THE REFLECTIONS OF MASTERS STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AS PRESENTED IN THEIR PORTFOLIOS

by

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my daughter, Rendani Khonokuhle and my sister, Khanyisile Zungu. You have been a pillar of strength and you have stood by me in the darkest days of my journey and you believed in me throughout my journey.
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I acknowledge that without the Power of the Almighty, I would not have been able to go through and get to the finish line of my journey not forgetting to thank the following people for their unwavering support and patience they have shown me.

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• To my relatives for your support and guidance and encouragement.

• To all of my friends for being there in times of need and being there for me.

• To my colleagues, who persevered and supported me and stood by me in times of need.

Thank you all for being there whilst I was busy on the road to fulfilling my dream.
ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at exploring the reflections of the Master’s student as presented in their portfolios in the Educational Psychology programme in the University situated in Gauteng. Part of the requirements of the programme was that participants were to engage in a reflective process whereby they could reflect on their writing and its metaphors presented in their portfolios to display how learning took place. The intention was to produce graduates who had acquired the habit of reflection as a means of continuing to learn and grow in their professions.

The participants were six master’s students in an educational psychology programme in 2008 and 2009. In this research, an interpretivist research with a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design was followed. Data was collected using metaphors and reflections. In analyzing data the thematic analysis, which is a process for encoding qualitative information, was utilized. In addressing the research question, the data was analysed by means of thematic analysis. The research question was what can be learnt from the reflections of master’s students in Educational Psychology as it is presented in the participant’s portfolios. I had to abide by the set of ethical guidelines that directed the research to adhere to proper decisions and actions. Therefore I remained accountable for the ethical quality of the study.

The conclusion was that day to day experience is the arena in which adults learn. It promotes lifelong learning. Themes that emerged during data analysis pointed out that participants grew both personally and professionally, collaborated with one another and had support. It also emerged that they had considerable challenges but they emerged as strong participants in the two year programme offered by the university.
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CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CLARIFICATION OF CENTRAL CONCEPTS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The reflections of the Master’s students in Educational Psychology as presented in their portfolios

- Socio-cultural theoretical framework
- Portfolios
- Reflections
- Metaphors
- Educational Psychology
- What can be learnt from the reflections of Masters Students in educational psychology programme
- Qualitative research Approach
- Phenomenological research
- Purposeful selection
- Methods of data collection
- Data analysis

- Informed consent & participation
- Confidentiality & anonymity
- Safety of participants and safekeeping of data
- Risks versus benefits
- Feedback
- Treating participants with respect
- Right to withdraw from the study
1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

“One roadblock to change has been that it was more difficult to document teaching than to compile evidence for scholarly accomplishments. Teaching portfolios appear to offer a mechanism for providing such documentation” (Knapper, 1995, p. 3).

The above quotation provides a suitable explanation on how portfolios brought about a change in documenting the activities of students. The focus of the study is on the reflections of Masters students in educational psychology as presented in their portfolios. The background, context, overview and aims of the study will be introduced to the reader. Concepts that informed the study will also be defined and elucidated. Other matters relating to the research approach, design and methodology will also be reviewed. Ethical consideration will be discussed as well.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The study was conducted at a University in Gauteng. The focus of the study was on participants who were previous master’s students in the faculty of Educational Psychology, from different racial groups in 2008 and 2009. The main language of learning and communication was done in English. This research focused on an accredited professional development module for master’s students. A specific approach was taken to the design and delivery of this module by using reflective developmental portfolios as a means for students to reflect on their studies and progress during the two year programme. The students were expected to compile their portfolios during their two year study period and submit them at the end of their second year. The students in the programme often made use of metaphors when reflecting on their experiences in the program. As such, when regarding their reflections, specific attention was given to the metaphors evident in their portfolios seeing as metaphoric language can communicate richness effectively, and thus adds to transference of meaning. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) propose a comprehensive concept of metaphor, which enables the reconstruction of cognitive strategies of action. We know, for example, the image whereby problems are portrayed as a weight, which "oppresses" a person.
With this research the researcher’s interest was on understanding the reflections of Masters students in educational psychology as presented in their portfolios. Furthermore I wanted to explore their experiences, considering their reflections.

1.3 CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The trend in Educational Psychology at this university was towards more student centred practices. These practices required students to actively participate in their educational development, in which they demonstrated a range of achievements. Wolfensberger-Le Fevre, Fritz & van der Westhuizen (2011) add on by stating that the value of learning communities lies in the ways in which active participation and the sharing of responsibility are promoted (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews & Gabelnick, 2004). The traditional forms of assessment, primarily pencil and paper tests, were no longer adequate to be used for assessing, I elaborate on this in chapter 2. Therefore, there was a need in the programme for different assessment strategies that captured a wider array of what students knew and could do, provided continuous feedback on student performance. In the Educational psychology programme the student portfolio was one such alternative. Barret (2007, cited in Zubizaretta, 2004, 2009) on Learning Portfolio in higher education book, describes the primary motive of a learning portfolio as to improve student learning by providing a structure for students to reflect systematically over time on the learning process and to develop the aptitudes, skills and habits that come from critical reflection.

This meant that the portfolios used by the students were seen as the means through which students could reflect on and document their growth as reflective practitioners. The participants were exposed to a rigorous programme which ensured that they gained personal and professional competences such as respect and humbleness as participant 6 indicates ‘You become more humble when working with other students in my group, who had to offer up their family time to come and meet to work on assignments’. She further states ‘I grew to respect other people in our group because some of them really led a difficult life up to now’. On professional level participants attended professional conferences and workshops. It is in one particular module where the participants were given an opportunity to showcase and reflect on their gained experiences using their portfolios. Reflection was at the root of cognition and learning and the challenge of the
lectures was to facilitate and encourage development of this skill in the students. This research is therefore directed at the reflections of the master’s students in the educational psychology programme as presented in their portfolios. The development of the participants came about not only from their own contributions but also through the contributions that society makes to their individual development. This comes about because of the interaction between themselves as a group, their lectures, their families, the community and the culture in which they live. According to the social–cultural theory, knowledge is best constructed when learners collaborate together. (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007).

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It was imperative that I familiarise myself with the underlying theory that explained the phenomenon of reflections. This theory helped generate insight into this phenomenon, and it also suggested alternative ways of understanding situations that were not easily perceived from an insider perspective. In contrast, theories as tools function in ways that help the researcher set up one’s perspective on the phenomena under study in ways that allow investigation of some otherwise overlooked side of these phenomena (Abels & Abels, 2001). The socio cultural theory according to Valsiner and Rosa, (2007) states that our cognitive developmental processes are the products of our society and culture. The participants had to be active members of the group by being social participators. This meant that they had to work collaboratively with peers to construct solid understanding of the material presented in the programme.

This theory furthermore helped in creating an understanding of how students used their reflections during the programme (Engelbrecht, Howell & Basset, 2002). I focused on the socio–cultural theory and reflections were explained according to this theory. I regarded this as a suitable theory for addressing the research question. As such, the human being is always seen in relation, co-constructed through interactions with others, within a certain socio-historical context. The point of departure for my conceptual framework, is the observation that humans are intentional beings engaged in ongoing social interactions that are characterized both by change and continuity. True to the socio-cultural theoretical framework, it was necessary to clarify the meaning of certain concepts within the context of this specific inquiry. In doing so it enhanced the
understanding of the lived experiences of the participants and added to the thick descriptions of the research as a whole. The socio-cultural theory has sound educational purposes. The primary focus is learning through socialisation. Through that, participants participated together to construct and connect new knowledge. Psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have educated us to know that peoples' views of themselves are sculpted to some extent by their culture as well as by geography, education, and social class. Both complexes of forces are important, or change in the world would not take place (Abels & Abels, 2001).

1.5 CONCEPTS CLARIFICATION

In order for the reader to fully understand this research study, it is necessary that the concepts be defined. Concepts are necessary to be defined so that there is some understanding between the reader and the researcher. Concepts are clearly specified ideas derived from a particular model. Concepts offer ways of looking at the world which are essential in defining a research problem. Mouton (2001) also define concepts as symbolic constructions by means of which people make sense of and attribute meaning to their worlds.

1.5.1 CONCEPTS

The core concepts of the research detailed information will be provided in chapter two.

1.5.1.1 Portfolio

I understand a portfolio as a tangible evidence of a student’s knowledge, abilities and growth in becoming a self directed life long learner. Dunbar-Krige and Fritz (2007) view it as a cumulative and on-going collection of entries that are selected following a given framework and reflected upon by the student, to assess the student’s development of a specific but complex competency. To add on to the definition, Artel & Spandel (1990) define a student portfolio as a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student’s efforts, progress, or achievement in a given area.
1.5.1.2 Reflection

According to John (2002) reflection is concerned with revealing the subjective world of 'I' by reading the surface signs to reveal the deeper nature of self, a self that may be hidden, reflection would prompt you to reveal to yourself the way you were thinking, feeling and responding within the experience. Dunbar-Krige and Fritz (2006) adds on when by stating that reflection is a process of deliberate, active, persistent and thoughtful consideration over a period of time to firstly understand and secondly make sense of experiences on cognitive and emotional levels in order for learning to occur and change or transformation to take place. Fritz, (2006) define reflection as a cognitive, affective and conative process or activity that requires active engagement on the part of the individual and it involves one’s responses, beliefs and premises in light of the situation at hand.

1.5.1.3 Metaphors

Metaphors are described as a characteristic of work in the qualitative paradigm, which is best illustrated in such alternative teaching and assessment strategies as the portfolio. Fritz (2006) adds on by defining metaphors as a means of communication in which one thing is expressed in terms of another. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the masters students through their reflections and metaphors. Schmitt (2005) states that the goal of a metaphor in the context of therapy is to present clients problems in a solution friendly framework. Deacon (2000) in his market research suggests that the participants describe either themselves or product relevant happenings in terms of colour, as a fairy tale, television show, object, piece of music, etc. Yet another possible way to work with metaphors in qualitative research is to elicit them directly from the research participants themselves.

1.5.1.4 Educational Psychology

Educational Psychology

Educational Psychology involves the study of how people learn, including topics such as student outcomes, the instructional process, individual differences in learning, gifted
learners and learning disabilities.
It is the study of social, ethical and cognitive development of students as they progress from children to adult learners. It is the science of understanding when, where, why and how one learns.

**Educational psychologists**

According to (HPCSA, 2006) educational psychologists assess, diagnose and intervene to optimise human functioning in the learning and development of human functioning. Educational psychologists assess the cognitive, personality, emotional and neuropsychological functions of people in relation to the learning and development in which they have been trained.

**1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Within the above context, the research question is formulated as follows:
This study was guided by the following key research question:

**What can be learnt from the reflections of Masters Students in Educational Psychology as it is presented in their portfolios?**

The following sub –question was investigated

- What is the use of metaphors in the reflections of the participants?
- How participants used reflections as presented in their portfolios?

**1.7 AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

This study aimed to:

* Establish the experiences of the Masters students enrolled in an Educational Psychology program by analysing the reflections captured in their portfolios.
* Look metaphors students presented in their portfolios in order to gain an understanding of how they regarded their experiences in the program.
1.8 RESEARCH PARADIGM, APPROACH, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section gives an overview of the research paradigm, approach, design and methodology of the research. The details will be discussed in more depth in chapter three.

1.8.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The choice of an appropriate paradigm for a research is important as it provides the researcher with a framework to shape and validate design decisions. The paradigms that are relevant to qualitative research include interpretation, critical theory, feminism, postmodernism, phenomenology (Merriam, 2002). An interpretive, constructivist paradigm was chosen for the purpose of this study. The interpretive, constructivist paradigm was ideal for this study because I was interested in how participants used reflections as presented in their portfolios. This approach has allowed me an opportunity to learn more about how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them (Merriam, 2002:4).

1.8.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Dawson (2006, p.14) defines qualitative research as 'Qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through methods such as interviews or focus groups. It attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants. As it is attitudes, behaviour and experiences which are important, fewer people take part in the research, but the contact with these people tend to last a lot longer.' I used a qualitative research approach. I was interested in gaining understanding of the experiences of the Masters students when they engaged in reflective practices through metaphors and reflections in their portfolios. The setting was therefore natural and the data was derived from the students themselves. The research was on students as participants and their reflections as presented in their portfolios.

Denzin and Lincoln cited by Silverman (2006) state that qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the
researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

Creswell (1998, p.15) defines qualitative research as ‘an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting’. A qualitative research approach was therefore utilised because it helped me as a researcher to understand the data I collected when researching about the reflections of the participants and in trying to understand participants’ views and how they constructed meaning out of their experiences through the two year program.

1.8.3 PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH DESIGN

I utilised a phenomenological design to understand the role of reflections as depicted in the portfolios of the participants in their two year training program. Cresswell (2003) states that to get to know and understand the ‘lived experiences’ marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedures involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. This meant that I had to understand reflections, as a phenomenon, from the perspective of the six participants involved, as Huysamen (2001) states that the phenomenologist is concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspective of the persons involved. This aligns with Flood (2010) when stating that phenomenological research is an interpretive, qualitative form of research seeking to study phenomenon that are perceived or experienced. People experience the world differently because of their different experiences and thus there is no single reality as every individual perceives and experiences things differently. I had to allow myself to explore the experiences and reflections of master’s students, through the use of portfolios and what their metaphors had to say about their experiences in the program. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) explain that a phenomenological study is one in which the researcher attempts to understand the participant’s perception, perspective and understanding of their situation.
According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smith (2004, p.3) ‘qualitative research aims for depth rather than quantity of understanding, the participants remain the primary and reliable sources of data and knowledge’. This shows that data collected from the specified participants cannot be generalised to other faculties, because experiences appear different to different people at different times. That is why a phenomenological design was appropriately used to understand the specific experiences or the participants in depth. The focus of phenomenological research is people’s experiences with regards to a phenomenon and how they interpret those experiences (Henning et al, 2004: Polit & Hungler, 2001) bearing in mind as indicated earlier on that there is no single reality as every individual interprets his or her experiences according to own’s perception.

Leedy and Ormrod (2000) explain that a phenomenological study is one in which the researcher attempts to understand the participants perceptions, perspective and understanding of their situation, as for instance being part of the students in the educational psychology programme.

1.8.4 PURPOSEFUL SELECTION

The dissimilarity between the qualitative and quantitative research is that the latter uses sampling to study a representative subsection of a precisely defined population in order to make inferences about the whole population (Silverman, 2006). The qualitative method allowed me to select participants that would enable me to answer the research question. According to Silverman (2006) purposeful sampling demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are studying and choose our sample case carefully. Purposeful selection is entirely based on the judgment of the researcher, in that the chosen participants are a sample composed of elements which contain the most characteristics, representative or typical attributes of the population (Strydom, 1998). The study as it is qualitatively based; it employed purposive and not random sampling methods. Sampling was based on purposive sampling as six former students who were registered for Masters in Educational Psychology between 2008 and 2009 at a university in Gauteng, were approached and invited to participate in the research and to seek their consent in order to access their portfolios. It is their reflections as presented in their portfolios that I was interested in.
1.8.5 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

According to De Vos, Strydom & Fouche (1998) data collection methods are ways in which the data are actually obtained. In engaging with the participants' portfolios, I aimed to explore their lived experiences pertaining to their learning using their reflections as tool for the exploration of their lived experiences. I collected data in the following manner:

* I interviewed six participants as a focus group exploring their experiences as captured in their reflections.
* I used portfolios as primary sources.
* I implemented relevant metaphors as secondary sources as presented in participants portfolios.

In most of the studies which employ qualitative research, the researchers collect various forms of data and spend most of the time in the natural setting gathering information to be used in the research (Cresswell, 2003). A complete description of the research design, data collection and analysis will be presented in chapter 3.

1.8.6 DATA ANALYSIS

As a qualitative, thematic analysis was used, Braun and Clarke (2006) affirm that using thematic analysis in and beyond psychology is a useful and flexible method for qualitative research. The data was analysed using the thematic method of analysis. According to Boyatz (1998) thematic analysis is a process to be used with qualitative information. He further states that it is not another qualitative method but a process that can be used with most, if not all, qualitative research and that allows for the translation of qualitative information into quantitative data, if this is desired by the researcher, in my case this was not required. Then, after reading through all the data in an attempt to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning, I immersed myself and began a detailed analysis with a coding process. Coding involves reviewing transcripts, breaking down data into components parts and giving labels or names (codes) to these component parts that seem particularly relevant. Then themes were generated in an attempt to formulate a description and to link that to categories. Further elaboration on coding is discussed in chapter 3. Themes that emerged are discussed in detail in chapter four. This suited the study as the purpose was to make sense of the reflections in the portfolios of the students, out of seemingly unrelated material that each presented.
Tobin and Begley (2004) state that the term ‘validity’ change somewhat as it translates the language of rationalistic to naturalistic paradigms. However, some writers have rejected the term completely and use others, such as trustworthiness, which is demonstrated through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer debriefing, audit trail, member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) soundness (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and triangulation (Begley 1996b; Creswell 2002; Tobin & Begley 2002). Each concept will be discussed in detail in chapter three. In this study, trustworthiness was ensured by means of the strategies for trustworthiness as indicated above, and as devised by Guba and Lincoln (1985), viz triangulation, peer group discussions and co-coding. Other than using portfolios and metaphors to elevate the degree of credibility, the conformability of the findings was also established through a continuous interactive consultation with my supervisor to prevent inconsistencies between the data and my subjective interpretations.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All professions are guided by a code of ethics that has evolved over the years to accommodate the changing ethos, values, needs and expectations of those who hold a stake in the profession (Kumar, 2005). The Health Profession Council of South Africa (1999) a board that oversee the ethics, has very strict guidelines and takes appropriate steps against those who do not abide by the guidelines.

1.9.1 Informed consent

It is unethical to collect information without the knowledge of the participants, their informed willingness and expressed consent. Informed consent meant that the participants were made adequately aware of the type of information I wanted from them why the information was being sought, for what purposes, how they were expected to participate in the study and how it would directly or indirectly affect them (Kumar, 2005). Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University (Annexure A). In addition an example of an informed consent letter for participant is attached. (Annexure B).
1.9.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

I had to do my best to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. I also had to make participants aware of the limitations of their confidentiality that should it occur that matters arise that were not directly within my scope of practice I would be obliged to refer the matter or hand over the information on hand. Participants were assured of confidentiality and safe keeping of the collected data and that the information provided by participants were to be kept anonymously. Pseudo names were used such that it would not be easy for both lectures and students to identify the participants. According to Kumar (2005) sharing information about a participant with others, for purposes other than research is unethical. I, as a researcher had to make sure that the information supplied in a group setting, would not be disclosed to other irrelevant parties.

1.9.3 Right to withdraw from the study

As laid out by the Health Profession Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2006), participants were not coerced into partaking in any endeavours that would be harmful to them. I had also to make them aware that they were under no obligation to continue as participants should they not wish to continue as participants. They therefore had the right to withdraw from the study.

1.9.4 Safety from harm

I needed to ensure that the research would not cause any harm to the participants. Harm, according to Kumar (2005) includes not only hazardous medical experiments but also any social research that might involve such things as discomfort, anxiety, harassment, invasion of privacy or demeaning or dehumanising procedures.

1.9.5 Treating participants with respect

It was important that the research process does not intrude on people's lives. I had to consider the age, level of maturity, the health of the participants and their social status. I had to ensure that I did not raise hope in that participants would be paid for taking part in the research.
1.9.6 Feedback

A hard copy of this study was made available to the University. It was also made available to those participants who were interested in the findings. Great care was taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as pseudo names were used to safeguard the participants and that they were not identifiable in the reporting of the results.

1.9.7 Benefits of the study

The findings thereof would be beneficial to the department of educational psychology to adapt the program based on the experiences of the students and to the participants.

1.10 SUMMARY

This chapter described the background and rationale of the study. The rationale of the study was to conduct research on the reflections of the Masters students in Educational Psychology as presented in their portfolios. The research question was aimed at finding out what could be learnt from the reflections of Masters Students in the Educational Psychology program and to establish the experiences of the Masters students in an Educational Psychology program by analysing the reflections captured in their reflective journals. The following chapter provides the theoretical framework and literature that informed the research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIO CULTURAL THEORY

REFLECTIONS

- Reflections through Portfolios
- Portfolios as assessment method
- Deep learning
- Reflective Process
- Reflections for learning
- Reflections through metaphors

SUMMARY
2. INTRODUCTION

‘Reflection is indicative of deep learning and where teaching and learning activities such as reflection are missing...only surface learning can result ’

(Biggs, 1999 in King, 2002)

Using the above quote as an introduction to the chapter on reflections as outlined in the portfolios, the aim is to clarify the theoretical background and literary review relevant to the study. As the quote says, this chapter intends to explore what everybody says about the experiences that participants acquired through reflections and how deep learning is promoted through reflections. According to Mouton (2001, p.87) ‘there are a number of reasons for doing a literature review : to ascertain the most widely accepted definitions of key concepts in the field; to discover most recent and authoritative theorizing about the subject; to find out the most widely accepted empirical findings in the field of study.’

2.1 THE SOCIO–CULTURAL THEORY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The outline of a theoretical framework is necessary to understand how this research is viewed according to a socio–cultural psychology theory. Coupled with contextual knowledge, the views are there to enrich insights into the research. The intention is to qualitatively explore and understand the way participants construct meaning in the context of their social practice. I will try to explore, and understand the participant’s discussions about their reflections in the educational psychology programme using the socio–cultural theory.

Socio-cultural psychology deals with psychological phenomena that happen because of the socio-cultural aspects of human lives in varied social contexts – peace or war, famine or purposeful avoidance of overweight by dieting, poverty, or affluence (Valsiner & Rosa, 2002). From this brief framework I was able to note how socio-cultural psychology specifically deals with the psychological phenomena that result from the interpretation of experience, and so it deals with meaning-making, the co-construction of knowledge and its keeping and transformation along time (Valsiner & Rosa, 2002). Socio-cultural psychology is concerned with the study of human actions and experiences as those are culturally organized. This theory has given me an opportunity to learn more about how
individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them (Merriam, 2002). Each specific context defines and simultaneously is defined by the persons who are actually or virtually present in it, with their specific characteristics, status, social roles and roles/positions, which contribute for the professional, personal, affective, and hierarchical construction of relationships among the participants. The goal of research from this perspective is to catch the participant’s lives, gain insider knowledge, interpret or construct meaning. (Henning, van Rensburg, Smit, 2002). Drawing from the socio-cultural theory my focus was on understanding and analysing the relationship or interaction between the participants and their environment or their social context. In addition to that, Wolfensberger-Le Fevre, Fritz & van der Westhuizen (2011) say that the epistemological position central to professional Master’s programmes focuses on the development of knowledge in community and, as a social constructivist point of view is relevant. They further state that knowledge is actively built by learners as they shape and build mental frameworks to make sense of their environments.

The work of socio cultural theory is to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context, hence, the focus of the socio cultural perspective is on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organised activities play in influencing psychological development.

2.2 REFLECTIONS THROUGH PORTFOLIOS

The Educational Psychology department in the University in Gauteng Masters program had identified the need for development of critical reflection through the use of portfolios. The Practicum module was undertaken by the Masters students who had to show both personal and professional development through the compilation of portfolios. Portfolios that are used in the educational psychology course at the university contain evidence of how students fulfil tasks and how their competence is progressing. Portfolios are paper-based and some content was prescribed and some left to the students’ discretion. Despite variations in content and format, portfolios basically report on work done, feedback received, progress made, and plans for improving competence. According to Dekker, Drissen, Van Tartwijk, Ter Braak, Scheele, & Slaetis (2009) portfolios may stimulate reflection, because collecting evidence for inclusion in a portfolio requires looking back and analysing what has been accomplished. The reflective developmental
portfolio is multifunctional, its purpose includes: to record experiences, to develop and deepen learning in the form of critical thinking and to enhance creativity (Moon, 1999, cited in Hardy, 2004).

According to Demirli Gurol (2007) the use of portfolios in daily life is not a new phenomenon. For instance, the financial services industry uses portfolios to help manage the value of investments. They are also used in areas such as fine arts, marketing or architecture. Portfolios were introduced in the field of education as an instructional tool in the 1970’s (Encase, 1995; Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997; Underwood & Murphy, 1998; Callahan, 1999; Lawrenz, Huffman & Welch, 2000; Briscoe & Wells, 2002). Since then, the use of portfolios has become common in teaching. This educational method has gained considerable popularity in medical training programs in the past decade, (Vanessa & Seggie, 2008). In Educational Psychology, in the Practicum module, the participants were also expected to compile their own portfolios and demonstrating, through their reflections how personal and professional development had taken place over the two year programme.

Educators at least as far back as Dewey (1904, 1910) have been suggesting that preservice teachers should be encouraged to become thoughtful and alert students of education rather than just proficient craftsmen (LaBoskey, 1994). For more than 10 years now, portfolios have been used in a range of contexts for a variety of purposes (Wolf, 1989 cited in Johns, 2002). The term portfolio has become a popular buzzword, while it is not always clear what is meant or implied by the term (Gipps, 1994; Wade & Yarbrough, 1996; Tillema, 1998) whilst according to Demirli and Gurol (2007), a general definition of portfolios used in education has been given by Paulson and Meyer (1991, p. 60) as “a purposeful sum of learners’ works reflecting their efforts, improvement and successes”. In another effort, Arter (1990, p.27) defined a portfolio as ‘a purposeful accumulation of the evidence of student efforts and successes reflecting selection and assessment criteria’. The participants were exposed in their training to a Practicum module where they were also given an opportunity to select their own set of works that went for compilation of a portfolio and using those activities in their portfolio to becoming reflective learners. Zull (2002, p.168) says ‘even if we are able to decrease our emphasis on speed and information and increase the possibilities for reflection, we still would have to give to our students the kind of experience that would produce dream-experiences
that engage their emotions’. The diagram (Barret, 2007, cited in Moon, 1999) provides further support for the importance of reflection in supporting deep learning.

The portfolios used by the students were seen as the vehicle through which students reflect on, and document their growth as reflective practitioners. Whilst compiling their portfolios, students were encouraged to implement their skills and knowledge in real life, they were also taught how to think critically (Blatter & Frazier, 2002, cited by Demirli & Gurol, 2007). Beers (1984) states that, in all, both students and I found portfolio writing to be different from the writing assignments one typically encounters. Driessen (et al. 2009) state that reflection and self-assessment are essential skills for lifelong learning. According to Davis, Ponnamperuma & Ker (2008) students perceived that the portfolio process supported their learning and heightened their understanding of the institutional learning outcomes. In the participants’ reflections as presented in their portfolios, they indicated that they enjoyed compiling their own activities and they engaged with their portfolios as they saw the portfolio as an active learning tool. Participants used their reflections and metaphors as presented in their portfolios to show the level of development, both personally and professionally, that they attained. The quality of their reflections and the use of metaphors bore evidence that learning in the program did take place. Participants enjoyed the benefits of flexibility by choosing own work samples collected over time, across various contexts and which were accompanied by reflections.

A major portfolio feature is the reflective component. Reflection is at the root of cognition and learning and the challenge of lectures were to facilitate and encourage development of this skill in students. The main reason of engaging students in reflective learning was for students to gain understanding when they construct their own knowledge. Barret (2007) concurs by stating that portfolios provide a powerful environment in which students can collect and organise the artifacts that result from engaging in these challenging, real-life tasks, and write the reflections through which students draw meaning. Through the analysis of the reflections of the participants it was learned that portfolios tended to stimulate reflective thinking. In line with socio-cultural perspective it meant that participants explored their understanding of the actions and experience, and the impact of these on themselves, others and the community at large.
Many courses and programmes of study in higher education require the reflective integration of learning which is derived from experience or practice. An example is cited by Drissen (et al. 2007) stating that the use of portfolio in medical education has increased over recent years, especially in the Netherlands where extensive educational reform of all postgraduate programmes has resulted in the compulsory use of portfolios for all residents. Assessment strategies such as portfolios have become major academic trends in finding alternative ways to demonstrate competency of outcomes. Mann, Gordon & MacLeod (2007) agree by stating that activities to promote reflection are now being incorporated into undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing medical education and across a variety of health professions. Mills & Brown, 1997, cited in de Jager, 2002 refer to the fact that portfolios are not a new idea. Reflection as a general skill can form part of the learning process and the ability to use this will enhance the quality of learning.

**First what is to be gained by reflection?** Reflection goes beyond just gaining knowledge, but also to

- explore the foundations of that knowledge.
- strengthening understanding, and
- increasing awareness of the values and attitudes that influence it (Johnson et al 2006)

![Reflection Cycle Diagram](image)

Table: 2.1: Reflection Cycle
Hullfish and Smith (1961 cited by LaBoskey, 1994) state that the immediate purpose of reflection is to resolve problems, but the long term purpose is the growth of the individual and the culture. Reflection helps one to reveal and understand cultural patterns. One does not live in isolation from others but share a world that is largely pre-governed by cultural norms that strongly, albeit unwittingly, shape the way one thinks, feels and responds within situations. This is very important in South Africa because it is a diverse state with multilingual languages and cultures. The process of reflection will often mean that theoretical learning is challenged by reality of experience, where such things as diversity, value, resource constraints and conflicts pose questions and dilemmas (Demirli & Gurol, 2006). John (2002) indicates that besides helping one to reveal and understand cultural patterns, reflection also helps one view or places one’s experience in terms of social systems that shape everyday practice. This means reflection will help one reveal and understand the way things fit together and whether the system is adequate as an organizing structure. Reflection is an essential component of good quality learning and the representation of that learning, as well as being a fundamental feature of a deep approach to learning (Dunbar-Krige, 2006). As table 2.1 indicates that reflection is a continuous process that involves engagement of an activity, analysis, modification and a conclusion to be drawn. Therefore a circle will resume and new experiences will be acquired.

2.2.1 Portfolios as assessment method

The portfolio originally provided an alternative to traditional assessment, by aligning assessment with instruction and by balancing testing or placement with developmental monitoring and an active involvement of the learner (Torrance, 1997) as quoted in the article by Smith and Tillema, (2003). As indicated earlier on, the department of Educational Psychology, through the use of portfolios aimed to promote learning or what is called reflective learning. On comparing the old type of learning, which focused on testing and giving marks based only on the test and learning through the portfolios, the traditional approach views learning as a passive process. The traditional approach views learners as blank slate with no previous knowledge or experiences. Therefore the role given to instruction is to transmit the truth and knowledge to students. In the performance approach, learning is natural, necessary and incorporated into all walks of life. It cannot
be transmitted from one to another. Instead, students need to be actively guided to construct their own meaning. It is the assessment of a systematically organised collection of samples of work used to demonstrate knowledge acquisition, skills development, growth and learning. When properly developed, portfolio assessment can provide valuable information about a learner’s background and the learning contexts, the process (how learning has progressed) and the ability to apply and extend learning. According to the socio cultural theory, knowledge is best constructed when learners collaborate together. Participants support one another and encouraged new ways to form, construct and reflect on new material.

This is exactly in line with what the educational psychology program aimed to achieve in preparing Masters students as human service professionals not only with education but with knowledge, skills and disposition to promote students learning and development. Wolfensberger-Le Fevre et al. (2011) spoke of communities of learning as having potential to contribute to meaningful experiences as members contribute to the learning of others. They further state that the value in learning communities lies in the ways in which active participation on the part of the learners, opportunities to share information, skills and knowledge, and the development and exercising of social skills required for future practice (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews & Gabelnick, 2004). The portfolio was used as a developmental tool allowing for the development and refinement of ideas over time and as a vehicle for the presentation of the student’s best work. Students were engaged in continually selecting, evaluating and reflecting on their work in the process. Landsberg, Kruger & Nel (2005) gives a good summary when stating that as portfolios contain an assortment of the learner’s work, this gives more of an idea of what the learner can do, not what the learner cannot do.

Participants had an option of what went into their portfolios, so they had to collect a variety of data from a variety of sources. Each activity collected, bore a reflection of what the participant went through over a two year period at the University. That was also accompanied by what that meant for each participant and whether learning occurred.
Deep learning focuses on what is significant, relates previous knowledge to new knowledge, relates theoretical ideas to everyday experience and the emphasis is on the internal, from within the student. Mann, Gordon & MacLeod (2007) state that reflective thinking in students appears to be associated with approaches to learning, specifically, reflective thinking at the deeper levels is associated with deep approaches to learning and meaning-making. On the role of Educational Psychology (Freire, 2008, cited in Pillay, 2008) argue that an authentic learning experience for psychology students is most likely to take place within a community service learning project. Such a project should enable students to make connections between academic learning and communities as well as their own social context. In Van der Westhuizen and Dunbar-Krige (2007,cited in Pillay, 2008) where issues of socio-cultural learning, community service learning are discussed, they emphasise that the social and cultural context of learners should be considered as part of their learning and that such learning should provide service to the learners’ community, leading to some positive transformation within the community.

Sims (2006) states that key to the effectiveness of learning in learning programmes, is the development of meta-cognitive skills, in other words thinking about and reflecting on one’s own learning. Through the development of meta-cognition students are encouraged to monitor, evaluate, control and reflect on their own learning, thus making a powerful contribution towards their development as confident and independent learners. Through the compilation of their portfolios, deep learning for participants meant that they had to reflect on relationships between pieces of information that they collected, apply knowledge to the real life and had to analyse and synthesise facts to create conceptual models and frameworks as will be demonstrated in chapter four. Participants became more involved and engaged in their learning. This meant socio-cultural theory focused on the relationship or interaction between the individual and her environment or social context. It focuses on understanding or analysing this relationship and responding or intervening – for the purpose of promoting the well being of all persons in society.
2.2.3 The Reflective Process

Zull (2002) state that learning is deepest when it engages the most part of the brain. The potential of portfolios to drive student learning in an educationally desirable direction and the importance of identifying individual strengths and weaknesses with regard to limits of competence as part of professional clinical practice may, be some of the reasons for the current wave of enthusiasm for portfolios in the health care professions. Wofensberger-Le Fevre (et al, 2011) adds that Educational psychologists specifically are guided towards becoming reflective practitioners “with a new way of seeing that leads to an enhanced personal capacity and a deepened sense of social justice” (Harris, Lowery-Moore & Farrow, p.2008:322).

(Kolb,1984,p 21) Metacognition

Table: 2.2 : The action–reflection model
Mann, Gordon & MacLeod (2007) state that most models of reflection described by Schon (1983, 1987), Boud (1985), Mezirow (1991), Dewey (1933), Hatton & Smith (1995) and Moon (1999) depict reflection as activated by the awareness of a need or disruption in usual practice. These models are base in both theory and empiric data. Their common premise is that of returning to an experience to examine it, deliberately intending that what is learned may be a guide in future situations and incorporating it into one’s existing knowledge. Reflection is a form of mental processing, like a form of thinking that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome Mann (et al, 2007)

The reflection process by Kolb (1984) entails four stages. The first and second stages are about learning through experiences and observations and are taken as basic steps required for reflection to take place. Having observed and reflected on an experience leads to learning from that observed experience. Priest and Gass (1997) describe experiential learning as a process in which a person participates in specific activities and then reflects on the doing of those activities. Similarly, Hopkins and Putnam (1993) view experiential learning as the process through which a person responds to, and reflects on, actual lived experiences. Students in the programme were encouraged to talk about ‘experiences’ in their everyday practice which they felt were significant for whatever reasons. It is those experiences that they wrote about in their portfolios. It was important to understand the context in which the participants lived and functioned on a daily basis. A context does not just contain the participants and their actions; it is relational, it is shaped by individuals, tools, resources, intentions, and ideas in a particular setting, within a particular time. Contexts are inherently social, reflecting and framing interaction. The most important facet of any context is the other people who share a particular here and now (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Reflections were used in order to learn from situations in which there was no set curriculum but where participants were to make sense of diverse observations and reflections as in stage two. Barrett (2007) indicates that the learning cycle, developed by Kolb (1984) is based on the belief that deep learning (learning for real comprehension) comes from a sequence of experience, reflection, abstraction and active testing. Reflections were used to make sense of unstructured situations in order to generate new knowledge and to try out what they had learned. The final stage deals with the
application of the gained knowledge through this process. This was achieved when learning took place or challenges were overcome. This leads to a further cycle of reflection and learning from experiences (Dunbar-Krige & Fritz, 2006). Reflection is an active process of witnessing one’s own experiences in order to take a closer look at situations.

That reflection is a difficult process, particularly when it supports changes of behaviour. It would appear though that for many the capacity to reflect purposefully needs to be fostered or coached. Those who engage in such activity may promote it without appreciating the difficulties others have when trying to do this (Moon, 1999). In a summary of recent research on critical reflection, Sparks, Langer and Colton (1991, quoted by LaBoskey, 1994, pxi) note that in spite of progress on the proposal of frameworks describing types of reflective thinking and the provision of techniques for developing, we are not completely clear on how one best promotes or assesses teacher reflection about political, ethical and moral values, beliefs and attitudes.

The idea is to focus on deeper philosophical issues on why we reflect rather than on the obvious and superficial answers such as ‘to improve on one’s practice or because it is a good thing to reflect. According to Bahman & Maffini (2008) through reflection, each student is helped to monitor individual progress, construct meaning from the content learned and from the process of learning it, and apply the learning to other contexts and settings (Costa & Kallick, 2000, cited by Bahman & Maffini, 2008). Maree (2007) indicates that the purpose of learning through reflection is to engage at a deep level of inquiry, where questions are constantly formed and reformed in order to penetrate deeper levels of consciousness and find themes and patterns that clarify elements of the situation that is the focus of inquiry. Reflection is a way of contemplating self, an opportunity to bring the self together, a self that may be fragmented within the turmoil of everyday existence. (Rinpoche, 1992, cited in Johns, 2002).

The reflection process helps the development of self awareness in learners, (Demirli & Gurol, 2007). This meant participants’ reflections led to greater self awareness, which in turn was a first step to positive change, a step necessary in identifying areas for improvement and growth in both personal and professional contexts. Reflection is an essential component of good-quality learning, the representation of that learning as well
as a fundamental feature of a deep approach to learning. Dunbar-Krige and Fritz (2006) further quote Moon (2002) to say it enables people to feel that they own the knowledge and understand because they have been part of the creation.

To add to the above one of the most commonly quoted models for understanding the process of reflection is a model developed by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985). This model highlights that experiences in learning combine behavior, ideas and feelings and all of these aspects need to be examined in the process of reflection.

Table 2.3: Model on learning through experience.

The process has three stages:
• returning to experience - a detailed recounting or recollection of the events
• attending to the feelings, both positive and negative, that have been prompted by the experience
• re-evaluating that experience in the light of these stages and the learner's intent, and self knowledge, bringing in new knowledge that has been gained through the process. (Johnson, Lynch, Rauhe, Roberts, Tillotson, Wollman-Bonilla & Nixon, 2006).
One needs to ask what are the skills and qualities needed to be reflective. Reflection requires an approach which is tolerant of diversity of ideas which means not everyone will think the way you do, and not everyone interprets or understands the world in the way you do. One has to be curious, there has to be a willingness to ask questions, to want to find out. It is also important to be honest and open so you need to be honest with yourself and this includes being honest about doubts and uncertainty or lack of knowledge. Learning can't take place if you pretend to know what you don't understand (Johnson et al, 2006). There is a clear link between action, reflection and change within this style of learning.

The call for reflection and reflective teacher practice is not new. Reflective teaching has emerged both locally and worldwide as a prominent phenomenon in education. This is evident as cited in the article by Johnson (et al. 2006) as requirement, where students are to prepare ‘A Preparing to Teach Portfolio’ that encompasses evidence of pedagogical development, professional dispositions and reflection on all four themes of the conceptual framework, Johnson (et al. 2006) further state that in developing professionals who are reflective practitioners there is a belief that becoming a reflective practitioner is an ongoing process. It further states that accordingly, programs forge a foundation not only of professional knowledge and skills, but also of the values and dispositions on which future professionals' growth depends. Sims (2006) sums up by stating that successful reflection enables self-awareness and personal and professional growth. Personally, I've found the four obtuseley named stages of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle somewhat abstract and foreign. The first stage was on reflection of experience, followed by learning from experience, thirdly, trying out what is learned and lastly to have an experience. Instead, I've found that a simple, 3 stage model, do-review-plan (see Table 2.4) appeals, particularly when explaining the model directly to participants on how people learn and acquire experience. Experience is gained by drawing on all relevant experienced gained. It means that experience produces an understanding and the potential to act differently in response to future experience. Experiences are being revisited in order to learn from them so as to consider appropriate action. As reflection is a strategy for dealing with complex problems, one explanation might be that the ‘surprise’ of a complex problem occurs less often with increasing experience (Mann et al, 2007). This suggests that when reflecting there may be improvement to learning and to learning from experience.
DO

go forth and have an experience

REVIEW

review what happened and what can be learned

PLAN

plan a way to tackle the next round of experience

Table 2.4: 3 stage model on how experience is gained.

2.2.4 Reflections for learning

Throughout the practicum module self-reflections were encouraged. According to the Experience-based Training and Development Professional Group (EBTD) (1998 cited by Human, 2006) all learning is experience-based. Experience-based learning is seen as learning by doing and becomes experiential when the element of reflection is added to the learning experience. Experiential learning is defined as the learning process where the actions of the learner are followed by a reflective process so that students could be stimulated to think about their own thinking, to reflect upon their own reflections and also to learn from their experiences. Gaye (2007) indicates that the purpose of a portfolio is to record own experiences and be useful. Furthermore, these written experiences need to be placed in the work context, revisited and re-read over time. He further states that the purpose might serve to deepen appreciation of something about self, own's work or place. It could be aligned with certain forms of reflection. As Educational Psychologists the students in the programme needed to make informed decisions by reflecting on their knowledge, beliefs and principles, their interactions with the people and communities they serve, as required in their practicum module.
Johnson (et al. 2006) on inclusive education, bear evidence in stating that the reflective practitioners must examine their own cultural and family background as it pertains to disability, reflecting on the impact of their beliefs and behavior on the classroom setting, counseling situation or planning sessions, making adjustments as necessary. Experience of this kind - according to Morris (2002) lead to learning at different levels. At the first level, students learn what to do in similar situations, in other words the content of the lesson, at the second level, students learn a lot about the relationships and structures which are implied, but not explicitly stated. John (2002) describe experience as the way an individual perceives self and others within the context of a particular event or series of events.

2.3 REFLECTIONS THROUGH METAPHORS

A secondary aim of the research was to look at the metaphors the students presented in their portfolios in order to gain an understanding of how they regarded their experiences in the programme. Participants had to identify an object that resonated with their current level of functioning and metaphorical projection becomes part of the supervision dialogue (Fritz, 2006). According to Lichtman (2010) a metaphor is the use of one idea or term to represent another or as Johns (2002) also states: metaphors are a way to conceive something in terms of another thing. Metaphors are used to contemplate ways of overcoming limitations and to facilitate thinking about those elements of the social world which cannot always be literally expressed. Burns (2001) describes metaphors as a figure of speech in which a place, a word or a phrase denoting one kind of object or action is used in place of another or suggests a likeness or analogy between the two. In this study, participants had various pictorial representations of ‘something’ to show their experiences and learning that took place within their two year programme.

Metaphors are used to assist with expression and understanding. In describing qualitative research, Shank (2002, in Lichtman, 2010) stated that using metaphors is a powerful tool that can change the way we understand things. Maree (2007) defines a metaphor as a word, sentence or story that describes something but suggests something else by analogy and in the process evokes memories and suggests multiple meanings. In this research process, I explored how participants used metaphors to reflect on what is presented in their portfolios. Participants were encouraged to make use of metaphors.
to explore their learning and to help them understand and clarify challenges they encountered in the programme. Metaphors can also serve as a bridge between a schema and newly developed constructs (Dunbar-Krige & Fritz, 2006). The metaphors are also used to capture the experiences of the students and in some instances metaphors are used as therapeutic tools as cited by Schmitt (2005) when he indicates that, in the context of therapy, the goal is for the therapists to develop metaphors and allegories, which presents the client’s problem in a solution friendly framework. Dunbar-Krige & Fritz (2006) state that by using metaphors in telling stories, the supervisor provides the counsellor or psychologists with the opportunity to make meaning for herself, and also models counselling techniques which the counsellor can integrate within his or her proverbial ‘bag of tools’ to be utilized in future counselling sessions. This became important for the participants as they can make use of metaphors when engaging with clients. Metaphors are one of the many tools that participants were encouraged to use because they can be used for various purposes, as stated by Geldard and Geldard (2010) such as describing a particular event or situation, to tell a story, heighten the client’s interest and to provide solutions.

The participants made use of various metaphors to reflect on their experiences. As such, when regarding their reflections, specific attention was given to the metaphors evident in their portfolios seeing as metaphoric language can communicate richness effectively, and thus adds to transference of meaning (Fritz, 2006). Part of viewing participants portfolios entailed understanding the metaphorical concepts that the students’ used, find categories and then to search for any metaphors which might stand out in the material. Schmitt (1995) indicates that metaphors may be present in all cultures but there might be those that are culturally specific and that is exactly one aspect that was researched when viewing the students’ metaphors. Moser (2001 quoted by Schmitt, 1995) states that the contributions of the various disciplines share the common conclusion that metaphors provide preconceptional orientation with respect to thought and experience that is hardly accessible, or accessible only with analytical aids. This means that metaphors can be utilised in cases where a client cannot express himself or herself or does not have enough language skills to express whatever he or she is feeling within himself or herself. By making use of metaphors, it is also about trying to make sense of reality. Through participants’ creative metaphors, reflections were enabled; self awareness and insight facilitated. Metaphors created by participants were regarded as a tool that promoted the
process of continuous development, enhancing both personal and professional development.

Dunbar-Krige & Fritz (2006) state that through stories and metaphors, psychologists and counselors can therefore guide their clients on the journey towards self-discovery. She further states that these techniques can, however, also be used in supervision to facilitate the learning process and growth of learning of the counsellor. In the research it became evident that the participants were well trained not only to assist clients by using metaphors, but also regarding how best metaphors can be used. Gaining exposure on metaphors added to their knowledge and it gave them an extra skill that they can utilise when meeting clients. It also meant, as it came through in participants’ metaphors, that the programme enabled them to understand their own reflective process. Cameron and Low (1999 quoting Lakhof & Johnson, 1980) state that our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphoric in nature and that a metaphor must be regarded as an irreducible, primary cognitive functions by which we create and extend structure in our experience and understanding. Metaphors proved to be another tool which was utilised in the programme to make participants learn and develop more personally and professionally. Participants were encouraged in the program to be actively involved in their learning and had taken ownership that they were responsible for their own learning as well.

2.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the theoretical framework that guided me in this research was discussed as well as the literature on reflections and metaphors, as presented in the participant’s portfolios. Kolb’s (1984) and other relevant models of reflection were discussed. Chapter three will provide the reader with details on the research paradigm, design, approach and methodology that was followed in the study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

PARADIGM

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESIGN

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

PROCEDURES TO ENSURE QUALITY IN THIS STUDY

ETHICAL RESEARCH PROCESS

• Data Collection
  • Portfolios
  • Metaphor

• Trustworthiness
  • Credibility
  • Transferability
  • Confirmability
  • Dependability

• Ethical Measures
3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Research is a journey which begins with questions and which requires many steps towards greater understanding and knowledge of the subject being studied, you will see that the end point of your journey is not so far away from where you begin” (Whickham, Bailey & Cooper, 200, p. 1)

The main aim of this chapter is to explain the research process that guided the research, hence the quotation that it is a journey. In chapter two, the theoretical framework that informed this study was presented and literature was reviewed to provide more insight into the reflections and experiences of the Masters students through their two years of study. Many steps were followed into the inquiry of the experiences of the Masters group at a University in Gauteng. In this chapter I explain the research paradigm, approach and design. According to Taylor & Bogdan (1998) the term research methodology refers to the philosophical basis on which the study has been built. I therefore aimed with this chapter to take the reader through the research process I followed. The themes drawn from the research are therefore elucidated systematically in order to provide an understanding of the reflections of the participants pertaining to their training programme at a Gauteng based university.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is a world view that includes certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). This research will be presented in an interpretive / constructivist paradigm with the aim of contextualising the study within the qualitative paradigm. This meant that reality according to this perspective is subjective and is influenced by the context of the situation, which in this study is the participants’ experiences, participants and their social environment. This recognises the position of the individual within the society or how individuals create meaning. This paradigm places emphasis on how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives. (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).
3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Creswell (2008) in his study on research approaches indicates that a research can be approached as a qualitative or quantitative study, all based on what the researcher intends to research about. Creswell (1994, p.1-2) defines a qualitative study “as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting”. Qualitative research is an approach to research that uses methodologies designed to provide a rich, contextualized picture of an educational or social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I was given an opportunity to understand situations in their uniqueness (the students’ experience of using reflections in their portfolios) as part of a particular context (the university) and interactions within the context under study (Adams, Colliar, Oswald & Perold, 2004). Merriam and Associates (2002, p.37) support the notion of interaction by stating that “one of the characteristics of qualitative research is that individuals construct meaning as they interact with their social worlds”. Babbie and Mouton (2001, p.270) support the notion of understanding by stating that “the primary goal of studies using this approach is defined as describing and understanding rather than explaining human behaviour”. Qualitative research is interested in the practical accomplishment of meaning and its relation to its social actions (Grubruim & Holstein, 2005). This study is about studying people and their behaviour. It is about how they understand their world and how they are making meaning out of that which happens to them. It gave me an opportunity to seek and discover the meaning that participants attached to their behaviour.

The focus was on understanding and meaning through verbal narratives and observations rather than through numbers. The evidence used was provided by the data and the supporting literature reviewed in chapter two. The study is denoted as qualitative research. It can be denoted as qualitative research because it was conducted in a natural setting. It is of a qualitative nature because it was explorative and descriptive and it occurs within a specified context (Mouton, 2001). In this research the context was a University programme offered to participants in educational psychology. The meaning of human behaviour and experience is the central issue that qualitative researchers are interested in. Small groups are normally investigated in qualitative research. According to Dawson (2006) qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviours and experiences
through methods such as interviews or focus groups. My research was based on the belief that a deeper understanding of a phenomenon is only possible through understanding the interpretations of that phenomenon from those experiencing it. Two important features of qualitative research were noted from the above discussions:

- Qualitative research is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data.

- Qualitative research describes social phenomenon as they occur naturally. No attempt was made to manipulate the situation as could be expected with experimental quantitative research. As it stands, I was able to engage with participant’s portfolios to explore their opinions, experiences and feelings and used data to explain participant’s reflections in the educational psychology programme.

3.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESIGN

A researcher’s design is a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical data (Maritz & Visagie, 2008). Mouton (2001) defines the research design as a plan or a blueprint of how the Researcher intends conducting his/her research. The research question intends to explore in a logical sequence, as will be explained later, how the participants engaged themselves and reached conclusions on their participation in the Masters program. In addition, Timothy & John (2011) add that a phenomenological design is a method for understanding how human beings make sense of experiences and transform them into consciousness, both individually and as shared meanings. I therefore selected this design as it enabled me to understand the experiences of the Masters Educational Psychology students by concentrating on their memories, feelings, thoughts, evaluations and judgments as presented through their reflections, captured in their portfolios (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological design was appropriate to be used because it made it possible to obtain rich and relevant information on the participants’ experiences, what they had to say in their own words and to describe their experiences as if straight from the mouths of each participant, as presented in their portfolios.
The focus of the phenomenological design was to understand how humans develop a way of knowing the world. Creswell (1994) states, a phenomenological data analysis study is conducted to reduce and organize data in order to produce findings that can be interpreted by a researcher. In other words, the process of data collection involves making sense of data and image data. Creswell (1994) further states that in essence the phenomenological researcher attempts to understand an individual’s personal perspective (his or her feelings and reactions) to events under study. Individual portfolios and metaphors were therefore scrutinised to understand how the participants experienced their journey in the program. In phenomenology the views of a number of participants are collected. Phenomenologist work much more from the participants' specific statements and experiences (Creswell, Hanson, Clark & Morales, 2007). A phenomenological inquiry usually involves identifying and locating participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon that is being explored (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

3.5 PURPOSIVE SELECTION

There were many different ways of selecting participants, but of importance was the method used which depended upon the focus of the research, research methodology and the preference of the researcher. As I opted for a qualitative approach, I had used purposive sampling because I was specifically interested in the experiences of the Masters educational psychology students from a specific year group (2008-2009). Purposive sampling is said to be useful in illustrating a feature or process of interest (Silverman, 2006) which in my case referred to reflections and experiences of the Masters educational psychology students. Purposive samples are used if description rather than generalization is the goal and the size of the sample will depend upon the type and purpose of the research (Dawson, 2006). Also, this type of selection was used to ensure that the sample selected had adequate information and knowledge. Purposeful sampling is a strategy to choose small groups or individuals likely to be knowledgeable and possess informative about the phenomenon of interest (McMillan & Schmacher, 2001).

According to Silverman (2006) purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants, because it illustrates some feature or process in which the researcher is interested. Purposive sampling is a form of non –probability sampling as it can be used
in a research situation where the target group is known not to represent the wider population. In this particular study the participants consisted of six students in the Masters program during 2008-2009. In my research, Masters educational psychology students, as my target group, were considered to be a smaller percentage of the wider population group of Masters educational psychology students in the country. In this inquiry, I purposefully selected participants according to the demographics of the University participating in the study.

By using purposive sampling I was able to include participants according to the relevant criteria based on the emerging research questions (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). As mentioned earlier, participants should have been through the program and as requirement, have compiled and captured their experiences through portfolios and metaphors. As a requirement in the programme, participants had to submit a professional portfolio to demonstrate their learning. These portfolios were used as data to gain insight and understanding of participants during their training programme. The course is mainly made up by females, due to the nature of the programme. There were only two males students, but I could not get access to them due to time constraints on their side.

The programme is largely made up of female students hence their numbering outweighs those of the males. White students outnumbered Black students as there were more White students enrolled in the programme. The participants were a mix of students from two different year groups 2008 and 2009 as reflected in table 3.1. The participants were selected based on the following criteria:

* They had to be former Masters Students at a University in Gauteng.
* They had to have completed their Masters Educational Psychology degree in the Educational Psychology Department.
* They had to represent all racial groups.
* They had to be from any age group.
* They had to be willing to participate in the study.
* They had to give consent to me to access their portfolios.

* They had to be willing to participate in a focus group session.

Table 3.1: Demographics of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Setswana</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>IsiZulu</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 The role of the researcher

As a researcher I aimed to place myself in the context where the phenomenon is occurring and developing interpretations of the phenomenon based on personal experiences as well as the experiences of those living it. The research journey was characterised by the process of becoming familiar with theory, whilst simultaneously being involved and interacting in the research process. This research process enabled me to be focused and gave me the opportunity to feel at ease with what was expected of me as a researcher.

The emphasis was on how I understood the participants’ worlds and how that provided a guide to understanding their experiences as Masters students and how they created and shared meanings about their lives. It was therefore my responsibility as a researcher to gather and understand the participants’ interpretations in a systematic and informed manner, developing my own interpretations of the phenomenon that made sense to the participants who experienced it first hand. It is exactly what was intended by this study which aimed to explore the reflections of the Masters students as presented in their portfolios. It gave me, as a participant observer, an opportunity to seek and discover the meaning that participants attach to their behaviour. My responsibility was to gather information from the participant, understand their interpretations and make sense of the
information as presented by them. Jorgensen (1989) state that participatory observation is suitable for various situations, which include instances where little is known about the phenomenon. I did not partake as an active member therefore my reflections were not part of the research. As an observer, I reflected and recorded what participants had to say about their reflections as presented in their portfolios. As a result I cannot claim for universality of the findings as stated by McLeod (2003) that studies through participatory observation make no claims to generalizability or their attempts towards generalization remain implicit.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION
Merriam (1998) explains that ‘data ‘is actually ordinary pieces of information in the environment that become scientifically noteworthy because of the researcher’s selective interest and perspective. The data collection process captures situations in the natural way in which they occur so that the participants’ experiences and perceptions are realistic. By means of this process people’s interactions and behaviours can be explained and verified. I was able to share in the understanding and perception of the participants and to explore how they experienced their engagement in the Masters program. The search for data must be guided by processes that will provide rich details to maximise the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about the content (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are information rich (Creswell, 2008). Data has been collected in this study through the use of portfolios, focusing on the reflections and metaphors of the participants and my perspective, as shown in the table below.

![Diagram](chart.png)

Table: 3.2: Sources of data collected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolios</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Reflections in the portfolios</th>
<th>Metaphors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3.8 ARTIFACTS

In this research data collection was done by looking at the reflections of both participants, their metaphors as presented in their portfolios and interviews within a focus group context. The aim in this qualitative research was to explore the participant's reflections and metaphors as presented in their portfolios. When looking at the portfolios a thorough analysis of symbols, words, phrases and pictures was done by me as a researcher. The intention thereof was for usage in the data analysis process and to later add to the validity of the research.

3.8.1. Portfolios

Portfolios were used as the main collection source. Students were required after a two year period to write and reflect about their experiences of the programme. As Moon (1999) indicates: that portfolios provide a powerful environment in which students can collect and organise the artefacts that result from engaging in these challenging, real life tasks and write the reflections through which students draw meaning. It is more than a purposeful collection of past work. It is more than that because it tells the story of the developer’s efforts, progress or achievement and as such his or her learning and growth. Portfolios were therefore used to assess the growth and development of the students that had gone through and to reflect on their learning experience.

3.8.2 Metaphors in portfolios

Gibbs, 1999 cited in Cameron and Low (1999) state that many scholars now recognise that metaphor is metaphors are essential for how people communicate about abstract, difficult-to-talk about ideas, and about aspects of ordinary experience. Metaphors that students presented in their portfolios were analysed to capture their experiences. Every metaphor was analysed for possible categories.

3.8.3 Interviews

According to Dawson (2006) semi-structured interviews are perhaps the most common form of interview used in qualitative research. The process followed when utilizing the focus group is based on the principles of self – disclosure, grounded in a comfortable environment, a particular type of questioning, and the establishment of focus group rules (Wilkinson, 2000). Dawson (2006) defines focus groups as discussion groups or
group interviews whereby a number of people are asked to come together in a group to discuss a certain issue. The discussion is led by a moderator or facilitator who introduces a topic, asks specific questions, controls digressions and stops break-away conversations. I followed the same procedures and had to ensure that each participant made a contribution and that no one dominated the discussion.

Wilkinson (2000) agreed with Dawson when he cited Kreuger (1994) stating that compared with one-to-one interviews, the researcher in a focus group interview plays the role of a ‘facilitator’ rather than the director of the proceedings. I therefore followed in his guidelines when deciding upon a focus group as part of the data collection process. I therefore attempted to gain information relating to how people think, asked questions and strived to gain an understanding of their experiences. I invited the participants to engage in a focus group, to obtain their experiences through using portfolios as a means of reflection in the educational psychology programme. Creswell, (et al, 2007) state that the inquirer collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experiences for all individuals- what they experienced and how they experienced it. I therefore thought it is best to select participants from which the most can be learned according to the research topic. It was important to involve ‘information rich’ participants as much could be learned from them as they are of central importance to the purpose of the research.
3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis is essentially about making sense of the data collected and using the results of this process to answer the research question (Wickham, Bailey, & Cooper, 2000). It also empowered me to build a coherent interpretation of the data that was collected and it provided an opportunity for me as a researcher to get immersed in the data and generate insight into it. I used thematic analysis which is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

The process involves the identification of themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). Reading plays a very important part in analysing data and it forced me as a researcher to become familiar with the data. Aronson (1994) adds by stating that the next step to a thematic analysis is to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns. The data was classified through coding into categories and themes after the transcribing and reading process. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Unsupported field themes offer descriptions of how people do or should behave.

The coding process involved recognizing (seeing) an important moment and encoding it (seeing it as something) prior to a process of interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998). A “good code” is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998, p.1). Encoding the information organizes the data to identify and develop themes from them. Boyatzis (1998, p.161) defined a theme as “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon”. Braun and Clarke (2006) add on that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned responses or meaning within the data set. According to Morse (1993) data analysis is a process of conjuncture and verification of correction and modification of suggestion and defence. Aronson (1994) state that themes that emerge from the informants’ stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. It is a creative process of organising data so that the analytic
scheme will appear obvious. I then summarised and interpreted the data in the research report by comparing it to existing data from the literature review. Finally the data was presented in a table form as illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. Example: Reading by me through all the portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extract and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Phases of thematic analysis
Phase 1.

Familiarising yourself with your data

Data was given to me through the portfolios which I had to read and immerse myself in the data to the extent that I was familiar with the depth of the content of the portfolios. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that immersion usually involves ‘repeated reading’ of the data, and reading the data in an active way, searching for meanings, patterns and so on. The picture depicts that I had to do the reading in all of the participant’s portfolios.

Phase 2.

Generating initial codes using summarised sentences from participants portfolios.

This phase began when I had read and familiarised myself with the data and had generated a list of ideas of what was in the data. The phase involved the production of initial codes from the data. In my research, coding depended on themes that were more data-driven, meaning that the themes were depended on the data and not on approaching data with specific questions in mind that I wished to code around. This is what I did summarising direct from the participant’s portfolios to the computer. Inductive data analysis was done. The themes were generated inductively from the raw information. That meant I had to paraphrase or summarise each piece of information. Boyatzis (1998, p. 30) indicates that working directly from the raw information enhances appreciation of the information, in addition to eliminating intermediaries as potentially contaminating factors. Example provided on page 46.
REFLECTION
JANUARY TO MARCH 2009

REPORT WRITING SKILL

Report writing skill is fundamental to all practitioners in the field of guidance and counselling. It is therefore skill that makes my heart beat each time I had to go through it after a long process of testing. I am extremely pleased because my lecturers are always hand-off to provide extensive support in this respect.

Problem statement is the cornerstone of any reason for referral. This is central to any counselling situation because it is largely the problem that brings the client to a helping counselling relationship. It has assimilated in my mind that I should never, each time I make a report, deviate from the problem statement when I make a report.

Involvement of stakeholders in the process of helping the client has shown to be fruitful. This cements the philosophy of holistic approach to my practice. It emphasizes that indeed, no man is an island and each client's problems are interchangeably connected to the background, relationships, personalities etc. This is vital to any report writing.

Sources by Lutz, Satler and Brink contributed much to the enrichment of my report writing skill. One can always make references to these sources even in future. I honestly appreciate the contribution of student tutors who were allocated to all masters students. This has been a meaningful support to enhance one's level of report writing.

Learning about career theories and assessment tools enhanced my knowledge on career report writing and interpretation. Richard S. Shart has been one of my sources of references in this area of study.

I vividly remember the meaningful contribution of the former LL student who paid us a visit on career issues. It was fulfilling and enriching to witness such success stories from a person who once walked our path.

I can honestly state that the areas of study associated with career choice and opportunities was relatively blank on my side. I gathered extensive knowledge and insight on this area, particularly with intensive studies in theories of Bronfenbrenner, trans-theoretical framework and attachment theories.

ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCE

Working on my adolescent reflection was one of the highlights of my academic and professional development. It serves as a mirror from which my life was reflected. I appeared as a judge and monitor but again as an analyst and spectator of my own life. It was very interesting to notice how various theories I learned in this unit clearly fit into my life experiences as an adolescent.
Phase 3.

Searching for themes.

This phase began when all data had been initially coded and collated and had a long list of the different codes that I had identified across the data set. According to Bayatzis (1998) I had to read, listen or watch raw material for each unit of analysis, then paraphrase or summarize each piece of data or information. This was followed by clustering the coded common concepts into categories. I used symbols to identify specific categories.

- **Support** received by participants either from internal or external sources.
  - Reflections as adolescent on an assignment that all participants did.

- **Clients** on how to handle and approach clients. The importance of clients in this profession.

  - Knowledge gained from lectures and outside sectors like NGO’s, workshops, conferences that the participants attended.

  - Relevant stakeholders that contributed to their personal and professional development.

- **Internal and external support** the participants received varying from lectures to fellow students and former students and members of the private sector in private practice.

  - Groups/Teamwork working together as a group or team members as a core learned skill.

  - Challenges experienced by participants both personally and professionally.

  - Ethics that they learned and had to adhere to as educational psychologists

  + Learning that contributed to their growth personally and professionally.
Figure 3.5 An example displaying symbols used for coding extracted from participant reflections.
Phase 4.

Reviewing themes

This was followed by clustering of the categories into tentative themes.

- Understanding the importance of clients and how to handle them.

- Holistic involvement of all relevant approaches and stakeholders.

- Support from lectures, fellow students, tutors and former students.

- Contributions and support by both internal and external community.

- Gained knowledge through various sources.

  - Reflections and experiences on adolescent life.
  
  & Use of metaphor contributed to enhanced knowledge.

* Promotion of teamwork and group work contributed to understanding diversity

@ Challenges ranging from time, content, families, work, university to finances

# Ethics the role of ethics in educational psychology.

+ Learning that participants were exposed to and that contributed to their growth personally and professionally.
Revisiting ethics as a lifelong learner is always crucial
Looking for relevant and binding ethics in studied cases was crucial
Tried all times to represent the group well, reach deadlines
Struggled with operating system to do transcription
Hearing what was said also proved to be a problem at times.
Doing presentations will help one to better presentation skills
Discussions also served to enhance teamwork spirit
Feelings of oneness and team building and cooperation was experienced
Established teams norms and values reinforced group hegemony
Groups/teams promoted common identity, mutual understanding and respect among group members
Shared goals and understanding were learned
Learned how common vision and mutual respect benefit people from diverse background
Learned how winning can be achieved irrespective of circumstances
Support very crucial in learning
No learning can exist without support
Engagement with Uj lectures live what they preach
Support is also received from student's institutions
Support is also received to be able to address learner’s barriers to learning
Balancing work home and studying huge challenge.
Time factor also a challenge
Learning barriers are experienced throughout the world
Learning about learning support important and relevant to a school counsellor
Learning support contributes to both personal and working life of students
First experience of learning support was misty
Support given by lectures and fellow students content became clearer
Experienced language barrier on writing because of English being a second

Figure 3.6 An example displaying symbols used for categories extracted from participant reflections.
Figure 3.7 An example displaying symbols used for changing categories into themes extracted from participant reflections.
Phase 5.

*Defining and naming themes.*

During this phase it meant defining and further refining of themes to be presented as findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that by ‘define and refine’ we mean identifying the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. Then the following themes were identifies as final themes.

- **Personal and Professional development**
  - *Human interaction (Teamwork)*
  - @ Challenges encountered by participants during the programme.
  - √ Support from internal and external sources.

*Table: Graphic presentation of four themes.*
Diagram 3.6 Summary of final themes.
Diagram 3.9  Summary of data analysis.
Creswell and Miller (2000) define the use of different methods of collecting data as triangulation, which could convergence among multiple ways of establishing truth. This is clarified in the explanation that triangulation refers to the use of various methods to collect data in order to find corroboration within the findings (Silverman, 2006). Various methods were used and integrated in the study to obtain meaningful insights into the participants experiences. Patton (2001) also advocates the use of several methods for data collection.

To account for the quality of the research it was important to define what trustworthiness, reliability and validity of the study entailed and how I met this. Trustworthiness is established through a synchronization of the constructed knowledge of the participants and the recording of that information by the researcher. This synchronization has been referred to as ‘good craft’ by Henning (et al. 2004, p.151). Thus supervision also played a vital role throughout the entirety of this research inquiry, in order to prevent unexplained inconsistencies between my interpretation of the data and the actual data collected.

3.1.1 Trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness was therefore established through the accurate and unbiased recording, analysis and presentation of data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290), ‘every systematic inquiry into human conduct must address the truth–value of the study and its applicability, consistency and neutrality’. They propose four alternative constructs that more accurately reflect the assumption of the qualitative approach. The constructs are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.1.2. Credibility

The goal of credibility is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the participants' views were accurately identified and described (De Vos, et al, 2005). This is emphasized in Merriam (1998) in explaining that credibility is obtained from the discovery of the experiences lived by participants in a
focus group. Research findings have to be truthful for the researcher, the participant and any person who is to read the research report. It refers to the extent to which the data is believable and trustworthy. In the study this was ensured through a prolonged and varied engagement with the raw data, as it was collated, categorized and coded, from various sources. Triangulation was used to enhance credibility of the study. Krefting (1991) states that credibility can be enhanced through triangulation. By comparing and collating different data sets, referring to the individual reflections in the portfolios, the metaphors and focus group interview, credibility of the study was enhanced. The process of credibility helped in establishing transferability.

### 3.1.3 Transferability

A qualitative study's transferability is the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or to other groups (De Vos et al. 2002). Shank (2006) views it as the use of adequate and detailed description in laying out all the relevant details of the research process. In order to achieve transferability, I engaged in a thick description of the research methodology. Trochim (2006) adds on by stating that transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other context or settings.

### 3.1.4 Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability to know where the data, in a given study, comes from and how it was collected (Shank, 2006). Dependability of the study was ensured by using different sources of data such as individual portfolio reflections, metaphors within the reflections and focus group. Findings from the various sources were compared and any possible weakness of a particular method of data collecting was compensated for by the use of triangulation as described earlier. The data that I used was triangulated by the different types of data and data gathering strategies that were used during the research (Shank, 2006). Willis (2007) views triangulation as the finding of multiple sources of confirmation when you need to draw a conclusion. Maxwell (2005) refers to it as collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods. Accordingly, validity was given to the data, which had been gathered, through the process of triangulation.
3.1.5 Confirmability

The confirmability of the findings of this study was ensured through the use of multiple sources of data. By using more than one source, I was able to ensure that the data supported the analysis and interpretations of the findings (Krefting, 1991). Confirmability deals with the details of the methodologies used (Shank 2006). De Vos (et al. 2005) refer to it as the traditional concept of objectivity. The above authors stress the need to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another study, so different resources were used to build the literature review and the research.

I attended supervision to ensure that I eliminate my biases. Confirmability was maintained in this study by including samples explaining in detail the processes followed in such a manner that an outside person can follow and understand what happened from the beginning of the study, through the stages of data collection until the drawing up of findings and conclusions, together with the rationale for these.

3.12 ETHICAL RESEARCH PROCESS

Ethics as a set of moral principles are important, widely accepted and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and participants, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students (De Vos et al. 2002). So it is important for those undertaking the research to adhere to those rules and regulations. The Webster New World Dictionary defines ethical as: “conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group” (in Babbie & Mouton 2002, p.50). In agreement with the above statements, the above ethical conditions were relevant to be considered in conducting this study. Students were not aware that their portfolios would be used for research purposes. When approached for the use of their portfolios, risks of exposure were discussed as well as the benefits that promoted the use of portfolios in the educational psychology programme.

The process followed is outlined as follows: The point of departure was the submission of my proposal outlining my research to the University Ethics Committee. As proof that the University allowed me to proceed with the research, I have attached an addendum A, to show that the study complies with standard ethical consideration. As the study was
based on the portfolios of the Masters students in Educational Psychology, as a focus group, to obtain their views on using portfolios as a means of reflection in psychology, I needed to have their consent, an example of one is attached as addendum B. In the letters it is indicated that participants in the study were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any given time, were taking part in the study voluntarily, as participants were fully informed about the research process and purpose, their identities were protected at all times and any information revealed either, personal or professional, was regarded as absolutely confidential, participants were not be exposed to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes. Confidentiality and anonymity were also regarded as crucial in the ethical protection of the participants. Pseudonyms were used and copies of the research findings were to be kept for two years following completion of the study, upon which it would be destroyed. All this complies with the Health Professional Council’s ethical code of which researchers need to abide by when working within the health service domain (HPCSA, 2006). Consent was also sought from the Co-ordinator of the Masters Programme of the department of Educational Psychology at the University in Gauteng. Reporting fully on the findings was adhered to, based on the ethics policy of the Faculty of Education.

3.13 SUMMARY

Using qualitative research provided me with opportunities to study experiences of master’s students in great detail and in a more natural way. In this study the intended purpose was to explore the reflections of the educational masters students as presented in their portfolios. Therefore to reach that goal, a phenomenological research design was followed. In this chapter the research paradigm and design used in this study was discussed in details.

A phenomenological design was utilized for data collection. Purposive sampling, a procedure that involves choosing participants with the qualities that I wanted to investigate, was used to identify appropriate participants for the original study. In this chapter themes and categories were identified from participant’s responses. In the next chapter I present the findings of the research, engaging with literature and then reflect on the limitations, strengths and recommendations.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM & THE PROCESS

PRESENTATION AND OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

STRENGTH OF THE RESEARCH

LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

CONCLUSION

THEMES

- Professional and Personal development
- Working as Teams/Group
- Challenges
- Internal & External Support
4.1 INTRODUCTION

‘A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience’ (Jack Mezirow, 2008).

As discussed in chapter one, this enquiry attempted to explore the reflections and metaphors of the participants in their journey to becoming qualified educational psychologists at a university in Gauteng. I therefore present the findings, as discussed, whilst considering the literature review. In this chapter an overview of the study will be given with reference to the background, problem statement and aims as well as the execution of the study. The limitations of the study, strengths and the recommendations for further research will also be discussed.

4.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND THE PROCESS

The participants were required, in their masters programme to compile portfolios that would summarise their two year program as educational psychology students. Part of their module outcomes was to do reflections on the entire period of study and to engage metaphors that depicted their journey throughout the course. The aims and objectives of this research study were to explore the reflections of the Masters students in educational psychology as presented in their portfolios.

4.3 PRESENTATION AND OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Once the data analysis process was complete, it became evident that the final themes informed one another and were connected in many ways. It thus seemed plausible to collectively join these themes under main overarching themes. For now, a brief summary of the themes is offered. From the diagrammatic representation presented, it can be noticed that there are four main themes which were derived from the data. The interlinking between these themes as they relate to each other and the research question are depicted by different colours. I will now go on to present and then discuss each of the themes. I will use literature to support, confirm or counter the findings of this study.
THEMES

4.3.1 Professional and Personal development.

“Learning for life” - Participant 3

Learning for participant 3 (Portfolio) meant the following ‘I hope to always have a thirst for knowledge and I believe that as an Educational Psychologist it is essential that one is always learning and developing one’s professional knowledge and expertise (through workshops, conferences, reading, interaction with other professionals etc)’.

Participant 3 further stated (Portfolio) that “I feel privileged to have been a part of this course and to also have had the opportunity to attend lectures, workshops and conferences on a wide variety of topics’ This bears testimony that when they reflected on the two years that they spent on the programme it was rather well spent and empowering.

By professional development it meant that participants were exposed to various theories of therapy for example, family therapy, and various workshops on parenting, trauma, emotional development workshop, perceptual development workshops and many more.

Participant 4 (Portfolio) reflected and stated that ‘I mentioned to someone that it feels as if my brain has expanded in size after doing the master’s course and certainly a vast amount of knowledge has been assimilated into my ‘frontal lobes’ when I look at what my portfolio represent’.

This bears testimony when Participant 6 (Portfolio) states that ‘I regularly attend workshops and conferences as well to add critical and practical knowledge on dealing with different situations. This contributes to my life long learning process.

This clearly shows that learning did occur when one is always learning and developing one’s professional knowledge and expertise through workshops, conferences, reading, interacting with other professionals. Demirli and Gurol (2006) bear evidence of the importance of developing and accumulating more professional skills continuously when stating that developing professionals who are reflective practitioners is an ongoing process.

This meant that students were continuously involved in programs that were to uplift their
standard of education as educational psychology students.

As Participant 3 (Portfolio) stated ‘I named my portfolio “Learning for life” as I have always believed that learning is not something that is merely confined to schooling or an academic setting, but is something that should be occurring daily’. The findings revealed that all the participants had used their training by applying their knowledge within their practice of educational psychology. Learning for life for the following person meant:

Participant 4 (Portfolio) in her reflections on the use of the portfolios states that ‘...It also serves to demonstrate my competence across all the modules of my knowledge, integration, and practice of theory, insight into a variety of assessment tools and therapeutic interventions, research and application of skills in the field.’

Participant 6 (Portfolio)...’ this learning encompassed both personal and professional growth’, as outlined in the above discussions (on how they grew in their personal as well as professionally life and how that created opportunities for learning) which are both crucial in terms of both the successful completion of this degree, and subsequent work as an educational psychologist.

Demirli and Gurol (2006) state that personal and professional development is about creating a career or professional trajectory, it is about being reflective, planning and evaluating processes that help one understand how one will get to one’s destination. He further states that fundamental to personal and professional development is the understanding and application of critical reflection, during and after all learning processes and activities – the glue that helps one bring everything together, as well as the sieve that helps one filter out critical learning and turning points.

The participants were able to be developed not only professionally, but personally as well as they were able to develop the seven vectors of personal development as outlined by Chickering (1993) as young adults during their undergraduate years. This is also relevant to Masters Students in Educational Psychology as well because they were also expected not only to grow professionally but personally as well.

* Developing competence
Participant 5 had this to say
‘I worked with different people in groups over the last two years. In groups of two, three, but the most difficult group was when we had to work as a group of six on a research assignment. You became more humbled when working with other student in my group, which had to offer up their family time to come and meet to work on assignments. I grew to respect other people in our group’.

* Establishing identity
Participant 4 further stated the highlight has been my self-development during the course…I’m glad I did (on entering the course) as I did plenty of self analysis and introspection.

* Achieving autonomy and interdependence
Participant 1 says ‘I am now confident to apply these theories in my practice and to a large extent; I can conduct a test and compile a comprehensive report that integrates all the silent issues’.

* Developing purpose
Participant 3 says ‘I am particularly passionate about doing preventative work (alongside curative work) and I enjoy facilitating workshops and training programmes.’

* Developing mature interpersonal relationships
Participant 3 further states that ‘I have led a weekly small group of teenage girls for 7 years. These experiences have helped to develop my communication and interpersonal skills.’

* Managing emotions
Participant 4 says ‘As I am a warm person, I find it difficult to relate to cold and dry clients. I will need supervision for this too’.

* Developing integrity
Participant 6 stated ‘I promise to demonstrate respect for people’s dignity and rights’.

Personal development according to Heysteck, Roos and Middlewood (2008) includes activities that improve awareness and identity, develop talents and potential, build human capital and facilitate employability. They further state that as personal development takes place in the context of institutions, it refers to the methods, programs, tools, techniques and assessment systems that support human development at the individual level.
Participant 4 says ‘the rest of the journey down the Zambezi (future practice) is under contemplation. I believe I am an over-comer with courage, character and a few scratches. As I lift my binoculars over the (possibilities for practice’).

Professional development took a central place when the programme in which participants participated went beyond academic teaching and provided participants with professional development. By attending various conferences and workshops they built on their self awareness, they fulfilled their aspirations and they improved their knowledge. Heysteck (et al. 2008) further state that personal development covers a wider field than self-development or self-help: personal development also includes developing other people. As trained educational psychologists, participants were expected to devise programmes meant to develop schools and parents. Phasha (2008, cited by Pillay, 2006) state that educational psychologists should organize seminars and workshops and even include lessons within the school curriculum that focus on all forms of abuse and neglect. School psychologists could also assist in setting up community policing forums to protect vulnerable learners and schools.

Participant 4 states that ‘I went full throttle into the ‘remedial’ field, organising workshops at school, holding parent education talks for my parents, going on courses and networking’. Participant 3 adds on ‘I presented a workshop on barriers to learning and differentiated instruction, researching this topic was very stimulating as there is a lot written on this subject’

Participant 2 on presenting a reading lesson at a school said ‘I think as an educational psychologist I should expand my knowledge about whole language learning and bring it as a suggestion to the schools’. Developing a professional identity was of utmost importance in the training program of the participants. This development of professional identity influences the personal development, as well as the learning that participants experience during their training. They all agreed that the program equipped them with the knowledge and skills that they needed to be successful in life. To attest to this, one participant had this to say:

Participant 5 ‘we had class from our lectures as well as “guest speakers “that provided
us with insight into their “specialised “fields of practice”.

Participant 2 said on engaging client activity in telling stories and actualising dreams ‘...it can also assist the therapist enter the client’s world and connect to him on a very deep level. I will be using these methods, please God in my practice’.

Johnson (et al. 2006) further state that candidates develop into reflective practitioners as they progress through the professional programs and continue to grow as reflective practitioners throughout their careers. It further states that accordingly, programs forge a foundation not only of professional knowledge and skills but also of the values and dispositions on which future professionals’ growth depends. Professional development was a top priority for the department of educational psychology. This meant that participants had not only developed professionally but have gained competence, relevant knowledge and skills. The two year program promoted professional and personal development for participants to keep abreast of the latest research and interventions, so participants had to keep up to date professionally by subscribing to professional organizations, read journals, books, attended workshops and conferences and grasped many other opportunities that existed.

Participant 3 attest to this by saying ‘the rest of my logbook shows that we had a few hours in workshops for the school and the teachers, workshops that I attended at the university’.

Participant 4 (Portfolio) stated ‘personally in terms of development I have almost felt my brain grow in capacity like the swelling of a river as the streams (insight) trickle and rush downhill into the mainstream of learning’. Students view their lectures as professional learning community communities not only through using outside resources such as TMI, non-profit organizations, but also by providing a lot of in house learning opportunities which did not cost them much, for example peer visits among lectures, coaching and mentoring, in training workshops, group discussions, reflection sessions, sharing books, journals and information.

As Participant 1 (Portfolio) summarized by stating that ‘A psychologist, just like a
teacher, is a life long learner’
Participant 3 (Portfolio) stated ‘So, in conclusion ...my learning about psychopathology has just begun! I am excited to gain more practical experience, increase in professional expertise, learn more and interact with other professionals so that I can gain insight that will assist me in better meeting the needs of the clients that I will come into contact with in future. I am a firm believer in life long learning.’

From the above extracts from the participants it became evident that being in the program equipped them with various therapies that they employed within their practice of psychotherapy including: psychodynamics therapy, psychoanalysis, person centered therapy, cognitive-behavioral, rational-emotive behavior therapy (REBT), transtheoretical framework, ecosystemic perspective and constructivist therapies.

Participant 4 (Portfolio) stated that ‘I aspire to incorporating many exciting new trends and theories into my personage. My purpose is to become a narrative therapist with a cultural flavour.’

On gestalt therapy, ego state, solution focused therapy (SFT), participant 2 (Portfolio) had this to say ‘I just came back from the workshop and it was superb, first day, the focus was on treating a panic disorder and the second day on General Anxiety Disorder and worry through CBT’.

Participant 3 (Portfolio) stated that ‘I am also excited about the prospect of being involved in family therapy and know that I will grow and develop as the year progresses. Participant 5 (Portfolio) had this to say 'last year therapy for me was reading up on theories and not really knowing what to say or what to do. This year my eyes opened to the possibilities by attending the mentioned workshops’.
Figure 4.1 Theoretical Frameworks. (Example from participant 6)
Participant 1 (Portfolio) stated that ‘as an educational psychologist I need to know more about my client’s background, culture and look at individual case according to its context and content’. As Mcloughlin Noltemeyer (2009) state that school psychology practitioner’s role is to help children reach their academic potential using empirically supported interventions.

Participant 6 (Portfolio) further stated that ‘When getting to know your client, it is not only the relationship that needs to be considered but getting to know your client as an individual is also important. Aspects such as the child’s culture, race, age, gender, belief system, customs, personal experiences are considered’. It was found that psychologists would need to work on a systemic level during any form of intervention (Donald et al, 2002). Pillay (2006) supports Donald that school psychologists should play a serious role taking the physical, mental, and social well-being of learners and other stakeholders in the school into consideration. In my own reflections, I believe therapists have to adapt the interventions they are using to accommodate diverse clients in different contextual circumstances. They need to work more systemically and include not only the client, but all systems of which he/she is a part of, in order to effect change quicker. In that way children would be helped to reach their academic potential/progress.

Participant 3 stated that ‘this portfolio is a reflection of the person I am and I enjoyed the journey of getting to know myself better. I will work within my scope of practice and level of competency and constantly develop myself and others and to keep up with current matters in the profession’. Participant 4 indicated that ‘I became aware that the SSAIS really was not ideal for Black grade sevens, which we had discussed in lectures. This is an important consideration for me as an inspiring EP to use relevant and ethically appropriate, curriculum based tests’.

Pillay (2006) supports the notion when stating that school psychologists have to think and act from an ecosystemic perspective if they are to be of value to children and schools. White Paper 6 (2001) on the new role of educational psychologists, states that, in particular, educational psychologists must now not only be prepared to intervene on an individual level, but also at a systemic level and to implement and evaluate preventative programs.
Pillay (2006) further states that school psychologists should capitalize on the willingness of learners to talk to them as psychologists by creating a safe and supportive psycho-social learning environment for learners to succeed academically. After the two year program, participants were to develop a sensitivity and understanding of the relationships and linkages within communities. The focus on families, schools and community indicate that an ecological systems model is essential for understanding the lived experiences of learners. Participants were orientated to understand cultural and contextual features of communities in order to understand communities within which they will be working. This meant that an ecological systems model highlights the interaction and interdependence between learners, parents, communities and schools.

To testify to this: Participant 3 gives evidence to the above statement when she says ‘we need to cater for a diverse population and this brings about what we will need is the knowledge that we have been given and be sensitive towards all clients’. Participant 4 stated ‘I also identify with the water birds that swoop down to drink, in that I have developed ‘eagle-eye perspective’ of myself, the context of my client and wider systems’. Participant 5 (Portfolio) states ‘thus I strongly support the move for psychologists to be involved in their communities’.

They construct their realities through systemic interaction within their environments. Trevitt and Carera (2009) emphasise that learning should focus on positioning for the future rather than remedial action premised on defects in past performance. Morris (2002) describes learning as acquiring what we need to know or mastering what we need to be able to do. He further states that lifelong learning is a guide to making important choices and fulfilling those choices through the expansion of adult learning. As indicated in the students reflections learning through their experiences was about the development of competence, about acquiring knowledge and skills. Participants were encouraged to stay abreast of latest developments in educational psychology, by attending workshops and conferences. He further states that lifelong learning responds to the needs of people in general but even more so to those dealing with discontinuity, uncertainty, change or tragedy.’ It is during these difficult times that the purpose of our lives invariably changes and we face our deepest needs and most profound learning’ (Morris, 2002, p. 8)
Participant 3 stated that ‘when I look at what I have done in my journey, then it is quite amazing. In my first year I did not understand what it meant to do deeper reflections. Although I wrote some critical reflections, they led to a deeper insight, because it meant that I have ‘reasoned with the literature or theories’ to better understand’.

Participant 3 stated ‘So….in conclusion my learning has just begun! I am excited to gain more practical experience, increase in professional expertise, learn more and interact with other professionals so that I can gain insight that will assist me in better meeting the needs of the clients that I will come into contact with in future. I am a firm believer in life-long learning.’

Participant 4 says 'I believe my growth over the two years has been enhanced by interactions and gaining knowledge at a variety of professional level'.

Participant 5 ‘In this portfolio I have collected some evidence of my learning experience so far, being guided by a road map, not a destination...meaning that I am still far from reaching the end of my journey’

Some participants made use of metaphors to reflect on their experiences. Geldard and Geldard (2010) state that a metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison: it expresses one thing in terms of something else. It uses an alternate picture and its contents to represent the real life picture symbolically.

Participant 5 used a calm, still pond to reflect on her experiences. ‘I had managed to overcome my academic insecurities, through much self - reflection and the fact that I was beginning to get positive feedback from lecture’s.

Participant 1 (Portfolio) had this to say about metaphors ‘I will definitely use metaphors in way of helping my clients to know and identify themselves, to utilise metaphors to arrive at possible solutions to some challenging problems…’

Participant 5 had this to say about the metaphors ‘I felt a bit lost on the presentation of metaphors. When I started to reflect about it later on it made sense to me and how it all fits in’.
Lakoff and Johnson (2005) state that in the context of therapy, the goal for therapists is to develop metaphors and allegories, which presents the client’s problem in a solution-friendly framework. Newer approaches assume that the development of solution metaphors should come as close as possible to the client’s own language. Here metaphors are seen as – to use a metaphor – "tools" which are employed intentionally and deliberately. This is clearly bears testimony by:

Participant 1 when she state ‘I could clearly realise that metaphor can effectively be therapeutic to one’s inner being’.

This reminds me of an importance of self awareness. Self awareness is knowing what is happening and how we think and feel about it, rather than being immersed in a situation and not knowing we are in it at the time. As Goleman (1995, p. 51) states “self awareness in short means being aware of both our mood and our thoughts about the mood” (Sharp, 2001, cited in Goleman, 1995) adds on by stating that self awareness involves a set of sub-skills. That is, recognition of feelings, understanding how these feelings impact on us, and being able to use that knowledge to manage the feelings effectively, for example by choosing to act more positively. The positive feedback from the lecture’s helped her to focus on positive aspects and to face her challenges. The use of metaphors clearly depicts how the students experienced the programme.

Participant 6 (Metaphor) stated ‘I am utilizing the metaphor of a journey, being guided by a road map, not a destination ...meaning that I am still far from reaching the end of my journey interesting and making meaning in the way’.

Illustration 4.2: Journey

Illustration 4.3: Gardener
Participant 6 used a metaphor of a gardener. She stated ‘the metaphor that I used in my second year, was that of a gardener and garden. She was always the gardener, the one taking the lead and planning everything to the tee. In my second year, I started to take the role of a garden. I did not always try to plan everything and in the end be disappointed. I took more a role of being supportive towards my group and I tried not to always take the lead. (This was because of that little thing called time and also that the participant was a full time teacher). In her journey she had to stop and look at the daisies family life and situations’.

This is indicated by a definition of reflection which indicates that reflection is a mental process which one goes through to look back at an experience and construct their own meaning. After reflecting, which is what the participants did, they then defined what they had learnt from their experiences and perhaps see how they can do things differently to improve their learning experience.

To conclude on this theme, as defined above, a portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of student achievement or growth. Portfolio assessment is a reliable assessment tool for continuous professional development programmes through learning. It provides useful information both for the student and the lecturer on how the former has grown both personally and professionally through the use of portfolios. The portfolio assessment process required that the participants engaged in some critical reflection and self-evaluation as they selected the evidence to be included and set or modify their goals. A well-designed portfolio assessment process evaluates the effectiveness of the learning or development programme at the same time that it evaluates the growth of the participants. At a personal level it enabled the participants to be seen as individuals, each unique with her own characteristics, strengths and diverse needs. It encouraged participants’ development as critical and reflective practitioners and enhanced participants’ skills for life-long learning and continuous professional development. Van der Westhuizen & Smith (2000) state that various studies on the use of portfolios for professional development have indicated that they could serve purposes of assessment of professional competence and of ongoing development.
4.3.2 Team work

‘Ultimately trying new skills leads to the strengthening of the sailor’s ‘therapeutic muscle’. Then there are times, as in group work or supervision, where I have been in the boat (team) pulling together and sailing with team skills (activities, research, phone calls, sharing, celebrating and networking)’ Participant 4

On support **through team work** participants had this to say:

Participant 3 stated when reflecting on group work’ Often we do day trips together as a big tour group – i.e. group work – pros (get to know each other better, learn from each other, constructivist approach to learning) and cons (frustrations when people don’t do their work, logistical difficulties)’.

Participant 3 (Portfolio) further stated about her classmates ‘I was encouraged to receive the positive feedback from my classmate, and they were gracious to me in that they did not give me much negative feedback (which I know there was).

Participant 4 (Portfolio) further stated ‘the group discussions we held in arriving at the diagnosis was interesting. In fact learning in groups and doing case studies this way became one of my best loves could one say opportunities to learn. We worked hard and were like detectives examining videos, researching and asking questions of each other’.

Participant 6 (Portfolio) felt much the same when she said ‘working with the group was a wonderful experience, we were all prepared to sacrifice our holidays and spend sometime together even though in the past there were some group dynamics which were not positive’.

Participant 3 had this to say’ It has been wonderful to have had the support and participation of all of my classmates –from each one I have learnt so much, and I really hope that we all stay in contact.’

When we have a positive relationship with ourselves we can have positive relationship with others. For any relationship to be smooth, beautiful and peaceful, it requires individuals to be beautiful and peaceful from within. What we show on the outside is a reflection of what we live in the inside.’ We send emotional signals in every encounter and those signals affect those we are with’ (Goleman, 1995, p.11).
Wilson & Pirrie (2000) state that the new emphasis is on working together to deliver a co-ordinated, some would argue integrated, service to end-users, be they pupils in schools, or members of the community. This is very true because the participants did assume different roles when doing group work. Wilson (et al, 2000) went on to say models of professional development suggest that members of professions develop by reflecting on their practice (Schon, 1983). This can be encouraged by team members sharing insights with others. Wilson (et al, 2000) further stated that teams work best when roles were clarified, when role extension and rotation were included, and members were provided with feedback on their performance. Feedback in working as a team is required if team members are to function effectively together. The term ‘team’ is used to describe individuals who work together to project a particular definition of a situation. (Correll, 2002 cited by Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Participant 3 (Portfolio) had this to say ‘I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to do this course. It has been wonderful to have had the support and participation of all my classmates— from each one I have learnt so much, and I really hope that we stay in contact. ‘As always, I enjoyed the experience of presenting to my classmates. I enjoyed teaching and also the interaction with my colleagues.’

Participant 3 had this to say ‘it was exciting to realise how various social interactions and relationships contributed to my personality, character and perception’. Wilson (et al, 2000) state that models of professional development suggest that members of professions develop by reflecting on their practice (Schon, 1983). This can be encouraged by team members sharing insights with others. This was the case with participants coming together and sharing ideas on assignments, presentations and insight.

Participant 6 states that ‘we would divide an assignment between the group and we would see how it went from there onwards’. This bears testimony on how they worked on common tasks.

Participant 3 had this to say ‘I think the amount of time that we spent together as a group brought us closer to one another’. This meant that when in a group other people have an incredibly powerful effect on others. Groups can either kill creativity, inspire others to work harder, make others calm,
which is what participants went through. But according to Glaveanu (2010) creativity is both individual and socio cultural mainly because individuals themselves are socio – cultural beings. He further states that creativity is socio-cultural because: a set of skills and types of knowledge that individual actors possess are developed through social interaction, creativity in itself is often the result of explicit moments of collaboration between individuals. Humanity cannot survive without banding together. We draw our psychological identity and strength from belonging, and groups provide us with support when times are hard (Heysteck, Roos & Middlewood, 2008).

Effective therapists possess effective interpersonal skills. They are capable of entering the world of others without getting lost in this world, and they strive to create collaborative relationships with others. They do not present themselves as polished salespersons, yet they have the capacity to take another person’s position and work together toward consensual goals (Glaveanu, 2010). Wolfensberger-Le Fevre (et al, 2011) state that according to Botha, Reid, Wilson and Mohape (2007) collaborative learning has many advantages, which include fuller participation on the part of the learners, opportunities to share information, skills and knowledge, and the development and exercising of social skills required for future practice.

Encouraging participants to work in teams was a powerful motivational aspect to secure commitment and high performance. The benefits of being in a team /group was that groups were more likely to represent a range of interests. Individual participants related better to smaller teams and more creative solutions were generated. Communication was more effective. Support and advice was always readily accepted. Heysteck, Roos and Middlewood (2008) state that teams do not necessarily become effective quickly. Individuals may go through various stages of relationships before becoming an effective team. Participant 4 (Portfolio) adds on by stating ‘Then there are times, as in group work and supervision, where I have been in the boat (team) pulling together and sailing with team skills ( activities, research, phone calls sharing, collaborating, and networking )’. Mann (et al, 2007) state that the development of reflective thinking was fostered by the mutual support of group members, the challenge to consider things more deeply and the opportunity to learn from others’ experience. This meant that the group experience enabled participants to be part of a self-regulating body, thus modelling professionalism in action. To add to that Brodie (2009) indicates that advantages of virtual teams
especially in higher education allows students to interact with individuals from many different societies, thus greatly improving their awareness and appreciation of culture in today’s global world (Black, 2002; Brodie & Porter, 2008).

As indicated above the participants acted together to do group case assignments and attended at times, group supervision sessions. It was therefore imperative that participants had good interactive skills and had an intention of being developed personally and professionally. The amount and quality of the work done by participants was regulated by the group. Sometimes groups had a social facilitation effect on performance, spurring them on to greater achievements. From the above discussion it was evident that humanity cannot survive without banding together. We draw our identity and strength from belonging, and groups provided support when times were hard. Sands, Kozleski and French (2000), strengthen the notion by stating that it is co-equal parties, as members that bring their unique perspective, experiences, knowledge or skills that work towards a common goal. They are also of the opinion that respect for diversity of experience and preferences is thus inherent in the definition of diversity.

Participant 5 (Portfolio) had this to say ‘as our group worked together, we started to reach a norming stage, in which we started allowing each other to bring the assets they have to the table and this would not have been possible if the guidance (that were given by our supervisors) was not that of unconditional positive regard…’. Feeling connected to others is a basic human need. This human need develops relationships, a sense of belonging and motivation of students. These aspects were essential for student’s success and engagement in the programme. Morris (2002) states that there are innumerable ways other people can help us with our life long learning. Trusted friends or advisers can be catalysts for long, fruitful periods of new learning and they can make it easier for us to get past major obstacles. Alternatively, we can become part of a group who learn together and who facilitates each others learning.

On group work, participant 5 (Portfolio) commented that it allowed for a collaborative learning experience, which meant that the students could all learn from each other which also widens one’s knowledge base. She indicated that in as much as she gained from learning from others it also proved to be a challenge, she stated ‘with regard to the group functioning, it must be said that, although group work allowed for collaborative
learning, it was not always an easy process. It was far more difficult to coordinate and complete the assignments as a group than it would have been were an assignment an individual task. Firstly there were time constraints in terms of coming together to discuss.’

Participant 3 ‘I selected the picture of a soaring bird. This selection was made due to the fact that I really felt that I was getting on top of my studies and starting to perform well, both in assignments and in terms of giving my opinions in class’. The participant was feeling good and feeling good about it and being on top of things.

Challenges on teamwork participants had this to say:
Participant 5 stated that ‘on a personal level, I found the group work challenging as I feel that I am a bit of a ‘control freak’ and I found it difficult to rely on others in order for the assignment to be completed, I much prefer working alone so that I have control over my own deadlines and my own work completion. So, the group work was a valuable learning experience for me and taught me how better to work with others so that a task can be successfully completed’.

Participant 4 (Portfolio) concurs by stating that ‘It has been written with nostalgia (referring to portfolio) anticipation of what the outcome will be and almost a sadness of loss, since I will be moving out of the intimacy of the group and care of the lecture’s where tight bonds have enfolded me. I also learnt so much from my colleagues open sharing of their realities. It became a saying in our group “Join Master’s and see life happen” such were the major life events that happened in many of our lives over the two years. I have learnt from theirs and I openly shared with them’. On the role of Educational Psychology Freire (1998 in Pillay, 2008) argue that dialogue involves people developing mutual respect by working with each other rather than imposing
themselves on others. Van der Westhuizen & Smith (2000) add on by stating that on the study they conducted on portfolios there was a need to build community, to learn from each other and to develop a sense of confidence.

The theme on teamwork showed that through collaboration the teams reached high-quality outcomes, because all the members took responsibility and accountability for the outcomes. Collaboration created opportunities for members to work together in specific tasks such as assignments and presentations. It also gave team members the opportunity to share, develop, refine, and/or adapt strategies through discussion and modelling (Ride-Salt Teacher Support Teams, 2006). As students, they recognized the creativity that occurs when people work together to solve common problems. They must recognize and value the benefits from working collaboratively. Members must be interested in reflecting on and changing their own practices (Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 2000). The functionality of an effective team depended on the existence of collaboration as a model of interaction between role-players. Its survival depended on a real team, compiled of a group of regular members, who relied on each other and learned from one another. Pillay (2008) argue that psychologists need to be trained to see clients as a collective. They need to be taught to work with groups, for example group assessments and group psychotherapy. The dynamics of working in the collective is very different from working with individuals; therefore the training in this regard should not be taken for granted. Another aspect of collective teaching that is often overlooked is the notion of working as teams, groups and peers during the course of training. Clearly in this university training as teams has been part of the programme judging on what participants had stated.

4.3.3 Challenges experienced

‘In terms of learning experience, these two years of my life have certainly been the most stretching and taxing not so much because the academic work itself is ‘difficult’ but because this course stretches you and challenges you in (I would say) every area of your life ..physically, emotionally, spiritually, cognitively, spiritually and rationally ’ Participant 3.
What follows are extracts on how participants were challenged during their programme. The course itself proved to be a challenge as:

Participant 3 (portfolio) states ‘...in terms of the academic side of the course, it is challenging because of the breadth of material and ideas that one is exposed to, I often had a sense of ‘I need a whole year just to read about, research, experience and get to grips with one module of the course which time did not permit’.

Participant 6 (portfolio) concurred with her when she said ‘this quarter was really short for me because I was still adjusting to the program and felt that there was so much to learn and so little time. It was up to me to decide to sink or swim’.

Participant 5 (Metaphor) state that ‘My first semester as an M1 can be likened to a tornado, I felt like there is so much to learn, but that I was hovering above everything, not sure if I was going to ‘touch down’ and be able to assimilate all the knowledge’

Participant 3 (portfolio) adds that “these cracks were chosen as this was a semester in which I experienced intense difficulties in almost all sphere of my personal life, as well as to a lesser extent in my work environment. She further stated that ‘feel like I fell apart, and I did go into a depressive state where work completion and daily activities became increasingly difficult for me to manage’.

Illustration 4.5
Cracks: Portfolio of participant 3

It felt like the participants were experiencing almost the same things which tells much about their gained experiences over the two year program, as also indicated by illustration 4. Participant 1 (Portfolio) that ‘to me being a student of the University is a blessing although it is often challenging and time consuming to come into grips with course content’.
Participant 3 (Portfolio) added on by stating that ‘a field like Educational Psychology seldom offers the kind of certainty (found in other fields). It is exactly because humans are complex and that each human and his/her context is unique which makes the field so challenging’. I got the sense that in as much as students were thoroughly prepared mentally, one biggest obstacle was time factor, as also attested by Participant 5 (Portfolio) who stated that ‘that little thing called time ...did not allow me to work like that anymore (redoing assignments). I had to do the best that I could with the time that I had to my disposal’. Morris (2002, p. 10) states that ‘many people live their lives in a pressure cooker. They have far more to do that can be accomplished in the time available. Shortage of time is a constant problem. It is hard to be reflective when there isn’t enough time in the day or when the safety valve is about to blow.’ Mann (et al, 2007) in a study conducted by Dornan (2002) on use of portfolios stated that practical barriers experienced by students included time pressures, lack of computer access, literacy and support.

Obstacles encountered by participants were not only academic but were personal as well. This is also very evident in Participant 2 (Portfolio) reflections ‘the demands of the home, children and varsity, will I not drown in the middle?’

Participant 4 (Portfolio) seemed to suffer the same fate when she stated that ‘the rowing through turbulence got me, earnings, single mom pressures, two burst geysers, computer glitches and financial drains. She further stated that ‘...with the pull and push (life’s unexpected challenges, time, planning and financial demands ... at times became too much. ...and a nail biting run down of technological, financial, family, love and health challenges to internship’.

Participant 5 ‘It was a very busy semester which is why I chose the picture of the bee having many flowers to pollinate’. The participant seemed very busy engaged with everything.
Participant 6 (Metaphor) stated ‘*I am utilizing the metaphor of a journey, being guided by a road map, not a destination ...meaning that I am still far from reaching the end of my journey*’ interesting and making meaning in the way’.

Beginning students typically find the start of professional training to be exciting, but also intensely challenging. Theories/research, clients, professional elders (professors / Supervisors / mentors / personal therapists), one’s own personal life, peers/colleagues and the social/cultural environment combine to impact and sometimes overwhelm the beginning student. (Ronnestad and Skovholt, 2003). This attest to the notion that the programme itself is difficult especially at the beginning of the course where participants felt overwhelmed because of the richness of information that they were to deal with during the programme.

Participant 1 and 3 (Portfolio) were challenged by the *language barrier*. They felt that as second language speakers, the language was putting them at a disadvantage because they could not participate the way they wanted to.

Participant 3 (Portfolio) states.... ‘*I think through it, you will be able to understand the impact this perspective had on, me since my language challenges prevents me from saying it as best as I could*’

South Africa is one country with 11 official languages. This is a challenge to the educational psychologist who will opt to work within schools. It is upon them to learn the basic language of not only the school they will be working in but also the language of the community as a whole. Pillay (2008) states that higher education institutions would have a critical role to play, especially in the transformation of teaching, learning and research. Participant 5 (Portfolio) observed a problem with a medium of instruction, which is English and she felt that comparatively speaking students whose first language is English, were more advantaged than the second language speakers. This is what she
The above mentioned phenomenon (referring to what she observed with regards to language of instruction, which is English) seemed to have the effect of placing those who were more proficient in English into more dominant positions within the group. It also excluded, to a certain extent those who were less comfortable in terms of expressing themselves in English.’ As such this could be seen as a barrier to learning in that the process developed into one that was not inclusive in the sense that it did not accommodate the diverse learning needs of all the students, and the excluded students did not have full access to the educational outcomes offered, or did not fully achieve a sense of collective belonging (Swart & Pettipher in Landsberg, 2005).

Participant 5” (Portfolio) …it was in this semester, that the questions about my ability to cope with course really started setting in. …this situation was exacerbated by the fact that I felt behind the other students, having not done an Honours Degree at the University ” this comment illustrates how the student felt challenged and the University was not accommodative with the situation of the feeling of exclusion and this made the challenge of studying at the university more overwhelming and emotionally taxing. She felt left behind as other students seemed to be armed with so much more practical knowledge than what she had. The university had measures in place to support students in this regard to particularly those who did not do the Honours with the University. Various means of support was offered to students and that included tutoring support, lecturers themselves who were accessible, through emails, cell phone and one on one tutoring if arranged properly and on time. So, students had to be pro-active themselves, taking ownership of their learning.

Participant 4 (Portfolio) stated that (having commented on the vast amount of knowledge she gained), ‘ there are other parts though that I still need to make my own and explore, because the quantity of information and rate of exposure was so fast. I was not always able to do as much in depth reading as I would have liked to’.

It seemed that nearly all participants had a bad experience concerning the amount of information that they had to deal with within stipulated time which seemed not to be on their side. Participants were encouraged in this university to engage in community projects to enable them to make connections between academic learning and communities, as well as their own social and cultural context.
The theme on challenges clearly shows that participants, on their journey towards reaching their destination, like everybody else came across some bumps, but they did not get defeated by obstacles. While working they managed to reach a level of what Goleman (1995) calls ‘flow’, which is a state of ‘self-forgetfulness’ as a result of being engrossed in the task at hand. I guess, like myself they saw problems as learning opportunities. The challenges were not only concerned with the vast amount of content that they were faced with, but also that some were holding full time jobs and had to deal with pressures from home to work to studying. Some were not as fortunate as the others because some experienced financial problems as well. The challenges can be summarised by remarks by Participant 4 (Portfolio) when she stated ‘The currents of Med ‘and ‘life’ swirled together to form ‘fearsome turbulence’ requiring sheer grit and long hours of sweat, negotiating the course, of the expected and unexpected shallows, pools, bends, straights, waterfalls and rapids. As illustrated that being in the programme for the participant was challenging, tough and demanding.

4.3.4 Support: Internal and External

‘no learning can exist without support’ Participant 1

Participant 5 (Metaphor) state that ‘I had managed to overcome my academic insecurities, through much self - reflection and the fact that I was beginning to get positive feedback from lecture’s. Some participants made use of metaphors to reflect on their experiences. Geldard and Geldard (2010) state that a metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison: it expresses one thing in terms of something else. It uses an alternate picture and its contents to represent the real life picture symbolically.

As many South African studies have clearly indicated, support is vital for participation in general and for learners and their families in particular (Engelbrecht, 2006). To support is to help or encourage somebody by showing that you agree with them. It is to give or be ready to give help to somebody if they need it (Hornby, 2000). Landsberg (et al, 2005) view support as the way in which people (educators) encourage and assist each other.
Participant 1 (Portfolio) believes that learning would not take place if there was no support and continued by stating that ‘It is of great privilege and honour to engage with the lecture’s who practiced and lived what they preach’.

Participant 3 (Portfolio) added on by stating that ‘I am grateful to all of our lecture’s for their input- and in particular some of the lecturers have gone out of their way to be supportive, available and have presented work of an excellent standard’.

The participants’ daily interactions with the lecture’s taught them that as educational psychologists they would be dealing with children. They also needed to consider the development of the children’s emotional and social skills.

Participant 6 (Metaphor) stated that on their training in inclusive education ‘this links up with our training for inclusive education, whereby every child should be accommodated and assisted to adapt to the environment, to be able to be functional, by making use of educational programs that are relevant and appropriate for a particular child’.

Participant 1 (Portfolio) said ‘Through my entire studies I have never had the supportive classmates and lecture’s like the ones I have now’.

Students in their reflections expressed that it was likely that at times they had been in situations where they got overwhelmed with negative feelings in their everyday student life.

Participant 4 stated ‘I was exposed to many courses and training ….I was enriched daily by rubbing shoulders with the interns, psychometrists and other professionals at the institution and I absorbed much knowledge in my interactions from Brain Gym. She further stated ‘I have learnt to keep on talking and receiving encouragement from my support system.’

Participant 1 (Metaphor) stated that ‘I am extremely pleased because my lecture’s are always hands on to provide extensive support in this respect’. The support that they received from their lecture’s was amazing and that kept them going. The lecture’s taught students that going through negative emotions is a normal process and as Goleman (1995, p.63) puts it, ‘downs as well as ups spice life, but need to be in balance’.
Participant 3 (Metaphor) also added to the above notion that lots of learning did take place in their two years of studying by stating that ‘she had learned a lot from her lecturers and her fellow colleagues.’ Participants also had an experience of meeting other professionals who provided support as well, as indicated by the following participant.

Participant 1 (Portfolio) concurs with the above participant by stating that ‘I vividly remember the outstanding contribution of the former X student who paid us a visit on career issues. It was fulfilling and enriching to witness such success stories from a person who once walked our path’.

Participant 4 (Metaphor) ‘This year I have made a point of visiting therapists and discussing their work and my cases in order to learn and I discovered it is worth the effort to be open and to share’.

Participant 1 (Metaphor) had this to say ‘I vividly remember the outstanding contribution of the former UJ student who paid us a visit on career issues. It was fulfilling and enriching to witness such success stories from a person who once walked our path’. Morris (2002, p. 172) states that whatever we do for a living, our learning can be helped by having a small group of people whom we can turn to when we need help, advice or counsel on which way to proceed on a technical or professional issue.

Most of the students liked to work in an environment that was orderly and organized and where they felt supported, trusted, respected and appreciated. One of the ways where appreciation was shown to students was when they were provided with the kind of help and support they needed.

Participant 3 (Metaphor) wrote ‘I am grateful to all of our lecturers for their input and in particular, some of the lecture’s have gone out of their way to be supportive and available’

Participant 4 concurs with participant 3 (Metaphor) when she stated that ‘I have followed the ethical code of conduct and focused on relationship building both with colleagues, clients, mentors, interns in Med 1, current psychologists and professionals within an increasing network.’
Goleman, (1995) state that many universities hold lectures accountable only for the academic achievement of their students, and place little or no emphasis on the social and emotional growth of their students. The reflections of the masters students in educational psychology bears evidence that the lectures in this department went miles further because they were not only interested in the academics of the students but also in the emotional and social life of their students. They understood that as students, some had faced great challenges from issues that not only hindered their academic achievement but also in extreme cases, challenged their basic survival.

There is a clear indication from the participant’s responses that the relationship between the lecturers and the students had a direct influence upon emotions and learning. An emotionally intelligent lecturer, who is well aware of how students feel, and who genuinely cares that they all develop to their full potential, emotionally and socially, as well intellectually, can have a greater influence on a student’s life than a lecturer whose main concern is to cover the curriculum. Goleman (1995) state that we might not always remember what we learnt in school, but we can’t forget those affectionate teachers who touched our hearts and soul. For me as a participant as well I fully agree when he further states that ‘one looks back with appreciation to brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feeling’ (Jung as cited in Ellison, 2001). It was indicated earlier on that the psychologists are facing a new changing role. These new roles would mean that psychologists should be good communicators who can network with other professionals and key stakeholders. In addition psychologists would need to be involved as collaborators, managers, facilitators, and mediators so that they reach the relevant role players and provide adequate support.

Landsberg (et al, 2005) views support as the way in which people (educators) encourage and assist each other. To support is to help or encourage somebody by showing that you agree with them. It is to give or be ready to give help to somebody if they need it (Hornby, 2000). According to Wilson (et al, 2000), the establishment of new community schools in Scotland has focused attention on the need for members of different professional groups to work together effectively for the benefit of pupils and young people. Lessons can be learned from other countries that collaborate in institutions to provide support to learners and the community at large.
This theme, to me as a researcher, was more on collaboration that took place, whether from the university or other relevant stakeholders. As educational psychologist, they may no longer work alone or exclusively with members of their own profession, but may be in multidisciplinary teams composed of classroom assistants, nursery nurses, learning support auxiliaries, educational psychologists, community educators, health and social workers, and parent volunteers. Therefore support of internal and external nature prepared the participants to collaborate with other stakeholders.

As Wilson (et al., 2000), put it, the new emphasis is on working together to deliver a co-ordinated, some would argue integrated, service to end-users, be they pupils in schools or members of the community. Cook and Friend (1993) describe collaboration as a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties, voluntarily engaged in shared problem solving, shared decision making, and shared resources, as they work towards a common goal.

The socio-cultural theory is based on the assumption that our personalities, beliefs, attitudes and skills are influenced by others. The support that the participant received was because of the interaction that took place between them and other stakeholders. The socio-cultural theory states that it is impossible to fully understand a person without understanding his or her culture (Miller, 1999, Phinney, 1996a). To fully understand and support the participants, who were from diverse backgrounds, there was a need to fully understand the context and culture of each of them. Any social force that influences human lives is important to the socio-cultural perspective. Socio-cultural theory looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development and it stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live.

To conclude: the environment the person lives in embodies factors that influence dimensions such as relationships, interpersonal involvement, cohesion, expressiveness and cultural orientation. The better the connectedness and depth, the higher the self-confidence and social competence. When support is provided there is improved social and psychological adjustment, coping ability and problem solving.
4.4 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Portfolio reflections were part of the Masters program and students were engaged in reflective activities in order to learn any new ideas being presented to them and to acquire the means and motivation for sustained growth and development once the program had ended. Once again it became evident in their reflections when it emerged that, through the use of their portfolio reflections, the most experience that they gained was more related to personal and professional development. At a personal level, participants became got to know themselves better. Barret (2007) states that learning / process portfolios involve the focus on Plato's directive, 'know thyself' which can lead to a life time of investigation. She further states that self knowledge becomes an outcome of learning.

The findings based on reflections of the participants had positive outcomes related to:

- **Professional and personal development:** Participants not only grew and developed personally but professionally as well when they were exposed to various workshops, conferences and training programmes. At a personal level, participants improved their self-awareness, improved self-knowledge, developed strengths and talents and they developed social abilities.

- **Team work:** Participants realised the key to understanding human behaviour was by working within the groups/teams and the active role they took to ensure that the decisions taken were beneficial to members and to their success. It was through understanding and respect that the benefits of being in a group rather than becoming victims were achieved. Feeling connected to others is a basic human need. This human need developed relationships, a sense of belonging and motivation of participants. These aspects were essential for participants’ success and engagement in schools.

- **Challenges:** It is often said that after hardships come success. Participants had gone through trying and hard times just so they achieve what they aimed to gain, becoming educational psychologists. Their challenges varied from finances, time constraints, working, studying, and having families and English as a language barrier. Therefore university support and language enrichment is vital.
• **Internal and external support:** It was through the power of support that participants received from both the university and other relevant stakeholders that saw them emerge through the various trials and tribulations. It appeared that the most influential fundamentals in enabling the development of reflections, as presented in the participants portfolios, are teamwork or peer support, support, development both personally and professionally and being able and supported to overcome challenges.

On the basis of the findings of this study it is recommended that:

• Follow up research can be conducted on the reflections of the participants on their experiences once they had qualified, that is, after completion of their internship.

• Further research can be undertaken as a comparative study to look at reflections of students in the educational Psychology programme across the different universities.

• As there is not enough educational psychologists in the schools, the Department of education can partner with universities to have to train and finance more educational psychologists.

• More male students are recruited or headhunted so that they partake in the programme and ultimately contribute to be the role models of male learners in schools.

• To help the students especially those who were not involved in the honours programme at the university, improve the content lectures that additional tuition should be offered to them to bridge the gap.

• The students need to ensure that when they get into the programme they have enough support that would see them through the course. The support needs to be at all fronts, at the university and at home and at work. As indicated by participants, the course is a worthy but difficult programme, so students need to have support even financially and resource wise.

• The university should look into the workload of the students, article writing or dissertation in line with what is required by the Health Profession Council of South Africa.
• To circumvent the language barrier experienced by some participants, it is recommended that those learners who have a challenge with English as a language of teaching, depending on the severity of the barrier, should be encouraged to attend classes for English communication or alternatively, other assessment forms should be found by the lecture’s to make up for the gap that exists. It could be in writing or any creative form.

4.5 STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH

Strength is regarded as a resource, capacity, skill or advantage. In this context, a strength is a condition internal to our field that is under our control and can be influenced by us. This study has revealed important ideas and opinions on using portfolios as means of reflection; the strengths were that:

• The University had a big role to play in leveling the field between the two parties, (Participants and lecture’s) and promoting collaboration and communication between the two. Co-operation between students (participants) was crucial for proper learning and teaching to take place.
• Strong ‘bridges’ between the university, relevant stakeholders and students must be built.
• At a personal level I gained more knowledge and skills on how to reflect, use portfolios for deep learning and how to engage with research data.
• I learned how to become a critical and lifelong learner.
• I recognised the value of the portfolio as a more authentic method of assessment of students' progress and documentation of prospective administrators' academic development and professional competence.

4.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research is limited because it is only based on female students because this course consisted more of female students than males. There seems to be a shortage of males who are venturing into the field of psychology. In the year in which the participants were enrolled in the program there was only one male enrolled and due to time constrains he could not be reached to be included in the research.
Secondly, documents were used as data, which could be incomplete in the sense that there was no opportunity to ask the participants to elaborate on their responses; this could have provided more and richer data. Neither can the findings be generalised to the experiences of students in other training programmes. It could have had an added advantage if besides reviewing portfolios; individual interviews and/or a questionnaire were completed for more information and clarity. It could therefore be valuable to explore the experiences of students in subsequent training programmes at this university and to follow these students’ professional development over a few years.

Thirdly, the fact that my supervisor is also part of the lectures in the department of educational psychology in the University where research was undertaken, could have limited me in that I could have withheld some information which could have been of value to the research because of her involvement with me. In addition, as I was also a student in the department of educational psychology, I could have been biased in the information that I presented.

Lastly at personal level I struggled a lot not only due to time constraints but also that I was a single, working parent. During this period my daughter also suffered from depression due to losing her father who was very close to her. This brought a lot of stress and frustrations and had to juggle between all the roles and that largely affected my research.

It could have been beneficial to have had my point of view in comparison to what the participants voiced out as I had the opportunity of being a student in this programme. I could have engaged in a researcher’s journal so as to further engage with the participant’s reflections.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This section comprised of a summary of the research process. The discussions on findings, strengths and recommendations of this research study, as it related to the reflections of the Master’s as presented in their portfolios were discussed. The last step of data analysis was informing the reader of the findings and drawing conclusions from
the results, indicating from that are recommendations for further research and the University.

I want to conclude this research by sharing some thoughts from Rønnestad and Skovholt (1992), which state that continuous reflection is a prerequisite for optimal learning and professional development at all levels of experience. It is our understanding that the ability and willingness to continually reflect upon professional experiences in general and difficulties and challenges in particular, are prerequisites for optimal development. As described, we see reflection as a continuous and focused search for a more comprehensive, nuanced and in-depth understanding of oneself and others, and of the processes and phenomena that the practitioner meets in his/her work. We believe that stagnant or deteriorating processes (negative development) may occur if the counsellor / therapist for some reason are not engaging in this reflective process.
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*ETHICS CLEARANCE*

Dear Busisiwe Ngwenya,
Ethical Clearance Number: 2011-029
Re: The reflections of Masters’ students in educational psychology as presented in their portfolios.

*The FAEC has decided to *
Approve the proposal
Provisionally approve the proposal with recommended changes
Recommend revision and resubmission of the proposal

Sincerely,
Professor Alan Amory
*Chair: FACULTY ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMITTEE *
18 July 2011
Mrs E B Ngwenya
120 Antelope Street
Leondale
Germiston
1401

Dear Mrs Ngwenya,

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL – MASTERS DEGREE – EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

I take pleasure in informing that your research proposal entitled “The reflections of Masters’ students in Educational psychology as presented in their portfolios”

Supervisor: Dr E Fritz

Please ensure that the abovementioned title appears on the front page of your research project. Any further changes must be approved by the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee beforehand.

Yours sincerely

Ms H Selolo
University of Johannesburg
Faculty of Education
Kingsway Campus
Room Bring 232
Auckland Park
2006

Copy: Dr E Fritz
To: The participants

I, Busisiwe Eugenia Ngwenya, am studying for Magister Educationis in Educational Psychology with the University of Johannesburg. I am currently doing a study that aims to focus on the reflections of Masters students in educational psychology as presented in their portfolios, as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree.

I would like to invite you to form part of my study by consenting to be in the focus group and to give me your consent to have access to your portfolios. The portfolios would be used to obtain information on your reflections. The information would be coded into themes. It is important to note that even if you agree to be a participant in this study you are at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without negative results or pressure from myself to provide reasons. I will also undertake to take all possible means to ensure that your information contained in the portfolio will be safe and confidential. I will also allocate a pseudonym to all participants to protect their identity. All information gathered will be treated with confidentiality.

In giving me your consent you will be required to sign on the space provided below. For further clarification I can be consulted at 011 694 9514 or 0834181713

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours truly

Ngwenya BE

I………………………………………………………………………………………………………(Name of participant) hereby give my consent to Busisiwe Ngwenya access to my portfolio for the purpose of the study.

………………………………     ………………..
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

……………………………..     ………………..
SIGNATURE OF WITNESS    DATE