

Chapter Two

Methodological Ruminations

*Political surrenders are familiar enough to us now and
we need a kind of cultural revolution in educational research,
not in favour of some kind of new orthodoxy, but in favour of experiment, creativity and risk.
To those who confine themselves to the politics of nostalgia,
we would say that mourning that loss
(of certainty, 'science', and 'enlightenment', 'ideas' or 'autonomy')
is a necessary thing,
especially if it constitutes the double loss of something that never existed.
But it should not become a way of life.
Life goes on and with it, perhaps, even, sometimes, if we are creative enough,
persistent enough, a sharper and less compliant educational research.*

Stronach & Maclure (1997:152).

Introduction

In recent years many feminist qualitative researchers have become increasingly disenchanted with the academic process of 'noise reduction', which aims at suppressing aspects representing the individuality of research subjects' cognition and experience. In the domain of educational practices, this has meant becoming more attentive to the voices of the research subjects in order to present a broader view of their social reality (Schratz 1993:1). This has resulted in a departure from some of the established conventions of objectivity, reliability and validity - the hallmarks of quantitative research. Researchers involved in qualitative educational research have employed new approaches ranging from ethnographic studies (Lather 2000; Britzman 2000; Villenas 2000), to the more recent enterprises of biographical analyses and profile studies (Fonow & Cook 1991; Reddy 2000), as well as action research, naturalistic inquiry or case studies (Merriam 1998; Luneta 2003; Nsibande 2004; Phurutse 2004).

This study, *Enacting feminisms in academia*, is guided by the theoretical underpinnings that inform feminist research methodologies. While feminist research methodology in itself is not a unitary concept, it is identifiable by its preference for qualitative research strategies and processes¹. In critiquing the restrictive standards of traditional social science research, which have hitherto, dehumanised and depersonalised both the researcher and the researched,

¹ See Reinharz (1992), for an extended discussion of 10 themes identifiable in feminist research methodologies.

feminist research methodologies wish to acknowledge the subjective, emotional, and biographic factors that continue to shape the researcher and the researched (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1991). In so doing they attempt to democratise the research process through the establishment of non-hierarchical, dialogic, mutually educative encounters between the researcher and the researched.

This chapter is presented in two sections. Section 1, which is titled: *Overview of Feminist Research Methodologies*, addresses some of the recurrent themes that inform feminist research methodologies. It provides an overview of the motifs of *reflexivity*, *voice*, *difference*, and *power dynamics*, themes that raise incisive questions regarding the ethical and methodological challenges of employing feminist research methodologies. It proceeds to survey a few studies that have employed narrative research to explore the personal, professional and pedagogic experiences of women educators. Section 2, which is titled: *Data Collection and Production Processes: strategies and analysis*, presents the mechanics of the research in terms of data collection and production processes. It describes the sample selection process, the instruments that were used, and the purposes they served in eliciting, and producing the data. It identifies possible ethical and methodological challenges that are likely to be encountered during the research process.

Section 1: Overview of Feminist Research Methodologies and Narrative Studies

In critiquing traditional mainstream research, many feminist researchers argue that much non-feminist research is sexist, largely as a result of broader cultural beliefs based on stereotypical conceptions of women (Eichler 1988), and a predominance of male researchers. Feminist research sees researchers as fundamentally gendered beings, whose gender shapes how they experience reality in gendered cultural contexts (Cook & Fonow 1990:70-71). Harnessing the recurrent themes that present themselves in feminist research, Neuman (1997:80), summarises its characteristics as follows:

- it seeks to advocate feminist value positions and perspectives. The aim being to reject sexism in the formulation of research questions, by being critical of stereotypical assumptions, and the manner in which concepts are engaged with throughout the research process.
- it is sensitive to the affective dimension of human relations as it relates to both the researcher and the researched. To this end feminist social research endeavours to create empathic connections between the researcher and the researched by recognising the emotional and mutual-dependence dimensions in human experience.

Reflexivity, which is a defining characteristic of feminist social enquiry, calls for researchers to incorporate and acknowledge their personal feelings, ideologies and experiences into the research process. It is also sensitive to how relations of gender and power permeate all spheres of social life, not least the research process.

- it encourages flexibility in choosing research techniques and border-crossings between academic fields.
- it is action-oriented research that seeks to facilitate personal and societal change.

Governed by these broad characteristics, in theorising about feminist research methodologies, the issues of *voice*, *difference*, *power* and *reflexivity*, have become recurring themes. In the following discussion I briefly explore these themes, and identify possible methodological and ethical considerations that I would have to negotiate during the research process.

In elaborating on the concept *voice*, it has been argued that educational research based on quantitative measurement, variables, experimentation and operations usually encode the 'voices' of its research subjects into statistical data, mathematical relations or other abstract parameters. Thus, the voices from the research field become 'disembodied', and sanitised when presented in reports, articles and books (Schatz 1993:1). Translated into the context of feminist research, the word 'voices' signals the need for researchers to redistribute the research field by investigating, and representing the social reality of women, and other historically misrepresented/underrepresented groups (Rudduck 1993:8). Feminist researchers generally study the relatively powerless or voiceless (See Perumal *et al.* 2002a; Perumal *et al.* 2002b; Bozzoli 1991). Buss (1985), however contends that these are not necessarily the *most* vulnerable people. She urges for more feminist biographical work to be done among people who are literate and highly educated, but whose experiences have remained hidden. In commenting on her own work, Buss partially echoes a rationale that I identified for my study, when she writes:

On the whole, the women whose stories appear [in Buss' narrative research] ... are survivors, and they are ... not the desperately poor. For each of these women who have somehow made it through all the barriers of class, racial, and sexual discrimination, there are those who did not survive. [These] women's stories tend not to be told, because they are not very visible, because they are so vulnerable ... dangerous, or because they have ... been too beaten down to discuss their lives.

Studying the lives of literate and highly educated women, feminist research does not give voice to the voiceless, but rather allows different voices to emerge. As with Buss' (*ibid.*) study, the

relevance of the concept *voice* for my study sensitised me to the fact that the profiles of the five feminist tertiary educators in my sample, did not constitute a marginalized group in the normative sense. This owes primarily to their educational accomplishments, and their subsequent social positionality, which renders them comparatively less 'voiceless' in the traditional sense. However, because they are subject to primary and secondary instances of discrimination and marginalisation within the academic community, their experiences and voices are often silenced/ignored in tertiary institutions, which continue to be the province of male domination. (See Section Two titled: *Data Collection and Production Processes: strategies and analysis* in which I discuss sample selection and address this issue more substantially).

The politics of *difference* is also a key concept many feminist researchers address in their discussion of research methodologies. Their concern is not restricted to interrogating the difference between genders, but also the politics of diversity among women (Reinharz 1992:4). Women of colour, in particular, are resisting the universalising tendencies of feminist theorising (Hill Collins 1991). Such resistance, according to Lather, (1991:27), has grown not out of a desire for theory but out of a need for survival. Feminists such as Lorde (1984); hooks (1982); Lugones & Spelman (1992), are among those who are critical of western feminist hegemony, and its notion of the universal unitary subject. They contend that in adopting one hegemonic paradigm, feminist researchers tend to ignore or neglect those writings and theorisings that fall outside that ambit. Mohanty (1984), refers to this tendency as a *coherence of effects* resulting from the assumption that the west is the primary referent in theory and praxis. This tendency privileges the concerns of western feminism, denies social and cultural agency of women of other cultures, and obliterates cultural and historical difference among them. She argues that no feminist today can innocently represent all women, so the position from which any feminist speaks must be continually interrogated, and relocated as circumstances change. In this regard feminist epistemologies and methodologies need to consider the discussion between feminist and non-feminist positions, and the discussion among feminist scholars themselves. This means that researchers need to take cognisance of the gendered, contextual, and positional diversity of research participants and researchers where multiple fissures across lines of public collective identities, such as race, class, ability, sexual identity, age, etc. are analysed (Canon, Higginbotham & Leung 1991; Reinhartz 1992:4). Sensitised by these observations regarding difference and positionality, in the introduction to this study, titled: *Portraiture in Shards*, I provided a micro sketch of my language, class, religious background, and sexual orientation. I offered this brief bio-data to serve as an explanation for the interpretative proclivities that have dis/coloured the lenses through which the research process, in its conceptualisation, implementation and analysis have unfolded. The discourse

on difference made me aware that the research process would be mediated by the differences in my social status and personal worldview as well as that of the five participants in this study. In addition, it alerted me to the need to attend to the nuances of diversity in my research sample, which comprised women who fell within the 30-60 age range. Furthermore, they emanated from different race groups, sexual orientations, geographical locations, and subscribed to different feminist and language philosophies, etc. I realised that such diversity would constitute differences that would make a difference in understanding the non-essentiality of women, my relationships with them, and my interpretations of them.

Acutely aware of the *power dynamics* that characterise social relations, feminist research methodologies express a commitment to confronting power differentials through the establishment of non-hierarchical researcher-researched relations (Reinharz 1992; Neuman 1997). Power differentials manifest themselves in various guises throughout the research process. Casey (1993:13), notes that researchers establish their status of power at the very inception of the study when they define the criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of research subjects. Their status of power prevails throughout the process of sample and data selection, analysis, interpretation, and representation. In attempting to confront the power researchers have to exploit research participants as objects of scrutiny and manipulation, feminist researchers encourage research processes into which research participants can enter as active subjects (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1991:134). However, despite the emancipatory intent, this still poses ongoing contradictions. The act of analysing the data, summarising another's life, and linking the individual to processes outside his/her immediate social world, for example, is an act of objectification, and demonstrates researchers' power in data representation and interpretation.

Notwithstanding this, there is a need for feminist research methodologies to deal with the issues of objectivity in educational research and the relationship between the researcher and the researched, so as not to transform those researched into objects of scrutiny and manipulation. Essentially, feminist research methodologies should prevent the research process from becoming another mode of oppression. By recognising the objects of the research as subjects in their own right, researchers must be wary of not making the research relationship an exploitative one (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1991:134-136). Westkott (1990: 63), draws attention to the potential for researchers to exploit research subjects. For example, in recent years there has been an escalation of research into women's lives. This has been precipitated by affirmative action agendas to re-distribute the narrative field, and excavate women's subjugated experiences from the margins. While celebrating this new impetus, there is a need to question the purpose of the social knowledge of women. This issue concerns the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge. The emerging contention is that so long as we

justify the study of women solely in terms of our past exclusion as objects of knowledge, we inadvertently reinforce the exploitation of women as data-generating objects of research. Westkott, ponders what happens after women have been measured, analysed, processed, dissected, reduced to manipulable data that advance the careers of researchers, but does little to impact positively on the lives of the researched, how then shall we justify the importance of studying women? This concern resonates with what Lather (1986:257), describes as a *rape model of research*. It is research, which in her view, 'takes rather than gives, describes rather than changes and transmits rather than transforms'. Perhaps, one way of responding to this issue is for feminists to engage in research with and for women rather than on women, and to ensure that the 'findings' are fed back and publications agreed upon. In addition, Measor & Sikes (1992:217), observe that very often research subjects receive little, if any reward for their participation in research studies. While some respondents may be happy to have just had the opportunity for professional self-enhancement, and to have contributed towards knowledge creation, others may value financial remuneration.

Although feminist research elaborates at length the power researchers wield over subjects, Measor & Sikes (1992:221), draw attention to the fact that research participants are not pathologically powerless. A symbolic interactionist research perspective reminds us that research participants wield power over what they choose to disclose about themselves, their experiences, about not participating in certain aspects of the research, and about how much time they will invest in the study. This tenuous power balance captures the dynamics of researcher-researched relationships.

The insights emerging from the discussion on the power dynamics between the researcher and researched made me reflect on aspects in my research design and processes that would compromise the egalitarian ethos of feminist research methodologies. For example, in my study, as researcher, I had established my power at the very inception of the study, when through purposive sampling, I defined the criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of the research subjects, and further stipulated the issues to be addressed in the autobiographical essay. This is alluded to in the following extract from Phumzile's interview:

Phumzile: ...this one (essay) has been harder because first of all I didn't decide - **it was part of the parameters. It was kind of the format that was required**, but also because I had to reveal so much about myself. It was not necessarily those things that I would ordinarily choose to reveal or ordinarily choose to talk about. (Interview). (Emphasis added).

In addition, I realised that although I had invited the research participants to write an autobiographical account of their socio-linguistic identity formation, in an attempt to capture

their 'authentic voices', and to democratise the research process through flexible and spontaneous reflection, the fact that both the autobiographical and biographical accounts would be subject to discursive analyses based on analytical frameworks derived from my theoretical and conceptual constructs, ensured that the balance of interpretative power remained in my favour. This further brought me to the recognition that the purported egalitarianism between researcher and researched courts the potential of masking researcher power, evident in certain enclaves of feminist pedagogies that also purport to equalise power relations between feminist teachers and their students, but usually eventuate in mystifying power dynamics between them.

Although exploitation and unethical behaviour are always a possibility when research is conducted with living persons, they take on a special urgency in the case of women researchers doing research with women, because feminists articulate a commitment to redressing past inequalities, and to democratising the research process through the establishment of non-hierarchical and dialogical relations between the researcher and the researched. In this regard the insights gleaned from the discussion on the power differentials made me consider ways in which I could avert exploiting the participants in my study by making it mutually beneficial. In this regard, at the outset of the study I had decided that I would offer financial remuneration to the participants for their contribution. In addition, they could submit their autobiographical essay to interested journals for academic publication, and use the data from the interview and lecture transcripts for their own research, if they so wished.

Finally, I had to factor in the acknowledgement that participants are not victims, at the hand of unscrupulous researchers. They could also exercise their power to withhold information from me, deny me access to areas of their lives and activities, and refuse engaging in aspects of the research process.

An issue central to the discourse on feminist research methodologies is its stress on *reflexivity*, which involves a process of self-awareness and self-consciousness; of 'researching' one's own position in the research process, in order to reflect the researcher's interaction with the process (Fonow & Cook 1991). Reay (1996:59-60), describes reflexivity as:

... a continual consideration of the ways in which the researcher's own social identity and values affect the data gathered and the picture of the social world produced.

Feminist researchers have stressed the importance of locating themselves within their research. By recognising who researchers are in terms of their race, class and sexuality, Reinharz (1979: 240), believes that we can avoid self-obscuring methodologies because the reflexive stance exploits self-awareness as a source of personal insight and discovery. The self can be used in research not only as an observer, but also as a receiver and receptacle of

experience. Essentially, reflexivity compels a revelation of self, with its frailties, passions, shortcomings, and biases.

In elaborating on the importance of reflexivity, particularly during the research report writing process, Atkinson (in Measor & Sikes 1992:212), emphasizes that researchers are not dispassionate observers, and suggests that accounts of research include the 'reflexive, subject-object dynamics of researcher-researched relations'. Latour (in Lieblich *et al.* 1998), further distinguishes between two versions of reflexivity; one, which he calls meta-reflexivity, involves a constant deconstruction of the text; and the other, which he calls infra-reflexivity entails a self-conscious recognition of the artificiality of the text with the aim of producing the most convincing account.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1979), observe that qualitative accounts are typically written in such a way as to suggest that they simply reflect how the world is. Their authors and the kind of work that went into the account are suppressed from the finished account. They draw attention to a mounting body of theory, informed by principles of reflexivity, that highlight both the ethical and methodological failures involved in not recognising the role of the researcher in the construction of the research report.

In writing about author bias, Thomas (1995), differentiates between the empirical text (the tendentious text which is made available for public consumption), and the liminal text (which is the edited, silent text that falls through the cracks and crevices of the author's censorship and selectivity). The mechanics of manipulating the text should be reflected upon in order to make clear the rationale for technical choices made during the writing process. I take up discussion on this issue in Chapter 7, in a section titled: *Methodological Reflective Synthesis: talking back to the researcher*, in which I reflect on the participants' responses to my interpretation of the data.

Lather (1995:294), suggests that developing skills of self-critique, and reflexivity may keep us from becoming impositional, and reifiers of our own regimes of truth. One way to accomplish this requires research designs that allow us to reflect on how we engage the tensions and contradictions that might present themselves during the research process.

Cumulatively the insights emerging from the foregoing discussion highlight several issues that I needed to attend to in my study. These included: attempting to democratise the research by negotiating the methodological moves and mechanics of the research process; accommodating flexibility and non-uniformity in the use of research techniques; keeping the research participants informed about developments in the research process after I had left the research field; being sensitive to the participants' voices in relation to their social realities beyond the teaching learning interface; attending to the differences among the research

participants in terms of race, sexual orientation, age, feminist and pedagogical ideologies, and being guided by these in my critical interpretations; striving for empathetic connections with my research participants, and being sensitive so as not to exploit the research participants by using them merely as objects of research.

The preceding discussion briefly explored the quantitative and qualitative fracas and argued for more research to be conducted using qualitative methodologies that make audible the voices of the researcher and the researched. The discussion explored the motifs of *voice*, *difference*, *power dynamics* and *reflexivity* which characterise feminist research methodologies as possible ways in which the moves, mechanics, the interactions and emotions of the researcher and researched could be made visible. Discussion in the next section focuses on distinguishing principles that define narrative research. It surveys studies that have employed this research to examine the personal and professional lives of teachers.

Surveying the Terrain of Women's Narrative

Drawing on the theoretical positions that shape feminist research methodologies I employed narrative research to investigate the critical questions I identified for this study. (See: *Aims of the Study*). The suitability of using narrative research to understand the complexity of socio-linguistic identity construction in multilingual and multicultural seascapes is confirmed by Lieblich *et al.* (1998:2-5), who contend that narrative research may be used for comparison among groups to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality. They point out that in many studies, the narrative is used to represent the character or lifestyle of subgroups in society (defined by their gender, race, religion, etc.) whose social, cultural, or ethnic perspectives have been discriminated against resulting in their narratives remaining unexpressed and their voices unheard.

In doing narrative research, the researcher's purpose is to create a written record of the research participant's life from his/her perspective in his/her own words. Long (1987), stresses the value of this perspective for the social sciences as follows:

... feminist scholarship ... has made it clear that third person accounts and 'generic' sociology have not, in fact, told us anything about women's experiences. First person accounts are required to understand the subjectivity of a social group that is 'muted,' excised from history, 'invisible' in the official records of their culture.

From the available body of research that has employed narrative research methodologies in educational studies, Goodson (1997), summarises the following distinguishing principles:

- *Respect for teachers' (auto)biographical voices.* This entails treating the personal experiences and individual voices of practitioners as valuable and insightful in understanding the everyday realities of teaching.
- *Understanding the relationships between teaching experience and the accounts of teachers.* This calls for recognising that teaching is full of narratives, and these stories can reveal the complexity and diversity of teaching experiences.
- *Recognising the importance of life experiences and backgrounds to the everyday practice of teaching.* The biographies of teachers are inextricably linked to the work they do. A narrative approach ensures that teachers' backgrounds and experiences count as important to understanding their personal and pedagogic philosophies.
- *Understanding the relationship between teachers' lifestyles, latent identities and cultures.* This recognises that identities are complex, fragmented and shaped by understanding the dynamics of lifestyles and cultures. Documenting and critically engaging teacher narratives can promote an understanding of the complexity of teacher-identity construction and teacher culture. It is here that the questions: who teaches what, why and how become significant.
- *Recognising the importance of life cycle for the perceptions and practice of teaching.* A biographical approach is sensitive to the relationships between the everyday realities of teaching and parameters such as age, generation, social status, and family background.
- *Documenting the importance of decisions and critical incidents.* Narratives provide conventions and frameworks for articulating and making sense of the teaching career. They enable the identification of key figures, incidents and turning points in teachers' lives, and help chart their decisions and progressions through their careers.

Commenting specifically about the significance of narrative research among women, Weiner (1994:11), points out that feminist narrative accounts aim to articulate women's identity as a process of historical construction, by offering a consciously political perspective on women's lives, thereby helping us understand changes in historical perspective, and social conditions.

Coffey & Delamont (2000:65), note that for a profession comprising predominantly women we know surprisingly little about women educators' daily lives, experiences and the meanings they attach to their teaching. The relative absence of research on the lives of women teachers, given their numeric majority within the profession, has become the subject of some discussion. Munro (1998), offers the following two possible contributory factors to explain the neglect of women's voices in research on teaching:

First, the gendered construction of teaching as ideologically congruent with women's supposed innate nurturing capacities has obscured the agency of women's lives. Second, the sexual stereotyping and gendered occupational structures resulting from the rhetoric of women's true profession has resulted in representations of women teachers as objects of knowledge, and rarely as subjects.

In response to the invisibility in the official records regarding women's cultural and social contribution, feminism has been a lively influence and exponent in documenting and exploring the lives of teachers in general, and women educators, in particular. There is a growing body of literature documenting the gendered epistemologies, experiences and agencies of women educators. In what follows I present a few narrative studies that have contributed to making visible how the personal, professional and political lives of women educators have impacted education. These narratives include Casey's, *I Answer with my Life*, Tamboukou's, *Spacing Herself: women in education*; Munro's, *Subject to Fiction: women teachers' life history narratives and the cultural politics of resistance*; Middleton's, *Educating Feminists: life histories and pedagogy*, Weiler & Middleton's, *Telling Women's Lives: narrative inquiries in the history of women's education* and Unterhalter's, *The Schooling of South African Girls*. Linda Darling-Hammond's edited anthology, which does not document the pedagogic and personal experiences of women educators exclusively, nonetheless stresses, through the medium of autobiographical vignettes of both male and female teachers, the relation between personal and professional teacher identity. It also favours self-disclosure as a sound strategy for bridging the cultural divides in the student-teacher coupling.

In her book: *I Answer with my Life*, Casey (1993), employs the narratives of three sets of 'ordinary' women teachers to illustrate the point that the lives of teachers provide rich and nuanced accounts that can be recruited in effecting educational reform. The insights from Casey's study are significant to my research which also explores the ways in which teachers' work is informed by their personal philosophies, and their interpretation and engagement of their diverse worlds. Of equal importance is the identification of institutional barriers that women educators experience and the strategies they adopt as counter responses.

In her article: *Spacing Herself: women in education*, Tamboukou (1999), explores the problematic status of the female self, seen from the perspective of women in education. Space is important in women's attempts for self-assertion and self-definition, and this article explores the ways women in education have been striving to negotiate personal spaces, within and beyond restrictive gendered social structures that prescribe normative scripts for womanhood.

Tamboukou's study provides valuable insights for my study in that it explores how women educators navigate the restrictive personal and professional geographical and ideological enclaves carved out for them. Participants in my study allude to the liberation they experience through academic networks and entering geographical and conceptual spaces that prompted them to redefine their identities and extend their social and intellectual encounters. They recount how entering into academia impacts their self-concept and helps reconceptualise social definitions of gender. Two of the research participants in my study, Thembi and Vijay, explicitly attribute their intellectual growth to academic travel.

Munro's (1998), study documented in the book: *Subject to Fiction: women teachers' life history narratives and the cultural politics of resistance*, employs the narratives of three American women teachers, Agnes, Cleo and Bonnie, in an attempt to provide an understanding of the politics of identity and the concepts of resistance and subjectivity. In a number of my analytical chapters I explore contiguous variables of age, race, class, gender, nationality, pedagogic ideologies that have influenced and continue to shape my participants' personal and professional positionalities, and the way it impacts their pedagogic practices.

Middleton (1993), describes her book: *Educating Feminists: life histories and pedagogy*, as a 'counterpoint-a polyvocal score' that weaves theoretical deliberations and daily struggles with feminist sociological educational theories. Through a focus on biography, history and social structure, she examines individual's educational life histories, their historical and material contexts, and power relations signified by race, class and gender.

In addressing these issues, the book focuses on two central issues. First, it provides an analysis of some of the ways in which feminist teacher-educators of the post World War 2 generation and their students experienced the contradictory expectation of educational policy discourses of the 1950s and 1960s, which was based on the assumption of equal opportunities, and feminine domesticity. Second, to illustrate how the educational policies of the 1950s and 1960s impacted on female students, Middleton presents a collective life history of twelve feminist teachers by tracing the historical and biographical circumstances that shaped these women's' work in education, and the process by which they assumed the label 'feminist'.

Against this backdrop, Middleton poses the questions: How did so many women who attended schools during these times develop feminist analyses of the social world? How and why did they come to work as activists in education? How did their feminist espousals influence their teaching and political activities in education? These questions, which she addresses in a chapter titled: *Becoming a Feminist Teacher*, is of particular significance for my study, which also explores the gendered nature of my participants' family background and schooling. Participants in my study also reflect on the people, places and publications that

contributed to the development of their feminist consciousness. Through this reflection it was possible to trace discernible movements and patterns that characterised their coming to feminist consciousness; and their subsequent theorising and teaching of feminist ideologies.

In a chapter entitled: *The Schooling of South African Girls*, Unterhalter (1999), examines the development of identities and schooling among two generation of women in South Africa. The chapter raises questions about the silences in the literature on gender, pedagogy and processes of identity formation in schools. The author argues that exploring these issues demand access to the changing subjectivities of girls and women during their experience of education.

Unterhalter is critical of the fact that these women's stories have been given less weight than the statistical data consulted for the formulation of strategies for gender equity in schooling and policy research in South Africa. She is perplexed that the views of international experts on gender policy, working within supposedly neutral frameworks, are often valued more than local storytellers. What emerges from these narratives is how complex the process of remembering schooling is, and how nuanced the ways in which it shapes 'voice'. Unterhalter's chapter supports the view forwarded by Casey (1993), that prescription for change is not necessarily the forte of policy makers. Both maintain that the voices of 'ordinary' women teachers offer sensibilities and an engagement with grassroots realities that often fall outside the gaze of policy makers. This gives credence to the various policy formulation initiatives that participants in my study are involved in both within the universities and in grass-root community projects. In addition, Unterhalter's study bears parallels to mine in that like her research subjects, many of the participants in my study also attribute their conscientization and participation in political and public life to the influence of significant men in their lives. While mention is made of outstanding women, for the most part, this is subordinate to that of the men. Further, even as the pall of Apartheid hung over the lives of the women in Unterhalter's research, the participants in my study also testify to the impact Apartheid, and in the case of Thembi, colonialism had on their identities and ideologies.

In a doctoral study entitled: *Intruders in the Sacred Grove of Science? A critical analysis of women academics' participation in research in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Singh (2000), draws on the national audit conducted by the Centre for Science Development (CSD) in 1997. Singh draws on the statistical data that was generated by the audit and explores ways in which a more qualitative understanding of the concerns, practices and experiences of women academics could be attained. In an attempt to 'get behind the statistics' she endeavours to hear the individual stories of women academics and researchers of colour, she is spurred on by the knowledge that there is a dearth in research documenting the voices of women in general, and women academics, in particular. Confirming the chilly climate and

androcentric bias in academia, the study disaggregates the statistical data and sheds light on the particular day-to-day experiences of women of colour. Singh shares her personal experiences and weaves it as a subtext into the study. Using the CSD audit that Singh refers to as a point of departure, the section, in Chapter Six of my study, titled: *Women's Bodies are the Objects of Gendered Academic Citizenship*, examines the narratives of my research participants to investigate their political, social and civic citizenship status within academia.

In an edited anthology entitled: *Learning to Teach for Social Justice*, Linda Darling-Hammond, *et al.* (2002), pose the following questions: does our identity influence what kind of school-White, upper-class, underprivileged, racially diverse, rural, urban-teachers elect to teach at? How much does teachers' personal identity influence pedagogies and their everyday practice? How do teachers develop a broader professional identity that extends beyond their personal experiences, and does it incorporate a commitment to teaching for social justice? The authors contend that answering these questions require teachers to think about their students, their curriculum, their instruction, and their own identities. They maintain that to truly begin to answer these questions about identity and teaching, a conversation must exist among people of different races, genders, religions, and sexual orientations (French in Darling-Hammond 2002:39).

The anthology presents the autobiographical stories of the six contributing authors, in the hope that through sharing their personal, professional and pedagogical experiences they would inspire other teachers to embark on similar processes to establish safe environments for discussing identity in educational contexts. Although each narrative raises different issues, they all converge on the common theme of working co-operatively to explore ways to promote social justice and equity in schools. The anthology tries to impress the importance of teachers sharing their personal stories regarding identity, and more especially how contiguous variables, such as teachers' race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion may privilege or oppress teachers and students in different areas of our lives.

In addressing these issues the authors, in the Darling-Hammond anthology (2002), provide questions for discussion, that co-incidentally resonate similar themes and concerns as the guiding questions I presented to the participants in my study (See: Chapter 3, section titled: *Framing the Autobiographical Essay*), when I invited them to write their autobiographical essays in 2001. These include:

- How do my experiences and my identity influence my teaching philosophy?
- How can I incorporate my own and my students' social identities into my work as a teacher of mathematics, science, English, social studies, foreign language, or other disciplines and as a teacher of primary, secondary, or adult students?

- What does it mean to a student to feel safe and included in the classroom and on campus?
- How might teachers act to increase all students' sense of psychological safety and inclusion?
- How can teachers with differing identities build alliances for social justice?
- How does language impact the classroom? What can we do about it as teachers?
- How can we move beyond classroom management to teach tolerance and respect in classrooms?
- What is a teacher's responsibility in confronting the way that society socialises some people to privilege and others to exclusion? (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2002:41).

The studies referred to in the above discussion represent a cross-section of some of the themes that narrative studies have engaged in an attempt to examine the lives of teachers in general, and women educators, in particular. They are a sample of some of the narratives through which teachers' lives are depicted. Discernible in these depictions are thematic plotlines of narrative genres that we as readers are familiar with. These include: the romantic form, which centres around caring, connectedness, and community. They include heroic stories of the triumph of the human spirit, of people who have overcome bureaucratic despair and achieved great excellence, reward, and success, as a result. There are tragic story forms of systems and bureaucracies that have taken their toll on the human spirit and on individual life chances. There are also discourses of collaboration, competition, etc.

In addition, most of these narratives take up issues that are insightful to the critical questions that I have raised for my study. For example, they stress the issues of structure and agency, and highlight the agentic potential of women educators to confront, challenge and change their personal, professional and political spaces, rather than passively accept the normative gendered prescriptions hierarchical social structures predestine them to.

These studies prove that narrative studies of women educators provide first-hand data, about teachers' personal and professional lives. They confirm that statistical data tells only half the story. Advocating for supplementing quantitative research with autobiographical accounts makes visible the myriad experiences of women educators, that contingent of the teaching fraternity that predominate numerically, but remain neglected by social enquiry. Narrative studies of women educators provide a nuanced picture of the teaching learning encounter and have the potential to bring important insights to policy formulation regarding gender equity and redress. In undertaking this research, it is my contention that, encouraging teachers to reflect critically on their personal histories and their raced, gendered, sexed and ethnic experiences may render them more sensitive to the diverse student demographics that

characterises most democratic educational contexts. Notwithstanding, the value of personal accounts of teachers' lives, critics inclined towards positivistic research genres challenge the scholarly rigour of narrative and qualitative research. This is a debate I address, briefly, in the ensuing discussion.

Narrative Research: is it art or serious scholarship?

Despite the potential for narrative research to offer rich insights into the lives of research participants, it has also been criticised for being more art than research, because it seems based predominantly on talent, intuition, or clinical experience, and defies clear order and systematisation. Furthermore, the work that is carried out is interpretative, and interpretation is always personal, partial, and dynamic. Lieblich *et al.* (1998:10), ponder whether narrative research is more suited to scholars who are, to a certain degree, comfortable with ambiguity? This question is posed against the historical tradition of social science research in which the criteria for evaluation is premised on research reliability, validity, objectivity, and replicability. These criteria, which are mainly quantitative, are expressed in coefficients of correlation or similar measures. While some scholars believe that the same should apply for all research, including narrative research, this position according to Altheide & Johnson (1994), is difficult to support, especially because it contradicts the very nature of the narrative approach, which starting from an interpretative viewpoint, asserts that narrative materials (like reality itself) can be read, understood, and analysed in extremely diverse ways. Thus, reaching alternative narrative accounts and interpretation are by no means an indication of inadequate scholarship, but a manifestation of the wealth of such material and the range of sensitivities of different readers.

Faced with such diverse views, what then can be offered as criteria for the quality of narrative research? How can we offer guidelines for the improvement of narrative analysis? In his summary of previous attempts to deal with the evaluation of narrative research, Runyan (1984:152), distinguished between internal criteria, such as style, vividness, coherence, and apparent plausibility; and external criteria, which include, correspondence with external sources of information about the subject. He suggests the following criteria for evaluating narrative research:

- effectively portraying the social and historical world of the person; by providing 'insight' into the person, and in so doing clarifying and making connections to experiences and critical incidents that previously remained seemingly insignificant, meaningless or incomprehensible;
- illuminating the causes (and meanings) of relevant events, experiences, and conditions;

- helping to understand the inner or subjective world of the person, how s/he thinks about his/her experiences, situations, problems, life; thereby deepening our sympathy or empathy for the subject; and
- being vivid, evocative, and emotionally compelling to read.

Rogers *et al.* (1999), propose that in qualitative research, a fundamental criterion of validity requires that interpretations and conclusions follow a trail of textual evidence that originate in the data source/s. Thus, readers need to rely more on personal wisdom, skills, and the integrity of the researcher. However, interpretation does not mean absolute freedom for speculation and intuition. According to Lieblich *et al.* (1998:10-11), interpretive decisions require justification, self-awareness and self-discipline in the on-going examination of text against interpretation, and vice versa.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1979), propose two very general criteria in terms of ascertaining the validity of a narrative study. The first criterion asks how truthful, plausible, and credible an account is, and the second criterion-related to the relevance of the study, asks whether an account is important and contributes to the field, previous findings, methods, theory, or social policy? In supporting this position, Mishler (1990:420), argues that:

Focusing on trustworthiness rather than truth displaces validation from its traditional location in a presumably objective, non-reactive, and neutral reality and moves it to the social world—a world constructed in and through our discourses, and actions, through praxis.

Synthesis

In Section 1, *Overview of Feminist Methodologies and Narrative Studies*, I surveyed and provided examples of narrative studies that have been conducted with a view to weaving a tapestry of the personal, political and professional nuances of teachers' lives. The discussion summarised central characteristics of narrative research with a view to engendering respect for the (auto)biographical voices of teachers. It argued for recognising the relationship between teachers' lifestyles, latent identities and cultures, their professional identities and pedagogic ideologies in order to better understand the complexities of teacher identities.

The discussion also addressed the charge that narrative research does not constitute serious scholarly work. It forwarded the counter argument that the nature of the genre may best be judged by its own benchmark criteria based on its value and trust worthiness rather than on the criteria of reliability, validity, objectivity and replicability. The latter criteria being more suited to quantitative type research genres.

Armed with theoretical insights and sensitivities to the merits and de-merits of employing both feminist research methodologies and narrative research strategies, in Part Two of this chapter, I describe the data collection and production processes, and interweave (where appropriate) reflections of the ethical and methodological challenges that I had to negotiate during the research process.

Section 2: Data Collection and Production Processes: Strategies and Analysis

In this section I describe the activation of the insights that emerged from the methodological overview. I narrate the moves and mechanics that defined the research process for this study. Discussion around the moves and mechanics of the research process include: a description of the sample selection and solicitation of the participants; procedures that informed the data collection and production, in terms of research design, development and refinement of research instruments, which comprised the autobiographical essays, lecture observations, student questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and respondent validation letter. In addition, I consider the theoretical issues relating to data analysis, theory generation, and respondent validation.

Soliciting Participants

In an attempt to excavate the autobiographical narratives and biographical data, I used purposive sampling for the identification and selection of the research participants for this study. Cohen & Manion (1994:89), describe purposive sampling as samples chosen according to specified needs, that is, researchers identify the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their typicality. Apart from personally approaching colleagues whom I knew were involved in teaching English from a feminist perspective, I also surfed the National Research Foundation's: *Women-in-Research Database* to help identify and contact prospective participants for the study. The database was useful in that it provided the names of South African women educators, together with their research interests and e-mail addresses. I e-mailed 48 prospective participants who cited their research interests in the area of English/Language and Gender Studies with the following generic invitation:

Hi

My name is Juliet Perumal and I teach in the School of Education at Wits. I am currently studying towards a PhD and I'm looking for research participants who teach English or Language and Gender Studies from a feminist perspective. If you are interested and would like to familiarise yourself with the study before you make a decision, I would be glad to e-mail you an abridged version of my research proposal.

I am prepared to pay up to R1500.00 for your time and participation. We could alternatively (or in combination) co-author a journal article based on your autobiographical essay, and other issues that emerge from your participation.

I would be most delighted to have you participate in the study and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Warm Regards

Juliet Perumal

My e-mail address is: juliet@iafrica.com

In the week that followed I received approximately 18 responses, many expressing regret about their unavailability, and a few requesting to familiarise themselves with the study. I e-mailed file attachments containing the abridged research proposal to those who expressed an interest in the study. However, the magnitude of the study in terms of what was required (that is writing the autobiographical essay, availing oneself for interviews and inviting me to observe their lectures) proved far too overwhelming and involved for most prospective participants and they graciously declined.

I received e-mail correspondences of the following nature from those who expressed an interest in participating in the study:

Dear Juliet

Thank you for approaching me. I would indeed like to have more information about what sounds like a useful project to be involved in.

Regards

Carol

Dear Juliet

Thank you for your e-mail. Your study sounds fascinating, so, yes, please send me an abridged version of your proposal as an attachment to this email address. I'm sure I'd like to participate.

Phumzile

Dear Juliet

I do not mind being of assistance to you, but I would like to clarify one or two points.

1) I am here at UCT as a visiting fellow on sabbatical, which ends on 30 July 2001, and I'll be going back to the University of Botswana, Gaborone, where I teach.

2) I teach English literature, and I do not know if I'll be of much help to you because it isn't clear to me if you are interested in someone teaching English Language or English Literature.

Thembi

Juliet

Gender is my passion: I am in charge of the Contemporary Women's Writing paper at Honours level in our department and am also involved in the Working Committee for the Institute for Gender Studies here at Unisa.

I would love to talk to you. Kind regards.

Jennifer

Dear Juliet

Thank you for sending me your abridged research proposal. I found your ideas and research methodology absolutely fascinating and I would be very happy to participate in your research. I do need to tell you, however, that I am a single mother, and therefore do not always have a lot of leeway in terms of free time and space to move about. Within those constraints, I will be happy to assist your research in any way that I can. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jennifer

Eventually, the following research subjects agreed to participate in the study, (the actual names of the research participants have been substituted with pseudonyms, however, the rest of the biographical details are authentic):

Research Participants	Race*	Sex*	Institutional Position	Courses being Taught that are related to the Research
Prof. Carol	White	Female	Uni.Western Cape Snr. Lecturer	Some African Women Writers
Dr Jennifer	White	Female	UNISA: Snr. Lecturer	Contemporary Women's Writing
Ms Phumzile	Black	Female	Uni. Free State: Lecturer	English for Specific Purposes & Literature Courses
Dr Thembi	Black	Female	Uni. Botswana: Snr. Lecturer	Writings in Africa
Dr Vijay	Indian	Female	UDW: Snr. Lecturer	Language & Power

Table 1: An abbreviated portfolio of the research participants as at the time of data collection (2001)²

² During the course of the research, the institutional positions of 3 of the participants changed. Carol has been boarded off sick. Thembi has been promoted to Deanship in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Botswana, and Vijay has been promoted to professor in the Faculty of Humanities at UDW (currently University of KwaZulu Natal). Phumzile took up an overseas doctoral scholarship, and has since graduated.

I recognise, in the light of discussions on the discourses of identity politics/the politics of difference, that the categories sex and race are simplistic and reductive. See Chapters 1 and 4 for an interrogation of these concepts.

The above five research participants matched the profile in terms of the aims of the study because their engagement in English language teaching is:

- a) informed by feminist theoretical and methodological insights, and
- b) they represent a group that has been discriminated against formally on the basis of their gender, and/or race.

A cursory glance at the subjects participating in this study, however, prompts the question: how does this sample, which comprises high-ranking academics, constitute a 'marginalised or voiceless community'? In order to justify the applicability of the concept 'marginal or voiceless' to my research sample, in a conference paper titled, *The Methodological and Ethical Challenges of Researching Marginalized Communities*, (Perumal 2000), I briefly explored the inherent tensions that manifest themselves at the level of the individual subjectivities of the research participants.

First, apart from survey-type audits (See CSD Audit 1997), confirming that women constitute a numeric minority in academia, they also suffer marginalization in academic establishments that have perennially been the province of male domination. (See Morley & Walsh 1995; See also Chapter 6 of this study for a discussion on the academic citizenship status of women educators).

Second, the research participants represent a group that has not only been discriminated against because of their gender, and/or race, but by a complex interplay of other social configurations. This second tier of marginalisation becomes apparent when subjectivity is understood as multiply constituted in terms of class, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual identity, age, etc. Thus, an interrogation into how these variables have positioned the research participants marginally is warranted (Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung 1991). It is important to note, however, that a dialectical tension emerges when feminist scholars occupy dual membership as part of oppressed women in general, and as part of a privileged class of academics in particular. At the methodological level, this dialectical tension intensifies the awareness of the double consciousness that arises from being a member of an oppressed group (women), and a privileged group (scholars).

It is important to note that although this sample comprises only women, this does not suggest that there are no males who are also self identified feminist educators. Given that the sample comprises respondents who volunteered their participation, it is unfortunate that the one male participant who initially comprised the sample had to withdraw from the study because of ill health.

Data Collection Plan: Methodological Moves and Mechanics

Having identified and secured the participation of the five feminist educators for the study, I developed the following instruments to facilitate the data collection and production process. As is illustrated in Table 2, (below), the data gathering process was divided into two broad strands comprising autobiographical essays and biographical data obtained from interviews and lecture observations, which were analyzed for possible theory generation.

Category	Instrument	Purpose
1. Autobiographical Essay	1. Schedule of questions related to the feminist and multilingual identity formation of the participants. (These questions were contained in the research proposal that was e-mailed to prospective participants.	1. Flexible, 'spontaneous' self-representation to document contiguous social variables that precipitated the participants' espousal to feminist and multilingual sensibilities.
2. Biographic Data	<p>2.1 Lecture Observations</p> <p>2.2 Student Questionnaire See Annexure B</p> <p>2.3 Semi-structured interviews See Annexure C</p>	<p>2.1 Lectures were observed, and audio-taped to see how, if at all, espoused feminist and multilingual theories and philosophies were translated into practice.</p> <p>2.2 A questionnaire was administered to students of the research participants to obtain an overview of student demographics, and to elicit brief comments as to why they had chosen to embark on Language and Gender Studies.</p> <p>2.3 Semi-structured interviews were conducted for clarification and elaboration of issues that emerged from the essays, and lecture observations.</p>
Data Analysis, Respondent Validation and Theory Generation	Respondent Validation Letter See Annexures G & H	To ensure the accuracy of the data representation, transcripts of the lecture observations and the interviews were returned to the participants for verification. The analytical chapters were also returned so that they could read, comment, and clarify the analytical commentary.

Table 2: Revised Overview of Data Collection/Production Processes

In the following discussion I provide a brief description of the research instruments, that is, the autobiographical essays, the lecture observations, student questionnaire, and the semi-structured interviews. I also comment on the data transcription, organization and categorization. In addition, I provide theoretical discussion on the analytical toolkit which comprised principles of grounded theory, content and discourse analysis that were used to analyze the data. Finally, I comment on the process of respondent validation.

The Autobiographical Essay

The first tier of the data gathering process required the research participants to write their autobiographical essay. The essays are presented in Chapter 3: *Insider and Outsider (Re)presentations*. Requesting participants to write the autobiographical essay was done with a view to gleaning insight into the contiguous variables (cultural, religious, linguistic, political, social, and theoretical underpinnings) that shape their socio-linguistic, and feminist identity construction, and subsequently informs their English language teaching from a feminist perspective. Cognisant of the ethical and methodological dilemmas associated with autobiographical writing (See Chapter 3, section titled: *Realism, Postmodernism, and Autobiography* which offers a discussion on this issue), I nonetheless considered it an informative way to elicit the voices of the research participants. To guide the task of writing the autobiographical essay, I presented the participants with a series of questions pertaining to their socio-linguistic and feminist identity construction. (See Chapter 3 section titled: *Framing the Autobiographical Essay* for a catalogue of the questions). The intention behind inviting the participants to write their socio-linguistic and feminist autobiographies illustrates my attempt to capture the socially constructed voices of the subjects, and to allow as much flexibility and spontaneity in their reflections. In addition, I posted a package containing journal and chapter articles on autobiographical writing to the participants. These were intended to provide a brief theoretical orientation to the nature and processes of autobiographical writing. The package contained the following material:

- Bullough, R.V & Pinnegar, S. Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research. *Educational Researcher* Vol. 30. April 2001. pp.13-21.
- Kozol, J. 1967. *Death at an Early Age: The destruction of the hearts and minds of Negro children in Boston Public Schools*. Boston: Houghton: Mifflin.
- Govinden, B. Learning Myself Anew. *Alternation*. Vol.2. 1995. pp. 170-183.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Davis, J.H. 1997. *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

From comments made in the autobiographical essays and the interviews, I later learned that most of the participants were familiar with the nature and processes of autobiographical writing and were also encouraging their students to experiment with the genre.

Despite busy work schedules the participants were willing to have my supervisor and I read through drafts of their autobiographical essays, make comments and seek elaboration or clarification. The following correspondence between Jennifer and I illustrate some of the mechanics involved in the production and writing of the autobiographical essay:

Dear Juliet

I attach my autobiographical essay as well as my CV. I would appreciate it if you could look at the essay and let me know if it is more or less the kind of thing you want. (It turned into a bit of a manifesto). If you don't like it, I can add, subtract or modify until it meets your requirements.

Best wishes

Jennifer

After reading through the essay, I e-mailed the following response to Jennifer:

Dear Jennifer

Thanks for a really wonderful essay. As I said in my previous message, the sincerity in your writing is riveting. I would appreciate if you could address the following questions in regard to the essay:

1. Would you like for us to use a pseudonym? If so, what name would you like to use?
2. Would you consider re-visiting the essay to re-style it into an essay, rather than an interview-type format? Essentially, I envision regrouping paragraphs that cluster thematically and employing connecting sentences to achieve structural flow, and adding a concluding paragraph that aesthetically synthesises the piece.
3. Since the study has a reflective-pedagogical dimension to it, I think that it would be interesting to reflect on how you have challenged, confronted and changed your own teaching styles, and curricula content from those you were subject to as a student (at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels).
4. What about comparing your teaching of English at Unisa to that at UDW?
5. I may be wrong, but I sense a resignation to your professional fate (remaining in a middle-management role). What are your feelings about this? Any sense of frustration?
6. Could you elaborate on the two tiers of marginalisation based on your gender and sexual orientation? Can you recall any specific incidents to show the nature and extent of discrimination you have experienced, if any?
7. There are at least 3 paragraphs in the essay where you mention a number of texts that have informed your feminist consciousness. Would you perhaps consider identifying an overarching theme/set of issues that is of particular interest to you in these texts?
8. Feminist theories have been criticised for being turgid and abstract. Some of that abstraction comes across in your response to the question: What impact did feminism have on your view of yourself and how has this affected your conceptualisation of language teaching? Perhaps an elaboration in lay terms might help.

Take care

Juliet

Dear Juliet

Here is my revised essay. I've used your questions as headings, as though they are interview questions, and have included some material on my relationship to language, politics and religion. Will you let me know if it is more satisfactory now? I look forward to seeing you on Monday.

Best wishes

Jennifer

In reflecting on the process of writing the autobiographical essay, the distinction made by Thomas (1995), between the empirical text (which is the text that is made available for public consumption), and the liminal text (which is the edited, silent text that falls through the crevices of author censorship and selectivity), is evident in the e-mail correspondence from Jennifer. After having written her autobiographical essay, she requested that I look at the text to see whether this is what I wanted, and she offered to modify it to suit my research needs. Her correspondence illustrates how the text has been manipulated. My response to Jennifer's e-mail illustrates the perspectival partiality and positionality from which the participants wrote their essays, and from which I subsequently engaged their texts.

In addition, as a way of rendering the research mutually beneficial my invitation to the participants also suggested co-authoring an academic publication if the participant was amenable to the idea. The following correspondence from Carol indicates a participant exploring the possibility of a publication:

Dear Juliet,

... I'm keen to have this published, as it could stand alone, either in an educational or English studies journal. "Current Writing", published by Natal U, Dbn, are having a special issues on cultural translations next year, and I thought it might be regarded by the editor as fitting into such a theme.

Carol

Several other important points emerged from the writing of the essay; however the relevance of the discussion becomes more apparent after the participants' essays have been read). Thus, I re-visit the ethical and methodological challenges of autobiographical writing, in Chapter 3, in a section titled: *Methodological Interlude: reflections on writing the autobiographical essay*.

Biographic Data: lecture observations, student questionnaire and interviews

In gleaning the biographical data, i.e. the second tier of the data collection, various strategies were used. These included observer-participation and the audio-taping and compilation of field notes on classroom activities and discussions (See Annexure A: Sample of Classroom Sketch and Student Participation Coding), student questionnaire (See Annexure B), and interviewing the five principal research participants (See Annexure C for interview schedule). These strategies were also intended to serve as triangulation devices. Mixed-method research (See Reinharz 1992: Chapter 11 for an elaborate discussion), which is also referred to as triangulation, has been described by Cohen & Manion (1994:233-235), as:

... the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour. Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint.

This study employed permutations of multi-method triangulation. Ideally, I would have preferred ensuring that the research collection and production processes were as uniform as possible. I was able to employ the same research instruments in the investigation of four of the participants, however, Carol's being off on sick leave meant that I was unable to observe her in the classroom situation. Table 3 (below), provides a schedule indicating the approximate time covered in lecture observations and semi-structured interviews:

Participants	Date & Duration of Lecture Observation	Duration of Semi-structured Interviews
Vijay	April 2001 (12 hours)	5 hours
Jennifer	July 2001 (06 hours)	4 hours
Phumzile	Sept. 2001 (04 hours)	6 hours
Thembi	Sept. 2001 (06 hours)	4 hours
Carol	nil	5 hours
Total	28 hours	24 hours

Table 3: Schedule indicating approximate time covered in lecture observations and semi-structured interviews.

Initially, I was concerned that I was unable to secure the same number of hours of lecture observation for each participant. However, I was comforted by Etter-Lewis' (1996:90), critique of the expectation to achieve uniformity in the research process. She says this expectation:

... appears to follow an unflinching pattern of 'one size fits all'. It is assumed that there is no problem with using the same methods for all informants. Unevenness of interviews and quality,

length, and content of narrative texts suggest that no single method could possibly suit all speakers, especially with only minimal/superficial adaptations.

In the following discussion, I reflect on the processes of the lecture observations, the questionnaire that was administered to the participants' students, and the interviews that I conducted with the participants.

Lecture Observations

According to Merriam (1998), the process of collecting and producing data generally interweaves observations, which occur in the natural field setting, with informal interviews/conversations. Observations make it possible to record behaviour as it is happening. They also provide knowledge of the context or specific incidents and behaviours, which can be used as reference points for subsequent data collection and production procedures. What to observe depends on the topic, the conceptual framework, the data that begin to emerge as the researcher interacts in the daily flow of events and activities, and his/her intuitive reactions and hunches to those experiences. The focus of observation generally emerges, and may in fact change over the course of study. (I do not entertain discussion here on the description of participants, the research context and the activities of the participants. Two sections, in Chapter 3, titled: *Partial Institutional Sketch* and *Profile of Research Participants*, respectively, describe these issues).

In the following discussion, I merely describe the process of lecture observations. The substance of what I observed in the lectures is also presented in Chapter 3, in a section titled: *Overview of Course Taught, Classroom Activities and Reflections*. The process of collecting data through observations can be divided into three stages: entry, data collection and exit. In gaining entry to certain settings, most participants will want answers to the following questions:

- what is the researcher researching?
- will s/he be disruptive?
- what is the researcher going to do with the findings?
- why have they been identified/selected for participation?
- what benefits/rewards accrue to them?

The above series of questions were addressed in the letter that was sent to prospective participants, outlining the aims, and rationale for the study and inviting them to participate in it. It did not need much further elaboration, however, some participants did ask for clarification.

On entering the research field for the lecture observations, all of which occurred in university lecture halls, (some in fixed seating amphitheatre type halls, and others in classrooms with moveable single tables), I was guided by the following key elements, which according to Merriam (ibid.), make observation a research tool, rather than a voyeuristic indulgence. Merriam points out that:

First, observation serves a formulated research purpose. The purpose of my observation was directly linked to one of the stated aims of my study, which sought to observe how feminist educators translated/enacted their feminist pedagogical philosophies/theories in actual teaching/learning situations. I did not formulate an observation schedule, but relied on the sensitising and background concepts that I had gleaned from the feminist and multilingual theoretical frameworks I had encountered in my readings, (and which I have presented in Chapter One of this study). These revolved on observing teacher-student and student-student relationships and dialogic exchanges; content of dialogic exchanges, the use of non-English languages in the classroom, etc. It also sought to see how these educators' feminist sensibilities inform their English language teaching and learning. Essentially, the observation was concerned with how theory manifests itself, if at all, in the practical context of the English language, multilingual university classroom: the particular interest to my study being tied to the questions: **Who** teaches **What**, **Why**, and **How**? In addition, through the lecture observations, I hoped to gain insights into how, if at all, the pedagogic relationship in the feminist classroom is redefined. This was of particular significance for my study given the emphasis feminist discourses place on power relations in terms of teacher-student dialectics, and the construction and deconstruction of knowledge systems.

Second, observation is a deliberately planned activity. I had to negotiate entering the classroom space by requesting the principal participants to inform me as to when it would be most convenient to conduct this component of the field research. While the purpose for conducting the observation was clear in my mind, students obviously also needed to be informed about my presence and briefed about the purpose of my research. Having obtained consent and ascertained time and venue details, for the most part, on arrival at the lectures, participants simply introduced me to their students and took it for granted that students would appreciate the importance of their contribution to research building. Those participants, who viewed their involvement in the study as a way of offering me assistance with my research, extended the same reasoning in assuming that their students would be willing to participate in the study. This is evident in the following extract:

Jennifer: This is Juliet Perumal and Juliet is doing her doctorate at Wits in their Department of Education. Her field of research is in the feminist teaching of languages and literature. She has asked if she can attend these classes and observe and make conclusions. And for all of us who have had the gruesome experience of writing a doctorate with minimal support, we agreed for Juliet to come and use us as research data. So when you appear in print and in famous research articles you will recognise yourself (*class laughs*). (Lecture Observation).

Although the participants' students did not constitute a primary unit of analysis, their voices as it emerged from their contribution to classroom discussions formed an important part of my study. In some instances, (as is evident in the following extract, the substance of which refers to the process of negotiating my lecture observations) the ethical and methodological considerations regarding student participation, understandably took on greater complexity.

Hi Juliet

I haven't told my students about the research but should find time on Wednesday ... if they are willing to be observed (and I think they should be alright - they are quite cool) it is very likely that they will be okay with the details you want to collect. The only thing they may be shy of using their names, which you probably don't need? When do you tell them about the audiotape? I think they may be quite shy (is it ethical to tape and then ask for permission - if not granted then you can just cancel the tape). Even I would find videotape (especially lights intrusive). What about taking down notes as a backup? (Oh for the skills of shorthand)!

Regards

Vijay (e-mail correspondence).

Vijay's extract throws light on two pertinent issues relating to negotiating classroom entry and researcher presence.

In seeking classroom entry I had to navigate two sets of negotiation processes. The first involved securing consent from the principal participant to observe her in her teaching/ learning context, and the second required securing student consent about their participation in the study. The extract draws attention to students' democratic right to decline being 'used as research objects/subjects', in the elicitation of the information requested in the questionnaire (See Annexure B: Students' Biographic Information), as well as to being observed. It points to the fact that it is not a foregone conclusion that since their teachers had agreed to participate in the study that the students were automatically expected to volunteer their participation. However, had students resisted to being part of the research, it would have meant my abandoning this component of the study and confining it to only the autobiographical essays and interviews with the research participants. Thus, students' contribution to this study is

acknowledged for the rich nuances it brought to what would otherwise have remained a theoretical and ideological investigation into feminist and multilingual sensibilities.

The second issue regarding classroom entry refers to the impact of researcher presence in the classroom, and the relationship between the observer and the observed. The mere presence of the observer can affect the climate of the setting, often effecting a more formal atmosphere than is usually the case. Vijay alludes to this when she cautions: *they (the students) may be shy of using their names ... I think they may be quite shy*, and she points out that my presence was likely to alter the natural flow of student participation.

In entering the classroom space, I had defined my role as observer participant³. This meant that my participation in the group would remain secondary to my role as information-gatherer. Merriam (ibid.:103), describes participant observation as a schizophrenic activity in that the researcher usually participates but not to the extent of becoming totally absorbed in the field activities. While participating, the researcher tries to stay sufficiently detached to observe and analyse. In order to achieve some level of detachment, in some instances, I seated myself at the very periphery of the class, so that my presence and that of the audio-recorder would not be overwhelming and intrusive. I confined my participation to instances when the principal participant specifically requested my views on certain issues, or when I thought that my anecdotal input would facilitate clarification of certain concepts. I tried to establish rapport with the principal participants and their students by fitting into their routines, finding some common ground with them, participating in their discussions, or helping out on occasion, in addition to being friendly, and showing an interest in their activities. Merriam states that the researcher is as much a part of the scene as the participants, his/her behaviour (whether as an observer or an intimate participant), will affect the scene being observed.

In an attempt to establish rapport with the students and teacher, to fit in and be helpful, my in-class participation, on one occasion, entailed helping design flip charts of key questions that emerged from discussions, and on another occasion showing students how to transcribe interview data, by letting them examine examples of interview transcriptions I was in the process of coding and capturing. In one instance, my out-of-classroom participation saw me volunteering to mark a set of test scripts for a research participant.

Third, observation is systematically recorded. Merriam (ibid.:104), notes that it is likely that a researcher will jot down notes during an observation and wait until later to record in detail what has been observed. In this regard, once most students had arrived at the lecture venue, I made a rough sketch of their seating arrangements and assigned each a number, and further indicated by code whether they were male/female, and where possible, I also indicated

³See Merriam (1998), and Layder (1993), for variations in the observation-participation roles that researchers can assume.

their 'race'. (For example, the code BF1 denotes Black female 1, or the code IM5 denotes Indian male 5). Using this sketch, I tried as far as possible to record teacher-student input by matching their assigned code to their utterances or classroom contribution. (See Annexure A: Sample of Classroom Sketch and Student Participant Coding).

Fourth, Merriam (*ibid.*), points out that observation is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability. In some instances audio-recording quality was compromised because of noise filtering in from outside the lecture hall, or inaudible exchanges between/among the students. However, I was able to refer to the notes I had compiled during the lecture observation to supplement inaudible dialogic exchanges. As a check on validity and reliability, after the lecture observations were transcribed, I sent copies to the participants to verify their authenticity, and the accuracy of transcription. I did not receive feedback from any of the participants, and assumed that they were satisfied with the way events in the lectures were captured in the transcriptions.

Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was administered either at the beginning or the end of the lecture observations. While the study did not aim to work with the participants' students as a unit of analysis, I thought that it would be useful to get an overview of student demographics to attain an idea about student diversity and hear their views on the importance they attached to English language and Gender Studies. With the permission and assistance of the principal research participants a questionnaire was administered to students (See Annexure B). A summary of the information from the questionnaire is presented in Section 2 of Chapter 3, titled: *Profile of Research Participants*). The information, which is presented in a table, provides a partial student demographic profile showing student diversity in terms of age, race, religion, language background/s, place of origin (rural/urban), courses being studied, reasons for studying English, and a brief statement ascertaining students' initial exposure to, and engagement with gender and feminist discourses.

Interviews

Merriam (1998:71), posits that interviews can be defined as a conversation-but a conversation with a purpose. The main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is 'in and on someone else's mind'. As Patton (in Merriam 1998), explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. ... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective.

For the most part, interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured. In this type of interview either all of the questions are flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section of the interview. The largest part of the interview is generally guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.

My study drew on the conventions of the semi-structured interview. Interviews, which were either conducted in the participants' homes or the institutions where they taught, served to discuss, and clarify issues, experiences, etc. that emerged from the autobiographical essay and lecture observer-participation. It also sought to elicit information regarding the purpose and nature of the specific courses participants were teaching at the time of my research; reflections on the thinking that informed material design and teaching styles; consensual and conflicting student interactions; language and gender ideologies and their manifestation in the classroom, etc. (See Annexure C: Interview Schedule). In order to elicit deliberated and considered responses, I e-mailed a copy of the interview schedule to the participants before hand. This formed the more structured section of the interview.

In addition, being aware of the potential for interviews to become static and hierarchical, I anticipated that guided by the ideologies of feminist research methodologies, I would need to be sensitive to ensuring that the interviews were interactive and dialogic, and that, according to Lather (1991:61), it may require 'self-disclosure, collaboration, reciprocity, and the negotiation of meaning'. However, sensitive not to de-rail participants' reflective thought processes, I volunteered information and shared personal and pedagogical experiences with the participants depending on the appropriacy, relevance and necessity for an interjection.

Transcription of Biographic Data and Data Organisation

The lecture observations and interviews were audio-taped and backed by field notes. I personally transcribed at least 75% of all the classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, and hired two professional transcribers to aid in the completion of the remaining 25%, fully aware of the trade offs that are associated with paying someone else to do transcriptions (for example, their unfamiliarity with the research context, being unsure about pronunciations - given the range of accents in demographically diverse classrooms, etc.). Fortunately, I worked with highly meticulous transcribers, and was generally satisfied with the level of 'accuracy' and quality of work.

Before embarking on the process of data analysis, at an organisational level, I filed each participant's data set into individual boxes, which comprised their autobiographical essay, interview and lecture observation transcripts, student questionnaires, and all curricula material pertaining to the courses I observed. I thereafter, organised the data thematically in relation to the four critical questions I had identified for the study, viz.

Who is the feminist teacher?

What does she teach?

Why does she teach what she does?

How does she teach?

I applied these four questions across individual participant's data sets, and compiled a composite template of categories that would aid in the data analysis process. (See Annexure F: Composite Categories from Essays, Interviews and Lecture Observations). The composite category table facilitated the organisation of thematic/conceptual clusters, to which a combination of discourse, content analysis and grounded theory could be applied as analytical tools.

Data Analysis and Theory Generation

The data that was produced for this study may be located within the genre of qualitative research. As such, strategies usually associated with qualitative data analysis were used to analyze the data. Acknowledging that there is no definitive approach to qualitative data analysis, this study drew discursively from a combination of qualitative analytical approaches and assembled an analytical toolkit that comprised principles of content analysis, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. The data gleaned from the autobiographical essay and

biographical data were then subjected to a combination of discourse and content analyses for eventual theory generation.

Content analysis is used quite widely in market research and linguistic studies.

Palmquist (1993 in Mouton 2001), defines it as a research method which:

... examines words or phrases within a range of texts, including book chapters, by examining interviews, and speeches as well as informal conversation and headlines. By examining the presence or repetition of certain words and phrases in these texts, a researcher is able to make inferences about the philosophical assumptions of a writer, a written piece, the audience for which a piece is written, and even the culture and time in which the text is embedded.

Sharing similarities with content analysis, discourse researchers, according to Slembrouck (2000 in Mouton 2001), explore the organisation of ordinary talk and everyday explanations, and the social actions performed in them. Slembrouck describes discourse analysis as being concerned with:

- language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence or utterance,
- the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication, and
- the interrelationships between language and society.

From a combination of Parker's criteria for distinguishing discourses (in Mouton 2001), and Terre' Blanche & Durrheim's three facets to approaching discourse analysis (also in Mouton 2001:495-498), the following critical elements emerge:

1. **discourse**: is manifest and realised in texts. This requires putting texts into words, and looking for as many meanings that emanate from it. Meaning-making in this regard requires using cultural competence and critical distance. Allied to meaning-making is the recognition that a discourse refers to other discourses. Employing cultural competence and critical distance requires first, setting up oppositional discourses by looking for binaries, and examining how they constitute different objects. Second, it requires looking at the similarities of discourses, that is, examining their points of overlap in different contexts. Third, it requires looking for recurrent terms, phrases and metaphors.
2. examining **effects**: There are at least two important points that emerge when examining the elements of **effects**. These include, sample selection, contextual location and self-reflection. First, in relation to sample selection and contextual location, an analysis of effects requires asking: Why were these subjects selected to participate in the study? What other participants, contexts, etc. could have been used? These questions are important as they suggest that other effects could have been achieved had different research considerations and decisions been taken in relation to who comprised the sample and where the study was conducted. In

this regard, in an earlier discussion I explained that I employed purposive sampling to solicit the participants for my study. This meant that the sample comprised research subjects whose participation was based on their typicality, suitability, and familiarity with the discourses on feminism and language issues, as taught in university contexts. Second, in examining the view that a discourse reflects its own way of speaking: the implication is that in each discourse it is possible to find at least some instances of self-reflection - points at which the discourse comments upon itself. These instances can be detected by referring to various texts in one discourse, looking for contradictions, and discovering what their implicit meanings are. The applicability of the facet **effects** for my study is, for example, evident in my research participants' familiarity with feminist and language issues. In this regard, many of the feminist educators in my study were quick to identify, through critical self-reflection, instances in their practices when what they professed in theory did not materialise in practice; that is, when there were deviations/contradictions from what might be considered 'normative' within the discourses of language and gender studies.

3. being sensitive to **context**: this entails indicating patterns, by looking at ideological, historical and institutional context. A discourse is historically located, thus by tracking its origin and evolution, it is possible to better locate the discourse in the context of its current position. This also entails, tracing the trajectory of how and where discourses emerged from, and looking at how discourses have changed over time, and how they engage pre-existing objects, and subjects. For example, in Chapter 3, in a section titled: *Partial Institutional Sketch*, I present brief historical overviews of the geographical contexts in which each participant was teaching at the time of the study. Also being cognisant of the diverse historical and cultural milieus that shape and influence the pedagogical practices of various participants helped to contextualise the data. It also sensitised me to tracing the trajectory of changes in participants' feminist and language ideologies if they had migrated to different university contexts during the course of their careers. Other contextual issues that I consider in the study relate not just to geographical context, but also to the political, socio-economic and ideological contexts that influence personal and professional identities.

In addition to distinguishing the 3 criteria for discourse analysis, I also drew on principles of grounded theorising to analyse the data. What grounded theory is and should be, has been the subject of much contestation. (See Charmaz 2000 for extended discussion on the fissures in grounded theorising). Strauss and Glaser were credited with early experimentation and developments of grounded theory. In reviewing the evolution of the method, Strauss & Corbin (1998), note that:

There is a realisation that grounded theory has to be adapted to the circumstances of one's own thought processes. Personal histories of dealing with particular bodies of data also affect adaptation of the general methodology.

The evolution and adaptations that researchers utilising grounded theory have made has been largely attributed to influences from contemporary intellectual trends and movements, including ethno-methodology, feminism, political economy, and varieties of postmodernism. Charmaz (2000), suggests that we use grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures during the data analysis process. She argues for a constructivist approach to grounded theory that affirms studying people in their natural settings. Her three-fold argument contends that:

- a) grounded theory offers a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions for data analysis;
- b) grounded theory clarifies meaning rather than limits interpretative understanding; and
- c) grounded theory strategies can be adopted without embracing the positivist leanings of earlier proponents of this analytical method.

In addition, Charmaz (*ibid.*), points out that grounded theory approaches offer qualitative researchers a set of guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships among concepts. It does not detail data collection techniques, but is concerned with the development, refinement, and interrelation of concepts, which provide insight into what people are doing, and what is happening in the setting. This further facilitates making comparisons, a defining technique in grounded theory. Data from different sources provide the grist for making comparisons, fleshing out ideas, and identifying patterns in the data. The constant comparative method of grounded theory means:

- a) comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences);
- b) comparing data from the same individual with themselves at different points in time; This helps gain an understanding of the dialectical nature of Self;
- c) comparing incident with incident;
- d) comparing data with concepts; and
- e) comparing a concept with other concepts (Charmaz 2000:515).

Given that this analytic method is characterised by constant comparative analysis, the approach is often referred to as the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 158). According to Strauss & Corbin (*ibid.*:179), grounded theory also requires the grounding

of theory upon data through data-theory interplay. This involves making constant comparisons, posing theoretically oriented questions, formulating theoretical coding and developing theory. Through using comparative methods, researchers can specify the conditions under which concepts are linked to each other. After deciding which concepts best explain what is happening in the study, they become useful for facilitating understanding of incidents or issues in the data. Sensitising concepts/background ideas that inform the overall research problem offer ways of seeing, organising, and understanding experience, because they are embedded in disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Thus, they deepen perception, and provide starting points for building analysis (Charmaz 2000: 515-520).

The relevance and adaptation of grounded theory for my research resonate with the following questions and comments, Strauss & Corbin (*ibid.*:173), suggest researchers consider:

What is power in this situation and under specified conditions? How is it manifested, by whom, when, where, how, with what consequences (and for whom or what)? Not to remain open to such a range of questions is to obstruct the discovery of important features of power and to preclude developing its further conceptualisation. Knowledge is, after all, linked closely with time and place. ... the more theoretically sensitive researchers are to issues of class, gender, race, power, etc. the more attentive they will be to these matters. The procedures of theoretical sampling and constant comparison are allied with theoretical sensitivity.

The appropriacy of the principles of grounded theory as explicated in the above quote is clear in terms of its relevance for my study, given its concern with the interrogation of knowledge and power in the analyses of feminist and language discourses. Furthermore, the grounded theory approach advocates that the researcher-theorist becomes increasingly theoretically sensitised, scrutinising the literature for received theories that might possibly be relevant to the emerging theory being developed through the continuing conversation with the data. In this regard, throughout the research process I was guided by various theories and paradigms related to language and gender, and feminist research methodologies. From these received theoretical narratives and paradigms I extrapolated aspects of general theory, which I used as a starting point for developing grounded theory. Layder (1993:65), acknowledges that:

General theory can be employed as an initial part of the research design, as well as a post-research strategy. Both forms have the effect of stimulating innovative forms of theory either by using ideas or concepts as initial 'sounding boards' or as a retrospective means of establishing an explanatory pattern on the data or as a way of organising and analysing the data.

In this regard, I employed various conceptual themes or sensitising background concepts from the existing/received literature on feminist pedagogies, as a framework for designing the

research instruments. For example, applying the recurrent themes of *teacher authority*, *the epistemology of personal experience*, *the politics of difference*, *voice*, etc. proved useful in designing the questions for the autobiographical essays as well as the semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, they became useful organising markers in ordering fieldwork data, in stimulating ideas or lines of argument about new concepts and theoretical insights. Layder's (ibid.:48), suggestion regarding the clarification of concepts and the assessment of their usefulness was also instructive. *Concept clarification* involves focussing on an important concept, which has been associated with a particular area with a view to illustrating its usefulness or its limitations in the research. Exploring the empirical dimensions of concepts, which I attempted to do by observing feminist teachers in their classrooms, helped in concept recontextualisation, concept clarification, concept redefinition, concept exemplification (that is the enactment/manifestation) of theoretical concepts. This allowed for the exploration of the practical dimensions of concepts in various contexts, thus highlighting their similarities and differences. This correlated with Vaughan's advocacy for '*theory elaboration*' (in Strauss & Corbin 1998:179), which entails:

... the process of refining the theory, model or concept in order to specify more carefully the circumstances in which it does or does not offer the potential for explanation.

According to Glaser & Strauss (in Layder 1993:45), grounded theory can be used as a running theoretical discussion to emphasize 'theory as process'. This discussional form of theory stresses the idea of theory as an ever-developing entity, which can be extended and modified. It subverts the idea that theories are perfected products whose purpose is served merely by being confirmed or negated. Strauss & Corbin (1998:170-171), contend that all interpretations, whether or not they have the features or status of theory, are temporally limited-in a dual sense. First, they are always provisional, they are never established forever; their very nature allows for endless and partial negation (qualification). Second, like many other kinds of knowledge, theories are limited in time, because researchers are immersed in certain societies and are subject to current ideas and ideologies.

Drawing from the principles of content, discourse analysis and grounded theory, I worked discursively through the data according to the following three levels:

- First, I employed an **intra-comparative** process of analysis. During this process I examined each participant's data set individually. An intra-comparative analytical process lends itself to employing discourse and content analysis, as well as grounded theory. The process entailed reading through the autobiographical essay, the interview and lecture transcripts of each participant to identify, select and cluster themes/issues that addressed the same/similar issues; and to identify oppositional or contradictory

themes/issues. The process entailed reading through the data to look for similarities, differences, overlaps, recurrent themes, words and phrases and then clustering them.

- Second, I employed an **inter-comparative** process of analysis. This process is similar to intra-comparative analysis, except that it entails comparing and contrasting data across/among the data sets of all the research participants to identify commonalities, and variances in issues pertinent to the study. The fact that the participants wrote their autobiographical essays in relation to pre-specified guiding themes facilitated thematic clustering. In addition, given that I posed more or less the same questions to all the participants during the interview also facilitated thematic clustering, and comparison. (See Annexure F: Composite Categories from Essays, Interviews and Lecture Observations).
- Third, I employed a **theory-data interplay** analysis. This entailed analysing the data against the literature review that was presented in Chapter One to see how it confirmed, and/or challenged existing views, or provoked new insights on the debates related to this study. These debates encompassed issues concerned with identity politics, tenets in feminist pedagogy, language and gender. The constant comparison and theory-data interplay corresponds with the principles of grounded theory, which are concerned with comparing data against received/established theory for the purposes of concept exemplification, clarification, elaboration, etc. The insights that emerge by virtue of differences in the researched and researcher's positionalities, variation in time and context specificities, generate new, revised theoretical perspectives.

From the foregoing discussion of content analysis, discourse analysis and grounded theory, we note that their principles and ethos are suited to the analysis of narrative research. Given the fluidity, and respect for contextual specificities that these analytical discourses imbibe, they accommodate Anderson *et al*'s. (1990:106), postulation that women's stories are important for theory-building. As descriptions of social life from the vantage point of women accumulate, they show that we must change our theories of society to incorporate their activities and perspectives. We need to go directly to women to learn about their part in the production and reproduction of society. We cannot have adequate theories of society without them. Learning about these invisible and neglected areas of experience grounds our attempts to develop new understandings and helps us to formulate better social and educational theories. The analytical commentaries from the study, which seek to provide new and better understandings of social and educational theories, are presented in Part 2 of this study, which is titled: *Exploring Webs of Personal and Professional Feminist Identities*.

Respondent Validation

As a final step in the research process the analysis chapters 4, 5, and 6 were returned to the research participants for review, verification, and comment. In writing about respondent validation Measor & Sikes (1992:217), suggest that it form a crucial feature during the data representation and interpretation process. Measor & Sikes also suggest that it may be a good idea to send copies of processed accounts or draft chapters to research participants for appraisal, and to check the accuracy of data. This often helps to verify whether the researcher has misunderstood the respondent, and it gives the respondent the opportunity to correct erroneously interpreted data. It also helps in testing out analysis of data with respondents, and to solicit their commentary. McCormick & James (1983), observe that:

... the chief problem confronting researchers using triangulation is that of validity. This is particularly the case where researchers use only qualitative techniques ... there is no absolute guarantee that a number of data sources that purport to provide evidence concerning the same construct in fact do so. ... In view of the apparently subjective nature of much qualitative interpretations, validation is achieved when others, particularly the subjects of the research, recognise its authenticity. One way of doing this is for the researcher to write out his/her analysis for the subjects of the research in terms that they will understand, and then record their reactions to it. This is known as respondent validation.

Measor & Sikes (1992:217), further note that respondent validation encourages participatory educational research practices. It enhances practices that give respondents the dignity of contributing to theorizing about their words through sharing in meaning production, and developing significant understandings of schooling and education. By confronting elitist and undemocratic research practices it challenges the denial of the subject's capacity to scrutinize and change the face of traditional research, and their marginalized role within it.

In this study participants were afforded several opportunities to help in the processes of validation. Firstly, my supervisor and me read through completed versions of the autobiographical essays, participants were requested to clarify, rephrase and/or elaborate issues that were ambiguous or which rendered meaning or interpretation unclear. Secondly, transcriptions of the audio-taped lectures and interviews were returned to the participants for verification. This served a twofold purpose: first, it was meant to facilitate member checks, and second, it was agreed that participants could use the raw data from the transcripts for any of their personal research projects. The third and final stage in the respondent validation process involved returning the three analytical chapters to the participants to affirm, extend or counterpose my analytical interpretations. (See Annexure G: Respondent Validation Letter).

Participants' responses to the analysis chapters are included in Chapter 7, in a section titled: *Methodological Reflective Synthesis: talking back to the researcher.*

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the theoretical impulses that inform feminist research methodologies, pointing out that it is a discourse characterised by multiplicity, and predominantly committed to confronting sexist and stereotypical portrayals of women. As a counterpose to quantitative research and its preference for statistical data, the chapter provided an overview of recurrent themes that emerge from employing feminist research methodologies. These include sensitivity to reflexivity which interrogates the researcher's positionality and biases in the research process; acknowledging race, class, gender, ethnic, etc. differences that exist among research participants as well as the researcher; re-distributing the narrative field by showcasing the voices of those who were previously underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream research, and unmasking the power differentials in researcher-researched relations. Opting for the use of narrative research to investigate the critical questions of this study, the chapter highlights distinguishing principles that emerge from narrative research, as a way of eliciting first-hand data about the personal, pedagogic and professional lives of women teachers. The chapter also provides examples of narrative studies, which have contributed to a better understanding of teachers' personal and professional biographies.

In outlining the methodological moves and mechanics in the data collection and production processes, I described the sample selection criteria and the processes that were used in soliciting the research participants and tabulated a brief description of them. The discussion proceeded to identify, describe and critically reflect on the data gathering instruments, which comprised the autobiographical essays, lecture observations, student questionnaire and interviews. Finally, the analytical tools generally associated with qualitative research, viz. content and discourse analysis, and grounded theory were reviewed to show their appropriacy for analysing the data that was collected and produced for this study. Where appropriate the ethical and methodological challenges that emerged during the research process were addressed.

Chapter Two thus sketches a theoretical and methodological framework, and serves to contextualise Chapter Three, which is titled: *Insider and Outsider (Re)presentations.* Chapter Three is an extension of Chapter Two. While Chapter Two is primarily concerned with exploring the theoretical principles of feminist and narrative research methodologies, and describing the methodological moves and mechanics of the research process, Chapter Three

presents the empirical evidence that the various data sources generated. It (re)presents the autobiographical essays, it provides a tabulated summary of the student demographic profiles, and it summarises the content and activities of the lectures I observed. In addition, it presents salient issues from the interviews, and participants' reflections on teaching demographically diverse students.