

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

\*To my **husband Douglas** who encouraged me to study further and who believed in me all the way even when I lost faith in myself. Thank you for providing for me financially, emotionally and in every other way. Thanks for being the breadwinner, counsellor, doctor, cook, dishwasher, shopper and everything else for the past five years. You are one in a million!

\*To my **father Paul** who has been there for me since I was born. Thanks for proof reading and language editing hundreds of pages of assignments, and especially this dissertation. For helping with shopping, banking, dog sitting, gardening, making your own food and being patient with me for all these years. You have watched me grow into the young lady and Psychologist I aspired to be, and you have played a huge role in helping me become who I am today. I know you are proud of me. I am so glad you are still around to see me graduate.

\*To **Ursula De Beyer** who spend many hours checking, typing and helping with transcripts, and offering moral support. You are a really special friend.

\*To the rest of my **family and friends** who have been badly neglected for the past five years, yet still love and support me. Thanks for all your prayers and calls, as well as the food when I was too sick to cook.

\*To my **Father God** who has restored me to health against all odds and given me a second chance at life. I have learnt to live for today and enjoy every moment. I pray that I bless the people who come into my life as I know I am fulfilling my calling.

\*To my amazing, patient **supervisors Prof. Jace Pillay and Dr. Elzette Fritz**, and all the other lecturers who have had such an impact on my life. Thank you for trusting me to conduct such important, sensitive research in the Educational

Psychology Department, and helping me every step of the way. I hope that this dissertation will make a difference to the lives of the future students and to the department. Thank you for walking the path of growth and professional development with me for the past five years. I am privileged to have been part of such an awesome team.

\*To **Tumi Diale** for helping to pave a path of credibility and trust with the participants I did not know, and for your awesome insight. Thank you for providing me with a different perspective into the lives of the African people in South Africa, and teaching me to respect diversity.

\*To the **participants** who were courageous enough to take part in this research, and who trusted me by opening up their hearts and souls to this “umlungu”. Thank you for allowing me to share your experiences. We have cried and laughed together and each of you has left a lasting impression in my life. I hope that your pain and the recommendations in this research will make a difference to those who come after you. To those who could not participate, thank you for knowing your limitations and respecting yourselves and me enough to say “no”.

## ABSTRACT

The high drop out rate of black students at Universities and other tertiary institutions throughout the world has been of concern to these institutions, and has been researched for many years. This research looked at the high drop out rate of black students from the Educational Psychology Masters course during the period 2002 to 2006 at a Gauteng University in South Africa.

The study investigated the experiences of the participants who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course and attempted to identify the extrinsic and intrinsic barriers to learning that contributed to this.

The researcher made use of an interpretivist, qualitative, case study design to explore the experiences of the black participants. The data collection methods included individual and paired interviews, using open-ended questions, as well as incomplete sentences questionnaires. Themes established were verified by participants at the end of the data collection process.

Data was analysed using the constant comparative method and aspects of grounded theory. Six themes emerged as findings, which were discussed in detail. These included three external barriers to learning, namely, “lack of time”; “lack of resources” and “structure of the course and University factors”. Two themes emerged which were discussed as internal barriers to learning, namely “cultural factors” and “lack of skills”. The sixth and final theme fitted under the heading external and internal barriers to learning and discussed “overt and covert racism” experienced by the participants.

Recommendations were made to minimise the barriers to learning experienced by the participants, and to better accommodate their needs within the course and University structure.

The limitations and strengths of the research were explained and the research brought to a conclusion with recommendations for future research within this realm made.



# CHAPTER ONE

## RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The researcher has been part of the Masters in Educational Psychology course at a University in Gauteng for the past two years, and is currently completing her internship at the same institution. This research emerged when the third of four black students in the course decided she could not continue in August 2005, the final of two years of study. Subsequent to the researcher writing this proposal and beginning this study, the last of four black students from her group of ten, dropped out after not completing his supplementary examinations in January 2006. The researcher thus became concerned about the high drop out rate of black students in her group (4 out of 4).

Table 1.1. gives a summary of student enrollment and drop-out figures for the Masters in Educational Psychology course at the University where the research was conducted, from 2000 to 2006 (as supplied by the University Statistics Department in August 2006). Further discussion of these figures follows in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Table 1.1. Student enrolment and drop-out figures for the Masters in Educational Psychology course at the University of Johannesburg from 2002 to 2006**

Second year of study	No of students who enrolled in first year of study					No of students who dropped out during two years				
	W	B	I	C	T	W	B	I	C	T
2002	9	3	1	0	13	0	1	0	0	1
2003	8	6	0	0	14	7	1	0	0	8
2004	5	4	1	0	10	1	4	0	0	5
2005	10	4	0	1*	15	0	0	0	0	0
2006	8	2	0	0	10	1	0	0	0	1

**Key:** W = White; B = Black; I = Indian  
 C = Coloured or C\* = Chinese  
 T = Total

These low enrolment figures for black students, as well as the high drop out rate of black students from the course, has affected both the Masters groups concerned as well as the University, because it has left a “gap” as far as diversity, culture and experience is concerned. Right back to the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa, MacKenzie (1994, p.69) commented that the poor performance of black students in South Africa was alarming when it was considered in relation to the achievement of white South African students. This is not surprising considering the poor standard of education received by black students during the apartheid era. In a country like South Africa, “equity” and “righting the inequalities of the past”, has become important at all levels of society including Universities, including the field of Educational Psychology. The high drop out rate of black students in the

field of Educational Psychology also has implications for the University, and the country as a whole, as there is a growing demand to produce adequately skilled/trained professionals, both black and white to meet the needs of a growing, diverse school-going population, who are facing an increasing number of traumas and difficulties including poverty, addictions, high death rates often as a result of violence, the HIV pandemic in South Africa and the recent spate of violence in Gauteng schools.

In this regard, Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002, p.92) found that there was a prevalence of 12 percent of children worldwide suffering from behavioural, emotional and developmental “disorders”, and that in the year 2000 there were an estimated 262 million children under the age of 18 years suffering from “mental disorders”. Moreover, they were concerned about the fact that early manifestations of behavioural, emotional and academic problems, (such as we experience in South Africa), can progress into major problems in adolescence, including substance abuse, pregnancy, AIDS, depression, suicide and school drop-out. These statistics reinforce the urgent need for well trained Educational Psychologists, both black and white, who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children in their communities.

Furthermore, Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p.92-97) suggest that the values and concepts of critical psychology, can be used to make changes at schools, (and by implication Universities), first by addressing the imbalances of power, and secondly by changing the way professional Educational Psychologists interact with the schools and other stakeholders. Lazarus (1987, in MacKenzie, 1994, p.70) suggests that these power imbalances are as a result of most of South Africa’s previously white Universities having an increasingly heterogeneous body of students and a relatively homogenous body of staff. Although change is evident, the situation is still much the same in 2006, eleven years after democracy. Thus, it is necessary for decolonization of Universities as well as the wider school community to take place, to begin to address some of these inequalities and power

imbalances. Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p.92-97) further recommend that professionals need to listen to disadvantaged people, appreciate their strengths, and benefit from experiential knowledge, and that the pooling of knowledge and experience of the different stakeholders is an important place to start designing any interventions.

Thus reframing the problem in educational interventions, as suggested by Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002, p.97), and Landsberg (2005, p.20-21) means a shift from reactive, individualistic practices, of the “medical or deficit” model, which focuses on diagnosis and labeling of students and “treating” their deficits, (as has been the case in the past in South Africa), towards collaboration, as well as a preventative and health promoting model which supports school change, community development, and social change. This fits in well with the inclusion policies and addressing barriers to learning and development, which formed part of the theoretical base of this research and is discussed later in this chapter.

Without the input of black students in the course, much of the peer learning regarding differences in culture, language, traditions and so on are lost, resulting in a loss of expertise and experience, which could be passed on to other Educational Psychologists, and thus the need for this research.

In agreement with Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p.97), as discussed above, Pillay (2003, p.262) has discovered through research in the field, that in addition to individual interventions, community psychology can be relevant to the South African context, especially if we wish to redress the psychological ravages of apartheid. Community psychology can also help to bridge the racial, gender and ethnic boundaries that exist in our society in South Africa. He further suggests that psychologists need to engage in social issues if they want to be more effective.

Furthermore, Pillay (2003, p.267) provided guidelines for future training in community psychology. Some of his suggestions included the need for trainees



gaining direct experience in working with communities through field-work, projects and case studies, as well as research, which is more action-orientated; being exposed to diverse communities; receiving cross-cultural training; and training that accommodates black students, so that the resultant diversity of students can bring richness of experience to the training programme. Training of this kind would ensure that all Educational Psychologists completing the course should be competent to meet the needs of children from any race, culture or creed.

These are wonderful ideals, but when a significant number of the black students drop out for various reasons, the fear exists that this diversity, richness and cross-cultural interchange is lost, and South Africa is the poorer for it.

Donald (1991, p.38), in his article entitled "Training needs in Educational Psychology for South African social and educational conditions", suggests that one of the major issues in defining the training needs in Educational Psychology for South African society requires a basic shift in perspective from that which has generally prevailed in training institutions to date. This shift involved a fundamental acceptance of the imbalances of services and resources between the privileged and non-privileged sectors of society. On the one hand, the privileged (mainly white) sector had psychological services in education that are comparable to most First World societies. On the other hand, there were vast educational, psychological and social needs in the schools and homes of the non-privileged majority (mainly black people), that were minimally provided for in terms of both services and resources.

One wonders if there has been enough change in the last fifteen years considering that the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) requires Universities to address the equity needs for more black Educational Psychologists in South Africa, as well as to train psychologists who are able to work in the unique South African context (HPCSA, 2006).

Furthermore, in a survey conducted as far back as 1989, by Cooper (1989), quoted in Donald (1991, p.38), there was a ratio of one Educational Psychologist to 30 000 black children at that time. In this same survey it was found that there was one Educational Psychologist serving 12 000 white children. If the ratios of Educational Psychologists to students quoted above are considered in relation to the fact that approximately 77% of the school-going population at that time was black, it is clear that the need for more Educational Psychologists to serve black children in particular is not only acute but also extensive (Donald, 1991, p.38). He further suggests that in order to meet the ratio that was applied at the time in “white education”, that an increase of nearly 2000 Educational Psychologists (or a 1000% increase) would be required to meet the needs of black children alone.

If we extrapolate these numbers to 2006, there is an even greater shortage, considering the fact that the school going population has increased and the number of Educational Psychologists of all races qualifying and entering the field has not increased by anywhere near 1000%.

To support this argument, the present statistics (HPCSA, IT Department, November 2006), for the years 2002 to 2006, which are relevant for this study, reveal that 134 Educational Psychologists registered with the Board during this time period. Out of this number, only 24 were black. (see table 1.2.). This means that only 18% of the Educational Psychologists who registered with the HPCSA between 2002 and 2006 were black. These figures alone give a further valid reason for conducting this study, in order to establish the reasons for so few black Educational Psychologists passing and registering to practice.

Statistics received from the HPCSA IT Department also showed that in November 2006, there were a total of 1195 Educational Psychologists registered with the HPCSA. Out of these 62 are black, 31 are coloured, 60 are Indian, 597 are white and 445 are of unknown race.

**Table 1.2. Registration figures for Educational Psychologists during the time period 2002).**

<b>No of Educational Psychologists who registered with HPCSA to practice</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>RACE</b>					
Black	4	3	8	4	5
White	21	18	6	21	6
Coloured	2	2	2	2	2
Indian/Asian	4	6	7	2	2
Other/unknown	3	2	2	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>15</b>

Furthermore, problems with the lack of diversity in South Africa were investigated by Madlala (1990, p.5), who conducted research at the University of Natal for his M.Ed in Educational Psychology and found that “Educational Psychologists who are able to co-operate with traditional healers, in cases where the client’s belief systems suggest it is appropriate, are likely to enhance the chances of therapeutic success”. Thus it follows that diversity in the group on the Masters level can serve to expose white Educational Psychologists to the world of experience of the black client, and this will encourage better understanding of diverse cultural, religious and language groups. Other research has shown that children respond better to therapy when they are able to verbalize emotions and problems in their vernacular or mother tongue (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker, & Engelbrecht, 1999, p.53).

Thus it seems logical that exposure to and/or learning of the basics of one of the common vernacular languages and/or learning about the intricacies and different ways of seeing psychological health through the eyes of different cultural groups in

South Africa, could be done through interaction with black and other non-white colleagues. This would serve to expand the capacity of the Educational Psychologist to meet the needs of the majority in this country.

I found a few international studies, especially American studies, (Bergen, 2003; Van Laar, 2000; Clemetson 1999 and Adan & Felner, 1995), regarding reasons for drop out rates of black students at post graduate level, which may have some relevance or bearing on my study. There only seem to have been two research studies conducted in South Africa, at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) regarding drop out rates of black students at University level, although these studies look at undergraduate drop out rates. These studies will be discussed in more detail in Chapter three.

Thus there appears to be a definite “gap” in the reasons for post graduate drop out rates of black students, in this case referring specifically to the Educational Psychology Master’s programme at a Gauteng University. Thus I am hoping that my research will add value to the body of knowledge, especially in the South African context.

## **1.2. CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH**

According to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), there were fifteen Educational Psychologists who wrote and passed the board examination in 2006, and thus registered to practice. Of these, only five were black (see Table 1.2.). Unlike countries overseas, such as the USA and Canada, where black people tend to be in the minority, in South Africa, black people are in the majority in an approximate ratio of one white to eleven blacks. In South Africa, up until the 1994 first democratic elections, the system of apartheid, prevented black students from attending formally “white” Universities. The University where this study was conducted, was one such University, and has recently undergone an amalgamation with other tertiary institutions, meaning that there have been rapid

changes over the past two to three years. However, change has been slow in terms of admitting people of “colour” and meeting quotas recommended by government, in order to meet the current needs for black Educational Psychologists and many other black professions in this country.

Thus the Educational Psychology programme itself has undergone changes from 2002 to present, in order to accommodate the required changes discussed above. This research attempts to look in detail at the difficulties black students have experienced in the programme during this time period that may have caused them to drop out or to nearly have dropped out. The findings are discussed in Chapter 4, but the reader will notice from the results, that there have been many positive changes in the course, especially over the past two years, to better include black students. In fact from a 100% drop out of four black students in the 2004-2005 group there has been a 0% drop out of the six black students from the 2005-2006 group (refer to table 1.2.).

Although students are trained to work within a multi-cultural context, and courses include methods of working with children and families where the use of a translator may be necessary, we are losing the diversity and the richness brought to Master’s courses made up of multi-cultural and multi-racial groups of students who share with one another continually on varying levels.

There appear to be many reasons for black students not completing their studies at Master’s level, and the researcher has attempted to discover what these are, so that the University can develop a strategy to assist not only black students, but all students, to succeed, and thus begin to meet the needs of a developing South Africa in terms of qualified Educational Psychologists. Linked to this is the aim of the research, which is explained overleaf.

### **1.3. AIM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTION**

The aim of this research is to explore and describe the experiences of black Educational Psychology Masters students at a Gauteng University, over the period 2002-2006, and in the process, identify some of the reasons for the high drop out rate. In addition to this the research will attempt to determine what can be done to support current and future students in the course to prevent such high drop out rates, especially amongst black students.

Keeping this in mind, the primary research question is:

**“What are the experiences of black students who have dropped out of the Educational Psychology Masters course at a Gauteng University during the period 2002-2006?”**

My secondary research question is:



**“What are the reasons for black students dropping out of the Educational Psychology Masters course at a Gauteng University during the period 2002-2006?”**

In order to answer these questions, the researcher made use of a qualitative, case study design, based on interpretivist principles. More details regarding this design follow in this chapter as well as in chapter 3, but first conceptual clarification follows.

### **1.4. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

Throughout this research, certain terms have been used, which are explained as fully as possible to the reader in context. However, there are a few terms that have been used to make the explanations clearer and to prevent the reader and the

researcher from becoming caught up in lengthy terminology. Thus the following explanations should prevent any confusion whilst reading this research:

**“The programme”** refers to the Educational Psychology Masters Course at the University where this research was conducted.

**“The participants”** are the eleven black students I interviewed for this study, who either dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course during the period 2002 to 2006.

The term **“dropped out”** implies the black students/participants who **“did not complete”** the course.

In order to achieve the aims in this research, as elaborated in 1.3. above, there must be a theoretical framework from which to work, which underpins the research. This leads to the discussion of the theoretical framework that contributes to the depth of understanding of the experiences of the black students who have dropped out, and on which this study is based.

## **1.5. THEORETICAL FRAME-WORK**

This research was based on a post-modern, qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, using the epistemology of social constructivism as postulated by Vygotsky (Gergen, 1994, in Phillips, 1997, p.187; and Creswell, 2003, p.132). Aspects of critical theory as suggested by Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002) are used throughout to support the argument. The theoretical framework, which underpins the research, consists of eco-systemic theory, as well as aspects of inclusion and learning support. This is discussed next.

### **1.5.1. The Post-modern, qualitative, constructivist Paradigm**

Rubin and Babbie (1997, p.37), and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, p.21) define a paradigm as a fundamental model or scheme that organises our view of something. It can be viewed as a set of basic beliefs that deal with first principles. The paradigm with which one works determines how one's world view will operate and how one's knowledge of the world and life will be structured. The paradigm defines and guides the content and end result of research. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, p.21) further explain that any given paradigm represents the most informed and sophisticated view that its proponents are able to devise, and as such are human constructions, and hence subject to human error.

According to Rosenau (1992, in Ritzer, 1997, p.9), post-modern theorists "offer indeterminacy rather than determinism, diversity rather than unity, difference rather than synthesis, complexity rather than simplification". It is from this post-modernist paradigm that many Educational Psychologists work today, including the researcher. This paradigm is thus congruent with the researcher's own thinking, and especially the contextual way she works as an Educational Psychologists and as a researcher.

Linked to this, the intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, and is largely an investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon where the researcher "enters" the participant's world, and through ongoing interaction (such as interviewing), seeks their perspectives and meanings (Creswell, 2002, p.198).

In addition to a post-modern, qualitative paradigm, the researcher chose to make use of an interpretivist approach, in contrast to using a positivist model. The interpretivist approach places emphasis on how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives (Rubin & Rubin, 1995,



p.32). Bryman (2001, p.13) adds that interpretivism is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people, and thus requires the social researcher to grasp the subjective meaning of social action. This is discussed further in chapter 2.

Furthermore, an interpretivist, constructivist researcher attempts to gain an empathic understanding of how people feel inside, seeking to interpret individual's everyday experiences, deeper meanings and feelings about a subject. This study focuses on the experiences of black students that dropped out or nearly dropped out of the Educational Psychology Master's course, thus it is important to acknowledge that each participant experienced the course in a different way and each person's reality was slightly different.

In addition to this, in South Africa, we celebrate diversity and difference with one of the most progressive constitutions and human rights policies in the world. The researcher has been trained to respect diversity, differences and complexity and to celebrate them. It is from this position, that this research is conducted.

Thus, this research was conducted and written up, from a post-modern, qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, using the epistemology, or philosophy of social constructivism, which will be explained in greater detail below.

### **1.5.2. Epistemology of Social Constructivism**

The term *epistemology*, comes from the Greek word *episteme* which means knowledge. Thus epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge (Henning, Van Rensberg, & Smit, 2004, p.15). The underlying philosophy of knowledge, or overarching philosophy, which underpins this research, is that of social constructivism.

Different interpretations of constructivism have arisen. There are those who believed that the individual alone constructs meaning. This is often referred to as individual or psychological constructivism in reference to Piaget. Others such as Vygotsky, argued that individuals in a social situation construct meaning. This is referred to as social constructivism, which stems from Marxist theory and was developed by Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, who worked with Piaget and challenged many of his views. It offers a view that helps us to understand the social construction of knowledge, which was important in this research as it looked at the experiences of the students that dropped out of the course, and thus their understanding or construction of the situation, as it occurred in social context.

Furthermore, constructivist theory suggests that all humans are continually engaged in the construction and reconstruction of meaning and this activity involves formal, experiential, intuitive and creative knowledge (Engelbrecht & Green 2001, p.7).

Vygotsky also believed that meanings themselves could not be separated from their social context, as they are social constructions, which are built up and passed on in the interactions between people. Some meanings are common across different social contexts, while others are more specific to a particular context. Meaning is dynamically developing and changing all the time as people learn, grow and interact with others. Thus the process of cognitive development is seen as taking place through the process of social interaction (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p.70). This is the standpoint from which this research was conducted.

In addition, by interviewing and interacting with the participants, the researcher attempted to understand the meaning and social constructs they had made and developed around dropping out of the course. Many of these social constructions were linked to the systems within which the participants lived, worked and interacted.

### **1.5.3. Eco-systemic Theory**

The Eco-systemic perspectives of learning developed by Bronfenbrenner and other researchers have been refined and further developed as explained in Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p.55-57), to show how developmental, ecological and systems theory combine to influence learning.

The Eco-systemic perspective connects individual psychological development and learning to social context and the systems within it. It helps us to understand the learner and his or her learning in a more holistic and contextual manner. It also helps us understand why the general challenges we face in South Africa concerning development and learning cannot be separated from the more specific challenges of addressing social issues. These include both internal barriers to learning such as hearing or sight difficulties, personal factors etc., as well as external barriers to learning such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, infrastructures for learning especially in rural areas, as well as addressing the imbalances in education and other backlogs from the past. (Donald et. al., 2002, p.57). All of these factors affects each individual in different ways and must be considered when developing intervention programmes both now and in the future.

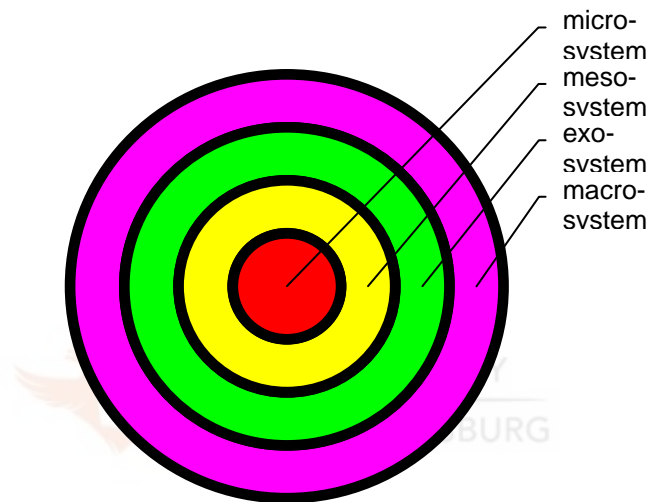
Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979), and the more recently revised bio-ecological model of development (1992), as discussed in Landsberg, (2005, p.9-12), have much relevance to emphasising the interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the social context. It is also important to remember that understanding the origins of and finding solutions to barriers to learning cannot be separated from the broader social context and the systems within it, including the individual.

The four interacting dimensions (systems) of Bronfenbrenner's model that need to be considered when understanding learner development or change in social context are discussed below. The model explains the direct and indirect influences

on a learner's life by referring to the many levels of the environment or contexts that influence a person's life (Landsberg, 2005, p.10). These factors may have a varying degree of influence on the reasons for black students dropping out of the course, thus their importance to this study.

Figure 1.1. adapted from (Donald et. al., 2002, p.57), can be used in conjunction with the explanation below:

**Figure 1.1. Bronfenbrenner's systems model**



Bronfenbrenner's systems model shown in Figure 1.1. shows how each individual participant that was interviewed was influenced by all levels of society, starting with themselves or the **micro-system**, which refers to the immediate environment and includes the interpersonal relationships between the individual participant and his or her family, peers, lecturers and university; the roles (son, brother, mother, learner, colleague) and activities that the person is involved in and the influences this part of the system has on his or her life.

The next level known as the **meso-system**, includes family, teachers, friends, peers, school groups and the local community, who all influenced each participant and affected their experiences in life and their studies. The **mesosystem** refers to the relationships that develop and exist between the microsystems. Each

microsystem has an effect and an interaction with the others which influences development and either aggravates or helps minimise barriers to learning. Developing partnerships and collaboration between microsystems (such as students, lecturers, families etc.) is an important part of the learning support process.

At the third level, the influences of the wider community or **exo-system** come into play. The exo-system refers to the environments that the student/participant does not directly interact with, but that influence him or her indirectly. These include the local government policies on education such as the curriculum, the education system, school/university policies, the health care system, welfare services, and so on. One system can have a “ripple effect” on the others.

Next is the **macro-system** which refers to greater society, its values, attitudes and norms, includes world-wide trends on education such as inclusion and also refers to national and international policies that eventually filter down and affect all levels of the system.

These influences, combined with **time** or the **chrono-system**. The chrono-system thus refers to the developmental time frames across which all four of these systems function. Time goes on, and as the student develops, so does the family. Everyone changes and develops in time. All these changes and developments although simultaneous, do not progress at the same rate as one another. Sometimes a student may develop at a faster rate than his or her partner who is not studying, and this can lead to conflict within the relationship. Thus as the individual experiences life and develops and learns, both internal and external factors affect each individual in a different way depending on where they live, where they study, with whom they interact and how they respond to these interactions.

Eco-systemic theory was relevant to this study because the participants all interact at different levels with themselves as individuals, their families, and their colleagues, and are also influenced by wider government legislation which covers the education/university systems and other laws in the country.

This study looked at how the various ecosystems, barriers and contexts in which each participant interacted, influenced them to eventually drop out of the course. In addition to looking at the influence of eco-systemic factors and contexts as possible causes for the high drop out rate of students, the researcher also investigated the various internal and external barriers to learning which may have had an impact on the students who dropped out. This is discussed further in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 4 of this research.

In order to address barriers to learning and make education accessible to all learners, the Policy of Inclusion discussed below will be implemented in South Africa over the next two decades (Dept of Education, 2001, p.45).

#### **1.5.4. The Policy of Inclusion in South Africa:**

The Policies of Inclusion and “Education for All”, regardless of colour, gender, age, race, religion or disability have been put firmly in place in South Africa and by law will be rolled out over the next twenty years (Dept of Education, 2001, p.45). Even the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996:16) states that every person has the right to basic education and to equal access to educational institutions.

The South African National Education Department’s Commission on Special Educational Needs and Training and The National Committee on Education Support Services (1997), whilst looking into developing the policy of inclusion, recognised that a diverse range of needs existed in South Africa, and that the education system needed to be structured in such a way as to accommodate a diversity of learner and system needs. These reports contributed to the

understanding of the nature and extent of barriers to learning within South Africa and the use of acceptable and respectful terminology (Landsberg, 2005, p. 17). These reports further proposed the idea of identifying “barriers to learning and development” in order to identify where the transformation of the system needed to occur.

The Department of Education’s Commission (1997), established to explore special needs in education and training in South Africa, also conceptualised “barriers to learning and development” as those factors which lead to the inability of the system to accommodate diversity, leading to learning breakdown or preventing learners from accessing educational provision. The idea is to minimise, remove and/or prevent barriers to learning and development, thereby assisting the education system to become more responsive to the diverse needs of the learner population. From a systemic approach, barriers may be located within the learner, within the education system, and/or within the broader social, economic and political context. In this study, the researcher set out to explore the experiences of black students who dropped out of the course, and find out what these barriers to learning for black students in the course were. Following this, recommendations were made to the Educational Psychology Department and the University to assist them in addressing these needs and hopefully lower drop out rates from the course (see Chapter 5).

Thus in terms of inclusive policies, students may need learning support, which is not only academic in nature, but should address any barriers to learning they may have. The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) makes provision for learning support by means of a systems approach, and collaboration between these systems, as suggested in this discussion. Barriers to learning and learning support are discussed in more detail 1.5.5.

### **1.5.5. Barriers to Learning and the Policy of Learning Support in South Africa**

As far back as 2000, in the Draft White Paper published by the Department of Education, Inclusive Education and its focus on addressing barriers to learning and participation within schools and communities, was placed at the core of educational transformation in South Africa (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001, p.20). This suggests that addressing barriers to learning is the essence of developing an inclusive education system.

The Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) (Department of National Education, 1997) and Education White Paper 6 (Department of National Education, 2001), all stress a need for a paradigm shift from a focus on “learners with special needs” to identifying and addressing barriers to learning and participation.

South Africa is unique in that we have such a diverse people with different languages, religions, cultures and so on. The Education Department’s Commission (1997), discussed previously, looked into developing the policy of inclusion, recognised that a diverse range of needs existed in South Africa, and that the education system needed to be structured in such a way as to accommodate a diversity of learner and system needs. They proposed the idea of identifying “barriers to learning and development” in order to identify where the transformation of the system needed to occur.

In addition, the Department of Education’s Commission (1997), conceptualised “barriers to learning and development” as those factors which lead to the inability of the system to accommodate diversity leading to learning breakdown or preventing learners from accessing educational provision.



Barriers to learning identified by the Commission (1997) and listed by Engelbrecht et al.,(1999, p.53) include both internal (intrinsic) barriers such as physical/health, neurological, and sensory impairments, moderate to mild learning difficulties, language and communication difficulties; or blocks where the medium of instruction is not in mother tongue; as well as external (intrinsic) barriers, which include socio-economic barriers, discriminatory negative attitudes, based on gender, class. race, or culture, an inflexible curriculum, lack of materials, lack of assistive devices, inaccessible and unsafe built environments, inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services as well as lack of protective legislation and policy to support the development of an inclusive education and training system. Thus this study set out to explore which barriers to learning affected the black students in the course, and the recommendations focussed on trying to address these barriers in order to lower the drop out rate in the future.

If the inclusion of learners with barriers to learning at both school and tertiary level is going to be successful in South Africa, these barriers will need to be addressed urgently. Obviously this will take time and a collaborative effort in all communities. It is further aggravated by huge backlogs in the education system, resources and money to ensure a “quick fix”.

This research will attempt to identify any barriers to learning that may have contributed to the high drop out rate of black students from the Master’s in Educational Psychology course, and then finally make suggestions as to how these barriers can be better addressed in the future.

#### **1.5.6. Qualitative Case Study Design**

By conducting a qualitative case study design, using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions with the participants, the researcher hoped to get a glimpse of how they personally perceive the world, how they have constructed

meaning from their experience of dropping out of the course from their own context or viewpoint, as well as the influences the world and people around them had on their decision.

The idea was to find out their “lived experiences”, and how they experienced dropping out of the course from their own context and viewpoint as well as the influences the world and people around them had on their decision. In addition to this the researcher hoped to discover the meaning the participants attached to dropping out of the course, in order to better understand their experiences from their points of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.20).

## **1.6. RESEARCHER ASSUMPTIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

Due to the interpretivist nature of qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analysing data, thus bearing the responsibility of producing meaningful and accurate information. Taking this into consideration, Merriam (2002, p.13-14) as well as Creswell (2003, p.184) warn that the researcher should maintain high ethical standards, as well as be sensitive to personal biases and how they influence the investigation. With this in mind, the researcher attempted throughout to identify the possible areas of bias, where personal values and interests may have had an influence on the research process and findings.

In the same vein, according to Borg and Gall (1989, p.176), the goal of research must be the discovery of scientific proof. They warn against researchers who are more interested in obtaining evidence to support a particular viewpoint than in discovering the truth. If this is the case, the likelihood of bias is greatly increased. Creswell (2002, p.70-71) adds that when deciding whether a problem should be researched means determining that the study will contribute to educational

knowledge and practice as well, and should not only be based on the researcher's personal agenda.

In order to guard against such bias, especially since many of the participants were known to the researcher, proper scientific research methods and processes were used as described in the methodology section. Thus the themes found were not those of the researcher, but those of the people interviewed. The themes were determined, and then checked by three other people, to ensure trustworthiness. These people were the two supervisors of the research, and one who was a past student and current lecturer.

Furthermore, Borg and Gall (1989, p.178) as well as Creswell (2002, p.309), also refer to non-deliberate bias. They warn that researchers who have an emotional stake in the outcome of the research, such as the researcher this study, are especially susceptible to non-deliberate bias and biased assumptions. Being aware of a certain amount of emotional involvement, especially since the researcher was interviewing some of her fellow students who dropped out, ensured that she did her best to maintain objectivity. The research was also checked by the supervisors for omissions or any unconscious or non-deliberate biases.

In addition to this, the researcher also needed to be aware of her own values, which included biases regarding culture, language, race and so on. Rubin and Babbie (1997, p.79) report that many scholars do not believe research can be entirely value free. Thus there was awareness that the values of the researcher could influence any phase of the research process. Thus trustworthiness needed to be checked regularly, as described further in this chapter. Creswell (2002, p.309) also recommends that the quality of the study be evaluated regularly by a supervisor or neutral, outside valuator. This was done.

When conducting individual interviews, the researcher needed to be careful not to ask leading questions, bearing in mind that these could be regarded as biased.

Denscombe (2000, p.112) as well as Creswell (2002, p.207-208) gave guidelines for using semi-structured interviews, as was used in the study. They recommend that the interviewer has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered, ensuring as little bias as possible. However, the interviewer should also be prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics (questions) are answered, and she should allow the interviewee to develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The questions should be open ended and there should be more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest. In this regard it is suggested by Creswell (2002, p. 208) that the researcher makes use of probes, which he describes as sub-questions used by the researcher to elicit more information or to clarify points made by the participants. Thus a basic semi-structured interview format was developed by the researcher to allow for this. (see appendix "D").

In agreement with the above, Rubin and Babbie (1997, p.162-163) as well as Creswell (2002, p.208) warn that questions should be asked in a way that does not predispose individuals to answer in a way the researcher would want them to, so that the answers support the research hypotheses. Individuals may also be biased to answer questions in ways that distort their true views or behaviours. In other words they tend to answer questions through a "filter" that makes them look good, especially if interviewed face to face. Thus the researcher should be aware of what is called social desirability bias.

In the context of the research the researcher was conscious that she is a white woman, conducting research with black participants who have dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course. Rubin and Babbie (1997, p.76) as well as Paton (2002, p. 391-394) warn that interviewers who are culturally insensitive can offend respondents, and their research findings may yield implications for action that ignore the needs and realities of respondents, may incorrectly stereotype them, as well as inappropriately generalise in an unhelpful manner. Merriam (2002, p.49) agrees that sensitivity, or being highly intuitive, as well as objectivity are important

traits for a qualitative researcher to have, especially to the context; the variables within it; the people; both the verbal and non-verbal cues; as well as the information being gathered.

Thus the researcher attempted to be as culturally sensitive and aware as possible.

In order to avoid the pitfalls mentioned previously, Rubin and Babbie (1997, p.77) suggest that the researcher immerses herself directly in the culture of the group included in the study; engages people who are scholars or community representatives from the same cultural group in the formulation of the problem and at all stages of the research to ensure that the research is responsive to the needs of the group; as well as involve representatives of the group who will be studied in the development of the research design and measurement instrument. Paton (2002, p.364-365) adds that establishing a deep rapport whilst still remaining neutral is essential to the research process. Rapport could only be built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding with the participants, without judgement. Added to this neutrality meant that the participants could tell the researcher anything without engendering either favour, disfavour or shock at the contents of their responses. This was not always easy, however, the researcher attempted to adhere to the above suggestions as far as is possible, and asked black colleagues, students and lecturers for their opinions and input throughout the process.

According to Merriam (1998, p.23-24), another trait that is important for the researcher to possess, is empathy. She believes that empathy is the foundation of rapport. The researcher was careful that her personal involvement with some of the participants did not cloud her vision and allow true empathy to become sympathy. In addition, the researcher also needed to be a good communicator, as well as a good listener who really “heard” what was being said, both verbally and non-verbally. Paton (2002, p.301) warns that the researcher must ultimately deal with issues of authenticity, reactivity, and how the research process may have been

affected by the researcher's background and predispositions. Thus, the importance of critical reflexivity by the researcher throughout the process.

A tape recorder was used to assist the researcher to remember what was said during interviews, although she was aware that it could also be a distraction when the tape had to be turned over, and may have made the interviewees self-conscious at first. It was found that in some cases, the interviewees often only really began discussing the "real" issues at the end after the tape recorder had been switched off. However, the taped and transcribed interview ensured better reliability, as the researcher did not have to rely on memory, and thus the risk of partial recall, bias and error was reduced (Denscombe, 2000, p.120). A couple of the initial interviews were video taped, so that the researcher could pick up non-verbal cues that may have been missed during the actual interview. However, it was found that most participants were less anxious and more open to talk with the tape recorder only when given the choice. They appeared to feel "less threatened and more anonymous".

In addition to this, the researcher was aware that her interviewing skills and the way she conducted herself influenced the interview situation. She tended to want to ask too many questions and use her therapeutic skills, which could have hindered and/or biased the data. To avoid this, she attempted to keep quiet more often, tried not to nod her head or respond too much during the interviewing process, and attempted to be more of an impartial gatherer of information, as was required of a good researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.13).

Finally, from the research module, the researcher realised that it cannot be assumed that the work is almost done once the interviews are completed, as transcription of tapes was generally far more time consuming than the actual collection of data (Denscombe, 2000, p.128). It was often difficult to hear what was said on the tapes as the voices were not always clear, and so the researcher also made notes during the interview.

## **1.7. THE SITE, THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The site of the research was a Gauteng University, with the research carried out under the guidance of the Educational Psychology Department at the University.

The participants were the eleven black students interviewed, who either dropped out, or nearly dropped out of the course during the years 2002-2006.

Throughout the research process, (which took place over an eleven month period, during 2006), the researcher attempted to ensure that the findings were comprehensive, holistic, expansive, and richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998, p.9). In addition to this, measures were put into place to ensure that the research and findings were trustworthy and ethically sound. This is discussed in detail further in this chapter.

The next step is to outline the research design and methodology used in this research.

## **1.8. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.8.1. Research Design**

A constructivist paradigm as proposed by Creswell (2003, p.6-9) was used, as it allowed the researcher to focus on the understanding and meanings created by the black students interviewed in their particular context. Furthermore, constructivist principles also ensured that the researcher was able to generate theory from the research findings, using qualitative research principles, and a case study design (see 1.5.2. and 1.5.6.).

As described by Merriam (1998, p.18-19), case study designs are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system. The reason for choosing this design was that the research involved a case study of the Educational Psychology Master's group at a Gauteng University during the period 2002-2005. This design allowed the researcher to look at the experiences of the black students who dropped out of the course from all angles. Further details of the design appear in Chapter 2, section 2.3.

Next, a summary of the data collection methods used in this research follows.

### **1.8.2. Data Collection Methods**

In this study, use was made of a number of qualitative data collection methods. Firstly, individual or in two cases, paired interviews (where two participants felt more comfortable being interviewed together), using semi-structured, open ended questions, in the medium of English were conducted. These interviews were recorded on tape and/or video-tape and transcribed later.

Secondly, use was made of incomplete sentences questionnaires, and once the main themes that emerged from the data were identified, verification questionnaires were sent out to participants to ensure trustworthiness and to help triangulate the research findings. In addition to this the researcher kept a research journal of her experiences, hypotheses and thoughts along the way.

Data collection methods are described more fully in Chapter 2, section 2.7.

Next follows a summary of how the data was analyzed, after using the above methods to collect it.



### **1.8.3. Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted in order to determine whether there were any patterns or trends that could be identified or isolated, in order to establish themes in the data (Mouton, 2001, p.108). Both Mouton (2001, p.108) and Merriam (1998, p.191) emphasise the importance of relating one's hypotheses, results, findings and the interpretation of these, to existing theoretical frameworks or models, and showing whether these are supported or falsified by the new interpretation.

In this research, use was made of the constant comparative method as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1997, p.39-40, in Merriam, 1998, p.191), with aspects of grounded theory as described by Glaser and Strauss, in Rubin and Rubin, (1995, p.4-5). The constant comparative method was useful in this case, as the researcher began with a particular incident from an interview, or artefact and compared it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons led to tentative categories which were then compared to each other and to other instances.

Grounded theory was used, as it is compatible with the constructivist principles underlying this research, where the researcher put together the information found from the qualitative interviews, to form explanations and generated theories that were grounded in the details, evidence, and examples of the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.4; and Paton, 2002, p.128-129). This was the basis of the process followed to analyse the data generated from the research.

During the process, the data gradually evolved into a core of emerging theory, which guided the further collection of data (Merriam, 1998, p.59 and 91). Thus the process became iterative, and the theory was therefore ever-evolving. This means that each time the researcher repeated the basic process of gathering information, analyzing it, and testing it, she came closer to establishing clear and convincing

themes or findings. The iterative or to-and-fro, comparative testing of concepts, themes and theories improved the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. This process allowed for the redesigning of questions and the shifting of settings and/or interviewees until the researcher could discover what was happening, especially if findings seemed inconsistent or stories did not ring true. Thus the findings, which were based on the evidence collected, should prove to the reader that they were credible and trustworthy (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.46 and 92).

In accordance with the above principle, after each set of interviews, new information was gathered, analysed, compared with previous interviews and the process then repeated. After several iterations, the researcher could begin to build explanatory theory, in the form of major themes, that closely fitted the interview data, and was based on the experiences and understanding of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.43-44). The data analysis process is explained in more detail in chapter 2, section 2.9.

In addition to this data analysis process, the researcher triangulated and verified the data to ensure trustworthiness of the research data and findings.

#### **1.8.4. Trustworthiness**

Strauss and Myburgh (2003, p.41), and Creswell (2002, p.280), warn that when using a qualitative approach in research, it is important to bear in mind that triangulation of methods, techniques and even approaches must be utilized to get an in depth exploration of the phenomenon under investigation. In qualitative research, the credibility is judged by its transparency, consistency, coherence and communicability (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.85). In this study, these terms are referred to as “trustworthiness”. Corroborating evidence from different participants was essential to establish trustworthiness (Creswell, 2002, p.280). Paton (2002, p.556) adds that by triangulating with multiple data sources, participants, methods and/or theories, researchers can make substantial strides avoiding the pitfalls and criticisms leveled at singular methods and perspectives are greeted with.

In addition to this, triangulation of data also improved trustworthiness, and was built into the design of this study by varying the methods of data collection used. This was achieved by conducting individual interviews, asking participants to fill out incomplete sentences questionnaires, as well as sending out verification questionnaires, once the main themes that emerged from the analyzed data had been established.

Furthermore, data analysis methods were used, that were congruent with the research paradigm and design. The researcher was aware of the fact that it was difficult to “generalize” the findings of this study, to other situations (Merriam, 1998, p.207-208). However, in this regard, the research aimed to understand the experiences of a small purposive sample of participants who dropped out of the course and the reasons for them doing so, because the researcher “wished to understand the particular in depth, not find out what was generally true of the many” (Merriam, 1998, p.208; and Patton, 2002, p.432-433).

Trustworthiness, triangulation and verification of data are also discussed in detail in Chapter 2, section 2.10.

## **1.9. ETHICS**

This research was conducted according to strict ethical guidelines, as laid out by the University Ethics Committee as well as the ethical guidelines for research of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). This is discussed in great detail in chapter 2, section 2.11. Copies of the informed consent letter given to each participant to sign, as well as a copy of the ethical clearance letter obtained from the University can be found in appendix “A”.

Finally, the organisation of chapters making up this minor dissertation is explained.

## **1.10. DEMARCATION OF STUDY**

The chapters for this study have been arranged as follows:

Chapter One serves as the background and contextualisation of the study, orientating the reader to the research. The purposes and aims of the study, as well as the research questions are stated. Concept clarification and assumptions held by the researcher prior to the study are discussed, and the theoretical framework used is explained. A brief discussion of the research paradigm and design, followed by the research methodology, and data analysis techniques are included. Finally, a short discussion of trustworthiness and ethics completes the chapter.

Chapter Two elaborates the research design and methodology underpinning the study. The reasons for choosing the data collection methods are explained, as are the methods of analysis and interpretation of the data. The enquiry is assessed against ethical requirements required by the University, as well as the ethical considerations of qualitative inquiries with regard to trustworthiness and credibility of the research process.

Chapter Three is the literature review, which consists of an in-depth discussion of the relevant literature consulted, which grounds this research study academically. It begins with a brief discussion of the problems experienced internationally and in South Africa by black students at Tertiary (University) level, which contributed to them dropping out. The literature review is divided into external or extrinsic and internal or intrinsic explanations for why black students drop out of tertiary studies. This is congruent with the theoretical framework used, based on Inclusion Principles and Barriers to Learning, which lead to high drop out rates of black students. This literature study also attempts to give a clearer, contextual picture of both historical and present problems which may have contributed to the failure of black students worldwide and specifically in South Africa at tertiary level.

Chapter Four includes a discussion of the themes and subsequent findings drawn from the research conducted.

In conclusion, in Chapter Five, the entire research study is summarised, and the researcher reflects on the limitations as well as the strengths of the study as a novice researcher. Recommendations for further/future research within a similar context are made, and the researcher ends with a reflection on the research process.

## **1.11. CONCLUSION**

Chapter One provides an overview of the research study, as well as a background to the study, contextualising the aim and research question. The novice researcher's assumptions, which may influence this study, are also made known. Thereafter, a brief discussion of the research design and methodology used to provide the qualitative framework of the study is given. Finally, a demarcation of the study is provided for the reader.

A detailed discussion of the research design and methodology used in this study will follow in Chapter Two.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the interpretivist framework on which this research is based is explained, as well as the reasons for choosing a qualitative case study research design. Next, a justification and explanation of the data collection and data analysis methods used is given.

The researcher chose to make use of an interpretivist framework, in contrast to using a positivist model, as the interpretivist approach places emphasis on how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.32). Bryman (2001, p.13) adds that interpretivism is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people, and thus requires the social researcher to grasp the subjective meaning of social action. Seeing that this study focuses on the experiences of black students who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the Educational Psychology Master's course, it is important to acknowledge that each participant experienced the course according to his or her own reality.

Most importantly, the interpretivist framework is congruent with the overarching constructivist paradigm on which this research is based. This interpretivist approach is expanded on in the discussion that follows.

#### **2.2. AN INTERPRETIVIST FRAMEWORK THAT UNDERPINS THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research makes use of the interpretivist research framework or approach, which emphasises experience and interpretation. It is fundamentally concerned

with the importance of seeing meaning in context, as well as the importance of understanding the overall text of a conversation (such as an individual interview).

Furthermore, this approach recognises that meaning emerges through interaction and is not standardised from place-to-place or person-to-person. It accepts the importance of culture and denies the existence of an objective reality independent of the frame of reference of the observer/researcher. The interpretivist social researcher examines meanings that have been socially constructed and consequently accepts that values and views differ. In addition, there is no single reality, as objects and events are understood differently by different people, and these are the realities on which we should be focussing. Understanding the meaning of the experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis- or theory generating mode of inquiry. Thus it is acknowledged that multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals in interpretivist research (Henning, 2004, p.21; Merriam, 1998,p.4; Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.34-35;).



This research design is thus well suited for giving a voice to the participants, from their own contexts and diverse situations, as described above, as this research sets out to understand the experiences of black students in the Educational Psychology Masters group, and their reasons for dropping out of the course. The ultimate reason for conducting the research is not just to give voice to the participants, but to also make suggestions and recommendations for the future to ensure that this high drop out trend of black students does not continue and thus deny the country of the multi-cultural diversity and experience which is lost through this current trend.

Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2003, p.275) suggests further that “the current risk is to extol respect for diversity above all values, for cultural diversity cannot exist in the absence of social justice”. Thus it would be ideal if this research resulted in

action from the University, HPCSA and other policy makers, to address and curb the high drop out rate of black students from the course.

In keeping with the interpretivist approach it has been borne in mind that each student experienced the course differently, and each person's reality was different. Thus the purpose was to reconstruct and understand each interviewee's experiences and interpretations, and through the seeking of thick and rich descriptions, the researcher sought to develop an empathic understanding of their world (Henning, 2004, p.21-22; Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.35). These descriptions provided substantial data from which themes for their dropping out could be established by the researcher. It was hoped that the results of this research would assist future black students in the course to be better accommodated and that the "values of self-determination and social justice would ensure multicultural competence" amongst future psychologists of all races (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003, p.275).

It must also be borne in mind, that there are many variations, standpoints and positions within the broad category of interpretivist research designs (Hart, 2005, p.324). I shall be making use of a qualitative case study design, as described by Bryman (2001, p.47-51); Creswell (2002, p.484-486); Denscombe (2003, p.30-39); and Merriam (2002, p.18-19) I shall look at the details and contextual matters of the experiences of students in the course, as well as their reasons for dropping out or nearly dropping out of the course, at a Gauteng University. I shall proceed to describe this in more detail below.

### **2.3. A QUALITATIVE, CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN**

A qualitative case study research design was chosen, because it was "employed to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved" (Creswell, 2002, p.484; Merriam, 1998, p.19). In a case study design, the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, and in



discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1998, p.19). This is congruent with the researcher's use of grounded theory which sets out to inductively generate new theory from this research.

Henning (2004, p.2) agrees with the above, adding that compared to quantitative studies, which focus on control of all the components or variables in the actions and representations of the participants, case study designs usually aim for depth and breadth, rather than quantity of understanding. Bryman, (2001, p.47); Denscombe (2000, p.32); and Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1991, p.2-3), add further that a case study is conducted as an in-depth, detailed, multifaceted investigation, and also entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. Case studies often rely on the use of several data sources, as I have done, using both individual interviews as well as incomplete sentences to gather information.

The rationale for using the case study design was the availability of a special case that seemed to merit intensive investigation and allows exploration of unique complexities around this case (Paton, 2002, p.297; and Rubin & Babbie, 1997, p.402). In accordance with this rationale, Creswell (2002, p.485) and Merriam (1998, p.19), add that case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system". Creswell (2002, p.484), and Rubin and Babbie (1997, p.402) add further that a case study is not a synonym for "ethnography" or "participant observation", but is distinguished from these by its exclusive focus on a particular case and its utilisation of a full variety of evidence regarding that case.

Bearing the above in mind, this research study looked in depth at the experiences of black students, who, within a certain time period, dropped out or nearly dropped out of the Educational Psychology Master's course at a particular Gauteng University. This specific, restricted group of students, within a certain faculty of a Gauteng University, constitute a single or bounded system. Thus the choice of a

qualitative case study research design fitted the criteria as described by the above authors.

Furthermore, Denscombe (2000, p.32) points out that case study research could more accurately be conceived as a strategy rather than a research method. He suggests that the decision to use a case study design is a strategic decision that relates to the scope and scale of an investigation and it does not dictate which method or methods must be used. In fact one of the strengths of the qualitative case study design is that it allows for the use of a variety of methods, depending on the circumstances and specific needs of the situation. It also takes into consideration the participants' own points of view and contexts (Rubin & Babbie, 1997, p.402).

The researcher collected open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data as suggested by Creswell, (2003, p.18). This qualitative case study design thus correlated well with the interpretivist, constructivist theoretical framework from which this research was conducted.

Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg, (1991, p.13) add that case study designs have been particularly important in the generation of new ideas, and lend themselves to theoretical generation and generalisations. Furthermore, according to Creswell, (2002, p.452) grounded theorists generate theory based on data collected during the research process. Theoretical generalisations involve suggesting new interpretations and concepts, and re-examining earlier theory and concepts in new innovative ways. This is what the researcher hoped to achieve by conducting this research, and above-all to generate new theory that is more relevant to the South African context, as well as make recommendations for change and improvements in the course. Bearing this in mind, the researcher is well aware of the fact that "criticizing the institution....is not easy... and....changing the institution is even harder....as being critical can lead to opposition, resistance and isolation..." (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997, p.3).

The interpretive paradigm, pointed to the use of qualitative research methods, both in collecting and analysing data. In this study, employing a qualitative orientation was well suited to the research conducted, as the method of individual interviewing used, specifically enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the perceptions, values, experiences and reasons for the participants dropping out of the course (Henning, 2004, p.22). In addition to this, Creswell (2003, p.18) adds that in a qualitative approach, the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, as well as meanings socially and historically constructed, with the intent of developing a theory or pattern.

To clarify further, and add to the former, qualitative research's principle orientation to the role of theory in relation to research is inductive, and is principally concerned with generation of theory. In order to generate theory from the research process, use was made of a grounded theory approach, which will be further explained under "research methods", later in this chapter. This contrasts to a quantitative research strategy which is deductive and more geared towards testing of theory. Furthermore, qualitative research has its epistemological orientation in the interpretivist framework as discussed above, with its ontological orientation being primarily constructivist, as explained in Chapter One (Bryman, 2001, p.20).

During this inductive process, of which the researcher made use, the first step was to gather information using research methods such as individual interviews, asking semi-structured open-ended type questions of participants, as well as giving out incomplete sentences to each participant to complete. The data was then analysed, making use of the constant comparative method and aspects of grounded theory in order to form themes or categories; and then the researcher proceeded to look for broad patterns, generalisations or theories from the themes or categories (see full details later in this chapter).

The details of how this was achieved are discussed further on under “research methods”, but next the aims of the research are explained.

#### **2.4. THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of this research was to explore and describe the experiences of Black Educational Psychology Masters students at a Gauteng University, over the period 2002 to 2006, and in the process, identify some of the reasons for the high drop out rate from the course.

In addition to the above, a further aim of the research was to explore what could be done to provide additional support for current and future students in the Educational Psychology Masters programme at the University, to help prevent such high drop out rates amongst future black students.

It is hoped that the results of this research will assist in transformation that will ensure that students from diverse cultures and backgrounds will be better accommodated, in terms of the South African Education Department’s Inclusion and Learning Support policies (Department of Education, 2001), in all spheres, including socially, culturally and academically within the institution and specifically in the Educational Psychology Masters course in the future.

#### **2.5. THE PARTICIPANTS**

The participants in the study were some of the Black students who dropped out (or nearly dropped out) of the Educational Psychology Masters course at a Gauteng University over the period 2002 to 2006, and who agreed to be interviewed.

In total, nineteen black students were selected into the Educational Psychology Masters course during the time period 2002 to 2006, six dropped out and six are

currently enrolled. Twelve agreed to participate in the research and eleven participants were eventually interviewed.

Choosing and approaching participants was difficult for the researcher as most of them had never met her before. In order to assist in this regard, the researcher approached a member of the University staff, who knew many of the participants, and who was willing to contact them first to inform them about the research, and vouched for the researcher's integrity. This was helpful, and when the researcher subsequently contacted the participants, most were willing to meet with her and agreed to be interviewed.

During the course of the research, difficulty was experienced co-ordinating times when the participants and the researcher were available to conduct the interviews, as most participants worked full time and had quite limited time available. It also meant that the participants and/or the researcher had to travel in order to meet and conduct the interviews. Thus the time it took to conduct the research was extended right up until October 2006, when it was originally hoped that the interviewing would be completed by the end of June 2006.

In addition to this, one participant lived too far away to be interviewed, and two possible participants were not willing to "dredge up the past" as they felt they would rather let "bygones be bygones". A few did not return messages left for them, in spite of many attempts to do so. There were difficulties experienced in contacting a few possible participants, as their telephone numbers and/or other contact details had changed and they could not be traced. This was especially a problem with black students who dropped out or qualified in the earlier years this study covered, namely 2002 and 2003. In spite of these obstacles, the researcher managed to interview black students who represented each of the groups during the time frame investigated.

## **2.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.6.1. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

As discussed before, the researcher chose to use a qualitative case study research design, which allows for the use of multiple research methods or data collection procedures.

The qualitative methods used during the course of the research included, individual or paired interviews with each participant conducted in the medium of English, to explore the experiences of each participant by using open ended questions. These interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed later. Use was also made of incomplete sentences questionnaires. In addition to this a research journal of experiences, hypotheses and thoughts the researcher had along the way, was kept. Figure 2.1., illustrates the data collection methods used.

A focus group interview was meant to be conducted with all the participants at the end of the study, using semi-structured questions. However, it was difficult to arrange to meet most participants for a personal interview, thus the idea of a focus group interview was discarded, as most participants were extremely busy and could not find time to fit in another meeting. This process was supposed to add to the validity and trustworthiness of the research, and thus help triangulate the research findings.

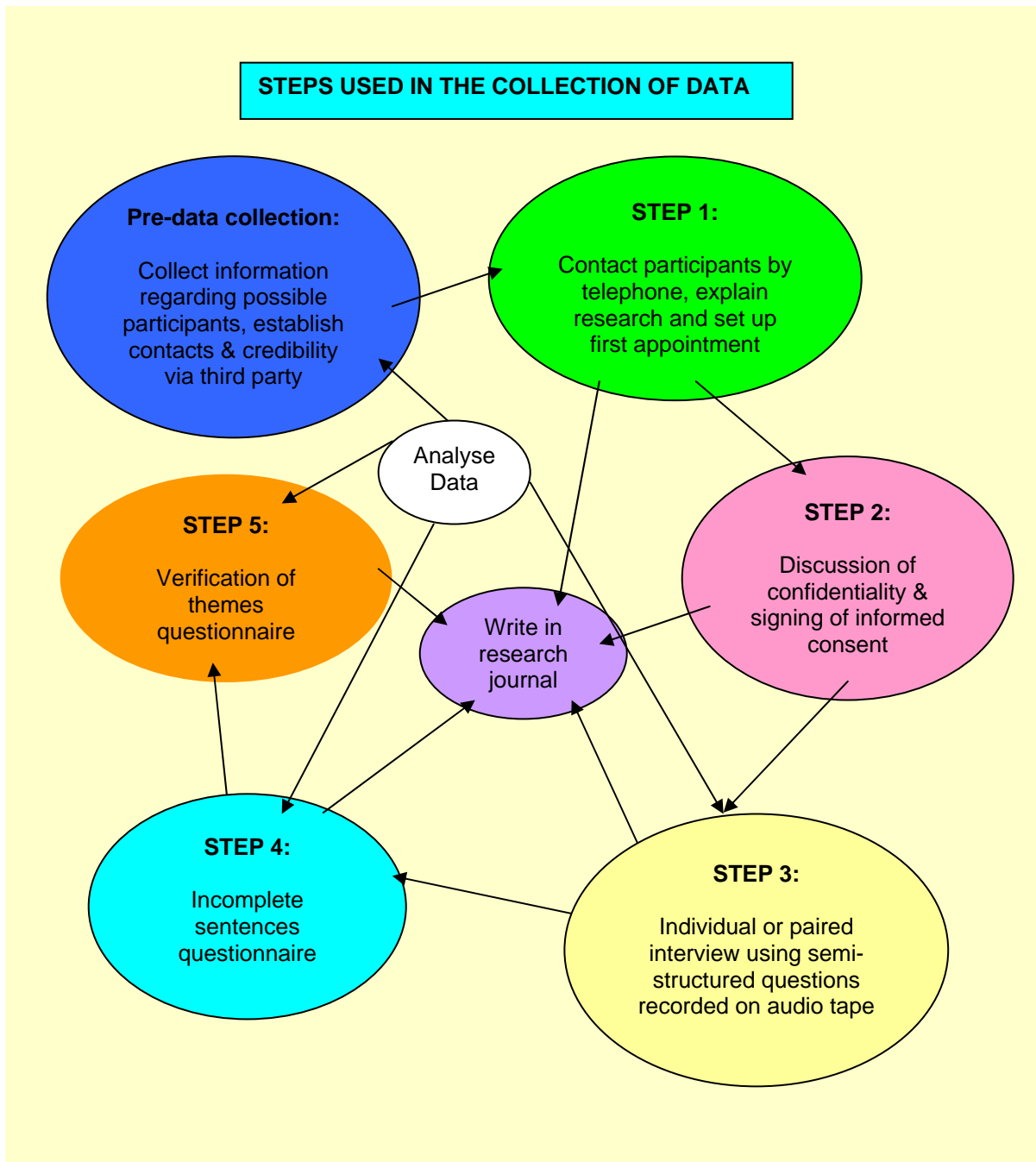
Instead, each participant was sent a verification questionnaire, to verify or confirm the six main themes identified during the data collection and analysis process in order to achieve this aim (see appendix C). Unfortunately there was a very low return rate on the verification questionnaires. Only four of the eleven were returned. This was possibly due to the fact that it was towards the end of the year and participants did not feel inclined to complete them. Some said that they were

happy with what they had already said, and some did not have the time to complete them. After phoning to remind the other participants twice, the researcher decided to let it be.

A total time frame of three to four months for conducting the interviews with participants, and collecting research data was initially envisaged. However, in the end, it took a full ten months to get to see and interview the eleven participants.



Figure 2.1. Steps used in the collection of data.



Making use of figure 2.1, a more detailed discussion of the research methods follows.



### **2.6.1.1. PRE-DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

Once the research proposal had been accepted, and ethical clearance obtained from the Higher Degrees Committee of the University, the researcher first collected contact details, such as telephone numbers of possible participants from various sources. Many of the possible participants were not known to the researcher, so she chose to use a third party, who was a past student, and also a lecturer at the University to help establish contact, credibility and trust between the researcher and participants. This process made it easier for the researcher to establish contact with participants whom she did not know, and they appeared to be more willing to come for an interview as a result.

In addition to this, many of the participants saw the need for such research, and yet some were reticent to “open up old wounds” again and meet with the researcher.

The first data gathering step was to interview the participants. This process is explained next.

### **2.6.1.2. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS USING SEMI-STRUCTURED, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

In this research, qualitative interviews were used as the main source of data collection because “qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.1). Thus through qualitative interviews, the researcher attempted to understand experiences and reconstruct events that occurred from the participants’ point of view. This method of data collection fitted well with the theoretical framework underpinning this research, especially the constructivist viewpoint, where people construct their own meaning through their experiences (see chapter 1).

Furthermore, the researcher used qualitative interviews as a tool of research, and an intentional way of learning about the participant's feelings, thoughts and experiences, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995, p.1). The interviews provided the information that the researcher later analyzed, and subsequently shared with others through a minor-dissertation like this one.

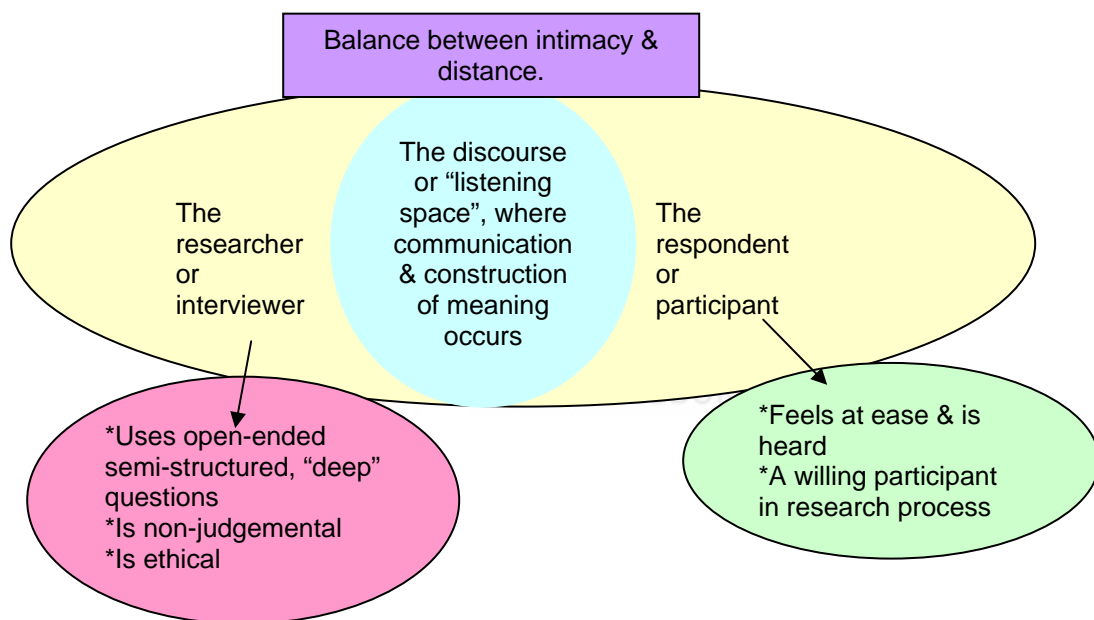
Denscombe, (2000, p.112-113) describes three main types of research interviews. On the one end of the continuum, is the first type he calls structured interviewing. This involves tight control over the format of the questions and answers. On the other end of the continuum, is what Denscombe (2000, p.112) calls the unstructured interview, where emphasis is placed on the interviewees thoughts. The researcher's role is to be as unobtrusive as possible, start the ball rolling by introducing a theme or topic, and then let the interviewee develop his or her ideas and pursue his or her own train of thought.

Somewhere in the middle of the above two types of interviews, lies what Denscombe (2000, p.112) calls the semi-structured interview, and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, p.185) call semi-structured depth interviews, which is what was used in this research. With semi-structured depth interviews, the researcher still had a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered. However, the interviewer was prepared to be more flexible in terms of the order in which the topics/questions were considered. In addition to this, and perhaps, more significantly, the interviewee/participant was allowed scope to develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher.

As mentioned previously, the questions the researcher used tended to be more open-ended (see appendix D), and this method attempted to create a "listening space", where meaning was constructed through an inter-exchange and co-creation of verbal viewpoints in the interest of scientific knowing (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p.185). This process hopefully helped the participants feel more at ease, and ensured that they felt "heard" by the researcher. In addition to this the

researcher attempted at all times to balance intimacy and distance between the participant and herself, whilst maintaining ethical conduct and a non-judgemental stance throughout the interview. Figure 2.2., illustrates the process the researcher followed during the semi-structured, in-depth interviewing process that was followed.

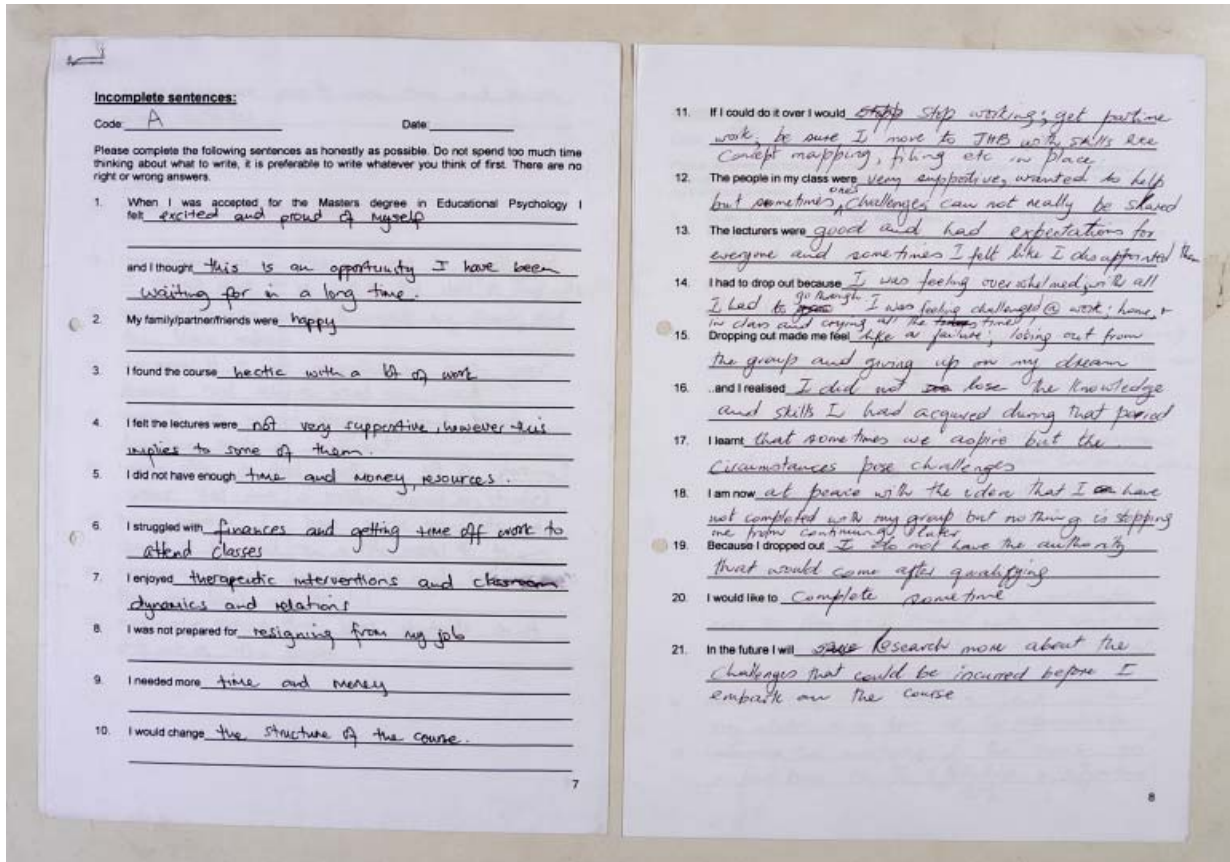
**Figure 2.2. The semi-structured interview as a communication event**  
 (adapted from Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p.187).



### 2.6.1.3. INCOMPLETE SENTENCES

In order to add to the trustworthiness, richness and to triangulate the data obtained from the interviews, each participant was asked to complete an “incomplete sentences” questionnaire (see appendix E). Twenty open-ended sentences that were “incomplete” were handed to the participants immediately after the interviews, and they were asked to complete them in any way they pleased. Figure 2.3. is an example of two different participant’s incomplete sentences questionnaire.

**Figure 2.3. Examples of incomplete sentences questionnaires**



### 2.6.1.4. REFLECTION AND PERSONAL RESEARCH DIARY

Throughout the research process, and specifically at the end of each interview, whilst transcribing and analyzing data, the researcher made some notes and wrote reflections. These notes were helpful in writing up the findings of the research. Notes were also made regarding questions related to the research, the data and findings, as well as ideas for further research. The researcher also noted any intuitive thoughts or ideas that came to the researcher as the research process developed.

### **2.6.1.5. VERIFICATION OF THEMES**

In order to ensure trustworthiness and to verify the data and subsequent themes, each participant was asked to fill in a “Verification of Themes” questionnaire (see appendix C). Trustworthiness will be discussed further in section 2.7.

### **2.6.2. DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Wiersma (1991, p.84), data analysis in qualitative research begins soon after data collection begins, because the researcher has to check on working hypotheses, unanticipated results, and so on. The researcher found this to be the case, as the data analysis began with the first interview and was continuous or recursive throughout the process, until a point of saturation was reached and no further information could be extracted from the data collected or added to the themes (Creswell, 2002, p.273; and Bryman, 2001, p.390).

Furthermore, data analysis was conducted in order to determine whether there were any patterns or trends that could be identified or isolated, in order to establish themes in the data (Mouton, 2001, p.108). Both Mouton (2001, p.108) and Merriam (1998, p.191) emphasise the importance of relating one’s hypotheses, results, findings and the interpretation of these, to existing theoretical frameworks or models, and showing whether these are supported or falsified by the new interpretation. The researcher has attempted to remain congruent with the theoretical framework established in Chapter One throughout the analysis process. In addition to this, Wiersma (1991, p.85) describes data analysis in qualitative research as a process of categorisation, description, and synthesis. Thus data reduction was necessary for the description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. Data analysis informed the next interview as the analysis was recursive and constant.

In order to analyze the data collected, the researcher made use of the constant comparative method, using some aspects of grounded theory as described by Bryman (2001, p.390-395), Creswell (2002, p.456-458) and Wolcott (1990, p.32-34). According to Strauss and Corbin, (1998, p.12), quoted in Bryman (2001, p.390); Creswell (2002, p.456); and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, p.496) grounded theory is theory that has been derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another.

Further discussion of these theories as applies to this research follows.

#### **2.6.2.1. Theoretical explanation of grounded theory and constant comparative method of data analysis**

In accordance with the qualitative, interpretivist nature of this research, grounded theory methods consist of a set of inductive strategies for analyzing data. This means that the researcher started with individual cases, incidences and experiences, and progressively developed more abstract conceptual categories and themes to synthesize, explain and understand the data, as well as to identify patterned relationships within them.

Bryman (2001, p.390) further suggests that there are two central features of grounded theory, namely, that it is firstly concerned with the development of theory out of the data, and secondly that the approach is iterative or recursive. This means that the data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other. This is confirmed by Wiersma (1991, p.84), and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, p. 497), who suggest that data collection and data analysis usually run concurrently. The researcher found this to be true in this case. It was also found that less data was collected and more data analysis was done, as the research progressed.

Before the process of data analysis followed is explained, a brief description of the tools of grounded theory that were used to analyse the data, as described by Bryman, (2001, p.302 & 391) is given.

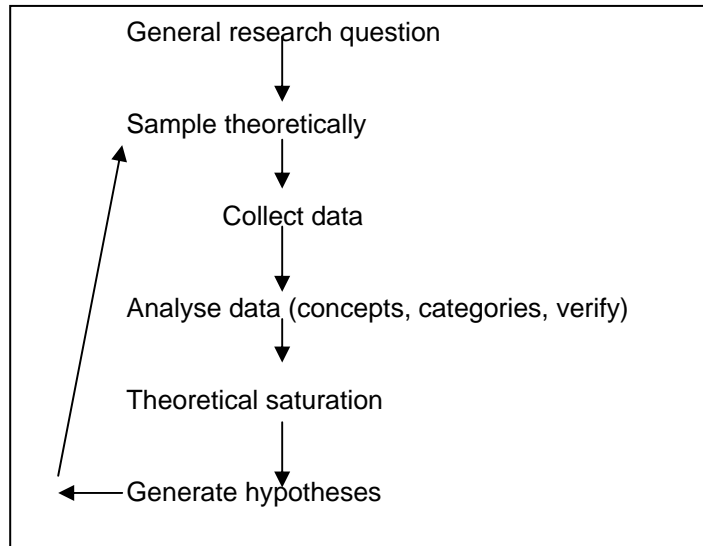
#### **2.6.2.1.1. Theoretical sampling:**

One of the primary tools of grounded theory is the use of theoretical sampling, which is done in order to discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.45 in Bryman, 2002, p.302), theoretical sampling is “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal”. This definition conveys a crucial characteristic of theoretical sampling, namely, that it is an ongoing process, rather than in a distinct and single stage.

Moreover, Strauss and Corbin, (1998, p201), quoted in Bryman, (2001, p.302) further suggest that in theoretical sampling, “data gathering is driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory and is based on the concept of making comparisons (thus the use of the constant comparative method along with grounded theory), and whose purpose is to go to places, people, or events that will maximise opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to “densify” categories in terms of their properties and dimensions”.

Figure 2.4. on page 56 outlined the main steps in theoretical sampling as used in the grounded theory approach, which is recursive or repetitive in nature to the point of “saturation” of data.

**Fig. 2.4. The process of theoretical sampling**



Thus, using this combination of the constant comparative and the grounded theory approaches, the researcher carried on collecting data by interviewing and collecting further information through incomplete questionnaires; verifying data; and then analysing it until theoretical saturation had been achieved. This means that successive interviews formed the basis for the creation of a category and confirmed its importance, until there was no need to continue with data collection in relation to that category or cluster of categories. For examples of this procedure, and transcripts, see figures 2.5. and 2.6. further on in this chapter. This process of data analysis is discussed in more detail in 2.6.2.2.

The key idea according to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.212) quoted in Bryman, 2001, p.303), is that the researcher carries on sampling theoretically until a category has been saturated with data. This means until (a) no new relevant data seems to be emerging regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships between categories are well established and validated.



Once this was achieved, the researcher could then move on and generate hypotheses out of the categories that were building up, and then continue collecting data in relation to these hypotheses.

#### **2.6.2.1.2. Coding**

Another tool central to analysing data in grounded theory is coding. Coding entails reviewing transcripts, breaking down data into component parts and giving labels or names (codes) to these component parts that seem particularly salient within the social worlds of those being studied. As Charmaz (1983, p.186) quoted in Bryman, 2001, p.392) puts it: "codes...serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organise data". It must be borne in mind that coding in qualitative data analysis tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity. The data are treated as potential indicators of concepts and the indicators are constantly compared to see which concepts they best fit in with (Bryman, 2001, p.392). This process began soon after the collection of initial data. More details follow in 2.6.2.2.

The constant comparison of data, as mentioned previously, took place as the researcher began reading the transcripts and tentative coding (and formation of categories) began. It refers to a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualisation, so that the correspondence between concepts and categories with their indicators (labels) is not lost. More significantly, attention to the procedure of constant comparison enjoins the researcher constantly to compare phenomena being coded under a certain category so that a theoretical elaboration of that category can begin to emerge (Bryman, 2001, p.391). See figures 2.5. and 2.6. that follow.

Merriam, (1998, p.159) explains further that the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is to do just that- constantly compare. To elaborate, the researcher began with a particular incident from an interview and compared it with

another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons thus led to the formation of tentative categories that were then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons were constantly made within and between levels of conceptualisation until theory could be formulated.

In addition to coding, Glaser and Strauss (1967) quoted in Bryman, (2001, p.391), advised writing a memo on the category after a few phenomena had been coded, to assist the researcher to make links later on.

### **2.6.2.1.3. Theoretical saturation**

A further tool of grounded theory is theoretical saturation, which is a process that relates to two phases in grounded theory: (a) the coding of data, implying that a point is reached where there is no further point in reviewing the data to see how well it fits with the categories devised, and (b) the collection of data, implying that once a category has been developed, a stage will be reached where new data no longer illuminates the concept (Bryman, 2001, p.391).

Consequently, the above process of data analysis was used by the researcher, jointly with the constant comparative method and elements of grounded theory.

This process will be elucidated in the discussion that follows.

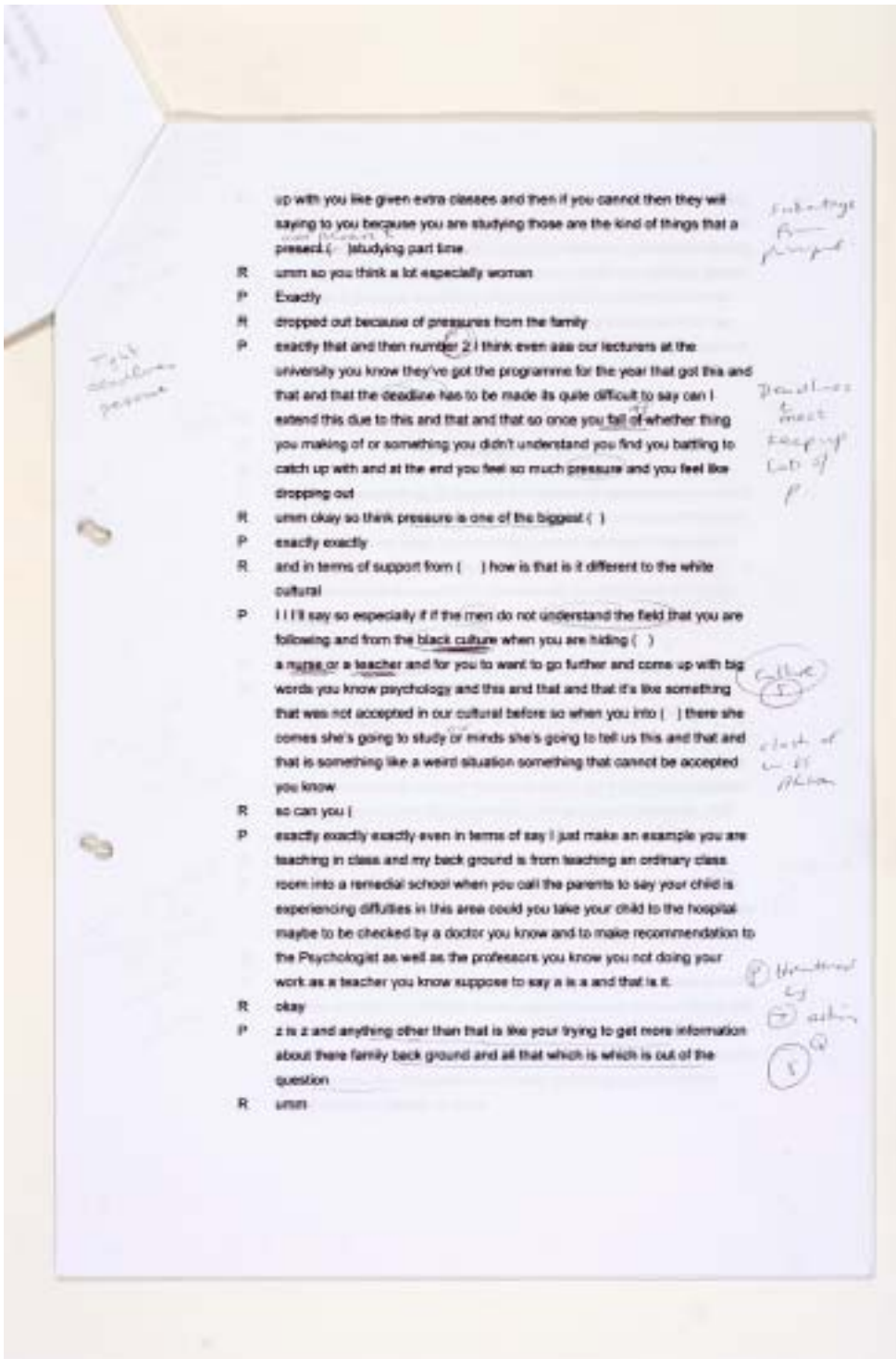
### **2.6.2.2. PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

As the individual interviews, with the eleven selected participants was conducted, the interviews were transcribed (word for word as far as possible) from the audiotapes. There were places where it was difficult to follow or hear the conversation on the tapes, and this was indicated by the researcher in the transcriptions as (.....). Following this, the researcher began reading through the transcripts, keeping the research question in mind.

First, the data was divided into units of meaning by analysing the content, using the constant comparative and grounded theory methods, and tentative codes were allocated. A sample of this appears in Figures 2.5. and 2.6. This process yielded over 30 tentative codes.



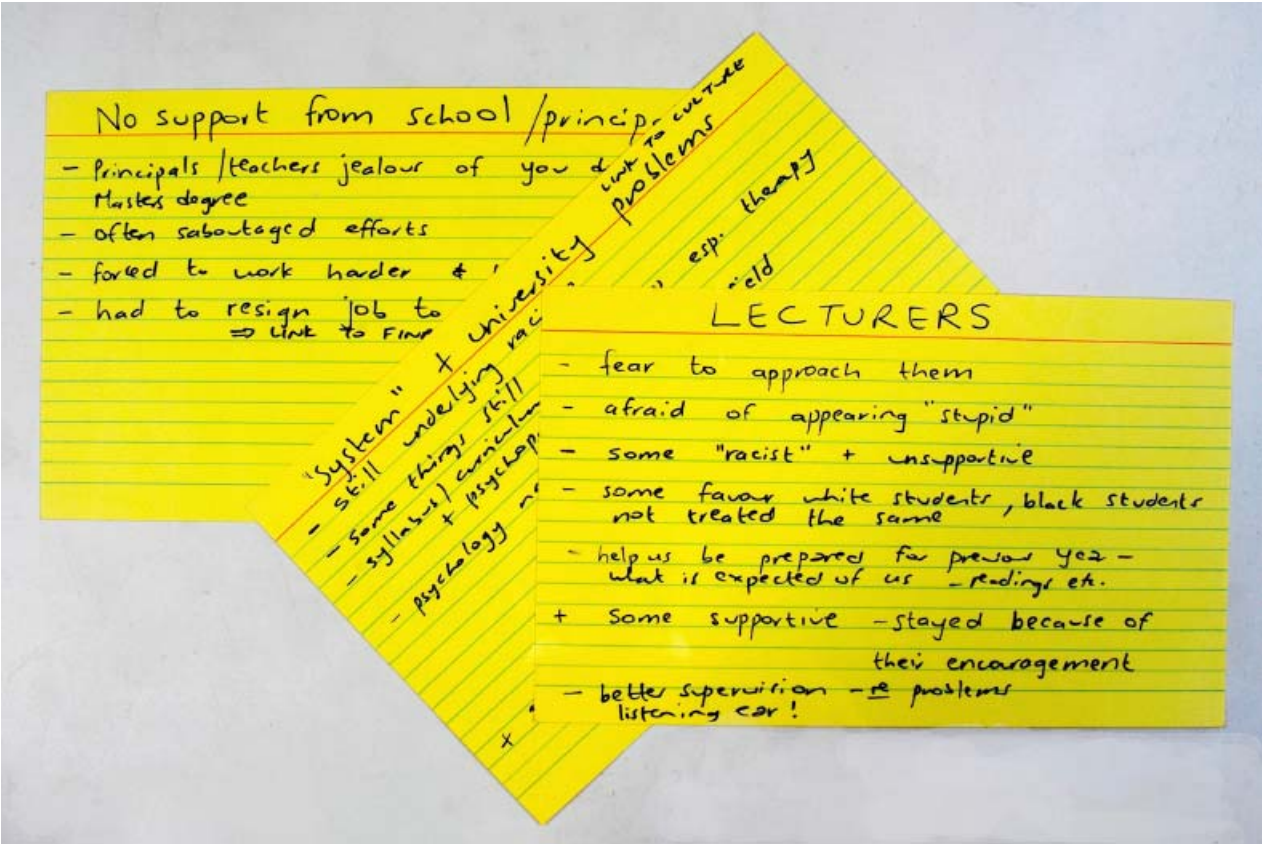
Figure 2.5. Sample of tentative coding





After completing this step, the researcher began to look for emerging themes, and clustered some of the codes together on yellow index cards, to form categories, or code families that had something in common. An example of this appears in figure 2.7.

**Figure 2.7. Sample of how tentative codes were clustered into code families or categories**





The researcher then used colours to highlight quotes and identify the emerging themes in the transcripts eg: red for time, orange for skills, brown for racism, purple for culture, green for money and blue for the structure of the course.

Figure 2.8. illustrates how this was done.

**Figure 2.8. Example of colour coding of emerging themes**

....if you have an assignment or any presentation do it when the time is right because really once you postpone, you you are not going to be able to make up for that time again, so really really that was the challenge that I had...I almost, I postponed three presentations but I had to present ee twice in one day in one session so they were so close and I couldn't cope really and for the first time in my life I thought of a psychologist really I never thought in my life that I would go to a psychologist, I thought that I need someone who can help me just to relax I was very tense, so my advice is do your work as early as possible so that you can at least ee, be able to cope definitely, because this is we have a lot of work here really, everyday has its own package

R So just to summarise just to check if I'm right I hear that distances, time, pressures in terms of the amount of work you need to do, umm working full time that also the course is full time not part time as it was supposed to be or as you expected it to be and umm also cultural expectations those are all things that have rally caused a lot of problems for you that could have been reasons for you to drop out

H That's right

K Yes plus money uu financial ja financial cos you go to work first you have to have petrol to go to work first, then from work its like going to do two jobs on one day ja, ja

H Ja definitely

R have you found the course relevant, is there anything that could have been done beforehand to make it easier for you have the actual modules been useful something that that would apply in your cultural context as well

K Ja the course has been useful and I think because we have....the option to use so many different approaches that can suit the context, in which you are at the moment ja so it has been fine.....

From here, slightly different language from the grounded theory approach described previously was used. Instead of calling the final groups “categories”, the researcher arranged the code families or categories described, into emerging themes as Merriam (2002) sees categories and themes as the same thing. Figures 2.9., 2.10., 2.11. and 2.12. on the following pages illustrate how these themes were developed by the researcher on big sheets of paper during the data collection analysis process.





Figure 2.9. Illustration of themes 1 and 2

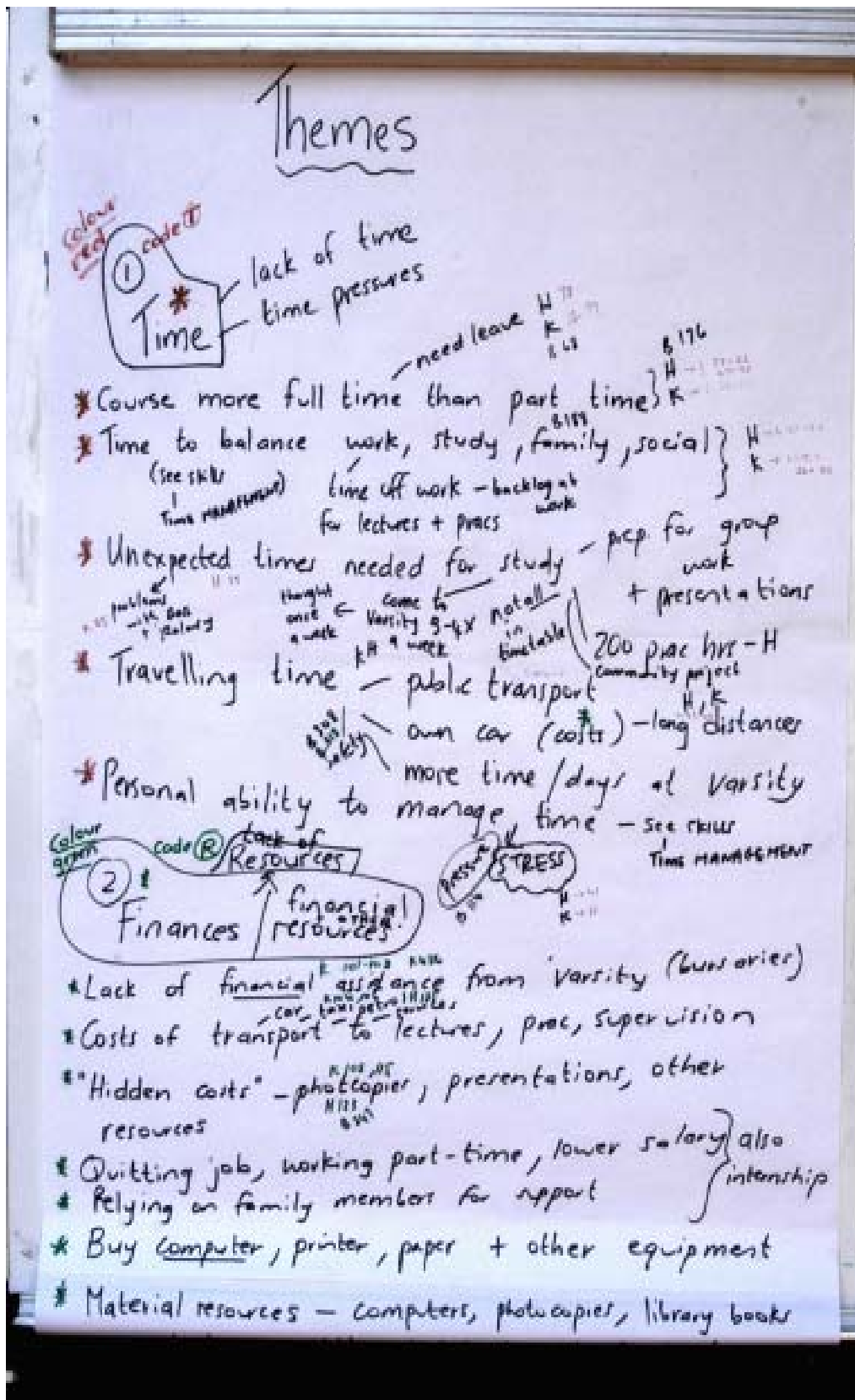


Figure 2.10. Illustration of themes 2 and 3

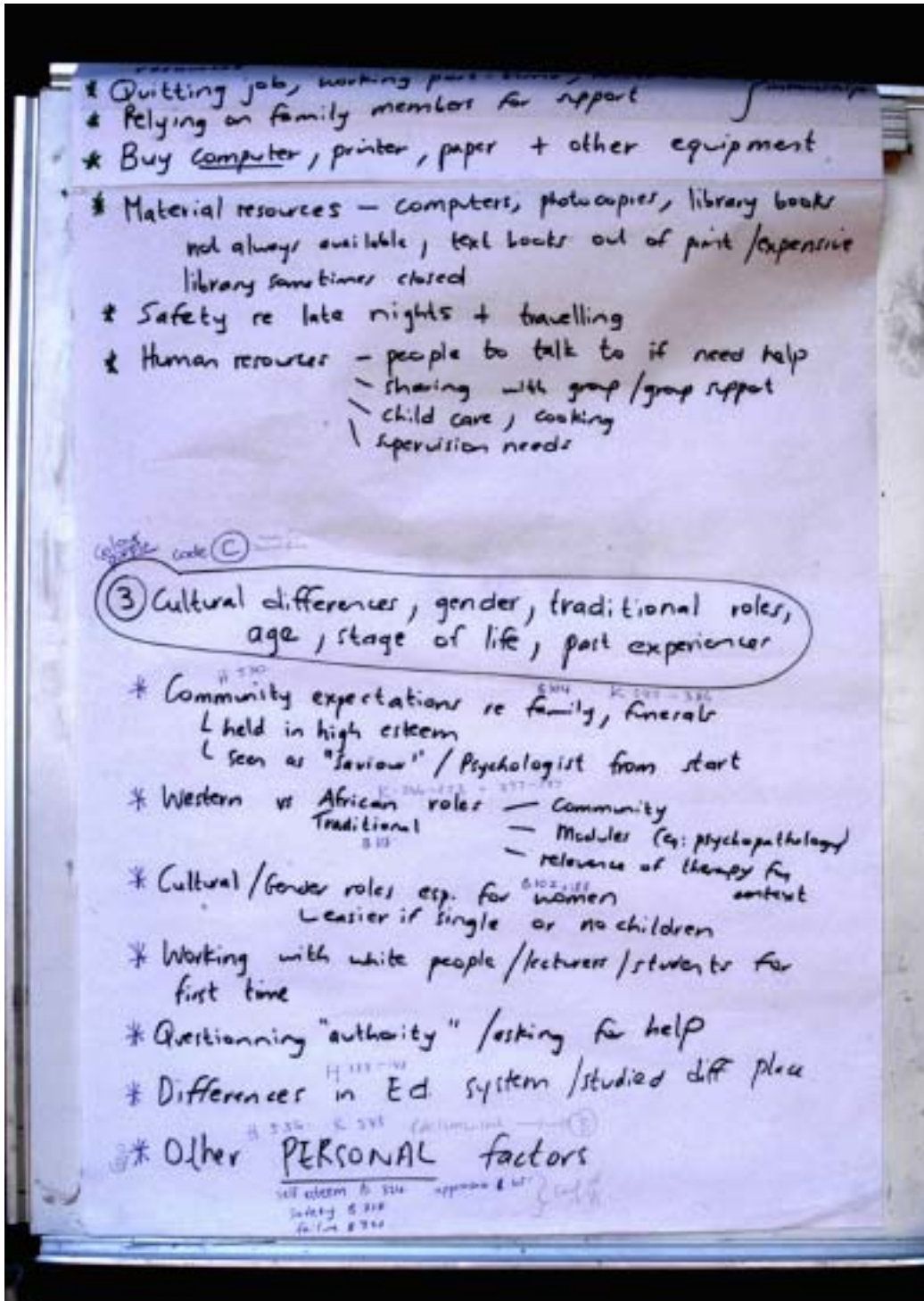


Figure 2.11. Illustration of themes 4 and 5

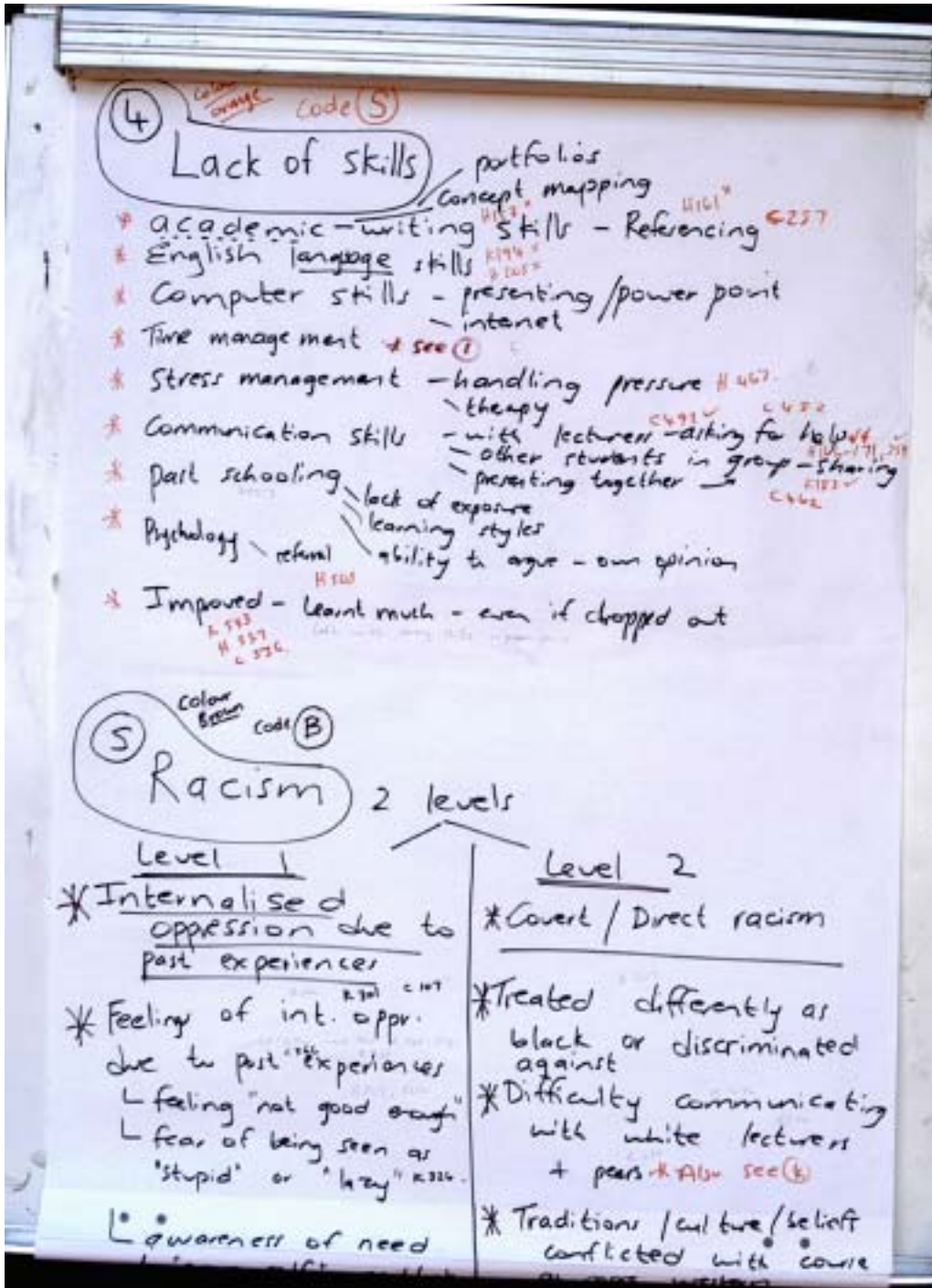
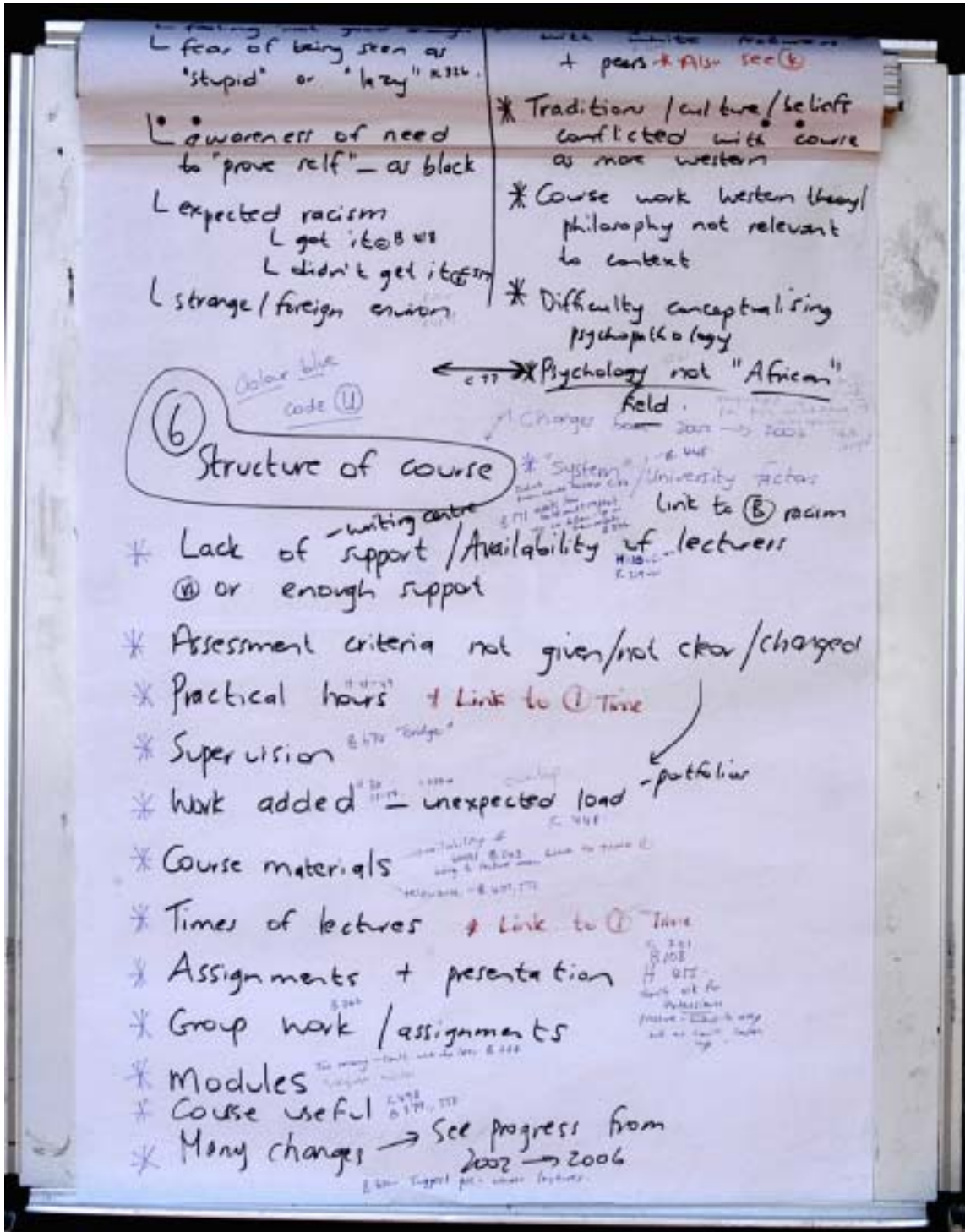




Figure 2.12. Illustration of themes 5 and 6.



Finally, the researcher developed a diagram, which linked these six themes, to the internal and external factors or barriers to learning, discussed in the theoretical framework in chapter one. This is illustrated in figure 2.13.

**Figure 2.13 Linking themes to internal and external factors**



Once the six themes were established, these were linked to the literature, and these themes became relevant findings, which were written up in Chapter 4.

The establishment of trustworthiness of the resulting themes and findings of the study are explained next.

## **2.7. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

In establishing validity and reliability of the study, the researcher has made use of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln's (1994) model as described in Bryman (2001, p.272) and Pillay (1996, p.31). They proposed an alternative model to reliability and validity models to assess the quality of qualitative research, which contained two primary criteria, namely, trustworthiness and authenticity. Guba and Lincoln devised these categories to assess the quality of qualitative research, as the categories of validity and reliability as used in qualitative research, tended to presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality was feasible. They argued instead that there could be more than one and possibly several accounts about the social world or reality.

Guba and Lincoln (1985 and 1994) further divided trustworthiness into four criteria, each of which have an equivalent criterion in quantitative research, namely credibility, which parallels internal validity; transferability, which parallels external validity; dependability, which parallels reliability; and confirmability, which parallels objectivity (Bryman, 2001, p.272). These criteria will be discussed in detail below, as they are relevant to this study.

### **2.7.1. Credibility**

Credibility establishes how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants and context in which the study was conducted. A qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate

descriptions or interpretations of human experience, that people who share that experience would immediately recognise the descriptions. To establish credibility, the researcher also attempted to describe the experiences of the participants as they were lived and perceived by the students themselves, within their own conceived contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1995, Krefting, 1990 and Sandelowski, 1986, in Pillay, 1996, p.31). Throughout the research process, an attempt was made to ensure that the findings were comprehensive, holistic, expansive, and richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998, p.9).

According to Paton (2002, p.552); and Rubin and Rubin (1995, p.85), qualitative researchers judge the credibility of their work by its transparency, consistency/coherence and communicability, and thus design the interviewing to achieve these standards.

Firstly, in order to ensure transparency, and achieve these standards, the readers of this research are able to follow clearly the process of data collection used, as was described earlier in this chapter. Transcripts were made from audio taped interviews, so that evidence was collected according to the responses of the participants and not from the memory or preconceived assumptions of the researcher. Data collected was also verified through questionnaires sent out to participants at the end of the research process (Paton, 2002, p. 552; and Rubin & Rubin, 1995:86).

The researcher also kept a reflective journal where thoughts and questions regarding the research were recorded, as well as the process the researcher followed, the reasons for choosing the methods used, as well as the feelings, problems and frustrations experienced along the way. This ensured that the researcher was constantly aware of any bias or preconceived assumptions made during the research process (Krefting, 1990, in Pillay 1996, p.31; and Paton, 2002, p.553). Notes were also kept of “off the record” conversations held with participants, and when writing up the findings, care was taken to ensure that such

confidential information was not divulged in any way, whether it added “meat” to the discussion or not. This showed respect for the privacy and confidentiality that each participant was guaranteed by the researcher and ensured that the highest ethical standards were upheld throughout (see 2.11).

Secondly, to ensure consistency, the researcher attempted to check out any data that seemed inconsistent. Themes examined from one interview, were compared constantly for coherence and consistency (or any exceptions) with the other interviews. Any seemingly contradictory information was checked carefully, but the idea in qualitative research such as this, was not to eliminate any inconsistencies, exceptions, but to understand the reasons for them occurring (Paton, 2002, p. 554; and Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.87). Credibility was increased further because the researcher could show in the findings that the core concepts and themes that emerged occurred consistently in the majority of the cases/participants interviewed. Thus the researcher attempted to build a consistent, evidence-based portrait that the reader could find credible.

Thirdly, the researcher attempted to communicate the research in such a way that readers who were not familiar with the research setting could find their way around and identify with the participants and their experiences. This has been achieved through the richness of detail, abundance of evidence, and vividness of the text to help convince the reader that the material is real and credible. The researcher also ensured that all evidence collected was first hand from the participants, and not hearsay. Readers can see the evidence and logic of the arguments presented, which led to the conclusions and theory generated by this research. To further convince the reader of the credibility of the findings, the researcher quoted generously directly from the transcripts so that the participant’s voices could be clearly heard in context (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.90-92).

In addition to this, Strauss and Myburgh (2003, p.41), warn that when using a qualitative approach in research, it is important to bear in mind:



triangulation of methods, techniques and even approaches must be utilized to get an in depth exploration of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study the researcher paid attention to triangulation of data by varying the methods of data collection by using individual interviews, incomplete sentences questionnaires, as well as using various congruent data analysis methods, in this case constant comparison and grounded theory approaches. Verification questionnaires were also sent to each participant to triangulate and verify the themes identified during the data analysis process. In this way participants have the opportunity to check the accuracy of what they said as well as the interpretations given by the researcher. Impartial colleagues and the two supervisors were also asked to check themes and data on a regular basis to verify accuracy and prevent bias (Krefting, 1990, in Pillay 1996, p.32).

### **2.7.2. Transferability**

To ensure transferability, the researcher presented sufficient detailed, descriptive data to allow for comparison by other researchers (Krefting, 1990, quoted in Pillay, 1996, p.32; and Paton, 2002, p.584). A detailed description of methods used in the collection and analysis of data earlier on in this chapter was given, so that similar studies could be conducted for comparison.

It is hoped that if another researcher interviewed the same participants, within a short period of time of this study being conducted, that similar themes would emerge from the data, although the actual details of the interviews may vary somewhat.

Due to the fact that this qualitative research entailed the intensive study of a small group of black students who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the Master's in Educational Psychology course during the period 2002- 2006, the findings tend to be orientated to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspects of the individual participants' social worlds being studied. To ensure transferability, only

black students who had dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course were chosen as participants. Thus if transferability of the study were to be tested, it would have to be conducted with the same black participants, from the same University. Participants from another race and/or University would have had different experiences and would thus be coming from a different context.

In addition to the above, the researcher also tried to ensure that the data was supported by sufficient empirical evidence and theory, including quotations from participants and other research findings where appropriate, so that trustworthiness was ensured. Henning et al. (2004, p.7), continues further that in order to ensure trustworthiness, that “thick descriptions” must also be complimented with a strong theoretical base and a coherent, convincing argument based on both empirical evidence, and the researcher’s understanding and logic. The evidence must therefore come from the data and from the theory that explicates and explains the data. The researcher has attempted to do just this throughout the study.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers are also encouraged to produce what Guba and Lincoln describe as “thick descriptions”, that provide the reader with “a data base for making judgements about the possible transfer of findings to other milieux. This point of view is backed by Henning (2004, p.7), who suggests that there is always a danger in interpretive inquiry that the researcher will bias the study to mean what she wants it to mean, but a well-trained researcher will address possible biases and present the “thick descriptions” with ample empirical evidence

In addition to this the researcher was aware of being a white woman conducting research on the drop out of black students in the course. In order to maintain trustworthiness, neutrality and credibility needed to be maintained as far as possible with the participants. It was difficult at times for the researcher to “see” through another person’s eyes. Thus the importance of the researcher transcribing exactly what was said by the participants and attempting at all times not to allow personal biases or points of view to taint the interpretation of the data. To decrease

the possibility of personal bias, the researcher asked a few peers as well as the supervisors to review the themes that emerged from the data, as well as the findings from the research.

### **2.7.3. Dependability**

As discussed previously, the consistency of the data needs to be considered. However, the key to qualitative studies is to learn from the participants rather than to control them. Thus it is highly likely that the findings could be consistently replicated if the research was conducted by somebody else, with the same participants, or black participants from the same time period who were not interviewed this time. However, consistency would be less likely if the research was conducted with participants from a different University, as qualitative studies focus on the uniqueness of the context and experiences of the participants at the time (Krefting, 1990, in Pillay, 1996, p.32).

As such, variability was expected and thus consistency could also be defined in terms of dependability. According to Guba, (1981, in Pillay, 1996, p. 32), dependability can be established if the sources of variability can be identified. Possible sources of variability may include increasing insight on the part of the researcher, as well as researcher or participant fatigue, or changes in the participant's circumstances or life (Krefting, 1990, in Pillay, 1996, p. 33).

To ensure dependability, a detailed description of the research methods and data analysis used in the study were presented, so that a step-by-step replication of the study could be conducted by another researcher. Triangulation, peer and supervisor examination of data analysis and findings, as well as verification as discussed previously were also conducted, to further ensure dependability.

#### **2.7.4. Confirmability**

In quantitative research, the researcher attempts to be neutral and distance him or herself from the participants. In qualitative research, the opposite is true, where the researcher is encouraged to form a closer, more intimate bond with the participants in order to illicit rich, thick, descriptions and data. Lincoln and Guba, 1985, in Pillay, (1996, p.33) indicated that the emphasis on neutrality in qualitative research, should be shifted from the researcher, to the data. This means that the neutrality of the data should be considered rather than that of the researcher. Furthermore, they suggest that confirmability be the criterion for neutrality. In this study, triangulation is the strategy used to establish confirmability, as described previously.

For the purpose of clarity and greater detail, the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness in this research are summarised in table 2.1. on the next three pages.



**Table 2.1. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness in this research**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Criteria used</b>	<b>Application to research</b>
Credibility	<p>Varied methods of data collection</p> <p>Reflexivity</p> <p>Triangulation</p> <p>Member checking</p> <p>Peer &amp; supervisor evaluation &amp; checking</p>	<p>Months of preparatory work, individual and/or paired interviews with all eleven participants, incomplete sentences questionnaires</p> <p>Keeping of research journal, reflecting thoughts &amp; questions arising from research</p> <p>Constant comparative &amp; grounded theory approach to data analysis, individual or paired interviews, incomplete sentences questionnaires, literature control</p> <p>Data &amp; findings were checked/verified by participants after analysis &amp; identification of themes</p> <p>Peers &amp; supervisors requested to check data analysis &amp; findings, as well as methodology &amp; approach</p> <p>cnt.....p.78</p>

	<p>Authority of researcher</p> <p>Transparency</p> <p>Communicability</p> <p>Consistency</p>	<p>Researcher is a supervised, intern Educational Psychologist registered with the HPCSA</p> <p>Data collection &amp; analysis methods clearly explained. Use made of audio-taped transcripts.</p> <p>Description rich &amp; detailed, familiarise reader with setting/context, sufficient evidence given.</p> <p>Checking of any inconsistent data, &amp; understanding reasons for it occurring. Themes &amp; findings constantly compared for consistency.</p>
<p>Transferability</p>	<p>Detailed, "thick" descriptions of methodology &amp; data analysis</p> <p>Bounded system</p>	<p>Step-by-step, detailed explanation of data Collection methods and analysis given so can be repeated</p> <p>Only black participants who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course during the period 2002 to 2005 were used in sample interviewed</p>

	Neutrality	Sufficient empirical & theoretical evidence to address bias, see through other's eyes
Dependability	Detailed, "thick" descriptions of methodology & data analysis  Peer & supervisor evaluation & checking  Triangulation	Step-by-step, detailed explanation of data Collection methods and analysis given so can be replicated  Peers & supervisors requested to check data analysis & findings, as well as methodology & approaches used  Same as for credibility
Confirmability	Neutrality  Triangulation  Reflexivity	Ensure neutrality of data not only neutrality of researcher  Same as for credibility  Keeping of research journal, reflecting thoughts & questions arising from research

## 2.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

After the proposal was accepted, written consent was first obtained from the University Higher Degrees Committee and the Research Ethics Committee to conduct this research, (See appendix A).

The principle of informed consent was outlined at the Nuremberg trials, following the forced participation of concentration camp inmates in medical experiments during World War II (Bulmer, 1979, quoted in Heaton, 2004, p.77). It requires that research participants are fully informed of the nature of the work and any possible risks to themselves, and that they freely agree to take part. In addition to this, the researcher is registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), as an Intern Educational Psychologist, and must adhere to the ethical code of conduct set out by them.

On these grounds, verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant followed by a written agreement, after the purpose, and scope of the study was explained to them (See copy of this written informed consent form in appendix A). Each participant was assured of confidentiality of all information given in the interviews, incomplete sentences and verification of data questionnaires by allocating each an alphabetical letter code.

First and foremost, the researcher was aware that the topic of the research could be described as “sensitive research”, which meant that it dealt with information which could be incriminating, hurtful and discreditable to both the participants who were interviewed as well as for the lecturers involved in the course. Sieber and Stanley (1988), quoted in Renzetti and Lee (1993, p.3) define socially sensitive research as “studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research”. Thus sensitive topics, which may seem to be threatening in some way to the participants, or others involved directly or indirectly with the study, present additional ethical problems, because the research usually involves potential costs to those who participate.

Thus, for a topic to be sensitive, Renzetti and Lee (1993, p.4) suggest that the threat it poses should at least be moderate, although probably often it is severe. According to Renzetti and Lee (1993, p.4), it appears as if sensitive topics involve particular kinds of costs. On the one hand these may take the form of psychic



costs, such as guilt, shame or embarrassment. Alternatively, sensitive topics are threatening because participation in research may have unwelcome consequences such as revealing of weaknesses or wrong-doing on the part of the participant or other people linked to the research topic, such as lecturers.

In order to conduct this “sensitive research” topic in an appropriately ethical manner, the researcher assured the participants and members of the Educational Psychology Department, both verbally, and in writing of anonymity and confidentiality as far as possible.

In order to ensure anonymity, alphabetical letter codes (eg: participant “A”), were used during analysis of data and on all tapes, transcripts and documents that may identify a participant. Great care was taken to ensure that no participants or lecturers were identifiable in the writing up of the results of this research. Participants were assured that all data would be stored safely to safe-guard privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, and destroyed, once the dissertation was completed, and approved by the external examiner.

Rubin and Rubin (1995, p.93-94) also discuss the fact that research ethics are about acquiring and disseminating trustworthy information in ways that do not cause harm to the participants. Obtaining high quality information in interviews means that the researcher is dependent on the co-operation of participants. Thus when they are encouraged to talk openly about their experiences, researchers incur serious ethical obligations to participants. These ethical obligations required avoiding deception, asking permission to record, and being honest about the intended use of the research.

Thus, as a researcher, the main objective was to “do no harm”. The researcher attempted at all times to ensure that the participants were not hurt emotionally, physically, or financially because they agreed to participate in the research.

In this research, which was of a sensitive nature, some uncomfortable feelings may have been evoked in the participants. If this was the case, the researcher contained these feelings as far as possible and/or referred the participant for counseling if this was necessary.

In addition to the above, each participant was informed in writing that they could withdraw at any stage during the research process without negative consequences. Participants were also assured that the researcher would not make use of information that they were uncomfortable about, or was given “off the record”, during the writing up of the research. Each participant was informed that they would not at any stage be coerced to give information that was uncomfortable for them and that all interactions with the researcher were voluntary. They could have refused at any stage to speak to the researcher if they were not comfortable to do so. Any information given “off the record” was not used in any way or mentioned in the findings out of respect for the privacy of the participants, and in the process, strict ethical conduct was maintained.

No participants withdrew their consent, but the researcher had great difficulty actually interviewing three of the male participants in the study, due to time constraints on their side, and possibly some feelings of failure, shame and guilt at having dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course. The underlying feeling was that it may also have been awkward for them to be interviewed by a white woman who had completed the course work. In fact, Rubin and Rubin (1995, p.40) recommend that the interview should not only cause no harm or not hurt the participants, but, if possible, leave them somewhat better off for having talked to the researcher. The researcher was fully aware of this and attempted not to cause harm or exert power over any of the participants, especially as many felt so vulnerable in the situation.

Finally, each participant was invited to read the completed study at the end of the process if they so wished. Verbal feedback was also given to participants throughout the process.

## **2.9. CONCLUSION**

The interpretivist framework on which this research is based was explained, as well as reasons for choosing a qualitative case study design. Next, a justification and detailed explanation of the data collection and data analysis methods used was given. Finally, the establishment of trustworthiness and the ethics involved in the study were discussed.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the past ten years there has been a growing trend in various countries throughout the world, towards accommodating, in Higher Education Institutions, certain minority students (mainly black) who were previously disadvantaged or marginalised. Research has been conducted in countries like the USA and Canada (Delamont, 2000; Quick & Shipley, 2004; Rovai, Gallien & Wighting, 2005; Sailes, 1993) to investigate the reasons for the high drop out rates of black minority students at Universities and Colleges.

Since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 Higher Education institutions, throughout the country, especially those that were previously "white only" due to apartheid laws, have had to undergo reforms and have had to change admission policies regarding the previously disadvantaged majority of black students. There has also been a move towards investigating the high drop out and failure rates of black students, especially at previously "white" Universities.

This research looks at the experiences of a selected group of black students at a previously "white" University in Gauteng, and investigates some of the reasons for the high drop out rate of these black students, particularly from the Educational Psychology Masters course.

This chapter will look at some of the other research and literature available regarding reasons for high drop out rates of black students from Universities and other Higher Education Institutions both worldwide, and in South Africa.

Bear in mind that the theoretical basis of this research is Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, as well as some critical theory and the policy of inclusion (see Chapter One), the literature review is presented in a manner that is congruent with this theory.

Some of the findings from other countries such as USA and Canada will be discussed and these findings will be compared to research conducted in South African Universities regarding high drop out and failure rates of black students, at both undergraduate as well as post graduate level from as far back as 1987 to the present day. Information has been included from so far back in this literature review, because many of the participants in this study grew up during the apartheid era in South Africa. They either completed or almost completed the majority of their schooling and undergraduate studies during this time period, prior to the first democratic elections, in 1994, thus making this information relevant to the study.

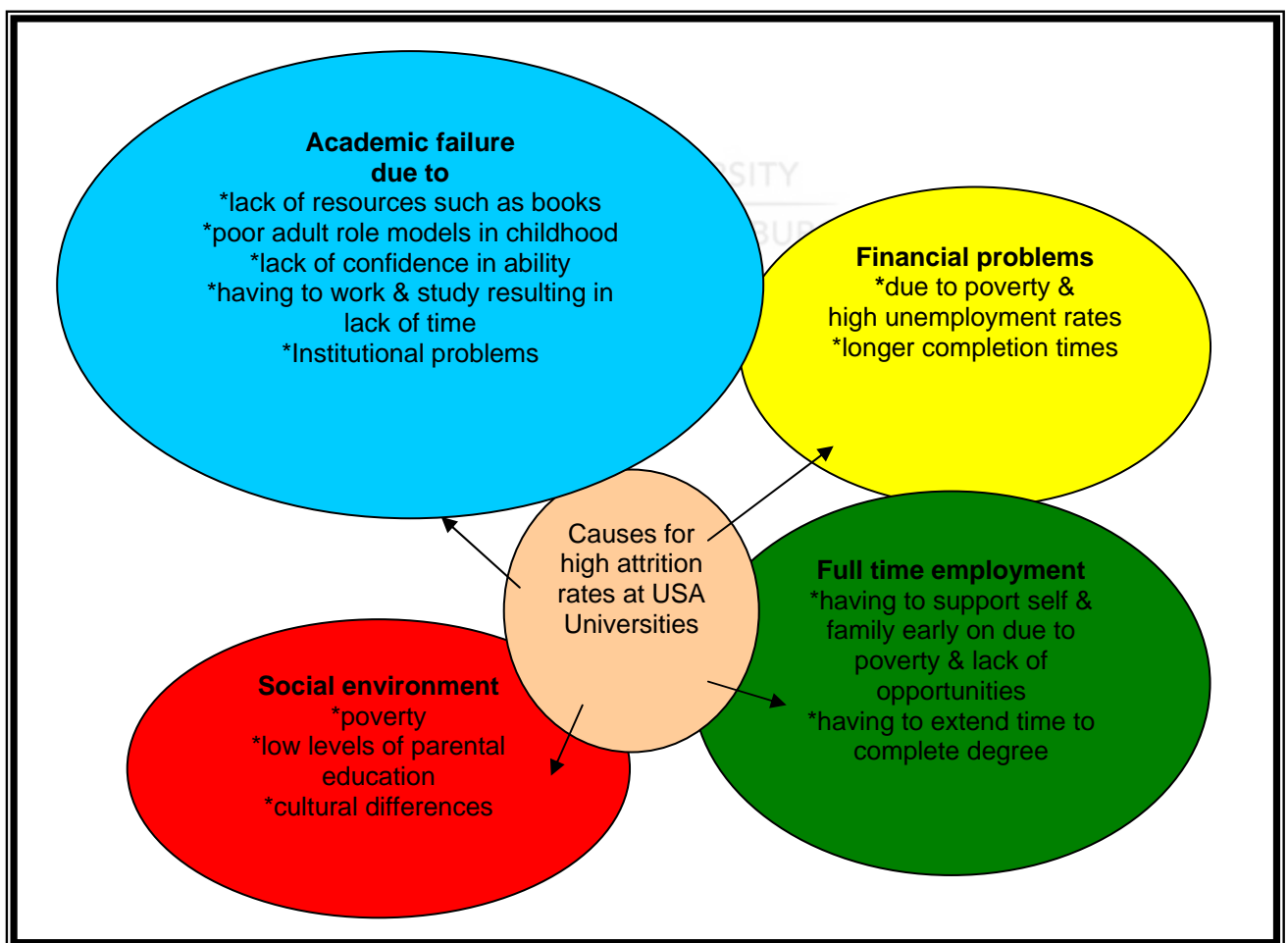
Whilst searching for relevant research and literature regarding drop out rates of black students at University, some interesting studies conducted in different regions of the USA regarding the attrition rates of African-Americans, as well as some Canadian studies researching drop out rates of African-Canadians, from Universities and other Higher Education Institutions were found.

In accordance with the theoretical framework set out in Chapter One, this Chapter will discuss these findings under two main headings, namely extrinsic (or external) factors, and intrinsic (or internal) factors that may have caused black students to drop out or fail at University or other Tertiary Institutions, both worldwide and in South Africa. In addition to this, the literature will be discussed critically, as proposed by Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002), and Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2003), and compared to the situation as it occurs in the South African context.

Sailes (1993, p.179) conducted research at Indiana University, a large predominantly white Midwestern University in the United States, and found that

there was a very high attrition rate (almost 60%) amongst African American students at that time. Data analysis revealed four factors that contributed to black student attrition, namely, academic failure, financial problems, social environment and full time employment. These factors were attributed to poverty; lack of financial and other resources, such as books and adult role models during childhood and later on. Also, low levels of parent education, resulted in the need for many students to begin working in early adulthood, to support themselves and their families. Figure 3.1. illustrates the factors related to and the causes for drop out more clearly.

**Figure 3.1. Factors related to and causes for high attrition rates of black students at USA Universities**



In addition to this, many researchers have found that fewer African Americans go to College than white high school graduates (39% versus 44% among 18 to 24 years olds), and many of those who do well academically on predominantly white campuses, exhibit a marked decrease in performance from their high school grades, beyond what is expected for adjustment to college-level work.

Moreover, these researchers found that black students obtained college degrees at substantially lower rates than white students, and many of those black students who did obtain degrees took longer than the traditional four years (Wilds, 2000; Haycock, Jerald & Huang, 2001, Forte, 2002; quoted in Rovai, Gallien & Wighting, 2005, p.360).

Furthermore, Rovai et. al. (2005, p.360) found that the nationwide American college graduation rates for black students in 2004, was 40%. This figure is 21 percentage points below the 61% graduation rate for white students that same year. Their research shows that most black students, who fail to complete their degree work, do so for reasons that have little to do with their innate ability. This underperformance points to mostly institutional problems, rather than individual shortcomings. See figure 3.1.

Linked to this, a study conducted in South Africa between 1987 and 1992 (Van Heerden, 1997, p.76-81), looked at some of the reasons for low achievement and high drop out rates amongst black University of South Africa (UNISA) students, compared to students of other races. At the time, UNISA, had the highest black student enrolment figures out of all former “white” South Africa Universities or Higher Education institutions, with about 45% of their student enrolments being Black (Bureau of Management Information at UNISA quoted in Van Heerden, 1992, p.1).

Lindow’s research (2006, p.44), looks at why so many black students are dropping out of South African Universities. She found that financial and cultural challenges

were two of the main difficulties faced by black South African University students, leading them to drop out. Attempting to reverse the effects of generations of racial discrimination under apartheid, the country has invested heavily over the past 12 years to bring Higher Education within the reach of even the most deeply impoverished black students who perform well in school. She found that black student enrolment figures at Higher Education institutions in South Africa grew by 80% between 1993 and 1999 alone, and continue to rise sharply. Today black students make up 59% of the public Higher Education system in South Africa.

Furthermore, Lindow (2006, p.45) reports that a study released last year (2005) by the Department of Education, found that of 120 000 South African students who entered the University system in 2000, half of them dropped out within four years, while 22% graduated in the same time period. They found that faced with obstacles that include poverty, shoddy education in poor, cash-strapped government schools, and cultural alienation in historically white university and college campuses, black students constituted the majority of the dropouts. Another study conducted by the Education Department researching a separate group of students, over the same time period, found that 72% of students who left College without a degree were black. The question can therefore be asked, why are there such high drop out rates of black students in all faculties at South African Universities?

South African researcher, Van Heerden (1997, p.79-83), found similar primary reasons for high attrition rates and poor academic performance of black students, at UNISA in South Africa, at that time, as found by Sailes (1993, p.179) in the USA, illustrated in figure 3.1. and Lindow (2006, p.44) in South Africa.

The results of the above research and that conducted by others have been used in the discussion which follows below, to ascertain the reasons for the high attrition rates and poor academic performance of black students at Universities and other Higher Education Institutions, both overseas and in the South African setting. In order to maintain uniformity throughout this research report, the discussion has



been divided into extrinsic and intrinsic factors which led to dropping out, as laid out in Chapter One.

### **3.2. EXTRINSIC OR EXTERNAL FACTORS**

As discussed in Chapter One, section 1.5.5., barriers to learning identified by the South African National Education Commission (1997) and listed by Engelbrecht et. al.,(1999, p.53) include both internal (intrinsic) barriers as well as external (intrinsic) barriers to learning which lead to high attrition and failure rates of students in school and tertiary institutions. These extrinsic factors also link to the Eco-systemic theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979-1992) and relate to the meso, exo and macro systems as discussed in Chapter One section 1.5.3.

This discussion will begin with the extrinsic factors, as found in the available literature, which led to high drop out rates of black students from tertiary institutions worldwide and in South Africa. These include

- (1) home background and circumstances during childhood; physical environmental factors, socio-economic status and lack of resources;
- (2) political climate, racism, quality of education, educational environment, the curriculum;
- (3) alienation and lack of social adjustment and integration;
- (4) lack of role models, mentors and support programmes.

These extrinsic factors are illustrated in Figure 3.2. on the next page.

**Figure 3.2. Extrinsic factors which led to high drop-out rates of black students from University**



### **3.2.1. Home background, physical environment, socio-economic circumstances and lack of resources**

According to Van Heerden (1997, p.79), the first extrinsic factor that was linked to high attrition rates and poor academic performance by black students at Universities and other Higher Education Institutions, related to the circumstances in which the students grew up during childhood. The economic circumstances in which they lived were on the one hand linked to socio-political factors in the apartheid society of South Africa at the time, and on the other hand to the traditional lifestyle in black communities. Most of the students she interviewed grew up in large extended families with parents who, primarily due to the political situation, were either illiterate or semi-literate, and hence earned meagre wages, or were unemployed, thus could not meet the household needs.

In accordance with the traditional support network, relatives who worked provided financial assistance to students, who repaid this money once they qualified, either to the older relatives in their old age or to their offspring. This sometimes occurred at considerable personal expense, including neglect or postponement of their studies, and hence attributing to the high drop out rates and poorer performance of these black students. The poor domestic environment in which these students grew up, meant that they lacked resources such as reading books, radios, televisions and toys, which according to Western culture, are important for intellectual development, particularly regarding knowledge and language, as well as preparation for learning at school and later University (Van Heerden, 1997, p.79-81).

Linked to this lack of resources, Lindow (2006, p.44) found that many black students had never used a computer before they reached University. They thus lacked computer skills and found it difficult to access assignments and course notes that were posted on the Internet/Intranet.

Furthermore, illiterate or semi-literate parents rarely brought books or newspapers home and could rarely assist their children with homework or assignments. This limited students' exposure to reading and general knowledge which may have contributed to them performing more poorly at University and thus dropping out more often than their white counterparts.

Looking at the family environment from another perspective, Malefo (2000, p.46) found that black South African students who came from homes where there were clearly defined and enforced limits and rules in the family, had higher average marks, even if the parents were not well educated and/or poor. The positive relationship between parental control and academic performance has also been reported in some studies done in America. For example, Clark (1983), and Lee (1984), quoted in Malefo (2000, p.46), found that academic performance was higher amongst black students from families where parents served as authority figures, had distinct achievement centred rules and norms, characterised by clear, specific boundaries and status structures, and also applied firm, consistent monitoring and rule enforcement. These same researchers assert further that a family environment with enforced standards of conduct would enable students to know when they have failed, as well as by how much, and would also allow them to determine what they should do to achieve success.

Related to differences in socio-cultural environments, another two factors that Van Heerden (1997, p.86-87) found that further aggravated the academic success of black students, were economic status and physical environmental factors. The majority of students interviewed came from very poor backgrounds, as mentioned previously, due to lack of opportunities for black people at the time, and thus students were often working to support themselves and/or their families. This meant that part time study was the only option for them.

Although working whilst studying eased the financial burden on students, they often studied under most difficult conditions. Whilst some students had electricity,

running water, a car and access to a telephone, many students lacked basic resources and studied in cramped, noisy, difficult conditions. Some students had to assist with the care of elderly relatives and younger children, as well as give gifts to unemployed relatives and large amounts of money was often needed to cover funeral costs of family members, frequently at the expense of paying for their own studies. This resulted in them dropping out as they could no longer afford their financial obligations to studies (Van Heerden, 1997, p.86-87).

In addition to this, Van Heerden (1997, p.86-87) reported that some female students complained that their husbands did not provide adequately for the family. Thus the onus was on these women, who assumed the role of the breadwinner, to carry on their career and complete their domestic responsibilities, often without assistance from the men due to cultural expectations and norms, which left little or no time for their studies.

An Editorial appearing in the Toronto Star on 2 April 2005, quoted in Delamont (2000, p.2), agrees with South African researchers such as Van Heerden (1997). The Editor suggests that socio-economics is one of the key reasons for the high drop out rates of black Canadian students. His research led him to believe that students do best when their parents are highly educated; speak English at home; have good incomes; and stable jobs and homes. Visible minorities lag behind on many of these counts. He also suggests that black children need more role models starting with teachers.

To the contrary, in a study that contradicts the above findings, South African researcher Malefo (2000, p.47) found that no statistical relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance of black students could be made. It appears as if other factors such as motivation to achieve and hard work may be a logical explanation for this.

A further contradiction to Malefo's study was found by Lindow (2006, p.46), who found that many students at UCT drop out due to financial constraints. In an interview with the student body president, she established that many black students often do not have a place to sleep, transport money or even food to eat. Black students coming from impoverished families are under immense pressure to succeed, with some households taking their entire income and investing it in one student.

In a more positive light, Lindow (2006, p.45) found that although the National Government and Universities in South Africa were trying to solve the problem of student finances by increasing financial aid for the neediest students and creating a range of special programmes designed to help them cope academically and socially, that these were "wasted" on the large number of students who dropped out.

Furthermore, Lindow (2006, p.44) found that many black students came to University under the impression that they would receive financial aid. Often students who are performing well academically have to drop out because they cannot afford the fees, and they are denied financial aid due to a restricted number of bursaries available. There was also the dilemma of spreading the financial aid available more thinly to help more students, but only partially, or to help fewer needy students based on merit and/or in "scarce" skills areas only.

In summary, research reveals that home background, socio-economic factors, physical environment and lack of resources are some of the extrinsic factors which cause high drop out rates of black students from Universities both in South Africa and abroad.

The next section looks at further extrinsic factors such as political climate, racism, the quality of education, the educational environment and the curriculum.

### **3.2.2. Political climate, racism, quality of education, educational environment and the curriculum**

Further factors, which link to childhood experiences, and contributed to poor academic results and high drop out rates of South African black students, especially those schooled prior to 1994, were found in Van Heerden's (1997, p.83) study, namely the political climate, racism, the quality of schooling resulting from the apartheid policy at the time, the curriculum, as well as the educational environment.

In addition to this, Van Heerden (1997, p.82) found that students schooled prior to 1994 in South Africa, often commenced studies at University in an environment that was not familiar to them. This is because they were schooled in "black only" schools and had little or no exposure to white people or the western culture, which they experienced when they enrolled in previously "white" Universities.

The most direct impact of political factors on students' studies and performance was experienced during their school education, specifically through segregated schooling prior to 1994, where according to the apartheid law, Black (Bantu), White, Coloured and Indian children attended separate schools, with separate departments of education. Bantu Education in particular was of an inferior quality and children were required to study and write examinations in High School in English or Afrikaans which was in most cases their second or even third language (Van Heerden, 1997, p.82).

Van Heerden (1997, p.84-85) also found that the actual quality of schooling most black learners received at the time under the apartheid system was regarded as "inferior" to those of their white counterparts. The schooling conditions were generally characterised by too few, poorly equipped classrooms, as well as too

few, poorly trained black teachers, who in many cases were not fluent in English or Afrikaans, the main languages of instruction at High Schools and Universities in South Africa.

Lindow (2006, p.45) backs Van Heerden's findings. She found that many black University students had experienced lingering racial inequalities in their schools. Students who came from rural areas were especially affected, experiencing overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers and had very few resources. Some had never used a computer or done Science experiments. In spite of expanded government spending in education, rural black students frequently arrived at Universities poorly equipped to face the challenges of Higher Education.

Delamont (2000, p.2) in a Canadian study conducted to determine reasons for low enrolments and high drop out rates of black students at Canadian Universities, found that at Canadian High Schools teachers' behaviour was viewed by the Afro-Canadian students interviewed to be racist, whether they intended to be racist or not. Pupils believed that teachers held low expectations of them which further acted as a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Furthermore, Delamont (2000, p.2) suggests that predominantly black schools in Canada also need to be more integrated; need better resources; better teaching of English; smaller classes; course work that better reflect black history and culture, as well as parenting programmes that help parents, particularly those from other cultures, to learn what they need to do to help their children succeed. This sounds very familiar to the South African situation as described by Van Heerden (1997, p.79-83), and discussed previously.

In line with research done by Van Heerden (1997, p.79-83) in South Africa, Canadian students also felt that the curriculum was a problem. They suggested that black history be taught, and that the curriculum should be less Eurocentric,



which would make it easier for them to identify with and engage with the material and thus stay in school.

In summary, this section found that further extrinsic factors such as the political climate, racism, the quality of education, the educational environment and the curriculum also played a role in high drop out rates of black students from Universities.

The next section discusses extrinsic factors such as alienation, lack of social adjustment and integration, as well as sexual harassment as further reasons for high drop out rates of black students from Universities.

### **3.2.3. Alienation and lack of social adjustment and integration**

Delamont (2000, p.2) found that many of the young black students interviewed expressed a generalised sense of alienation, and not being able to find an identity in Toronto (Canadian) Universities.

Malefo (2000, p.47) supports this theory in her findings amongst black South African University students at a previously “white” University. She found that Black students often experience “minority status” stressors. Students tend to feel socially and academically alienated, which has been found to impact negatively on their performance. She recommends that a more supportive community, which comprised of the student’s peers, as well as members of the University staff such as lecturers and professional counsellors, could offer what she termed “responsive counselling services”. They could serve as a useful support system that would mediate the stress experienced by these students.

Added to this, in a study conducted only three years ago by Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson and Strauss (2003, p.113), on the adjustment of black students at historically “white” Universities in South Africa, it was found that white students

achieved significantly higher scores on social adjustment scales than black students. Their findings suggested that black students were relatively less socially integrated into the University environment. They found that a range of factors contributed to this situation. In general, they found that these black students possessed fewer social support structures, as most had to live in University residences, or “digs” located in predominantly white residential neighbourhoods, far from black townships. There was very little entertainment geared for black students and transport to other areas was scarce, expensive and time consuming.

In contrast, in this same study, it was found that more white students tended to live at home or in shared accommodation. White students more often had easier access to cars and/or transport. Thus white students tended not to find University such a complete dissociation from familiar community and social life, as was the case with black students. This poor social adjustment seems to be one significant factor that tends to lead to lower academic scores and higher drop out rates amongst black students.



Contrary to the expectation raised by previous research, Sennett et.al.(2003, p.114), conducting research into the experiences of black students at UCT, found they had a high level of affiliation or sense of belonging to the University. This may reflect the changes that have occurred in the ethos at the University since 1994, particularly the higher proportion of black students and the visibility of this group in activities such as student governance. This equivalent institutional commitment, yet poorer social adjustment on the part of black students, may suggest that while students value the University as an institution, they experience a degree of alienation within it.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Delamont (2000, p.2) it was found that many of the young black Canadian girls she interviewed, experienced unwanted pregnancies and/or sexual harassment and abuse. This further added to their alienation and feelings of estrangement, and thus led to them dropping out.

Thus in summary, it appears as if extrinsic factors such as alienation, lack of social adjustment and integration at University, as well as sexual harassment and/or unwanted pregnancies are further reasons for the high drop out rate of black students.

Lack of role models, mentors and support are the next extrinsic factors that will be discussed.

### **3.2.4. Lack of role models, mentors and support programmes**

In a study conducted in Ontario, Canada at the University of Toronto, it was found that in 2000, only 11 black students were enrolled in the Medical Sciences and Health Care faculties out of a total of 700 (Manzer, 2000, p.28). The Association for the Advancement of Blacks in Health Sciences (AABHS) was started in Canada in 1993 by a group of health professionals concerned about the under-representation of blacks in the sciences and health care fields. Members of the AABHS, “teamed up with” black high school students, in a summer mentorship programme, that has grown from 7 members in 1993, to 150 participants in 2000. They encourage black students to consider careers in the health professions and act as role models to encourage them to work hard to achieve their goals.

It was found by Manzor (2000, p.28) that black students perceive the health sciences to be too difficult, so they subsequently dropped Maths and Science early on in High School, resulting in them closing the door on most health professions. This is further aggravated by their lack of exposure to good role models and the way they were socialised.

One member of the AABHS, a black female medical student was quoted as saying “We are socialised differently. We see a lot more of basketball then we see doctors. People see me and automatically assume I am a nurse, as I am female

first, and black second. It never occurs to people that you're in medicine!" (Manzer, 2000, p.29).

Quick and Shipley (2004, p.31), conducted a more recent study on African-American college students in the United States. They looked at factors that contributed to an increase in the enrolment of black students, as well as some of the possible reasons for the high failure rate of these students. Quick and Shipley (2004, p.31) found that the enrolment of minority students, had doubled over the decade between 1994 and 2004. One factor attributing to this increase was the presence of programs that had been created to help raise minority (black) enrolment figures. They were concerned that the so-called "paradigm shift" that signified change, and indicated that societal values are dynamic not static; instead of producing change and a different outcome, had simply changed the name of the same issues, which were being "reborn" in a different form. They were also concerned that the paradigm had not shifted sufficiently to value the presence of black students, as people with the right and the ability to learn more advanced educational material; and that institutions were just glad that the rise in black student numbers increased their marketability.

Closer to home, in South Africa, Lindow (2006, p.46) reports that many of the historically "white" Universities in South Africa, such as UCT are assigning mentors to first year students. These Universities also offer academic support programmes designed to help non-white (black) students acclimatise. UCT's Engineering Department run a bridging programme called Aspect, for black students whose academic performance is not up to the regular admissions standards. The programme stretches the standard four year curriculum into five years. According to Howard Pearce, co-ordinator of Aspect at UCT, quoted in Lindow, (2006, p.46), black students who enter the programme perform better and have a far greater chance of graduating, than if they had been placed directly into the mainstream.

Thus in summary, it appears as if lack of role models, mentors and support or bridging programmes are extrinsic factors that add to the high drop out rate of black students from Universities. The extrinsic factors leading to high drop out rates of black students from University both in South Africa, and abroad were summarised in figure 3.2.

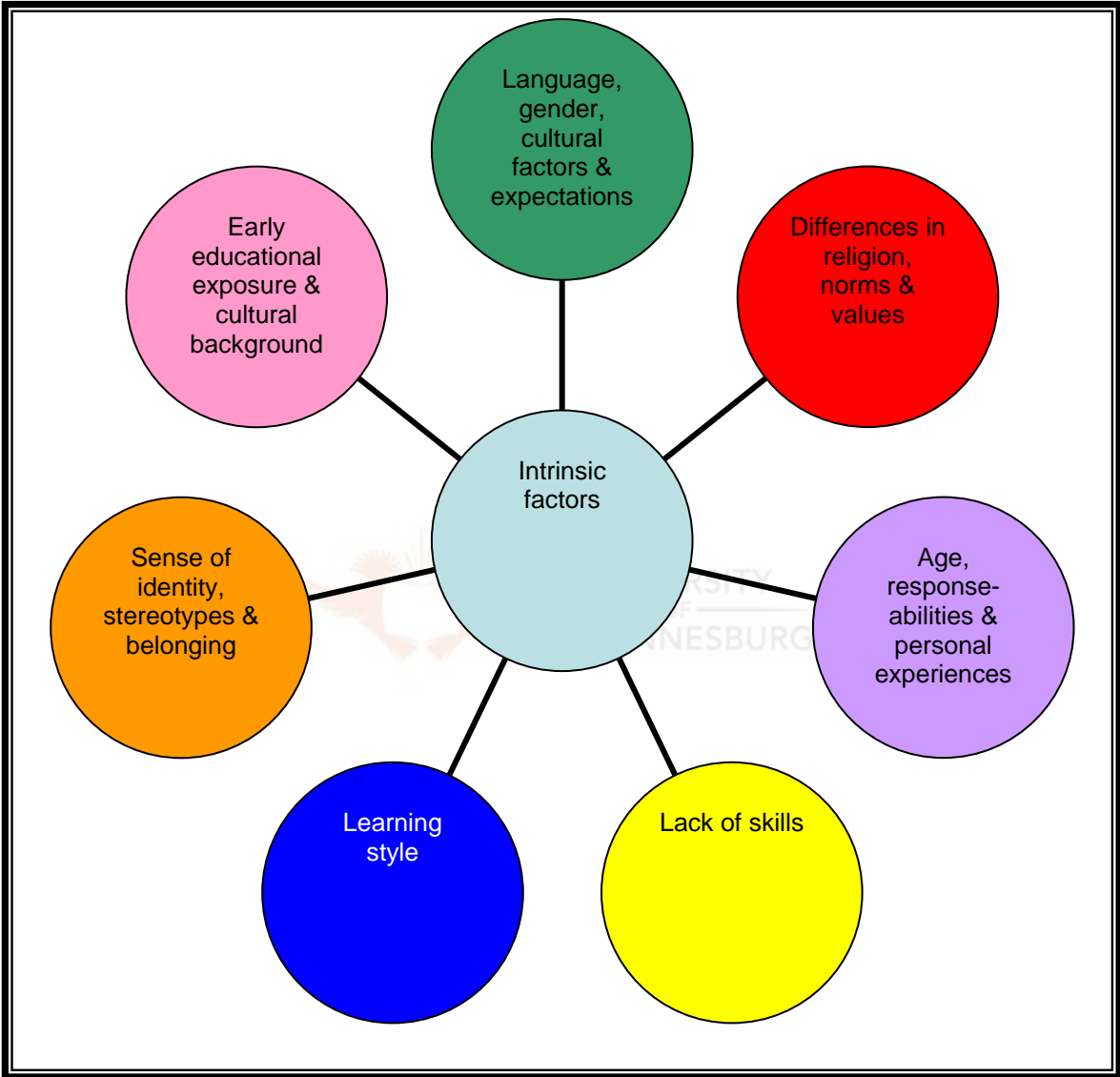
A discussion of intrinsic factors which contributes to high drop out rates of black students from University follows next.

### **3.3. INTRINSIC OR INTERNAL FACTORS**

Intrinsic barriers to learning can also lead to high drop out rates of black students from University. In this literature review, intrinsic factors mentioned include: (1) life stress, age, personal responsibility and experiences and motivation of students; (2) differences in language and culture, as well as norms and religion; (3) interpersonal factors, and differences in learning styles.

The intrinsic factors that contributed to the high drop out rate of black students from University, are summarised in figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3. Intrinsic factors which led to high drop-out rates of black students from University**



### **3.3.1. Life stress, coping skills, age, personal responsibility & experiences, expectations and motivation of students**

Although extrinsic factors such as good role models, socio-economic status, and home background, play an important role in the success or failure of black students, some researchers such as Molefo (2000, p.47) assert that the students themselves have an important role to play in terms of their own motivation, expectations and the personal responsibility they take for their success or failure. I have personally seen many young people work hard at school and University, and go on to succeed in spite of poverty, poor backgrounds and lack of resources.

In addition to the abovementioned extrinsic factors, Malefo's (2000, p.47) study found that intrinsic factors such as motivation, age, acceptance of responsibility as well as the way students coped with life stress played a role in black students' success at University. Results from her research revealed that students who experienced fewer stressful life changes demonstrated problem-solving coping behaviours, and students with higher negative life change scores, demonstrated more maladaptive, emotion-focussed coping efforts. Generally she found that student's whose scores on the stress index were lower, tended to use problem-solving focussed coping efforts, which included seeking other people's help in dealing with stressful life events.

In another study, Van Heerden (1997, p.86-87) found that there was a tendency amongst black South African students to attribute their under-achievements to external or extrinsic factors. These factors included political and socio-economic circumstances, educational institutions, the lecturers, and "the system" in general, as discussed previously. However, whilst Van Heerden agrees that this is understandable considering the past political climate in South Africa, she feels that one cannot completely disregard the element of personal responsibility in terms of individual output and effort. She suggests that what students regard as the cause

of the problem (of failure and drop out), has a major influence on what solutions they consider in addressing the situation.

Following from this, Heese and Badenhorst (1992, p.3-4), quoted in Van Heerden (1997, p.87) point out that an assumption seems to have taken root in South Africa, that education is a commodity, something that can be bought or given. This has led to the idea that education can be given or withheld from a person, and people view themselves as passive receivers or unfairly disadvantaged non-receivers. They go on further to explain that this perception leads to students believing that they may boycott classes and then take sudden remedial action to be “given” enough education to succeed in the examinations. Thus they conclude that active involvement in and personal responsibility for one’s own education is a factor necessary to ensure success.

Louw (1995), and Mbigi and Maree (1995) quoted in Van Heerden (1997, p.87) suggest that although disadvantaged communities and individuals may be tempted to blame others, their circumstances, the apartheid era or the colonial past in South Africa for their dismal fate, that this will not change anything. They assert that it is important for disadvantaged groups in South Africa to overcome a sense of being victims, assert themselves and rise to the challenge of development and reconstruction. In addition to this they recommend that when disadvantaged groups take ownership, personal accountability and responsibility for improving their situation, they can change their future.

In addition to the above findings, Malefo (2000, p.46) found that in her study of black women at a predominantly “white” South African University, that age also played a significant role in student success at University. She found that older women students were generally better achievers at University than younger students, since a positive relationship had also been reported between age and coping efforts. It seems that older women students coped better than younger ones, possibly due to experience and motivation. In other research, Michelson,



(1991) quoted in Malefo, (2000, p.46), found that older students were also better equipped to deal with environmental stressors.

Furthermore, Malefo (2000, p.44) noted that the students' stress levels decreased as they progressed at University, with stress levels higher by 4,58% amongst first year students compared to second year students; and lower by 1,28% amongst third and fourth year students. Thus it appears as if stress levels decreased as students adapted to University life and the academic demands made on them. Malefo (2000, p.44) also found that life stress levels were 15,56% higher among married black women students compared to those classified as single with a relationship. In my opinion, this is likely to be due to the cultural demands made on black South African women and the more subservient role they are expected to play in the marriage, whilst they are expected to think critically and form their own opinions at tertiary level.

In addition to this, Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson and Strauss (2003, p.113), found that white South African University students achieved higher scores than black students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) on personal-emotional adjustment, suggesting an association between race and the experience of psychological and physical well-being. This may reflect the real experiences of the black student as evident in their disclosure of painful events. Significantly more black than white South African students reported painful experiences such as exposure to violence, crime, illness (particularly HIV/AIDS) and death of family members due to crime and illness. Exposure to these events, increased stress levels added to the risk of lower academic scores and resulted in higher drop out rates amongst black students. As a researcher and Educational Psychology student, sensitised to culturally relevant testing and practice, I would be interested to know if the researchers used culturally sensitive tests. Also, it is interesting from a critical point of view that research was only conducted at UCT and not at other previously white Universities in this regard.

Surprisingly enough, Sennett, et al.(2003, p.113), found that there was no significant difference between white and black students on the academic adjustment scale, which was perplexing to them in the light of the evidence that the average grade marks of the black students who participated in the study were disproportionately lower than those of the white students. It appears as if black students are satisfied with their academic adjustment even though they are not performing as well as their white peers. One explanation for this given by Sennett et al.(2003, p.114) may be that black students equate low passing grades with academic success. Added to this, Sennett et al.(2003, p.114) suggest that the stereotype that blacks are less intelligent than whites may be operating to depress the aspirations, academic striving, confidence, and achievement of black students.

Malefo (2000, p.46) also found that there was a high variability in average marks in black women students at a predominantly “white” University, which she contributed largely to motivational factors, whereby family responsibility and/or obligations serve as a driving force behind older students’ determination to succeed in and complete their studies. She found that the low social integration of older women students in her study, who were less likely to participate in campus social activities, could also have been a contributing factor to these students’ slightly higher academic performance. She found it worth noting that although high social integration is thought to have a negative effect on students’ general averages, it is also thought to have a positive effect on the students’ rate of progression. This seems to suggest that there needs to be a balance between alienation of students, as discussed in 3.2.3. and high social integration, where both extremes have negative effects on student performance.

In a similar vein, in an American study, Quick and Shipley (2004, p.32), found that black students entering college for the first time, are likely to hear that they may not succeed for a number of reasons; or that their race is not well represented; or that they may be less likely to succeed than their White counterparts. With this deficit standpoint as their supporting model, it was found that Black students are faced

with the idea that they are already a step behind their counterparts before they even begin.

In addition to these factors, Washington Post columnist and education advocate William Raspberry (quoted in Quick & Shipley, 2004, p.32), suggests that some Black students attributed their lack of success on their own lack of effort and low motivation. He asserts that some Black students are cognisant of the fact that they are not pushing themselves in comparison to their classmates. Thus, they become their own oppressors and defeat themselves. This attitude of self defeat ultimately sets up personal roadblocks that are often unseen to outsiders. This is what is known as internalised oppression, which has caused complacency where there used to be persistence in some Black students, and is often intensified by low expectations.

Education advocate Marian Wright Edelman (quoted in Quick & Shipley, 2004, p.32), speaks of “getting off the paradigm” referring to black students’ need to challenge the above models. She suggests that this “shift” in what has become the normative standard for so long amongst black students, requires a new way of thinking about success and achievement, along with the commitment to academic and social persistence.

Similarly, in agreement with Van Heerden (1997), both Edelman and Raspberry (quoted in Quick & Shipley, 2004, p.32) suggest that black students should enter University expecting to succeed, regardless of whether they fall into a minority category or not. The ownership needs to become the students’, and the norms based on stereotypical expectations should no longer be fact. They suggest that black students stop waiting for white America to change its attitude towards blacks, but rather change the way they (the black students) respond to what they believe the attitude is. This change or “shift” can take place when black students refuse to be number increasers, and begin to expect, demand and partake in the quality

education being received by their white counterparts. The researcher believes that the same should apply in South Africa.

Furthermore, Edelman (quoted in Quick and Shipley, 2004, p.32) in an address to the Harvard University graduating class, suggests that black students, whether advantaged or disadvantaged, should be enthusiastic and energetic when it comes to their studies, and that they alone can motivate themselves, and cannot expect the institution to do so for them. She continues that studies take preparation, time and much effort to complete, and black students should not settle for just “getting by”. She also reminds students that they should not be afraid to take risks, or be criticised; that they challenge the norm, and go after what is rightfully theirs whether they were chosen to be number increasers or as valued members of the institution they attend

This section explained how intrinsic factors such as life stress, coping skills, age, personal experiences and responsibilities, expectations, and motivation could affect drop out rates of black students at University.

Further intrinsic factors such as language, religion and cultural norms are discussed next.

### **3.3.2. Differences in language, cultural norms, and religion**

Another reason found by Van Heerden (1997, p.83) for poor academic results and high University failure rates in South Africa was that the school and University systems at the time were embedded in Western culture, based on the Christian religion, and the language of instruction was either English or Afrikaans, as mentioned previously in this discussion. These languages were foreign to most students who had grown up speaking a vernacular language. The school and University curricula included matters about (for example) foreign countries, electricity, airports and ways of life that which were unknown to many black

students. In spite of pictures and photographs, the new information could not be successfully accommodated into their existing frame of reference.

To explain briefly, in terms of what Piaget (1950) quoted in Schafer (2002, p. 220-221) suggested regarding cognitive processes, people *construct* and *modify* their intellectual schemes by two processes known as *organisation* and *adaptation*. In terms of learning, especially in a new language and/or environment, as is the case with many black University students, a person must undergo *organisation*, a process where existing schemes must be rearranged into new and more complex schemes or structures. The goal of *organisation* is to promote *adaptation*, the process of adapting to the environment.

According to Piaget, *adaptation* occurs through two complementary activities called *assimilation* and *accommodation*. During *assimilation*, the person tries to adapt to a new experience by interpreting it in terms of existing schemes/knowledge. In other words they adapt the new information by trying to construe it as something familiar. eg: If a person has never seen an aeroplane, they may think all flying things are birds. However, what Piaget terms *disequilibrium* occurs when the person notices that the aeroplane does not have feathers or a beak, and does not flap its wings. Following this, a process called *accommodation* occurs, where the person rearranges existing schemas into new and more complex structures. Successful *accommodation* restores *equilibrium*, where there is harmony between one's schemas, for the time being. Thus the person forms a hierarchical scheme consisting of a super-ordinate class of flying objects, with two sub-ordinate classes of birds and aeroplanes.

A student of Piaget's, Lev Vygotsky (1920-1978), quoted in Schafer (2002, p. 246-247), insisted that cognitive growth occurred in a socio-cultural context and that most cognitive skills evolved from social interactions with parents, teachers and others. He believed that each culture provided its children with tools of intellectual adaptation that permitted them to use their basic mental processes more

adaptively. Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky believed that people learn from social interaction and through what he called *scaffolding*. It is in the *zone of proximal development*, which is the difference or “gap” between what a person can do independently or knows, and what he can learn to do through instruction or scaffolding, that social scaffolding or instruction takes place. This process leads to learning and cognitive growth.

Thus, based on the cognitive theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, it would make sense that black students studying in an unfamiliar environment, within a context and in a language that is foreign to their existing schemas, would need assistance in assimilating and accommodating these new experiences, in order to ensure successful adaptation and organisation. Failing this, they are more likely to drop out due to frustration and lack of adaptation.

In this same vein, Lindow (2006, p.44) found a similar problem of language still existed today, in spite of the many reforms in education in South Africa. Black students, who were often schooled in their vernacular language, with English only a second or third language, often had to spend extra hours trying to make sense of English language text books and course notes at Universities, which increased their chances of dropping out. They were also often schooled in a more classical manner where they were not encouraged to question or think for themselves. This is very different to a University environment where students are expected to be critical thinkers.

Furthermore, the researcher has observed that the Christian faith around which the education system at the time centred, differed from the religious beliefs and behaviour of many black students, which centred around ancestor worship, and other forms of indigenous beliefs and values they experienced at home. There was thus a *discontinuity* between home and school (including University) regarding language, religion, stimulation and preparation for formal education, differences in socio-cultural climates, as well as material and non-material “deficits”. Thus during

this time it appears as if very little recognition, if any, was given to indigenous knowledge.

Linking closely to language and religious differences, Van Heerden (1997, p.83) found that cultural expectations, particularly regarding involvement with members of the community and extended family as discussed previously, was another important factor that contributed indirectly to poor academic performance and increased drop out rates. Amongst some students there was also confusion regarding some scientific and anthropological explanations, which conflicted with their religious and/or cultural beliefs, as some events and circumstances were linked directly to mystical causes such as witchcraft, sorcery or the actions of ancestor spirits. For example, a birth defect caused as a result of incest, was seen by many students as the ancestors punishing the mother for some wrong-doing in her past, rather than the actual genetic problems associated with incest, which in itself was not seen as wrong in many black cultures.

Rovai, Gallien and Wighting (2005, p.359), also conducted research, on cultural factors affecting African-American academic performance in Higher Education. They coined the term “The African-American achievement gap” to describe the disparity in educational outcomes between the majority white and minority African American (black) populations. They examined the underperformance of African-American university students by providing an overview of the major cultural, and communication characteristics of black students as well as the schooling conditions and practices at predominantly White universities. Schwartz (2000), quoted in Rovai et.al.(2005, p.360), commented that efforts to close the academic achievement gap, where the black minority, are achieving far below their white and Asian American peers, has been largely unsuccessful and that differences in educational performance persist at all achievement levels.

Rovai et.al.(2005, p.360), suggest that some of the reasons for this “achievement gap” include limited education levels of parents; students’ lack of access to high



quality preschool, primary and high school education; poor study habits; as well as negative peer influences. In addition, further difficulties include White faculty and administrators who have low academic expectations of black students on campus; Eurocentric curricula and pedagogy; poor campus racial climate; relatively limited financial resources amongst many black College students; and the absence of a strong and relatively large core of black students on campus. (Bennett, 2002, and McWhorter, 2000, quoted in Rovai et. al., 2005, p.360). This confirms much of the South African research described previously. The reader will notice that the above mentioned factors link very closely to external factors rather than internal factors. It is often difficult to separate the two, so the researcher had to choose sometimes where to include the information. The same is true in Chapter Four where the findings are discussed.

Adding to this Boyd (1997), quoted in Rovai et. al. (2005, p.360) have found that the hip-hop “gangsta” culture, as popularised in the media, as well as the move away from more positive images of blacks, may have contributed to greater sentiments of apathy and alienation of young black students in America, in a misguided effort to reaffirm black culture. In South African schools and Universities, this hip-hop “gangsta” culture is very much prevalent amongst the black youth, as they attempt to gain some sort of identity. This apathy and further alienation of black youth from the dominant western culture currently experienced in Universities in South Africa, may be a contributing factor to poor academic achievement.

To summarise, intrinsic factors such as learning in a second or third language, within a different social context, can cause difficulties in adapting and assimilating new information and thus learning becomes difficult. Furthermore, differences in early education, culture and religion add to these difficulties for black students at University. Lack of support and mentorship on these areas, along with a need to form a sense of identity and belonging, are all factors that contribute to high drop out rates of black students at Universities.



Further intrinsic factors such as interpersonal factors and differences in learning styles are discussed next.

### **3.3.3. Interpersonal factors and differences in students' learning styles**

In addition to the poor quality of education and teaching many students had to cope with during the apartheid era in South Africa, Van Heerden (1997, p.82) found that in the homes of black students, learning mostly took place through observation, imitation and participation. In general, children seldom questioned their parents or other adults out of respect for them, fear of reprimand and because questioning was not encouraged. In turn, parents allegedly did not question their children to test if they understood or comprehended phenomena or instructions, and thus most black children just accepted matters at face value and were not encouraged to be curious or seek causal relationships or inferences. This means that due to the use of "classical teaching" black schools in South Africa at the time, students often were never taught to think critically, and this may have contributed to poor performance at University, where critical thinking skills are essential.

In schools, teachers emphasised rote learning with little comprehension or critical thought as to what was "learnt", thus perpetuating their own poor training and unfamiliarity with the Eurocentric emphasis on education. As with the home environment, students were not encouraged to ask questions or query issues, and thus when they reached University, their analytical, critical thinking and creative skills were limited, resulting in poorer academic results and increasing the possibilities of their dropping out altogether.

Apart from the unfamiliarity of the University culture, as well as the passive mechanical learning style taught at black schools, Van Heerden (1997, p.82) found that students' passive learning style continued at University level. The absence of an appropriate frame of reference which allowed material to be accommodated and interpreted, together with problems with the language of instruction strengthened

the tendency for memorisation rather than perceptive learning. (Refer back to 3.3.2. for the discussion on Piaget and Vygotsky). Once the volume of work became too large, or students were required to answer a question in a more critical or evaluating manner, this learning style failed. Thus inadequate study habits, poor planning skills and correct use of available time to study further aggravated and caused poor results and increased the drop out rates.

In summary, interpersonal factors such as upbringing and learnt behaviour, along with inadequate studying and learning skills, poor planning and critical thinking skills, as well as a passive learning style, were further intrinsic factors that helped contribute to high drop out rates of black students at Universities.

### **3.4. CONCLUSION**

Both the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that contributed to the high drop out rates and poor academic performance amongst black students in Higher Education Institutions both abroad and in South Africa, are discussed from the available literature in this Chapter. These factors are summarised in figures 3.2 and 3.3.

In Chapter 4 that follows, the research findings regarding the experiences of the black students in the Educational Psychology Masters course at a Gauteng University during the years 2002 to 2006 will be discussed. In addition to this some of their reasons for dropping out or nearly dropping out of the course will also be discussed, and these will be linked to the literature reviewed in this Chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

As discussed in Chapter One, this inquiry has attempted to explore the experiences of black students who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the Masters in Educational Psychology course at a Gauteng University during the years 2002 to 2006. It must be remembered that each participant experienced the course or similar events from a different perspective and context, so these findings, represent their individual interpretation of events that took place.

The above links to the social constructivist framework on which this research is based, which considers the participants' views, describes them within a setting or context, and explores the meanings the participants personally held on the issue being investigated (ie: their experiences of dropping out or nearly dropping out of the Educational Psychology Master's course).

Thus, bearing this in mind, it is my intention as a researcher, to present the information I gathered in this inquiry to the reader, representing the views of the participants at a unique time, place and context, according to what the participants experienced at the time of the inquiry.

This Chapter begins with an overview of the data collection and analysis that took place, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings according to the common themes which emerged, bearing in mind that the research findings "did not come from nowhere, (but) from an

interaction of the values and assumptions of the researcher with the particular historical representation of the phenomenon under study". Thus the participants' voices have been used throughout this section as they were directly involved in the construction and negotiation of the meaning that was created from their experiences. In this manner they act as partners in relationship with the researcher in reporting the meanings they have constructed and the researcher avoids misinterpreting these meanings.

#### **4.2. OVERVIEW OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

After the interviews with participants, the researcher transcribed the data. Next, after reading through the transcripts, the constant comparative method of data analysis was used, to analyse the data collected during the interviews with the participants. The aforementioned process was described in detail in Chapter 2 but a brief summary is given before the findings are discussed.

The researcher set about looking for possible reasons for dropping out or nearly dropping out that began to emerge from the data (transcripts). Brief notes were made in the space left on the right hand side of the transcripts about these reasons in the form of basic categories. This process was repeated two to three times to familiarise myself with the data and added any other ideas/categories that emerged. In total I had about thirty basic ideas/categories which I coded from 1 to 30.

I then proceeded to record these basic categories under broader headings on cards. From there I identified six common themes that linked to the external and internal factors I discussed in the literature review in chapter two. I began fitting each of the many ideas/categories into the six dominant themes that emerged during analysis of the data,

and discarded any single categories that did not seem common across the board, or only applied to one or two participants. A clear “audit trail” was shown in Chapter 2 of this process.

It must be borne in mind, that having immersed myself into the data collecting process, whilst doing the transcribing and during the process of looking for categories and then finally condensing these many categories into more comprehensive themes, that much of the process involved not just physical coding and analysis. As Merriam (1998, p.156) suggests, the process was often highly intuitive, and the researcher cannot always explain where an insight, that may later become a finding, came from, or how relationships amongst data were detected, although I have attempted to do this as far as possible to ensure that my findings are trustworthy.

A detailed discussion of the themes that emerged from the data analysis follows in the next part of this chapter.

### **4.3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Previously in Chapter One, I discussed that the range of factors resulting in barriers to learning could be viewed on a dynamic, interactive continuum from internal to external systems factors (Landsberg, 2005, p.17). This also links well with the bio-ecological systems theory model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1998) and discussed in Chapter One according to Landsberg (2005, p. 10-11), where all the systems making up the participants’ world, had an impact on them.

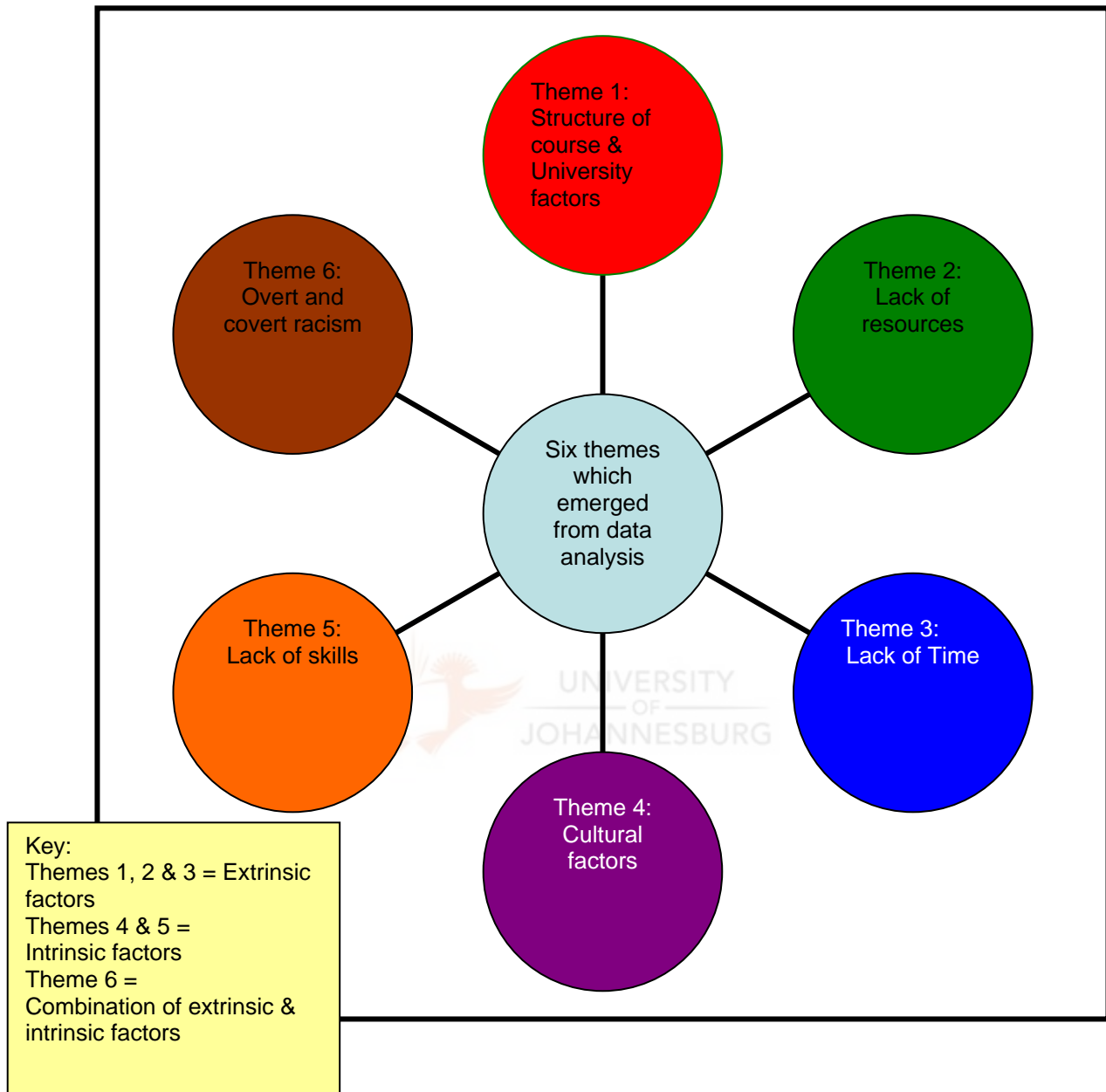
In addition to this, in Chapter Three, I reviewed the literature available on the reasons for the drop out rate of black learners from tertiary

institutions in various parts of the world as well as in South Africa, allowing for congruency by discussing these factors under the heading “internal or intrinsic factors”, “external or extrinsic factors” and “both internal and external factors”. Following in the same vein, I shall discuss the themes that emerged in this particular study under the same headings.

Following many months of data analysis, it was found that six major themes emerged during the study namely: “the structure of the course and university systems”; “lack of time”; “access to and lack of resources”; “cultural factors”; “lack of certain skills”; as well as “covert and overt racism”. These are illustrated in figure 4.1. on the next page.



**Figure 4.1. Themes that emerged from data analysis**



The three themes that relate to the “structure of the course and University systems”, “lack of resources”; as well as “lack of time”; are discussed under the overall heading of “external or extrinsic factors”. The two themes “cultural factors” and “lack of skills”, are discussed under the heading “internal factors”. Finally, the sixth theme, “covert and overt racism” is discussed, which is discussed within the dual realm of

“internal” as well as “external factors”, which may have contributed to the drop out rate of black students.

The researcher made use of **direct quotations from participants** so as not to contaminate the evidence that supported the findings. These are not necessarily grammatically correct.

#### **4.3.1. External or extrinsic factors**

As discussed previously in Chapter One, external factors that may give rise to barriers to learning are those factors within systems that are in the environment and outside or “external” to the individual. In Bronfenbrenner’s model, external factors can be located in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Landsberg, 2005, p.17). The first external factor that is discussed is the “structure of the course and University factors”.

##### **4.3.1.1. Structure of the course and university factors**

To enable the reader to have a clearer picture of what was involved in the Educational Psychology Masters Programme up until the end of 2006, Table 4.1. gives an outline of the course modules as they were during the time this research was conducted. It must also be considered that this course is meant to be “part time”, which in itself is a misnomer, or even a misrepresentation, when students discover the “man hours” required to obtain sufficient credits. (See 4.3.1.3. where this is discussed in further detail).



**Table 4.1. Outline of the Educational Psychology Master's course modules from 2004-2006 as accredited by SAQA and HPCSA**

Core Modules	Module Name	Credits	Notional hours
1	Assessment & evaluation	16	160
2	Theoretical framework	8	80
3	Practical	20	200
4	Psychopathology	16	160
5	Research	16	160
6	Therapeutic Interventions	36	360
<b>Foundational Modules</b>			
7	Learning Support	20	200
8	Community Psychology	20	200
9	Inclusive Education	16	160
10	Career Development	8	80
<b>Research Report</b>	To be completed before end of internship	120	1200
<b>Internship followed by Board Exam</b>	One year full time after completion of 10 modules making up course work component.		

One of the biggest complaints regarding the structure of the course from participants was the **times of lectures**. Prior to 2005, lectures were held

once to twice a week in the afternoons from 15h00, some Saturdays, and then there were block weeks held in the middle of the school term, requiring students to take a week off work once a semester.

This is one area where change had been apparent. Since 2005, lectures are now held during afternoons, Saturdays, and during school holidays as far as is possible, so as not to impinge on school hours and thus accommodate students better.

Another area that many participants found difficult was an **unexpectedly high work load**. This can clearly be seen in Table 4.1. They said that in many courses clear guidelines of what was expected of them from the course was not given. In addition to this, many participants complained that **assessment criteria** were not given, or were not clear, in some of the modules. In some cases assessment criteria were reported to have been changed during the year. In some courses, the participants felt that work was added at the last minute and requirements for portfolios or other assignments were not mentioned right from the beginning. This also impinged on their time and planning as they were suddenly faced with unexpected work. This caused a great deal of stress and concern for many students. Lack of time, and the more full time commitment required to complete all the necessary tasks and course work are discussed in more detail in the third theme (4.3.1.3.).

Furthermore, many of the participants felt that there were an **excessive number of assignments and presentations** that had to be made, but no credit or feedback was given for many of them.

*“..the course is well organised...this is a good, comprehensive course...it produces well rounded psychologists....but it seems too much in terms of content ..”* (Participant I, lines 30-33)

There was also some doubt as to the reason for the **large overlap** of many of the courses, which could have been condensed, and thus reduced some of the work-load and repetition. In the words of one participant:

*“I found the most difficult part of the course was too (many) assignments whose purpose could have been easily served by class presentations, workshops and seminars,....this factor contributed to me dropping out of the course”* (Participant J, incomplete sentences Q.5 & 6).

Some participants questioned the **relevance and intensity** of some of the modules and course materials, specifically mentioning Learning Support and Inclusion modules in this regard. They also questioned the relevance of some of the course material for an African context.

*“I am not sure if the theory part accommodates different contexts...in practice there needs to be some changes regarding the way psychopathology and therapy are taught.....it needs to be looked at.”*(Participant A, lines 482-487).

Others were concerned about the lack of **availability** of many of the **books and articles** prescribed as discussed in theme 2 under “lack of resources” in 4.3.1.2.

Two participants clearly suggested that students **keep up to date** with the work and not ask for extensions, as things become compounded further down the line and add to the pressure of keeping up.

*“...if you have an assignment or any presentation do it when the time is right because once you postpone, you....are not going to be able to make up for that time again...”*(Participant H, lines 454-467).

*“...you want to ask (the lecturers): “can I extend this , due to this and that”...but once you fall off...you find you battle to catch up...at the end you feel so much pressure and you feel like dropping out”* (Participant B, lines 107-113).

Many participants felt that their **supervision needs** were not adequately met. This is discussed further in 4.3.1.2. under “lack of human resources”.

Another area many students found lacking was **academic writing support**, especially prior to 2004. Many participants were second or third language English speakers and found they received little support in this area. Most **lecturers** did not have the time or the inclination to help them.

From 2004, a post-graduate writing centre was opened at the University, and this has been a great help to all the participants interviewed who were registered during this period. Some participants did not know the centre existed. I have personally made use of the writing centre on many occasions, and attended special group meetings that were organised to help students with the writing of assignments, research proposals and dissertations. Lack of academic writing skills is discussed in 4.3.1.2.

Many participants felt that some of the **lecturers** were aloof, unapproachable and racist.

*“I felt the lecturers were quite aloof and not supportive”* (Participant B, Incomplete Sentences Q.4.).

Other lecturers were found to be available and helpful.

*“I felt the lecturers were helpful but some forgot the fact that we are from different academic backgrounds”* (Participant D, Incomplete Sentences Q.4.).

The above issues are discussed in more detail in the themes that follow.

From my own personal experience, I know that in 2004 an internal audit was carried out in the Educational Psychology Department, by two lecturers who were at that time, external to the University. This was requested by the new management of the Department of Educational Psychology who took over around that time. They work-shopped with, listened to students and wrote up reports about the difficulties the present students were having with the course, lecturers, lecture times, course work and so on. They asked the two student groups they worked with to make recommendations for changes, and I have noticed that almost all the suggestions were implemented, where this was possible.

Some areas of change that I have noticed, and this has been confirmed by my research findings, is that since the beginning of 2005, there have been changes to the timing of lectures to better accommodate teachers and other students who work and study, the implementation of a better supervision system, more co-ordination between the lecturers and the different modules, a better spreading out of the modules, workload and examinations between first and second year, as well as better organisation of assignments and presentations.

However, it appears as if the completion of the **200 practical hours** is still a “bone of contention” amongst the participants. This is because of the many difficulties around seeing clients at schools, due to absenteeism, difficulty accessing them at times convenient to the school and students, travelling times, work commitments and not having access to clients, or sufficient referrals to see clients at the Institute for Child and Adult Guidance (ICAG). Some participants reported that they were not given “white” clients or the white clients refused to see them. This was not the case according to participants registered after 2004.

*“..some of the issues were not explained to us...like practicals...are not in the timetable” (Participant H, lines 49-51).*

In order to assist in the many challenges they face during the two year course, many participants suggested that there be some sort of pre-course “get together” or orientation of some kind to brief students about the course and its demands, as well as deal with some of the skills they may be lacking such as computer literacy, academic writing and others. This time could also be used to orientate students to the University systems, such as the library, academic writing centre and so on. In addition to this, students felt they could make use of the December break, prior to starting the course, to begin to read and prepare for the course before lectures began, as well as buy some of the books and access some of the articles they needed to read. According to two current black students, it appears as if some of these ideas have been implemented to a small degree by the Educational Psychology Department this year.

#### 4.3.1.2. Lack of resources

The second primary reason for many of the participants dropping out or nearly dropping out of the course was a lack of resources. These resources were not only financial, but also related to human resources, access to material resources such as computers, transport, books, and so on. Although most students found the course was extremely costly, there were also many “**hidden**” **expenses** that they were not prepared for. These included travelling expenses, photocopies and books. These participants sum this up as follows:

*“...financial security contributed to me possibly dropping out...how can I do my internship?.....if I can't work who's going to provide for me...and it costs one so much a month to travel here (to classes)...you have to pay for the course...buy books....make photocopies...you have to pay things you don't plan for ...”* (Participant C, lines 369-381 and 415-446).

*“...I was the only one working at home ...one of the reasons I had to quit the course was finances...unexpected expenses...”* (Participant G, lines 186-216).

A common complaint from the participants was the lack of financial support from the University in the form of **bursaries or funding**. Although merit bursaries were available, most black students did not qualify for these, as their Honours results were not high enough. Many felt that more money should have been available for post-graduate students who needed financial assistance.

*“I did get a bursary to pay the fees....but there are still so many other things that are involved so many other costs ..the petrol for example ..I*

*travel far...at times I come to university four times a week and that is a lot.....my finances are dwindling this year ...the books that we have to buy and the handouts that we have to give our classmates when we present ..it has strained my finances because the petrol price has really affected it a lot....”* (Participant K, lines 102-120).

**Travelling expenses** became a real problem for many of the students, especially when they found themselves travelling long distances to University not just one or two days a week as expected, but sometimes up to four or five times a week, especially in the second year. The excessive **rise in fuel costs** also impacted the pockets of most students, including myself. This meant that taxi fares also rose, and the amount of money budgeted for travelling was not sufficient. Longer distances also meant unexpected running and servicing costs for those who had their own cars.

*“...finances this year are a serious problem...you are using your own car, you have to pour petrol for work and also to come over here it is means ee more money again which will be a struggle for me...”* (Participant H, lines 122-130).

Another financial difficulty emerged in the form of “**unexpected or hidden costs**” that students mentioned related to the course, as mentioned in some of the previous quotations. They had expected to buy textbooks and make a limited amount of photocopies, but most discovered once in the course, that there were many expenses related to presenting to the group. This involved making copies for each member of the group when an individual presented a topic. Many of the books and articles were out of print or unavailable at times which meant extra expenses copying these. Some students revealed feeling guilty



and unethical regarding copyright laws, and yet to pass and keep up with the work, they sometimes found themselves having to do so.

*“...in terms of cash flow I would say um it was like one of the surprises ....even the useful things had a way of infringing on your pockets...you had to go for supervision....for lectures .....there would be ee clients that you must see....you must budget for petrol and so on.....then others like the photo coping stuff.....getting text books and materials and so on those are the things you needed to budget (for)..”* (Participant E, lines 420-450).

A further common difficulty related to time issues discussed next in 2.3.1.3., was the need for some participants to quit their jobs or work part time, thus accepting a lower salary. In many cases this had a direct impact on the participant's **financial status**. This meant relying on their families or partners for financial assistance. **Finances** (or lack thereof) were thus another primary cause for the drop out of many of the participants from the course, especially if they were bread-winners. Although they were capable of coping with the course work, finances became an issue, leading some of the participants to have to choose to take care of their families or complete the course. This left them no option but to drop out.

*“I would have made it if I could resign from my job and concentrate on the work...but I had too many other commitment...to others..”* (Participant J, lines 49-51).

According to my findings, single students, living alone or at home, or married women students who had husbands that could support them were less likely to drop out than married men or single women with children who had more financial obligations and other responsibilities,

especially to family. This was because married women or single students (in most cases, without children) could still rely on husbands or other family members to support them during their studies. They were more likely to be able to stop working or work part time, thus relieving a lot of pressure on them both financially and time wise.

*“I was lucky that I could resign from my job because my husband could support me and my kids...he was not a typical African man...he would cook...or I would never have made it!”* (Participant A, lines 498-502 0.

Some participants related feeling guilty and embarrassed by the fact that they had to rely on their families or partners for financial assistance, especially in some cases where they had previously been financially independent.

South African researcher, Van Heerden, (1997, p. 86-87), found that some students had to assist with the care of elderly relatives and younger children, as well as give gifts to unemployed relatives and large amounts of money was often needed to cover funeral costs of family members, frequently at the expense of paying for their own studies. This resulted in them dropping out as they could no longer afford their financial obligations to studies

**Material resources**, such as **computers and printers**, that some participants either did not have at home or did not have easy access to except at University, added to the stress levels of many participants. In order to alleviate some of the stress of working at University, some participants found it necessary to buy their own computers, which made it easier for them to meet deadlines, but again drained their financial resources.

*“..I didn’t have a computer or the means to buy one...so I had to work at a friend...which was inconvenient to her and her kids...”* (Participant B, verification of themes).

This added to the time they took to complete assignments and research, as they had to work in the library or computer laboratory instead of being able to work at home at more convenient times. Some participants reported that the **library** was often closed when it was convenient for them to access it. This included school holiday periods, evenings and Saturdays. I found this to be the case especially up to 2004, and personally had to make allowances for the times the library was open. It seems that over the past few years, library times have been revised and it is open for longer periods, and at more convenient times to better accommodate part time students.

*“...many of the books were on three day short loan so you had to work there (in the library) or copy it...or they were not available at all...”* (Participant B, verification of themes).

Some participants also complained about the fact that many of the books and articles that they needed to complete assignments, research and presentations were not always available in the library when they needed them, and some prescribed books were out of print or not available at the book stores or in some cases not even through the internet. To remedy the situation, over the past few years, lecturers have made requests for more copies of books that are commonly prescribed for some of the courses, and copies have also been placed on reserve so that they are available when students come in to work.

**Human resources**, was another area where students found themselves lacking. Some participants felt that they were not made to feel welcome

by the other students in their groups and/or there was very little group support. Some even felt marginalised by the others.

*“The people in my class were quite strange, and seemed as if they were not willing to offer assistance, even forming a study group was a battle...”* (Participant B, Incomplete Sentences, Q.12).

*“People tended to go into their own ethnic groups eventually in the course rather than inter- mixing or sharing”* (Participant B, lines 535-536).

Many participants felt that there seemed to be only a few lecturers who genuinely cared about what happened to them.

*“..these two lecturers...unfortunately enough for them it was political but there were another two lecturers who if it were not for them ....actually I said that’s it I am going to quit....they said you are going to stay.....and out of respect for them I stayed...ultimately I felt that if a white person can understand me even if the others are opposed....I stayed”* (Participant A, lines 233-250).

This was especially prominent in the years prior to 2004. In the past two years, participants that dropped out actually mentioned that they would have left sooner if it wasn’t for the support and encouragement they received from their groups. Participants who have stayed in the course, in spite of adverse conditions and personal circumstances commented that their groups and the lecturers have carried them and supported them so much that they have been able to stay in the course. This was especially so in the past two or three years.

In the words of these participants:

*“The lecturers were patient and available in times of need” (Participant D, Incomplete Sentences Q.13.).*

*“I found my class mates and lecturers very libertarian and loving, except for one lecturer who was racist, arrogant and practise her oppressive psychology against black learners” (Participant J, lines 34-35).*

In addition to the above needs, many women participants felt that they needed more support and understanding from their families and spouses. Child care needs and household chores was an area that many found difficult to cope with, if they received no help from others at home. These responsibilities impinged on their study times and often added to their stress and along with other factors led to them having to drop out.

Another area of human resources that was found lacking especially by black students who dropped out prior to 2004, was that their **supervision needs** were not met, and that they were left to themselves to deal with personal problems or clients. Some felt it was a racist issue but others commented that the supervisors felt they were not equipped to supervise black students or students with black clients. A further difficulty linked to supervision needs was that many participants felt they had nobody to talk to if they needed help, especially those participants who were in the course prior to 2004.

*“..I was one of the people who never got supervision because....my supervisor didn't understand when I had to do therapy in vernacular...she did not understand vernacular...so she was not prepared to supervise me as she said she did not understand....I was at a disadvantage because maybe I failed to learn what I was supposed to*

*learn during my practical...because someone did not understand..”*  
(Participant A, lines 650-651 & 658-666).

From my own experience, I think that this was not just a problem for black students as I had a similar difficulty. Lack of supervision was one of the primary reasons I nearly dropped out of the course at the beginning of second year.

After complaints from many students, this area has been addressed significantly, and proper, well organised supervision structures are in place at present to address all student needs. None of the participants who are currently in the course mentioned that supervision was a problem area. In fact all were exceptionally complimentary of supervision they were receiving, and that in many cases, access to good supervision and support had been the reason they had not dropped out of the course.



An **intern mentorship programme** is also currently in place, where the interns are allocated Master's students to mentor/assist during their two years of course work. Within the structure, second year students are also allocated to first year students. The interns and students are thus available to help one other with issues ranging from time management skills, to report writing, to personal issues. The interns report to the Educational Psychology Department once a quarter, so that any issues that arise with the course or issues that can lead to potential “drop outs” are addressed immediately. This system seems to have worked extremely well this year (2006) as there was only one white person who dropped out from the entire Masters programme, and that was a personal choice. Issues and difficulties that arose this year were thus dealt with adequately through a well established mentorship and

supervision programme that has been instituted and refined over the past few years.

#### 4.3.1.3. Time factors

Time was one of the factors mentioned by all the participants interviewed as being one of the primary factors that contributed to them dropping out or nearly dropping out of the course. Also, most of the difficulties the participants experienced relating to time, and that led to them being stressed, were due to external factors. Time management issues will be discussed under “internal factors” and specifically “lack of skills” further on in this chapter.

*“When we started here we were told that this is a part time course, but only to find that this needs more time than we thought..”* (Participant H, lines 36-43).

As voiced by the quote above, many participants mentioned the fact that the course was marketed as a **part time course**, whereas in reality it turned out to be **more full time**. Many of the participants reported that this caused a good deal of pressure and stress for them. This is clearly stated by some of the participants regarding this factor as quoted below:

*“...most of the black students who do Masters are working so they take it that it’s going to be a part time course, only to find out later during the year or even in the second year that it is more of a full time course and now that it impinges on our time...so that is one of the reasons (for) burnout and stress out because of the two fulltime jobs that you have...”* (Participant K, lines 21-32).

*“I would change the marketing of the course as 30% part time and 70% full time” (Participant E, Incomplete sentences Q.10).*

However, on reflection, this participant also said that she would not have believed anyone who told her in the beginning that she would not be able to cope with the time demands of the course because she was *“so elated that her dream of becoming an Educational Psychologist was finally coming through (true)”* (Participant E, Incomplete sentences, Q.2).

Having completed the MEd Psychology programme, with ten modules including 200 practical hours myself, I agree with the participants' comments that the course should be marketed as a full time or three quarter (75%) time course, and that students should be warned of the quantity of time and level of commitment necessary, especially in the second year of study. Referring back to table 4.1. makes one aware of just how intense the course was. **The full time versus part time** nature of the course clearly added to the pressures and stress the participants experienced, because many found it difficult and even sometimes impossible to balance the demands of full time work, university studies, family and other personal commitments.

The **many roles** some of the participants found they had to juggle became too much for them. This was one of the primary causes for three of the participants having to drop out of the course. In the words of two participants:

*“I mean you’ve got a full time job you’ve got a full family running and then you’ve got your studies and in one way or other you tend to sacrifice one for the other..... studying on a part time basis you’ve got a lot of responsibilities and no you cannot just drop everything and then*



*say I do this on a full time basis and I will come fix whatever with the family later...."* (Participant B, lines 68-71 and lines 176-180).

*"There was not a point where I said okay because now I am studying I'm not a daughter in law....the role as a wife is still expected, the role as a mother is still expected for me to fulfil, I could not shake the issue that I was a mother, ....and so as time goes on you negotiate, the tensions mount up...my role as a working person...I am kind of like a breadwinner... so sometimes my studies would suffer, sometimes my work would suffer, sometimes my family issues would suffer.."* (Participant E, lines 268-274).

These participants eventually dropped out because they felt their families and work commitments had to take priority over their studies.

In this study, the men who participated also revealed the sometimes overwhelming burden placed on them to provide for their own plus extended family members. All the men interviewed faced enormous pressures to keep a balance between their work, family and study commitments. In all cases this pressure was one of the primary contributing factors leading to them dropping out of the course. In their own words:

*"I had to drop out because I could not cope with the demands of my full-time job...the course needed full time engagement"* (Participant J, incomplete sentences Q. 14 & 16).

*"...is this course really appropriate for students who are in full time employment, who might have other obligations....for people who have family related responsibilities?"* (Participant I, addition to incomplete sentences).

Linked to the course being more fulltime than part-time, were the **unexpected demands on their time** that participants experienced. They felt that they were not always warned upfront from the beginning of the course about extra lecture days and/or extra courses such as research that were added in the second year. Many mentioned the extra time needed to meet classmates to prepare for group presentations. In addition to this they needed a vast amount of time to complete their 200 compulsory practical hours, (refer back to page 126 and Table 4.1.), which entailed extra days at schools or at university, as well as extra travelling time.

*“..especially this black guy in my class...one of the biggest reasons (he)..couldn't finish was because (he) could not make the practical, there's no way the system accommodated him. He was a family man he had a wife and kids and there was no way the systems accommodated him in his practical work...and he couldn't leave work ...and do all the hours he had to complete. It came to a point where he had to make a choice and although he completed the course work, he could not complete the practical hours...so he quit the course”* (Participant A, lines 292-296).

On the topic of travelling time, many participants found that they spent a good deal of **time travelling** to and from University, as they lived long distances away. Participants who had their own cars found it difficult enough, but those who had to rely on public transport found they wasted a lot of precious time waiting for taxis and/or buses, or relying on others' help, often ending up late for classes or group meetings. A few of the women participants were also concerned about their **personal safety**, especially when they had to use public transport late at night due to evening lectures or only having time in the night to go to the library.

*“...it means going to the library...and at nine at night coming back all alone...I mean with all the hi-jacking incidents and all that everybody at home they are phoning me ...you’re afraid for your own safety on your route home..”*(Participant B, lines 309-317).

On a personal note, I also found that I spent a vast amount of time travelling to and from lectures, as I live quite far from University. I was also afraid to travel home late at night, as I had previously been in two attempted hijackings. I had very little time for my family and friends, but my husband and father were extremely supportive emotionally, financially, and physically, taking up a lot of my previous responsibilities themselves, such as shopping, cooking and cleaning, to give me more time to concentrate on my studies. If this were not so, I may well have had to drop out too.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that travelling long distances and fear for their own safety added further to the stress levels of the participants, and added to the time needed for the course, as well as impinged on time with family and work obligations, thus leading to some participants having to drop out of the course even though they were coping with the work.

One participant had to take almost a month off work and the course, as he almost suffered a nervous breakdown trying to cope with the time demands and pressures of the course, his work and family commitments. In his own words:

*“one of the reasons why it was so difficult for me was ....having to be two places at the same time... when I was supposed to be teaching at that time I was also expected to be here as well (at University) and*

*sometimes I had to....not attend you know the classes at that time and so I attend two days here three days there ...so that I can satisfy my work as I had to be there and I also had to be here (University)...."* (Participant I, lines 81 -86 & 92).

This could have resulted in him dropping out permanently, as was the case with another participant who found he could no longer keep up with all his responsibilities as well as his studies.

*"I struggled with time to work on my assignments and preparation for class presentations because of my fulltime work and family responsibilities"* (Participant J, incomplete sentences Q.6 &14).

I discussed these difficulties experienced in more detail under the themes "lack of skills" and "structure of the course".

Many of the participants found it difficult to ask their bosses or principals for **time off work** as the demands of the course increased. Some ran out of leave or had to "lie" about being sick when in fact they were at University. Stricter legislation regarding leave from schools also hampered participants even when their principals were understanding in this regard.

If **examination timetables** were not available well in advance, participants could not always apply for leave far enough in advance. This led to some participants feeling guilty about not being upfront and honest, as well as feeling they were letting their students and/or work colleagues down when they had to take "sick leave" to write exams. The participants voiced this as follows:

*"...at times I just have to stay away from school... if I have to be able to cope and I don't think that is conducive for the environment and for my conscience as a working person..."* (Participant K, lines 93-97).

*"..with school regulations now of late, when you are absent you need to come up with a substitute and when you have to write examinations you've got to submit everything in time..."* (Participant B, lines 252-258).

Some participants experienced **hostility and jealousy from colleagues, bosses and Principals**, as they seemed to feel threatened by the fact that they were furthering their studies and were not always at work, due to needing extra time at University. They even went as far as trying to sabotage some of the participants' efforts to study.

*"..my Principal is not understanding ...I travel far, at times I come to University four times a week"* (Participant K, lines 85-91 & 104-105).

*"...the Principal he was very cold toward me...he's unsupportive, he's not willing to listen to me...he is forever giving me more work ...the leave and stuff it's quite difficult...and you know they (the other teachers) don't speak to me because all I do when I get to school I do work.."* (Participant C lines 237-259).

*"...you find that in the school the principal's highest level of education is just a secondary or primary teacher's diploma....you study for your Master's it goes as a threat to them...and they have a way of getting back with you like giving extra classes and then if you cannot then they will say to you it's because you are studying...those are the kinds of things that add pressure to studying part time..."*(Participant B, lines 296-315).

This need for extra time for their studies forced many of the participants to either **quit their jobs or work part time** in order to cope with the demands of the course. Others wished that they could have had the opportunity to make arrangements to take proper leave or make alternative arrangements to accommodate their studies better, and thus may not have had to drop out.

*"...I had to resign from my job"* (Participant A Incomplete sentences Q.8)

*"...when I look at that type of context I might find that some of the others are not working or working part time and that they do have flexi hours whereas I have to work a full full day...I think had I known that it was going to be so demanding...maybe I would have applied for leave then or maybe resigned then in order to do it on a full time course basis, because I thought it was part time like all the other part time courses we have had. I was not prepared or aware of the intensity that the demands that have been placed on this course....it is very demanding...it needs all your time"*(Participant K, lines 334-337 & lines 391-401).

As the researcher, I can relate personally to the above findings, as I too had to take a drop in salary in my second year of study and resign from my HOD position in the school because it was impossible to carry out the duties expected of me by the school and cope with my studies. I was also given junior instead of senior (matric) classes as I was told that the seniors missed out on too much work when I was away at lectures. Being away from work regularly caused a lot of conflict between the other staff, my principal and myself. When I was ill they automatically assumed that I was at University, and I experienced a lot of jealousy and animosity from my colleagues.

Corroborating these research findings, Sailes, (1993, p. 179), who conducted research at Indiana University in the USA, found that the necessity for many black students to work full time in order to support themselves and often their families, caused high drop out rates amongst part time students, and made studying full time almost impossible. In addition to this, low levels of parent education, resulted in the need for many black students to begin working in early adulthood, to support themselves and their families, thus forcing them to drop out of tertiary studies.

#### **4.3.2. Internal factors**

According to Landsberg (2005, p.17), barriers to learning may be as a result of internal factors, which are those factors or systems situated within the individual as a system. I shall discuss the two themes “lack of skills” and “cultural factors” under the heading “internal factors”, although there are some places where these themes overlap with “external factors”. In these cases I shall mention the areas of overlap during the discussion which follows.

##### **4.3.2.1. Lack of skills**

Many participants found that they lacked the ability to **manage and balance their time** well, and that any unexpected demands added more pressure and stress to their lives. Some participants found that they **lacked computer skills** and so had to spent vast amounts of wasted time learning to use computer programmes and learning how to use the internet which they needed for research.

*“I struggled to juggle between my studies, family and work demands.....I (thus) experienced family and work related problems and sometimes did*

*not organise my time appropriately*" (Participant I, incomplete sentences Q.6 & 14).

Many participants were second or third **language** English speakers and found they got little support in this area. Most lecturers did not have the time or the inclination to help them. Some students reported that some lecturers and students spoke in Afrikaans and they could not understand.

*"...often in meetings in class they spoke in Afrikaans....it happened a lot....in the middle of class someone would discuss or ask something in Afrikaans and the lecturer would answer....I would not understand...but for me I felt it was the lecturer's right to make sure everybody was accommodated and understood...and interpret in English...it was lack of respect..."* (Participant A, lines 409-425).

Another area many students found lacking was **academic writing skills and support**, especially prior to 2004. Writing in a second or third language was difficult for most students. Academic writing was even more difficult.

*"..the black student is not able to write certain words in English...but the white person is also not able to write in Zulu...what I am saying is that black students they have a language problem...if (lecturers) could see it in context they would understand this is not a stupid student....the challenge is language.."* (Participant A, lines 599-621).

From 2004, a post graduate writing centre was opened at the University, and this has been a great help to all the participants to whom I spoke, and who were registered during this period.



I have personally made use of the writing centre on a number of occasions, and they have organised special groups that meet regularly to discuss writing of research proposals and dissertations.

I personally feel that it would be of great benefit to me and my clients if I was able to speak at least one vernacular language. I think that the black students who are multi-lingual, have an advantage as they are able to communicate with a variety of client from many different backgrounds. They may have experienced difficulties with academic writing, but if I was expected to write an academic paper in Sotho or Zulu, I would fail.

Some participants also felt they lacked **communication skills**, as they experienced communication difficulties with their fellow classmates and lecturers. This was especially the case prior to 2004. Some participants even felt “left out” and unable to approach lecturers due to their upbringing of not approaching or speaking to “seniors”.

#### **4.3.2.2. Cultural differences and other personal factors**

All the participants revealed some form of difficulty regarding the role of their culture, gender, age, traditional roles, stage of life and/or past personal experiences.

One of the most predominant reasons for the married black men and women participants to drop out or nearly drop out was the traditional expectations of men and women within their communities. These expectations differed vastly, according to gender, but had equal impact on the participants regarding their time, role and commitments, which ultimately impacted on their studies.

The married male participants found that they were ultimately responsible for the provision of the physical and educational needs of immediate and extended family members, as well as having to be available for all important “family” meetings and community functions such as weddings and funerals. This responsibility meant that male participants not only had to ensure that they had a full time job to provide financial support for their extended families, but were frowned upon and even ostracised by the community if they attended lectures instead of important community occasions such as religious or cultural meetings, weddings and funerals.

*“..for the past four weeks it’s either we have an unveiling or a funeral...a few weeks ago I had class and could not attend an unveiling...they confront me....they say my studies are not an excuse...this affects you dearly in the future...it is serious pressure...”* (Participant H, lines 363-386).

Accordingly, women participants faced a similar dilemma when faced with family and community commitments when they had to attend lectures or be available for practical sessions. In addition to this, women participants who did not have the support of their husbands and/or family found it extremely tough to balance the traditional women’s roles of being available to take care of the children and household/domestic chores, as was expected of them, as well as attend to their studies. Some women participants faced criticism from their communities and immediate family members for “neglecting” their traditional duties and families. Although most families were understanding in the beginning of the course, when time became scarce and they were under pressure to complete work, it was not so easy for others to “fill in the gaps”.

Some women participants were also sole or primary bread winners in their families, and so faced the added pressure of not being able to resign or work full time. Some also found it difficult to reconcile being a student or professional in a “western” role and then having to revert to “traditional” roles at home or at community functions.

*“..I am the bread winner...I have to work..I could not resign my job...so I had to quit the course”* (Participant E, lines 324-326).

These findings are corroborated by South African researcher Van Heerden (1997, p. 86-87), who reported that black students struggled to balance the many roles they had to perform as well as their studies. She found that some female students complained that their husbands did not provide adequately for the family. Thus the onus was on these women, who assumed the role of the breadwinner, to carry on their career and complete their domestic responsibilities, often without assistance from the men due to cultural expectations and norms, which left little or no time for their studies.

*“...whether we like it or not there are still racial issues from the past and they impact on us and our family systems. It might be easier for a white child than for me to complete my degree....(it) placed tremendous stress on my family system”* (Participant A, lines 304-309).

Generally it seemed that single men and women participants, with fewer responsibilities were more likely to cope with their studies and other commitments, and were less likely to drop out of the course. I feel this is a pity, because the older, more experienced students often bring something “extra” with them in terms of wisdom and life experience, which balances the energy, enthusiasm and fresh ideas of younger students. Losing large numbers of black students from the course also

impacts on what the other students can learn about other traditions, cultures and races.

In addition to cultural roles, many participants, especially in the years prior to 2004, felt that they struggled to work with white fellow students and lecturers, as they had grown up during the apartheid era and had seldom been exposed to white people on an equal footing. Many participants had grown up in a culture where they did not question authority, and asking for help from an adult meant you were “stupid” or not capable of coping on your own. This impacted on their ability to ask for assistance and/or approach lecturers if they needed help with work or had questions in class or regarding assignments.

“...I didn’t want to approach the lecturers in case they thought I was stupid or they held it against me later....” (Participant G, line 348-349).

Added to this, some participants found that their fellow students did not include them much and they felt “marginalised” as the minority group. Some felt as if they were there to fill “quotas” although they knew that they were there on merit.

Interestingly, participants who were enrolled in the course from 2005 reported just the opposite. They found their lecturers and fellow students supportive and willing to help no matter what.

*“I found the lecturers and fellow students to be committed in offering their assistance and support to everyone...they really care about their students’ welfare”* (Participant H, Incomplete sentences, Q.4 & Q.12.).

Many participants, especially those enrolled prior to 2004, reported that they found some of the modules, such as Psychopathology difficult to

understand and come to grips with as the course was taught primarily from a “western” perspective. Many of the so-called psychopathologies in the DSM-IV, had other explanations in traditional cultures. eg: schizophrenia or delusions are often seen as “gifts” in some communities, and rather than being labelled as “ill”, these people are often regarded as healers or prophets.

*“...psychopathology in the African context is interesting...in the western context psychopathology is seen as a mental disorder...a human being with a mental problem. In the African context it could be nature versus nurture or a natural phenomena or witchcraft...you know so many things are involved...Africans use other systems ...community systems...the family systems, we use the church...we use traditional healers...we are coming into this field that is Western....most Africans don't know what Psychology is....”* (Participant A, lines 326-346 & 376-381).

In addition to this, participants found many of the therapy techniques were not relevant for their contexts and thus found themselves struggling to meet the needs of their clients, as they felt their training was inadequate in some of these areas. Some participants even felt inferior to their white counterparts as they saw things from a different context and background. Added to this were the problems experienced by poor and/or “western” supervision, as well as lecturers who were not understanding of a different cultural context and the difficulties some of the students faced. Since 2005, these difficulties have been addressed as far as possible and the Department is aware of, and trying to implement changes in this regard.

Other internal or personal factors that had an impact on participant's studies included **health issues, lack of self esteem, and fear of failure**. One participant had a heart attack from the stress of the course,

another almost had a nervous breakdown. In the participants' own words:

*"...the stress from this course can kill you....."* (Participant F, line 54).

*"White people have respect automatically...if you are black you have to earn respect.....they don't just respect you, black people face different challenges...we feel we always have to prove ourselves.."* (Participant A, lines 565-566).

Many of these factors related to covert and overt racial issues, internalised oppression, as well as previous life experiences during the apartheid era. I shall discuss these next.

#### **4.3.3. Combined external and internal factors**

The final theme I shall discuss falls into the realm of both external and internal factors. The theme relates broadly to racism.

##### **4.3.3.1. Covert and/or direct(overt) racism/oppression**

The theme of **direct or overt racial oppression** emerged as particularly relevant in the years 2002 to 2004, and was mentioned by participants as one of the major causes for them dropping out of the course during this time period. I found that described and reported incidences of covert and overt racism declined up until 2005. Students currently in the course this year as I write my research findings in 2006 reported only isolated cases.

*"Oppression can be regarded as a state of domination where the oppressed suffer the consequences of deprivation, exclusion,*

*discrimination, exploitation, control of culture, and sometimes even violence. Oppression involves institutionalized collective and individual modes of behaviour through which one group attempts to dominate and control another in order to secure political, economic and/or socio-psychological advantage” (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002, p. 12-13).*

This quote relates directly to what many of the participants experienced both prior to as well as after the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa.

All of the participants who were in the course during 2002 to 2004 reported various incidences of overt and covert racism, which directly affected them. Some reported that they felt marginalised and discriminated against by both their fellow students and some of the lecturers. Many reported being treated “differently” because they were black. Some pertinent comments by participants include:

*“I thought you know what I am going to stay in this institution whether I like it or not. It’s racist as much as they try to put on a political front that they are an equal institution. They have blacks, it is for politics but behind the political curtain they are still racists and they are still prejudiced but unfortunately enough those 2 lecturers for them it was political...what’s interesting is the politics, the racism was very subtle not out in the open...in fact it was as such not easy that you could pin a person down you know and say you know. You couldn’t challenge them in the open. I wasn’t scared by them I thought about my future and education....and....my mom sat me down and said it is not worth your fighting you got so far stick with it” (Participant A, lines 228-234 & 251-257).*

Even as recently as last year (2005), one participant reported being unfairly treated and discriminated against by one particular lecturer. In his words:

*“I had this fear of unsupportive lecturers in the programme who use archaic psychology of oppression to deal with black learners.....which was the case with one particular lecturer. I did get support from the new Head of Department...but it was too late for me to recover from the damage caused by the racist lecturer...and I dropped out...”* (Participant J, lines 11-12 and 24-27).

Many reported that changes since 1994 in the constitution and new laws in South Africa were implemented only on paper, and that real reform was not evident to them at the time. Participants were concerned that they were admitted on merit and did not like feeling as if they were merely “stats” to fill quotas.

*“I did not want to be admitted as a stat, for them to admit they had a black person in the course....if I wasn’t good enough they should not have admitted me...the one thing I am sure about in my life is that I was good enough...I had never failed anything, and I was not just a stat. I knew I was good enough for the course I got in because I was good enough my marks were good enough”* (Participant A, lines 264-270).

Some participants felt the course was too “western” in its approach to Psychology, and much of the course material, especially in Psychopathology and Therapy conflicted with their traditions, culture and beliefs, and so they found it difficult to relate to the work. In addition to this, many participants found that the course work and the theoretical frameworks were not always relevant to their contexts. These difficulties seem to have been addressed to a certain extent in the past few years.



Comments on this varied, but there were definite signs of improvement in the later years covered by this research. For clarity, some relevant comments in chronological order include:

*"...I went to University in the height of politics in South Africa...I thought...I am going to stay in this institution whether I like it or not....it's racist... as much as they try to put on a political front that they are an equal institution...they have blacks, it is for politics....but behind the political curtain they are still racists...they are still prejudiced....especially these two lecturers.....for them it was political....I had to transform myself but only to a point I made my African status very clear...I don't comprise about it"* (Participant A, lines 62-63, 229-234 & 353-255).

#### **4.3.3.2. Internalised oppression due to past experiences**

Many of the participants found that they experienced **internalised oppression** caused by their past experiences during the apartheid era, and their upbringing. The following quote sums this up well:

*"When we describe a people as oppressed, what we have in mind most often is an oppression that is economic and political in character...but it is possible to be oppressed in ways that need involve neither deprivation, legal inequality, nor economic exploitation; one can be oppressed psychologically (often referred to as psychic alienation). The psychologically oppressed become their own oppressors; they come to exercise dominion over their own self esteem ie: psychological oppression can be regarded as the internalisation of intimations of inferiority"* (Bartky, 1990, in Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002, p. 13).

It is this **internalised oppression** that became a dominant theme during the process of data analysis, and affected almost all the participants interviewed. Those students who experienced externalised politically motivated racial oppression, as well as those who did not experience it, seem to have internalised these restrictions and they operate not just on a physical, outward level, but at a psychological level as well.

Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p. 13) suggest that psychological and physically experienced political oppression are two dimensions, and the one cannot exist without the other. Internalised oppression thus appears to have negative effects on the self-esteem, confidence and motivation of those who experience it.

This internalised racial oppression showed itself in students being afraid to ask questions or illicit help from others for fear of being judged to be stupid or incompetent by lecturers or their peers.

In the words of some of one of the participants:

*“..it is a feeling that I have deep inside myself and I think maybe I need to work on it....I feel judged...I know it is not true...but his is how I feel...if I ask for help (from lecturers) I am afraid they will think I am just lazy....that maybe they think all blacks are lazy...I have realised that maybe they don't judge us ....it is a misconception...my (white) colleagues ask for help so freely....we sit back and swallow it...that is why we get so stressed and bogged down...because we feel we are not always on par with the others...”* (Participant K, lines 288-317).

Furthermore, Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p. 13) have found that psychological (or internalised) oppression, is the internalised view of self as negative, and as not deserving more resources or increased

participation in societal affairs. They also found that psychological dynamics of internalised oppression entailed surplus powerlessness, belief in a just world, learned helplessness, conformity, obedience to authority, fear, and emotional abuse.

The results of this internalised oppression were revealed in this research in many forms. Participants found that they were afraid of failure, yet felt they could not easily contribute to discussions and decision making in their groups, they felt that instead of arguing their case they had to conform to the “norm” of the rest of the group or to what they thought the lecturers expected, they were afraid to challenge anyone in authority including lecturers, and often felt a sense of powerlessness over their circumstances, achievements and future goals. This can be clearly seen by the words of the following participant:

*“...instead of crying out for help... I keep quiet...so they don't think I'm stupid or lazy...”* (Participant K, lines 316-319).

These findings are corroborated by Van Heerden (1997, p. 82) who found that that students schooled prior to 1994 in South Africa, often commenced studies at University in an environment that was not familiar to them. This is because they were schooled in “black only” schools and had little or no exposure to white people or the western culture, which they experienced when they enrolled in previously “white” Universities. She also found that the quality of black education at the time was “inferior” and this impacted on black students’ ability to adapt and cope at Tertiary level. She also found that they “felt” inferior.

#### **4.4. CONCLUSION**

This Chapter revealed the findings of this research and discussed the themes under the headings of “internal” and “external” factors, as well as one theme that fitted under the dual title of “internal and external” factors.

It was difficult at times, for the researcher to make clear distinctions between these themes, and make the themes “mutually exclusive” as is the norm for qualitative research, as there were so many areas of overlap. These were pointed out in the course of the discussion.

To sum up, external factors that contributed to the high drop out rate of black students from the course included “structure of the course and University factors”; “lack of resources” which included finances, hidden expenses, computers, books and so on; and “lack of time”.

Next, internal factors that led to high drop out rates of black students from the course, that included “lack of skills”, and “cultural factors”. were discussed.

Finally “overt and covert racism” were discussed under the heading “internal and external” factors.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, a summary of the research discussed in the previous chapters is presented to the reader. Following this, recommendations for change are discussed. The recommendations also act to provide the Educational Psychology Department at the University as well as future researchers with some ideas as to where their research would be most beneficial. Next, the limitations of the study are acknowledged and discussed. Then further recommendations take into account areas of the study in which further research could be required in order to acquire more accurate results. Finally, the research is brought to a conclusion.

#### **5.2. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH**

The primary aim of this research was to explore the experiences of black students who had dropped out, or nearly dropped out of the Master's in Educational Psychology course at a Gauteng University during the years 2002 to 2006. In addition to this, the research set out to establish some of the reasons for this high drop out rate. A further aim was to explore what could be done to provide additional support for current students in the Educational Psychology Master's programme at the University, to help prevent such high drop out rates amongst future black students.

This research made an **original contribution to the body of knowledge**, by investigating the experiences of the black students who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course, and discovered some of the reasons for this. External factors such as the “structure of the course and University factors” were unique to this University and its context. Recommendations for areas that can be changed to assist students in this regard are made further on.

Lack of resources and racism were factors that were found by other researchers both overseas and in South Africa, as were discussed in Chapter 3. Many of the cultural factors were unique to the South African context, and would thus have to be addressed as such.

Lack of skills was another area that seemed to be common in some of the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, however, there were some skills that were found lacking that related back to the poor schooling during the apartheid era that some participants experienced.

Lack of time seemed particular unique to the demands of the course and cultural demands made on black participants within the South African context.

Eleven black students who had dropped out or nearly dropped out of the Master's in Educational Psychology programme at the University during the period 2002 to 2006 were selected as participants. There were other students who fitted the criteria for selection to participate in this research, but they either refused, or were not contactable.

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher made use of a post-modern, qualitative, case study design, based on interpretive

principles. The theoretical framework underpinning the research included the epistemology of social constructivism as postulated by Vygotsky and described in Creswell (2003); elements of critical theory, (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2005); Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, (Landsman, 2005), as well as various learning theories proposed by Piaget and others. These were explained in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two the research design and methodology were explained. A qualitative case study research design was chosen in order to gain an in-depth, intensive, multi-faceted investigation and understanding of the experiences the participants faced, and the meanings created by them (Merriam, 2002; Denscomb, 2000). Data collection methods included individual or paired interviews, using semi-structured, open-ended questions, as well as incomplete sentences questionnaires. In order to improve the trustworthiness of the study, verification questionnaires were given to the eleven participants. Data analysis included the constant comparative method and aspects of grounded theory.

Six common themes were established after data collection and analysis. These themes were discussed and elaborated on in Chapter 4 as external or internal barriers to learning as described by Landsman, (2005, p. 17). The three themes that related to "lack of time"; "lack of resources"; as well as the "structure of the course and University systems" were discussed under the overall heading of "external or extrinsic factors".

Next, the two themes "cultural factors" and "lack of skills" were discussed under the heading "internal or intrinsic factors", although there are some places where these themes overlapped with external factors.

Finally, the sixth theme, “covert and overt racial factors”, was discussed under the heading which combined “intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

According to the findings of the research the following recommendations are made.

### **5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In corroboration with the findings presented in this study, related recommendations are made. These recommendations are, however, by no means exhaustive. The aim is to propose possible strategies that could be implemented to assist in supporting black students enrolled in the Master’s in Educational Psychology course, to prevent the high drop out rate of black students from the course. In fact, these recommendations could apply to the support of all, not just black students in this course, or indeed to other similar courses.

Furthermore, the recommendations that follow are based on the findings from the research conducted into the reasons for the high drop out rate of black students from the course, which were gleaned from the individual and paired interviews conducted with those students. These interviews along with the incomplete sentences questionnaires, as well as the verification of data questionnaires allowed black students who had dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course, to discuss their experiences, and explain some of their reasons for having to drop out.

In addition to this, the recommendations are divided into strategies to address both external and internal barriers to learning, experienced by the participants, and are discussed under the six themes as described in Chapter Four.



### **5.3.1. External barriers**

Recommendations regarding external barriers discussed in Chapter 4 follow.

#### **5.3.1.1. Lack of Time**

Students should be made aware that the course is more full time than part time and it should be marketed as such. Portraying the course as part time is misleading because the demands made on students to complete both course and practical work involve more full time commitment, as expressed clearly by all the participants in this research. Students should be made aware of travelling time (especially those who live far from the University), the amount of time and preparation they need for group work and preparation for lectures or presentations outside of contact hours, and also be warned that there are many unexpected demands made on them, especially during the second year of study regarding practical hours.

On a personal level, I would also like to add that students be warned about the amount of time they require during their third or internship year, as they work a full day, and are also expected to complete and write up a comprehensive research report (see Table 4.1.). The internship also draws on financial resources. My fellow students and I found that we had to take a large drop in salary, and travelling expenses rose, especially for those of us who travelled long distance daily to the University where we were employed for our internship year. In addition to this, students should be made aware of the fact that they may not practice until they have completed and passed the Board Examination set by the HPCSA, which may further delay their ability to earn an

income for three months after successfully completing the internship, course requirements and research.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the course, students should be made aware that they may have to work part time or make arrangements for leave, (well in advance in the case of the Education Department).

In this regard the University would need to ensure that examination timetables are published well in advance to allow students to make leave arrangements in time. Students also need to be warned that they will be required to balance the time needed to fulfil the demands of the roles they play, especially married students, and those with children.

These findings have implications for selection processes, as candidates who are over-committed or have to work full time to support themselves and their families seem to have a higher possibility of dropping out according to the findings of this research. No participants in this research had clearly thought out or realised the huge time demands made on them by the course

#### **5.3.1.2. Shortage of Resources**

Participants all mentioned the difficulties they experienced regarding various resources ranging from not having computers, not qualifying for bursaries and the vast amount of hidden or unexpected costs related to the course such as petrol, photocopies, books, and so on. Human resources such as lack of supervision or support from fellow students and lecturers were also often mentioned.

It may be wise for the Educational Psychology Department to conduct a survey to identify the cost implications to the students in the course.

Costs include transport, books, photocopies, computers etc. There are also costs related to loss of earnings when students have to work part time or quit their jobs. There are even further financial and other obligations regarding the internship year and the expenses related to the research/dissertation required to fulfil the academic requirements of the course. Students need to be made aware of these costs, and further reminded that they cannot work as an Educational Psychologist until they have passed the board examination. This may mean a two month delay between completing the internship year and the examination (if they pass first time).

It is suggested that financial arrangements in the form of bursaries, subsidies or grants be made available to black (and other) students who may not have high enough Honour's marks to qualify for merit bursaries, but who have the academic potential and personal qualities necessary to become Educational Psychologists.

The University has number of useful resources available for students. There is a computer laboratory available for use by students, but it is not always convenient or possible for students to work there, especially after hours if they work full time. It may be possible to look to a computer company for sponsorship or donations of computers and printers to students who cannot afford their own. One possibility is that these computers be donated to the Educational Psychology Department who then "loans" them to students for the duration of the course. In terms of e-mail, all students at the University have access to their own personal e-mail account at no extra cost, as long as they register for this. They are usually made aware of this facility when registering.

Students should be made aware of the fact that they are entitled to free counselling services through the Student Services Bureau if they have

personal, family, or work-related difficulties. Free courses are also offered by the University, especially in the first half of the year, to teach students study, time management and stress management skills.

Currently there is a supervisor who is allocated to the Masters students by the Educational Psychology Department, who understands and has experience in both Western and African culture and context. She is available for supervision of practical, course work and personal difficulties. This is a well received shift for the better, over the past two years. However, it should be borne in mind that all supervisors should ideally be able to work with students from any background or culture, and in the same way the students themselves need to be trained to work with children from all backgrounds and cultures.

There is a Campus Health clinic at the University which offers medical attention at greatly reduced rates, free contraception, and VCT for HIV, if students require it. In addition to this there is a post graduate writing centre for students who require assistance with academic writing skills, completion of assignments and research.

A few participants suggested an “information or orientation” day be set aside prior to the start of the course, where students are shown what facilities are available to them at the University, especially those who are new to the University. Many requested a basic computer skills course in “word” “internet explorer” and “power-point” to get them started. This is available at undergraduate level, but the need for it to be extended to post graduate level should be evaluated by the Department or University.

In order to make up to date books and resource available to students, it may be viable for the students to form a “book club” and share

resources to limit expenses. Often books are printed at such a quick rate, that books prescribed earlier in the year are “out of date” by the end of the year. Lecturers could ensure that the latest books are available on short loan or reserve from the library, which is not always convenient for students, but ensures that everyone has equal access to them. A further suggestion is that the Department budgets separately for certain books which can be loaned by the students via a student assistant or tutor and used at the University that day or returned the next lecture day. The same applies to relevant journal articles.

#### **5.3.1.3. University system and the structure of the course**

The research showed that there have been many significant positive changes in the course, as well as in the University structures, since 2002 in terms of accommodating not just black, but all students.

Students have been better accommodated time-wise through the adjustment of lecture times to afternoons, Saturdays and school holidays, so that there is minimal disruption during school hours.

To cut down on the number of assignments and presentations, the course is presently being revised, and areas of overlap between modules are being addressed. Modules are also spread more evenly over the two years of course work in order to spread the work load more evenly.

#### **5.3.1.4. Overt (or Externally Expressed) Racism**

Whilst the Educational Psychology Department practices at the University currently embrace a critical psychology philosophy which

promotes well being and equality, this was not always so, as has been reflected in the findings of this study. As Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p. 17-19) put it

*“a primary challenge is to reflect on our own existing practices, and scrutinize their effects. A subsequent challenge is to incorporate lessons about power, injustice, well-being and liberation into everyday practice. The amount of work to be done to transform uncritical perspectives that blame victims and perpetuate asymmetric power relations is quite enormous. To promote well-being and to resist oppression... critical psychologists have to cross boundaries, develop clear communication with service recipients, and attend to contextual diversity”.*

Both lecturers within the Educational Psychology Department and students in the different Educational Psychology Master's groups need to examine their own personal beliefs and determine to what extent they contribute to externally expressed racism. At the same time, lecturers and students can overcome oppressive social practices by encouraging more equal power sharing, and egalitarian relationships, peer mentoring and support, as well as respecting the rights, identity and dignity of each individual. This could be done by work-shopping and sharing of experiences, both amongst the lecturers and the students. The anti-bias workshop that I was exposed to was a great help in adding to my understanding of people from other cultures, backgrounds and races.

Policies should begin to reflect more empowering social practices, and provide for and encourage prevention and wellness of all involved. All students and lecturers should be encouraged to participate in the design and implementation of more suitable programmes and policies that would better meet the needs of, as well as reflect the demographics and context of the current South African situation. As Prilleltensky and

Nelson, (2002, p. 27) put it *“(there should) be respectful listening and attention to internal and external sources of oppression....(then) it is more likely that the outcomes will be empowering”*.

According to the findings, the Educational Psychology Department at the University has made a concerted effort over the past three years to conduct annual audits of the course through an external facilitator. These facilitators allowed the students within the course to comment and critically analyse the course and their experiences, as well as to make constructive recommendations for change. The researcher can personally vouch for the fact that many of the recommendations made by the group of which she was a member, were implemented the following year and many changes to the structure of the course were made to better suit the students in the following years.

These audits continue to be conducted and changes are ongoing to suit the needs of the students. This is a vital, positive change to what occurred prior to 2004, where the participants interviewed often felt marginalised, criticized and their voices went unheard.

### **5.3.2. Internal factors**

Internal factors that contributed to the drop out rate of black students are discussed next.

#### **5.3.2.1. Cultural factors**

The researcher believes that there is not much that can be done to change cultural barriers to learning, other than attempting to accommodate students who may have to attend funerals or other functions on lecture days. This could well be a contentious issue, as all

students, regardless of background or race, would be expected to make certain sacrifices in order to meet the requirements of the course. This should be clearly indicated upfront.

### **5.3.2.2. Lack of Skills**

As suggested by many of the participants, it may be wise to have an orientation day where potential students are shown around the University, so that they are aware of the resources available to them. These include the post-graduate writing centre, the library, the computer laboratory, the health clinic, sports facilities and so on.

A brief introduction to basic computer skills could also be given for those students who are not yet competent to use Word or Power-point.

### **5.3.2.3. Racism: internalised oppression**

From the findings, it is clear that there has been a shift from outwardly expressed racism as discussed in 5.3.1.5. at University, Department and Course levels. However, data collected revealed that many black students still experience internalised racial oppression, especially the older students who attended school and undergraduate courses during the apartheid era. Those students who experienced externalised, politically motivated racial oppression seem to have internalised these restrictions and they operate not just on a physical, outward level, but at a psychological level as well. This can be referred to as internalised racial oppression.

Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p. 13) suggest that psychological and physically experienced political oppression are two dimensions, and the one cannot exist without the other. Internalised oppression thus appears



to have negative effects on the self-esteem, confidence and motivation of those who experience it. As Bartsky, 1990, quoted in Prilleltensky and Nelson, (2002, p. 13) so succinctly put it:

*“the psychologically oppressed become their own oppressors....(and thus)....psychological oppression can be regarded as the internalisation of intimations of inferiority”.*

This internalised racial oppression showed itself in students being afraid to ask questions or illicit help from others for fear of being judged to be stupid or incompetent by lecturers or their peers. They themselves suggested that lecturers become more amenable and welcoming thus allowing the students to feel more comfortable when approaching them for help. Perhaps a sense of interdependence rather than isolation or the need to prove independence could be possible when participation is encouraged and questioning is welcomed, obviously in a respectful manner, so that power differentials are acknowledged and dealt with.

A few participants suggested that lecturers meet and discuss requirements with students in advance, and that all lecturers and supervisors undergo training to understand and work in a multi-cultural environment, and are thus able to understand the ethos of the black or any other students and their underlying cultures. They will then be able to take responsibility to deal with this and other barriers to learning within the course. A supervisor can also be allocated and be available to meet with students on a regular basis both personally and/or as a group to mediate between the lecturers and the students, as has been the case over the past eighteen months, although on a more informal basis. Participants intimated that if this was a more formal channel of communication that was open to them and that if this person could liaise with other member in the Department, that they would feel more

comfortable and know that their voices would be heard through a safe, professional channel.

#### **5.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

One limitation of the study was the fact that not all the black students who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course during the period 2002 to 2005 were prepared to be interviewed. Some could not be contacted, or did not return messages. Perhaps if the researcher had more time available and did not have tight constraints to complete the study, more participants, especially those who were students in the earlier years covered by the studies could have been included.

The researcher felt that her credibility and the trust participants showed during the interviews was directly linked to them knowing her or being told about her by a third party, who agreed to act as a facilitator for the researcher. Participants, who had never met the researcher prior to this research being conducted, were more reticent to participate than those who had met her previously. Many of those who refused to participate did not want to open up old wounds and/or did not feel sufficiently confident confiding in a “stranger”. This makes sense considering the sensitivity of the subject of the research as well as the fact that the researcher is a white woman interviewing black participants. There was a certain amount of suspicion and mistrust which is to be expected considering the past dispensation in South Africa.

The individual interviews were conducted using semi-structured, open-ended questions, but this proved to be a limitation, as many of the participants discussed experiences that were outside the questions asked, and usually this happened later once the interview was over or “off the record” and so the data could not be used. Some participants

also went “off at a tangent” and used the interview to air their views on education, the current political situation in the country, and other issues which meant that the researcher had to spend many extra hours transcribing data and information that was not always relevant to the study.

Another limitation, linked to participant bias was the fact that some of the data which could have added to the richness and value of the study was discussed with the researcher in confidence or “off the record”. Much was said either prior to the taped session or after the interview was officially over, and thus the researcher could not include this data in the findings or recommendations due to confidentiality and ethical constraints, as agreed to in the informed consent letter signed by each participant. Thus at all times ethical considerations took precedence over data collection, which did limit the findings that could be discussed.

The limited experience the researcher had in interviewing during a research situation was thus a further limitation. The researcher learnt through experience to maintain better control over the interview situation and thus later attempted to restrict the participants’ discussions to their experiences of the course and not everything else. This was not always possible.

In addition to this, when interviewing participants, it is important to consider if all of them were completely honest in their responses. Thus it is important to acknowledge possible participant bias.

Researcher bias could be another limitation within this study. The researcher was aware that her own personal beliefs and expectations, as well as her own experiences within the course, could have had some influence over the findings and discussion of results. The researcher

tried to remain as objective as possible whilst interviewing, transcribing and interpreting the results, but this always remains a challenge when conducting research. The researcher did allow her voice to be heard in Chapter 4 where findings were discussed. Where this occurred, it was clearly stated that this was the opinion or experience of the researcher, so as to ensure it did not contaminate or influence the voice of the participants or any other data.

When discussing limitations, trustworthiness of the study, which is concerned with the accuracy and truth of the findings, can always be questioned. The researcher ensured that trustworthiness was maintained and checked as far as possible throughout the research process. Interviews were transcribed word for word, data was triangulated with incomplete sentences questionnaires, and verification questionnaires were sent out to ensure that the themes discussed in the findings were accurate.

Supervisors and colleagues also checked the process to further ensure trustworthiness. In addition to this, strict ethical conduct was followed throughout the process to ensure that anonymity and confidentiality of participants was upheld, and that there was no harm done. This was difficult at times, especially when direct quotations were used to back up findings in the study. The researcher had to ensure that these quotations could not be directly linked to participants. Participants were encouraged to read the findings in order to ensure that there was no breach of confidentiality, and that quotations used did not directly identify or embarrass them in any way. This limited the researcher in some instances to which quotations she could use when discussing the findings.

A further limitation was that the participants selected were black students from one University only. This aspect makes it difficult to generalise these findings to any other University or population group. In addition to this, the participants interviewed were black students who dropped out or nearly dropped out of the course, thus there could have been a certain level of racial bias, as the research was conducted from only one particular race groups' perspective and context.

It was also difficult to generalise finding even within such a limited sample group of participants who were all black within the same course due to their varied contexts, backgrounds, ages, gender, experiences and exposure in life. Thus only common themes were discussed. Exceptions and inconsistent experiences or incidences were not detailed in this study, thus perhaps limiting the recommendations according to the common themes rather than real experiences. If the sample (number of participants) had been extended, exceptions or inconsistent findings may have become common themes.

Changes in the course, different lecturers and different dynamics within the groups, as well as individual differences and differences in circumstances of the participants made it difficult to establish common themes over the four year period of time the researcher investigated. The study may have been more accurate and have elicited richer data, if the researcher had looked for themes within each individual year of study, and discussed these separately.

Lastly, the literature reviewed may have been a limitation to the study, as the findings of this study were not always consistent with current literature available on drop out rates of black students from tertiary institutions. This was due to the fact that the majority of the literature currently available was based on studies conducted in countries

overseas such as the United States of America and Canada. There have been limited studies conducted in South Africa, and these were not specific to Educational Psychology Masters courses, and in many cases not current. Thus much of the literature reviewed was not contextual or relevant to the unique situation experienced by black students in South Africa.

## **5.5. STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

This study filled a gap in the literature, and the findings revealed the external and internal barriers to learning black students experienced in this particular course. These barriers were also relevant to the South African context and culture. Positive changes within the course are now possible, as concrete proposals for change that is relevant is now possible.

The findings also raise awareness of difficulties some black students experienced, and thus these issues can be addressed to alleviate the high drop out rate from the course in the future.

This study also allowed for the participants' voices to be heard and for their difficulties to be acknowledged.

Considering the findings of the study, and the limitations discussed previously, recommendations for future research are given next.

## **5.6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

A future researcher may be able to track down students who could not be contacted within the time constraints required by this study, and add to the richness of the data and recommendations made here. This

researcher may also find that in time, participants in the study may be willing to discuss some of the issues and experiences they had “off the record” which would add value and depth to the current findings and recommendations.

A future researcher may also be interested in discovering why there were no black students who dropped out of the group that started in 2005 and are currently completing their course work this year (2006).

A further area of interest linked to this study would be to interview and look at the experiences of the lecturers who lectured the Masters in Educational Psychology groups during the time period 2002 to 2006, to discover their reasons and opinions for the high drop out rate of black students from the course. This data would add richness and insight from another point of view to these findings.

In the same vein, the white and Indian students who were in the course during the same time period may also be interviewed to discover their opinions related to the high drop out rate of black students.

Furthermore, white and Indian students who did drop out during this same time period could be interviewed to investigate if there were common or different reasons that led to their dropping out compared to the reasons given by the black students in this study.

It would also be pertinent to research how much it costs the students in the course financially, as well as how much time is spent fulfilling the requirements of the course.

## **5.7. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, taking into consideration the limitations discussed previously, it was found that there were both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons for the high drop out rate of black students from the Masters in Educational Psychology Course at a Gauteng University during the time period 2002 to 2006.

Following many months of data analysis, it was found that six major themes emerged during the study namely: “the structure of the course and university systems”; “lack of time”; “access to and lack of resources”; “cultural factors”; “lack of certain skills”; as well as “covert and overt racism”.

In South Africa, the Constitution provided the guiding principles for developing a democratic society, and pays particular attention to overcoming disparities of the past in order to provide an equitable and just society for all. This has directly influenced policy development and legislation in education on all levels, specifically the policy on inclusive education. Thus there is a strong socio-political motivation underpinning the South African policy of inclusive education, but other ecological and systemic theories must be included in these policies in order to explain the complexity and multidimensional nature of inclusions and change required in all areas of South African society, not just education (Landberg, 2005, p. 21).

From this research study it can be seen that the diversity within South African society, and the wide continuum of barriers to learning experienced by students both intrinsic and extrinsic, naturally add to the complexity of inclusion. This can also provide a platform for transformation, and an opportunity for developing a blueprint for



inclusive education in South Africa based on emerging needs and findings rather than those gleaned from existing frameworks developed in other countries that may not be relevant or useful for South Africa's unique context.

The researcher hopes that these research findings, and the recommendations given, will make a difference not only to the black students studying within the Educational Psychology Department at the University in which this research was conducted, but that it will help to transform Departmental and University policies to benefit all students.

Furthermore, it is the fervent hope of the researcher, as an emerging critical psychologist, that this research will not land up on a University library, or any other shelf merely gathering dust. It is hoped that these findings and recommendations will continue to benefit others as it is read, critiqued, further research is added to it; and that the contents thereof will be presented at conferences and papers published on it to ensure transformation and positive change, not only at this University but also throughout South Africa.

To conclude, in the words of Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002, p.146):

*“More than anything else, critical psychology practice and action is about creating transformative change.....This change is guided by the core concepts of values (personal, relational, and collective), oppression, empowerment and well being. This involves a process of empowerment, in which power imbalances are identified and in which steps are taken to reverse such imbalances”.*

## 5.8. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

During this research process I have developed and grown in many areas. It has been a long tough journey through an exciting, sometimes uncharted forest. As with most things in life that are worth acquiring, there has been a tremendous amount of hard work, sweat and tears involved. I have been scratched by unexpected thorn trees and branches that whipped back into my face. I was extremely tired at times and wondered if I would ever complete this study. Sometimes I needed time to sit down in the shade to rest and consolidate. At times I was so tired I required longer periods of rest to gain perspective of where I was going, as well as gain a sense of direction as I familiarised myself with a new area of the forest. At these times it felt as if I was walking in circles and getting nowhere.

At other times I wished I had a helicopter so I could see the big picture from a meta-perspective, but I did not have that luxury. In retrospect I realise that this was a journey I had to take alone. I realise now that no amount of prior research, reading, planning or outside support could prepare me for it. It was a journey I had to construct and complete in my own time and context. I had to experience each part of the journey myself in order to report on my findings accurately and with as little bias as possible.

I struggled to remain unbiased and to keep my findings trustworthy, and there were times I had to call in specialists for advice on how to proceed, or I had to consult the various useful resources I found along the way. I had to be wary that these experts and resources were up to date and that I was not relying on outdated knowledge that would hamper the journey.

I learnt to cut through the undergrowth and the tangles of weeds to find the beautiful flowers on this journey. Sometimes, I had to search for many frustrating hours, as they were sometimes hidden and were hard to find in the multitude of literature and data available to me in this modern technological, information-overloaded age. On my quest for perfection I was often disappointed by the stark reality of the woods. I discovered that even the ugly mushrooms and poisonous nettles had their uses and often fed creatures which helped sustain the balance of the new eco-systems that I previously never knew existed.

I discovered with horror, how hunters and human predators, with no regard for preserving life, had sometimes caused deliberate irreparable damage to sections of the forest and its ecosystems. Natural bush fires had in places caused charring and wreaked havoc to large well-established trees, and yet they were unbelievably resilient and were still standing tall and growing new shoots despite their blackened damaged trunks below.

In the end, I made it to the other side, with a few bumps and bruises to show for my efforts but otherwise relatively unscathed by the adventure. However, I take with me the richness of the personal experience and the satisfaction of a successful journey into a partly unknown, sometimes dark place. It took courage and guts to do it, and there were times when I wondered if I could really see it through. I sometimes felt overwhelmed and even frightened by the unknown, as unfamiliar noises and sights made me nervous.

Luckily at the lowest moments there were others nearby that I could ask for assistance, and although the cell-phone signal was sometimes too weak to call for help, often because I forgot to charge the batteries, when I really needed assistance, someone seemed to be there. I later

found out that there were those who had tracked my progress all along, and monitored that I was not in any serious danger at any time. They knew that the hardest journeys, the ones that were the most memorable and fulfilling, were those you managed to accomplish alone.

In the words of the famous English author Robert Frost:

*“Two roads diverged into a wood  
I took the one less travelled on  
And (I hope) that has made all the difference!”*



## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Adan, A. & Felner, R.D. (1995). Ecological congruence and adaptation of minority youth during the transition to college. *Journal of Community Psychology*, Jul95, Vol. 23 Issue 3, p256-269.
- Bergin, D. (2003). "Acting White" does not affect minority student achievement. *Black issues in Higher Education*, 9/11/2003, Vol. 20 Issue15, p17.
- Borg, W.R. & Gall, M.D. (1989). *Educational research. An introduction*. Fifth Edition. New York:Longman.
- Bryman, A. (2001). *Social research methods*. New York:Oxford University Press.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative enquiry. Experiences and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco:Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Clemetson, L. (1999). *Trying to close the achievement gap*. Newsweek, 06/07/99, Vol. 133 Issue 23, p36-37.
- Creswell, J.W. (2002). *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. New Jersey: Merrill.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. California: Sage
- Delamont, S. (2000). Reconstructing 'drop out': a critical ethnography of the dynamics of black students' disengagement from school. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, Jul 2000, Vol.23 Issue 4, p773-774.

Denscomb, M. (2000). *The good research guide for small scale social research projects*. Philadelphia:Open University Press.

Department of Education (1997). *Quality Education for all: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development*. Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services. Pretoria.

Department of Education. (2001). *Education White paper 6. Special Needs Education. Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*. Pretoria.

Department of Education. Directorate: Inclusive Education. (2002). *Draft Guidelines for the implementation of Inclusive Education (Second Draft)*. Pretoria.

Donald, D. (1991). Training needs in Educational Psychology for South African social and educational conditions. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 1991, Vol. 21, Issue 1, p38-44.

Donald, D.; Lazarus, S. & Lolwana, P. (2002). *Educational psychology in social context. Challenges of development, social issues & special needs in Southern Africa*. Second Edition Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Engelbrecht, P. & Green, L. (2001). *Promoting Learner Development. Preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Van Schaik:Pretoria.

Engelbrecht, P.; Green, L.; Naicker, S. & Engelbrecht, L. (1999). *Inclusive education in action in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Feagin, J.R.; Orum, A.M. & Sjoberg, G. (1991). *A Case for the Case Study*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Fox, D. & Prilleltensky, I. (1997). *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*. London:Sage

Hart, C. (2005). *Doing your masters dissertation*. California:Sage.

Health Professions Council of South Africa. (2006). *Ethical Code of Professional Conduct (form 223)*. Pretoria: HPCSA.

Health Professions Council of South Africa. (2006). *Statistics* obtained from [ithelpdesk@hpcsa.co.za](mailto:ithelpdesk@hpcsa.co.za)

Heaton, J. (2004). *Reworking qualitative data*. London: Sage.

Henning, E; Van Rensberg, W. & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria:Van Schaik.

Henning, E; Van Rensberg, W. & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria:Van Schaik.

Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy, P. (2004). *Approaches to qualitative research. A reader on theory and practice*. New York:Oxford University Press.

Landberg, E. (2005) *Addressing barriers to Learning. A South African Perspective*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Landsman, E. (2001). *Factors perceived by black students as affecting their success or failure in the Department of Psychology*. MEd. University of Witwatersrand, Department of Psychology.

Landsman, E. (2005).

Lindow, M. (2006). Falling through the cracks. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. March 2006, Vol.52 issue 30, pA44-A46.

MacKenzie, C.G. (1994). Black students in “white” universities. The character and provision of liberal higher education. *Compare: A journal of comparative education*. March 1994, Vol.24 Issue 1, p67-79.

Madlala, C.F.M. (1990). *Traditional and Western approaches to Educational problems-a co-operative model for educational psychological services in Kwazulu/Natal*. MEd [1990]. University of Natal, Department of Educational Psychology.

Malefo, V. (2000). Psychosocial factors and academic performance amongst African women students at a predominantly white university in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*. Dec 2000, Vol. 30 Issue 4, p40-50.

Manzer, J. (2000). Raising the profile: only a fraction of Canadian medical students are black, but a group of black health professionals and students mainly from the University of Toronto are trying to make medical schools more representational. *Medical Post*. Toronto. May 16, 2000. Vol. 36, Iss. 19; pg28-29.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco:Jossey-Bass Inc.

Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco:Jossey-Bass Inc.

Mouton, J. (2001). *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies. A South African guide and resource book*. Pretoria:Van Schaik.



Paton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Third Edition. California:Sage.

Phillips, D.C. (1997). How, why what when and where: Perspectives on constructivism in psychology and education. *Issues in Education*, 1997, Vol. 3, Number 2, p151-194.

Pillay, J. (1996). *Pupils from informal settlements in Indian secondary schools: Guidelines for the educational psychologist*. Doctoral Thesis. Rand Afrikaans University.

Pillay, J. (2003). Community Psychology is all theory and no practice. Training educational psychologists in community practice within the South African context. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 33(4), 261-268.

Prilleltensky, I. & Nelson, G. (2002). *Doing Psychology Critically. Making a difference in diverse settings*. Palgrave MacMillan:New York

Prilleltensky, I. & Prilleltensky, O. (2003). Synergies for wellness and liberation for counselling psychology. *The Counselling Psychologist*. Vol. 31 No. 3, May 2003

Quick, R.T. & Shipley, D.L. (2004). Shifting the paradigm: when black students refuse to accept the norm. *Black Issues in Higher Education*; 5/6/2004, Vol.21, Issue 6, p31-33. Downloaded from Epnet 2006/08/11

Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1996). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Renzetti, C.M. & Lee, R.M. (1993). *Researching Sensitive Data*. California:Sage.

Ritzer, G. (1997). *Postmodern Social Theory*. USA: McGraw-Hill.

Rovai, A.P; Gallien, L. B. & Wighting, M.J. (2005). Cultural and interpersonal factors affecting African American academic performance in higher education. A review and synthesis of the research literature. *The Journal of Negro Education*. Washington: Fall 2005. Vol.74, Iss.4; pg 359-371. Downloaded from Proquest on 2006/08/08.

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (1997). *Research methods for social work*. Third edition. California: Brooks/Cole.

Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I.S. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing. The art of hearing data*. California: Sage Publications.

Sailes, G.A. (1993). An investigation of black student attrition at a large, predominantly white, Midwestern university. *Western Journal of Black Studies*. Pullman: Winter 1993. Vol.17, Iss. 4; pg.179. Downloaded from Proquest 2006/08/11

Schafer, D.R. (2002). *Developmental Psychology*. Sixth Edition. California: Thomson Learning.

Sennett, J.; Finchilescu, G.; Gibson, K. & Strauss, R. (2003). Adjustment of Black students at a historically White South African University. *Educational Psychology Journal, Vol.23, No.1, 2003*. Downloaded from EBSCO HOST on 2006/08/12  
*story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Strauss, J. & Myburgh, C.P.H. (2003). *Research Methodology*. Study Guide for BEd Honours, Education, Training and Development. Johannesburg:RAU.

Toronto Star Editorial. 4 February 2005. Canada. Downloaded from Epnnet on 2006/08/11.

Van Heerden, E. (1997). University Education and African thought: reflections on underachievement amongst some UNISA students. *South African Journal of Ethnology*. June 1997. Vol. 20, Iss. 2; pages 76-86.

Van Laar, C. (2000). The paradox of low academic achievement but high self esteem in African American students: An attributional account. *Educational Psychology Review*. Mar2000, Vol. 12 issue 1, p33-61.

Wiersma, W. (1991). *Research Methods in Education*. Fifth Edition. Boston:Allyn and Bacon.

Wolcott, H.F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. California:Sage.

Websites:

[www.aabhs.org](http://www.aabhs.org)

