Chapter Three

“...many researchers claim that ‘understanding’ is more pertinent to qualitative research than validity.”

Wolcott (1990)

This chapter looks at the methodology selected for the research. Various issues will be discussed like the sample, the methods used to conduct the research as well as validity and reliability.

Philosophical Approach to education research

The research methodology that I chose is a phenomenological study. According to Ozman & Craver (1995: 255), this broad approach seeks to understand ‘original experience’ or the primordial phenomenon of consciousness… trying to arrive at meaning through conscious experience. This research study will look at a small group of ‘coloured’ learners with the aim being to unearth their own unique experiences and the effects of language on learning. The study also takes on a slightly heuristic form, as language is central to hermeneutics. “It is through language that fruitful interpretation and meaning are secured.” (Ozmon and Craver, 1995:255). The central focus of the study is on language and how language shapes culture and meaning in people’s lives.
The central concern of phenomenology is about meaning. Understanding the apprehension of meaning in any context requires a readiness to suspend taken-for-granted beliefs (attitudes) in favour of a more critical stance towards everyday experiences.

Merriam (1984:181)

**Description of Research approach/ Strategy**

My research is located within a qualitative paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as:

> Research that is multimethod in focus involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

(1994:2)

The qualitative paradigm is relevant to this study as the focus of the study is to explore the natural experience of a group of people (learners) and then to interpret that experience. Winter (2000:4) states that qualitative research concerns itself with the meanings and experiences of the ‘whole’ person, or localised culture. This interpretation will take the form of words and language that perhaps would not have the same essence if the study were to be a quantitative one.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) states that the word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured, in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.
Such researchers emphasize the value– laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. Winter (2000:5) posits that, whereas quantitative researchers attempt to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the research process, qualitative researchers embrace their involvement and role within the research.

**Reasons for Selecting Particular Research Methods & Techniques**

The methods that I selected were: observation, interviews, and document analysis.

**Interviews:**

I did in– depth interviews with seven participants, five learners and two teachers. These interviews took place in the homes of the participants and were face-to-face interviews. In this way I hoped to get a sense of how language is used in the home setting. The interviews were scheduled in such a way that they fitted in with the timetable of the participants. They were conducted during the day, and on weekends. The interviews with the two teachers were conducted in their classrooms before lessons. This strategy personalized the study and gave voice to the unique experiences of this selected group of adults.

The reason for purposely selecting an older group of adult learners is because I attended school with much younger learners and my aim was to determine whether the results from both groups would turn out to be the same or different because of the age gap and different settings, (i.e. high school and ABET center.) I
limited my sample to five learners, as this would be manageable. There are mostly females in this ABET class, and my sample consists of four females and one male. The two teachers are both male. I specifically chose the Afrikaans teacher as I saw his involvement as crucial to the study as I had to look at the use of standard Afrikaans in the classroom. I also chose an additional subject teacher, namely the Economics teacher, to establish if the language demands were the same in both subjects.

The interviews were set up to seek out subjective information in the form of values, beliefs and opinions. In terms of design, the interviews were structured. A.L. Behr (1983: 145) describes a structured or standardised interview as one in which the procedure to be followed is determined in advance. An interview schedule is prepared in which the pattern to be followed, the wording of questions and instructions and the method of coding or categorising the answers are detailed.

Although the interviews took on a structured form, it was not tightly structured. The questions were open ended and I made the line of questioning relaxing and allowed participants the opportunity to bring in their own personal views. I started by introducing myself and made my own personal connection to the study explicit from the beginning. The main reason for the structured interviews was to get a sense of format, and to be able to determine if I acquired the same or different responses from each participant.
The interviews were conducted in Afrikaans to ease the participants and gain their confidence. The questions were also phrased in such a manner that they were easily understood. A personal letter of thanks followed up every interview. The time duration was one hour to one and a half hour per interview. There was only one interview per research subject because of time constraints, the learners and teachers were busy with the final examinations and therefore I was only granted one interview before examinations started. I used a good quality tape recorder during each interview, as this aided me in acquiring the written transcriptions that I made after each interview.

**Observation:**

With observation, I paid particular attention to the way in which language was used by the learners and teachers in both the Afrikaans and the Economics class during lessons. I wanted to determine the extent to which standard language features when conversation is being made and how learners and teachers use different forms of language. I wanted to establish whether teachers and learners brought colloquial Afrikaans into the classroom, or whether they used standard forms only.

I observed the learners and teachers in the classroom setting, both in the Afrikaans and Economics class, and I looked specifically at how they engaged with one another and if the spoken standard of Afrikaans was present in this setting for both teachers and learners. The other fundamental factor was to determine if there was an understanding of the information conveyed by the teachers to the learners when the teachers spoke standard Afrikaans. I kept a notebook where I listed what I
observed. I sat in each class for one session only, which is 1-½ hours for each
class. I opted for recording the observation results in a book, rather than bringing a
tape recorder to the classroom as I felt that this would be too intrusive.

A list of the interview and observation schedule appears on the following page, as
well as a list of the structured interview questions posed to the respondents.
### Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olivia and Karen Hartlief</td>
<td>18 October 2004</td>
<td>Goudstreet, Eldoradopark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maymoena Ward</td>
<td>23 October 2004</td>
<td>Extension 4, Eldoradopark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy Strander</td>
<td>25 October 2004</td>
<td>Alberg Street, Eldoradopark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Janet</td>
<td>30 October 2004</td>
<td>Extension 9, Eldoradopark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mr. Smith</td>
<td>02 November 2004</td>
<td>Silver Oaks Secondary School, Eldoradopark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Baadtjies</td>
<td>02 November 2004</td>
<td>Willow Crescent Secondary School, Eldoradopark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observation Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place: E.W.Hobbs</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time: 1½hours</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>29 July 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>05 August 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structured interview questions.

Before each interview I introduced myself, stated the purpose of the study and my personal involvement in it.

Questions for learners:

1. What does Afrikaans as a language mean to you?

2. Do you ever consciously distinguish between the language you speak at home and the Afrikaans you speak in the classroom is there a difference for you?

3. How would you describe the colloquial language you speak at home and the overall dialect in Eldoradopark?

4. How would you describe the Afrikaans spoken in the classroom?

5. Can you perhaps think of a subject that you are currently doing, where you experience difficulties because of the language used in the textbooks or in class?

6. To what extend to you think you are allowed to bring the colloquial language into the classroom?

7. What form of Afrikaans do you think is expected of you in your written work?

8. Do you think that you take on two different identities with standard Afrikaans in the classroom, and colloquial Afrikaans at home?
Questions for teachers:

1. What does Afrikaans as a language mean to you, as a ‘coloured’ Afrikaans speaking male?

2. How would you describe the forms of Afrikaans you use as a speaker of Afrikaans and also as a teacher?

3. As a teacher, do you allow colloquial Afrikaans in the classroom, or do you encourage a more standard, spoken form?

4. What is the required form of Afrikaans in the written work of the learners?

5. What impact do you think the colloquial language has on the learner in the classroom?

6. As a teacher, do you think there is a distinct difference between the colloquial Afrikaans that learners speak at home, and the standard form of Afrikaans that is required of them in the classroom?

7. With regard to your particular subject, what would you say are the particular language demands?

8. I told the teachers about what I observed in both classes, and wanted them to elaborate on their particular teaching style, with regard to the use of standard Afrikaans in the classroom.
Document Analysis:

I was granted permission to look at the written class work of the learners to see how the colloquial language that they bring from home influences their written work in the classroom. I also looked at the syllabus for the year, for the two subjects (Economics and Afrikaans). Other documentation included looking at Afrikaans and Economics textbooks and comparing the language used in them with the actual written variants that learners produced.

Scope of the study

In the study I looked at 5 adult learners, between the ages of 20-36. I also consulted two teachers in the school (Afrikaans and Economics teachers.) The study is limited to the ABET center in Eldoradopark, Gauteng.

Gaining Entry

I had no difficulties gaining access to the ABET center at E.W.Hobbs, as a friend of mine who is also an educator at a primary school knew the principal at the center. The principal consented from the moment I asked about doing research at the center, as he felt that it might assist the teachers and learners in some way. Both teachers and learners were cooperative during the period that I was doing my fieldwork.
**Sources of information**

My sources of information were:

The group of five learners (four females & one male) and the two male teachers (Afrikaans and Economics.) The research is primarily about the unique language experience of this group of learners and I received most of my information from them in the interviews, observations and document analysis. The learners provided the more colloquial form of Afrikaans.

The two teachers acted as sources of information that looked more at the standard form of Afrikaans that is used in the classroom.

The documents provided by the teachers were also sources of information as they contain the written language of the learners, and the syllabus provides the prescribed material. The syllabus, textbooks, and examination papers look at the use of standard Afrikaans but the workbooks of the learners reveal how they engage with Afrikaans in its standard form, colloquial form or a combination of both.

**Strengths and weaknesses of research design**

One of the chief criticisms levelled against observational research lies in the area of validity. Without the benefit of members’ analysis, observers are forced to rely more exclusively on their own perceptions. They are therefore more susceptible to bias from their subjective interpretations of situations.

Webb (1966)
Denzin and Lincoln (1994:381), argue against the statement raised by Webb (1966). They state that observers can use verisimilitude or *vraisemblance*, a style of writing that draws the reader so closely into subjects’ world that it can be palpably felt. When such written accounts contain a high degree of internal coherence, plausibility and correspondence to what readers recognise from their own experiences and from other realistic or factual texts, they accord the work (and the research on which it is based) a sense of ‘authenticity.’

I observed only two classes (Afrikaans and Economics), and the participants’ behaviour for these particular classes might have been influenced by my presence in the classroom for the pre arranged days that I observed them. This method, though, was not used in isolation. It was combined with other methods (triangulation), which adds to its strength and validity.

Most commentators on triangulation concentrate their attention on the sub types, the in-between method triangulation…the combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units.

Denzin (1989:302)

Miller and Dingwall (1997:38) assert that when using triangulation, validity can be claimed because replication of the findings by different methods minimizes the possibility that the findings may be the result of particular measurement biases.

Although the participants might have been influenced by the tape recorder during the interviews, these interviews took place in their home settings where they felt most comfortable and they also expressed themselves in colloquial Afrikaans.
This added to the intimacy that the method offers. It was also convenient as the interviews fit in with the time that could be arranged with the participants.

My own personal experience with Afrikaans counted as a strength as it guided me as to what to look for, as I compared my own experiences to those of the adult learners. I could also communicate with them in a language that they understood, and in this way they felt more comfortable to communicate.

**Research Ethics**

I had to be very clear about explaining the intentions of the study, and the learners especially felt more comfortable once I alerted them to the fact that I was also a resident of Eldoradopark, and that I also attended a school with Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. The learners felt that they could connect with me and spoke freely of their own experiences. I also made the intentions of the study clear to both teachers, but encountered problems with one particular teacher and had to acquire a letter from my supervisor to enable me to have an interview with him. Once the interview was conducted the teacher realised that I had no hidden agendas and immediately gave me all the documentation that I needed from him.

**Confidentiality of sources and data**

I ensured the participants that the information that I retrieved from them would be kept confident and asked if they wished to remain anonymous or use their real names when I cited them in the report. One teacher and one learner wanted to remain anonymous. I also promised the learners that the content of written essays
would not be exposed, only one line from an essay was used, as I felt it was too personal.

**Language Issues**

I personally felt that it might have been much easier to write the report in Afrikaans. I felt that the essence of some of the issues raised by some of the learners and teachers were lost during translation. There were some things that I could clearly grasp in Afrikaans, but did not know if I was expressing them adequately in English. I constantly had to remind myself that I was writing for an English audience, and not an Afrikaans one. The most problematic part for me was rewriting phrases and articles form standard Afrikaans to English. I was not certain if the English interpretation still had a standard essence, as English is a second language to me.

**Validity, reliability and generalisability**

**Validity**

According to Winter (2000:2), the aggregated definition of validity could be that of accuracy, and the definition of reliability, that of replicability. In the qualitative context, researchers find different interpretations of the same event. The interpretation, however, has to be consistent with the data.

To ensure validity and reliability in my research, I gave copies of the annotated transcriptions that I made of the interviews to participants as member checks. Bradshaw (2000:2) states that member checks are argued to be a key to
establishing the accuracy and credibility of many types of qualitative research.

Douglas (1997) describes this approach as requiring certain criteria, such as securing the informed consent of the research participants, and this should be met before the research can proceed. I also plan to give a copy of my report to the principal of the ABET center, with an invitation to participants to look at it.

**Generalizibility**

Although the study looks at a small group of learners in Eldoradopark, the results might be generalised to a certain degree if the same research design is applied. The results might not precisely be the same as in this study, but if a future study is done on the same cultural group, in other regions of South Africa, dealing with the same issues concerning Afrikaans, then similar findings may arise.

At the end of any study or investigation there arises the question of generalizability of results. This is, do the results found in the present study hold as well as for other samples of subjects at other locations. Studies in the social sciences are rarely, if ever, universal and one must keep in mind the limitations.

Spector (1981:18)

**Methods for analysing and presenting research results**

For the purpose of this study, I align myself with the approach to data analysis as posited by Stauss and Corbin (1990:22) in which the researcher is primarily concerned with accurately describing what she or he has understood and reconstructing the data into a ‘recognisable’ reality for the people who have
participated in the study. This approach requires selection and interpretation of the data, and as a researcher I would have to ‘weave’ together descriptions, speakers’ words, field notes, quotations, and their own interpretations into a rich and believable descriptive narrative.

Description and quotation are the essential ingredients of qualitative enquiry. Sufficient description and direct quotations should be included to allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report.

Patton (1990:430)

**Dissemination of findings**

I arranged to have the findings from the research published in *The Horizon*, the local newspaper in Eldoradopark. This newspaper contains local news and also has a section that includes developments in the community. I sought permission from the editor to publish the findings of this research and in this way it will reach most of the members in the community of Eldoradopark, as the newspaper is free of charge and delivered through the post at people’s homes or they can collect it from a local house shop.

The different methods that I used in the study were helpful and gave me three different perspectives regarding the main issue of standard Afrikaans that I was looking at. The participation on the part of the learners and teachers also assisted with the smooth transition of the research process. Chapter four will look at the findings that emerged from the research.