support us and we should continue. The support which followed came in

the form of students returning to the clinic and some small amount of seed funding provided.

Today we have 14 clinical Master's students and a few counselling Master's students working in the clinic, about five interns of psychometry and trauma counselling, as well as about five volunteers full time and also a squad of Psyche students (student association) highly active in the clinic every day of the week. We see about 90+ sessions a month and we have a waiting list of clients. Art therapy classes run twice a week and music therapy classes run once a week for mostly children who have been traumatised. Volunteers run the art therapy classes while the University's Music Department run the music classes. Occupational Therapy students from the University see our children on the campus. We also refer children to the special education students. We have a volunteer on a fellowship coming from the US to work next year and we have a PhD student from the Netherlands coming in September to run an art therapy research project. We collaborate with Lifeline who has offices in our clinic; the Vaalwater project based in the Waterberg; and the Centre for Creative Leadership for whom we are trying to find funding in order to run a 'leadership without boundaries' programme for youth in Mamelodi. Itsoseng donors have sponsored a trip to Israel for Rosemare to attend a creative arts therapy workshop/conference held at Haifa University.

We are very active. We are well known. We battle for funding. We no longer challenge policies in that we seem to have exited from the political arena. We are looking more alternative in a mainstream kind of way. What remains the same is that the support from the University was confined to the initial seed funding, and a continued tolerance of our activities. The original staff members of the clinic are still the only staff involved. A gift has been Rosemare who is a fiery fighting spirited person carrying passion we once knew. We are going for funding independence by forming an NPO which will remain under the University system.

The trees are tall, the grass lush and green. There is little dust and the chickens were gone when I last looked. The students of the campus are of mixed racial grouping and none are in mainstream programmes - they are all enrolled for special programmes. Programmes we had designed have long since disappeared and I think none of us have any trace of them on our PCs. There is a dusty box somewhere in a storeroom with some left over hard copies. The bitterest battle at present is the fight to get a ramp for our one disabled student so she can get herself out of the parking lot.

*Linda*

**14 August 2011**

Hi Willem

Just some clarification and responses to your mail.

The University does not much refer to the clinic. Guests are only told of the clinic or brought to the clinic if one of the 'Mamelodi three' get to get the message in. Then the visit will be an after-thought and no-one else among the staff will accompany the guest. We are hosting a dinner event later this month to raise awareness and celebrate some successes with our donors. Yes, private funding is the only way to go with independent status as far as funding is concerned. We are planning a post graduate creative arts therapy diploma for qualified psychologists and other professionals. This will be in conjunction with Israel University - Haifa.

We still select 7 students at Master's level each year but we now have a two year programme. There are great advantages to this for all and not least for the clinics. It provides us with continuity from year to year as far staff in the clinic is concerned. We also always have a squad of experienced counsellors as well as a new batch of trainees who eagerly lap up what mentorship they can get from the seniors. It gives the seniors status and a sense of progress.

*Linda*

*Email received from Terri*

**15 August 2011**

Hi Willem (and Linda)

Maybe the do-gooder image is inevitable in terms of the position of the campus within The University - a distant colonial outpost.

To illustrate: A public relations officer has recently been appointed to the campus. After my initial (admittedly naive) excitement at the prospect of some assistance with networking in the community, I discovered that her job description entailed using the campus to distribute glossy pamphlets of the main campus activities of the university in the surrounding area, as well as policing the campus for potential deviations from The Corporate Image! I was given a lecture



about The Excellence of the University and given a stack of pamphlets of cultural activities on the main campus (not sure what I was supposed to do with them, invite the clients to buy tickets to the symphony concerts?).

The campus is extremely tidy. It has happened that I have arrived there to find only the clinic staff and an army of cleaners and gardeners on the campus, but the dust and the boom boxes and the voices of the township are still blown in through the concrete fence poles...

*Terri*

*Email received from Ilse*

**15 August 2011**

Dear Willem

I read thru Linda and Terri's email and can't help feeling saddened and on the other hand grateful that the clinic endured.

2011 has brought with it the realisation that to continue is indeed to adapt and change and the clinic's survival has been no different. So yes we are still housed in the same building, on the same campus and staffed (in terms of psych staff) by the same people. BUT the larger landscape has changed, environmentally as well as discursively.

The open veld, a short walk between the campus' official grounds and the community, has given way to large concrete fencing that separates the clinic, and campus, from the community it serves. Manicured gardens, although beautiful, now seem to stand between me and the real-life of the people of Mamelodi because I can enter and leave without ever really leaving an impression. The distance between us and them has again been restored. Then again what more did I expect from a HWU. Perhaps I expected more of myself as I have allowed these perceptual divides to become 'real'. I miss the singing, the vibrance and I miss the chickens!

We work differently than before and I feel our role of activists has given way to strategists of survival and masters of adaptation. As a therapist I know this has been necessary for the clinic and our survival. On another level for me this sadly means we have needed to forsake (or perhaps set aside) the very essence of why we choose to work in Mamelodi in the first place. We are pioneering spirits at heart and we thrive and are energized on the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of the

context and are thrilled that we may, in collaboration with the community, choose how we interact and what we may do in/for the community.

Contrary to the cynics view, we strive forward and I, naively, wait for the day when the powers that be decide to allow a truly African community based and resourced campus, where fences figuratively and literally are broken down. Ahhh sigh!... Perhaps the dominant discourses haven't broken me yet.

In writing this I realise it may read as a step back or that I have not developed to the point where perhaps Linda and Terri are. Not ascribing a judgment for or against this position but possibly my naiveté and idealism that longs for a South Africa that is all I dream it can be. But I digress.

To end, because I could rattle on: I truly believe the power of education lies in respecting the pupil and thus constantly look to my students to see the change they enact while in training and I excitedly imagine the roles they are going to play as psychologists in South Africa. It is both humbling and an honour to be part of that. The landscape of Itsoseng is constantly evolving and we along with it.

Perhaps one day the chickens will return.

*Ilse*

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Notice of the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting**

**Appendix B: Invitation to Hatfield Campus colleagues**

**Appendix C: Ethics statement**

**Appendix D: Permission letter**

**Appendix E: Typed records of the 17 R@I meetings**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Notice of First Meeting**

# RESEARCH@ITSOSENG

## NOTICE OF MEETING

**DATE:** Wednesday 26 May 2004  
**VENUE:** Sammy Marks museum  
**TIME:** 10:30 – 12:00  
**INVITED:** All interested in *Research@Itsoseng*  
**CONVENOR:** Willem Louw (willem.louw@up.ac.za)

## MOTIVATION FOR THE MEETING

The main motivation for this meeting is an attempt to synergize three current contextual factors in our sub department: one, a threat to our survival; two, improving our quality and methods of training; three, improving the functioning of Itsoseng.

As you all know we are fighting for our place in the dust. We are convinced that what we can offer as a psychology sub department is of value to current and future students. Unfortunately nobody will believe us just because we say so.

Money talks and Research output (which eventually relates into money) talks. We are all qualified and registered psychologists in academia who by high probability should have the potential to do good enough (publishable) research. If we collectively decide to make research output a core function of this sub department, we might find that nobody will stop us. We each have unique talents that when pooled together could make it attainable to publish. It is my belief that if we employ the correct strategy (one that adapts to our needs) we can assist each other to publish on a regular basis.

Practical problems (Itsoseng, training, etc) → (Action) Research → Publications, dissertations, seminars → Money, attracting students (over seas, etc) → Survival
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## PRELIMINARY AIMS OF MEETING

- To establish a core research team at ITSOSENG
- To inspire and infuse ourselves with excitement about the possibilities and opportunities for Research@Itsoseng
- To work out the pragmatics and draw up a time frame or schedule

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Invitation to Hatfield Campus Colleagues**





**RESEARCH@ITSOSENG**  
Theory-in-action  
Valuing local relevant knowledge  
Turning resources into assets



Department of Psychology

Mamelodi Campus

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**INVITATION TO THE NEXT RESEARCH@ITSOSENG MEETING**

Research@Itsoseng is an initiative spearheaded by the psychology department designed to facilitate locally relevant knowledge creation on the Mamelodi campus. Social researchers gather every two to three weeks during which we aim to encourage and support ongoing research projects. We have a strong action research focus and place a high value on informed committed action. Fellow practitioners / trainers / lecturers who would like to improve their research output in an atmosphere of support and creative challenges are invited to attend the next meeting.

## **Next R@I meeting**

**DATE:**

WEDNESDAY *10 NOVEMBER 2004*

**TIME:**

09:00-12:00

**VENUE:**

STAFF ROOM, ITSOSENG (EDUCATION BUILDING, MAMELODI CAMPUS)

**PLEASE REPLY TO [willem.louw@up.ac.za](mailto:willem.louw@up.ac.za) IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND.**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Ethics Statement**

**RESEARCH@ITSOSENG**  
*Turning Resources into Assets*

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**ETHICS STATEMENT**

2004-07-14

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This document is an attempt to ensure good ethical practicing in conducting my research.

My research is an action research study that explores the question of relevant local knowledge. I am attempting to establish a research centre at the ITSOSENG clinic on the Mamelodi campus that is able to produce knowledge that is relevant and useful to the community it serves. The ITSOSENG community is defined as all the people who have some connection with the clinic, be it clients, referral agencies, students, staff or friends of ITSOSENG. This project will be successful if the research centre is producing knowledge that is relevant and useful to the ITSOSENG community and when the rate of research output in terms of articles published in accredited journals is significantly higher than the current rate of research output at ITSOSENG. My intention is to submit aspects of this process in the form of a thesis for a PhD degree.

I undertake to at all times negotiate permission to conduct the various aspects of the research, to respect confidentiality and to ensure participants' rights to withdraw at any time from the research. I will make use of various data collection methods. These might include audio tape recordings, video tape recordings, written notes during meetings, contents of email communication, recollections of informal conversations, photographs and submissions from participants in whatever form. I intend to facilitate the research in such a manner to ensure that all participants benefit from the participation in one way or another. Issues of confidentiality of the research material are constantly open for discussion and negotiation and I undertake to revisit these issues on a regular basis.

Please indicate with your name and signature below that you understand the focus of this research project as well as your rights as participant in this research.

Kind regards,

Willem Louw

Research facilitator: tel 083 360 8672 / (012) 842 3684



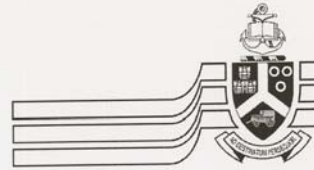
-----  
I understand the focus of this research project (facilitated by Willem Louw on the establishment of a research centre at ITSOSENG, Mamelodi campus) as well as my rights as participant in this research.

Date	Name and Surname	Signature

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Permission Letter**

Tel: (012) 842-3412/22  
Fax (012) 842-3634  
E-mail: [edwin.smith@up.ac.za](mailto:edwin.smith@up.ac.za)



University of Pretoria

Cnr Hinterland Street and  
Hans Strijdom Ave  
Mamelodi  
Republic of South Africa  
<http://www.up.ac.za>

**Office of the Director  
Mamelodi Campus**

16 May 2006

Mr WP Louw  
Researcher  
Department of Psychology  
Mamelodi Campus

**Re: Permission to conduct research on Mamelodi Campus**

Dear Mr WP Louw:

I am pleased to inform you that I support your request for research on the Campus using colleagues as participants. You will have to engage in the necessary steps to gain their permission and consent as required by your project.

I wish you well in your research and look forward to learning of the outcome of your investigation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Edwin T. Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Edwin T. Smith  
**DIRECTOR: MAMELODI CAMPUS**

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Typed Records of the 17 R@I Meetings**

## Record of 1st R@I meeting held at Sammy Marks 2004-05-26

### **Present:**

Linda, Terri, Gerhard, Ilse, Member 6<sup>1</sup>, Willem

### **Contextualization:**

I convened this meeting in an attempt to formalize some of the ideas that were expressed in conversations that I have had the privilege to share with most of you on various occasions around the research potential and opportunities at Itsoseng. I have a passion for Action Research and believe that if we pool our unique creative resources and apply this to practical problems/opportunities that we see at our place of work (passion), that this could lead to many benefits for all of us.

I see this project as varying in size for each participant. I myself am interested in the project as a whole (establishing an Action Research centre at the Mamelodi Campus that is able to do research on various focus areas (or practical problems) with the aim of producing research products that is relevant and useful to the participants of each of the research projects.) This I plan to document in the format of a PhD research report.

I see us starting with a core team, testing our wings in true AR style on a problem that has practical relevance for each of us – the efficient running of Itsoseng clinic. From this many other smaller projects can fit into the original problem (Improving Itsoseng clinic) or we could work on other projects concurrently. The specific problem that we tackle can be regarded as content and our progressing competence in applied research can be seen as the process.

A key aim for me is to record the work that we do and problems that we deal with everyday in such a format that we can publish this as legitimate research – whether in accredited journals or other archives, which keep records of meaningful events/actions/processes that took place.

I undertake to arrange the logistics/pragmatics of the meetings and to make available and distribute my documentation of the process.

### **Invitation:**

This document serves as my recollection of some of the main ideas expressed during the meeting held on 2004-05-26 at Sammy Marks museum. I invite you to add to this document:

- ideas that you remember that were expressed but which are not reflected (or not adequately reflected) in this document
- new ideas that came up for you while reading this document and which relates to the general topic

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<sup>1</sup> Originally this team member's name appeared in these records, but was changed to "member 6" to respect this member's wish to remain anonymous in this document.

- other crazy ideas which are not really related to the topic of the meeting but which you feel could add value to future meetings or reflection on this meeting
- process comments on the meeting – perhaps you noticed something in the way we communicated or dealt with contributions that influenced the discussion.

**Recollection of main ideas expressed during the meeting:**

I noted the following responses to my question “what is your most important or urgent concern regarding Itsoseng Clinic?”:

**Member 6:**

First of all I get defensive when you start asking about what is not working at the Clinic because Ilse and I have done everything that is necessary to ensure the efficient running of the clinic. However, our problem is Intern A<sup>2</sup>; she does not do what we tell her to do. We (Member 6 and Ilse) have a clear idea of what should be done to improve the functioning of Itsoseng, we communicate these ideas to Intern A and Intern B but I feel that Intern A just does not cooperate. A meeting is scheduled with Intern A and Intern B for 2004-05-27 to address this concern. This meeting should be more effective than previous ones since our authority as clinic managers has recently been communicated to the interns very clearly.

**Ilse:**

I don't think that the meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> will make any difference. I do not feel defensive when we talk about what is not working at the clinic. There are a lot of things not working and that is a great concern for me. The following are a few of the many areas I see that need improving:

- Case management and client distribution
- Marketing of Itsoseng
- Intern interactions with clients especially on the first contact
- Security (of valuable assets, e.g. psychometry)

I would like to reiterate what Member 6 has said; we have put all the procedures and systems in place, but the interns, especially Intern A, are just not following them.

**Terri:**

I want to know what is going on with the nursing station. There seem to be a lot of people milling around in the waiting area. Perhaps we need to speak to the nurse(s) and work out a better system around the waiting area.

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<sup>2</sup> Originally the names of the two interns appeared in these records. This was changed when these records were included in this document for the purpose of protecting their privacy.



I also have some ideas about the role that the BPsychs play in the clinic. They seemed to be often used by the masters' students as interpreters. My suggestion is that they do the first interview (intake) on their own and then team up with a masters' student to form a therapy team doing co-therapy for the remainder of the sessions.

**Linda:**

My concern is the client distribution and case management in the clinic. I am especially concerned about the practice of using the home language of the client as basis for referrals to students. I think this issue needs urgently to be addressed and perhaps me and Terri can have a combined discussion with the clinic managers, Interns, Masters' students and BPsychs students around this topic.

My other concern is the state of the second therapy room that is unusable as a therapy room at the moment.

**Gerhard:**

My concern is the Clinic-training interface. I have experienced some frustration around communication problems between various sectors within the clinic. This to me is a big concern. For example we have made decisions about the nature of the work the BPsychs are allowed to do in the clinic and have communicated this to the interns on several occasions but somehow the message does not have its intended effect. Students also ask us questions during the training or supervision sessions about what they can and cannot do, which puts us in a difficult position. We have however recently decided to just refer those questions back to the clinic managers.

I share Linda and Terri's concern about the M's using the BPsychs just as interpreters. I am also concerned about the *ethics* training of the BPsychs.

**Linda:**

Should we include the BPsych internship issues here? I ask because I am concerned about the workload and the intensity of the cases they have to deal with.

**Terri:**

That reminds me of research done at Vista, Port Elizabeth, which has to do with support structures for the BPsych students and the need of educating the institutions where they do their internships.

I have a wild idea to address some of the problems we experience with the clinic: how about we use the M's as nodal point since they seem to display a lot of creative energy. My assessment of the main problem at Itsoseng is a problem of *engagement*. The interns have a lot of passion and a lot to give – somehow this is just not being manifested.

**Gerhard:**

How about we involve the interns in the training program (in other words let them present some parts of the training) to create a sense of ownership?

We have spoken about the high volume of “learning problems” that present at Itsoseng. I have made contact with an educational psychologist at the main campus who is willing and interested to talk with us (al at Itsoseng) about their approach to learning problems and perhaps assist us in finding our way to work with similar problems.

**Linda:**

I think it is vital that we have accurate and updated stats on the client population and presenting problems at the clinic so that we can identify and address the various issues as they come up and we can also use these stats to motivate for support structures (admin personnel etc).

**Priorities that emerged during the conversation**

- Involve the masters’ students more
- Engage Intern A – increase a sense of ownership
- Address the issue of “Learning problems” Gerhard and Linda to organize a work session in combination with somebody from main campus educational psychology.

**Preferred outcomes**

1. Friday 28 May – deadline for clinic stats to be submitted by the interns to Member 6 and Ilse.
2. Friday 28 May – deadline for psychometry inventory to be submitted by the interns to Member 6 and Ilse.
3. Ideally a working relationship be fostered between clinic managers and interns as opposed to an adversarial relationship

**Agreed upon action before next R@I meeting**

**Gerhard and Ilse:**

Conversation with Intern A to engage her in the “learning problem” workshop

**Ilse:**

Changing the dynamic of the current relationship with the interns

**Date and venue of next R@I meeting**

**Wednesday 9 June 2004**

**09:00, Sammy Marks**

**End of this document**

## Record of 2<sup>nd</sup> R@I meeting held at Mamelodi Campus (Staff room) on 2004-06-09

### Present:

Terri, Gerhard, Ilse, Member 6, Willem

### My recollections of the nodal discussion points of the meeting:

During this meeting I kept record of the main ideas discussed without necessarily recording authorship of the ideas. The discussion flowed more freely between everybody and I did not focus so much on individual contributions from everybody. For that reason I do not present the ideas in this document as expressed by anybody specific, but in terms of a rough chronological flow of the conversation.

### **A shift in focus**

One of the first issues that were raised was the importance of making a clear distinction between a management focus and a research focus of the R@I meetings. Since we tackled the issue of improving the service delivery and efficient functioning of ITSOSSENG as a first action research project the danger existed of seeing these research meetings as an attempt to exercise control over the clinic management team (Member 6 and Ilse)<sup>3</sup>.

### **Clarification of my (Willem) role**

I see myself as the research facilitator or primary researcher. I have taken it upon myself to set up a research wing at Mamelodi campus (psychology sub department), with a core aim to make it easier to publish the work that we do anyway. I believe that action research is ideally suited to this purpose and that we are surrounded by relevant research questions that would be beneficial to find answers to.

### **What is Action Research?**

I undertake to give you a quick overview (20 minutes) of the main characteristics of Action Research during the next R@I meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July. I also include some light, yet exiting reading you can do (about how we can implement AR at ITSOSSENG) before that meeting if you are interested.

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<sup>3</sup> The efficient running of the ITSOSSENG clinic is a goal that I believe we all strive towards. What exactly it would look like if it runs efficiently and to capacity I think we can define more clearly. Perhaps we also need to rethink the "clinic management team" idea. Since this meeting I had discussions with most of you around this topic and I would like to suggest that we brain storm possible ways and structures that will meet everybody's needs around this issue.

## **Curriculum development**

The Vista psychology modules have just been through an extensive development process and a feedback loop still exists to evaluate the modules. An idea was mentioned that we should capitalize on this feedback loop while it still exists.<sup>4</sup>

## **Establishing an Archive**

To assist us in generating locally relevant research questions and to just do it, I (Willem) undertook to serve as a collection point and manager of a research contribution archive. This basically means that anybody who identified a research question can forward that to me and I will catalogue it. The idea being that we experience many great ideas but often do not record or follow them up and then they are lost. This archive is also for research reports that won't necessarily get published in accredited journals. The archive could furthermore also serve as a reference site for relevant literature that could be useful in making sense of our situation. If you read anything cool, send me the reference and a short description of what makes this reference cool. So – anything is acceptable and wanted, as long as it can be framed as remotely connected to research. This is an invitation to experiment with research, no matter how small or how crooked.<sup>5</sup>

## **Research questions and topics generated during this meeting**

1. The link between qualitative research methods and psychotherapy training (Exchange of metaphors, hermeneutic circle – move from local to general and back)
2. Class participation – what contributes to the status quo?
3. Class participation – what is the reality? What categories of explanation (eg white lecturer, black students) are used and by whom to explain the reality?
4. Assumption that the Mamelodi campus (students) are busy moving from an African mindset to a western mindset. Common frame of looking at people who are different from the norm.
5. “The oppressed majority” – a concept that is uniquely South African?
6. Transport of UP students between Mamelodi campus and Hatfield campus – what is the sentiment among students about this.
7. What do students on the Mamelodi campus feel and think about the vision and happenings around the incorporation?

## **Feedback regarding the meeting with Intern A**

Member 6 reported that the meeting went very well and Ilse mentioned that Intern A seemed a lot more open and relaxed. It was felt that Intern A's new position, as administrator, is possibly

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<sup>4</sup> Now that I am writing about the feedback loop, I must confess that I am not quite sure what the main point was. I remember however that Terri and Gerhard had strong views about it. If any of you could remember more about this issue, please drop me an email and I will include it in this document.

<sup>5</sup> Up to date I have received two contributions from Gerhard – way to go Dr G!

in part responsible for the shift. Certain relational dynamics between Intern A and Intern B was mentioned and I (Willem) started to draw an ecological map on the board to aid exploration of the effect this dynamic might have on various other role players in the clinic.

### Ecological map of primary staff and student relationships at ITSOSENG

I attach a copy of this map at the end of this document. We jokingly remarked that there seemed to be a number of woman dyads characterized by a less than comfortable relationship between them.

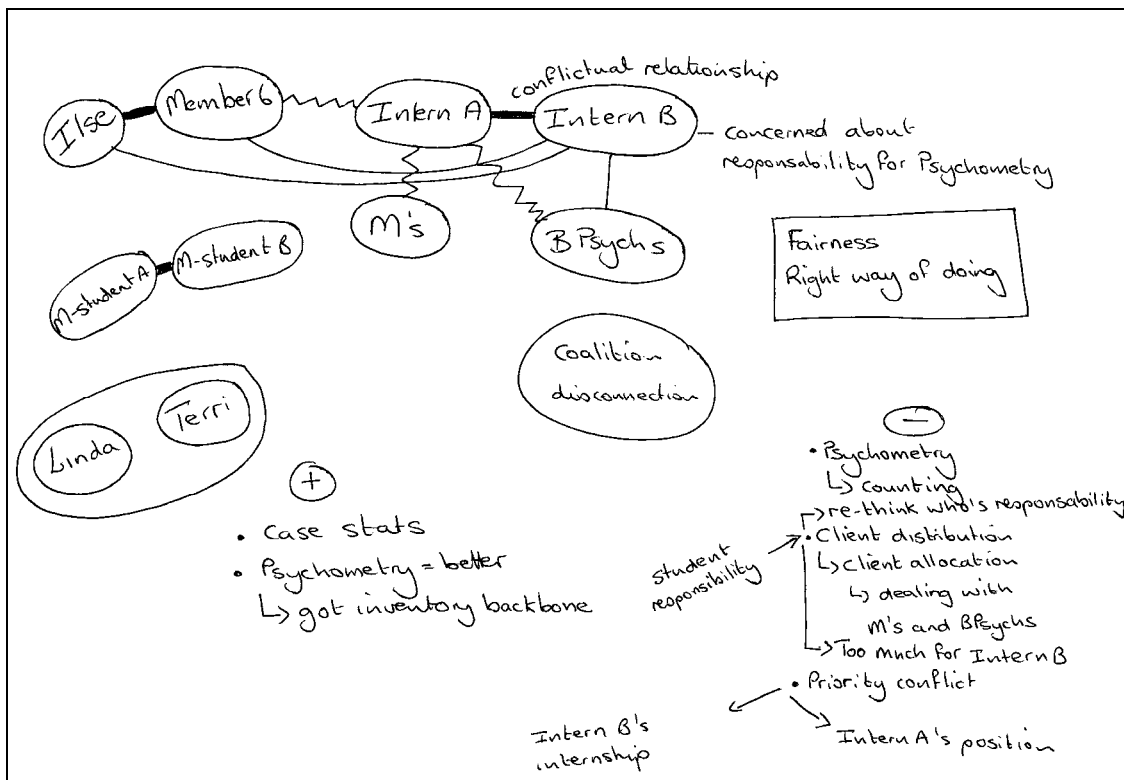
### Disagreement between Ilse and Member 6

A disagreement erupted between Member 6 and Ilse about what approach to take in dealing with the conflict between Intern A and Intern B. This interchange seemed fairly intense and it was suggested that Ilse and Member 6 find ways to resolve it outside of this meeting.

### Next meeting

16 July 2004

09:00 – 12:00 at Ilse's house



**End of this document**

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## Record of 3<sup>rd</sup> R@I meeting held at Ilse's House 2004-07-16

### Present:

Gerhard, Ilse, Linda, Member 6, Willem

### Authorship of this document

This again is my recollections aided by my notes taken and writings on a flipchart during this meeting. Comments, refutations, amendments and enhancements are always welcome to these records.

### A key issue

Gerhard specifically ask that we omit from these notes an issue that came up surrounding his keys. If any accidental reference to Gerhard's keys appears in the rest of this document please make an effort not to notice it.

### Agenda points

- 1. Orientation of ourselves in the research process as well as the context within which the research is taking place.**

### **Clinic management team**

It was decided that Member 6 and Ilse would draw up a job description of the clinic management team, in other words a list of areas that needs to be managed or controlled. Based on this list two portfolios would be decided on. Member 6 to serve as a clinic manager with a specific port folio which would make her in control of various areas that needs to be managed, the individual areas can be allocated to other staff members. The same counts for Ilse. In this regard an organogram based on area to manage would be useful. Member 6 and Ilse to have a conversation regarding the clinic management function as a whole and their respective roles in it.

### **Clinic receptionists**

Linda stated that money is available to appoint two maybe three student assistants ASAP to work as receptionists for ITSOSENG. Member 6 and Linda to follow this up.

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## Becoming more visible

It was decided that we are now no longer *in the process of establishing* a centre of excellence or *in the process of establishing* a research wing. We are doing it and living it and can make it known to the world. Possible forums to introduce R@I could be the following:

- CSA (Centre for the study of Aids)
- PSYSSA (Community psychology conversation on last day – join in)
- “Midrand community psychology centre” Linda to follow up somebody there.
- SOS children’s village
- Seminars at Psych dept main campus
- Agape: network and making ourselves known. Becoming a force to be reckoned.

## HIV focus of research

We should not ignore the importance of HIV related issues in any research we do. It was decided that the R@I would not exclusively do HIV research, and that we perhaps should revisit the idea that the M-dissertation topics be limited to HIV research. As it stand however, the status quo remains.

Linda reiterated the tremendous need for psychologists in SA to be aware of HIV related issues and gave the following examples to illustrate her point:

- The Phelophepa incident (where dentistry students who received needle stick injuries were sent home without any counseling support or debriefing)
- Research@Itsoseng = implications for getting big funding from NRF for BIG projects (5 year projects)
- SOS project
- Georgia State University Project

## 2. Quick presentation (20 min) of Action Research principles and how that relates to our context and vision.

I gave a quick presentation of my understanding of the main points of Action Research relevant to R@I. This turned out to be a lively and an interactive discussion, which I appreciated. I include the main points of the presentation here:

### Action Research

1. If you want to understand something, try and change it (Kurt Lewin).
2. AR is about serious (rigorous) problem solving (Improvement focus)
3. NB for whom knowledge is created : power-knowledge tension
4. The value of knowledge lies in its ability to effect change or to understand why change is impossible. (A discussion ensued at this point about the word “improvement” –

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- perhaps an effort to stay contextually relevant better describes the aim of knowledge in this regard. Gerhard quotes Hayley on this one if my memory serves me correctly.
5. Turning resources into assets (Linda objected to the use of words from the economic genre which is perhaps better suited to describe objects than human interactions.)
  6. AR = a form of self-administered in-house training. This raised the issues of “being the expert”, “expert knowledge” and “outside experts”. When we try and solve a problem that has very specific local relevance and we consult outsiders – then they act as consultants rather than outside experts.
  7. AR gives us an opportunity to integrate the 3 tasks of universities (Teaching, Research, Community service) in one go. Linda links the word “Praxis” to this idea.
  8. The Basic process of AR is as follows:
    - Voice a concern
    - Formulate a desirable alternative
    - Plan certain actions that will most likely effect change
    - Implement the actions
    - Observe (creative methods), Evaluate (implementation and the outcome) and Learn
    - Revisit original concern with additional info and go through the cycle again.
    - Once desirable alternative is reached or other unique outcome that you are satisfied with is attained – tell the story, report on the process and what according to you as responsible for the shifts – provide evidence for your claims.

## PAR (Participatory Action Research)

Linda offered to give a presentation on Participatory Action Research at the next R@I meeting.

## Organic evolution

The point was made that even though there is a lot of planning and monitoring of desired outcomes, any AR project evolves organically and that this process should be respected. Caution should be taken to be too rigidly invested in a very specific outcome.

## 3. Tackling ethics and issues of confidentiality.

I explained my need to circulate an ethics statement, which would explain what every participant’s rights are in this research project as well as stipulating how I intend to deal with issues of confidentiality and sensitive information. As soon as Gerhard in his role as my supervisor had a look at my proposed consent form, I will distribute and explain it.

## 4. Exploring and consolidation of what we have learnt so far (In general and about improving the service delivery of ITSOSENG).

This project was officially named the (F)RIC project: *Reinventing Itsoseeng Clinic* project.

The main aim of this project is to evaluate whether ITSOSENG is running to capacity or whether it is underutilized. We ask ourselves “what can be done to improve the functioning of all three legs of ITSOSENG ?):



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1. Teaching  
(eg live supervision, assessments better suited to content)
2. Research
  - ITSOSENG library of contextually relevant knowledge
  - Web site accessibility
  - Publishing of articles
3. Community involvement
  - Under capacity? – create mutually beneficial partnerships (eg SOS, Stanza, Mamelodi Day hospital, Kalafong, I Mil hospital, Dept of Health, Faculty of health sciences)
  - NB to define “community” – What or who can be regarded as the ITSOSENG community, or the community that ITSOSENG serve?

It was proposed that ITSOSENG = **the sub department in action**, with the understanding that the SUB DEPARTMENT = Staff, interns, students and all the support structures and infra structure. This will serve as a working definition.

We have also learnt that our **communication** between the various staff members and with various other role players in ITSOSENG could be improved and this have lead to some incidents of frustration. The R@I meetings seems to help in focusing our attention on certain issues of importance and following them up.

In looking at the decision making process, management function and executive function of ITSOSENG noticed an interesting phenomena:

Clinic management team:	CMT	= Member 6, Ilse
Clinic execution team:	CET	= Intern B, Intern A
MA trainers:	MAT	= Terri, Linda, Gerhard, Willem
Students:	STS	= MA, BPsychs

1. CMT communicates (x) to CET. CET behaves in a way that looks like (x) was sent, but not received. We started looking at how (x) is communicated on a content and process level and what indicators were used to ensure that message sent was message received.
2. CET complained to CMT that students receive different instructions from the trainers than what the CMT communicates to them. This was specifically about client allocation and psychometry lending practices. We discovered that some communication happened between trainers and students (relevant to the CMT and CET) without ever reaching the CMT or CET. Consequently it was proposed that we need to standardize procedures in the clinic and make sure that everybody has access to these procedures.
3. We also learnt that Member 6 and Ilse works better separately than as a team and consequently a redefinition of the CMT was requested with the understanding that

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neither Member 6 nor Ilse would like to leave their positions as part of the clinic management team.

## 5. Deciding on a course of action based on what we have learnt.

- Synchronization of procedures and info about procedures in the form of a procedure manual
- Redefinition of the CMT.

The following task list was set:

### Task list based on R@I meeting held at Ilse's House 2004-07-16

NR	TO DO	ACTION BY
1	Write down any strong feelings or reactions (excitement, disgust, sadness, resentment, joy, etc) you had to any thing said during the meeting and email it to Willem.	All
2	Please think a bit about the effects of your involvement in the R@I project had so far on you – what were the unexpected benefits and gains (if any) and what were the sacrifices (if any)	All
3	Job description of CMT (Clinic management team)	M & I to compile Everybody to submit suggestions
4	Identify a research project you want to drive / steer / take primary responsibility for. Name it and submit it to Willem via email.	All
5	R@I Broad casting board on first floor	Willem and whoever is interested
6	Search for a nice logo for R@I and a slogan, eg. <i>Turning resources into Assets</i> . I have included three slogans in this document's letterhead.	Anyone who is interested
7	R@I newsletter	Willem + anyone who is interested.
8	Procedure manual for clinic	Gerhard to compile, everybody to submit
9	Investigate the possibility of getting more rooms – a R@I room	Linda
10	Next meeting: Gerhard's house 6 August 09:00	All

**End of this document**



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## Record of the 4th R@I meeting held at Gerhard's House 2004-08-06

### Present:

Gerhard, Ilse, Linda, Member 6, Terri, Willem

### Authorship of this document

This again is my recollection of this meeting aided by my notes taken, writings on a flipchart and a tape recording. Comments, refutations, amendments and enhancements are always welcome to these records.

### Discussion points during the meeting

#### 1. Clinic management job description list

Ilse informed us that she took responsibility for the **test lab** and that Member 6 took responsibility for the **monthly clinic statistics**. They have started to sort out these two issues first as a matter of priority, but are still open to receive ideas of what else can be included on a "job description" of the clinic management team.

#### 2. Student assistants

Member 6 informed us that she is aware of 2 students who are really interested in the student assistant's positions and she required info regarding the procedure to get them instated. Linda replied that we must just get forms and then let the students fill them in. Linda agreed to acquire these forms.

#### 3. Sustaining the energy level of R@I

Gerhard cautions that R@I becomes an extra stressor and binds us rather than liberates us. He states that if we can hang on long enough to the research focus and plan our activities for next year around this idea it will be easier. He attributes the current difficulty in sustaining the energy due to two systems running concurrently – our usual way of doing things and on top of that working from a research focus.

#### 4. Three legged model

Linda talked about the 3-legged model (Teaching, research, community support) that was worked (see Appendix A) out a while ago. Terri mentioned that there is more info available than is represented on the page Linda handed out and that she would have a look on her computer.



## 5. Mentoring

Willem proposed an idea to integrate research and mentoring even more with the current academic offering and community support. This idea entails teaching fitting into research projects rather than teaching happening independent of research. Students do assignments (gather and present information) that is relevant to the research projects and in so doing are mentored in the research and community support process and have a chance to see psychology in action from the first year level. If we do this well enough we should be able to get NRF funding. Terri volunteered here horror experiences with the NRF form. We know someone who has seen the form and lived to tell the tale. NRF funding is project focused, not researcher focused and must contribute to staff developing and must also empower disadvantaged students.

## 6. Social research centre of excellence

If we become proficient at getting NRF funding we might even gradually become independent of UP and exist on our own.

## 7. Year planning for 2005

Gerhard suggest that we start as soon as possible to work out a plan for next year within the three-legged model. Terri suggested that we take what we do already and reframe it to fit within this conceptualization.

## 8. Research formats

Congratulations to Ilse and Terri for submitting an article on Ilse's research that was accepted. Willem added that we should not only think of research that can be published but also to generating local relevant knowledge that is useful to us and that from this bigger pool of knowledge we can publish. Terri reminds us that a pool already exists; she has a lot of data in her office that just needs to be analyzed. Gerhard added that he and Linda has also accumulated data as a result of their "Translators/interpreters/co-therapists" workshop – now we just need to work the info into article format. Linda suggests that we employ master students to work as research assistants to start writing up preliminary articles on the already available data.

## 9. 2005 teaching programme

We start with the UP BA programme from 1<sup>st</sup> year level next year. This will necessitate us to think hard about how we are going to divide our manpower.



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**10. PAR**

Linda gave a presentation of PAR, accompanied by an 8-page handout. The following points ensued from the discussion:

**11. Revisiting the task list set at Ilse's house**

- Procedure manual
- Other items on task list

**End of this document**



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## Record of the 5th R@I meeting held at Mamelodi in the tea room 2004-08-27

### **Present:**

Gerhard, Ilse, Linda, Member 6, Terri, Willem

### **Authorship of this document**

This again is my recollection of this meeting aided by my notes taken, writings on a flipchart and a tape recording. Comments, refutations, amendments and enhancements are always welcome to these records.

### **Discussion points during the meeting**

	<b>page</b>
1. Kiosk – keys on door + cupboard	1
2. Student assistants - Reception	1
3. R@I Letterhead	1
4. SOS project	1
5. An Itsoseng website	2
6. Clinic functioning	2
7. Energy levels	2
8. Presentation to the Dean	2
9. PSYSSA – community psychology conversation	2
10. Community psychology focus	2

#### **1. Kiosk – keys on door + cupboard**

#### **2. Student assistants - Reception**

This will start on Mondays and Tuesdays

#### **3. R@I Letterhead**

Formalize the letterhead so that the health clinic can also use it.

#### **4. SOS project**

Follow up and give feedback



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**5. An Itsoseng website**

This should be linked to other sites as well as having several pages regarding various aspects of Itsoseng

There should be member access for private documents.

**6. Clinic functioning**

Problem with continuity from one year to the next – a procedure manual will aid with this. This procedure manual should also specify what the stats form should look like as well as how to fill it in. It should also contain a copy of all the relevant forms to be filled in, eg consent forms, etc.

**7. Energy levels**

Energy levels depend on a closed system (?)

**8. Presentation to the Dean**

Linda will contact the Dean today to invite her to a presentation to the department about Itsoseng. It is vital that we prioritize what it is that we want to do. This presentation will force us to prioritize for ourselves.

**9. PSYSSA – community psychology conversation**

**10. Community psychology focus**

Look at compulsory readings

**End of this document**



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## Record of the 6th R@I meeting held in the Staff room, Mamelodi campus 2004-10-08

### Present:

Ilse, Linda, Member 6, Terri, Willem

### Discussion points / Agenda:

	<b>page</b>
1. Clinic functioning	1
2. Office space	2
3. Kitchen	3
4. Presentation to the Dean	3
5. Future of the Mamelodi campus meeting feedback	3
6. Video cameras and other equipment	4
7. Research opportunities at Phelophepa	5
8. ISTP2005	5
9. Next R@I meeting	5

### **Clinic functioning**

Ilse reports that no items were reported stolen since more rigorous security measures have been put in place. She reports that the interns are much more strict with the control of the Psychometry lab key and that seems to have made the vital difference. There seems to be overall happiness with the Psychometry lab at present. Ilse is frustrated with the seemingly cumbersome process of ordering new Psychometry and Linda offers assist Ilse the aim of identifying and clarifying:

- what forms to fill in
- who to submit the forms to,
- etc

Member 6 is busy designing a new stats form. She expressed her disdain at the current description of *presenting problems* on the stats forms (eg. Psychological problem.) All MA students are requested to redo their stats for the whole year and submit their completed stats forms by no later than 29 October. MA lecturers and supervisors are requested to assist with enforcing this decision. It is envisioned that the new stats form should enable us to use the info for meaningful and hopefully insightful research into the functioning and possibilities for improving service delivery at Itsoseng.





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Ilse received feedback from the interns that some students are not punctual in performing their clinic duties and seems to have a very relaxed attitude about their clinic duty. She suggests that the Supervisor on clinic duty go down at 13:00 and keep record of who is there and who isn't.

Linda indicated her disdain at the clinic's reception area that seems to be non-existent. She recalls an incident where she moved the furniture around herself to try and improve the reception area and noticing later that day that it has been moved back. An idea was raised that if somebody could serve as a full time receptionist that this might alleviate the problem.

Ilse informed us about the current practice in client distribution at Itsoseng which results in an uneven client distribution among the students. The interns do not manage this function and Ilse thinks that this is partly because Intern B is intimidated by the M's. Willem made a suggestion that we should do an orientation with the interns in the beginning of the year to give them clarity about their roles, responsibilities and mandates for control and management.

Ilse relayed salary related concern from Intern A and informs us that she refereed Intern A to Linda.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Linda & Ilse:** Identify and clarify procedure for ordering Psychometry

**Member 6:** New stats form designed and distributed to all M's and Bpsych students by 15 October 2004.

**Linda and Terri:** Follow up client distribution practice with the M's.

**Office space**

It was decided that now is the time to request more office space on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Education building. We proposed that Linda make this request via email asap to the acting campus principal via his personal assistant. We decided to ask for minimum 5 offices.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Linda:** write and send email requesting 5 offices on our current floor



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### **Kitchen**

Before Linda went on leave she requested alterations to our tea room's counter on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and the instillation of a code lock on the door facing the main passage. The response to this request was an installation of a code lock on the door of the Itsoseng kitchen, down stairs. Heheheh. Simple requests are'nt. Linda offered to follow this up and make a 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt to secure our tea room.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Linda:** Installation of code lock and alterations to tearoom counter.

### **Presentation to the Dean**

Terri expressed again the urgency with which we have to act in this matter, especially considering the uncertainty about the future of this campus and the continual decisions that get taken in ignorance of the potential that exist. By doing this presentation it is assumed that we will give some people with executive power some info to act on. This is our hope anyway, and perhaps the best we can do so far. It was agreed that by Wednesday 13 October 2004 we would send a one-page letter summarizing our main arguments and attractions to:

- Psychology Department, main campus (head of department)
- Head of the school of social sciences
- The dean of the faculty of humanities
- Two Vice chancellors of the University of Pretoria)

Attached to this one page letter we also send the Presentation that will be refined by Ilse and Linda.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Ilse & Linda:** Refine presentation

**Terri:** Write one page cover letter and send the whole package to our targets readers.

### **Future of the Mamelodi campus meeting feedback**

From all the feedback I (Willem) have heard of this meeting I get the impression that an overall vision for the Mamelodi campus is still in absentia. Much discussion ensued about the logistics of the present handling of exams, student intakes and module offerings. I also picked up a fear



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narrative around asking the wrong questions and Terri and Linda wondered whether we should warn the department on the main campus that the consequences of our inquiries might have unjustified repercussions for the executive committee of the psych department. It was decided that Linda and Terri would discuss their experience and expectations for retribution at the next executive meeting (12/10/2004).

**FOR ACTION:**

**Terri & Linda:** Contextualize at the next executive committee meeting possible future conversations from top management around our department's inquiries and requests at the meeting with the vice chancellor and one of the vice principals.

**Video cameras and other equipment**

Willem gave a short presentation of the results of his research regarding suitable video equipment for ITSOSENG. It was decided to acquire the following:

Item	Quantity	Estimated price
Panasonic GS11 Video camera	1	R3999-00
Sony HC30 Video camera	1	R5300-00
VCR (stereo)	1	R1199-00
VCR-DVD combo	1	R1799-00
Flash drives (128 Mb, R219-00 each)	6	R1374-00
Tripods (R220 each)	2	R440-00
Canon A400 digital camera	1	<b>R1399-00</b>
Mini dv tapes	10	<b>R390-00</b>
Quote from New World, 2004-10-11		R15900-00

Linda has already sent the secretary of the psychology department an email regarding the procedure to acquire these items. Linda indicated that she would follow this up with the secretary since we did not receive any response so far and would like to acquire these items before the end of October 2004. Willem offered to do the physical buying of the equipment as soon as we have a means to acquire them.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Linda:** find a way to get the money in our budget to New world

**Willem:** find a way to get the items from New World to ITSOSENG



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## Research opportunities at Phelophepa

Willem and Gerhard attended the Phelophepa meeting on 6 October 2004 at the Carlton centre. The dates that were allocated to us are as follows:

Week 1	4 students	25-29 April	Robertson
Week 2		02-06 May	Ashton
Week 3	4 students	09-13 May	Swellendam
Week 4		16-20 May	Oudsthoorn

During that meeting Willem and Gerhard realized that we are in an ideal position to do some community psychology research. The general idea is to prepare the students before hand to do research on the train and then write it up as an article when they return. This can be done as one of the module outcomes and they can perhaps co-author papers with us on the results of their research. This idea is still in its infancy, but it seemed during the R@I meeting that it created great excitement. Willem also mentioned an idea that was raised at the Phelophepa meeting by a lecturer from the University of Natal about Community psychology as:

*Western psychology inflicted upon disadvantaged communities (done by psychologists)*  
VS  
*Psychology by the community for the community (done by anyone)*

## ISTP2005

The International Society of Theoretical Psychology conference is scheduled for 20-24 June 2005 in Cape Town. We thought it a capital idea to each present a paper on our individual research activities at this conference and ideally speaking all the papers in the same larger time block (a symposium). Abstracts need to be submitted by 30 October 2004. We have scheduled a sub dept meeting on Wednesday 20 October 2004 at 09:00 in the staff room to share our individual abstracts with each other and discuss.

### **FOR ACTION:**

**All:** Write an abstract of no more than 200 words and bring to meeting on 20 October at 09:00 in staff room.

## Next R@I meeting

Wednesday 10 November 2004 at 09:00. Venue: Staff room / Fly Lounge.

**End of this document**



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**Record of the 7th R@I meeting held in the Staff room,  
Mamelodi campus 2004-11-10**

**Present:**

Ilse, Linda, Member 6, Terri, Willem, Gerhard

**Discussion points / Agenda:**

	<b>page</b>
1. Recap on previous minutes	1
2. Prof M	1
3. Clinic	2
4. SOS project	3
5. ISTP 2005	3
6. Video cameras and other equipment	3
7. Terri's research	3
8. Next R@I meeting	3

**Recap on previous minutes**

**Prof M**

Two meetings in future:

With Vice rectors – selling our vision of the campus

Faculty meeting 22 Nov for the department's vision

Linda: there seem to be a stalemate in terms of a date for the first meeting, Prof D's secretary cannot give us a date yet. Linda to follow this up.

Gerhard: We should push the "standards of excellence" idea:

Values

International opportunities

Competencies

Interdisciplinary involvement

Research

Itsoseng

    Research

    Clinic

We need to write a proposal based on the NRF idea of a centre of excellence focusing on:

- Indigenous knowledge systems
- Educational relevance



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Proposal content:

- Interdisciplinary cooperation
- Infra structure
- How UP Vision & Mission fits and can be manifested on Mamelodi campus
- Current and potential research
- Existing service delivery – clinic
- Unique focus of programmes on Mamelodi campus
  - Post graduate
  - Indigenous knowledge
  - Unique assessment methods
- NB!!! Pilot study for improving student support and academic support
  - How study guides are written
  - Various ways to support students in this context

Two proposals need to be written – one for the vice rectors and one for the faculty

Linda to search for a skeleton format.

Ilse: We should be able to create 7 page document and therefore will need a summary page on top which will probably be the only bit they will read.

## Clinic

What has been improved?

- Communication and relationships within the clinic
  - Evidence: stats forms are being filled in by Intern A and others
- Service delivery
  - Better service to clients
  - More accountability on all levels of the clinic
  - When problems come up – more aware of them
  - Clinic runs more ethically (Member 6: When something happens Intern A now writes incident reports)
  - Terri & Ilse: the communication between training and the clinic better, next year want to take it further. There should be less distance between the training and the interns
  - Gerhard: the disconnected complaint process have been changed
  - Linda: I receive a lot less problems regarding the clinic that I need to address – this used to happens lots
  - Ilse: Delineation of clinic areas is much clearer – in terms of which problems are dealt with by Ilse, Member 6 and Linda.



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- 
- One of the M-students from this year has been appointed as an intern for 2005 and there is general optimism about how her structured and diligent way of working could improve the clinic's functioning
  - We should publish this in the Journal of Psychology in Africa.

### **SOS project**

A draft memorandum of understanding has been sent, we are awaiting feedback from the research psychologist requesting the research. We have decided to start with the data collection early in 2005.

### **ISTP 2005**

Funding: Terri has exerted tremendous amounts of energy to accrue funds for us – no luck. Because the department lacks sufficient research output – there seems to be no money for us. Terri is willing to write a report and take it to Prof C if nothing happens to make funds accessible to us.

Linda urges us to register for ISTP.

### **Video cameras and other equipment**

One of the ladies from acquisition needs to get the asset numbers. We were successful in acquiring the two video cameras – yeay!

### **Terri's research**

Invitation to a discussion on indigenization on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2004 at 9am in the Big room. Bring cake and make it fun.

### **Next R@I meeting**

25 January 2005 at 09:00. Venue: Staff room

**End of this document**



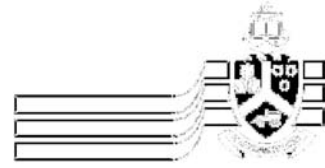
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## Record of the 8th R@I meeting held in the Restorative room, Itsoseng, Mamelodi campus 2005-01-25

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Gerhard**

<b><u>Discussion points / Agenda:</u></b>	<b>page</b>
1. Outstanding issues from 2004	1
2. Reflecting on meetings with Mamelodi campus principal Smith in 2004	1
3. Reflecting on the meeting with Prof D (Vice principal) in 2004	2
4. Reflecting on the Vice chancellors meeting with Prof D, Prof C, Prof M and the head of the psychology department in 2004	2
5. A separate identity for the Mamelodi campus?	4
6. Reflecting on the meeting with Prof M	5
7. Itsoseng as Psychology clinic of UP	6
8. Gerhard's meeting with Prof JJ	7
9. Gerhard's meeting with our Dean	8
10. Feedback from the Senate meetings	8
11. Meeting with Prof KM	9
12. People we need to have informal chats to about R@I	9
13. Teaching/Training function	10
14. Research Function	10
15. Community service	11
16. Reflections	11

### **Outstanding issues from 2004**

Various meetings were held in 2004 and the important points from these meetings were discussed and are mentioned below.

- The coffee during this meeting was outstanding.
- Office space and computers remains an issue of urgent attention – follow up with Linda.
- Website for Itsoseng – remains on agenda, still no clarity on appropriate action to take.

### **Reflecting on meetings with the Mamelodi campus principal in 2004**

- G: The Mamelodi campus principal is a career-orientated person, and sees Mamelodi as an important part of his career. He made the statement “I’m too young to have a failure on my CV”. ***The point being that when we speak to him, we must let him know how R@I can contribute to his personal success.*** (Ilse: I’m too young not to have a failure)





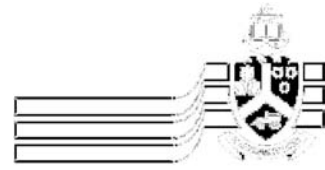
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- T: When we (Terri & Linda) originally spoke to him; he was enthusiastic, but not pro-active. We are the ones who need to make things happen.
  - T: the other impression I got was that he is very careful not to offend existing structures (the one time Terri asked for the mailing list of important people on the main campus she was reprimanded – he seems very careful about the chain of command and red tape structures)
  - M: My sister started studying yesterday and the Mamelodi campus principal was the only person who spoke to the first years that was entertaining – they enjoyed him thoroughly.

### **Reflecting on the meeting with Prof D in 2004**

- Prof D has bought into the idea.
- T: I have never seen him as enthusiastic.
- For some reason he cannot take it further – he did however arrange a meeting with the vice chancellors.

### **Reflecting on the Vice chancellors meeting with Prof D, Prof C, Prof M and Psych dept HOD in 2004**

- Advise us to keep the project focus small to start off with at least
- Prof C was critical, non-committal, cool. He did not say yes or no.
- Prof D said that if we put a proper proposal on the table he could approach Prof C for money. If we can keep Prof D excited he can probably exercise leverage over Prof C.
- Prof M: he is the joker in the pack. He can play any card. The classic double bind – “Who are you that you think as white people you can do something for the black community” but at the same he criticizes you for not doing enough.
- Psych dept HOD: We should spend more energy selling the R@I idea and vision to her – she was silent throughout the meeting and did not look happy. The politics are interesting: Psych dept HOD gets keen on ideas that come from higher levels but does not seem to play a role in getting higher levels excited about ideas coming from the bottom. So, we had to in a sense go over her head to convince the vice chancellors of our good idea so that they can instruct the faculty level officers on vision and direction. Psych dept HOD does not look down to find enthusiasm, she looks up. We originally planned to have a meeting on faculty level that includes Psych dept HOD but could get it off the ground since Berg and Muller could not commit to a date-time for that meeting. It seems very important that we cultivate the relationship with Psych dept HOD around this issue.
- Prof D:
  - Get other faculties (deans, specifically the dean of medicine and the dean of student affairs, etc) and departments on this campus on board.



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- 
- Contact Dr J (research director) who can explain to us how to get funding for this project.
  - Link with CSA (Centre for the study of Aids) – lost of money for research in HIV/Aids.
  - Prof D is available to facilitate these meetings.
  - Our proposal is too broad, get it more focused and launch a project. However, our purpose in our talks with all these people is not to get money for a research project, but to share our vision for the Mamelodi campus (especially in the apparent absence of anybody else doing it)
  - If we launch a project successfully, we can use that to convince people of the workability of our vision.

Gerhard: We must give them what they want to hear while meeting our own needs. It is a question of reframing: we must have a focused project that keeps them happy and that also meets the needs for establishing the campus as a worthwhile site. Perhaps we should establish this campus as a worthwhile site through launching and pulling off successful projects.

Willem: I am also just wondering why we need their support – why can't we just do what we are doing here.

Terri: Because of the dean. We are sitting with top management and then us and a layer in between (Dean and school head) that seems impenetrable. Initially we worked from the bottom up to no avail. However, if we can convince the top layer the middle layer will fall in.

Willem: I understand, but for what do we need the dean, why can't we just live our solipsistic existence on this campus. Why do we need any support from the top to do what we are doing here?

Ilse: We want to engage in something that is going to last and not just terminate after a year or two.

Terri: It is also about marketing and making visible what we do. We want to influence the decision makers that decide on the future of this campus. When we tried to send a proposal to the Dean we were very forcefully told that we are out of line, "who are you to talk about these things" – they were actively discouraging us from even thinking about a future for the Mamelodi campus.



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### **A separate identity for the Mamelodi campus?**

Member 6: Apparently only black students received letters inviting them to apply at the Mamelodi campus. There must be many white students who would easily study this year on the Mamelodi campus, if only they were aware that it was an option. Students with very high M counts (eg 21) were refused due to lack of space at the main campus and yet were not advised to try and register at the Mamelodi campus.

Terri: Linda and I went to the main campus for a meeting and we walked through the registration hall and I walked past a table with a map of the Mamelodi campus lying there and we chatted with him, but did not get the idea that he would recommend anybody to register at the Mamelodi campus.

Gerhard: We should have had a stall there: “Have you considered Mamelodi?”

Terri: Anyway, that is why we are talking to all these people.

Willem: I think I get it now.

Gerhard: **This is actually the whole drive with what we are busy with (R@I) - a quest for recognition, identity, relevance, for keeping something that is potentially very worthwhile for the community and hopefully in the end for the whole university.**

Ilse: I just still wonder whether we cannot sell the R@I initiative to one or two of the lecturers on the main campus – I know it is probably impossible because none of them are really interested or very busy – but if we could we say: “look we are working with the main campus, we don’t really have a separate identity.” I think that half of the time we are being blocked by the dean and Psych dept HOD because they feel we are separate from ‘them’, (they don’t regard us as part of their ‘us’.) **A separate identity is not necessarily all good.** Maybe we should have the next R@I meeting on the main campus. Then they have no excuse not to attend.

Gerhard: Maybe in La Pat? They’ve got a lovely Prego roll there.

Terri: **You see it is part of the bigger problem of people who don’t want the campus to have a viable identity – because that is why they get so upset if we talk about the campus as a “thing” – because “the campus” should not exist (as distinguishable from the university).**

Willem: We got an intuitive feeling from faculty level that the vision is to close down Mamelodi campus and we assumed that is filtering through from top management to the faculty level. However when we talked to Prof D, we find that top management seems to be very positive



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about the campus. Just for this reason alone – it was valuable to speak to top management – there does not appear to be a hidden agenda, from top management’s side at any rate.

Terri: Two facts are very important to this issue: (1) the deans and top management exist in a conflictual relationship regarding the issue of incorporation of Mamelodi campus (2) the government (education dept) have a conflictual relationship with top management (budget cuts) about representivity and there are people in top management who think that this conflict can be solved by the presence of the Mamelodi campus.

**FOR ACTION: A separate identity for the Mamelodi campus?**

**All**: Investigate the suitability of La Pat as next R@I meeting venue and sample the Prego rolls

**Reflecting on the meeting with Prof M**

- G: We need a strategy to market our ideas.
- T: Prof M said that he would set up a meeting with some of the other deans.<sup>6</sup>
- Tension between the local and the general with regards to training – what makes our training unique and to what extent is local knowledge transferable to other contexts (so that students who are trained here also can work in England).
- Synergies between this programme and the main campus programme –we mustn’t reinvent the wheel. By 2006 there must be one counselling training programme at Tuks.
- Identification of partners and who to speak to/market the Itsoseng vision.<sup>7</sup> Eg
  - CSA (Centre for the study of Aids)
  - Health Sciences
  - Natural Sciences (Aids research)
  - Deans
- What is very important is to find out how our research vision for Itsoseng and the Mamelodi campus fits in with the existing research plans of the different faculties. Dr J might be the appropriate person to contact in this regard.
- We have to write a proposal to convince the role players and the funders.
- We must be careful not to duplicate what is happening on the Hammanskraal campus – so we must visit the Hammanskraal campus. T: As far as I know, the Hammanskraal

<sup>6</sup> [R@I8, tape1of2,side 2, 098]

<sup>7</sup> [R@I8, tape1of2, side 2,198]



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campus is not used for teaching, community service or research, they use it to have bosberade (strategic planning meetings), and you can rent it if you need a lot of students to do a workshop – it is not functioning as a campus. G: I think we should go there to at least be able to say, this is how we are not duplicating what is happening there.

**FOR ACTION: Reflecting on the meeting with Prof M**

**Linda & Terri:** Raise the issue of integration of Counselling programme at next Executive committee meeting

**Willem & Gerhard:** Get hold of the research plans / strategies for the different faculties from Dr J.

**All:** Arrange an exciting visit to the Hammanskraal campus.

**Itsoseng as Psychology clinic of UP**

Itsoseng is now the official clinic of the Psychology Department of the University of Pretoria. Consequently the equipment and Psychometry from the child and adult guidance clinic can come to Mamelodi. There is talk that some of the clinical students will do some of their practical work at Itsoseng. G: We must not lose our broader vision of the R@I project here when students from the main campus come and work here. We understand the philosophy, but not everybody on the main campus do: *that the clinic is a research site, a service delivery or community service site and it is a training site*. So when we say that Itsoseng is now the Department's clinic, it should not only mean a site for practicals but for all three these functions. T: Linda has submitted a proposal(s) to the department about Itsoseng related to her directorship of the clinic. G: It is important to get hold of the proposals to Psych dept HOD about Itsoseng – nb documents explaining Itsoseng to UP.<sup>8</sup> T: It is likely that our vision for Itsoseng does not match the larger department's vision for/of Itsoseng. G: That is why we have to sell it to them.

<sup>8</sup> [R@I8, tape1of2,side 2, 168]



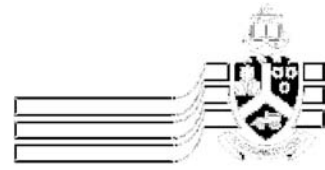
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**FOR ACTION: Itsoseng as Psychology clinic of UP**

**Ilse and Willem:** Make a plan to get Psychometry and equipment from Main campus to Itsoseng.

**Willem & Gerhard:** Get hold of the Itsoseng proposals submitted by Linda as part of the archive.

**Gerhard's meeting with Prof JJ**

- I went to him since it is known that he values scholarship and developing young academics and while I was there I told him what we do on our campus
- He seemed excited about ideas and suggested that he would be keen to attend a workshop between the major players to talk about how to establish this campus as a research site and he will also provides workshops for us. He would like to be part of the panel that brainstorms ideas for this campus in the workshop rather than facilitate this workshop. Prof D might be willing to facilitate this workshop for us.
- T: We must be very aware that Jonathan is not popular amongst everyone in top management – there is resistance against him. I also talked to MS and he is keen to be involved.
- Top management has supported our initiative in principle but they want now a concrete plan of how we intend to pull this stunt off – and to do this we need to include more people, more faculties – and this workshop could be just the means to achieve this end. The outcome of this workshop should be a strategic plan of “how” to establish Mamelodi campus as a valuable site for research, teaching and community service.

**FOR ACTION: Gerhard's meeting with Prof JJ**

**Willem & Gerhard:** Schedule a workshop on how to establish this campus as an important research site, approach and invite major role players and invite Prof D to facilitate this workshop. (Good marketing opportunity as well)

**All:** Get other academics in our building excited about our vision for this campus (Dan, Gilbert, Mishak)



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### Gerhard's meeting with our Dean

Gerhard has an appointment with the Dean to discuss why he was not promoted and this is an hour long appointment. It would appear that this is a clever scam to get an audience with the Dean so that Gerhard could infect her with our enthusiasm and wicked plans for the campus.

**FOR ACTION: Gerhard's meeting with our Dean (Prof Muller)**

**All:** Be impressed with Gerhard's cunning plan.

### Feedback from the Senate meetings

- The actual senate meeting: Our colleague from the sociology dept commented on the inferior programmes at Mamelodi. Terri defended our work and received support from Prof D and Callie and was thanked for her wise words.
- The senate committee for Mamelodi academic programmes: The sad fact is that the chairperson for this committee is a dud. So people have lengthy discussions about a subject, no decisions are made and then he says: "We will close this item now and your concerns are noted." (G: noted, printed, shredded). The Deans make out the majority of this meeting and the content is mostly administrative concerns (study material, exam dates, etc). One thing that we can use is that Prof **MK walked in at some point and said the campus is an opportunity for a pilot study for student support because the government is looking critically at the university with regards to the level of student support specifically for the black students** that is why they are willing the spend a lot of money on the development of study guides. And the idea then is that whatever is learnt here can be taken back and applied at the main campus.<sup>9</sup>

Gerhard: So, when we launch a project it must contain the idea of student support and that whatever comes from this project should be framed in terms of how the knowledge created here can benefit students in "similar situations" on the main campus.

Terri: Prof D says a lot of sensible things, but it is not followed up. At the start of the senate meeting a black academic raised the question of why the vision for the Mamelodi campus is not addressed, but nothing came from it. Gerhard stated that he would like to know who that academic is.

Willem: We do not concern ourselves with Onderstepoort or the Groenkloof campus, why should anybody on the main campus be interested in us?

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<sup>9</sup> [R@I8, tape2of2,side1, 000]



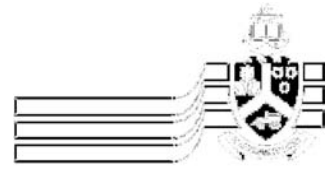
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Terri: The difference is that Mamelodi is a campus containing many faculties whereas O/poort and G/kloof each contain only one faculty and does not function as a campus.

Gerhard: Prof MK went to the G/kloof campus and shared his vision for UP with them and apparently Mamelodi does not really feature in there. I will try and get hold of the power point presentation from Jean-Marie.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Gerhard**: Get hold of the power point presentation of MK on the vision of UP

### **Meeting with Prof KM**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February I am meeting with Prof KM. He received the award of best performer at Tuks (university of Pretoria) in 2004 and has also received his NRF rating and this makes him a good person to know that can share with us who at tukkies (university of Pretoria) to approach for funds and sympathy and enthusiasm and who not. I will give feedback at next R@I meeting on this meeting.

Gerhard: It may be a good idea to find out how he relates to Prof JJ.

**FOR ACTION:**

**Willem**: Give feedback at next R@I meeting (2005/02/21)

### **People we need to have informal chats to about R@I**

Dispel ignorance, ignite the world and spread the gospel!

- Dr GB (Terri)
- DD (Gerhard)
- GT (Gerhard)
- KA (Terri will talk to him, G: maybe he can talk to the dean of sciences on our behalf)
- FS (Terri)
- The Dean of engineering (Perhaps write a letter, and if we get a workshop of the ground, invite the dean to send an observer/representative)
- The dean of medicine (Linda)
- Student services (Linda)
- The SRC
- Dr JH





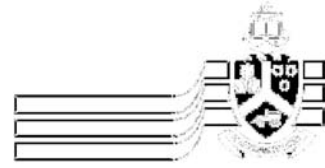
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- The CSA (centre for the study of Aids) (Willem)
- The marketing dept /corporate branding (Terri) – It would appear that marketing have the perception that Mamelodi is just for the students who could get in at the main campus. Consequently Mamelodi is only marketed in townships.
- The Dean of humanities (Gerhard)
- Law faculty ,IG (Terri)
- The other departments in our faculty – Sociology, History, English, African languages, Afrikaans, Political science, Industrial psychology.
- The Mamelodi campus principal – Gerhard: we now have a mandate from Prof D to speak to various people about R@I. We can go to The Mamelodi campus principal and say that we want to organise a campus meeting – Terri is unsure whether this is a good idea, since there was serious resistance from him in the past.<sup>10</sup>

Gerhard: we must not forget – how do we dovetail the R@I idea with existing research initiatives in each faculty – because we might find in discussions with these identified people that they are already involved in research projects that they are enthusiastic about (eg, the centre for gender studies, law).

### **FOR ACTION:**

**All:** have informal discussions about R@I with various people.

### **Teaching/Training function**

- MA practicals: students must work at Itsoseng 1 afternoon/week and somewhere else one afternoon/week
- An active dynamic network list/file<sup>11</sup> needs revisiting.
- Gerhard wants to write an article/book on the training philosophy at the Mamelodi campus – he will discuss with Linda and find a way.

### **Research Function**

NIH project: Psychosocial needs of children affected by AIDS in low-resource countries:

- Ilse to write email to M (coordinator of the project), informing her of her (and our) desire to be involved in a later stage of the process.

SOS project:

<sup>10</sup> [R@I8, tape2of2,side1, 355]

<sup>11</sup> [R@I8, tape2of2,side2, 470]



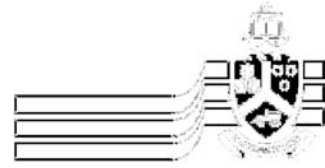
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- Willem & Gerhard is starting with the interviews on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January

ISTP 2005:

- All funding applications must go through Psych dept HOD's office in the form of a letter. She is busy designing a standard form for applying, but we can already inform her of our intention to apply for funding.

### **Community service**

Clinic functioning

### **Reflections**

Does a campus exist independent of the university – can a campus distinguish itself from the university by means of the distinction “us” and “them”

**End of this document**



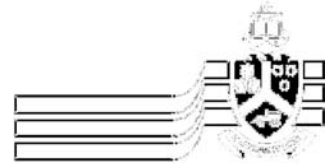
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## Record of the 9th R@I meeting held in the Tea room, Itsoseng, Mamelodi campus 2005-02-21

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Gerhard, Linda**

<b><u>Discussion points / Agenda:</u></b>	<b>page</b>
1. Security	1
2. Office space	2
3. R@I Website	3
4. Integration of UP MA counseling programs for 2006	3
5. Conversations with people who could be sympathetic to our cause	4
6. Feedback on current research projects	4
7. Salvaging material	5
8. Clinic functioning	5

### **Security**<sup>12</sup>

- Computers have been ransacked and some hard drives and memory modules were stolen.
- Linda: Plan – increase security (code locks for store rooms) and request for either laptops or removable hard drives.
- Gerhard: How about a safe in the storeroom where we can lock away our removable Hard drives at the end of each day.
- Terri: We have a safe room down stairs, but we need to secure the ceiling – once that is done it is a safe.
- Willem: One level of intervention is to increase security, but nothing is fail proof, the other level of intervention is to get clarity and commitment from the insurance agency as to what exactly the procedure is for getting operational as soon as possible.
- Terri: We need a meeting with all the role players – security, campus management and insurance agent(s) to get agreement on procedure for claims.

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<sup>12</sup> Tape 1 of 2, side1, 000-174



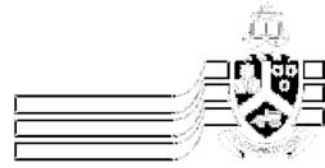
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### Office space <sup>13</sup>

- The campus principal's PA sent out an email saying that people who wanted offices must apply and Linda did apply – and received an acknowledgment that the application was received. In the mean time the campus principal indicated that two offices are available to us. He would also follow up why the dry walling has not been done in the counseling rooms down stairs. Campus to carry the cost of the dry walling (Acc to Linda).
- Various options were discussed in terms of how best to use our existing office/ counseling and training spaces, no conclusions were reached. We went to look at various open spaces in the geography side of the building and identified room 107 (and 207 & 208) as suitable to our purposes.
- Terri: the reception area contains a large amount of wasted space and suggested that we drywall certain sections and make a whole separate office space.
- Ilse: Tutors need office space too.
- Terri: we need a sign for Itsoseng again, as well as name board of staff members downstairs.
- Terri: A crazy idea just popped into my head <sup>14</sup> - why don't we move the Photostat machine/printer into the tea room? This is a communal room – we must just secure the room and then we win a whole other office.

### **FOR ACTION:**

**Linda** to speak to campus principal re

- securing room 107 as well as
- organizing a meeting to speak about space in general, dry walling
- date that we can occupy room 207 & 208
- security issues

**Linda** to follow up

- Name sign for the clinic, board with names of staff in building
- Converting tea room into a combined printing tea room – have to organize network and telephone points.

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<sup>13</sup> Tape 1of 2, side1, 310-574

<sup>14</sup> Tape 1of 2, side1, 519



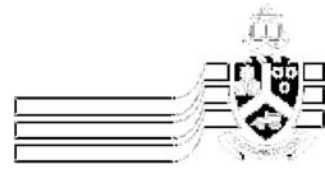
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### R@I Website <sup>15</sup>

- **Member 6:** Dr M is currently managing the UP Psych dept website and is possible resource person that could help us. I would really like to become our expert in this area and can we please look into how much it will cost to go on a course.
- **Linda:** We should get many links to the R@I website.
- **Gerhard:** What we need is an action plan based on information.
- **Willem:** I don't want Member 6's going on a website course to be the deciding factor whether the R@I website come into being or not.
- **Gerhard:** Member 6 must still go on the course because the website will need to be maintained, but we need a shorter way to get the website up and running.
- **Ilse:** What about Terri's boys to assist us.
- **Gerhard:** Have a look at [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) which might offer an option or two. Also look at the NRF website which has a free do it yourself HTML writing course on their site.

### FOR ACTION:

- **Member 6** to prepare a basic R@I page and to give this to Terri who would then pass this on to her sons to put that page onto a website format document.
- Alternatively **Member 6** to use a website writing program she has at home to prepare a draft R@I website for us.

### Integration of UP MA counseling programs for 2006 <sup>16</sup>

- Terri & Linda: was discussed at the Executive committee and a workshop was scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2005.
- Anyone is welcome to send ideas and proposals in writing with Terri and Linda to this workshop.
- Bureaucratic inertia has the implication for us that to even just to exist (as separate from the main campus) we have to go against the status quo, against the grain.

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<sup>15</sup> Tape 1of 2, side1, 574 – side 2, 058

<sup>16</sup> Tape 1of 2, side2, 061- 130



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### Conversations with people who could be sympathetic to our cause <sup>17</sup>

- **Terri:** Did speak very briefly and informally to Dr K who delivered a proposal to Mamelodi Senate committee regarding a unique statistic program that he would like to start facilitating on the Mamelodi campus – so he is also planning new things for the campus. In principal he agreed with new developments on this campus but was not particularly interested in Itsoseng and could not see how the science faculty could benefit from it. Prof D also indicated that he wants to develop a large institutional process for developing a new vision for this campus – involving staff on this campus and the main campus, students and the community.
- **Gerhard:** Had a meeting with the Dean on Friday and it was a very disappointing meeting, both in terms of feedback on my promotion as well as a conversation on R@I. Had great difficulty engaging with her. She listened very politely and disinterested. Interpersonally she is just not present. Unfortunately no support from her.
- **Linda:** I am seeing our head of the department this week regarding the clinic proposal so that we can get Itsoseng to be independent from the Psychology department and functions as a UP clinic. Linda also indicated that she is willing to talk to Dr J. Gerhard expressed an interest in being present at this meeting.
- **Gerhard:** I think we should give Prof D a quick update (like a progress report) every now and then on what we are doing and what we are planning<sup>18</sup>

### Feedback on current research projects <sup>19</sup>

- SOS Educare project: Last Thursday & Friday (17&18 Feb 2005) Willem and Gerhard conducted focus groups with the 36 Day care mothers. A critical question that came up for us during the process was “how is what we do action research – what elements are present to make this action research?” “Do we structure our questions in the later focus groups based on our conversations in the first couple of focus groups?” – “not sure whether the repetition of information is due to the specific spaces the facilitators open up through the questions or whether there is a sameness inherent in the respondents experience.”
- SLK 391 project: Ilse: 3<sup>rd</sup> year students have to volunteer as a receptionist and to observe over a couple of months what sort of clients come in and decide for themselves what type of problem is prevalent at Itsoseng and then design an intervention according to that.

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<sup>17</sup> Tape 1of 2, side2, 137- 300

<sup>18</sup> Tape 1of 2, side2, 470

<sup>19</sup> Tape 1of 2, side2, 301



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### Salvaging material <sup>20</sup>

- **Linda & Terri:** If anyone has anything on their computers that looks remotely connected to me, please save it because one day I might have a computer again and will then appreciate to have some of the stuff I have sent you back.

### Clinic functioning <sup>21</sup>

- Test lab inventory:
  - The two interns C & J has been given time until the end of Feb 2005 to update the test lab inventory (and hand in to Ilse) and after that the lending procedure as in the past will take effect.
- Stats:
  - First handing in date is the first week of March 2005.
  - 2004 Summary of stats + Feb 2005 stats to be brought to the next R@I meeting to investigate trends. <sup>22</sup>
- Interns:
  - Both now work 2 mornings and 1 afternoon a week outside work and supervision. It is set up in such a way that at least one intern is always in the clinic. It was decided that the interns should attend a part of the sub dept meeting to have a space to give us some feedback.
- MA's:
  - Member 6 reports that the MA students have some concerns about the sufficiency of amount of clients in the face of low client inflow as well as the presence of the Tukkies<sup>23</sup> students.
- Creative space solutions:
  - When we have more clients than counselling rooms and therapists we will have to think of creative solutions in terms of type of sessions
  - It will also be worthwhile to consider our current arrangement in terms of counselling rooms available and optimize that.
- Marketing:<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tape 1of 2, side2, 495

<sup>21</sup> Tape 1of 2, side2, 577

<sup>22</sup> Tape 2of 2, side1, 000

<sup>23</sup> Colloquial name for the University of Pretoria, from the original name Transvaal University College (TUC)

<sup>24</sup> Tape 2of 2, side1, 100 -201



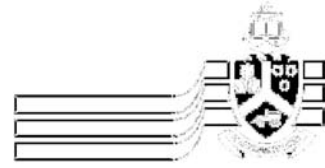
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- M's referral list exercise was useful
  - K (Bpsych student) to drive the marketing initiative – he should get an on campus marketing port folio. Member 6 saw enthusiasm from A (Masters student) and she suggested that he be involved in the marketing since it would suit his personality.
  - Students on campus should be targeted, because we don't get a lot of students on this campus that make use of the facility
  - Staff on the campus probably do not know that they can refer students to Itsoseng
  - SRC is a valuable resource – if they believe that Itsoseng could benefit students, word might get around
  - Format of stat forms:
    - Stats forms to be changed to reflect the possibility to have group sessions – if this option appears on the form, perhaps students will consider trying this format of session out.

### **FOR ACTION:**

- Ilse: Follow up Test lab inventory report at next R@I meeting
- Member 6: Bring summary of 2004 stats + Feb 2005 stats to next R@I meeting
- Willem: Talk to K about the marketing port folio

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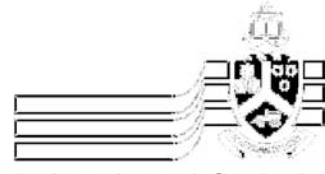
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**Record of the 10th R@I meeting held in the staff room,  
Mamelodi campus  
2005-04-25**

**Present: Terri, Willem, Linda, Gerhard, Ilse**

**Discussion points / Agenda:**

**page:**

1. Action research not necessarily community sensitive	1
2. MA brochure	1
3. Unisa brochure	2
4. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year MA's feedback	2
5. AZ's proposal	3
6. Clinic duties	3
7. Indigenisation of knowledge	3
8. Reception duty	3
9. Follow up on plans made in previous meetings	3
10. ISTP 2005	3
11. Librabry assistance	3

(At the beginning of this meeting I asked for items to put on the Agenda by asking for anything that is either connected to *research* or *Itsoseng*)

**Action research not necessarily community sensitive**

It is important not to confuse action research with research that is necessarily in service of the down-trodden or automatically relevant to surrounding communities. Action research is also used in high power executive companies to increase their earnings. It has a strong educational and industrial base. Action research does not come ready made with values – it can easily be co-opted into mainstream traditional research.

**MA brochure**

Adjustments to the current MA brochure – we need to give LH (coordinator of the masters programme in counselling psychology on the Hatfield campus of the university of Pretoria) suggestions as to how we want to change this based on the decisions we took in the meeting between the two campuses' counselling training teams. New brochure to reflect:

- Phelophepa Health train
- More info regarding bursaries available, eg closing dates and size of bursaries



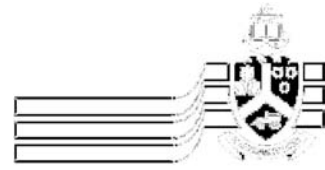
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- Practicals at Itsoseng
  - Programme offered on the Mamelodi campus
  - Language issue needs to be addressed – English only or English and Afrikaans – perhaps not necessarily addressed in the brochure.
  - The last paragraph of the introduction needs to be changed to reflect that students need to sit for the Board exam before registering as psychologists
  - Several adjustments were made to the wording of the brochure to make sure students know exactly what they are letting themselves in for should they be accepted on the programme

In general the brochure looks fine.

### **Unisa brochure**

Unisa has an institute for social and health sciences and their mission interested Terri, it reads:

#### *Mission*

To function as an internationally and locally recognized African research centre of excellence within the social and health sciences.

Specific focus areas:

- Injury prevention
- Safety promotion
- Encouraging methodological, theoretical, policy and intervention expertise.

*This really is a brochure that we can learn from. If they can do it, why can't we do it. Their emphasis is on research, but they also do intervention and teaching! Exactly what we are doing.*

*NB: we need to send an envoy to make contact with this centre.*

*We can form an alliance with them and form a different focus area and work in partnership with them.*

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Year MA's feedback**

Terri reminded everybody formally that we should all get feedback from MA2's during our thesis supervision with them and remind them that the next feedback meeting is on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2005.



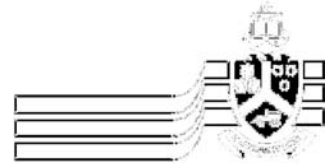
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### **AZ's proposal**

Terri needs feedback on Az's proposal asap.

### **Clinic duties**

Next block started this week. Please make sure that you know when you are doing clinic duties this block.

### **Indigenisation of knowledge**

Linda and Gerhard to get themselves involved

### **Reception duty**

In an attempt to integrate our teaching and clinic work, please try and frame your undergraduate assignments in such a way that the students can get involved in Itsoseng clinic. Ilse has succeeded in doing this by giving her PSY 391 third year students an assignment that requires of them to do a certain amount of reception duty hours and submit a report of their observations while doing reception duty. Well done Ilse. You go girl!

### **Follow up on plans made in previous meetings**

#### **ISTP 2005**

#### **Library assistance**

L V is the Humanities' dedicated research assistant in the library on the main campus. She is an incredible resource that could become an asset to us if we make use of her services. She is very knowledgeable regarding electronic resources and other material useful in literature studies.

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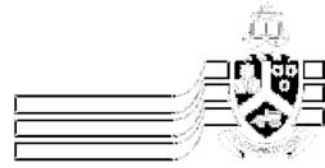
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**Record of the 11th R@I meeting held in the tea room, Mamelodi  
campus  
2005-05-23**

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Linda, Gerhard**

**Looking back over the first 10 meetings**

Willem's opening address of the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting:

When I looked back at the first 10 meetings we had I saw that initially there was a lot of enthusiasm and optimism from my and your side to see if we can integrate teaching and research more on this campus and also that we are busy with innovative teaching anyway we might as well write it up as research. From then from where we are now we spent a lot of time in the meetings not really on research or teaching innovation or community engagement. Instead our focus evolved naturally out of those original commitments because we asked ourselves in the first meeting what is our most pressing concern and that was that the clinic was not functioning as well as we thought back then it could. We spent a significant amount of time trying to improve the clinic. During the course of 2004 we also felt that the campus was under threat from being closed down and we also focused on what we could do to save the campus so that we could continue what we are doing. We took on an enormous project to sell a vision for this campus to top management of Tukkies (University of Pretoria). We are still busy with that by arranging conversations and presentations to people in power who have influence over what happens to this campus. So the focus on ourselves as researchers and how we can provide support to each other to have a higher research output and get involved in projects that won't necessarily take up more of our time – that focus have been lost. We also focused on quite a lot of issues that could be dealt with in sub-departmental meetings (security, office space, etc). So the issues around action research, peer support and integration of teaching and research takes up very little space on the minutes.



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This morning I would like check with you to what extend you also feel a need for refocusing the R@I meetings or do you feel that the way it evolves is fine.

Terri:

I agree with your perceptions, but you did not mention ISTP – we are all preparing for that and that sort of covers the areas that you mentioned were lacking.

Linda:

Yes, maybe we would have focused on something else (research related project) if ISTP had not come up.

Gerhard:

Having said all that, maybe we should look at ISTP and see how that fits into the original plan. Maybe we should say how the ISTP papers fit into the R@I idea. If we make that link explicit, we might find that we have done more than you think we have done.

Terri:

Doing that would also be useful for our R@I presentation next week at the department's *Research day* (30 May 2005). We have to report on the research at Itsoseng initiative (what it is and what its purposes are) and then show what work we are doing in order to show how our work slots into that.

Willem:

If the topics of our conversation during R@I meetings are more general peer support and not so focused on specific logistic support then our meetings might be more accessible to other members of the department to join.

I'm not saying we have done anything wrong. But when I look at the evolutionary process it looks a bit removed from the original idea, which is still a powerful idea for me.

Linda:

One of the difficulties that we face is trying to keep those three branches integrated given that the pattern here is that really they are three very separate activities (research, teaching and community engagement) – so we get pulled into the separate branches and it is then difficult to bring them back into the others.



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Terri:

The point is that the culture on the main campus is that these three activities or branches are separate and we have been drawn into that, because we had programs that were much more integrated with the other two and those programs were just thrown out and replaced by programs we did not have a say in and that had not been integrated.

Linda:

But, a ray of hope is that through the semesterisation process that we are intimately involved in is that we could put a proposal on the table that brings back the vista modules.

- The point is that the vista modules are seen as of equal value in this semesterisation process and it makes it possible to again link the teaching curriculum to the community and research legs.

Ilse:

Just to respond to what you said at the beginning of this meeting; for me it was very useful to use ten of the meetings to get the clinic back on track because that opens up a lot of research opportunities – we needed to sort out a lot of things before the research data could become available – so I don't think al was lost, I think we have got to a space now where a space is created where we can use what we did to get research products out of it. It has helped me also to focus my ideas a lot more on how to get going with research.

Willem:

One of the things that I fantasized about was that we would think of ourselves more as researchers than we did before the R@I initiative. That by engaging with research hands-on we would become comfortable with our identity as researchers. I find that the research identities of academic staff are very underdeveloped. The teaching side is much more developed and so also our therapist identities for those of us doing therapy.

Linda:

J S (professor from the psychology department, Hatfield campus) confirmed a move in the department towards becoming research focused and less teaching focused. We should not worry about losing students during the semesterisation process.

- It becomes a priority to develop a research identity – and working through the obstacles towards it. How to be a researcher and stay sane.

Willem:



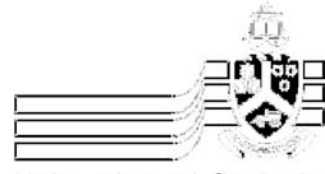
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Some wild ideas about the integration of research teaching and community engagement:

1. How we define these three terms is important.
2. If we define **teaching** as imparting knowledge or making available to a group of people a specific set of knowledge then to integrate research and teaching would be to make our findings available to a group of students we feel should get access to these findings – so research informs our teaching. Teaching brings us into contact with a subset of the immediate community as well as the market needs and should inform our research focus.
3. **Community engagement** could imply a charity like engagement with a group of people we envision to be less than us in some ways and our engagement with them makes them more. Alternatively, it could also be conceived as engaging with a group of people we perceive to be more than us, so that we seek out people we anticipate to benefit from. A third option is to form a partnership with a community of people and that we define and create the partnership in such a way that we derive mutual benefit. This community is invoked around an opportunity for mutual benefit and does not exist independently from “the presenting problem”.
4. What counts as **research** for us. Is it only research if the results or findings are captured in a research product format (eg article) that is peer reviewed and accepted by an accredited journal? Or can the knowledge that we generate (and have generated) in our own archives also be considered as research.

Gerhard: The only research that counts is research with money attached to it – because money does not talk – it swears.

Willem: I sense a split in myself: on the one hand a desire to increase my research output almost at any expense and on the other hand a desire to do meaningful work (work that I believe in and regard as ethical) whether it gets published or not.

Gerhard: My sense is that there has been a lot of ripening of the fruit during the past year, the fruits are not quite ready for the plucking, but I think that there is much more on the table and under table and something can be done with it. I can already think of about six things that I can possibly write articles on. For example the SOS project – there is at least two articles in there that Willem and I can write about. Last year – conceptually at least the idea of publishing was much further in my mind than it is now.



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- The SOS project came as a direct result of establishing R@I. Gerhard met KM at some research day and mentioned the R@I initiative to him to which KM responded with a proposal that we do a small research project for them. We then met with KM and D (social worker), got a sense of their need, wrote a proposal which were accepted, conducted the research, wrote a budget or invoice and got paid for a job well done. All this was possible because we had established research identities for ourselves and engaged from that position.

Gerhard: It is almost as if my mind has been slowly populated with ideas for research and now I can start narrowing them down. Before the R@I project I could not narrow things down because there wasn't a critical mass from which I could draw. I always have vague ideas about what to write, but now there is a context into which these vague ideas can grow and develop.

Terri: We mustn't forget the rich source of completed dissertations for article writing. If we are desperate for building up publications – that is one way of doing it. Even if the student does not publish on their own, we can still publish on the findings. I just never have the time to follow that up.

Linda: Time is an issue

Willem: If we can develop a format or blueprint that while the student is waiting for the results, they reduce their dissertation manuscript into this blueprint article format, it should not take that much time from us. At present we are not in this routine, but it sounds like a very good routine to get into.

Gerhard: It becomes important now to ask how has what we have been doing for the past 10 meetings been action research? And this ties in with my idea of operationalising the ideas rather than just talking about them. And on the research day we should operationalise ideas rather than just dreaming about them. We should also remember that AR is not a very familiar paradigm on the main campus, we might get questions like “why is this research? – why do you call it research?” Also just because we work in a broader framework of AR it does not mean that every research project within R@I should be an action research one.

Terri: Yes, it is important to differentiate between two levels. The one is that R@I is an action research project with the aim of stimulating various research initiatives and activities etc, and that those research activities fall on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level.





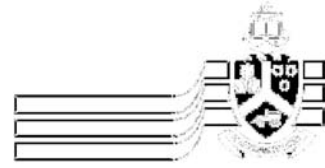
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## Indigenous psychology symposium at Mamelodi campus 3 June 2005

Decision to send a broad invitation to other staff members on the campus as well as main campus psych dept members. We are going to set it up sitting under the tree.

## Departmental Research Day 30 May

Terri will act as the chair of the meeting. For our R@I spot on the programme we have 20 minutes to discuss:

- Goals
- Funding
- Project life
- Completed activities
- Current activities
- Future activities
- Opportunities
- Challenges

We can also differentiate between research done on the clinic and research done in the clinic. The Research day's presentation is attached to this document.

## Definition of Itsoseng "Clinic"

This word clinic is somewhat confusing. We have a clinic that has certain goals and functions. We have teaching activities – some of which are not linked in any way to the clinic and we have a community project that fits into the broader clinic function. More info available on the tape. It would be NB to get other stakeholder's perceptions of what "the clinic" means to them and where they see the boundaries. There seems to be different definitions of the Clinic at different times. There are different activities that counts as various different ritual enactments of the different *ideas* of "clinic".

## Defining 'community' in community engagement

An Ecosystemic constitution and defining of community. One should make it as wide as possible, e.g.

- The geographical community around the campus
- The people who come to the campus from all over the world
- The places where interns and students go out to work at as part of their practicals



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- The main campus
  - Any possible stakeholder that feeds information into the system (and out of the system)

Community therefore is not a word describing a homogenous, geographically bounded group of people that we do a project on, but rather a word for everybody we engage with from whom we derive value and perhaps and hopefully our contact is also beneficial to them. This begs the question how teaching differs from community engagement or can teaching be done in such a way or looked at in such a way that it can be regarded as community engagement. What makes something teaching, research and community engagement. Can they not overlap and is it useful to distinguish so clearly between them.

Events do not have an essential nature that can be classified into either teaching, research or community engagement, rather each event can be described from either a teaching angle, research angle or community engagement angle. Our language makes it so. Ad hoc communities form around a research question – question determined systems (a-la problem determined systems, Goolishian & Anderson). The community dissolves again after completion of the project.

Is the university embedded in a larger community or does it grow from within a community – is it the fruit on a tree or the carving on the tree? (See Alan Watts; Creative meditations – an apple tree applying an apple)

One of the meta purposes of the R@I initiative is to develop a specific valued base research approach where relevance is one of the key values – local relevant knowledge.

When we put theory into action we also operationalise criticisms against traditional research.

A renewed need to have a website on which we can publish some of this morning's discussion's main points.

**Next meeting**

2005-11-29

**End of this document**



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## Record of the 12th R@I meeting held at Café 41 in Arcadia 2005-09-19

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Gerhard, Linda**

<b><u>Discussion points / Agenda:</u></b>	<b><u>page:</u></b>
1. Terri's medium term vision for the department	1
2. R@I legitimacy and track record	1
3. ISTP2005 / Publishing research	2
4. R@I and Willem's PhD	2
5. Authorship of Willem's PhD	4
6. R@I Website	5
7. Work allocation and research	5
8. HIV research focus	6
9. The way forward for 2006	6

### **Terri's medium term vision for the department**

- We have an honours class consisting of 85 people, who are academically very strong and very frustrated that they can do very little with their qualification.
- We also have a lack of **Masters-by-dissertation** students (lost of Masters course work students)
- We also have a lack of staff in the dept.
- Now if we put these 3 ingredients together we can do the following:
  - Create posts for research fellows/junior lecturers and they slot into research projects and do Masters' dissertations within a focus area run by us – which could become part of Research@Itsoseng.
  - We employ them - so they can also do some of the teaching
- In this way we address the lack of staff, lack of Masters' by dissertation, increase research output and create jobs for this huge pool of honours graduates.
- We will need a rated researcher in order to get NRF subsidy and this person could coordinate this staff contingent.

### **R@I legitimacy and track record**

- We have great dreams and visions, but to sell these we need to show that we are able to produce. We should work with what we have done and publish that asap and THEN on the basis of that take on bigger projects. We will be much more convincing that way.



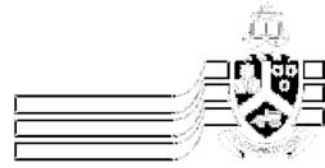
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### **ISTP2005 / Publishing research**

- In order for us to publish our work we need motivation. Each of us invest R100-00 in the person who first get his ISTP2005 paper published in an accredited publication. Everybody agreed to this!
- We are not sure which journals we should submit our articles to – what are the journals we could choose from?
- Prof JJ insists that academics should know the top 5 journals in the world / SA in your field of expertise.

**TASK:** For next R@I meeting: bring names of 5 articles in your field of study – a journal that would most likely be interested in your research topic.

- We must still start a journal for rejected articles (Gerhard). Yes! And get it accredited (Linda).
- M-students – an under-utilized source of article co-writers: we should request each m-student we supervise to also submit a draft article. We do an enormous amount of work in thesis supervision – we should get accredited publications out of it.
- Linda – there are also a lot of potential articles in the information we received from the BPsych students working at various placements. (eg, Baviaanspoort [Linda]).
- The idea is that the lecturer gets the articles publish ready and then take second authorship.
- MM (BPsych student) is very keen to get involved in any research assistant capacity. Would like to do something more stimulating than just photostats.
- Gerhard shared with us an opportunity he has (with a professor of Afrikaans literature at the university of Johannesburg, Prof WB) to do some research on creative writing as therapeutic process and how to contain such a process.
- Proff WB said something to the effect of :”...in my first twenty papers I argued this line of thinking....” – making it sound as if article writing is just a run of the mill activity. We seem to have a mental block against article writing. And this we need to attack.
- There is a lot to be said for disciplined writing – making time on a daily basis to write something, because article writing seems always to be the last thing we have time for – and that is why it never happens.

### **R@I and Willem’s PhD**

Willem: It might be useful to discuss how what we are doing during the R@I meetings fits into my PhD process.



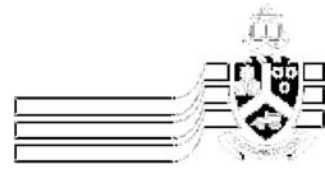
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Gerhard: how about giving us a very short overview again of the AR process and orientate us where we fit into an action–reflection cycle.

- The original idea: To create a regular event-shape to link the need we all expressed to publish more and our frustration with Itsoseng clinic. We had / have very little time to do our teaching, improve the functioning of the clinic and to publish. I thought that we could use the meetings to make our life easier, more meaningful and then publish on the process and the effects.
- A linear trail of knowledge creation in each successive meeting not very visible from the surface reading of the minutes – poses some question of whether we are going about our action research project in the proper way.
- Gerhard: “Is the research question posed in May 2004 still appropriate in September 2005? Or has there been a shift?” “Is the development of the Itsoseng clinic a sustainable idea in the light of recent political developments and uncertainties at UP, Mamelodi campus?”
- Terri: “There is another outcome of this R@I project that we should not forget – when we put together our proposal for the Mamelodi campus there was a whole section on a research centre at Itsoseng which would have not been in existence was it not for this work Willem has done with R@I. Consider that Action reflection cycles not only run between meetings but also in longer time periods. So look for links across meetings and not so linearly in successive meetings.
- Willem: “So it has more of an organic feel to it, than a mechanical feel.”
- Terri: “Yes, that is the one thing, the other thing is that, yes, there were a lot of circumstances that worked against your original conceptualization of it, but in another sense that conceptualization contributed towards the next step.
- A shift has taken place in my mind from – using Itsoseng as the spine and from the spine teaching, research and community development happening to how can any psychology dept be relevant to the community that it serves and is embedded in? It makes me curious how relevant psychology departments in other parts of the country is to their immediate communities?
- Willem: Using our students as a therapeutic workforce in the community is one form of relevance, but I’m more interested in knowledge creation activities – are there any such joint ventures? – in psych departments?
- Linda: Universities seems extremely self serving, the final question is always what will financially benefit the company, not the student nor the community.
- Gerhard: Benefit has been narrowed down to one discourse – money.
- Ilse: I urge you to continue your PhD project until next year, do not stop now. It is likely that we are in for major changes next year. We are more and more moving to a less integrated and less community relevant teaching status quo – it would be great to evaluate your original research question against the reality of May 2006.



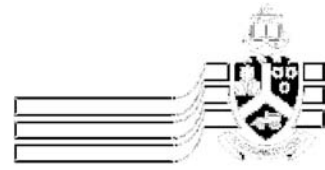
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Note: This idea is quite different from the original idea of seeing how our actions have improved our situation to see how political changes have worsened our situation and what the role of our actions were in this – a saving/self preservation effect or a sinking effect.

- Gerhard: I think it would be a good idea to situate this project within bigger landscape (South Africa) and to look at other models that work and are better, worse and nonexistent – and that could be a nice networking opportunity. The second thing that seems to happen here is that we tend to talk about our dreams and then the (our) constraints that make it difficult – and I'm just wondering how much a discourse analytical stance will be beneficial in our understanding why we always see these ring wraiths coming in from the outside and spoiling the party. How do these discourse functions to disempower the whole process (us). Could this be a way to stand back and evaluate the process from a certain standpoint – otherwise it is just a loose collection of complaints all the time.
- Willem: we have done lots in response to the ring wraiths and complaints which we perhaps don't always give ourselves credit for.
- Gerhard: well, then that needs to be identified. Perhaps exactly because this is more of an organic process it is more difficult to identify the links between events and shifts and evidence for shifts and cause of shifts.
- Ilse: Don't think that if you can't answer your original research question that we got nothing out of it – if it wasn't for R@I who knows in what state the clinic would be in now.
- Willem: Perhaps R@I also served as a psychological survival mechanism to deal with the incorporation – it keeps a unity where all other unity structures are broken down.
- Gerhard: Yes, it gives us hope for identity, for survival, for relevance or a stage for our voices.
- Ilse: R@I is one place where we can fight for what we believe in – we still have a voice here.
- Gerhard: Your records and minutes needs to be reviewed and systematized and then fed back to the group so that they/we can respond to that. The traces, the different punctuations on the circular processes.

### Authorship of Willem's PhD

- I need to give evidence of independent research and that I created new knowledge – but in this context how can that be done when the whole R@I group generate knowledge together and work on the research question together?



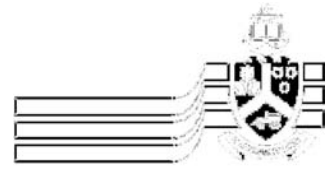
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- Linda: aren't you doing research on a Meta level?
  - Willem: on some level it is Meta and on another level it is micro.
  - Terri: For me there is a distinction between you and us – you call these meetings and guide the agenda and pose questions to the meeting – it is a little bit like being a therapist – you do take a certain initiative in terms of asking certain questions to the system which then run with it. Ask yourself what would do you do that would not have happened if you did not run this project.
  - Linda: Aren't you in the typical position of a participant action researcher – because that is exactly what that person does.
  - Gerhard: why don't we throw this question on the PAR net and see what responses we get.
  - Linda: Isn't the debate around PAR and the role the researcher that the researcher relinquishes the expert role and I here discomfort about this.
  - Willem: Yes, but I still need to give evidence about expertise for a PhD study, not so?
  - Linda: I think you can still show evidence of expertise without having directed in a very active way the research process.
  - Terri: Yes, for example, you can substantiate the way the research is done theoretically – that is proof of your research expertise. We are not doing that. The inputs you make and organizing of the meetings as well as your reflection on the process are all uniquely yours. We don't do that.
  - Gerhard: Co-created reality does not mean we walk away from the conversation with the same reality – we both constructed each other's different realities.
  - Linda: there is always the expert role on some level otherwise you won't be commenting on the process in the first place. The fact that you comment on it puts you in the role of expert.
  - Gerhard: It will be important to report on your various identities and roles in this process. Maybe separate them as different characters in this play.

### R@I Website

- Terri: R says he can get hold of another program to make a website for us.
- Gerhard: Can't we just use FrontPage?

### Work allocation and research

- When we decide who teaches what next year, we should also budget research time, not just teaching time. This should be an actual part of the planning in terms of time management.



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## **HIV research focus**

- We have managed to supervise the majority of M dissertations within the HIV focus. Students from the main campus we will be supervising from next year onwards might not be so open to it and can we really force it?
- Our ISTP papers did not have a HIV focus, but a community relevance focus. Perhaps we could reconsider our HIV focus and broaden it to community relevance – HIV is in any case a very relevant topic in the community we are embedded in.
- We should compile a list of completed dissertations at Itsoseng with a summary of its main findings so that we can use the knowledge so created.
- Terri propose that we approach a publisher and publish something like “studies in HIV” and that it is made up of summaries of the dissertations done at Itsoseng.
- A good focus area could attract Masters by dissertations students and we can market ourselves in this way.
- A cool paper could be to investigate job opportunities for psychology students (Honours, BPsych, Masters by dissertation).
- Terri: All of this would be so much easier to invest energy into if the future of the campus was just decided – then we can run!
- Linda: The irony is that we keep hearing that the campus is dying, but we cannot get going because they have not made a decision about where we are going.
- Willem: We could now use this argument and do nothing or run anyway in the face of uncertainty – we might just provide proof that it is worthwhile to continue.

## **The way forward for 2006**

- Because we do not know what our future will look like, we must just keep moving forward because that momentum CREATES a future for us.

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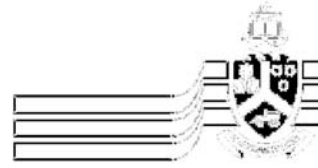
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**Record of the 13th R@I meeting held in the tea room, Mamelodi campus  
2005-10-18**

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Linda, Psych dept HOD**

**Discussion points / Agenda:**

**page:**

1. NRF rated researcher in the department	1
2. Local relevant knowledge and Learning problems at Itsoseng	3
3. HIV Focus	5
4. Meeting with Unisa	6
5. Accredited journals	6
6. Next meeting	7

**NRF rated researcher in the department**

Linda:

- It is very difficult to get a rating at the NRF,
- We all publish and do research separately
- What if all of us work together on all the R@I projects then we attach everybody's name to it and in this way we get more publications under more people's names and therefore have a better chance to become rated NRF researchers.

Psych dept HOD:

- When it comes to promotion time however, there is a high premium on sole authorships and that co-authorship and multiple authorships is frowned upon. So in terms of career development I would advise to find a balance – to publish some stuff on your own.

Linda:

- I hear the argument in terms of career development, but in terms of NRF rating – would multiple authorships count against a person?

Terri:

- The NRF requires a proven research record of your own as well as having loads of postgraduate students (Master's and doctoral) working under you – they also look at the profile (previously disadvantaged, etc, etc) of those students.

Linda:



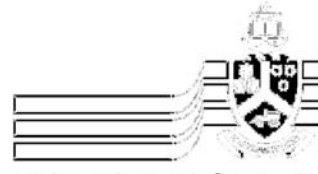
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- Would it then not make more sense to have an umbrella project ran by one person and then have focus areas within this umbrella project

Willem:

- Why bother getting an NRF rating, what is so important about it? Is it that a NRF rated researcher has access to vast amounts of funds that could be spent on remuneration of PhD and Masters students in the umbrella project when they are used for teaching some modules.

Psych dept HOD:

- Yes, this could be done, but it is not so easy to get an NRF rating.

Terri:

- The other possibility is to appoint an NRF rated researcher.

On a practical level there isn't space in the department to appoint somebody who is at that level (only senior lecturer positions available). The other problem is that the University system does not really accommodate research only positions in academic departments. The University of Pretoria promotes the principle of individual promotion and individual achievement and NOT teamwork. So for everybody in the department to agree to help one person to become an NRF rated researcher will work against the whole current philosophy of the university.

At Vista, no student of ours ever received even feedback from the NRF, despite complete applications, and to get somebody in our department to get an NRF rating looks close to impossible. So it seems that this source of money is not accessible to us and perhaps we should look towards the private sector for funding.

Willem: If somebody gives us R500-000 today for research – what would you do with that money?

Psych dept HOD: We don't know what to do with that, because we have never even fantasised about that.

This is an important question that challenges the idea that we can only do meaningful work if we have lots of money.



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Linda: The problem we are trying to address is to free ourselves up in order to achieve more quality of work life and produce quality research. If we can find cheap labour to run our classes then we can focus more on our research.

It is also possible to introduce a module at Masters' level requiring of them to do some professional assistance work, some teaching load etc. In this way they get training in professional presentation skills, liaison with other professionals, etc. We should also not assume that Masters student would detest teaching at undergraduate or honors level – they might regard it as a great honor.

The presenting problem in other words is **to free up more time to do research**. One attempted solution is to get somebody else to take over some of the activities that take up most of the time like teaching, marking, etc.

Willem: Another solution might be to enter into a partnership with private enterprise eg The “Sanlam HIV project” or the “Sanlam director of Itsoseng” where we solve social science research questions for big a companies in partnership with big companies.

Terri: Some companies have social consciousness funds and make them available for just such projects.

Psych dept HOD: We seldom think that the service we can provide is good enough or would sell. We underrate and undermine ourselves in this way.

Willem: If we can pull this off, we kill two birds with one stone: (a) we get funds that we can use to free us up and, (b) we ensure that we do community relevant research.

### **Local relevant knowledge and Learning problems at Itsoseng**

Terri: If we are looking for some project to spend R500-000 and I think of the need in our immediate community, then “Addressing learning problems in Mamelodi” is a project that might attract funding from private enterprise.

Linda: There used to be a wise old woman calling herself a child psychiatrist working in Garankua who found herself in exactly the same position as we found ourselves – seeing child after child with learning difficulties. She then started keeping careful record of each case and when she and her staff had a critical number of kids on this record they then went and sought sponsorship and funding and



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legitimization and then opened up a centre for learning problems. This is one of the reasons why we started keeping statistics at our clinic.

Linda: I'm concerned about the ethics of current ongoing projects in townships funded by overseas organizations – how does this really benefit the communities where the research is being done – the benefit should be there WHILE the project is running – not in the form of recommendations of what somebody else must do to alleviate suffering.

Willem: Ok, but there might be a way of writing the proposal to say UNAIDS to access funds, write a report at the end justifying what we spend the money on and what the gains were AND go about it in an ethically responsible way so that the community of people involved in the research derive immediate benefit from the research process.

Terri: If we are in a context of very urgent social problems then it is unethical to just make observations about that – that's why action research becomes really important, it becomes impossible to not do action research – if people are dying from hunger how can you just record this and send the stats in a report.

So where do this discussion leave us in terms of our own research projects?

- A renewed commitment to action research
- A renewed recognition that we are committed to doing relevant work here anyway, we might as well make sure that we get publications out of it. Why don't we structure "learning problems" as a project and we take doing action research that can be published on this seriously. Somebody runs the project in 2006 and gives it everything they got and we slot into it doing smaller individual projects that all combine to answer the overall research question – how can we best be of service to the clients that seeks our help with learning difficulties – what are the resources available to us to be of service. This will prompt us to streamline our Psychometry, redefine again our role, scope of practice and social responsibility as psychologists and help our M students in becoming socially aware and relevant.
- We could even involve the HSRC to develop test material that is relevant by collecting the necessary data for them (perhaps somebody is already involved in such a project [developing Psychometry for black township kids]) at our site.

Ilse: I'm sceptical that any of us has the time to really run a project of this magnitude, just running the clinic was already very time consuming.



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Terri: I agree, and was thinking on a much smaller scale, recording that which we do anyway, rather than trying to save the world. By starting with data collection and for this we can use the M students – to keep more careful and complete records of the various presenting problems surrounding learning problems.

Psych dept HOD: They could also do their dissertations on it, thereby harnessing the person power available to us.

Terri: I'm thinking even smaller than that – that we design a standard form that needs to be filled in by the therapist every time they see a child that was referred by a school and then drop this form in a box. So we start with a problem definition and description before we do anything else.

### **HIV Focus**

Linda: Even though I acknowledge that the learning problem focus is very real at our clinic, I am concerned about the HIV focus of the clinic. My fear is that the HIV focus is under threat to stop and perhaps we should discuss this in the bigger department.

We should also put the dissertations done so far within the HIV focus on our blog – NB

A renewed commitment to make our completed and ongoing research more accessible on the Internet.

Linda: We should not forget the community projects that the Bpsych students have done – some of them can really be published with some work. HIV affects so many more levels than just managing a person health or CD4 count – it provokes gender issues, family connection and disconnection, sexuality and power differentials. It speaks to confidentiality and hiding away, etc, etc – some aspects of HIV is very visible and other almost completely invisible yet no less devastating. We **cannot** ignore it.

Terri: It is important that we do not lose the value and the momentum of the work that we have already done, because we have built up here a reservoir of resources regarding HIV research and training and do not let that go to waste and take it further.

Linda: I do not believe that a single professional psychology graduate should go into the field without having done some study into HIV/AIDS.

Linda: We need a health promoter on this campus – the position that Ernest filled – for he made it possible that HIV was visible on this campus – there was always HIV awareness or training projects running, condoms freely available everywhere. Since he left, all that has stopped.



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Willem: Prof KM is still available to give us recommendations on Psychometry in our lab with regards to treatment of learning difficulties.

Terri: I hear all these ideas, but we just do not have enough time for all of them.

I hear all these ideas, but we just do not have enough time for all of them.

Ilse: Yes, we are still at the stage where the clinic appointment book cannot be properly managed, so I love all the ideas and wish we could get it done, but how?

Linda: You know what Ilse, I think part of the problems with the appointment book has to do with the attitude of the current interns – and next year upfront we have to get it very clear from the beginning what their responsibilities entails – they are not just here to do counselling.

Ilse: Neither the appointment book nor the stats were a problem in the past.

### **Meeting with Unisa**

Willem: On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November we are going to Unisa's psych department. They have been a source of great kinship and support of the kind of research we do. Every time we go there or they come here I really get the sense that they have an appreciation for the subtle nuances of doing action research or working in this context. And this relationship was strengthened during ISTP.

Renewed commitment to publish the ISTP papers.

Psych dept HOD: The University receives R71000 for every peer-reviewed article and we are entitled to claim R9000 thereof.

### **Accredited journals**

There seems to be two places that accredits journals: ISI and IBSS –

See: <http://www.up.ac.za/asservices/ais/nse/accredited.htm>

ISI: International statistical institute

ISI: <http://www.isinet.com/cgi-bin/jrnlst/jloptions.cgi?PC=master>

IBSS: International bibliography of social sciences

IBSS: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/IBSS/about/journals.htm>

“Local” South African accredited journals

[http://www.up.ac.za/services/research/intranet/docs/DoE\\_appendix.pdf](http://www.up.ac.za/services/research/intranet/docs/DoE_appendix.pdf)



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Psych dept HOD: The NRF also accepts “local” SA journals even if the university would not give you money for it, it will still help with your NRF rating. But practically speaking one should aim for IBBS or ISI accredited journals.

Willem: My dream is that article writing becomes like an assignment one does where you can focus on the content and not on the process of writing an articles as major obstacle.

Linda confirmed with Psych dept HOD that there is no difference in terms of the money that you get whether you publish in a South African or international IBSS journal. However, ISI journals are more prestigious and you would get more money for publishing in those journals.

## **Next meeting**

2005-11-29

**End of this document**



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## **Record of the 14th R@I meeting held in the Tea room, Mamelodi Campus 2005-11-21**

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Willem, Gerhard, Linda**

### **Discussion points / Agenda:**

**page:**

1. Taking stock	1
2. Unisa partnership	1
3. Itsoseng clinic	3
4. Book chapters	4
5. Terri's study – the Testimonio	4
6. Conferences in 2006	5
7. The next meeting	5

### **Taking stock**

In the next R@I meeting in January 2006 I want to present a summary of all the main points of the 14 meetings and do a stock take and more formal member check. This will be an attempt to stand back one-step and look at the process and discuss this process so that it can be fed back into the evolving process. Gerhard suggested that I start the next meeting with an introduction of how I see the action research process as it plays out in my research project.

### **Unisa partnership**

We were invited to the Unisa psychology department's "people-to-paper forum" on the 15th of November 2005. B and two of her students presented an article they are writing on treating a client diagnosed with schizophrenia at Agape. JN expressed a concern about research done for the purpose of publishing and not to the benefit of the client. This sparked a conversation about exploitive study case research. Another point of concern is that there is a trend to only focus on the researcher's own story in the research and the client disappears. It was an energetic discussion with an attempt to look critically at certain issues in case study research. JN expressed a desire to give guest lectures at Mamelodi campus, particularly but not exclusively to post graduate students.

E, V, M and others made it clear that they value the link with us (Mamelodi) and would like to maintain it. Gerhard thinks that this desire to be linked to us has something to do with how they relate to the rest of their department – they might find in us also a group of odd bods that wants to research and the rest of the people in their department are less keen. Linda agrees and said that perhaps in order for





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them to find meaning in their work they have to try and create something outside of the department – and maybe that is something we will have to do as well. Terri reckons that this is maybe why we connect so easily with them – the margins connect.

V introduced us to the new revamped Unisa psychology journal (the old *psychologia*), now called *New Voices*. V wants to get it accredited, and therefore invites us (pleads with us) to submit articles and serve on the editorial board. This opens up a magnificent opportunity to play around with new ideas of *interactional* editorial boards. The traditional editorial board is an oppositional one; this one could be more of a collaborative model.

V energetically invited us to contribute to both the conference proceedings as well as the *New Voices*. In addition to publishing our individual ISTP papers we can also publish a symposium paper. It makes more sense and saves space to publish symposium papers in the conference proceedings.

Ilse's ISTP paper has been sent off to *Psychology in Africa* for review. She has beaten us all to submitting her paper. As soon as it is accepted she wins the R500-00. Congratulations and well done!

Our current understanding of publication subsidies is that publication in an accredited journal receives automatic subsidy from the education department, when you publish in an un-accredited journal you are then entitled to apply to the general university fund and a committee makes a decision whether you are entitled to some money or not.

Gerhard's "open conversation presentation on the merger process" would be a very suitable submission to *New Voices*.

As we are committed to our partnership with Unisa we should invite them back here soon. Martin asked what the future is of our inter-institutional collaboration – do we have enough momentum that the process will sustain itself or do we have to add to the momentum. Linda reckons that if our submissions to *New Voices* come of the ground and that part of our partnership grows that we should consider organising a conference in the future. Gerhard wondered how this partnership link with the community psychology interest group – do we relate in any way or is it separate? Can that discussion group be a forum to present our work.

Terri has a need for all our interesting discussions in all these forums to become something – like a publication. It is hard to keep a balance between formal goal directed meetings and informal chat groups. We don't want the meetings to just float, because a lot of energy goes into them, but you also don't want to institutionalise or formalise the meetings too much. Linda expressed a need to also have



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place where you can just reflect without having to commit immediately to write it up into paper. This balance seems very important.

We discussed using co-authorship as well as the buddy system to increase our rate of producing publications. When using the buddy system, your buddy motivates you, and you report back to your buddy at regular intervals on your progress which forces you to work between meetings with your buddy – but you remains the single author.

I have a vision where in approximately 3 years from now we are knowledgeable in the technical aspects of publishing: we are connected and known to a couple of journals, we know the submission criteria, deadlines and preferences of the editorial boards and we can start producing articles at a much faster and energy efficient rate.

**Itsoseng clinic**

- The interns: The new interns seem very energised for next year.
- V, J and E will form the intern team for 2006.
- We will have 12 M-students working in the afternoons next year.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	8-2	8-1	8-1	8-1	8-1
Afternoon	2-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	

- Willem will be on study leave until July 2006
- Ilse will go on maternity leave from March to July 2006
- Linda will take over the primary responsibility for the clinic in 2006 and Gerhard will take responsibility for the stats
- The 2005 interns were given a task list to complete before the end of their internship:



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- 
- Compile a proper inventory
  - Client files should be alphabetically organised according to client surname as well as to year
  - 100 copies of each compulsory form
  - Clean their computers of all their files
  - Tidy the intern office + therapy rooms
  - New prototypes for key + psychometry files
  - Make a list of clients that needs to be followed up
  - Make a list of 2005 referral network that needs to be followed up in 2006
  - Stats completed until the end of 2005
  - List of all the codes
  - Hand in keys

### **Book chapters**

Terri reminded us of an email she sent us about a book called *Counselling in Africa*. The book it is aimed at the readership of the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* – which is basically black people all over the world. So here is an opportunity to become an author of a chapter in this book. This is a textbook / scholarly book and you would get a little subsidy for it. Both Gerhard and Linda expressed an interest to contribute to a chapter. Patrick is on the editorial panel of this journal. This might be a foot in the door to get known with the editorial board.

### **Terri's study – the Testimonio**

The testimonio belongs to all of us – it is a data source we can all use. Terri requests us to look at the

Testimonio in two ways:

- Whether we are content with how we are presented, confidentiality etc.
- What we can do with this Testimonio – how can it best be used.

Terri: This document is basically a chronicle of what we have gained from the previous institution and what we found valuable – in order to take this into the new institution with us.

Gerhard suggests that this document articulates with other “historical” accounts of Vista University currently in existence. Linda remembered a woman (H) who used to work at Central campus in public relations who might be useful in this regard.

LR and EF might be good contact people in this regard.



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This document (Terri's testimonio) is not just a historical account, but was constructed specifically to inform the future. The power of the testimonio is that when Tukkies took stock, or made an inventory of what is valuable on the campus – the experience and tacit knowledge of the staff of what works in this context was not included – this document attempts to redress that. The question is what forums should this knowledge be presented to. Linda thinks that the one forum people usually avoid is the forum that shuts them out – so how do we knock on that door? Maybe a coffee table book for the top management and deans of Tukkies.

This R@I meeting is a forum where the Testimonio has a place and it is exactly for this reason that R@I exist – to serve as just such a forum for all kinds of fledgling research initiatives.

### **Conferences in 2006**

- Mexico – Working with marginalized families and communities: professionals in the trenches – 4-6 August 2006, Oaxaca.
- Iceland – IFTA world congress “Reflection, hope & resilience” 4-7 October 2006, Reykjavík.

### **The next meeting**

2006/01/19 09:00-12:00 at Mamelodi.

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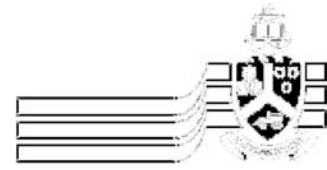
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**Record of the 15th R@I meeting held in the tea room,  
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2006-01-20**

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Gerhard, Linda**

**Discussion points / Agenda:**

**page:**

1. Revisiting the original focus of R@I and redirecting our energy flow	1
2. Gerhard's research	2
3. Member 6's research	4
4. Linda's research	4
5. Ilse's research	5
6. Willem's research	5
7. General comments	5
8. Completed dissertations at Vista Mamelodi	5
9. Some good ideas to be followed up	5
10. Itsoseng Clinic	6

**Revisiting the original focus of R@I and redirecting our energy flow**

It is easy to think that we should just publish what we do anyway and not think of this as two separate activities, but making that happen is not so easy. Finding time to be researchers is not easy. We do not have that build into our programme for us, we have to set aside time and make it happen ourselves. In this respect the R@I structure enable us on a regular basis to engage with each other using our research identities.

Our group identity as researchers from R@I has formed sufficiently so that we are comfortable with running a research centre and we have engaged in many actions to live out our sense of belonging to a research centre on the Mamelodi campus. My concern is that our current direction and volume of energy is directed towards the outside to "prove" that we have a right to exist. My proposal is that we redirect our energy inwards towards ourselves and use that energy to improve our skill at publishing our work. I propose that we individuate within the group identity, declare our current work – our joys and struggle and make use of each other as resources to improve our own competence level.

R@I as an action research project currently is formed around two main aims:



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- ❖ Solving a practical problem that has personal relevance – Improving Itsoseng, increasing our “sub department’s” research output
  - ❖ A raised awareness of resources in our environment and within ourselves. (What are these?)

**Terri:** it is important to qualify and stress that R@I started in the context of our existing resources (Ask her about which ones she is thinking about) falling away – it would have been a totally different ball game to run R@I in the old Vista context.

**Gerhard:** (quoting from Terri’s testimonio: “in a context where there is scarcity of resources you need richness in relationship” – and I think in the context of that we can ask what the things that threatened the R@I process are and what the things are that sustained it. Relational resources have always been strong in the Vista system and there is a threat that the receiving institution erodes that.

I proposed that we shift in process from ‘a united front against the forces that threaten our right to exist’ – where our energy is directed outward to ‘a soundboard and resource for ourselves’ so that we become available to each other in a differentiated way. In this way we can work on our individual projects (between the meetings) and use the R@I meetings to enrich that, rather than mostly work in the R@I meetings together and in so doing disempower us to work in between.

### **Gerhard’s research**

Gerhard: I wonder why one of the goals namely to help us to publish has not happened for me yet? A need for me is to look at why that has not happened for me yet.

Linda suggested that Gerhard is very close by virtue of having delivered so many papers last year. “You have 4 papers that just need to be converted into articles.”

Gerhard: Yes I do, maybe I just need a space here to reflect on how I am going to get over that final hurdle – the things are lying there, but I just can’t get myself to do that. To be frank about my experience, it is positive in that I am busy organizing my work load in such a way that I create spaces for myself where I can sit and work. But maybe I am just the sort of person that needs a kick on the butt.

Terri offered her kicking prowess and service which Gerhard rapidly declined.

Gerhard: To convert my papers into articles feels like a long pregnancy where I expect the baby to be born anytime, but every time the doctor says the baby is going to be another month. It is not the R@I process that is keeping me from publishing, it think my inertia has more to do with my own personality and way of working. Maybe the differentiation process will be beneficial to make a more tailor made space for my own research needs.



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Linda: If you can just get one of the papers done it will give you inspiration to do the rest.

Gerhard: It is true. Last year Linda and I wrote a chapter for a book in a week. What gets me is why I can't get to a point where I take one week and just finish an article. It is some block that I have.

Willem: If you have already published an article, what would make the 2<sup>nd</sup> one easier?

Gerhard: Knowing that I can do it. This is a theme that I have had from grade one throughout – the next level is always the difficult level. It is something in me that always thinks that it is too difficult to do, until I do it. Maybe you can call it anticipation psychosis – the idea that it must be difficult, because I haven't done one yet.

Linda's suggestion:

On a tactical/strategic level to keep these 4 papers open on your computer.

Terri: Yes it's a foreground back ground thing – keep it in the fore ground.

Gerhard: Maybe I haven't bought into the identity of researcher or **publisher** yet. I must buy into the idea that this is who I can be – I can publish.

Gerhard's plan / tactics:

1. To look at what I foreground and what I back ground – if I foreground more publishing actions it will feed into my identity as publisher.
2. There are at least 4 papers that I want to get submission ready. I want to keep all 4 open and it is high priority for me to finish them this year.
3. There are also some M-dissertations that I am supervising and I want to facilitate articles out of them



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## Member 6's research

I want to register and start working on my PhD this year. I have some ideas in place but my focus now is not there, I'm going on leave next week. But when I get back from leave I am keen to start on it.

Willem: I would be keen to hear about it – maybe discussing it here could be helpful to you and us.

Member 6: That would be nice but not likely because you do qualitative research and I cannot stand qualitative research and you do not like quantitative research.

Ilse, Linda, Terri assured Member 6 that they are not against quantitative research, they just don't do it.

Gerhard: I am scared of quantitative research maybe, but not against it at all.

Member 6: That is so weird for me, for in my mind quantitative research is the easiest thing in the world.

Willem: Well, it would be great if R@I could have a research output that is balanced in terms of quantitative and qualitative research. At present our focus is heavily biased towards qualitative research as you rightly pointed out.

Gerhard: I would be keen to see if we could do quantitative research that is not trying to be value free but fully declaring our values and biases in doing it.

### Member 6's plan:

To engage with her PhD when she comes back from leave and share some of her plans and enthusiasm for it at the next R@I meeting

## Linda's research

- Busy with an abstract for that "call for papers for critical psychology special edition"
- 3 other papers that I am finalizing at the moment
  - o One is a theoretical paper – maybe to SAJP,
  - o Other two are action research papers
- Community article
- Mamelodi symposium thing

I have more than enough material to work with and would like to get them all submitted this year and I think it is possible.

I have momentum at the moment.





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For me there has been a mind shift – at the end of last year I felt very tired, not enthusiastic at all about coming back. Then I had a major clean this holiday, all the things I have neglected throughout the year. My financial situation also changed for the better, so slowly things are falling into place.

### **Ilse's research**

Ilse has submitted her ISTP paper in journal format to the Journal of Psychology in Africa. If her paper gets accepted she wins the R500-00!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Well done Ilse.

### **Willem's research**

- Tremendous enthusiasm about R@I and PhD
- Focus is to make the minutes as complete as possible
- Looking at critical points in the minutes as well transformations that took place between meetings.
- Summarising my findings and then I am going to give **my findings to the rest of you to do a member check** – this is not **participatory action research** – **findings should be “found” together. It is also not a matter of finding, but on discovering together.**
- Member check (Validity of R@I claims to knowledge) – March 2006
- SOS paper – March 2006
- ISTP paper – March 2006

### **General comments**

Linda: Testimonio type, action research, socially responsible and critical psychology research should be pertinent and in a few years hopefully it would be considered mainstream.

### **Completed dissertations at Vista Mamelodi**

We are all carrying valuable information related to completed research projects as well as new ideas between us in virtual space, but it is not in an accessible archive for it to become an asset – currently an underutilized resource.

### **Some good ideas to be followed up**

- Central archive for abstracts of completed dissertations
- List of accredited journals that we can publish in on wall of tea room – tea room as repository



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- 
- Fridge can be used as a whiteboard – just need to get some white board pens.
  - Terri: Set up an agreement with your M student:

We want to publish, send us a draft article based on your research within 3 months after finishing your dissertation. If we don't receive draft within 3 months do you give me permission to write it up myself and you (the student) become the 2<sup>nd</sup> author.

### **Itsoseng Clinic**

Differentiate again between clinic management and research at the clinic.

We reiterated that Gerhard is in control of the stats and Linda the intern concerns.

#### Stats:

- must include a qualitative description of the presenting problem which they use to motivate an ICD10 code given.
- Also include who was seen in the session

Terri: I see genograms to be included in every first or second session – but I think we must wait a bit with that.

Ilse: Can you all please give me feedback on the Itsoseng job descriptions asap.

Linda changed her clinic afternoon duty from Monday to Thursday. (Swapped with Ilse, Gerhard also offered that Linda swap with him from Monday to Wednesday).

#### Notes to myself:

- I was tempted to write “what prevents us from publishing” and what “enables us to publish” – the decision to differentiate this brings to life for me the fact that different things enabled and prevented each of us this far.
- Shift from our research output to my and each of your research output – *differentiation* and *individuation* facilitates personal responsibility.
- 

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**Record of the 16th R@I meeting held in the tea room,  
Mamelodi Campus  
2006-02-28**

**Present: Linda, Gerhard, Terri, Willem, Ilse, Member 6**

**Discussion points / Agenda:**

1. Follow up from previous meeting
2. Linda's research
3. Gerhard's research
4. Member 6's research
5. Terri's research
6. Ilse's research
7. Willem's research
8. Itsoseng clinic – feedback meeting with the M's
9. Research workshop 7<sup>th</sup> March: Jean McNiff Action research learning shop
10. Rata

**Follow up from previous meeting**

W: If we look at point 9 on the minutes of the previous meeting (15) there are two ideas that I would like us to attach names to (people willing to take responsibility for making it happen), rather than just agree that they are good ideas. I am willing to do one of them:

Central archive for abstracts and completed dissertations	Willem
List of accredited journals that we can publish in on a wall of the tea room – tea room as repository	Gerhard



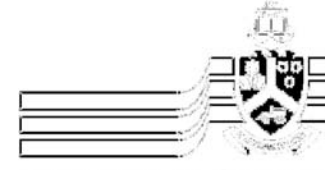
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	Projects	Goals	Needs	Comments / Concerns
<b>Gerhard</b>	1.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme	Middle April	Possible places for publications	* dissertation articles
	2.Translation article	End of May		
	3.Social construction methodology: a compendium of games	End of May		* AR journals at wshop
<b>Member 6</b>	1.Draft PhD proposal for: The psychological implications of small intestine reduction operations	End of July	Ideas and suggestion wrt proposal	I'm quitting smoking soon,be patient with me
<b>Terri</b>	1.Incorporation article	End of April	A kick every now and then	Report on each project
	2.Indigenisation article	Middle March		next time
	3.Testimonio	End of April		
<b>Ilse</b>	1.Article on C's dissertation: Forgiveness in HIV/AIDS	End of Sept	Permission from Corneli	Pregnancy & baby now
	2.Awaiting feedback on submitted article			a high priority
<b>Linda</b>	1.The ghetto is in the eye of the beholder	End of April	Keep nagging me	Invite Unisa
	2.Globalisation & Indigenisation		Visual reminder in Tea room	
	3.Local knowledge & theory around research - critical perspective		Invite Unisa crowd	
	4.Therapeutic development in indigenous contexts			
	5.Two chapters on trauma counselling in Africa			
	6. Co-editor of counselling book			
	7. Section editor for counselling book			
	8. Involved in chapter of MV's book			
<b>Willem</b>	1. PhD: Integrating Research, teaching and community engagement:		Keep doing what you are doing	
	Permission from The Mamelodi campus principal	End of March		Tearoom lists
	Consent from participants	End of March		Website
	2.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme	Middle April		Invite Unisa



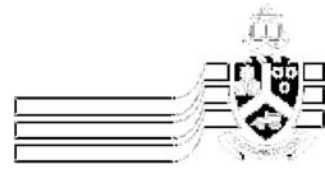
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**An example of a knowledge creation process:**

**Willem addressing Gerhard:** Okay, how I have divided this form is in four columns; projects, goals, needs and comments/concerns. Is there anything you need from us that would make it easier for you to reach your goals with each project?

**Gerhard:** What I would need to do is to approach you and talk about possible places for publications, but I think maybe the social constructionist paper would be good in the SAJP<sup>25</sup> for two reasons; the fact that Martin is the editor means that that kind of article would probably be considered and secondly I think it is good in South Africa – it is very popular in South Africa (Social Constructionism), everybody applies it willy-nilly – so, I think it might be a useful article in a South African context. The translation article I am not sure at all. Maybe it could be published in some kind of interdisciplinary language based sort of journal.

**Willem:** Okay, so for you to finish this by the end of May, if I understand you correctly, you will have had to select a couple of journals to see how to write this article, because from our discussions last time, it sounds like that is where you start. You start with this is the idea that I have, this is the journal where this idea would get accepted, so in what format would they want the article.

**Gerhard:** Okay, so what you are saying is that I must actually now before I take those rough drafts and put them in the shape of an article, I must identify the journals.

**Willem:** And it would work well then, because you are also facilitating and coordinating the list of journals in which we can publish, you already have two then. So this is a list that can grow as we submit. It need not start out as a list of 20 journals.

**Gerhard:** Okay, well, this is helpful to me now, because I still had it in the back of my mind that I must have a finished article and then go shop around for a journal.

**Willem:** Yes, it makes sense to know your audience so that you can write for them. Would it be possible for you in future R@I meetings to discuss these three articles as research projects and say “this is my research question, this is my design” that kind of thing, just to share a bit of what you do and how you conceptualize your research project.

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<sup>25</sup> South African Journal of Psychology



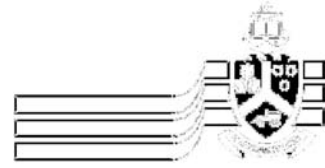
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**Gerhard:** Okay.

**Willem:** That would be valuable for me. Would it be possible and valuable for you?

**Gerhard:** Yes, I think this is an interesting thing. I think it will be valuable for me, because we always in the research committee look at the specific format in which something is presented such as the research questions, what is the methodology, how are you going to answer the research questions, what is the theoretical base and so on. If I have to sit here and say this is my questions, this is my method and this is my theoretical base; I think it will be useful to reflect on what am I actually doing, and what makes it research, that it is not just an opinion piece.

#### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (30-50 MINUTES)

The purpose of these interviews is to get evidence from everybody participating in the R@I initiative regarding my educative influence and the value that this initiative held for everybody individually.

#### **What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?**

1. Please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of
  - a. Your **Values** (what is important about research for you)
  - b. Your **Way** of working (how you approach your research projects)
  - c. Your **Identity** (How you think about yourself as researcher)
  - d. Your own **unique abilities** and **preferences**
  - e. **Resources** available to you as researcher
2. What is there that I specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?
3. Any other comments about R@I you feel is important to mention.

**End of this document**



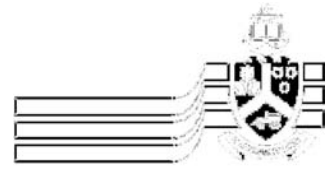
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**Record of the 17th R@I meeting held in the tea room,  
Mamelodi Campus  
2006-03-29**

**Present: Ilse, Terri, Member 6, Willem, Gerhard, Linda**

The following table was used to discuss our individual research projects. This table was the main focus of the discussion. Very fertile discussions ensued when we debated which boxes were most appropriate to put our research efforts in.

<b>Gerhard</b>	<p><b>1.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>In Evaluating SOS Mamelodi's presentation of the <i>Educare</i> programme we discover complex definitions of vulnerable children in a township context and we give a critical reflection on trying out an action research approach in programme evaluation.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul> <p><b>Critical psychology</b> <b>Constructionist</b> <b>Action research (critical look at this)</b> <b>Explorative, political</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul> <p><b>Action-reflection cycles (critical look at this) (ref? according to whom?)</b> <b>Focus groups, interviews, policy scrutiny</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul> <p><b>AR websites, Karl Muller could recommend</b> [Definition of concepts, paradigmatic point of view needs to be clearly given account of] [Could choose journal for: method, content, politics, geography (eg. solidarity with the African continent), etc]</p>
	<p><b>2.Translation article</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>An alternative conceptualisation of the problem of translation in psychotherapy can provide opportunities for using language differences as a psychotherapeutic strength.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul>



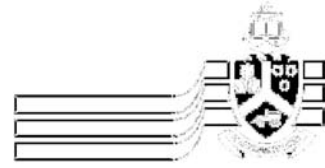
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	<p><b>Post modernism acc to Kuhn’s definition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul> <p><b>Language games method – under construction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul> <p><b>SAJP?, Look in articles on similar topics where they were published</b></p> <p><b>“Language matters” Family process? Journal of systemic therapy</b></p>
	<p><b>3.Social construction methodology: a compendium of games</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>That people who claimed to employ social constructionist methodology in research projects do not consider the full implication of the theory. This article attempts to provide possibilities for rigour in doing (“real”) social constructionist research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul> <p>Interpretive? Constructionist? Build in levels of reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul> <p>Sound argumentation Write article and then critically appraise this article in terms of rigour Deal explicitly with the criteria of rigour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul> <p>Journals on constructionist therapies?</p>
<p><b>Member 6</b></p>	<p><b>1.Draft PhD proposal for: The psychological implications of small intestine reduction operations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul>
<p><b>Terri</b></p>	<p><b>1.Incorporation article</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>The implication of the incorporation process is that the psychological knowledge base (content and process, epistemology) of the psychology department was threatened with extinction and the purpose of this study was to find a way to conserve some of those knowledges and</b></p>





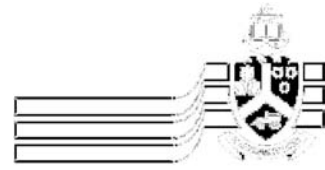
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	<p><b>processes.</b></p> <p><b>Purpose of the article is not a claim to knowledge, but a form of activism – giving a voice to the disenfranchised and marginal – it is to document a process and a testimony. Witnessing as outcome. To document knowledge that can be taken forward.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul> <p><b>Postmodern, social constructionist paradigm</b></p> <p><b>Action research, Narrative therapy, Oral history</b></p> <p><b>Research as conversation and dialogue and recognition of voices</b></p> <p><b>Research is a political process that has been institutionalised in favour of the privileged</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul> <p><b>Created a community from the marginal</b></p> <p><b>Concerned with oral, particular, the local and the timely (Toulmin, 1990)</b></p> <p><b>Individual interviews (conversations better describes this process), written documents (emails), focus groups, transcribed tape recordings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul> <p>?</p>
	<p><b>2.Indigenisation article</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>How do people involved in psychology on this campus (incl staff, students, etc) understand indigenisation and how do we think we do it. Conceptualisation and operationalisation of indigenisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul> <p><b>Postmodern, social constructionist paradigm</b></p> <p><b>Action research, Narrative therapy, Oral history</b></p> <p><b>Research as conversation and dialogue and recognition of voices</b></p> <p><b>Research is a political process that has been institutionalised in favour of the privileged</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul> <p><b>Individual interviews (conversations better describes this process), written documents (emails), focus groups, transcribed tape recordings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul> <p>?</p>
	<p><b>3.Testimonio</b></p>



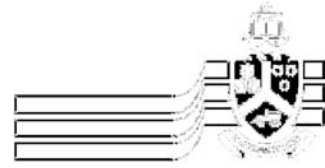
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>Documentation of the 1<sup>st</sup> article</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
	<b>4. Article on play in psychotherapy in HIV/AIDS families</b>
	<b>5. First year text book</b>
	<b>6. Counselling in Africa textbook</b>
<b>Ilse</b>	<p><b>1. Article on Corneli's dissertation: Forgiveness in HIV/AIDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
	<p><b>2. Awaiting feedback on submitted article</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
<b>Linda</b>	<p><b>1. The ghetto is in the eye of the beholder</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>Symposium paper – written:</b></p> <p><b>A report on a symposium, theme of indigenisation and practice of psychology in all of its forms in a township context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul> <p><b>Constructionist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul>



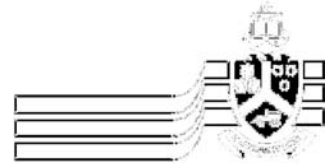
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	<p><b>Collecting, editing and integration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul> <p><b>Conference proceedings of ISTP2005 – yet to be accepted for publication</b></p>
	<p><b>2.Globalisation &amp; Indigenisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> </ul> <p><b>Looking at the indigenisation process of psychology in South Africa within a broader context of indigenisation processes elsewhere and a simultaneous globalisation movement. The paper looks at both the dialectic and the dialogue between these two positions.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> </ul> <p><b>Constructionist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical discussion, challenge to the profession</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
	<p><b>3.Local knowledge &amp; theory around research - critical perspective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
	<p><b>4.Therapeutic development in indigenous contexts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
	<p><b>5.Two chapters on trauma counselling in Africa</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul>
	<p><b>6. Co-editor of an introductory psychology text book</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Duties</li> </ul>



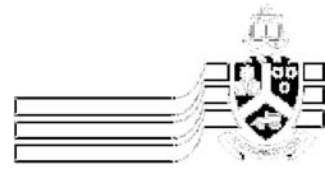
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	<p><b>7. Section editor for counselling book</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Duties</li> </ul>
	<p><b>8. Involved in chapter of Maretha's book</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> </ul>
	<p><b>9. Translation in psychotherapy – a systemic analysis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
<b>Willem</b>	<p><b>1. PhD: Integrating Research, teaching and community engagement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>
	Permission from Campus Principal
	Consent from participants
	<p><b>2.SOS article: Evaluation of the Educare programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Main argument, statement or question</li> <li>➤ Paradigm</li> <li>➤ Method</li> <li>➤ Possible journals that might be interested</li> </ul>

IDEAS RESULTING FROM THIS DISCUSSION

- **Article not necessarily a research report – report on a research process**



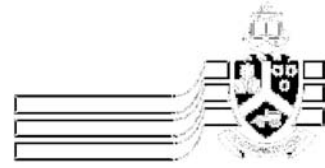
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- 
- **Article could be a critical discussion or explication of a personal stance or view that could be of value to other people in the field – or a question or challenge to other people**
  - **So – an article/paper cannot be evaluated purely on the basis of fitting into the 4 headings used above**

**End of this document**