CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I provided the theoretical framework of the study, based on the review of relevant literature. This study seeked to provide insight into the process and outcome of conducting PR, more specifically in terms of the power relations that occur. In order to achieve this broad purpose, I utilised a PRA approach to explore the experiences of teachers participating in a longitudinal participatory intervention, where I specifically examined issues of power and partnership.

In this chapter, I describe, explain and elaborate on the research methodology and strategies I used. I justify the choices of feminism as epistemology and participatory methodology as methodological paradigm. After providing details and justification for PRA as the selected research design, I describe the selection of participants and sites of the study, data generation and analysis as well as ethical considerations. I conclude the chapter by explaining quality criteria I aimed to adhere to. As an introduction, Table 3.1 provides an outline of the selected research methodology.

Table 3.1: Outline of methodological choices

PARADIGIMATIC ASSUMPTIONS	
Methodological paradigm	Participatory methodology
Epistemological paradigm	Feminist standpoint theory
RESEARCH DESIGN	
Participatory reflection and action	
SELECTION PROCEDURES	
Selection of sites	**Convenience sampling:** Two schools as information-rich sites
Selection of participants	**Purposeful sampling:** Ten female teachers (co-researchers) in school 1 and five teachers in school 2 (four female and one male). A total of 15 participants (14 females and 1 male)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="5">DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Data generation techniques</td><td colspan="3">Data documentation techniques</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Visual PRA-based data generation techniques
Focus groups
Interviews
Observation</td><td colspan="3">Verbatim transcripts of audio recordings
PRA artefacts, photographs/visual data
Research journal</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="5">DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Thematic analysis and interpretation (Charmaz, 2000)
Categorical aggregation (Stakes, 2000)</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="5">QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY</th></tr>
<tr><td>Credibility
Prolonged engagement in the field
Peer debriefing
Crystallisation
Member checking</td><td>Transferability
Thick descriptions
Purposive sampling</td><td>Dependability
Audit trail
Code-recode strategy
Crystallisation</td><td>Confirmability
Crystallisation
Reflexivity</td><td>Authenticity
Member checking
Audit trail</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="5">ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Expertise of the researcher, Informed consent, Safety, Confidentiality, Trust, Role of the researcher</td></tr>
</table>

3.2 PARADIGMATIC APPROACH

For the purpose of this study, I chose the feminist standpoint paradigm, following a PRA approach.

3.2.1 META-THEORETICAL PARADIGM: FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

Knowledge and knowledge creation is politically inclined as it occurs in conditions that are enmeshed in relations of power between knowers and knowledge itself (Ali, 2006; Campbell, 2004). The standpoint theory of feminism is interested in local sites of power and knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The locations of power and discourses are situated at extremities. As a result, location of power discourse includes and excludes privileges and issues of knowledge (Halbert, 2006). My interest in power relations, partnerships and feminist theory led me to investigate what might become visible if a feminist lens were applied to partnerships and power relations in PR. Feminism implies a critical understanding of women's multiple perspectives and works toward inclusion, participation, action, and social change while confronting the underlying assumptions a researcher brings into the research

process (Reid, 2004). Feminism not only focuses on a variety of particular moral and political claims, but also on ways of asking and answering questions, constructive and critical dialogue with mainstream philosophical views and methods (Haslanger, Tuana & O'Connor, 2012). Feminist inquiry thus provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena that includes topics of the body, class and work, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work, human trafficking, and sexuality (Haslanger, *et al*., 2012). Given that multiple forms of feminism can be distinguished (Ritzer, 1992), I thus used feminist standpoint theory as a possible avenue to obtain an understanding of power dynamics and relations in PR partnership.

Feminist standpoint theory provides an approach for overcoming some of the limitations in theorising about diversity. This theory is an offshoot of the Marxist philosophy, and thus gives a systematic approach for theorising the experiences, lived contexts, and perspectives of women (Adam, Howcroft & Richardson, 2001; Harding, 2004; Haraway, 1991). Its core is premised on acknowledging societal positioning and provides a subjective standpoint from which individuals interact with themselves and perceive the world (Orbe, 1998). Feminist standpoint theory fulfils dual research objectives. As a first objective, the theory aims to premise itself on the social, political, and material contexts of women's experiences and situated knowledge (Orbe, 1998). Thereafter, the situated knowledge is used with the objective of achieving social change. However, it was possible to use the standpoint stream of feminist theory to interpret the experiences of teachers in a world where both men and women's experiences and voices can be fully represented based on their own perspectives. I should emphasise that a feminist approach aims to establish non-exploitative, collaborative relationships and to conduct research that is transformative.

A feminist standpoint can provide insight into power, knowledge and social structures (Brookfield, 2001; Jacques, 1992; Ritzer, 1992). Since power is a central concept in feminist theory, I am of the opinion that it was appropriate to rely on feminism, in my attempt to explore and understand the experiences of teachers as I unveiled issues of power relations and partnership dynamics, from the participants' own perspectives, experience and local knowledge. Feminism is believed to have conceptualised power as a resource to be (re)distributed (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Other groups of feminism perceive power in terms of resources as domination and as empowerment, which could be exercised at individual and collective level respectively (Belenky *et al*., 1986). I agree with

this conceptualisation, as the intention throughout the study was to investigate how teachers understand power from their standpoint as a group or individuals, either as resource to be redistributed or as a tool of empowerment.

While there are no other independent points that exist to evaluate the virtues of other standpoints, what has been referred to as legitimate knowledge is based on the lives of men in dominant status, cultures, classes and races (Allen, 1998). Collins (1990) argues that premising the construction and legitimisation of knowledge claims perpetuate and uphold unjust power systems. In most areas of studies, for example, the dominant knowledge upholds that women and other marginalised groups are outsiders, whose relations can be analysed in relation to dominant groups. I agree that no neutral field of knowledge production exists and that all knowledge production is rather influenced by standpoint in a social class. Furthermore, I agree and argue that the current way of knowledge production (typically created by the upper group in a hierarchy) is not a universally applicable framework, but one of many possible avenues for knowledge construction. Feminist standpoint theory derives its argument from the power/knowledge framework that focuses on collective experiences and histories (Heckman, 1997). The collective experiences and histories are based on common experiences in subordinate locations in relation to power hierarchies, and these common experiences lend a particular kind of sense-making to social groups (Heckman, 1997; Collins, 1990). The power and knowledge framework created is established in such a way that the activities of the dominant group (mostly men) that usually occupies the top of the stratified hierarchy organise and limit what persons in lower positions can understand about themselves and the world around them. Therefore the dominant hierarchy standpoint is usually given privileged preferential treatment by most theorists. As a result, qualities of race, class, gender, ethnicity, age and sexuality are essentials of social structure that foster inequality in groups (Haslanger, *et al.*, 2012; Collins, 1990). The compound of the qualities creates social groups and their resultant standpoints.

Many feminists want to deconstruct the power/domination relationship and suggest alternative methods for understanding relationships, based on reciprocal empowerment (Cixous, 1977; Hartsock, 1997; Held, 1993; Irigaray, 1985). A feminist way of knowing thus emphasises the relationship built, rather than the domination over others. It seeks to value multiple ways of knowing instead of privileging one over the other (Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Fletcher, 1998; Ritzer, 1992). I pay heed to this concept of using feminist epistemology of emphasising

relationships, and also pay attention to the multiple ways of knowledge construction, appreciating one's standpoint in a society.

Feminist standpoint theory emphasises the social location of the knower and the participants. As humans are engaged in dialogue, questions such as the following come to mind: *Whose lens of reference and understanding are humans concerned with? What is the situation of participants in terms of their gender, race, social class, power and margin? Through their voices, whose ideas count?* (Chambers, 1994a). Throughout the study, I formulated a method of articulating voices of participants (as reflected in my research journal, see Appendix J) as they experienced power relations, partnership, authority of knowledge and experiences of enablement.

Having said the above, I found it appropriate to utilise a feminist perspective as a tool to understand the complexity of partnerships and teachers' experiences in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the related issues of power relations, knowledge, authority, voice, and empowerment. In line with this, I selected PRA as research design. The basic assumption of PRA is that common people (everyone regardless of being a researcher) possess a rich knowledge base and are capable of generating new knowledge necessary to guide actions for their own benefit. Furthermore, PRA stresses power reversals in research, whereby 'ordinary' people are the ones who lead, do the research and come up with solutions. Power reversals are such that the idea is to help a community rediscover or create knowledge that will improve quality of life. By returning the power of knowledge generation and use to 'ordinary', often marginalised people, such knowledge could contribute to the creation of a more accurate, critical reflection of social reality, the liberation of human creative potential, and the mobilisation of human resources to solve social problems (Hall, 2009; Maguire, 1987). Feminism and PRA both emphasise relationship building based on reciprocal empowerment and the value of multiple ways of knowing.

One of the many advantages of using feminist standpoint epistemology is that it 'incorporates the Marxist idea which proposes that all social groups have different epistemological standpoints' (Ahlstrom, 2005:30). All social groups are considered equal in terms of the knowledge that they possess, regardless of their socioeconomic position. Social groups, including marginalised groups, construct their social reality. This gives them a sense of emancipation; hence, they may feel that they too are understood. The goal of this study was to allow for the creation of knowledge that is truthful from the social reality of teacher

participants. It is my belief that multiple truths do exist, based on feminist standpoint epistemology. The participants in this study were allowed to share their experiences from their own perspectives, meanings and social locations with respect to their unique ways of thinking and knowledge creation.

However, feminist standpoint theory also implies a few limitations and challenges (Stanley, 1997). Some critics question the very epistemology of feminism, in which it is critiqued for a lack of producing rational and unbiased knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). This is attributed to the concern that a researcher might bring his/her own biases. For the feminist standpoint, this problem can be countered by being reflexive about the research project (Olesen, 1998). I used reflexivity to reflect on my views, thoughts and conduct. Another critique relates to the recognition of diverse experiences from different social classes by feminist standpoint, making it hard to come up with clear accurate knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). In order to address the aforementioned challenges, I used different methods of data generation to articulate the credibility and authority of knowledge. Furthermore, my position as an African woman, pursuing her doctoral studies and with experience of being a teacher, allowed me to acquire multiple identities and be in the position to represent the social realities of teachers who participated. Additionally, it was the goal of the study to recognise diverse voices and knowledge production from the different standpoints of the participants.

As an epistemological doctrine, feminist standpoint theory is critiqued for the possibility of entailing a subjectivist approach to knowledge that privileges the experience of knowers as the source of knowledge without grappling with complex questions concerning the credibility of particular knowledge claims (Hawkesworth, 1995; Olesen, 1998). In relying upon experience as the ground of truth, feminist standpoint theory is further critiqued and there are claims that it does not do justice to the fallibility of human knowers, the multiplicity and diversity of women's experiences, and the theoretical constitution of experience (Grant, 1995; Hawkesworth, 1995). In an attempt to address this challenge I employed crystallisation, where I used multiple data sources. I also included member checking, to ensure that the participants' voices were heard.

Feminists are also challenged with ethical dilemmas, which include 'the concern for and even involvement with the participant persons' (Olesen, 1998:316). Some ethical dilemmas may arise when doing research in one's own professional culture, where roles may conflict. In this study, I had established sound rapport with the participants. They were more than willing to

participate, and at the same time I ensured that I remained reflexive, subsequently applying ethical research principles. Furthermore, I treated the participants as co-researchers, whose lives and situations were the focus of the research project. As this study was participatory, both partners discussed issues openly and in a respectful manner as a way to achieve consensus on research through a co-learning and reflexive process (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). By ensuring that I used participatory principles and practices, I was able to be politically and ethically accountable to the participants.

I believe that standpoint epistemology can provide resources that traditional epistemologies lack. Several central themes in standpoint theory may provide a comprehensive picture of how societies are structured and may thus have epistemological consequences. Knowledge and power are interconnected (Freire, 1987; Turner & Roth, 2003). Turner and Roth (2003) succinctly summarise the core themes of feminism, which I applied and adhered to as a guide in this study and the focal point of my research questions. Accordingly, I believe that what people do – what kinds of interactions they have in social relations and relations to the natural world – both enables and limits what they can know. Yet what people typically can 'do' 'depends in part upon their locations in social structures – whether or not they are assigned the work of taking care of children, and of people's bodies and the spaces they inhabit, or of administering large agencies, corporations, or research institutes' (Turner & Roth, 2003:201).

In conclusion, and addressing the challenges associated with feminism, I relied on reflexivity as a strategy and political stance, with reflexivity serving as a powerful analytical and methodological tool enabling sensitivity to the power relations embedded in the process of research. Haney (2002:296) emphasises the results of such an approach: '… feminist scholars have produced new interpretations of the forms of power embedded in everyday life'. Taking a feminist stance, I was interested in empowerment and investing control over the process of the production of knowledge in the hands of the participants (teachers). This perspective is evident in this study. The power dynamics within the world of research, as well as within the research relationships and psyche, were factored into the research rationale of this study and accounted for. The potential of research as an empowering and emancipatory tool was also seriously considered.

3.2.2 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM: PR

I used PR as methodological paradigm. I view a PR approach as a suitable paradigm since it involves inquiry based on the existential concept of experience, as proposed by Ortega-Gasset (cited in Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). PR is an umbrella term for approaches that share a core philosophy of inclusivity and that recognise the value of engaging those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users, and stakeholders of the research (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Israel, 2003; Green & Mercer, 2001). In broad terms, PR is defined as 'systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change' (Cargo & Mercer, 2008:326).

The essence of PR is that marginalised people take the responsibility of researching problems they face in a partnership with outsiders (researchers) and take action to advance their lives and ultimately reflect on their ongoing experience (Rahman, 2008). PR projects are typically conducted with the view of a social change agenda and are based on the belief that the process of participating in constructing knowledge about one's own context could result in equalising asymmetrical power relations that are often present in social science research (Rahman, 2008). The key element of participatory inquiry approaches is that they reduce the 'researcher' and 'researched' distinction which is common among a traditional research stance. The assumption of PR is based on the notion that integrating implicit knowledge and multiple perspectives might result in more authentic research. Equal participation of academic and non-academic partners is the ideal for many PR approaches to help partnerships balance scientific excellence with social and cultural relevance; foster ownership, capacity building, and empowerment of non-academic partners; and translate research knowledge into action. This democratic ideal emphasises the unique strengths, complementary expertise, and shared responsibilities of academic and non-academic partners who are engaged in a partnership where each contributes equally (Israel *et al.*, 1998). PR assisted me in understanding the dynamics of power relations as experienced by teachers participating in a participatory study (STAR intervention).

In PR, the conceptualisation of power stands central, as PR addresses the notion of relationships between power and knowledge. PR argues that its 'strategies can challenge the deep rooted power inequities' (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008:172). Power is an important element in that it allows people to construct reality, meaning and truth as perceived by the participants from their standpoint (Foucault, 1977). Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) further

argue that in PR, the goal is to reduce and maximise the multiple ways of conceptualising power and its implications to research. Assuming that knowledge is power, PR is premised on the concept of attempting to rectify power imbalances by sharing the power that is within a knowledge generation process. This implies that the role of the researcher is to form a 'power with' relationship with the co-researchers in a community. By virtue of this assumption that knowledge is power, PR adds a different set of social relations to the participants engaged. Participatory projects are unique and highly context-specific, and the social relations among those involved in a research project are typically complex. However, the advantage of PR for this study is that it could be used to answer questions about the complex nature of a phenomenon under investigation with the purpose of describing and understanding power and partnership in PR from the perspective of teachers (Leedy & Omrod, 2005).

Chambers (1997:45) argues that the principle of PR is to 'recognise the importance of bringing in the voice of marginalised people's realities as it forms part of decision-making and basis for action'. In other words, PR allows for diversity of knowledge from different social groups. Chambers (1997) further argues that bringing in participants and listening to them in a participatory process might result in new insights, priorities, problems and issues. I view this methodological paradigm as appropriate and relevant to the current study, as I truly believe that participatory methodology assisted me in uncovering dynamic complexities of power, from multiple perspectives (Boser, 2006).

A key strength of PR is the integration of researchers' theoretical and methodological expertise with non-academic participants' real-world knowledge and experiences into a mutually reinforcing partnership (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). The advantage of using PR further rests on two dimensions, which clearly distinguish this approach from the traditional approaches to social sciences. First, PR is people-centred as the research is informed and guided by the experiences and needs of people (Brown, 1985). In this case, people are brought together to discuss through dialogue, and talk to one another as they investigate a problem from their own standpoint. People-centredness implies that everyone's voice is heard and that there is no relying on people of the 'upper' strata for action and decision-making. Praxis is equally important as it acknowledges that theory and practice cannot be separated, which makes PR value-based and explicit in its political stance (Brown, 1985). Throughout the study, the teacher participants were engaged in all forms of investigation and they were allowed to use and capitalise their power through language and meaning-making. The essence of PR is promoting the forging of partnerships, which I employed in the study as I allowed the

teacher participants to interpret content. In doing this, Sohng (1995) asserts that such partnerships will result in empowerment. Through empowerment, the teacher participants in this study were brought together to investigate a common problem as well as acknowledge their experiences as the basis for understanding and critical reflection.

PR also implies some challenges. I acknowledge the fact that traditional research as well as in participatory research has been critiqued for being gender blind and overlooking some of the differentials inherent in participatory research (Reid, 2004). Women have been largely excluded from producing dominant forms of knowledge and Maguire (1987) emphasises the distinct silence around gender and women in PR discourse, calling it the 'androcentric filter'. While feminists researchers have attempted to address the androcentric biases inherent in PR (Reid, 2004) and embrace a call for transformational structural and personal action (Maguire, 2001), Harding (1986) argues that there is no clear strategy for achieving truly emancipatory knowledge-seeking. In order to address this challenge, I applied the guiding principles of inclusion, participation, social change, and researcher reflexivity as provided for in feminist action research frameworks. Some critics view PR as non-scientific in its methodology and particularly challenging in terms of issues such as reflexivity, transferability and rigour. The aim of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of teachers using participatory methodologies in the STAR intervention project by exploring issues of power and partnership. As such, credibility is an important aspect of this study to assure readers that the findings can be trusted in terms of the information presented and interpretations made. According to Keeves (1998:322), 'a measure is valid if it does what it is intended to do'. I relied on the strategy of crystallisation in which I derived the sources of data from multiple methods such as focus groups, interviews and visual methods in order to view the phenomenon from various angles. I also utilised the strategy of member checking, where my interpretations of the data were taken back to the teacher participants to confirm what they have said. Furthermore, I strived to obtain trustworthiness in terms of the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (2005), being credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. These criteria are explained in more detail in section 3.9.

The concept of empowerment in PR has been criticised for implying a paternalistic relationship between researchers and the people being researched, and ignoring the extent to which people can self-empower (Leyshon, 2002). There is a tendency to assume that power can always be transferred, that academic researchers have this intention and that participants are willing to be empowered in this way (Kitchin & Hubbard, 1999). Given the increasing use

of PR in research, 'empowerment' can mean empowering people to take part in the modern sector of developing societies (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001), and participatory processes may give an impression of change while serving to contain planning or stifling dissent (Pugh & Potter, 2003).

Inequalities within communities are sometimes poorly reflected by PR, as has been illustrated in various studies in the subordination of women's voices and interests unless these are explicitly addressed (Maguire, 1987; Goebel, 1998; Guijt & Shah, 1998; Momsen, 2003). The power relations in which participants are enmeshed within their communities can make it difficult to participate fully, even where they wish to. In researching violence, for example, women may be reluctant to speak as it may jeopardise their safety (Moser & McIlwaine, 1999). In practice, academics often have the most input and retain overall control in research (Pain & Francis, 2003).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since I attempted to explain teachers' experiences and perceptions of power relations and partnerships in a participatory intervention project, I view a PRA design as appropriate for the study. A PRA research design enabled me to interact with teachers by understanding and learning from them in an interactive manner.

3.3.1 CONCEPTUALISING PARTICIPATORY REFLECTION AND ACTION

Participatory reflection and action (PRA) is a methodological approach for interacting with local people in an effort to understand and learn from them (Chambers, 1994b). It involves a set of principles, a process of communication and a menu of methods for seeking local people's participation in putting forward their points of view to make use of such learning (Chambers, 1994b). PRA is a means of collecting different kinds of data, identifying and mobilising intended groups, evoking their participation and opening ways in which intended groups can participate in decision-making, project design, execution of actions and monitoring of progress and outcomes (Chambers, 1994b; Mukherjee, 1993). Due to its participatory nature, PRA is a useful methodology to focus attention on people, their livelihoods and their inter-relationships with socio-economic and ecological factors (Chambers, 1994b; Mukherjee, 1993). To fully explore the in-depth experiences of teachers as

partners in research with particular reference to power relations, I used innovative PRA-based data generation techniques.

The philosophy of PRA is that the researcher is required to acknowledge and appreciate that the research participants possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be partners in research. I took cognisance of the fact that teachers do indeed possess the knowledge and skills to be partners in the study as they participated in getting answers to the research questions. PRA is both a methodology and change of attitude technique that combines a number of approaches to enable local or indigenous people to obtain, share, and analyse their knowledge of life and living conditions (Chambers, 1994a; Chambers 1994b). In academic research (Goebel, 1998), using PRA methodology provides a means to increase the space for participants to express and control the knowledge being created.

In this study, I believe that a PRA design allowed the participants with the necessary space to express the knowledge being created. PRA relies on visual, flexible and creative data generation methods such as venn diagramming, direct observation, and focus groups. The use of PRA lies in pursuing selected objectives through application of its principles, processes and methods. Some of the objectives of PRA are greater and better involvement of participants by learning about their perceptions, experiences and capabilities; ongoing research on the use of PRA; and suggesting improvements for this methodology (Mukherjee, 1993). In the current study, I assumed that participants could learn from their experiences, as articulated by Murkherjee (1993).

In order to fully benefit from the selected PRA design, I adhered to its guiding principles as cited by Chambers (1994b). I employed the following principles as I interacted with the participants: (1) Reversal of learning: I learnt directly from the participants, on the site and face to face, gaining insight from their local, physical, and social knowledge on issues related to teachers' experiences on power relations and partnerships; (2) They do it approach: I allowed the participants to facilitate the investigation, analysis, presentation and learning by participants themselves, for them to generate and own the outcomes and also learn, known as 'handing over the stick'; (3) Sharing of information and ideas between participants and outsider facilitators as well as between different practitioners and organisations (Chambers, 1994b). For this purpose, I engaged in a dialogue with the teachers.

A major strength of data generated by means of PRA is the possibility of rich contextual data which draws on people's own standpoint and locations (Chambers, 1994b). In this study, I used a combination of techniques drawn from PRA, which I explain in detail in section 3.5. I found PRA techniques to be suitable, as participants had the opportunity to express their experiences and ideas against the background of their own social reality and in their own terms. PRA emphasises control and definition of information by participants. For example, participants could be asked in their own language to provide drawings on how they perceived themselves as partners in research. Participants were at liberty to express themselves in their mother tongue if necessary.

Chambers (1994a) relates the success of PRA to a series of reversals, namely that of (1) frames (from etic to emic, that is, from the social standpoint or view of teachers; (2) modes (from individual to groups, from verbal to visual, from measuring to comparing); (3) relations (from reserve to rapport, creating a conducive environment where teachers could easily relate to me); and (4) power (from extracting to empowering; teachers did their own investigations and were allowed a voice) (Chambers, 1994a). As this study explored power dynamics and partnerships in PR, all series of reversals as stated by Chambers (1994a) could be observed and put into practice.

Although some scholars (Gibbon, 1999; Gibbon & Shrestha, 1998) view PRA as lacking in aggregating local knowledge to influence policy, it is used extensively in developing countries to plan, design, and implement programmes and policies that are culturally relevant, specific, and sustainable. Criticism of PRA cites its apparent lack of consideration for the complexity of rural communities (Goebel, 1998; Guijt & Shah, 1998). To some authors, problems with PRA may stem from its wide use and from scaling up without proper care, training and understanding of the methodology (Blackburn & Holland, 1998). To other authors, the challenges related to PRA concerns the methodology itself. For example, Guijt and Shah (1998), as well as Goebel (1998) argue that PRA, by emphasising public expression of knowledge and consensus, may obscure power differences and conflicting interests in the community (particularly gender-related differences), thereby contributing to the disempowerment of already disempowered groups. In response, Chambers (1994b) points out that PRA is oriented more by 'what works' than by 'why it works'. He argues that the advantage of this approach is that it is practical and related to the field, as opposed to an academic approach. In conducting the study, I agree with Chambers (1994b) that PRA is about 'what works'.

Another potential challenge of PRA is that when used in large applications it may end up becoming more extractive and losing meaning of the underlying principles of this approach. This study followed the underlying principles of PRA as articulated by Chambers (1994a), in which the foundation is the use of different types of methods and activities to collect information. I relied on PRA-activities, visual data, interviews and focus groups. Goebel (1998:41) further asserts that PRA could disadvantage people within a group, as PRA may 'work to hide local power relations' in which the voices of others can be silenced. In this study, the issue of 'dissident' views was not a problem since I allowed everyone to participate and express their opinions freely. Furthermore, I aimed to represent the views of all participants using different data generation activities.

Bevan (1999) identifies some additional challenges of PRA. The first challenge relates to little recognition of the fact that poor people are diversely embedded in unequal meso-/macroeconomic and social power structures (Bevan, 1999). In addition, many poor people are aware of their situations. In most countries there are universities with historians, social anthropologists, economists and sociologists, who often know a lot about the way poverty is mapped spatially, economically and socially within the country and about the causes and dynamics of poverty (Bevan, 1999). The STAR project uses the asset-based approach, whereby it is acknowledged that participants bring with them skills, strengths and resources. Therefore, as a researcher I aimed to learn from participants and fulfil the role of facilitator (Grinstein-Weiss, Curley & Charles, 2007; Mathie & Cunningham, 2002). Bevan's (1999) second challenge is related to the likelihood of scanty local knowledge on the part of PRA practitioners. Bevan (1999) asserts that people will often not mention important things in public or to strangers they do not trust. In this study, the STAR project has been ongoing since 2003, and sound rapport between teachers and researchers has been established (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011; Ferreira, 2006; Loots, 2010). The participants thus seemed open and an equal partnership appears to have been established (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011; Ferreira, 2006; Loots, 2010).

The third problem according to Bevan (1999) can be characterised as one of moral confusion. Recognition of the prevalence of nonlinear dynamics in social life brings with it the recognition of a gap between intentions and outcomes of PRA. In conditions of uncertainty and ongoing path dependence where the actions of other actors cannot be predicted, an act committed with the best of intentions can produce the worst of outcomes and vice versa. As indicated above, the STAR intervention is formed on the assumption that teachers who are

core participants are the drivers of the intervention, where they initiate and sustain psychosocial support in their school communities (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011).

3.3.2 SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

The ongoing STAR project has been conducted in three different regions in South Africa. For the purpose of this study, I conveniently chose (Nieuwenhuis, 2007) two of these sites (schools) to partner with teacher-cohorts. The rationale for convenience sampling is that, as explained earlier, the study forms part of a national PRA study conducted under the leadership of Ronél Ferreira and Liesel Ebersöhn (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012). The schools that participated in this study are familiar with the project and primary research team. This enhanced accessibility based on established relationships between the school stakeholders and the research team. I thus applied convenience sampling to select an information-rich site for an in-depth study. The sites that I chose are a primary school in the Eastern Cape and a secondary school in a remote area in Mpumalanga.

As convenience sampling implies the possibility of participants not reflecting a true representation of the greater population (Nieuwenhuis, 2007), the possibility exists that the results might not be generalised to the greater population. However, it was not the aim to obtain generalisable findings, but rather to focus on the experiences of a selected group of people. However, based on the detailed descriptions I provide on the context and the research process, the findings may be transferable to other similar contexts, as judged and decided by the reader of this thesis. Photographs 3.1 and 3.2 show sites of the participating schools.

Photograph 3.1: School 1: 1 March, 2009

Photograph 3.2: School 2: 19 May, 2010

As indicated in table 3.1, I purposefully selected (Nieuwenhuis, 2007) fifteen co-researchers (teachers: fourteen females and one male) from the participating schools in the two said provinces, who have been participating in STAR since 2003/2004. Although the research sites

were thus conveniently identified, the participating teachers were purposefully selected based on the following selection criteria:

- Teachers who have participated in the STAR intervention project since its initial stage;
- Teachers who have acted as STAR facilitators in the STAR dissemination research phase;
- Teachers who are teaching at the participating schools.

Employing purposive sampling allowed me to choose participants that fit the selection criteria, from whom I could obtain relevant data in terms of the focus of the study (Silverman, 2000). Furthermore, purposive sampling allowed me with the opportunity to choose participants involved in a phenomenon or process in which I am interested (Silverman, 2000). However, a purposive sample implied certain challenges and potential limitations as the selection of participants was solely based on my criteria (researcher's decision). Therefore, the selection can be regarded as subjective and biased (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). However, as this study contributes to the broader STAR project, I do not regard this as a limitation. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the selection and number of participants at each site.

Table 3.2: Summary of participants at each site

Site	Context	Number of participants	Criteria for selecting participants
Site A	Primary school: Eastern Cape, Port Elizabeth	Ten female teachers	Teachers participating in the STAR project since 2003
Site B	Secondary school: Mpumalanga, Steynsdorp	Four female teachers & one male	Teachers participating in the STAR project since 2004

3.4 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND ACTIVITIES

In this section I provide a detailed description of the research process of the study. The study involved four activities, spread over a period of two years (March 2009 to July 2011). Data were generated by using PRA-based activities, namely visual data techniques, focus groups, interviews, observation, field notes, member checking and a research journal. Table 3.3 provides a research schedule of the data generation process.

Table 3.3: Summary of research process

Venue of study	Respective school sites (Eastern Cape [EC] & Mpumalanga [MP] participating in STAR)			
Activity of study	**Activity 1**	**Activity 2**	**Activity 3**	**Activity 4**
Description and purpose of activity	Concept clarification and visual activity. To find out how teachers as co-researchers experienced being part of the STAR intervention in terms of power relations and partnerships.	Interactive visual activity and clarification on experience of power/partnerships. Participants had to explain and share their own understanding and experiences of power and partnerships in STAR and how they perceived themselves as co-researchers in a collaborative research project in terms of power relations.	Focus groups. To determine which factors can facilitate or hinder the process of partnership between co-researchers and researchers in a research partnership.	Interviews. To determine which factors can facilitate or hinder the process of partnership between co-researchers and researchers in a research partnership.
Time Frame	Eastern Cape March 2009 –July 2011 Mpumalanga March 2009 – July 2011			
Data generation techniques	**Purpose**	**Data documentation techniques**	**Participating teachers**	**Activity**
PRA-based visual activity (drawings)	To determine how teachers perceived their role in the project.	Drawings, tape-recordings, transcripts, field notes.	Ten teacher participants in EC school. Five teacher participants in MP.	Activity 1
Formal discussion sessions	Conceptualisation of the key concepts of the study (power and partnerships).	Tape-recordings, verbatim transcripts, photographs, videos.	Ten teacher participants in EC school. Five teacher participants in MP.	Activity 2
Visual activity (poster pictures)	To determine how teachers perceived themselves as co-researchers in a collaborative research project in terms of power relations. To establish when the teacher participants experienced power or felt powerless through poster photographs, going through the years of participating in the project. This also addressed the research question of how power can be expressed by teachers as co-researchers within a participatory process.	Photographs, drawings, tape-recordings, transcripts, field notes.	Ten teacher participants in EC school. Five teacher participants in MP.	Activity 3

Visual activity (sun rays/ clouds)	To determine the factors that enabled or hindered power and partnerships in the project using sun rays and clouds, and also how teachers perceived themselves.	Tape-recordings, verbatim transcripts, Photographs, videos.	Ten teacher participants in EC school. Five teacher participants in MP.	Activity 4
Focus group session	To gain insight into issues of power and partnership as experienced by teachers, the challenges and the successes. To determine in which manner teachers as co-researchers could benefit from participating in an asset-based intervention. This provided an opportunity to further elaborate in detail on activities 1–3.	Tape-recordings, verbatim transcripts, photographs, videos.	Two teacher participants in each school.	Activity 5
Interviews	To augment the information gained through focus groups and to address the research question on the relations of power at play in the specific activities of STAR.	Tape-recordings, verbatim transcripts.	Three participants per school.	Activity 6

3.5 DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION

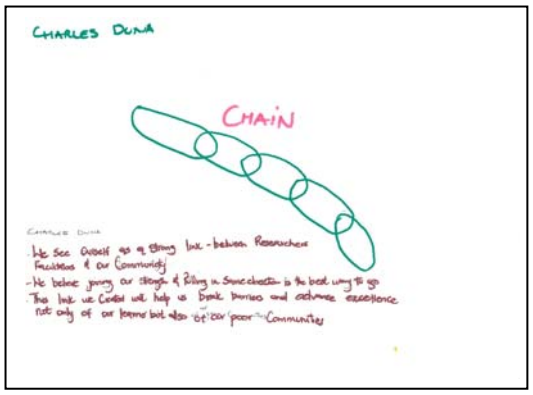
Janesick (2003) emphasises that research methods must go beyond the aim of triangulation and therefore proposes crystallisation. The concept of crystallisation allows for an infinite variety of angles. This enables a shift from seeing something as a fixed, rigid two-dimensional object towards the idea of a crystal, which allows for variety of shape, substance, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities and angles of approach (Janesick, 2003). Richardson (1994:522) explains the crystallisation metaphor as follows: ‘crystals grow, change and alter, but are not amorphous… crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, though partial understanding of the topic’. Since the purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth exploration and description of teachers’ experiences as partners in a PR project in terms of power relations and partnerships, I relied on crystallisation and employed multiple data generation techniques (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2003).

Furthermore, I utilised PRA techniques with direct participation, many of which involved visual activities as an integral part of the study. These correlate well with feminist standpoint

epistemology. My supervisors were present throughout data generation. I also consulted with my supervisors on a regular basis when doing data analysis, as explained in section 3.6.

3.5.1 VISUAL PRA-BASED DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION TECHNIQUES

I used visual representations in the form of drawings and photographs as one of the major sources of data generation during a seminar on 'Partners in education research and practice: collaboration between teachers and education researchers' (2009). I introduced myself to the teachers and reflected on the STAR project. The purpose of this visual PRA-based activity was to address the following research questions: *How do teachers perceive themselves as co-researchers in a collaborative research project in terms of power relations? In which manner might teachers as co-researchers benefit from participation in an asset-based intervention.* During this session, teachers were requested to in groups draw how they viewed themselves in the STAR intervention. I provided teachers with pencils and coloured markers, for them to compile symbolic representations of their role, and experiences in the project as co-researchers. Photograph 3.3 show teachers' perceptions about themselves in the STAR project using a PRA visual activity.



Photograph 3.3: Teachers' drawing, depicting how they perceived their role as a chain that links the community, school 1: 19 March 2009

In addition to asking the participants to draw pictures that would depict how they saw themselves as co-researchers in the project, I requested them to include some narratives to accompany their drawings. Even though this activity involved all schools participating in the STAR project at the time, I only analysed the drawings of the two schools I selected for this study.

For the second data generation activity, exploring how power can be expressed by teachers as co-researchers within a participatory process, I asked the participants to divide into groups of at least three (where the group was large enough to be divided into groups), where each group had to discuss the question that I presented to them (Appendix A**:** video showing teachers conceptualising concepts of 'partnerships' and 'power'). The purpose was to access prior knowledge on concepts which formed the core of the study, namely 'Power' and 'Partnerships'. Essentially, I aimed to conceptualise meaning and understanding of the words 'Power' and 'Partnerships' as understood by the teachers. Participating teachers had to write their own meaning and understanding of these two concepts on flipchart sheets. During this conceptualisation stage, the groups had to explain their conceptualisation in terms of their own experiences and how they related their understanding to the project. Thereafter, small groups shared their power sharing partnership experiences with the rest of the teachers. Each group reported back, after which the entire team was allowed to add or elaborate, if they felt they needed to do so.

Following this discussion, another visual activity was completed, where I requested the participating teachers to use drawings to demonstrate how they perceived themselves as co-researchers in the STAR project. These drawings were supported by written narrations. This visual drawing activity was done in an attempt to address the research question on *how do teachers perceived themselves as co-researchers in a collaborative research project in terms of power relations.* Photograph 3.4 depicts some writing by teachers on the PRA visual activity expressing their meanings of power and partnerships.

Photograph 3.4: Conceptualisation and meaning making of concepts, school 1: 18 March, 2010

In the third visual PRA-based data generation activity, teachers were requested to locate power retrospectively using visual data. I provided the teachers with photo posters of themselves participating in the STAR project dating to 2003 (Appendix B). Each photo poster had a couple of photographs showing the teachers participating in the project. Below the photographs a line was drawn with the word 'power' on one end and the word 'powerless' on the other end. I asked the teachers to indicate at each year of photograph posters to which extent they experienced power or felt powerless. Teachers used a symbolic indicator (hammer drill) on the line to indicate their experiences. Once they had indicated their location of power on the continuum line by pasting the hammer drill symbol on the line, I asked them to explain in writing below each photo poster why they had placed the indication where they did. After documenting their views, groups were requested to report back to the entire group in order to elaborate on their writing during a focus group discussion. Photographs 3.5 and 3.6 provide evidence of this activity.

Photograph 3.5: Photo poster to indicate power, school 1: 18 March, 2010

Photograph 3.6: Photo poster to indicate power, school 2, 15 November 2010

I found the use of photographs as a data generating prompt advantageous in the sense that it seemingly captured the PR process as is (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006), which allowed me to prompt the participants to remember events that happened some time ago. Since I used photograph posters that covered a period of eight years, this enabled me to provide concrete prompts. The mere fact that photographs are tangible evidence and that they attest to the fact that a certain event took place as it was captured in motion at that particular time, guided participants in reflecting on their experiences.

Another advantage of photographs is that they assisted me during the data analysis process. Through photographs, I was able to come up with themes that emerged during data generation. Furthermore, photographs did not only provide concrete evidence, they also

showed change of time as transpired in the research process and through the different times of how the STAR project advanced, making it easy for the teacher participants to capture moments of 'power' and 'partnership'. The last advantage of using photographs in the study was that it demonstrated rigour in the study, as this could provide evidence of the research process.

While visual representations may depict various reflections of the meaning of a phenomenon, they may be difficult to analyse because of the rich information captured in them (Harper, 2005). As a researcher, I agree that visuals are open to multiple interpretations. As stated elsewhere, I used member checking and crystallisation to ensure that I capture the participants' views and meanings as they were. Another potential disadvantage is that I could potentially influence the nature of drawings or visuals collected (Harper, 2005). In this study, I occasionally allowed participants to draw what they wanted to and how they wanted to depict the situation, by leaving them to their drawings. As a result, I do not believe that I influenced the participants in creating their drawings.

The fourth visual PRA-based activity of data generation focused on factors that could have enabled or hindered power and partnerships. During this interactive visual activity, I provided small groups of participating teachers with drawings of sun rays (photograph 3.7), in which teachers had to indicate factors that enabled them to experience power and that they were partners in research. This activity attempted to address the research question on *which factors that can facilitate or hinder the process of partnership between teachers as co-researchers and university researchers in a research partnership.*

Photograph 3.7: Using sunrays to indicate factors that enabled power and partnerships, school 2: 15 November, 2010

Photograph 3.8: Using clouds to indicate factors that impeded power and partnerships, school 1: 19 March, 2010

Additionally, I provided the participating teachers with drawings of clouds (photograph 3.8), requesting them to indicate factors that hindered power and partnership as they participated in the projects. After completing the sun ray and cloud visual activity, groups were requested to report back to the group and elaborate on their experience of power and partnership in the project (Appendix C). This activity was augmented by interviews with a minimum of two teachers per school.

In the last PRA activity, I facilitated a discussion on clarifying factors that had enabled or hindered power and partnerships as experienced by teachers in the STAR project. Each group and the team as a whole had the opportunity to reflect on their participation in the STAR project and report back on their experiences of being partners in a participatory project with emphasis on power relations. Furthermore, I asked additional questions during focus groups at each school, where all participating teachers formed part of the focus group. In particular, the purpose of the focus group discussions was to augment the following research question: *In which manner might teachers as co-researchers benefit from participation in an asset-based intervention*? Photograph 3.9 provides evidence of this activity.

Photograph 3.9: Focus group discussion to augment PRA visual activities, school 1: 19 March, 2010

'Making a photograph is a form of thinking' (Da Silva, 2000:4), which might work as a vehicle for promoting self-exploration, reflection, and personal discovery. Following post-positivist research, social scientists have often connected photographs, videos, drawings, paintings, and films with narrative descriptions to illuminate a society's culture and behaviours (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Educational researchers (Richards, 1996, 1998), particularly those using qualitative methods, have expressed keen interest in using visual approaches as a form of inquiry (Banks, 2001; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Janesick, 2003;

Pink, 2001; Rose, 2003). Visual method interpretation as a form of data may provide an alternative opportunity to explain phenomena in a rich manner and interpret experiences (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The advantage of visual representation is that it is 'viewed as trustworthy text that can be more important than the spoken or written word' (Pink, 2001:5). This study used feminist standpoint theory that locates local knowledge. Therefore, I believe that drawings had the potential to adequately and accurately reflect the understandings of the phenomenon from the standpoint of the participants themselves. Visuals provided an opportunity to participants to express and share their perceptions of reality (Harper, 2005). Richards (2006:38) succinctly states that 'we rely on sensory images that present up to date information and instantaneous messages'. These messages are in the form of films and digital graphics; therefore, knowledge becomes visually constructed (Rose, 2003). As a researcher, it is my view that the drawings portrayed teachers' perceptions of their reality and state of mind as compared to verbal definitions and descriptions (Diem-Wille, 2001).

Pink (2001) argues that the use of visual methods needs to move away from concerns with justifying visual ethnography as 'valid', both in itself and as a part of qualitative research, to a focus on seeing the visual as a medium through which knowledge and critiques can be created outside of text. Prosser (1997) shares the same sentiments of image-based research and states that the use of images within research is often viewed as a practice that has traditionally been seen to detract from social research as a science. In other words, visuals may be considered untrustworthy (Polkinghorne, 2005). Prosser (1997) states that it is only through the increased use of visuals within research, and discussion of this, that the disparate and fragmented instances of image-based research will be brought together and into the mainstream. In support, recent research brings the value of visual methodology to the fore, as seen in the work of Theron (2012) and Theron, Stuart and Mitchel (2011). I agree with the benefits and possibilities of visual methodology stated by authors like these, hence my choice of these data generation activities.

Another concern for visual ethnographers and anthropologists relates to the 'realism' which can be claimed from visual material. Traditionally, positivists have been concerned with the demonstrable objectivity of images in research. Those from an ethnographic background have been concerned with ensuring that the film and images they use convey a picture which is real, that portrays realism (or the 'truth') of the situation as it occurred (Ball & Smith, 1992).

With the development of digital technology, it is also increasingly easy to manipulate images, giving an impression of events that may be inaccurate (Ball & Smith, 1992). Yet, since the first visual anthropology, there has been an awareness of the implications of photographs or events captured being staged. I have addressed this potential challenge by ensuring that each picture is accompanied by a description of time and place as well as field notes and analytical observations. In addition, I relied on reflexivity and recognition of the context which produced the images (Pink, 2001).

3.5.2 FOCUS GROUPS

In an attempt to obtain in-depth insight into how teachers experienced power and partnerships in the STAR project, I supported visual techniques with focus group discussions (see Appendix E for transcripts of the focus groups). Focus group interviews allowed me to obtain a range of responses and activate forgotten details of experience (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). According to Berg (2003:100), focus groups are described as 'either guided or unguided discussions addressing a particular topic of interest or relevance to the group and I'.

Focus groups were conducted with about five teachers as a way of creating a non-threatening atmosphere. For each PRA visual activity, I included a focus group discussion. At each site I conducted a total of four focus group discussions. In the Eastern Cape, focus groups were conducted in March 2010 over a period of two days, each lasting for at least an hour. In Mpumalanga, focus groups were conducted in October 2010 over a period of two days, each lasting one to two hours. A non-threatening atmosphere was conducive for participants to speak freely and openly as they expressed their opinions and shared their views on how they had experienced power relations and partnerships in the STAR project. I ensured that the discussions remained focused and that everyone's voice was heard and opinions expressed. I also selected conducive venues that could allow teacher participants to feel comfortable. Photographs 3.10 and 3.11 capture some of the focus groups that took place.

Photograph 3.10: Focus group, school 1: 19 March, 2010

Photograph 3.11: Focus group, school 2: 15 November, 2010

All focus group sessions were conducted in the various staff rooms which could be closed. Sessions were conducted at a time when most non-participating teachers did not need to utilise the staff rooms. Focus groups were conducted in a language that was understood by both parties, namely English. As I was aware of the fact that English is a second language to all of us, teacher participants were allowed to also contribute in their mother tongue languages with translations by fellow group members. I cross-checked the translations with a language expert to confirm accuracy. Sessions were attended by five participants.

The use of focus groups in this study proved to be valuable in the sense that I was able to 'generate large quantities of material from the group in a short period of time' (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005:903). The data gained from focus group discussions provided me with 'powerful interpretive insights' about the topic under discussion (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005:903). Furthermore, I was able to gain rich information about the issues of power and partnerships in greater depth due to the synergy and dynamics o*f the group. The study used the feminist standpoint epistemology to unravel the voice and knowledge of teacher participants on how they saw situations in their own way. I therefore agree with Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) that focus groups may reveal the dynamic and in-depth ways in which people perceive themselves in relation with one another during dialogue. Another important observation that I noted in this study was that the principles of a participatory methodology that advocates for voices of the marginalised to be heard and propagates handing over the stick, were revealed during the study. I noted democracy during the process of data generation as teacher participants experienced ownership of the research process since the whole process encouraged open dialogue interactions. By experiencing the feeling of democracy and ownership of the research process, focus groups allowed teacher participants to create a

variety of meanings, interpretations and perspectives on the topic under discussion (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

During focus groups, I experienced the advantage of such discussions allowing researchers to acknowledge, appreciate and understand group dynamics (Nieuwenhuis, 2007), by facilitating interaction in terms of the participants' views and experiences within a group. Focus groups provided me with the opportunity to observe how the teacher participants interacted with one another. I was able to identify how meanings and attitudes were formed among the participants and could observe non-verbal cues. I could prompt teachers to elaborate when needed (Anderson, 2002). Furthermore, I was able to identify the power relations at play among the teacher participants. Whenever I noticed that certain members were dominating the discussions (another potential challenge), I gave others the chance to express their ideas and experiences, hence allowing everyone an equal voice (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Yet in this study, I view the potential disadvantage of domination to be positive, since it could expose issues of power relations, which form part of the study. I devised the strategy of using non-verbal cues in a respectful manner to encourage everyone to participate. At times I would move the digital voice recorder to the direction of silent participants, as a cue. I was able to notice contradictions and uncertainties, and could encourage teacher participants to share more and further clarify issues. I believe that the dynamics of the groups in terms of the participants' experiences, perspectives and ideas that were shared made it possible to obtain rich, informative contributions (Berg, 2003; Litosseliti, 2003).

Power is a contested and at times sensitive issue to discuss, particularly when it is mentioned together with partnerships. This study thus focuses on issues that imply discussions of sensitive topics, in turn implying ethical challenges of confidentiality and anonymity. In this regard, I aimed to conduct the research with respect and sensitivity for all the information I obtained. The core responsibility of this study, as indicated by De Vos *et al*. (2002), was to keep the identities of the participants anonymous; therefore I made sure that I did not mislead them in any manner during the research process.

Krueger and Casey (2000) argue that at times focus groups may not be able to achieve their purpose of providing reliable data on topics that might elicit strong feelings. This may be true in instances where a discussed topic is sensitive to a particular group. However, focus groups enabled me to discuss and address a contested and sensitive topic with teacher participants

who had been collaborating with researchers. As the environment seemed conducive, participants were able to communicate and express their views freely in my presence as a doctoral student. I focused on creating sound rapport based on trust between me and the teacher participants, which made it easy for them to share their experiences and views. At the start of each discussion we established a code of conduct. Participants agreed that there ought to be respect for one another; that all should speak freely and that no one should be judged on the basis of their contributions nor be interrupted when they were speaking. Before each focus group, we had lunch together, creating an atmosphere of relaxation and trust. During lunch, I could convey the message that I was interested in more than the information to be shared at the session, that I respected the participants as individuals and that I too was comfortable with relating to them. At the end of each focus group discussion, I again spent time with the participants in general discussions, planning for future sessions.

While focus groups are good ways of generating data in qualitative research, there are some limitations when using them. I do acknowledge for example, that due to the small number of participants, the end results may not be generalised, also because meaning varies and differs across situations and contexts of human interaction. However, the study had the purpose of gaining in-depth understanding and description of issues of power and partnership in a specific participatory project (STAR) from the perspective and experience of teachers, and not to generalise the results. Generalisation was not the purpose of this study as I aimed to gain insights and knowledge on how power and partnerships were experienced by teacher participants specifically within the STAR intervention project.

Focus groups have also been critiqued for the possibility of being influenced by the voices of one or two participants. I agree that focus groups do not clearly imply a homogeneous group in terms of thoughts, views, opinions and attitudes. As a researcher who is also a trained psychologist I relied on my experience of facilitating group discussions when conducting the focus groups. I guarded against individuals dominating the discussion and allowed everyone to participate equally, since the goal was based on truly valuing the diversity of each participant's views and experiences. Another disadvantage of focus groups could be that they can become artificial, which could have an adverse impact on the quality of responses generated. While I was aware of the possibility of an artificial environment, I do not think that this potential challenge affected the study. As mentioned earlier, I established sound rapport with the teacher participants and they became very open in discussing how they felt.

I further found focus groups challenging in the sense that some participants seemingly influenced others regarding their own views and opinions. I also experienced that the participants tended to occasionally divert from the topic to address other issues that were not part of the scope of the study. I had to keep redirecting the participants to remain focused on the topic of discussion (De Vos *et al.*, 2002). Another challenge specific to qualitative research relates to participants' opinions and views being interpreted within a specific social context, implying that a research study can be viewed as biased and subjective. However, I support the statement that there is no one truth and no value-free science, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) succinctly state.

3.5.3 INTERVIEWS

I conducted semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002) (see Appendix G for transcripts) with two participants from each school. Fontana and Fray (2005:707) advocate for the importance of finding an informant who is an insider member of the group that is studied 'who is willing to be an informant and act as a guide and a translator'.

I aimed to obtain in-depth knowledge on individual participants' views on power relations as experienced during the STAR project by means of these interviews, through the lens and view of each participant (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). At its core, an interview has the purpose of understanding how the interviewee perceives the world as he/she interprets the meaning of the phenomenon described (Kvale, 1996). Cohen, Marion and Morrison (2003) affirm that an interview is a two-person conversation where the goal is to gain information that is relevant to research. In this study, I was able to take advantage of such a face-to-face dialogue, which allowed for on the spot clarification and elaboration of issues that needed to be explained further. The opportunity to probe for more details was a distinct advantage that I experienced first-hand. Through interviews, teacher participants were thus able to open up even further and convey the meaning of their experiences from their points of view (Kvale, 1996).

Another advantage of interviews is that they allow for participants' voices to describe their own construction of 'knowledge and social reality' (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87). I allowed the participants to explain their own beliefs and understanding on how they perceived power relations in the participatory intervention project. As I had already established rapport with participants prior to the interviews, they seemingly revealed deep-level information. I agree

with Holstein and Gubrium (2004) that the interviewer should use creative ways of interacting with participants based on friendly feelings and intimacy. I developed a close relationship with the participants, thereby reducing the differences between myself and the participants. I was also reflexive in creating an environment in which there was an ongoing dialogue about experiences.

I captured the detailed 'voices' of the participants as they described their knowledge and social reality using a tape-recorder, after obtaining their permission. The audio-recorded interviews were then transcribed (see Appendix D). The audio-recorder allowed for the permanent storage of the information 'as is' (verbatim), hence making the study more authentic, representing the true voice of the participants. I agree with Merriam and Simpson (1995:101) that data need to be presented 'in the form of quotes from interviews, episodes from field observation, evidence to adequately and convincingly support your finding'. I conducted two series of interviews, each lasting about two hours. I asked questions such as *What is your understanding of power and partnership and how have you experienced power and partnership in the STAR intervention project? What are the benefits or challenges for participating in the project?* (see Appendix E for the interview schedule that guided this phase of data collection).

The use of interviews as means of data generation implies certain potential limitations. Some participants could view interviews as intrusive to their personal lives. Since I had created rapport and applied the principle of PR, where the participants and I were equal, I did not find this challenge to be a problem. Besides, I had obtained permission from the participants, who had agreed to participate on a voluntary basis. In order to ensure confidentiality, raw data was preserved, particularly during data analysis. Finally, interviews are sometimes critiqued for lacking objectivity. This research is not concerned with objectivity, as I believe that many truths exist. However, I used other data generation methods to corroborate data obtained during interviews. I was primarily focused on the intersubjective interaction, which is premised on the notion of standpoint feminist epistemology (Olesen, 1998). Even though the interviews were time-consuming, interviews served as a strategy for rigour by allowing for prolonged engagement in the field (Padgett, 1998).

3.5.4 OBSERVATION

I used observation in support of the other data generation methods. I observed all the activities and interactions of teachers during data generation, thereby becoming a participant observer

(Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Merriam, 1998). As I employed observation-as-context-of-interaction (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000), I did not rely on an observation schedule. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), qualitative researchers often become participants in the situation being observed. I used Merriam's (1998) checklist of elements to structure my observations, in terms of the physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors, and participants' behaviour. Evidence of the checklist is found in entries of my field notes (see Appendix M). Additionally, in order to document a clear picture of my observations, I videotaped all activities and interactions between teachers and between them and myself. In this manner, visual data documentation methods enhanced the observations that I relied upon (Creswell, 2002). I view observation as a measure of trustworthiness, as I was able to correlate what I observed with what I had heard from the participants during PRA-based activities and discussions. I thus believe that observations assisted me in gaining insight into possible issues of power, knowledge and social structures based on the perspectives of teachers as they shared their experiences of power and partnership during their involvement in the STAR project.

The possibility of observer bias is a main critique of observational research. I acknowledge that no observation can be truly objective and that it may lead to subjectivity that could in turn jeopardise the reliability of data. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000:693) succinctly recognise observer bias by stating that 'observational research is essentially a matter of interpersonal interaction and not a matter of objective hypothesis testing'. I acknowledge that I entered the study with my own background and worldview that could have had an impact in shaping the research inquiry and became part of the interpretation and construction of meaning. I addressed this challenge by declaring my bias in my field notes (see Appendix M) and using an audit trail from other data generation techniques to corroborate the trustworthiness of the data (Adendorff, 1996).

Another challenge with participatory observation is that participants' behaviour may change because they know that they are observed. At times, participants may become comfortable with the researcher and end up revealing information that they did not intend to disclose (Merriam, 1998). Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000) warn against this and remind researchers to be mindful of such factors and find means of addressing such challenges during observation and interpretation of data. I addressed this challenge by constantly reflecting on the possibility that I could influence the participants to alter their behaviour. As a way of guarding against this, I did member checking (see Appendix H), thereby involving

participants in the process of data interpretation as a way of ensuring that their experiences and perspectives were accurately captured and reproduced (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). I also used my research journal (see Appendix J) to document my observations, thoughts and experiences as accurately as I could. My research journal was used as a tool for debriefing. Observations were documented immediately when I observed certain actions.

3.5.5 FIELD NOTES (RESEARCH JOURNAL) AND AUDIO/VIDEO-RECORDINGS

I relied on field notes throughout, documenting what I observed and what transpired during the PRA-based activities. I used field notes in both the descriptive and reflective sense (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For descriptive notes, I relied on words, pictures of the setting, participants' actions and conversations that I observed. For reflective notes, I captured my own ideas, concerns and thoughts. The value of field notes lies in the fact that they supplement other data generation techniques. Additionally, field notes allowed me to document observations as accurately as possible, hence making it possible to establish context and meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

I also documented the research process by means of audio and video recordings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Both audio and video recordings added the nuances of people's voices (Ely *et al.*, 1996). I recorded all proceedings and transcribed conversations verbatim (see Appendix F) for the purpose of data analysis. Both audio and video recordings allowed me to repeatedly check any ideas against transcripts and field notes (Ely *et al.*, 1996). The use of verbatim transcripts could subsequently serve as an audit trail of the research process (Creswell, 2002; Janesick, 2003).

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis is not a onetime event, but rather a continuous process. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) view the continuous process of data analysis as a dynamic and systemic search for meaning. For data analysis, I made use of some features of Charmaz's (2000) grounded theory as well as Stakes' (2000) guidelines to inform the thematic analysis and interpretation of verbatim transcripts of focus groups and interviews, visual data and observation notes in my research journal. Thematic analysis and interpretation is a systematic inductive method for analysing and interpreting data (see Appendix I to view examples of my thematic data

analysis). This process is interactive as it takes into consideration the co-creation of knowledge and meaning by both the researcher and the participants, and attempts to obtain an interpretive understanding of participants' meaning. I engaged participants in the interpretation of data using member checking (see Appendix H).

Although thematic analysis and interpretation is an interactive, systematic process, its main challenge is that it is time-consuming. However, it provided me with a record of the research process as well as an audit trail (Anderson, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). I had large volumes of data to analyse, in the form of visual data and text. I had to make sense of the raw data in order to identify core meanings in terms of patterns, themes, subthemes, categories and interrelationships, working inductively. I was the primary data collector and analyst, with data analysis being an on-going process. I was engaged throughout the research process, giving me the advantage of gaining insight into the entire context, which helped me with interpreting the data. All the data collected and documented, were analysed and interpreted against the theoretical framework of the study (see chapter 2).

First of all I organised all data into a database (Yin, 2003) in a chronological order, after each data collection session. By organising the data in a chronological order, I was able to see the progression of the entire data set. For each site I analysed the generated data sources (i.e. each of the A to E activity outcomes/artefacts/visually documented data). Each analysis depicts the setting and participants as well as the chronology of events. Charmaz (2000) identifies important strategies for data analysis and interpretation, which I utilised. I audio/video-recorded the data generated. I had to process the generated raw data by typing, and editing transcriptions.

For the transcribed data that came from focus groups and interviews, I used the method of open coding, which is based on the phrases, paragraphs and sentences that represented the participants' perceptions on a line-by-line basis (Glaser, 1978). Some of the codes include definitions of the concepts of power and partnership perception, experiences, interaction with university researchers, and challenges encountered. These common elements in the data formed part of categorical aggregation (Stakes, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 1998). In addition to the open codes, I made brief notes in the margins, which became the initial sorting process (Stakes, 2000). Thereafter, I coded the data in order to identify categories and themes that occurred in the data. The process of coding and categorising sharpened and enhanced my ability to ask questions about the data. Through the categories

that emerged in the data, I started to create themes based on the relationship within the categories (Stakes, 2000).

Further subcategories were identified using the process of axial coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998:125), 'axial coding is a way of resembling and organising data such that there are connections between categories'. Through axial coding, I was able to sort by category again to identify emerging relationships between categories (Stakes, 2000). The identified categories and themes were related back to existing literature (see chapter 2 and 5). Furthermore, the process of coding helped me to stay abreast of the unique viewpoints and realities of participants (Charmaz, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

Over and above my role as primary data analyst, I regularly consulted my research supervisors to discuss the data analysis process, particularly on issues of the codes and themes that emerged. I had the opportunity of going through the process of coding and re-coding each line of my data with the assistance of my supervisors (Charmaz, 2000). We made notes of possible themes and categories. After reaching saturation in the coding process, I finalised the themes and subthemes.

As for visual data, I utilised an inductive process of data analysis and interpretation. I coded visual data and used memo writing, by writing notes in the margin. I also used member checking to ensure accurate portrayal of the interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I followed the tenets of content analysis as proposed by Ball and Smith (1992). Since the visual data was accompanied by some text, I did a 'line by line reading' of text (Ryan & Bernard, 2000:780). I began by coding the data manually. Coding is a process of breaking down data sets into small chunks for easy analysis by creating categories and concepts derived from the data (Creswell, 1998). The process of coding data aided me to become more familiar with the data, and identify common patterns. As there is a relationship between the visuals and the text that accompanies it, I had to reread the units of ideas to come up with common connections. I realised that these common connections within the data had what Creswell (1998:154) calls 'issue- relevant meaning' for the study.

When I identified common elements, I focused on determining whether events were supported throughout the data. I also observed that there were some concepts that stood out because of their uniqueness. As categories within the documented data began to emerge, I started looking

for patterns or themes that could connect the categories. I made use of Stakes (2000) guidelines for developing categories that are thorough and insightful.

As part of all data analysis and interpretation, I formulated inclusion and exclusion indicators (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This was achieved through the process of conceptualisation, whereby I formulated working definitions of the meaning of concepts used in the study. I indicated the indicators, by stating the presence and absence of each concept. At first I indicated a set of anticipated meanings of concepts which I defined during data analysis and interpretation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Throughout the data analysis and interpretation process, I did member checking, presenting the teacher participants with preliminary findings as themes emerged, in order to allow them the opportunity to confirm if the findings represented a true reflection of what they had said, or indicating where it was necessary to elaborate (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). As the study is based on feminist standpoint epistemology, it was imperative for me to honour and include the participants' perceptions as truthfully as possible and to ensure that their voices were reflected (Hole, 2007; Sultana, 2007).

A challenge of thematic analysis and interpretation is that coding and meaning analysed from the same data might differ from one researcher to another. I attach a copy of my thematic analysis (Appendix, I), so that the reader will be able to understand where I derived the themes from (Anderson, 2002; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). However, it should be taken into consideration that humans are subjective beings and that each interpretation is therefore subjective in nature. As a result it will always be a challenge to achieve objective truth as every researcher's subjective experience of interaction adds to unique knowledge (refer to 3.9 for quality criteria of the study).

3.7 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

The researcher plays a vital role in PR as both an active participant and interviewer, with particular emphasis on fulfilling the role of principal data collector (Maree, 2007). As a researcher, I was immersed in a 'rigorous experience' with the participants, requiring of me to be aware of any potential bias, values and personal interest that could affect my actions or interpretations of data (Maree, 2007:297). I am aware of the fact that I have my own framework of understanding the world and as a result could be subjective and biased in data interpretations. I guarded against this by constantly reflecting in my research journal on

potential factors that could influence my interpretations and meaning-making process. In my research journal (see Appendix N) I noted my thinking, and reflected on the perceived experiences of the teachers. I also used the research journal as a memory tool to describe and keep record of the research process in order to assist me in remembering events at a later stage. I thus used my research journal to document my observations, feelings and ideas during interactions with the teachers (Patton, 2002).

It is important to feminists to be attentive to the politics of knowledge production and processes of research, to be analytical and reflexive about their fieldwork and research process, to challenge pre-given categories and narratives, and to be attentive to power, knowledge and context (Moss, 2002). For feminists, being reflexive implies 'an attempt to identify power and power relations, a theoretical take on power in research, making ethical judgments, accountability for knowledge produced' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002:119). Reflexivity in research thus involves reflection on the self, the process, and representation, critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher accountability in data generation and interpretation (Sultana, 2007). In this study, I continually focused on being reflexive. I agree with Sultana (2007) that a reflexive research process can open up research to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues, where boundaries between process and content can get blurred.

I believe that, taking a feminist stance in this study, allowed me to pay ongoing attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that were inherent in the research processes in order to undertake ethical research (Sultana, 2007). I do not believe that being reflexive about one's own positionality; rather, it allows one to reflect on how one is inserted in grids of power relations and how that may influence methods, interpretations, and knowledge production (Kobayashi, 2003; Sultana, 2007). It may further impacts on how one relates to research participants and what can/cannot be done *vis-à-vis* the research within the context of institutional, social, and political realities.

Peshkin (1988) points out that an individual's subjectivity is not something that can be removed, and is therefore something that researchers need to be aware of throughout the research process. I had to acknowledge that my values, personal views, opinions and experiences were part of the research process (Strand, 2000). While subjectivity is not altogether negative, as a researcher, I had to appreciate, realise and acknowledge the possibility thereof (Peshkin, 1988).

Therefore, as a researcher, it was imperative that I examined my own subjectivities throughout the research process and attended to my own ideas and preconceptions based on gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. I do believe that my status might have influenced the contact with the participants. My status in relation to my nationality, conducting a study in a foreign country, and my position as a graduate student might have influenced how the teachers viewed me and my role. My language background could also have affected the interactions with the teachers. I come from a country where I speak Setswana, and the majority of participants spoke Xhosa and SiSwati. Although the participating teachers spoke and understood English, there were possibly times when the participants were more comfortable in expressing themselves in their mother tongue. The contextual use of a language could thus have been a barrier, as English is used in many countries with each country having its own version of English. I aimed to address these challenges by means of continuous reflections, a constant awareness and debriefing sessions with my supervisors.

Stakes (2000) warns that researchers should not compromise the needs or interests and situations of participants. As a researcher, my role was to collect data, in a manner that adhered to the ethical guidelines described in section 3.8. Another important aspect of PR is the recognition of emic (insider) explanations and epic (diverse voices of participants) contributions in the research process (Creswell, 1998). The diverse voices of participants, bringing in their values, beliefs, views and understandings of reality, posed a challenge. As such, I attempted to understand and interpret the participants' views and values, while being mindful of the fact that I have my own views, values and understanding of the world. To attend to this dilemma, I tried to borrow from the concept of empathic identification (Schwandt, 1994), trying to put my own values and beliefs aside. According to the emic approach, learning does not imply an imposition of outside views but is built locally. In addition, I also reflected on the perceived experiences of the teachers and the views they shared. I used field notes to describe and record the research process, which served as a memory tool, to help me remember events at a later stage.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Power functions at different levels, both implicitly and explicitly (Alldred, 1998). This has particular resonance for my research, which is primarily based on the theme of power. Alldred (1998) describes the multi-layered power relations present in research as follows:

> Researchers' power can be conceptualised as operating through multiple levels: through the hegemonic cultural perspective contained within the language we (must) use; through the subject positions we take up and are positioned within (including our deliberate claims to researcher positions); and through our particular individual relationships with participants and to our field of inquiry (Alldred, 1998:162).

There are challenges with making judgments about ethical behaviour in research, and the codified ethics in government and institutional 'regulatory regimes' of review boards (IRBs) (Boser, 2006; Israel & Hay, 2006). One of the goals of PR is to include the participants (often called 'subjects' in conventional or traditional social research) in the design, analysis, interpretation, and subsequent applications of the research (Boser, 2006; Kindon, 2005). PR seeks social change, or social action, as the name suggests. The degree of participant involvement at each stage of PR varies with the goals of the project and the researcher. PR recognises power relations within the research process, and seeks to empower social groups who may be marginalised within society and especially in social research (Kindon, 2005).

PR does not see the researcher as able to 'give' power to participants per se, but views research as inherently power-laden, needing negotiation between researchers and participants (Kindon, 2005). PR demands that the researcher take on political causes or stances that reflect the needs and goals of research participants. By working to interrupt power relations and to change them, PR brings an explicitly normative component to the research process. Interpretations of what is 'right' in research will inevitably be subject to considerable debate, however. Such controversy extends to how to work within, or challenge, bureaucratic norms that seek to ensure ethical practices in research (Hay, 1998). The simplest and broadest meaning of ethics is that it 'is a branch of philosophy and theology...'Ethics is the study of 'right behaviour'(Singleton & Straits, 2005:515). Applying ethics to research, then, involves determining what is the 'right' research approach for a given project. Drawing on Reese and Fremouw (1984), Singleton and Straits (2005:515) identify three distinct areas of research ethics: 'data generation and analysis… treatment of participants, and… responsibility to society'.

Focusing on human subjects, Hay (1998:40:41) suggests that three principles guide most human subject committees in their evaluation of research projects: 'justice, beneficence, and respect'. These echo the 1979 Belmont Report of the United States National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (Department of Health, Education and Welfare, U.S., 1979). The central conflict between bureaucratised ethics

and PR philosophies is that the former conceptualise research participants as 'subjects' who face potential harm and exploitation in the research process (Kindon, 2005). PR, however, seeks to redefine the researcher-subject model, conceptualising research as a collaborative, negotiated process in which the direction and benefits of the research are as much a product of the participants' involvement as the researcher's (Kindon, 2005; Kitchin & Hubbard, 1999). Understanding the origins and frameworks of the regulatory regime, however, may offer means to challenge those frameworks, creating a more active and empowering model of participant and researcher subjectivity.

What is understood as ethical PR has been strongly influenced by debates around feminist methodology (Sultana, 2007). These debates are on issues of reflexivity, positionality, difference and representation (McDowell, 1994; Nast, 1994; Staeheli & Lawson, 1994) and several scholars have debated at length how to undertake reflexive research while still engaging in material and political struggles that have meaning and relevance (Mounts, 2002; Nagar, 2002; Raju, 2002; Staeheli & Nagar, 2002). Many feminist methodologies emphasise non-hierarchical interactions, understanding, and mutual learning, where close attention is paid to how the research questions and methods of data generation may be embedded in unequal power relations between the researcher and research participants (Bondi, 2003; Moss, 2002).

Drawing from my own research experience in the STAR intervention project and based on insights from feminist scholarship, I argue that ethical research is produced through negotiated spaces and practices of reflexivity that is critical about issues of positionality and power relations at multiple scales. It is broadly proposed that quality research implies an ethical piece of work (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis & Dillion, 2003). Throughout this research study, I abided to the ethical guidelines stipulated by the University of Pretoria's ethics committee. Principles relating to ethics include respect for the rights of the participants, participants not being exposed to harm, and voluntary participation. I adhered to all these principles of research ethics in relation to the participants' rights (Welman *et al.,* 2005).

3.8.1 INFORMED CONSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Drawing from my research experience and insights gained, I believe that informed consent and confidentiality cannot be assured in PR in the same manner as in conventional research (Boser, 2006). This argument is based on the rationale that participants cannot always give

informed consent to research activities up front, because the scope of the process of the research is not determined in advance by one individual (Boser, 2006). Instead, the practice in PR is that research activities are negotiated by participants at each stage of the research cycle; hence participants will have a voice in determining what these research processes will entail.

Nevertheless, I obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's ethics committee that allowed me the right of passage and permission to enter the research field (Appendix K). All participants were requested to participate of their own free will (De Vos *et al.*, 2002). In order to respect their rights, I explained informed consent to them and requested them to sign consent forms (Appendix L). I explained the nature of the study, their role in the study and what they would be expected to do. I also informed the participants that all discussions would be recorded, obtaining their consent to do so.

Participants were furthermore informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time they wished to do so. I also explained the possible consequences of participation in the study.

3.8.2 PROTECTION FROM HARM

Sarantakos (2005) states that researchers should not expose participants to physical, psychological or legal harm. Throughout the research study process, particularly during data generation, I ensured that participants were not subjected to unnecessary stress or embarrassment. I remained aware of the possibility that participants might be affected by data analysis and the reporting process, particularly during member checking. There is a possibility that participants may identify themselves in the way that a researcher reports on a study. This issue did not affect me since the participants were eager to know the outcome of the results and embraced their participation in the study, which seemingly resulted in them experiencing feelings of empowerment.

3.8.3 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Participants were informed of their right to confidentiality and anonymity, including respect for the data obtained. In this study, participants expressed the desire not to be anonymous because they felt that the PR project was a platform to bring about social change, through which they could share experiences with the community. In this study, participants openly shared their experiences and views on issues of power relations and partnerships. At times

they also divulged sensitive information. Mouton (2001) mentions the so-called epistemic imperative, which refers to the moral commitment researchers are expected to make, while in search of truth and knowledge. In order to respect the views of the participants, I treated information with the utmost confidentiality. However, in PR, confidentiality cannot be assured, since a discrete, distant researcher does not gather all data and assume responsibility for removing identifying information before releasing findings (Boser, 2006). I am aware that multiple individuals in the context may have access to the data, thereby implying that even when publicly disclosed information removes specific identifying information, the location of such projects within local contexts often renders anonymity unlikely (Boser, 2006).

I stored all data safely and did not expose any of the participants' names or locations. Additionally, participants were assured of issues of privacy and anonymity, as well as their obligation to respect the confidentiality of any information shared by others during the study. I changed the real names of participants to pseudonyms in raw data. I argue that ethical guidelines that are stipulated by most research institutions are often inadequate for meeting the ethical needs present in PR which is democratically intended research. However, PR by its nature is inherently ethical because it is a normative, dialectic process with a democratising intent. This position is supported by feminist standpoint epistemology (Boser, 2006; Stringer, 1996).

3.8.4 TRUST

The goal of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants in partnership. Therefore, I aimed to establish an environment where participants could share their views without hesitation. In order to maintain rapport, I applied the principle of trust and respect of privacy with the participants throughout the research process. I ensured that I created positive and warm relationships with the participants. Participants were also not misled in any manner (Mouton, 2001).

3.9 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY

Rigour in qualitative research assumes that research findings accurately reflect 'an external objective world' (Essy, 2002:51). I aimed to enhance trustworthiness in this study in terms of how I interacted, facilitated and applied PRA principles. I also continually observed all the processes and interactions, and made adjustments where needed. I strived to meet the quality criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (2005), as discussed below.

3.9.1 CREDIBILITY

Polit and Beck (2008:751) define credibility as 'a criterion for evaluating integrity and quality in qualitative research'. Credibility is equated to internal validity in quantitative research. It should be noted that in qualitative inquiry, participants typically reveal multiple and changing realities and that participants will always have unique ways of constructing reality (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, the comprehension obtained is a researcher's interpretation of participants' experiences of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, I believe that the data interpretations, observations as well as conclusions drawn are a true reflection of the raw data, which in turn is supported by the perceptions of the participants. Credibility is concerned with the extent to which findings are true reflections of the 'truth'.

Credibility is thus concerned with professional integrity, methodological capability and rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Seale, 2000). Throughout the research process, I attempted to maintain credibility by representing the perspectives and experiences of participants as holistic as possible. I employed several strategies in order to meet these criteria.

First of all, during data generation, I employed the strategy of prolonged and extensive engagement in the field. Data generation was done over a period of two years (March 2009 to July 2011) during more than six field visits. The prolonged visits were augmented with the utilisation of observation and field notes, which helped me to continually reflect on the study in order to make decisions that were appropriate to the research. Furthermore, I used field notes to give a detailed account and description of the research context and environment and of my own feelings, experiences, assumptions and biases about the research. In an attempt to improve credibility, I provided in-depth, rich and thick descriptions of the environment, participants and the entire research process. I therefore believe that, by virtue of providing rich and thick descriptions, it may be possible that the findings of the study could be used in other communities of similar context.

Peer review and debriefing were utilised in this study, whereby both the supervisors and co-researchers were allowed to comment and review through the process of data generation, analysis and interpretation. Another strategy that I used was that of providing an audit trail, where I have included some samples and evidence of the field notes, design of a transparent process of coding, raw data, data analysis, and interpretations. The whole process of an audit trail allows other readers to have access to a transparent process and gain a clear understanding of the study.

I relied on crystallisation, in order to obtain multiple perspectives about the phenomenon under study as a way of obtaining layered multiple meanings from various data sources. I subsequently used member checking to enhance the accuracy of the interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As themes emerged during my data analysis, I went back to the teacher participants to verify that the themes were a true reflection of what they had said. The process of member checking allowed the participants an opportunity to reflect on the credibility of the account of their perceptions. As part of this process, I furthermore employed the validity strategy of disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

3.9.2 TRANSFERABILITY

The ability to generalise data and transfer the findings to other research settings is regarded as transferability, which is the equivalent of external validity in quantitative research (Polit & Hungler, 1995). In the natural sciences, research is concerned with the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the general population. However, in qualitative inquiry, the aim is not to generalise but rather to transfer the findings to other research sites and settings (Merriam, 2002).

In this study, I presented a thorough, detailed, rich, thick description of the research process. I also made use of video-recordings and photographs, as background of the study and a way to show the physical setting and content of each research site. I hope that these strategies will allow readers of the study to be able to determine the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts. It is not the intention of this study to generalise. My argument is premised on the notion that the study applied PRA principles, and that each setting is unique and different from others, having its own unique resources, challenges and preferences. Findings from one community can therefore not merely be transferred to other communities (Mukherjee, 1993). While some researchers may experience the need to use these findings and transfer them to other settings, such a decision lies with the reader who will be in the position to determine if findings can be transferred to other settings or not.

3.9.3 DEPENDABILITY

The equivalent of dependability in quantitative research is reliability. Dependability therefore attempts to answer the following questions: *Are the results consistent with the data collected? Can the same study be replicated and yield the same results?* (Merriam, 2002:125). This study dealt with human beings, who shared their experiences by interpreting their own

experiences and views of the phenomenon under study. I thus dealt with human beings, where human behaviour is not static, but keeps changing as people adapt to new situations. Furthermore, the study used principles of PRA, characterised by diverse creative interaction during data generation.

Hence, attempting to replicate the study and ultimately get the same results may be a challenge because the outcome of other studies will be different. In an attempt to obtain similar findings (dependability), should the same study be conducted with the same participants and in the same location, I used an audit trail (Creswell, 2002), where I provide a detailed account of the methods, procedures and decision points in carrying out the study. All data collected were audio-recorded and video-recorded and the use of verbatim transcripts as well as a field journal added to the depth and rigour of the study. This auditing process assisted me in producing a trusted report and a true reflection of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2000).

3.9.4 CONFIRMABILITY

Ladkin (2005:110) asks: 'Is it possible that subjectivity can lead to knowledge which might be valid outside of one's unique subjective experience?' The concern for objectivity versus subjectivity is a concern in qualitative research (Ladkin, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Therefore, confirmability is concerned with the possibility of the findings and interpretations being confirmed, reflecting the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher.

I used crystallisation to reduce the potential effect of bias and enhance confirmability. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider a key criterion for confirmability as the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions. I acknowledge the possibility of my own bias, as my values might have had an effect on the way in which I interpreted data. However, in order to guard against biasness, I employed reflective commentary, in a field journal. In order to acknowledge my own bias, I involved others throughout my study, particularly when I involved participants during data analysis and interpretation. I reflected my preliminary interpretations to the participants to gain their views and further elaboration. I engaged my supervisors to check and ensure that my interpretations and conclusions were supported by the data. Moreover, I included an audit trail which allowed me to trace the course of the research step-by-step *via* the decisions made and procedures described (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.9.5 AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity refers to the true description of people, events and places. Authenticity within qualitative research therefore indicates whether descriptions and explanations correlate with each other. It refers to the degree to which different points of views are fairly and equally represented (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Spencer *et al.*, 2003). In qualitative research, authenticity is assessed in terms of fairness and implies catalytic, ontological and tactical authenticity.

The goal of this study was to use participatory methods to accurately describe a social phenomenon in such a way that the description correlates with and was a representation of the participants' views. I attempted to achieve authenticity by using a range of different perspectives (realities) as well as reporting on contradictions and conflicting values, as a result addressing fairness. In order to enhance the authenticity of the research, I asked the participating teachers to verify the identified themes for authenticity and make sure that their perceptions were understood correctly and are accurately captured and reported, hence enhancing ontological authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To this end, I used member checking and an audit trail.

3.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 provides a summary of the research methodology and strategies that I employed, which I explained and justified. I further explained my choice of paradigmatic assumptions, including the metatheoretical and methodological paradigm of the study. In this chapter I thus explained the research process and different strategies I employed. I also justified the use of a PRA research design and explained my choice of the selected place and participants. Thereafter, I explained the process of data generation analysis and interpretation. I concluded the chapter by explaining the quality criteria and ethical considerations of the study.

In chapter 4, I present the results in terms of the three themes that emerged. I authenticate, substantiate and enrich the results by means of participants' verbatim quotations, visual data and entries from my research journal.