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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### *1.1 Purpose statement*

The purpose of this study was to explore how the researcher-practitioner relationship is expressed, experienced and preferred by researchers and practitioners. The study involved a sample of researchers comprising postgraduate education students and lecturers at a university and a sample of practitioners comprising teachers practising at schools.

### *1.2 Background*

What is the relationship between educational research and practice? More specifically, in what ways, and to what extent, does educational research inform practice? Southworth (1999) claims that the influence of theory on practice is near negligible. Although his work is based only on primary schools in England, this weak theory–practice relationship, also often known as the huge research–practice gap or low research utilisation, has been observed by numerous authors across a wide range of areas of research (Berliner, et al., 1997; Bostrom & Suter, 1993; Caldwell, 1991; Donmoyer, 1998; Glaser, Lieberman, & Anderson, 1997; Robinson, 1998).

The concepts of *theory* and *research* are not identical. Oliver defines theory as “systematically organised knowledge”, or as “a belief” or “an assumption” (Oliver, 2000), in other words, a finished product – an output. However, since this study was interested in not only the output, but also the process, the concept of *research* was used instead of *theory*.

The way in which theory influences practice is usually captured and explored in literature by the concept of research utilisation. Conceptually, this notion of research utilisation is broad and embraces many different meanings. These include two important types of utilisation, namely, *instrumental utilisation* and *conceptual utilisation* (Beyer, 1997; Weiss, 1979).

History reveals that early social scientists focused mainly on *instrumental use* (applying research results in specific ways, often denoting actions) (Caplan, 1974; Knorr, 1976; Rich, 1975; Weiss, 1976). It was only later that it was suggested that this kind of use is indeed rare, particularly in social science (Weiss, 1980). It is rather *conceptual use*, as general enlightenment, building an inventory of personal knowledge bank (March & Simon, 1958), or in certain conceptualisations, as a stage towards instrumental utilisation (Bostrom & Suter, 1993; Knott & Wildawsky, 1980), that occurs more frequently.

Logically, this suggestion leads to the conclusion that instrumental utilisation is not necessarily the only desirable result of social research. However what prevails in educational practice is not merely a low level of direct use of research (*instrumental utilisation*), but also often a disinclination on the part of practitioners to participate in research and a reluctance to acknowledge the value of research (*conceptual utilisation*). One vignette, drawn from an informal discussion with a fellow researcher, follows as an illustration of the latter phenomenon.

I am a PhD student and my study was on classroom practice. I was so excited when my proposal was approved and I finally could start fieldwork. I expected that all teachers would be as excited as me and queue there to participate in my data collection. To my surprise, there were no volunteers. Indeed, when I approached them, the majority seemed quite indifferent. In the end, the only possible sampling that I could do was convenience, as long as they fit into my basic requirement, I simply took the ones that said 'yes' to me.

In the search for explanations for this research–practice gap, literature often points to the differences that exist between the researchers and the practitioners. Factors usually cited often include different logics driving research and informing educational practice; the cultural differences between these two institutions (academic universities and schools); and different aims, requirements, expectations and values (Caldwell, 1991; Randall, 2002). Nevertheless what is the actual explanatory force of this *two-community theory*?

In his explanation of the researcher–practitioner relationship, Randall describes the image which practitioners usually associate with researchers:

Social workers, like many other front-line practitioners, see researchers...good at identifying what is wrong, generate ideas and raise expectations, but disappointingly weak in sustaining commitment long enough to make things work (2002, p. 117).



Similar perceptions also emerged during my casual conversations with some teachers. “They [researchers] just come in, take over the school, use us as subjects, conduct an information ‘raid’ and leave”.

Meanwhile, it is not only the practitioners who manifest a low level of interest, together with hesitation and doubt in respect of research and researchers, but the researchers’ own attitudes towards engaging the practitioners, not only in research dissemination but also in the research process, is also often not optimistic. Certain researchers view the conducting of research dissemination activities as a threat to professional prestige (Rich, 1979). The research process is also sometimes characterised by minimum engagement with the practitioners – leading Greenwood and Levin to conclude that an anti-praxis orientation is observable in most university-based social research (2003).

In fact, this two-way mistrust has been pinpointed in numerous reports: many researchers are able to relate disagreeable instances about the uncooperative nature of practitioners and their unwillingness to pay attention to the findings of research. On the other hand, many practitioners themselves reflect distrust and wariness, as they perceive researchers as having a narrow focus, and also as too theoretical, too idealistic, and too general to relate directly to practical realities (Levin, 2004; Levin & Wong, 2004; Lewison & Holliday, 1997; Nuthall, 2004; The Central New York Practice Research Network (CNY PRN), 2002).

Certainly, a good relationship alone will not guarantee a successful transition from theory to practice. And this double-sided mistrust could also be seen as another aspect of the cultural differences that exist between researchers and practitioners, or as a consequence of these cultural differences. However, this lack in a positive attitude towards and an understanding of each other and the presence of scepticism in the two communities could be another important constraint between research and practice. If Lather’s critique is true – “the characteristic of mainstream social science: career advancement of researchers built on their use of alienating and explorative inquiry methods” (1986, p. 261) – then this anxiety and mistrust should come as no surprise.

So, to what extent does mutual respect and trust exist between educational researchers and practitioners? Do they have a favourable attitude towards one another and does a sense of partnership exist? How do these two communities understand their mutual responsibility towards each other? How willing are they to understand

the world and the needs of the other?

This research adopted the *interaction* model of research utilisation, and, more specifically, Huberman’s general model (1990), as a theoretical framework. The research set out to explore the nature of the researcher–practitioner interaction through the perceptions and experiences of both parties, and aimed to discover a link that could shed light on the research–practice puzzle.

### ***1.3 Rationale and uniqueness of this study***

The rationale behind this research stemmed from a concern about the possible consequences of a weak research–practice relationship. Indeed, to investigate this relationship was also to investigate the value of research – something which is often taken for granted. I echo the sentiment of Feuer, Towne and Shavelson when they state that “educational research relies critically on relationship between research and those engaged in professional practice ... the educational research enterprise could not function without this relationship, and its vitality depends in part on the willingness of practitioners to participate in, or otherwise, support, research” (2002, p. 7). Furthermore, the concern was also that a low level of research utilisation could mean that the increasing volume of research – conducted at huge public expenses<sup>1</sup> – is rendered meaningless, or, as stated by Hargreaves, educational research could be of “poor value for money in terms of improving the quality of education provided in schools” (1996, p. 1). If, as Caldwell (1991, p. 177) insists, “In a practical sense, all research knowledge is intended to be diffused and utilised”, then this scenario is even more worrying.

During the course of the literature review, it became obvious that this topic was receiving far less attention in the field of education than in other fields, such as anthropology and the medical field, including nursing. Furthermore in the meagre literature that does exist in the field of the education, the focus is often either pragmatic (presenting plans to facilitate such gaps), or else the topic is only indirectly touched upon during discussions on ethical/methodological issues (such as Dickert & Grady, 1999), but it is seldom empirically reported and examined (a description of what happens during the process of a research study). These

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<sup>1</sup> The pressure to produce more research is constantly increasing. In South Africa, government encourages research output by providing monetary incentives linked with publication in certain accredited journals. Some institutions and faculties also give research high priority by way of promotion.

observations are supported by a report from the National Education Research Forum which states that “there is a surprisingly small amount of literature on the impact of educational research on policy and practice, including an underdeveloped language in which to explore such topic” (National Education Research Forum, 2000, p. 1). The observations are also supported by Huberman’s claim that “the bulk of writing on the gap between research and practice, and on ways of bridging the gap, is of a rhetorical nature, much of it in the form of keynote speeches or occasional papers” (1990, p. 364). Thus, the practical rationale behind this study was to contribute empirically to the existing knowledge on the research–practice gap in education.

Another observation which emerges from current literature in the field was that “despite its centrality, very few theoretical or empirical studies have directly addressed participants’ perspectives on research” (McGinn, 2005). Therefore, another aim of the study was to address this lack by making extensive use of the voices of practitioners, not only to provide a more holistic picture, but also to provide a triangulation with the accounts presented by the researchers. This was achieved by targeting completed studies as units (cases) and comparing data from the written reports and interviews of researchers, as well as the data from the interviews of researchers and the original participants.

Existing literature also reveals a lack of contextualisation within developing countries. Developing countries often face multiple social and economic challenges, yet little attention seems to have been directed to research utilisation issues within these developing contexts that can least afford wasted resources. Furthermore, the country in which this study was carried out – South Africa – also provides a background of a fundamental social transition. Would this also affect the researcher–practitioner relationship as experienced in this country? This context rendered the research more interesting and more imperative.

#### ***1.4 Explanation of the boundaries***

As the title suggests, the study targeted qualitative studies only, in other words, those studies which used surveys or questionnaires as the sole data collection technique (quantitative research) were excluded. This was out of the concern that such methods may not only offer little room to report real interaction, but also that the researchers may not have intended to interact with their participants because of the objectivity/detachment

often advocated by such methodology.

This study also adopted the narrow concept of education, in terms of which it targeted schools or classrooms studies only. This was because a broader notion of education would have meant including all studies with learning implications and thus, potentially, all research studies.

Another boundary of the study also merits mention. During the ongoing literature review process, long after the preliminary literature review and the fieldwork had been completed, I realised that anthropology (including ethnography) is a field in which the researcher-researched relationship has been discussed and explored extensively. Yet, because of the timing of this discovery, the sheer volume of the literature which would have had to be included, as well as the possible difference in learning about culture (one's life) and teaching practice (one's profession), it was decided to exclude anthropological studies about culture from the study.

### ***1.5 Theoretical framework***

In a literature view theorizing knowledge utilization, Landry, et al. (2001) identified four alternatives, namely the *science push model*; *dissemination model*; *demand pull model* and *interaction model*.

The *science push model* stresses the supply side of research findings as the major determinant of research utilization. In this model, utilization follows a linear flow from the supplier to the users—the researchers are the sources to direct research, and the users are there only to receive the result. On the other hand, the *demand pull model* suggests that instead of the researchers (suppliers), the users are the major source to direct research (Rich, 1991; Weiss, 1979; Yin & Moore, 1988). In this model, research utilization is explained only by the needs of these users, meaning that the needs of the users are more of a focus to the researchers than the advancement of scholarly knowledge (Chelimsky, 1997; Frenk, 1992; Orlandi, 1996; Silverside, 1997). The *dissemination model* ascribes the lack of impact of research to the fact that a large amount of research is never widely or properly disseminated (MacLean, 1996). Lastly, the *interaction model* suggests that knowledge utilization depends on various interactions between the researcher and the users. This model points out that research utilization, which depends heavily on information transfer, occurs best in the context of relationships

based on familiarity and trust, often built over time through a two-way interaction (Bogenschneider, Olson, Linney, & Mills, 2000). Empirical work such as Caplan, Morrison, & Stambaugh (1975), Landry, Amara, & Lamari (2001) and Yin (1981) suggests that the *interaction* model offers a better explanation than other alternative utilization models. In this study, this *interaction* model also serves as my theoretical framework.<sup>2</sup>

### ***1.6 Conceptual framework***

Although the central issue of this study is the research–practice gap, this must not be taken to imply that I, as the researcher, regard theory and practice as dichotomous. In fact, together with the critique of positivism, the dichotomy of these two concepts has been contested since the early 1970s. Currently, the emergence of terms such as *practice-based research*, *practice as research*, *research-informed practice*, and *research into practice* (Douglas, Scopa, & Gray, 2002; Humphreys, Berridge, Butler, & Ruddick, 2003; Jarvis, 1999; Piccini, 2002) has challenged the boundaries between research and practice, and also the researcher–practitioner distinction. As will be explained later in this chapter, I align myself with this new movement. However, the dichotomous view still carries much weight in the current academic discourse, particular within the South African context. In addition, it was also observed that, in this particular context, researchers and practitioners still seem to constitute two separate entities and that research often refers to projects carried out by a researcher (from an academic setting) in a school with practitioners (often teachers). Therefore, it is this type of research only – most common in the context – that was the target of this study. To be more specific, the researchers included in this study were either postgraduate students who carried out research for degree purposes or lecturers at a university who carried out research as part of their academic activities; meanwhile the practitioners only referred to teacher-practitioners who participated in a research study mainly to provide data.

In addition, the term *practitioner* as used in this study needs clarification. In the study, the term *practitioner* refers to the *research subjects* only. In other words, the researcher–practitioner relationship addressed in the study is the relationship between *the researcher* and *the researched*. Although I was aware that *the practitioner* and *the researched* were not identical, these two terms were used interchangeably in the study for the following reasons.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, please see par 2.1.

- In the broad sense the term *the practitioner* could refer to anyone who may be affected by the research and not necessarily only those who participated in the research. The focus of this study was on those who participated in the research study (*the researched*) only resulted from a concern that the researcher–practitioner relationship, if endorsing the term *practitioner* in the broad sense, could be far more indirect, remote and vague, and thus more difficult to identify.
- In reality the term *the researched* might also refer to a bigger group than merely *practitioners*. In the educational context *the practitioners* could refer mainly to the teachers, while *the researched* could also refer to policymakers, community members, students, parents, etc. Policy makers were excluded in this study because they occupied different positions of power to the usual practitioners. Furthermore, the lack of existing empirical data and therefore the explorative nature of this study indicated that unnecessary noises caused by including different groups of *the researched* was better shut out. Lastly, parents and students were excluded out of a concern for access<sup>3</sup> and the level of articulation needed for a complex issue such as the researcher–practitioner relationship.

## ***1.7 Methodology***

### **1.7.1 Paradigm, epistemological assumptions and research approach**

Given the topic of this study, the qualitative research approach was used to investigate the research phenomenon. The qualitative approach was chosen particularly because the focus of this study was unpacking how different researchers and their participants understood and described their researcher-practitioner engagement. This underlying assumption gave acknowledgement to individuals’ subjectively constructed knowledge and allowed space for difference in understanding from different individuals. This understanding is situated in the interpretivism and constructivism paradigm which recognises multiple realities.

### **1.7.2 Research design**

The qualitative multiple case study method was found to be well suited as it explores the diversified perceptions, understandings, feeling and experiences of different groups. This is because “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p3). Denzin and Lincoln view the researcher as *bricoleur*—a Jack-of-all-trades who uses any methods, strategies or empirical material that are available in the

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<sup>3</sup> The concern about access was particularly important to me because of my foreigner status. Detail explained in par 7.2.

context to produce the *bricolage*, that is a solution to the puzzle. In a qualitative case study, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, analysis and interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I chose to use a qualitative case study research design for the following reasons: first, epistemologically, I accepted reality to be a subjective concept that needed to be interpreted rather than measured. Second, the flexibility of the design allowed me to follow a planned process, yet also to be open to any surprises and to use the information gathered in the earlier research stages to alter subsequent stages; in other words, to “move with goalposts” (Paechter, 2000). Third, a qualitative case study is guided by the ethic of remaining loyal or true to the phenomena under investigation and is not confined to any particular set of methodological techniques or principles (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). Methodology thus serves rather than leads the research. And lastly, this research sought to account for the two communities’ experiences and perceptions and to pose questions regarding meanings and interpretations. It was therefore important to have a flexible design that could accommodate this diversity.

Because of the explorative nature of this study, the research design can be best described as an exploratory multiple case study (Cohen *et al*, 2000), which investigates a relatively unknown research area, opens the way for further studies and generates new researchable hypotheses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) and examines initial assumptions on which to base other studies (Merriam, 2001).

To be more specific, the research phenomenon investigated in this study was explored, firstly, through a document analysis of twenty–eight Masters and PhD dissertations where the evolving relationship of the dissertation authors with their participants was examined. This was followed by six empirical qualitative case studies.

The choice of including the document analysis as part of the research design was based primarily upon one finding from the literature review reported in par 2.4. According to this finding, there were relatively few reports on the empirical disclosure of the researcher/practitioner relationship in published journals. The expectation was that this could be caused by the restraint imposed by journal space. Furthermore, the expectation was that dissertation authors would be less confined in terms of number of pages and also more

willing to report on what had happened between them and their participants.

The distribution of the six empirical cases was as follows:

- One student-researcher case chosen from each of the categories classified in the document analysis database (see par 4.1, three categories in total);
- Two experienced researchers cases (defined as those researchers who had completed their PhDs more than five years before the study);
- The interaction between researcher and participants (Chapter 7).

The aim of including the student-researcher cases was to allow for a comparison between document (dissertations) and narratives (interviews); to approach the experienced researchers was to examine further whether/how the student-researcher cases differed from the experienced researcher cases in terms of the relationship. Extensive reflection of the way in which my participants reacted with me as a researcher was to provide more firsthand insight.

### 1.7.3 Research questions

The main research questions framing this research were:

- **How do researchers and practitioners perceive and experience the researcher–practitioner relationship?**
- **What kind of researcher-practitioner relationship do the researchers and the practitioners prefer?**
- **How does such a relationship (both experienced and preferred) link with the researcher/practitioner context<sup>4</sup> and research utilisation?**

In order to answer these questions three main sets of sub questions were drawn up to “obtain rich and varied information by approaching the topic from several angles” (Kvale, 1996, p. 130). They were designed parallel to the way in which a research study usually unfolds.<sup>5</sup>

1. Pre-research phase – What is the motivation for conducting/participating in the research? What expectations do the researchers and their participants have of each other? How do both parties understand

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<sup>4</sup> The researcher/practitioner context refers to the organisational factors that the researcher or practitioner brings into the research setting. For a detailed explanation please see conceptual framework of Huberman’s general model and the relevant literature review in Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> For detailed interview guidelines, please refer to par 3.3.3, interview protocol.



their responsibilities towards each other?

2. Interim phase – How do the researchers and their participants encounter each other and engage during the course of the research? How do both parties perceive and experience the engagement?
3. Post-research phase – Was the relationship continued in any way after the research? In retrospect what are the impressions of the researchers and their participants of each other and how do they evaluate the relationship?<sup>6</sup>

These questions were posed to both the researchers and their original participants in order to draw a holistic picture of the relationship, as well as to explore convergences or contradictions.

The following questions were developed through brain storming and discussions with other educational researchers<sup>7</sup> and were used to frame the document analysis, as well as the literature review, since it is, in fact, very difficult to define the quality of a relationship and there is no specific literature from which I can draw:

- What was the extent of the disclosure of the researcher-participant relationship?
- According to this disclosure what was the researchers' experience of the researcher-practitioner engagement<sup>8</sup> (both in and beyond data collection period)?
- To what extent were the voices of the participants (direct quotes or those filtered through the researcher) included in the disclosure?
- How did these researchers describe their relationship? In other words, what was the main tone of the descriptions and the extent of self-reflection?

#### 1.7.4 Data collection

Lengthy in-depth interviews were used as the main data collection method.<sup>9</sup> This was supplemented by observation and reflection, particularly for the last case.

Face-to-face interviews with original researchers and their original participants from the sampled research

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<sup>6</sup> Although the data collection period was essential I did not imply that the periods both prior to and post data collection were peripheral when examining the researcher-practitioner engagement. Indeed, ignoring those periods and focusing on data collection only could have made the practitioners feel *they were being used* and therefore uneasy. In accordance with the theoretical framework I specifically included these two periods in the exploration of the topic.

<sup>7</sup> Other educational researchers included my mentor for the bigger study and colleagues and fellow researchers in the education faculty where I was registered.

<sup>8</sup> The issues investigated regarding the researcher-practitioner engagement included accommodating the participants, the involvement/detachment decision etc.

<sup>9</sup> A pilot study was not carried out because a qualitative study design, by nature, comprises adaptation, changes and refinement. Thus the necessary changes concerning interview questions asked or probing were constantly kept in mind and directly influenced the interviews in the next round.

projects were done. I initiated the interviews with the original researchers first and used the questions (semi-structured interview) contained in chapter 3.3.3 as guidelines. Then I requested the researcher to seek the permission of the original participants. In some occasions, however, the researcher either did not do so or else could not do so. In these cases I asked for the contact details of the original participants and approached them myself directly. Selected researchers and practitioners were also interviewed about their understanding and perceptions of the interactions with me in the last case.

### **1.7.5 Data analysis**

I analysed the data manually, using both pre-determined codes derived from literature and ongoing open codes emerged from fieldwork. I followed the step-by-step procedure of coding, categorising the data and clustering the data into families and eventually searching for the patterns, recommended by Tesch (1990) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001).

The tape-recorded interview data was first transcribed into text. Then the data were broken into sections and classified into codes, guided by the research objectives. The correlations and connections between the categories were then studied and similar codes and codes that connected to each other were further clustered into one category. The same procedure was carried out for each category until all categories were clustered into families. During this procedure, patterns that emerged from the data were identified.

### ***1.8 Significance of the research***

This research was among the first to investigate the research–practice issue from the perspective of the researcher–practitioner engagement. The accounts obtained from the practitioners contributed significantly to a more holistic and richer and better defined picture of the researcher–practitioner relationship. The findings of this study also contributed to a greater understanding of the linkages between the researcher/practitioner context, researcher–practitioner interaction and research utilisation.

The design of this study required an extraordinary amount of self reflection. Other factors such as incorporating extensive critical analysis of Masters and Doctoral dissertations as data sources were also very

uncommon in similar studies.

### ***1.9 Limitations of the study***

One salient feature of this study was its retrospective nature. The intensive use of retrospect in this study certainly allowed the respondents to evaluate their experiences from a perspective which had matured over time. However, there are also disadvantages inherent in this retrospective aspect. Retrospection relies heavily on recollection, and, therefore, the extent to which people remember and, more importantly, recall correctly determines the quality of their stories and the findings from the data. Furthermore, since such retrospective stories are based mainly on self-reporting, the possibility certainly existed that the self reported stories were affected by a *social desirability bias* to colour a past event or even to fictionalise the experience (Shisana & Simbayi, 2002). In an effort to address this limitation, I included my interactions with the participants for first hand and on site data. Extensive built-in triangulation (multiple cases, multiple sources, as well as multiple methods) also allowed for interrogation of the relationship between written and oral description, between novice researchers' experience and that of the experienced ones, and between the perceptions from the researchers and those from the practitioners.

Another limitation arose from the sampling strategy used. Since the *researched* included in this study comprised those participants who had taken part in previous research, those who either did not participate or were not willing to participate were filtered out. Furthermore, since in the empirical case studies *the researchers* had had the opportunity to select the original participants whom I accessed, there could also have been bias in the sense of choosing only their participants who had favourable perceptions about the research and the researcher. Although I had asked *the researchers* to provide at least two participants in order to address this problem, the findings need to be applied with caution.

Furthermore, as indicated earlier, my own characteristics strongly influenced many aspects of this research. For example, the possible selection bias of what to include and what not to include in the literature review and document analysis, and the way in which to describe my review and analysis could have resulted in a different display and interpretation of the data if carried out by another person. Furthermore, my own ideology and

commitment to the utility value of research, my expectations of what should/could be and my understanding/expectation of the relationship itself could also have impacted on my judgement. I could not discard my biases, so, instead, I provided detailed traces of the evidence for my conclusions, including the way in which the dialogue evolved.

A fourth limitation resulted from the documents that I used for analysis. Although the choice to include these Masters and Doctoral dissertations was a choice I made due to the limited scope of the existing publications, I did realise that what I discovered from these *student-researchers* could differ from what had been discovered from the experienced researchers. This was, in fact, the reason why the two cases of experienced researchers were included in the empirical section of this study.

The time and facilities available for this study also meant that my inquiry could not cover all the dimensions that I planned initially – dimensions such as distinguishing whether and how different motives for carrying out research could affect the researcher–practitioner relationship, whether and how contract and non-contract research could result in a different relationship, whether classroom–based research manifests differently from non-classroom based research, whether researcher–practitioners (practitioners conducting their own research) conduct their research differently from the researchers defined in this study, as well as the way in which policy studies differ from general practice studies, etc. Although I could not cover all these dimensions, I regard this research as explorative research to initiate debate and strongly encourage further investigations into these dimensions.

### ***1.10 Organization of the thesis***

This thesis is divided into eight chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the background of the study, the research questions and research design, together with reflections on the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 describes the conceptual framework of the study and presents a literature review.

Chapter 3 describes the epistemological assumption and the methodological decisions.

Chapter 4 contains a critical document analysis of the researcher–practitioner relationship described in 28 Masters and PhD dissertations in order to present a synthesis of the relationship from the perspectives of these novice researchers. It also lays the foundation for further comparison and discussion of the empirical study in the next two chapters, as well as identifying and classifying the dissertations from which the empirical cases were selected.

Chapter 5-6 provide detailed descriptions of the five empirical case studies, of which three were the cases of student-researchers selected from the document analysis database. The other two were the cases of the experienced researchers.

Chapter 7 describes in detail how the participants interacted with the researcher in the study, reflects on how decisions were made throughout the study, and also provides a more detailed data analysis.

Chapter 8 synthesises the overall findings, revisits the conceptual framework and other literature, and proposes two theories regarding research utilisation and the insider/outsider positioning.

## 2 THE PATTERNS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP – A LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains, firstly, a presentation of the research utilisation models and Huberman’s (1990) general model. Next, relevant debates about different aspects of the researcher–practitioner relationship are examined, as well as limited publications which empirically report on this relationship.

### *2.1 Research utilisation model*

Weiss (1979) proposes seven research utilisation models in her article *The many meanings of research utilisation*. These models are the *knowledge-driven model* (linear flow from knowledge creation to usage), *problem-solving model* (linear flow initiated from a problem that needs to be solved), *interactive model* (research is among the many sources of decision making and the process is “a disorderly set of interconnection and back-and-forthness” (1979, p. 428), *political model* (research is used to justify oneself after a stance has already been taken), *tactical model* (research is used for purposes such as enhancing the prestige of a decision or deflecting criticism, or simply as a bureaucratic politics), *enlightenment model* (research influences consciousness), *research as part of the intellectual enterprise of the society* (research responds to current thought, all explanations are adopted from the original text).

Although her categorisation initiates a comprehensive way of viewing research utilisation and also led to many other subsequent works, her categorisation suffers from repetition and lacks consistency in the criteria adopted. The *political* and *tactical* model are virtually the same, while the *enlightenment model* is also very similar to *research as part of the intellectual enterprise of the society*. Furthermore, the first few models pinpoint the possible drives behind research utilisation, while the latter models focus more on possible methods of research usage.

To address the discrepancies in the inconsistent criteria used in Weiss’s seven models, the discussion below is

organised around the following two themes:

- different models of research utilisation, explaining the possible drives behind research utilisation and reasons for its under-utilisation; and
- the debate on instrumental/conceptual utilisation.

### 2.1.1 Modes of research utilization

In literature theorising knowledge utilisation, Landry et al. (2001) identified four alternatives, namely the *science push model* (corresponds closely with the *knowledge-driven model* identified by Weiss); the *dissemination model*; the *demand pull model* (corresponds closely with *problem-solving model* identified by Weiss) and the *interaction model* (corresponds closely with *interactive model* identified by Weiss).

The *science push model* stresses the supply side of research findings as the major determinant of research utilisation. In this model, utilisation follows a linear flow from the supplier to the users – the researchers comprise the sources from whom to direct research, and the users are there solely to receive the result.

According to this model the dimensions that research could use to influence utilisation are the following:

- Content attributes, such as compatibility, complexity, validity, applicability and radicalness (Dearing & Meyer, 1994; Edwards, 1991; Lomas, 1993)
- Types of research: basic/applied; general/abstract (Machlup, 1980), qualitative/quantitative (Huberman & Thurler, 1991, as cited in Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001), particular/concrete (Rich, 1997), research domains and disciplines (Oh, 1997; Rich, 1997)

Criticisms of this model include a lack of empirical evidence for the relation between the technical quality of research results and utilisation (Dunn, 1983; Edwards, 1991; Huberman, 1987), as well as the assumption that the transfer of knowledge is automatic and that raw research information is usable without any adaptation.

These criticisms stimulated the emergence of the *dissemination model*. The *dissemination model* suggests that, besides the type and content of research, the dissemination effort is also an important factor in explaining knowledge utilisation. Such a dissemination effort includes the identification of useful knowledge and the adaptation of such knowledge in ways suited to potential users. This model explains the absence of any significant impact of research in that much of the research is neither widely nor properly disseminated (MacLean, 1996). Although this model still views the relationship between the knowledge producer and the

user as linear, and users, as predicted in this model, are still not involved in the selection of transferable research information, the important role of the users is clearly more advanced.

The *demand pull model* maintains the emphasis on users. This model suggests that, instead of the researchers (suppliers), the users are the major source with whom to direct research (Rich, 1991; Weiss, 1979; Yin & Moore, 1988). This model also often points to a customer–contractor relationship, in terms of which the practitioners behave like customers who define what research they want, and the researchers behave like contractors who execute contracts. In this model research utilisation is explained only by the needs of the users – the needs of the users are more important to the researchers than the advancement of scholarly knowledge (Chelimsky, 1997; Frenk, 1992; Orlandi, 1996; Silverside, 1997). As regards an explanation as to the reason why some research is still put aside even when it has been initiated by the practitioners, this model pinpoints the fact that the organisational interests of the users could possibly conflict with the research findings. The main criticism of this model includes:

- It is applicable only in cases in which users initiate the research, while much research is still initiated by the researchers;
- It follows a linear flow, although the path is from the user to the producer;

In response to the criticisms on the linear view, the *interaction model* abandons this view and suggests that knowledge utilisation depends on the various interactions which occur between the researcher and the users. This model identifies a lack of two-way interaction between the researcher and the user as the main reason for under-utilisation (Huberman, 1987; Leung, 1992; Lomas, 1997; Oh & Rich, 1996). The cultural differences between these two groups are also often identified as one of the obstacles to engagement. The model further points out that research utilisation, which depends heavily on the transfer of information, occurs best in the context of relationships which are based on familiarity and trust, and often built up over time (Bogenschneider, Olson, Linney, & Mills, 2000). Therefore, unlike the previous models, this model suggests greater attention be given to the relationships between the researchers and the users at different stages of knowledge production, dissemination and utilisation.

Empirical work such as the studies of Caplan, Morrison, and Stambaugh (1975), Landry, Amara, and Lamari (2001) and Yin (1981) suggests that this model offers a better explanation of the under utilisation phenomenon



compared to other alternative utilisation models. This could also be supported by a theoretical observation that this model integrates the explanatory factors identified in other models, particularly the importance of a match between the type/content of the research and the interest of the user (*science push model*) and the importance of a mechanism with which to facilitate the credibility of both the researcher and the research (*dissemination model*).

The *interaction* model serves as the theoretical framework in this study.

### **2.1.2 Instrumental/conceptual utilization debate**

Another angle from which to approach the issue of research utilisation is that of the instrumental and conceptual debate. Although this debate also arose from the attempt to explain the research–practice gap in many disciplines, it highlights the possible disciplinary difference between natural science and social science.

*The many meanings of research utilisation* model of Weiss (1979) points out that research could be among the many factors influencing decision making. It may also be used to justify after a decision has been taken, or serve as general enlightenment. In accordance with this, the most commonly accepted classifications of research use are instrumental, conceptual and symbolic.

Instrumental use involves applying research results in specific, direct ways. Conceptual use involves using research results for general enlightenment: results influence actions but more indirectly and less specifically than in instrumental use. Symbolic use involves using research results to legitimate and sustain predetermined positions (Beyer, 1997, p. 17).

The remaining discussion will be limited to only the instrumental and conceptual use, since symbolic use is of a very different nature compared to the other two types (in terms of the role to inform decision making/legitimate predetermined decision) and often remains the least desired type of research utilisation.

Instrumental use has been in use from way back in history. During World War II when programme evaluators found that their recommendations had no significant impact on policy decisions, they complained. “At that time, expectations of programme evaluators and university researchers were that decision makers

would have made direct use of their research results” (Amara, Ouimet, & Landry, 2004, p. 76). During the period following World War II the social sciences endeavoured to demonstrate their utility, often in the same sense (Lewis, 2002).

It was only in the 1980s that some researchers began to challenge this view, arguing that research could be useful for other purposes, such as for general enlightenment or conceptual use (Caplan, 1980; Cohen & Garet, 1975; Feldman & March, 1981; Knorr, 1977; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Pelz, 1978; Rich, 1975; Rich, 1977; Weiss, 1979; Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980).

This view quickly gained popularity and, in the social sciences, it is now commonly accepted that conceptual use does indeed happen more often than instrumental use. In fact, both Weiss (1980) and Dunn (1980) state that instrumental use seems to be rare. This dominance of conceptual utilisation is claimed to be related to the characteristics of social science itself, for instance, its nature of being both tacit and context bounded; the lack of strength, authority and efficacy of an individual study (Hammersley, 1997; Hargreaves, 1996; Herie & Martin, 2002); and lack of incentives for rapid and direct knowledge dissemination (compared with the patent or other reward system existing in natural science). To conclude, Weiss (1980) names such utilisation as *knowledge creep* and claims that the use of social science knowledge ought not be viewed as having a direct impact on specific decisions as is the case in instrumental use; rather it has a diffuse relationship with practice, and often permeates practice in the form of new concepts, frameworks and world-views. Many other writers also support this view and echo that the research practice relationship follows an indirect path, often through the collective power of several research studies over time (Hellstrom & Raman, 2001; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Rich, 1977; Weiss, 1979; Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980).

The above discussion can be summarised as follows:

- Instrumental utilisation exercises greater influence on actions; yet it seldom occurs in social science.
- Conceptual utilisation is a more realistic way in which to view research impact; it is indirect, occurs over time, or, in other words, is less influential.

Taking the two above statements into account, research utilization from the social sciences into practice is expected to be weak.

This conclusion is also in line with studies investigating the way in which practice is informed. Weiss's (1979) suggestion that research could be one among many other sources of knowledge usage is confirmed by the studies of DeMartini and Whitbeck (1986) and Patton et al (1977) in which they conclude that an experiential knowledge source is the most important in informing practice, and is followed by interpersonal and theoretical knowledge. Research into evidence-based practice or into the reasons why practice does not follow research findings also points out that professional habits, routines and norms, personal beliefs, and general resistance to change (Ben-Peretz, 1994/95; Caldwell, 1991; Kirk, 1999; Lomas, 1993) are often more powerful in shaping practices than are theories.<sup>10</sup>

In his explanation of why “the relations between theorist and practitioner of pedagogy have in general been neither close or highly productive”, Bolster (1983, p. 294) highlights again the difference that teachers, as practitioners, often operate in a particular situation and are interested in what could explain or work within that particular situation, while theorists are, in general, more interested in establishing general principles or defining/demonstrating the principles across similar situations. This could surely be regarded as a typical two-community explanation, yet it also points to the ultimate dilemma faced by social science – if context-specific is recognised as one of main characteristics of social science (Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2002) as well as multiple realities (implying that there is no absolute truth or universal principle), why are social scientists still interested in developing general principles or theory in general? From this point of view, the emphasis on the existence and prevalence of conceptual utilisation in social science might also be viewed as an excuse rather than a proper explanation. If teachers were naturally more interested in their particular situation and, if this interest also often accompanies a desire to find things that work in the specific situation, then the idea of instrument utilisation (at least in that specific context) should indeed be revived instead of abandoned or ignored. In the same vein, the meaning of theory, whether it could/should refer to a general principle only or whether it could also refer to an explanation that is context specific, might also need to be revisited.

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<sup>10</sup> Although the source of conceptual utilisation may also be understood as an umbrella that includes work environment, past experiences, beliefs and educational background, or even tradition itself, not all these elements actually result from research, so, although they may be viewed as good examples of conceptual utilisation in a broader sense, one may not simply conclude that they indeed stem from theoretical knowledge, or research findings.

## 2.2 Huberman's general model

The *interaction* model of research utilisation is relevant to this study as it points to the importance of examining the interactions between the researchers and their participants, while Huberman's general model (1990) further extends a primary interest for the researcher–practitioner relationship beyond the isolated relationship manifested in the research process itself, to both the pre- and the post-research period. In other words, Huberman's general model (1990) not only provides a comprehensive framework within which to view the researcher–practitioner relationship as an ongoing process, but it also pinpoints the importance of locating this relationship in a flow of from where it comes and to where it goes. This provides not only a more holistic, but also a more realistic view of the researcher–practitioner relationship. This model did not influence the analysis of data in this study *per se*, but it did, however, inform the overall design of the research.

As co-author of *Qualitative data analysis* (Miles & Huberman, 1984), Huberman has exerted a tremendous influence on the literacy researchers who, at the time, were attempting to bring qualitative paradigms to enquiries into teaching and learning. At that time qualitative and ethnographic research had started to claim a central position in the field of literacy, and many other methodologists have since joined with Miles and Huberman to inform and instruct the ways and means of qualitative research.

Huberman first proposed his General Model in 1987 in an attempt to build an integrated model to explain research utilisation, with particular emphasis on the conceptualisation of those variables which account for the variations between different research utilisation patterns from different research projects. Accompanying this general model, Huberman also provided three specific models: the researchers' organisational model, the users' organisational model and the dissemination effort model that spelt out the variable sets in the boxes in the general model, for example, organisational factors, linkage to user organisation, impact on user, etc.

To summarise these models, Huberman views the researchers and practitioners (referred to as *users* in his model) as people from two organisations and he regards the researcher–practitioner relationship mainly as an organisational tie. According to him, the interaction between the respective organisational factors of these two groups of people (defined as *researcher/user context* in the model) informs the type and degree of the

researcher–practitioner relationship (*linkage/network*). He also views this relationship not as a once off tie, but as an ongoing process that takes place "not only on completion of the study, but also during, and ideally, before the conduct of the study" (1990, p. 365). Furthermore, he claims that this relationship influences what happens after the research, namely, the dissemination effort resulting from the readiness on the part of both the researchers and the practitioners to embrace the research findings, and thus the concrete effects of the study (research utilisation, both *instrumental* and *conceptual*) and secondary effects (mainly a longer-term influence, or *conceptual* in nature).

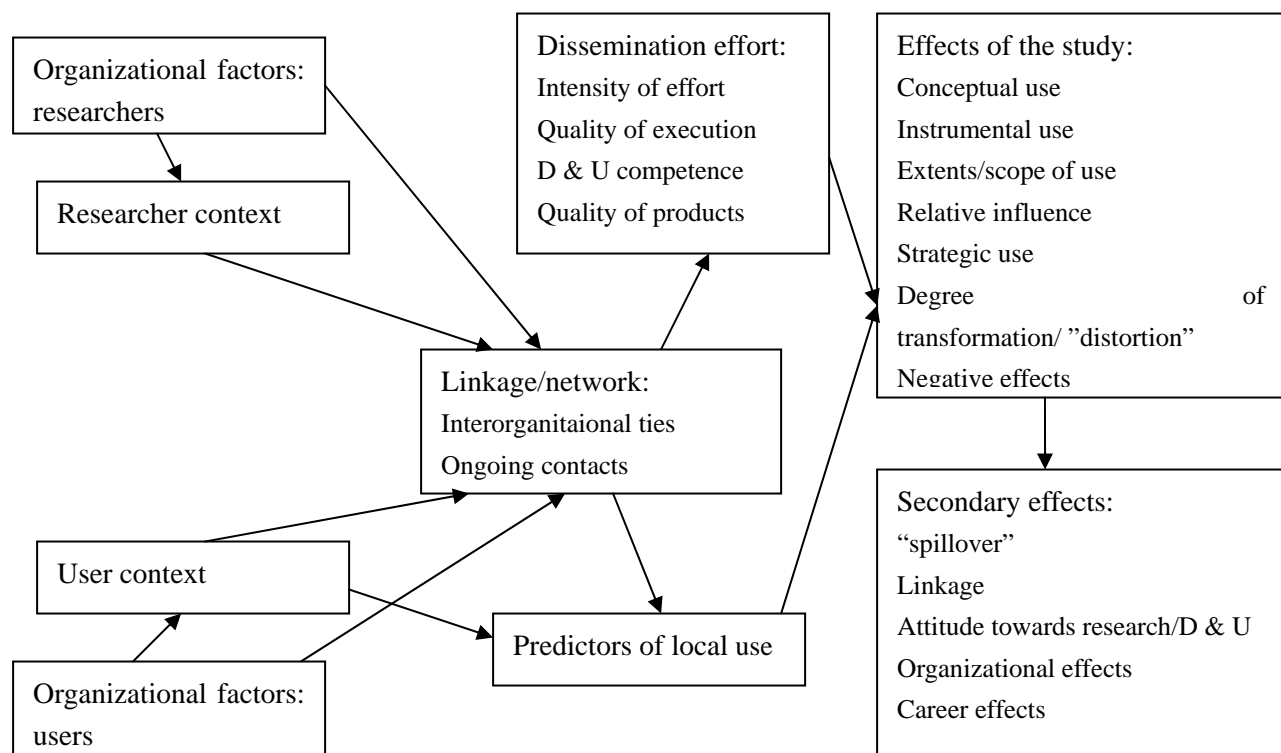


Figure 1: General model (Huberman, 1990)

In 1990, Huberman published another work that re-presented the 1987 general model in a more concise and neat manner. In addition, he proposed two categories with which to assess the several research cases he had included in the discussion. Altogether these two categories included five possible scenarios in terms of the way in which the researcher–practitioner engagement affects the relationship both before and after a study. It is anticipated that these scenarios will be useful in examining the empirical data in the study. For these reasons

the 1990 reference is used instead of the 1987 reference as the theoretical framework of this study.

Category 1: Stable levels of linkage prior to and after the project

1. "Hello-goodbye"- no links before, none after
2. "Two planets"- weak links which remain weak
3. "Standoff"- moderate links remain stable

Category 2: Increasing levels of linkage prior to and after the project

4. "Reciprocal engagement"- weak links which strengthen
5. "Synergy"- moderate links which strengthen

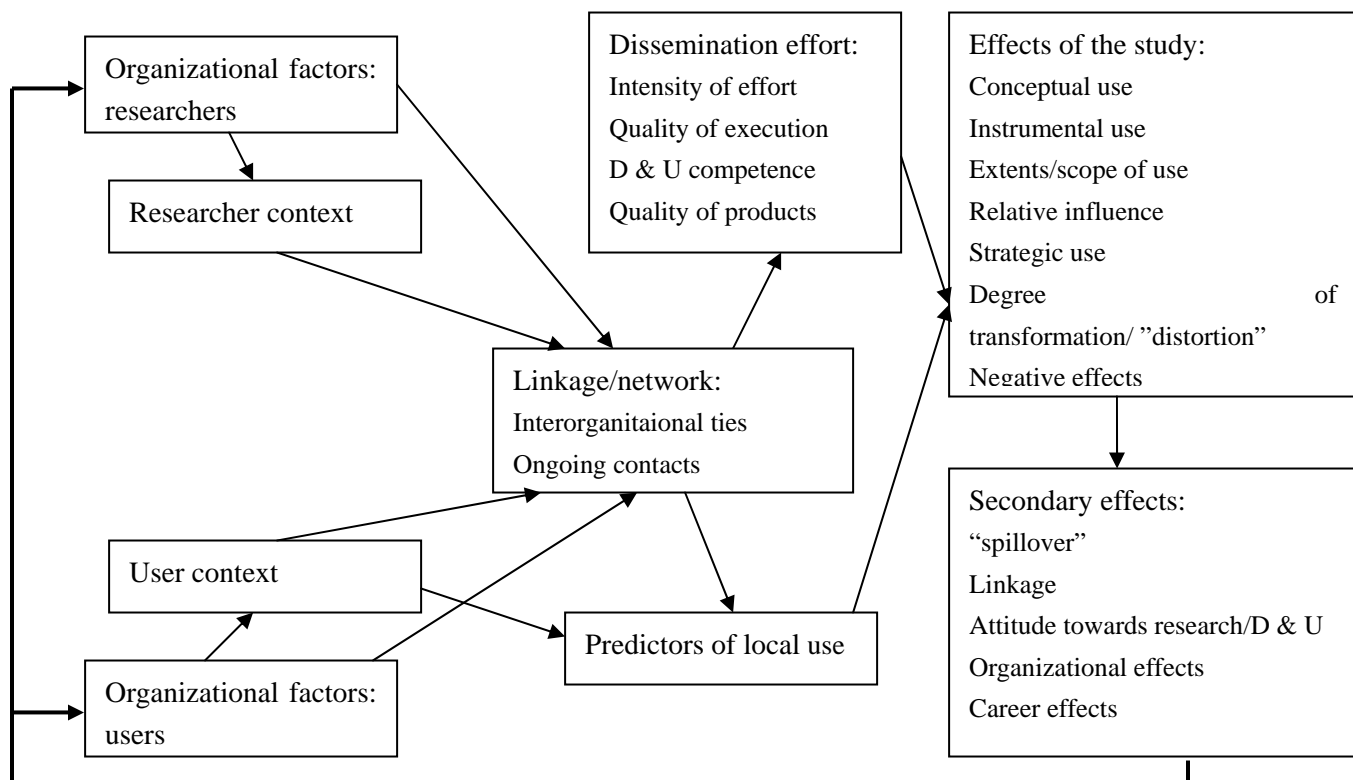


Figure 2: Revised Huberman's model

A literature search of references to this model reveals that the majority of the references simply describe the model, and neither provides any sustained criticisms of the model nor do they pose any questions about the model itself. My own intuition did predict the overall usefulness of this model, however, my initial criticism about the model was that it should include a link that feeds the *secondary effects* back to the

researcher/practitioner context for the next potential engagement (as I show in Figure 2).<sup>11</sup>

### ***2.3 Researcher/practitioner context—what influences the researcher–practitioner relationship?***

Since Huberman’s model indicates the importance of viewing the researcher–practitioner relationship as a result of those organisational factors that feed into the researcher/practitioner context, it was considered necessary to search for possible factors that exist within this researcher/practitioner context and to discover the ways in which these factors could have influenced the researcher–practitioner relationship during the research.

Huberman’s general model does not specify what these factors may be. However, when the model first appeared in 1987 Huberman did propose certain variables. These variables include organisational experience with dissemination and utilisation (D & U), status, the priority of D & U in an organisation, rewards, disincentives for D & U activity and the researchers’ network. Except for the last factor all the others factors seem more applicable to the organisation as a whole rather than to the researcher. Since my interest in this research was focused more on the people involved than on the organisation as a whole, I found it necessary to seek out other factors that describe the influences of an organisational culture on individual researchers.

For this purpose I conducted an intensive literature search. However it was still a problem to derive indicators directly from literature. Therefore, through a synthesis of the literature, I came up with the following factors myself – detachment/involvement decisions, aims of conducting research, beneficence.

#### **2.3.1 Detachment or involvement—a choice deeply rooted in the epistemological stance?**

The British Sociological Association suggests that, in order to maintain the professional integrity of both the researchers themselves and the sociological inquiry as a discipline, researchers “should be clear about the limits of their detachment from and involvement in their areas of study” (British Sociological Association (BSA), 1996, p. 1). However the literature on the detachment/involvement decision does show that not only are the notions of detachment and involvement complex, multifaceted, dynamic and situational (Acker, 2000;

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<sup>11</sup> More criticisms of the model, which arose out of the findings from this research, are presented in par 8.2.2.

Banks, 1998; Kanuha, 2000; Sherif, 2001), but that the insider-outsider boundary is also often problematic and highly unstable (Visser, 2003).

Although there is no direct guidance on how close the researcher and practitioners could/should be, Gold's (1958) typology of the role and level of involvement of the observer could provide a guideline to the general researcher-participant distance.

In his typology, Gold's outlines four modes by means of which an observer may gather data: *complete observer*, *observer-as-participant*, *participant-as-observer* and *complete participant*. A *complete observer* is an outsider who does not interact in any way at all with the participants. According to the traditional ideal of *objectivity*, this constitutes the most perfect observer. An *observer-as-participant* starts to interact with the participants, although his identity does remain strongly research-orientated and no personal involvement is recommended (Adler & Adler, 1998). *Participant-as-observer* is one-step further as relationship occurred in the fieldwork, sometimes even friendship, is granted. In this role the development of trust is important. A *complete participant* covers his identity as a researcher in the field so that he is able to interact with the participants as naturally as possible.

Three types of membership roles classified by Adler and Adler (1998) later evolved from the above typology: *complete-member-researcher*, *active-member-researcher*, and *peripheral-member-researcher*:

Researchers in peripheral membership roles feel that an insider's perspective is vital to forming an accurate appraisal of human group life, so they observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership...The active membership role describes researchers who become more involved in the setting's central activities, assuming responsibilities that advance the group, but without fully committing themselves to members' values and goals... Researchers in the complete membership role are those who study scenes where they are already members or those who become converted to genuine membership during the course of their research...to immerse oneself and grasp the complete depth of the subjectively lived experience (1998, p. 84).

An epistemology divide, particularly between the qualitative and quantitative paradigm, is deeply rooted in the roles identified in both categorisations of Gold and Adler & Adler.



Traditionally, only positivism and post-positivism (related to the quantitative paradigm) are thought to have scientific rigour and worth. This position advocates highly the necessity for neutrality in research in order to acquire true knowledge. It regards detachment and objectivity as highly desirable, and perceives involvement or subjectivity as a source of bias that needs to be eliminated (Finlay, 2002). Such traditional discourse also emphasises a separation between research and practice, as well as a separation between the role of a researcher and that of the practitioners. It preserves the researchers as “academics and scientists who have had the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct research” and “practitioners have been expected to abide by and implement their findings” (Jarvis, 1999, p. 3).

In the 1920s and 1930s, a group of researchers who were not satisfied with this stance proposed an alternative paradigm. Initially this proposal met with rejection and strong resistance, but gradually recognition as well as acceptance and, in certain circumstances, even popularity, was granted, especially in social science. It became known as the qualitative paradigm – an umbrella concept covering critical theory, interpretivism and constructivism. The advocates of this paradigm challenge the necessity and feasibility of objectivity (e.g. Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979) and promote an alternative that grants *intimacy* and a close, interactive, emancipatory relationship between the knower and the known (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Together with the criticisms of traditional positivism, this movement also witnessed the emergences of certain other concepts, such as *practice-based research*, *practice as research*, *research-informed practice*, and *research into practice* (Douglas, Scopa, & Gray, 2002; Humphreys, Berridge, Butler, & Ruddick, 2003; Jarvis, 1999; Piccini, 2002), which not only challenge the boundaries between research and practice, but also the researcher–practitioner distinction. For example, Jarvis defines those practitioners who conduct their own research as *practitioner-researchers* (1999, p. 3), or, as Heron views it, all those involved in research should indeed be known as *the researchers* (1981, p. 20).

Gibbons et al.’s (1994) two modes of *how knowledge is generated* respond well to these two paradigms (traditional quantitative paradigm versus qualitative paradigm) and may further be used to explain the differences between them. Table 1 explains the characteristics of both Mode 1 and 2.

Table 1: Modes of knowledge production, adapted from Gibbons, *et al.* (1994)

|   | Mode 1  | Mode 2   |
|---|---|--|
| Hierarchy of knowledge                      | Ascribe to basic, strategic and applied research as a hierarchy of esteem and virtue. Basic or pure research is more highly regarded than applied works.  | The hierarchy between basic, strategic and applied is irrelevant, what counts is the advancement of knowledge. |
| Advancement of knowledge within disciplines | Knowledge advances within disciplinary boundaries.  | See knowledge as fostered by trans-disciplinarity, has no predilection for particular discipline.              |
| Quality control                             | Peer review is necessary and sufficient for assessment.   | Inputs from potential users are also regarded as valid contributions to quality assessment.                    |
| Individualism                               | Individualism is emphasised.  | Teamwork, with involvement from other departments, institutions or the practitioners, is preferred             |
| Flow of knowledge                           | Linear. The academic role is confined to the early stages of the knowledge follow from the researchers to the practitioners, with a clear distinction between producers and users of knowledge. | Interactive, acknowledge joint production of knowledge.  |

A further examination of Mode 1 reveals that *privilege* is at its core. The perception that the production of knowledge is a privilege for the researchers only means that researchers are moved up in the hierarchy and a *man-made* gap is created between the researchers and the practitioners. Another unspoken assumption of this mode is the low value ascribed to the knowledge of the practitioners, which in turn reinforces the low status of the practitioners, and further widens the gap.

Since knowledge in this mode is regarded as a one-way flow, the issue of the researcher–practitioner relationship in this scenario has mainly to do with ways in which to bridge the gap (still linearly). There are many organisations, researchers and journals working on this aspect, for example, the *Making Research Count* network in the UK (Humphreys, Berridge, Butler, & Ruddick, 2003), the American Laboratories Centres and the Pedagogical Research centres in many European countries (Huberman, 1999). However, few challenge the perception of the privileged status of the researcher and the presumption that the gap between the researcher and the practitioner is inevitable.

As a traditional mode, Mode 1 has been widely accepted in the academic world. For example, as Rogers (2000) points out, the nature and main assumptions underpinning Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) in England – an influential research assessment exercise – are largely Mode 1.

The strong influence of Mode 1, for example, the value-neutral orientation, may even be discerned within the Mode 2 community (Apple, 1996). Jacobson, et al. (2004) point out that, while Mode 2 is increasingly becoming the popular choice for researchers in social science, many academic units continue to operate under the traditional mindset (Mode 1) which emphasises the primacy of disciplinary authority. Such organisational factors exert a strong influence on the way in which researchers position themselves. Way (2005) also points out a similar phenomenon that, although many scholars have abandoned the notion of pure objectivity, they continue to believe that their ultimate goal is that their research be as objective as possible.

From my own conversations with fellow new researchers and observation of researchers through published articles, it also appears that a deliberate naïveté and an advocacy of the absence of presuppositions are still often strongly present among those researchers who conduct qualitative research, positioning themselves in the new paradigm and following the guidelines of Gold's role *participant-as-observer* or Adler & Adler's role of *active-member-researcher*. In practice, these researchers often choose not to voice their own opinions and to avoid answering questions. In certain instances they not only adopt a one-way approach (only ask, not answer) in their research process, but a *remote* tone also remains, as well as *facelessness* and *invisibility*. One example can be seen in the study of Blodgett et al. (2005) in which the researchers claim that considerable attention was devoted to establishing a positive, friendly relationship with their participants and they themselves indeed claim that they became *insiders*. However, in the report of the same study, when one practitioner began to discuss personal matters after the interview the interviewer responded by saying, 'I'm sorry, we cannot give advice on parenting. We are most interested in hearing about your thoughts and experiences.'" Such examples not only illustrate the difficulties in detachment/involvement positioning, but also raise questions as to whether it reflects a conflict between a theoretical and a practical position or in fact represents a conflict within the mindset of the researchers.

### **2.3.2 Purpose of conducting research**

#### 2.3.2.1 Intrinsic/extrinsic debate

Briefly, the aim of the intrinsic argument is to acknowledge the value of pursuing knowledge for its own sake

or to accede that academic curiosity is sufficient reason for conducting research. The extrinsic argument claims that it is not possible for research to escape its social obligation, and therefore requests research/researchers to provide certain practical benefits, such as influencing educational practice (to improve/disapprove certain practices), empowering the participants, or influencing the formulation of a policy.

In academia there are supporters of both arguments. The issue of the social relevance of research has been raised by many researchers (e.g. Bodone, 2002). Among them several academics who advocate action research even claim that action research, of which the most important aim is the empowerment of individuals, is the only form of social research that is able to enact the social obligation to increase fairness, wellness and self-determination (Greenwood & Levin, 2003). Meanwhile the intrinsic argument is still favored by many. As Greenwood & Levin (2003) observe with the addition of knowledge often being used as a comfortable and common justification for a research study, an anti-praxis orientation does, in fact, exist in much of the university-based social research. Not only does the notion of the inferiority of *applied research* (improving practice) compared to pure *basic research* (adding knowledge) still exist widely, but I, as a young scholar, have also been advised, by people including my supervisor, on numerous occasions that “practical reasons are not a *scholarly enough basis* for carrying out research, especially at a PhD level” (emphasis added).

The question, however, is in a social science field that focuses directly on human issues, such as education, whether extrinsic obligation is an excessive requirement or it is indeed inevitable? Winch’s identification (2001) could provide some insight into this issue. After identifying four possible aims of educational research (corresponding markedly with the intrinsic/extrinsic categories elaborated upon earlier), Winch then suggests that, besides these aims and consequent responsibilities, another possible area for which educational researchers need to assume responsibility is that of *accounting for the money spent on educational research to those who provide it* (2001, p. 449). Although he does not explore this notion further, I would like to use it in the following argument.

Firstly, I would like to make a further subdivision of this proposed accountability into *short-term accountability* and *long-term accountability*. *Short-term accountability* refers mainly to contract research, and, by definition, contract research clearly serves certain extrinsic obligations. *Long-term accountability*, on the

other hand, refers to the situation in which the research system is often sustained by public funds. In this scenario extrinsic obligation, as a need to account for a general belief that it would be possible to channel money collected from the taxpayers back as a social benefit for the public, could be remote, but still inescapable.

As noted by Albert (2003), the debate in academia between intrinsic and extrinsic argument also demonstrates a divide between those who favor the traditional autonomy and those who advocate collaboration with non-university actors.

Rich claims that “the notion of adapting knowledge to the needs of society dates back to the Greeks and is the theme running through much of Western thought. scientists were clearly not the only ones to recognise the need to weave knowledge into the fabric of society” (1979, p. 15). However, if one were to review the history and tradition of the universities, it would become obvious that freedom and autonomy have been, at least partly, defined as important academic values.

Universities were established within a liberal environment and it is generally believed that this independent and uncontrolled environment has been both beneficial and necessary. However, it is interesting to note that, this preference for an *independent environment* was due mainly to opposition to interference from authority or political power, it was never the aim to separate academic value from social value. Nevertheless, the notion of the *ivory tower* arose around this idea of independence, and later the creation of an own identity was advanced to preserve authority and power, from which all non-academics were excluded. Meanwhile, as Jacobson, et al. point out, the tradition of evaluation and rewards within universities “continue to value traditional types of within-group activities” (2004, p. 249), and reinforce the ideology that knowledge is an authoritative and self-regulating universe. Whether so intended or not, this institutional culture creates and reinforces, in terms of the researcher–practitioner relationship, a gap between one group known as academics and another group comprising non-academics (including the practitioners) who are often considered not sufficiently competent to participate in intellectual dialogues.

*To account for the money* could also be viewed from another angle. Although motives such as the

establishment of peer recognition, scientific prestige, and academic tenure, have been recognised in certain literature (for example, Lor & Britz, 2005; Yarborough & Sharp, 2002), such extrinsic reasons have usually been omitted from the discussion on either intrinsic or extrinsic aim of conducting research.

To summarise I would like to expand the existing intrinsic/extrinsic argument explaining the purpose of conducting research in the following categories:

- Pure intrinsic reasons: to acknowledge the value of pursuing knowledge for its own sake;
- Pure extrinsic reasons: to acknowledge social obligation and request research to provide certain practical benefit to the community or society, or to anyone other than the researcher him/herself;
- Other extrinsic reasons: for practical reasons benefiting the researcher him/herself, including promotion, recognition and completion of a study degree.

#### 2.3.2.2 Public/private good debate

The intrinsic/extrinsic debate is also closely related to the debate on whether knowledge should be regarded as a public good or as a private good.

In this respect the summary of Lor and Britz (2005) provides a good starting point for further discussion. In brief, Lor and Britz identify and categorise six kinds of value of knowledge according to the two categories of public/private good:

Table 2: Value of knowledge, categorised according to public/private good, explanation adopted from their text. Source: Lor & Britz (2005, p. 64).

| <b>Public good</b>  | <b>Private good</b>  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Instrumental value</i>: application of knowledge to improve the capacity of humankind to cope with its environment.</li> <li>➤ <i>Accumulative value</i>: the value of knowledge for the further development of knowledge.</li> <li>➤ <i>Educational value</i>: to equip successive generations of human to improve the quality of their lives and environment.</li> <li>➤ <i>Cultural value</i>: to strengthen the cohesion of communities or society.</li> <li>➤ <i>Transcendent value</i>: to enhance non-material quality of life, satisfying aesthetic, religious, spiritual or other self-actualisation needs.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Competitive value</i>: giving the knower a scarce resource that may be exploited to gain competitive advantage.</li> </ul> |

This summary gives the impression that the public good side of knowledge weighs much more than the private

side. However, the categorisation suffers from the following problems:

- There are similar values repeated in the public good side. For example, *educational* and *cultural* value, in essence, involve the application of knowledge to improve the capacity of humankind; therefore they are duplications of *instrumental* value;
- Not all values in the public good side constitute values for the public. For example, *transcendent* value is a value more for individuals rather than for the public as a whole.

However, although I propose that the revised table (Table 3) is a better representation and gives a totally different impression to that given by table 2, I do not intend to suggest that both categorisations contribute in a meaningful way in judging which side is, overall, more important, because it is still virtually impossible to weigh and compare each value. This difficulty, together with the problem of reaching consensus, probably brings Badash to the conclusion that “social responsibility in science seems increasingly a matter of personal choice rather than a community maxim” (2004, p. 291).

Table 3: Revised understanding of value of knowledge as public/private good

| <b>Public good</b>          | <b>Private good</b>         |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ➤ <i>Instrumental value</i> | ➤ <i>Competitive value</i>  |
| ➤ <i>Accumulative value</i> | ➤ <i>Transcendent value</i> |

Nevertheless, I do want to highlight one more problem related to the conceptualisation of the notion of public good. This problem is associated with the main boundary of this research, namely, qualitative studies. As stated earlier, the qualitative paradigm has an epistemological stance that is fundamentally different to that which underlies the traditional quantitative positivism paradigm. One important assumption in this new paradigm is the recognition of multiple realities, instead of a single absolute truth and reality. Against this background, it would be imperative to ask the following question – to what extent are we able to view the public as homogenous or as a whole? Or, in other words, who represents the public? And if it is not possible to provide a meaningful answer to this question, then the longstanding belief that scientists, including social scientists, contribute greatly to the pursuit of human welfare (Oh, 1997), and thus implicitly assuming that society can be perceived as a whole, is sadly flawed.

### 2.3.3 Beneficence

The advancement of knowledge to improve the well-being of human kind has been constantly and comfortably

used in academia as justification for a research study. However, as I explained earlier, a universal standard of *useful* does not fit into the qualitative paradigm, neither does the concept of society or the human world as a whole. This means that to ask the question of who benefits from research is not only important but also imperative.

#### 2.3.3.1 Mutual benefit or benefits in conflicts

According to the Belmont report (1979), the principle of beneficence includes the promotion of social benefits and individual benefits for the research subjects. There would be no problem if these two benefits are indeed mutual. In fact, literature often portrays such a view, and depicts personal benefit as a practical gain (for example, the availability of a new medicine) when the whole knowledge base is advanced (when such medicine is developed, tested and proved to be effective). This argument appears sound at a theoretic level; however, it is only sound if we refer to the individual as *anybody* or else view the individual in the abstract sense. When we take the standpoint of the research subject – the person who participates in the research study – the scenario looks quite different.

Let us first consider the example of medical research. For the mutual benefit argument to be true, medical research must fulfil each of the following conditions:

- The person is suffering from a certain disease;
- The research study in which he/she participates is specifically to test the medicine that could cure this disease;
- This very study proves the effectiveness of the medicine under investigation (thus the knowledge base is advanced and social benefit achieved);
- There is no need to test the medicine further;
- A short time will elapse before this medicine is produced and sold on the market;
- This very person has the chance to access the medicine on the market because it is now available (his/her benefit realised).

Any of these conditions that are essential to make the argument stand could easily not be met. And furthermore the scenario described above is not usually what happens. Instead, what normally transpires is that this person would benefit if the medicine tested in the research proves to be effective. However this is achieved by trading an unknown benefit with an unknown risk in terms of whether the medicine works or not (both unknown at the time of participating in the research). This is vastly different from the ideal argument because in the ideal



situation, there is no unknown factor involved, while uncertainty is at the very heart of the normal situation.

In fact, as certain writers claim, research is, by its very nature, not for the benefit of the research participants (Veatch, 1987) and, for the person involved, he/she always needs to sacrifice something (possible risk associated, body in medical research, time and energy in others) for the advancement of knowledge so that social benefit may take place (Miller, 2004; Yarborough & Sharp, 2002). The best a research participant may hope is that, since one benefits from the sacrifices of others, there are chances that one would be able to exchange sacrifice in one situation to gain in another and perhaps break even in the end.

In the domain of education it is even less likely that these two benefits will occur simultaneously because, in education, it is even more difficult to define and realise social benefit. Not only are there disagreements about the value of a study, but, since the research utilisation that is more likely to occur conceptually in social science, education included, the chances that social knowledge would flow from one single research study are even more remote.

The next question is, if these two benefits are, indeed, in conflict, what would/should a researcher do? As the public good argument and the traditional preference for theoretical contribution still prevail, it comes as no surprise that a researcher would take a similar stance to that of Miller – “research [clinical research in his case], which is not aimed at personal benefit, would be impossible if all the risks of research interventions had to be justified by their potential benefits for participants” (2004, p. 112). In other words, individual benefit should be sacrificed, if necessary, in order to serve the common good – the social benefit.

#### 2.3.3.2 Who benefits of what?

Is there anyone who does benefit from research? And what is this benefit?

The advancement of knowledge, or empowerment, has traditionally been one of the most prominent and often targeted benefits of research. However, such an advancement of knowledge is more likely to occur in the case of the researcher, as it is not uncommon that the data from the practitioners results in either a change of view or even a change of the entire conceptual framework of the researcher (Huberman, 1999; Sehlola, 2004), while,

for the practitioners, the acquisition of knowledge is often no more than goodwill, particularly in the light of the weak and indirect impact of social research. In addition, given that a large proportion of research is interested mainly in the establishment of general principles but not in the exposition of a particular situation in depth, even such an indirect knowledge gain is not always guaranteed. A typical thought of a practitioner is:

I don't know why we agree to participate in these studies. First, you take our time. Then you draw generalizations about us, and then the government makes up all kinds of rules that interfere with our private affairs. Be fair, tell me—what's in it for us? (Yassour-Borochowitz, 2004, p. 179)

In the mean time, while “the participants may never directly experience the long-term benefits that dissemination of the findings aims to bring about” (Zigo, 2001, p. 352), the practical, immediate or direct benefit, on the other hand, is also more for the researchers rather than for the participants. For a researcher, possible direct gains include both academic (peer recognition) and practical benefit (promotion or other monetary rewards); while, for the practitioners, the direct benefit could be almost nothing. The opportunity to improve/change practice often goes a begging because the aim of a research is often to uncover what is happening and, thus, any interference, including the giving of advice, is strongly opposed. The contribution of the participants is also often not recognised because of confidentiality has been advocated. Furthermore, a token of appreciation, especially in the form of money, is also, in many cases, strongly discouraged or even forbidden.<sup>12</sup> My own experience was that my initial ethical statement, including the following sentences, was rejected by the research ethical committee because I “have the tendency of inducing the participants” (comments from the rejection letter).

Fully aware of the necessary reciprocation of *give* and *take* in the research process, I will try to define what I expect of my participants and what they may get in return (knowledge, other ways of empowerment, money<sup>13</sup> or just a sympathetic ear). Such issues would be discussed with the participants before the interview starts.

Until I had removed the word *money* in the above paragraph and added, “However, to ensure the principle of voluntary participation, no inducement will be offered.”

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<sup>12</sup> Although in certain countries, such as the US, the UK and Australia, and in certain fields, such as medicine and market research, compensation is common (College on problems of drug dependence, 1995; Fry, et al., 2005; Wright, Klee, & Reid, 1998) or at least acceptable.

<sup>13</sup> I planned to offer it after the interviews, instead of informing them in advance, to avoid the possible charge of inducement.

Understandably, the rationale for the objection to inducement may have stemmed from the concern about violating the ethical principle of voluntariness. However, most choices in life are at best *partially voluntary*, as Hewlett (1996) suggests, rather than *fully voluntary*, as the theoretical principle suggests. And there is also no sound evidence for the argument that inducement could significantly impact on a decision on whether or not to participate.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the receiving of an inducement would compromise the overall welfare of the participant, as stated by Wilkinson & Moore, “altruistic motives aside, why should people accept inducement unless they judge themselves better off for receiving them?” (1997, p. 379) The argument that “it encourages people to expose themselves to risk of harm” (McNeill, 1997, p. 395) appears plausible because it presents the negative side of the risk-benefit balance only, while decisions in life are usually based on an overall risk-benefit consideration. The concern of McNeil that a considerable sum of money may expose participants to unnecessary substantial risks also does not stand up to scrutiny because not only all not all risks necessarily lead to harm, but also not all harm is substantial to offset the benefit. In fact, it is only when inducement has been forbidden, and, as a consequence, the possible benefit is reduced, that the risk side becomes more prominent.

Many people would not work if they were not paid, however, few people would conclude that, since a wage constitutes an inducement, it is wrong to offer wages or that the workers should receive less pay. In fact, the more risky or dangerous (or unknown risk or danger) an occupation, the bigger wage (inducement) is required. Accordingly, McNeill’s concern about substantial (unknown) risks should be addressed by providing greater inducements, and not, as he advocates, forbidding inducement.

It is also interesting to note that, particularly in research carried out including mainly the poor as participants, “volunteering might be a perfectly prudent use of their time, when compared to their alternatives” (Wilkinson & Moore, 1997, p. 380). Indeed, when comparing the provision of an inducement to providing nothing, the latter (traditional sense of fully voluntary) is more explorative.

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, there are studies that either confirm or disprove the impact of payment on decision, no matter whether these studies investigate small inducements, ranging from a token 2 cents to \$1, or big inducements, from \$100 to \$ 500 (Casarett, Karlawish, & Asch, 2002; Cook, Schoeps, & Kim, 1985; Dawson & Kass, 2005; Rudy, Estok, Kerr, & Menzel, 1994), and thus neither statement is conclusive.

Lastly, if the concern is indeed to help the poor, it is also difficult to be convinced that denying them the option of gaining something, including money, through the research, is a way to help them.

There is a fine line between a potential exploitive under-acknowledgement and a potential undue inducement. But what constitutes *undue* inducement? If we adopt the suggestion of Emanuel *et al.* (2005, p. 337) that there are four conditions to be fulfilled simultaneously for there to be undue inducement, we would probably conclude, in accordance with Emanuel, *et al.* do, that such situations are indeed rare.

- an offered good;
- the offer is excessive;
- the offers results in poor judgment;
- and the poor judgment results in risk of serious harm,

The final problem linking this issue with the researcher–practitioner relationship is the extent to which researchers may/should expect the practitioners to participate solely from altruistic motives, in view of the fact that it is the researchers, and not the practitioners, who derive the most benefit (direct and indirect).

#### ***2.4 Empirically reported researcher–practitioner relationship***

There is no shortage of literature about the research–practice gap. Yet as indicated in the rationale, a literature search for empirically reported researcher–practitioner relationship proved to be rather unfruitful. Although one possible explanation for the paucity of literature is that, since this relationship is often not the main focus of a study and due to limited space in journals, this is not discussed in detail. However, as the audience for academic publications is usually fellow academics and reflection on research practice could facilitate better research and serve the academic audiences well, it can be expected that at least some descriptions of what happens between the researcher and the practitioners in research would appear in a report. However, even a deliberate search for ethical and methodological discussion and reflection did not yield a good number of references. This is certainly not consistent with the call for the process of qualitative study to be more transparent and qualitative researchers to be more reflective (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

As indicated in Chapter 1, the following questions were used to frame the literature review:

- What is the extent of the disclosure of the researcher-participant relationship?
- According to what is disclosed, how do the researchers experience the researcher–practitioner engagement (both in and beyond data collection period)?
- To what extent is the voice of the participants (direct quotes or those filtered through the researcher) included in the disclosure?
- How do these researchers describe their relationship? In other words, what is the main tone of the description and what is the extent of self-reflection?

Keywords that describe the nature of the researcher–practitioner relationship are difficult to identify and no proper subject terms exist in various databases, therefore different words and sometimes combinations of words were used to search for this literature review, including “theory-practice relationship”, “research/practice gap”, “research utilization”, “knowledge spillover”, “the researcher”, “the researched”, “the participants”, “the practitioners”, “insider”, “outsider”, “detachment”, “involvement”, “collaboration in research”, “power/politics in research”, “partnership in research”, and “objectivity/subjectivity”. Databases used include mainly EBSCO host Academic search Premier (now called Academic search complete) and Eric. This process was further accompanied by snowballing the search from the reference list of each article that was identified as relevant, and a further inclusion of methodological journals such as the *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* and the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. To ensure that the content of this review is time-relevant, this review only includes publications from 1990 onwards.

The search results reveal that the researcher–participant collaboration is the most popular framework for these empirical descriptions and reflections. Therefore, in what follows, reviews of publications that adopt such a framework are presented first, and reviews of those that do not specifically indicate the usage of this framework follow thereafter.

#### **2.4.1 Researcher-participant collaboration**

Cole and Knowles (1993) provide three examples (empirical reports) of researcher–participant collaboration in their proposal for an alternative approach to research on teaching (collaborative relationship) to the more traditional researcher-oriented relationship.

The two examples that Knowles describes are both studies conducted with his students as participants. In one case, reflection on why the participant eventually “chose to remove herself from the study” (1993, p. 482) is provided. This case does not entail much case description besides the several contributors to the withdrawal suggested by the author. On a closer look at these contributors, although they do incorporate the voice of the participant, it sounds more like what the researcher thinks. The other case examines the reasons why one of his students fails to become a prospective teacher. The motive for this research is the insistence of the participant to pursue the study and collaboration is used to describe the relationship during the research, where the researcher and the participant co-write a publication. Knowles also reflected that an original relationship was a traditional one “and this faded into the background because the agenda as originally conceived became quite inappropriate and *her* agenda became compelling” (1993, p. 487, original emphasis). More details of the relationship could not be detected.

The example Cole describes is a study exploring “the spontaneous aspect of teaching practice through an examination of their [the teachers’] implicit attitudes, beliefs and theories about teaching and learning” (1993, p. 484). The mutual benefit derived from the collaborative partnership, as perceived by the participants (teachers), is reported extensively. Many other issues that are negotiated between the researcher and the participants, including logistical matters, the researcher’s participation in the classroom, and the interpretation and representation of the participants, are also touched upon, although not to the extent of as the mutual benefit section. Some self-reflection, such as on equity in participation, is also provided, although it is also not extensive.

Both the title<sup>15</sup> and abstract<sup>16</sup> suggest that the main focus of Mould’s report (1996) is the role of the researcher-teacher relationship in enhancing the effectiveness of early learning. Confusingly, however, in examining the content the largest portion of this report is devoted to describing the study itself and its result (how a intervention programme contributes to more effective learning), while the limited reflection on the teacher-researcher collaboration and its impact on the study is not only marked by a rather vague description

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<sup>15</sup> The influence of researcher-teacher collaboration on the effectiveness of the early learning of four year olds in schools in England.

<sup>16</sup> “This paper explores the potential of enhancing the effectiveness of the early learning experiences of young children, as a consequence of a genuine collaboration between researchers and teachers” (Mould, 1996, p. summary).

but also an overall overly optimistic picture. The challenge of developing a relationship is recognised, yet the author does not describe in any way how a positive relationship is achieved before simply mentioning “by the autumn term a positive relationship had developed with the four schools. The teachers and myself had adopted an open learning stance within an environment of security, acceptance and trust” (1996, p. 11). It is claimed that “for the study to positively evolve, it had been vital that the teachers were provided with a high level of sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy” (1996, p. 12), yet it is not clear how the teachers are provided with a high level of sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy, how the level of teachers’ involvement develops, how this is a result of the former, and how *synergism* (the word the author used to describe the “true nature of our relationship”) is achieved, as well as what really happens in the collaboration besides “research articles and literature were sent to the teachers at their request” (1996, p. 12). Although it is recognised that “the voices of the researcher and teacher may never have been completely equal, but everyone’s voice was heard” (1996, p. 13), the statement that everyone’s voice has been heard remains a claim without further evidence. Furthermore, little reflection is provided, except for rosy pictures, such as:

As the fieldwork progressed the voices became harmonious and the overall quality of the whole learning experience was enriched ... as the fieldwork progressed these positive feelings were reflected in our experience (1996, p. 13).

Boostrom, Jackson & Hansen (1993) describe and reflect on the success and challenges of using a specific tool (meeting between the researchers and teachers) to bridge the research–practice gap in a three-year study of how moral concerns permeate school life.

The essential format of the meetings never changed: the first hour or so was devoted to dinner and conversation; the remaining two hours were spent in open-ended discussion, usually with the participants facing each other in a large circle (1993, p. 37).

The authors claim that there are three ways in which the meetings help in bringing the researchers and participants together and cultivating trust, namely the importance of conversation, the decision to pass the responsibility for chairing the meeting to the teachers, and the inclusion of meals. Examining the whole report, nevertheless, the major portion is devoted to describing the tensions that arise in the research process, not the three methods mentioned above or other aspects of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

Johnston reports a collaborative project that “was both an educational programme and a research project” (1990, p. 173). To be more specific, the educational programme refers to a graduate degree programme for in-service teachers (particularly aimed at promoting reflectivity, two consecutive programmes are reported), and the research refers to her investigation of the changes in teachers’ beliefs and practices that occurred as a result of this programme.

Collaboration is said to lie in both the educational programme and the research. In terms of the educational programme, the first programme was “somewhat a top-down model. Theories and research were at the top, and teachers’ concerns and practice were at the bottom ... in the second programme, the goal was to give teachers’ practical knowledge equal weight in our deliberations ... the result was a more equal collaboration in our interactions” (1990, p. 174). Similarly in the research, “the research for the first programme was carried out in a fairly standard, non-collaborative way ... as the second programme began, increased collaboration with the school district and growth in my own understanding led to a more genuinely collaborative research project” (1990, p. 175).

The main focus of this report is the author’s evolving understanding of collaboration. For example:

I wanted to dispel some of the consequent difference in power as control, but I did not know how to do it or even how to talk about it clearly ... [later], there was a growing sense that we were co-labouring in a more extensive way. Clearly we were sharing ideas more openly than in my former research project (1990, p. 176).

Overall, her description and discussion of the research process remains limited, and she uses many of these descriptions as examples of her reflections. For example,

At the start our roles were differentiated clearly. I was the researcher, and I supposedly knew how research worked. They were participating but, as one teacher put it, “totally naïve about research”. Over time several teachers began to take more responsibility for the topics we discussed during the interviews ... our talks began to feel more like conversations than interviews, although I continued to ask more questions of them than they did of me (1990, p. 176).



#### 2.4.1.1 Co-teaching

Co-teaching seems to be a popular strategy used in enhancing the researcher-participant collaboration.<sup>17</sup>

Zigo reports her experience of a research study exploring “the literacy strategies students with reading and writing difficulties possess and make use of, both in and out of school” (2001, p. 354). One strategy of her entry to the school under investigation is to offer her “services as tutor or assistant in their classrooms in any way they believed beneficial” (2001, p. 355). According to her, this offer serves several purposes:

First, I wanted to develop as much of a mutually respectful and trustworthy relationship as possible with the teachers who might allow me to learn from their classrooms. Although I did not intend to engage in a teacher-researcher partnership in the most complete sense, I nonetheless wanted to develop relationships of reciprocity, with each member’s agency honoured in our ongoing considerations of teaching and learning. I hoped that by making myself available as a teaching assistant, I would be communicating the seriousness of my concerns for issues of equity and access in education, as well as my degree of respect for these teachers. Second, I was becoming cognizant of my emerging beliefs in reciprocity as collaboration in service ... I felt a need to offer more tangible contributions to the Michigan Avenue community ... my hope, then, was to earn trust through demonstrating a commitment to the teaching and learning (2001, pp. 355–356).

In other words, such an offer appears to serve her ethical consideration of the necessity of reciprocity, trust and offering benefits. To a much lesser extent, another purpose of such strategies – to facilitate data collection, particularly access to other participants (students and their parents) through teachers– is mentioned later in the article. From the report itself, it is not clear whether these two are pursued with similar emphasis or whether one is more of a by-product of the other.

Her involvement includes not only facilitating small groups for student discussion and giving one-to-one assistance to needy students, but also helping the teacher to manage the class, stop the disruptive behaviour of certain learners and participate in informal conversations about class instruction and preparation.

It is not clear whether she asked the teachers about how they felt about the engagement, but from what the teacher does, such as helping to facilitate her interview with the parents, trust clearly exists. To summarise her

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<sup>17</sup> It is necessary to explain the exclusion of Moje’s (2000) work in this category. Although Moje describes and reflects on her co-teaching with Diane, and Moje uses this co-teaching opportunity to carry out her research, the focus of this publication is mainly on how power is perceived, not particularly about how power is played out in the research study.

six months of “constant collaborative labour”, she believes that it “led to a variety of results that I believe were beneficial to both students’ academic needs [acknowledged both by the teachers and students] and to my more formal research processes” (2001, p. 358).

She also reflects on her understanding of *objectivity* and *subjectivity* and claims that “trustworthiness is strengthened when researchers foreground their attempts to monitor and account for their natural subjectivities” (2001, p. 357).

However, the lack of any description of a post-research relationship leaves one to wonder how she negotiates her way out of the classroom after such a close and mutual beneficial engagement. One could also ask how she possibly left out such an important issue, especially since her awareness of collaboration always seems so high.

There are two more articles (Coldstein, 2000; Schulz, Schroeder, & Brody, 1997) that describe co-teaching with the teacher. Both start from the notion of collaborative research and both relate such an approach to the advocacy of care from feminism. Coldstein (2000, p. 520) “attempted to design methods of gathering written data that would be equitable and mutual”. To achieve such an equal and mutual relationship, “it was important to me that Martha [the teacher] benefit from her participation in this study” (2000, p. 522), and her understanding of the benefit at the time of data collection was “one of the ways that I understood this project to be of any benefit to Martha was in that it would give her an opportunity to be heard, to share her views” (2000, p. 520). However, Martha does not seem to be interested in “craft[ing] well-written response narratives” to become part of the finished work. In an attempt to reflect retrospectively, Coldstein acknowledges that she probably needs to “re-read my desire that Martha benefits from her role in this project as a scam to help me feel less guilty about the fact that I was using Martha for my own purpose” (2000, p. 522). Furthermore, although she intends the relationship to be collaborative and equitable, she reflects that probably she has achieved collaboration, but that the relationship is not equal.

Brody starts her project with a similar understanding that “co-teaching appeared to me the most ethical way to experience Marilyn [the teacher]’s decision making, while contributing to her need as a teacher” (Schulz, et al. 1997, p. 479). She acknowledges that her agenda and that of Marilyn are different, where “the categories and

questions for our investigation were more of my concern, Marilyn was interested in them to the extent these affected the time we spent together solving pedagogical problems” (1997, p. 480). And for the author, “it was not only right for Marilyn, the students, and our relationship, but right for me as a university researcher” (1997, p. 480) to have her own research interest become “secondary to Marilyn’s professional development as a teacher” (1997, p. 480), although how so is not clear. How Marilyn perceives the collaborative relationship is not reported.

#### 2.4.1.2 Co-presenting (co-author)

Co-presenting the collaboration (co-author with the participant) also seems to be popular.

Lewis & Holliday (1997), one an author from a university and the other a school principal, describe in detail the experience of a partnership in a study to experiment with new forms of professional development (teacher development) by using a collaborative form (both among teachers and also between the school and the university). As the authors are clearly aware of the distrust and wariness that are commonly held by many teachers towards researchers, equalizing power and encouraging collegiality were constantly and consciously sought. For example, the authors are aware that in this project,

teachers had little choice or control over the content, format, and mode of their participation ... we felt it was critical to design this project as a collaborative effort with teachers so that they had freedom and control over participation, initiating topics, creating agendas, developing structures, and if they did participate, choosing the amount and manner of that participation (1997, p. 110).

The university partner and the principal took a back seat as the teachers negotiated the topics and structure of the meetings (1997, p. 112).

In practice, of thirteen teachers who decided to participate in the study, each could decide to participate in any one of three forms of activity (monthly study group sessions, reading research or theoretically-based reading, and keeping weekly journals) and also how each study group session would be run. The result is “a remarkable change in school climate during the first year of the partnership. For the overwhelming majority of teachers, the study group sessions satisfied a hunger to meet and discuss issues of teaching and learning in an informal setting. They felt the study group sessions cut down isolation and created closer bonds with their colleagues”

(1997, p. 116).

However, such achievement seems to be related to the methodology used (the three activities that aim at promoting collegial relationship among the teachers), rather than the primary concern of the project – the collaboration between the university and the school. Throughout the report, the use of the term “partnership” seems confusing and refers to different meanings at different times. As demonstrated above, it seems to originate from a concern for a university–school partnership, yet soon it turns to describing a partner relationship among the teachers.

Furthermore, this university partner seems far more concerned with the principal than the teachers. For example, initial trust building is a major concern for the university partner, however, what is revealed in the report is that many different strategies are used to form partnerships with the principal (1997, pp. 119–120), while for the teachers, an hour-long pre-interview seems to be the only strategy that is as used. Furthermore, towards the end of the article, the university author once again emphasises that “*more important than working with teachers were the continuing conversations between the university partner and the principal about issues of writing, collegiality and power*” (1997, p.122, emphasis added).

In addition to the lack of documentation of how teachers perceive the process of collaboration between the university and the school, there are occasions that yield subtle implications of the presumptions the university partner has:

The university partner found that although the teachers were very amenable to sharing their stories, they really *did not want to help with analysing data* (1997, p. 114).

The university partner attempted to adopt a *nurturing stance* during the meetings (1997, p. 121).

*Even though they were given control*, the teachers wanted the university partner to facilitate the study group sessions – *no teacher would volunteer for this role. This troubled the university partner*, but she couldn't force leadership on someone who didn't want it (1997, p. 121, all emphasis added).

Furthermore, the voice of the report is predominantly that of the researcher. Not only can few direct quotes from the teachers or the principal be found, but one might also wonder why the university partner chose to

co-author with the principal when the voice of the principal is almost non-existent.

Zajano & Edelsberg (1993) also choose to co-author a paper describing different phases of how their relationship evolves in a project investigating the way in which a new state testing policy affects the work of educators. How each party felt about the relationship in each phase is presented, from the point where the researcher is seen as a suspect stranger, cordial acquaintance, welcome guest, expert recourse, valued colleague to the final phase of confidante (also referred to as phase 1-6).

The researchers describe an incident (see below) which “signalled a growing trust in the researcher-researched relationship, a trust which affected the rest of the study” (1993, 146) in Phase 2. “One of my first opportunities was to observe Chip [the participant] at a meeting of high school teachers who were attempting to complete a form initiated by Chip’s office. On the form, teachers were to indicate whether they taught each instructional objective assessed on the upcoming state proficiency test. The meeting was marked by confusion among teachers regarding how to respond to the form. The next day I sent Chip a memo summarizing what I felt were the items needing clarification as well as the concerns teachers had expressed about the state testing policy. This memo became important to our evolving relationship as the first instance in which the research process assisted practitioner action. It signalled a growing trust in the researcher-researched relationship, a trust which affected the rest of the study” (1993, p. 146).

However, in examining the incident itself, two questions arise:

- without the acknowledgement from the practitioner himself, whether this memo is appreciated or indeed assists in the relationship development is questionable
- even assuming that such an action of handing over the memo is appreciated by the practitioner, how it signals trust is still not clear because logically the trust would come from the practitioner, not the researcher.

Interrogating the participant’s description, it in fact sounds more likely that it is the researcher’s “*compelling and accurate accounts (quote from below)*” that help in developing the trust.

Nancy’s [the researcher] careful description of what she was observing resulted in compelling and accurate accounts ...  
The more she expressed her interpretations of what she saw happening in the district, the more willing I became to

share concerns with her and to test my hunches and ideas (phase 3 & 4, 1993, 146-148).

Benefiting the participants is one of the researcher's concerns from the beginning. However, keeping in mind that objectivity is often associated with positivism and quantitative paradigms and not the qualitative paradigm, when the opportunity to offer benefit arises (to assist in preparing test data reports), the researcher "felt grateful that I was able to assist the practitioner whom I was indebted for my dissertation data" (1993, p. 148), yet at the same time, "I felt a nagging sense of having lost an 'independent' research view" (1993, p. 148). Ironically, the participant reveals that it is only "when Nancy got involved in helping him prepare the presentation to the school board (the test data report) that he starts to feel less like a 'subject' of the study and more like a collaborator in the research" (1993, p. 151).

The researcher's decision when facing the stranger/friend dilemma also seems to be inconsistent, and probably resulted from being torn between remaining objectivity and a consideration for the benefit of the participants. On one occasion, the researcher faces a "stranger/friend" dilemma regarding what to do with an ongoing conflict between the participants and another person in the district, and she decides:

I decided to ask Chip about this conflict. He acknowledged it and offered his perspective on it. The next question to myself was: what, if anything, would I do about the conflict? Should I offer to play mediator – to try to get them understand each other's professional competence, and find a way to work together for the betterment of the district? Or should I just acknowledge that their conflict was a part of the organizational context and let it go at that? I took the latter course (1993, p. 149).

In another incident, however, when she notices that Chip's presentation of the test result is not clear, using too many jargons and technical terms, she chooses to talk to the participant about it.

|                                 | <b>Toledo</b> (one researcher and one participant)  | <b>Flint</b> (one researcher and two participants from two different schools)   | <b>Detroit</b> (two researchers and three participants from the same school)  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Entry                           | <p>Welcome researchers (who are on the cutting edge of research) into classroom is reported as the general attitude of the particular participant.</p> <p>Participant particularly expected to learn.</p> | <p>With both participants, entry is based on previous relationship (one from previous research, where the experience was described as comfortable and trusting; the other had co-worked with the researcher before in the researched school).</p> <p>Both participants state they might otherwise have felt threatened by been inspected.</p> <p>Both participants expect to learn.</p> | <p>Started when one researcher (the other being her research assistant) talked with one participant at a meeting, where the researcher showed interest in the participant's stories.</p> <p>While the other two participants describe their initial feeling as scared and reluctant, the other participant agreed that it could be risky.</p>   |
| The nature of the collaboration | <p>Co-teaching happened outside the classroom through planning and dialogue, rather than inside the class.</p> <p>Both the researcher and participant are satisfied with the situation.</p>               | <p>The researcher described her work as co-teaching; the relevant participant described it as learning from the researcher.</p> <p>The participant in the other venue also described the relationship as a team (both in and outside the classroom).</p>  | <p>Student researcher mainly sits in as a silent observer in the class (sometimes also helps with group work).</p> <p>One participant describes being observed as good when teaching is smooth, but embarrassing when teaching is not going well.</p> <p>The other participant mentions that the mere silence of the researcher could be negative (communication should be open).</p> |
| Dissemination                   | <p>Participant mentions that although attending conference can be informative, most teachers don't go to those meetings.</p>  | <p>One participant mentions that participation in research can be an extra requirement.</p> <p>The other participant mentions that credibility is central to dissemination, thus teacher themselves would be better disseminators.</p>  | <p>The time constraints many teachers face (research is not part of job description, thus they could feel guilty about spending school time on research work) is mentioned by one participant.</p>  |

Table 4: How various aspects of collaboration is reported in Clark *et al.* (1996)



Collaboration is also clearly the main focus of Clark, Moss, Goering, Herter, Lamar, Leonard et al., (1996)'s report, which looked at the way in which all the researchers and participants in three graduate projects (named Toledo, Flint and Detroit, all under one supervisor) perceive issues such as entry, the nature of the collaboration, relationship with students<sup>18</sup> and dissemination (detail provided in table 4 in the previous page). The participants' voice is clearly extensively present in this report, as well as many reflections from some researchers.

#### 2.4.2 Other publications

Blodgett, Boyer & Turk (2005) reflect on their role as insider and outsider in a large qualitative study inquiring into the development of self-regulation in early childhood. Ethical consideration is clearly at the heart of this study, since not only almost endless sensitivity, but also a similar effort to establish trust and obtain real and on-going informed consent, is reported in the article. As the authors claim, they attempt "a level of ease and friendliness without abandoning our professionalism" (2005); friendliness refers to an introduction to the participants by a familiar and trusting source and a warm and welcome setting (by informal chat and juice and cookies) before starting the interviews; while by professionalism, they mention one specific example where one parent "began disclosing personal matters *not related to the research topic*" (2005, emphasis added) and asked for advice in solving personal and family matters:

In order to maintain an outside status and to *respect the contribution of the participant*, the interviewer gently reminded the parent of the researcher's role by stating, "I'm sorry, we *cannot* give advice on parenting. We are most interested in hearing about your thoughts and experiences, and we thank you for your time in answering *our* questions" (emphasis added).

What is not clear, however, is not only how this response effectively "*respects the contribution of the participant*", but also why it is necessary to use this situation as "an opportune moment to establish the role of the research to the parent and increase outsider status". If a warm and respectful relationship is, as the authors claim, a major concern of their approaches, how can it be achieved without reciprocity and how would this parent feel when he/she is turned away just because what he/she asks is not *related to the research topic*? Furthermore, why this is no longer a concern to the authors who are obviously so considerate? What dominates the article is also a rosy portrait of the research group, implying how

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<sup>18</sup> The relationship between the teachers and the students is not included in this discussion for its irrelevance.





considerate, trustworthy and professional they are, while almost no self-reflection, especially self-critique, exists.

### 2.4.3 Summary

This review reveals the following:

Firstly, there is a rather limited number of empirical publications on the researcher–practitioner relationship and this limited amount of description in relevant publications signals a fairly limited interest in this topic in the education field. Furthermore, a fairly large number of authors that this review identified are indeed student-researchers. Among the eleven publications that are identified, seven involve a student-researcher as the main author (Zigo, 2001; Coldstein, 2000; Brody from Schulz, Schroeder, & Brody, 1997). The first author, as well as another two authors in Clark, et al. (1996), are students; two out of three authors, including the first author in Blodgett, Boyer, & Turk (2005), are students; the first author of Lewison and Holliday (1997) and Zajano and Edelsberg (1993) is both students (second authors are teachers/school administrators). The exception are Cole and Knowles (1993), Boostrom et al. (1993) and Johnston (1990). The case with Mould (1996) is not clear from the descriptions in the publication.

Secondly, the notion of collaboration seems to have started spreading; yet the understanding of the notion itself seems to be still limited. Many authors equate collaboration with a simple notion of giving up the researchers' power to achieve equity and many are also preoccupied with an attempt to transform the practitioners into researchers, suggesting that the more practitioners are involved in research activities – particularly writing up – the better. As yet there seems to be no awareness of building on each others' strengths. This could subtly imply a hierarchic view of researchers and practitioners that still exists.

Thirdly, exploring and fulfilling practitioners' expectations is lacking since their voice is rather weak overall, even in some co-authored publications. On some occasions, it is claimed that the participants' voices are respected, yet their participation in research decisions seems rather limited (not necessarily research activities, but issues such as how to handle informed consent, what kind of feedback to provide and so on).

Other noteworthy points include:

- Descriptions of how the researchers negotiate their retreat from the field and the post-research



relationship hardly exist.

- With a few exceptions, self-reflection, particularly researchers' self-critique, is also largely lacking.
- Overall, there seems to be a tendency to portray the researchers themselves as considerate.

## 2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter started with a brief introduction to the four alternatives research utilisation models, particularly the *interaction model*. This was followed by a discussion on the instrumental/conceptual utilisation debate and a question regarding the meaning of theory itself. Huberman's (1990) general model was presented next, not only in terms of pinpointing the importance of viewing the researcher–practitioner relationship as an ongoing process, but also in terms of extending the interest of the relationship itself to a broader theoretical frame that seeks to explain the patterns and consequences of such an engagement.

This was followed by references to relevant literature and debates about possible elements that exist within the *researcher/practitioner context* and the way in which these elements could possibly influence the researcher–practitioner relationship.

As the most important element within the *researcher/practitioner context*, the detachment/involvement decision was discussed against the framework developed by both Gold (1958) and Adler and Alder (1998), as well as the two modes of *how knowledge is generated* of Gibbons, et al. (1994). This discussion further pointed out the powerful influence of the traditional epistemological stance guiding quantitative paradigm (Mode 1) among the qualitative community (Mode 2).

A discussion of motives for conducting research was presented next as another possible important element within the *researcher/practitioner context*. The notion of *to account for the money* of Winch (2001) was borrowed in order to address the question raised in the intrinsic/extrinsic motive debate. This discussion concluded by proposing an extension to the traditional argument of intrinsic/extrinsic to include an *other extrinsic* dimension. Certain misleading messages regarding the categorisation of the value of knowledge according to public/private good of Lor and Britz (2005) were pointed out. A further problem associated with the notion of public good was raised next, namely, that against the background of the qualitative paradigm that acknowledges multiple realities, is it possible to view the public as homogenous, and by



whom is the public represented. Questions such as these also cast doubt upon common notion of theoretic contribution, which implicitly assumes that research work would be of benefit to society as a whole.

Since a universal standard of *useful* does not fit into the qualitative paradigm, the question of who benefits from research was raised next. The mutual benefiting theory (that it is possible for both the social and individual to benefit at the same time) was disputed first, and then both knowledge and practical benefit were examined in order to answer the question of whom it is who actually benefits from research. Two further question were raised – how justifiable is it for the researcher to sacrifice any consideration of the benefit to participants in order to serve the social benefit, and to what extent may/should a researcher expect the practitioners to participate solely from altruistic motives, while, in fact, most benefits (direct and indirect) accrue to the researcher.

The last section of this chapter is devoted to a literature review of the empirically reported researcher–practitioner relationship in published articles. Few publications could be identified, but those that were identified were analysed critically. Significant observations arise from this literature review include that overall disclosure of such relationships is limited; most publications involve student-researchers as the main authors; the notion of collaboration is spreading although the understanding of it is still limited; descriptions of the way in which the participants experience and view the engagement as well as self-reflection and criticism on the part of the researchers are largely missing; and, finally, descriptions of the retreat from the field and a post-research relationship are also largely nonexistent.



### 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter clarifies the study's research methodology. It begins with an explanation of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide this study. This is followed by a detailed description and a motivation for the research design, theoretical framework and methodological approach, including explanation on data collection, interpretation and analysis. This chapter also includes a discussion of my ethical stance and how validation measures were carried out for this study.

#### *3.1 Epistemological assumptions*

I utilised an interpretive/constructivism paradigm for this study because it resonates not only with my personal world view and belief in the interpretive and constructive nature of knowledge, but also with the research question of this study.

Interpretive/constructivism ontology acknowledges multiple realities. The corresponding epistemology purports that events are understood through interpretation, which is mediated by the social context. It sees reality as being constructed through human interaction. Reality is constructed, interpreted and therefore subjective (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Schwandt, 2000).

I myself also believe that there is no single reality. Rather, people construct their own reality through their individually lived experiences. I construct my own truth and others, including my participants, construct their truth as they understand it. I believe that reality consists of "people's subjective experience of the external world" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 6) and there are different ways of constructing reality and making sense of it (Cohen *et al.* 2000). I expected that my participants' understanding and preference of the relationship may differ from my own. My role, as a researcher then, is to take a subjective and interactive stance and engage my participants both in the data collection and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Although I tried to remain true to the reality revealed by the participants, I was also aware that the reality revealed in this thesis is filtered through my own interpretation of my participants. This also predicts that the nature of knowledge revealed in this thesis encounter would be subjective, personal and derived from joint social constructions.



### **3.2 Research approach**

In this study the emphasis was on the fact that reality is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by those experiencing it. It focuses on perception and its patterns, therefore it includes subjective experience and conditions influencing perceptions and experience (Carspecken, 1996). Therefore a qualitative approach is appropriate to this ontological understanding. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the ways in which participants make sense of a certain phenomenon, therefore allowing differences in terms of one's understanding (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

The qualitative approach does not predict or claim rigidity or complete objectivity, but acknowledges that research is value-laden (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). I concur with Henning *et al.* (2004, p. 25) who argue that there is no value free or bias free qualitative research. The main focus of this study was not to discover the universal, generalisable truth (Hammersley & Gomm 2000) that other researchers can reproduce. Instead it was to explore and understand how researchers and practitioners understand their researcher-practitioner engagement in the particular research study they conducted or participated and from their particular view point. The expectation that my participants' understanding and preference of the relationship may differ from my own is also in line with Schwandt's statement that qualitative research philosophy opposes the existence of universal truth (1997). In fact, as discussed in par 2.3.3, I held the view that seeking universal laws and universal generalisations is rather problematic, particularly in social science and more specifically education.

Furthermore, the research question of this study also suggests a qualitative approach since it demands an understanding of the complicated researcher-practitioner relationship. Not only did I expect that one's perceptions about a complicated issue such as researcher-practitioner relationship cannot be fully understood through simplistic questionnaires, I also believed that thoughts, perceptions and preferences would be too complex through numerical means in quantitative terms. This fit between the qualitative approach and a research topic of one's perception is also supported by Miles & Huberman (1994) when they describe one of the core reasons for choosing a qualitative approach:

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's 'lived experiences', are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process and structures of their lives: their 'perceptions, assumption, prejudgements, presuppositions', and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (1994, p. 10).



### **3.3 Research design**

#### **3.3.1 Paradigm & research design**

Following the research philosophy (interpretive, qualitative paradigm) as explained above, the multiple case study method was chosen as the research design as it is commonly used in qualitative research. Data were obtained through face-to-face, in depth interviews and observations.

There are various kinds of research and the choice of what type of research to carry out is often determined by the purpose of research, the research question(s) and the kind of data required (Johnson, 2002; Scott & Usher, 2000). This particular study was descriptive and interpretative and involved the gathering of largely qualitative data.

The descriptive nature of this study involved rich and complex descriptions of meanings and feelings that the researchers and their participants experienced (Mouton & Marais, 1990). These descriptions were recorded and analysed so that “interactants as the interaction unfolded” could be determined (Denzin, 1989, p 101). In the process of interpretation, I read between the lines of what was said and interpreted the meanings as they were felt, intended, and expressed by the participants.

According to Ritchie (2003:28), a case study concerns itself with “identifying what exists in the social world”. In so doing, such research design focuses on:

- describing phenomena,
- identifying the different issues, and
- establishing how issues are understood.

This study is a multiple case study. Cohen *et al.* (2000:181) define a case study as “a study of an instance in action”. In this study, one case is one research project and as explained earlier, there were altogether 6 research projects that I investigated.

#### **3.3.2 Theoretical framework**

This study is informed by the *interaction model* of research utilization as the theoretical framework. As explained more in detail in Chapter 2.1, there are four models of research utilisation that aims at explaining why educational research often fails to inform classroom practices. The usefulness of *the interaction model*



is proved both from empirical works that such a model offers a better explanation than other alternative utilization models, including *science push model*; *dissemination model* and *demand pull model*, firstly identified by Weiss (1979) and then re-categorized by Landry, Amara, & Lamari, (2001) (Caplan, Morrison, & Stambaugh, 1975; Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001; Yin, 1981), and a theoretical observation that this model integrates the explanatory factors identified in other models.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, the main focus of this model suggests that knowledge utilization depends on various interactions occurring between the researcher and the users (participants). A lack of two-way interaction is identified in this model as the main reason for under-utilization (Huberman, 1987; Leung, 1992; Lomas, 1997; Oh & Rich, 1996). This model further points out that research utilization occurs best in a relationship based on familiarity and trust, built over time at different stages of research (Bogenschneider, Olson, Linney, & Mills, 2000). Therefore this model suggests giving greater attention to the relationships between researchers and participants at different stages of knowledge production, dissemination and utilization.

More specifically, I used Huberman's (1990) general model to inform the design of this study because his model does not only pinpoint the importance of viewing the researcher–practitioner relationship as a ongoing process, but also extends the interest of the relationship itself to a broader theoretical frame that seeks to explain the patterns and consequences of such an engagement. This provides not only a more holistic, but also a more realistic view of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

In short, Huberman's model views the researchers and practitioners as people from two organisations. According to him, the interaction between the respective organisational factors of these two groups of people (defined as *researcher/user context* in the model) informs the type and degree of the researcher–practitioner relationship (*linkage/network*). He also views this relationship not as a once off tie, but as an ongoing process that takes place "not only on completion of the study, but also during, and ideally, before the conduct of the study" (1990, p. 365). Furthermore, he claims that this relationship influences what happens after the research, namely, the dissemination effort resulting from the readiness on the part of both the researchers and the practitioners to embrace the research findings, and thus the concrete effects of the study (research utilisation, both *instrumental* and *conceptual*).

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<sup>19</sup> Particularly the importance of a match between the type/content of research and the interest of the user (from *science push model*, Dearing and Meyer 1994; Edwards 1991; Lomas 1993; Huberman and Thurler 1991, as cited in Landry, Amara, and



In light of this, this study focused on these three phases of how a research study unfold, namely pre-research phase, interim phase (also referred to as the data collection period) and post-research phase.

### 3.3.3 Data collection

Case study designs do not claim any particular method for data collection or data analysis (Merriam, 1998).

The aim in this study to collect people’s perceptions determined that interviews would be the most appropriate methods. By conducting interviews, I was exposed to the meaning that original researchers and their original participants attached to their understanding of the engagement. Slightly different schedules were used for these two groups in order to explore their specific areas of understanding and knowledge, but the gist was the same throughout.

The following table represents the interview protocol used in this study.

Table 5: Interview protocol

|                    | Researcher  | Practitioners  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Pre-research phase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What was the intention of doing this research? (theory/practice/degree)</li> <li>➤ What were your expectations?</li> <li>➤ Why do you think are the possible reasons why your participants agree to participate?</li> <li>➤ Do you think that you have any responsibility towards the practitioners? Do you think they have any responsibility towards you?</li> <li>➤ What do you think of the issue of benefit to the participants?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is your general impression of academic research and researchers?</li> <li>➤ Is that your first time to participate in a research study? Why did you agree to participate that research?</li> <li>➤ How do you usually decide whether to participate or not?</li> <li>➤ Were there any expectations?</li> <li>➤ How do you think about benefits? Was covering identity important to you?</li> <li>➤ Do you think that you have any responsibility towards the researcher? Or researcher towards you?</li> </ul> |
| Interim phase      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How did you secure your participants? Any previous connections?</li> <li>➤ How did you experience the relationship?</li> <li>➤ Would you describe your relationship as research-based only or also friendship (formal/informal) involved? Which one you prefer?</li> <li>➤ How do you balance involvement/detachment?</li> <li>➤ Did you have critique to them? if yes, how did you handle it?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Do you know the researcher before? Were you contacted before the study? Through anybody?</li> <li>➤ Do you think coming to you through the principal or somebody that you know makes any differences if the researcher comes to you directly?</li> <li>➤ How did you experience the relationship?</li> <li>➤ Would you describe your relationship as research-based only or also friendship (formal/informal) involved? Which one you prefer?</li> <li>➤ If the researcher had been your friend,</li> </ul>         |

Lamari 2001; Rich 1997) and the importance of a mechanism to facilitate the credibility of the researcher and research (from dissemination model, MacLean 1996).





|                     |  |  |
|---------------------|--|--|
|                     |  | would you behave/respond differently?<br>➤ What do you think if the researcher comes back with critiques?  |
| Post-research phase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How did you retreat from the field?</li> <li>➤ How did you handle the post-research relationship?</li> <li>➤ How did you find the practitioner?</li> <li>➤ Do you prefer continuity/closure?</li> <li>➤ Do you feel powerful/empowered in anyway in the research process? Do you feel powerless in anyway in the research process?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Were you given a transcript? Analysis? Abstract? Did you ask for them, read them? Do you think it's important to do that?</li> <li>➤ How did you find the researcher?</li> <li>➤ Will you be willing to participate if another researcher approaches you in future?</li> <li>➤ Were you contacted afterwards?</li> <li>➤ Do you prefer continuity/closure?</li> <li>➤ Do you feel powerful/empowered in anyway in the research process? Do you feel powerless in anyway in the research process?</li> </ul> |

This was supplemented by observation and intensive reflection, particularly for the last case of how my participants interacted with me as the researcher. I observed for example, how my participants reacted to the request of signing the informed consent. The focus groups were not used because the interest of this study was individual view, not group interactions and collective data, which is the most important advantage of using focus groups.

The interviews were intended to elicit information about understanding directly from those who were involved in research projects. Cohen *et al.* claim that face-to-face interviews are best suit for data related to experiences, opinions, values and feelings (2001) and Patton (2002) explains this fit as follows:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviour that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of the observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of the interview then is to allow us to enter into another person's perspective (2002, pp. 340-341).

I consulted interview protocols developed by Creswell (1998) for my own interview questions. A variety of probes were utilised to expand the participants' responses to the questions provided in the interview protocol. I also adapted changes and refinement found necessary and suitable from one interview into the next interviews.

Mason explains that interviews actually encompass a "rigorous set of activities." The interviewer must be able to "ensure that the interview interaction actually does generate relevant data, which means simultaneously orchestrating the intellectual and social dynamics of the situation" (2002, p.67). When combined with Riesman's conceptualisation of interviews as "conversations in which both



collaborators—teller and listener/questioner—develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerate freedom to both” (2002, p.248), the demands on the researcher are in fact quite high. Authors like Patton (1990), Fraenkel & Wallen (1993) and Fontana & Frey (1994) stress the importance of establishing rapport with the respondent during interview. The interviews employed in this research therefore strongly lean towards the interpretive pole of interviewing as indicated in the following table.

Table 6: The two ends of a continuum of interview forms (Plummer, 2001, p.411)

| Positivist pole                         | Interpretive pole  |
|---|--|
| Standardised through questionnaire      | Flexible-shaped by guidelines  |
| Mass — can be used for many             | Idiographic — used for fewer people  |
| Focused — planned answers               | Open — follows hunches   |
| Structured and hence easy to administer | Unstructured or semi-structured hence requiring more personal skills and sensitivities |
| More predictable                        | Less predictable   |
| Objective — best for facts              | Subjective—best for moods, thoughts, feelings  |
| Sees interviewee as passive             | Sees interviewee as active   |
| Less prominent role for interviewer     | More central role for interviewer  |
| Less reflective/reflective              | More reflexive/reflective  |

To be more specific, I did not avoid showing emotions and limit disclosure of my own views to the respondents if asked. This was done not only to gain their trust, to make them feel at ease and encourage them to talk freely and openly, but it was also done in order to present myself as a real, living person and to treat them in a similar manner. Nor did I deliberately avoid using leading questions or engaging into argument. Rather, I simply allowed the conversation to assume a natural dialogue style: flexible, spontaneous and more responsive to individual differences. Mouton (2001) supports this type of rather unstructured interview as good to capture textual data, rich in meaning.

The cases were selected as follows:

- One student-researcher case chosen from each of the categories classified in the document analysis database (three categories in total);
- Two experienced researchers cases (defined as those researchers who had completed their PhDs more than five years before this study);
- The interaction between the researcher and participants (Chapter 7).

A more detailed description of my sampling strategy, how each research project was selected, how the researchers and their participants were approached can be found in Chapter 7.



### 3.3.4 Data recording

On the agreement of the participants a tape recorder was used for the interviews in order to facilitate a smooth flow and a more reliable record of the conversation. All data were then transcribed and coded by myself. Furthermore, field notes was also employed as an important part of the data in order to record my judgment, decisions and experiences during the research process, as well as reflections on the interview questions, ways of phrasing, probes and casual conversations. Certain of these reflections were incorporated in the next round of interviewing, while others were used in chapter 7 to describe and analyse the ways in which the participants interacted with me as the researcher.

### 3.3.5 Data representation

Riessman (2002) explains that there are several levels of representation in the research process. These levels of representation present various levels of interpretation and representation of subjective realities. There are five levels of representation which follow on each other hierarchically. Each level builds its representation on the representation of the previous levels. The five levels are:

1. attending
2. telling
3. transcribing
4. analyzing
5. reading (Riessman, 2002, pp. 222-229)

Attending relates to the primary experience where the research collaborator reflects, remembers, and recollects specific aspects of the experience. The telling relates to the performance of a personal narrative of the experience to an audience. Transcribing is the process where one of the members of the audience tries to capture the telling in the linear format of written language. Analysis is the generation of themes and narrative elements from the written text, while the last level of reading adds the interpretation of the reader within her own context (Riessman, 2002, pp. 222-229).

On the surface, representation seems to be rather straightforward:

A commonsense answer to the question: 'how to represent?' is: faithfully. Reality should be re-created in the text. A scientific text should reflect what I describes, hopefully in a one-to-one correspondence. This should not be any problem as 'facts speak for themselves', and texts can be rendered loyally to the intentions of the authors (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 117)



However, this simplistic view is not compatible with the epistemological and ontological assumption guiding this study that acknowledges the existence of multiple realities which are interpreted and created. In fact, each of five levels identified by Riessman is endowed with some complexity. Even at the level of attending certain aspects of memory may be more significant to one than others. Authors such as Mason (2002) and Clandinin & Connelly (2002) draw attention that interpretation is already taking place at the level of transcription. In an effort to maintain rigor in this research process, Mason (2002, p. 78) suggests “read the interview both in an interpretive and reflexive manner. Thus reading both for inferred meaning and reading in order to try and determine my own role in the interaction.” This is a clear acknowledgement of the level of interpretation inherent at the level of transcription and then transferred to that of analysis and “we create and re-create voices over and over again during the research process” (Riessman, 2002, p. 229).

Czarniawska (2004, p.118) also mentions two major problems.

- The incompatibility of worlds and words. There is no one-to-one correlation between the world and words. Any representation is in effect a creation.
- The politics of representation. Who has the right to represent and judge?

I experienced difficulties in both. In terms of incompleteness of participants’ narrative, Altheide & Johnson suggest, “our subjects always know more than they can tell us, usually even more than they allow us to see” (1998, p. 296), and this results in the possibility that the final narrative is less rich than the actual experience. Besides, there is also the warning from Apple (1993) that the participant always tries to put his best foot forward, and therefore does not necessarily speak what truly happened, but what he thinks the researcher wants to hear. As a result of these considerations my initial reaction was to include more naturalised methods (a term used by Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, pp. 1281-1285), including context messages, such as involuntary vocalisations (laughing), response tokens (mono or bi-syllabic sounds; silence), non-verbal vocalisations (body language), even pronunciation (the use of slang, accent, diction), grammar and other nuances in the transcription and data analysis, but the realisation soon dawned that:

- such context messages seemed to bear very little relevance to enhancing the understanding of the inquiry;
- these details distracted the attention, both during the interviews and in the analysis, from the content of the conversation itself;
- the respondents seemed to be quite open and honest and did not seem to be particularly interested in portraying themselves in a favourable light (probably because this is not a very sensitive topic).



Since the study was more interested in the meanings and perceptions of the disclosure than to the way in the perceptions were communicated it was decided to adopt a more denaturalised method in order to focus on the content rather than on the mechanics of the conversation. To conclude the main mechanisms used to strive for the most possible true account in this study were, on the one hand, a concerted effort to make the participants relax and talk honestly, and, on the other hand, the use of probing and triangulation (researcher with practitioners, document with narratives, cases with cases).

The question of how to construct multi-voice, my participants', mine, also that of the potential readers, was also challenging. I realised that, as a qualitative researcher, there is a "commitment to obtain the members [participants]' perspectives" (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, p. 293), but, at the same time, the final dissertation is my product and my own signature is also important. Hence the decision was taken to state in interviews, as well as in cases descriptive and further analysis, where my voice was located in relation to the voices of the participants. As for the responsibility to reflect the voice of the audience the description of the context within which decisions were made, interactions among researcher and participants, methods, and settings etc were provided in detail, so that any potential readers might be able to formulate their own interpretation of the data and the applicability of the study.

### 3.3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative enquiry often produces large quantity of data and appropriate data analysis methods are necessary to ensure that this large quantity of data is properly been interpreted, analysed and reported.

I followed suggestions from authors like Charmaz (2000), Tesch (1990), and Miles & Huberman (1994) that the data analysis process should be done immediately after the first set data is gathered and further integrated with the forthcoming data collection process. Therefore, collecting, analysing and interpreting the data coincided as a process that unfolded as the research progressed.

In terms of the procedure for data analysis, different authors cite a variety of methods and steps to use in the analysis of qualitative data. For the purpose of this study, I integrated the suggestions of the simultaneous collection and analysis of data mentioned above and the analytic steps suggested by Terre Blanche & Telly (1999). The following diagram illustrates this integration:



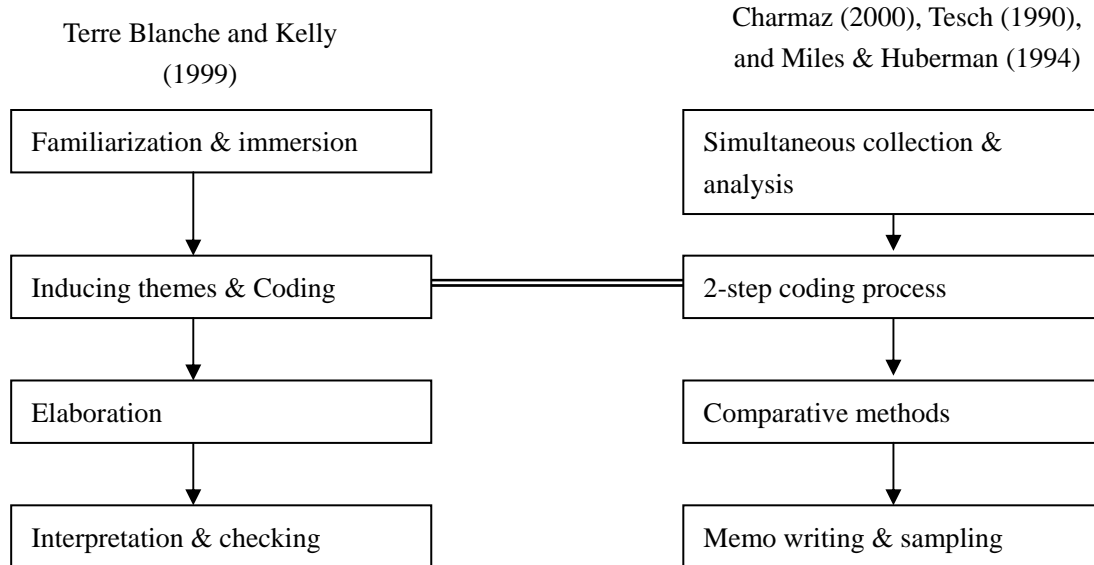


Figure 3: integration of strategies for data analysis

Noteworthy, however, is that these analytic steps were not treated as a fixed recipe, but served to “unpack some of the processes involved in immersing oneself and reflecting on the data” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 140).

To be more specific, after transcriptions were made of the tapes, I went through each transcript, firstly to gain an overall impression of the content, and secondly to explore what emerged from the text (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). Reflection and new strategies from these analyses were used to inform collecting forthcoming data.

Before coding, I first sorted the data into sections of the pre-research phase, interim phase and post-research phase, as informed by Huberman’s (1990) model. Coding in this research was a combination of the deductive method, using a codes based on literature review, and the inductive method, generated through a process which started with preliminary thoughts in the interview process and was revisited and refined through re-listening to the audio tapes and transcriptions (Seager, 2000). I first identified the data that could be coded by the pre-determined codes derived from literature review and then searched for codes that would best describe the uncoded data until I have every piece of data coded. Different codes were separated by different colour to aid visibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then re-organised data according to each code and searched for emerging meanings and patterns. To reach this stage, I engaged in the constant comparative method, going through the data over and over again to identify, revise, modify and amend new categories and families.



### ***3.4 Methodological limitations***

The main methodological limitation of this study is what positivist researchers call lack of generalisability. Qualitative data do not qualify for statistical analysis and therefore the extent to which the result can be confidently applied to context outside my samples is limited. Furthermore, the sample size was small and my participants only comprised a limited type of researchers and practitioners. All these made the generalisability from this study weak. However, as indicated earlier, to produce universal results was not the purpose of this study. Rather, the purpose was to produce an illuminating description and explanation of the researcher-practitioner relationship from the perspective of my participants.

The other limitation is the heavy influence from my own perceptions. Not only did my own understanding and expectation of what the researcher–practitioner relationship should be like influence greatly how I constructed the interview question, how I probed, how I analysed data, but I also allowed myself space to be subjective—not shying away from expressing my own view, arguing with my participants, using leading questions and so on. In order to address this, I built in this research report extensive reflection and detail description of how the conversation unfolded to allow readers to determine their agreement to my data interpretation.

### ***3.5 The researcher as both an insider and outsider***

I am aware of the extent to which personal history, biography, gender, social class, ethnicity and background influence a qualitative researcher, and thus the research. Accordingly I present briefly myself as a conflicting being who is often both an insider and an outsider (more detail is discussed in Chapter 7).

I have always had a critical mind. I don't accept things just because they are tradition. Rather I accept things only because they can sustain logic reasoning. I have many conflicting dimensions of my personality that often result in situations in which I am both insider and outsider. For example, I am interested in exploring people's perceptions (what they are), but at the same time, I also have my own strong ideological attachment (what it should be).

Aside from these conflicts my position in this research was even more complex because I was both a *researcher* and a *researched*. The *being researched* part of the data was important because what was related



in the interviews or documents was retold stories, at best good secondhand information. The study of the interaction between the participants and myself was my only opportunity to glimpse first hand the world of the *researched*. In practice, this meant that I sometimes placed myself in the position of *researcher* in order to listen to the stories, and, at other times, pushed myself into the position of the *researched* in order to reflect.<sup>20</sup>

### ***3.6 Measures of validation***

As different terms and criteria swamp the field of validation any dispute about one's choice could easily evolve into an endless debate on its own. Hence I decided not to choose any particular term for this study, because to me, what was important was whether "it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 69), and not the terms per se. Therefore, this section presents only the following mechanisms that were used in the striving for validity:

Triangulation—this is the convergence and divergence among multiple cases, multiple sources and multiple methods. Triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding in participants' perceptions and preferences, bearing in mind that objective reality could never be captured. Especially relevant to my study were two sets of triangulation. The first set of triangulation included triangulation of methods, namely documents, interviews and observation. The second set of triangulation included triangulation of sources, including not only novice researchers, but also experienced researchers and practitioners.

Member checks—this involves taking data back to the informants, discussing with them whether the interviews reflected their attitudes and then incorporating their comments into the research. This validity check was in line with my epistemological belief that there were many truths and that these were relative to one's personal worldview. Moreover, member checking is also considered to be an ethical handling of the research findings as it allows informants to control what would be written about them (Walker, 1980). However, I also realised that not all participants would prefer member checks for various reasons. Therefore, upon finishing the interviews, I enquired of the participants whether they would like any feedbacks and, if so, which types of feedbacks they would like to have (to read/comment on the transcript, case description, analysis, or abstract). I then did what they had requested. This was also done to observe their reactions

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<sup>20</sup> My interest and ability to examine and reflect on my own thinking and behaviour constantly made this feasible. Details





towards feedbacks and made this observation an item of analysis. Details were provided and discussed in Chapter 7.

Peer examination— this is a valuable procedure by which external observers review the data and the research process. It provides an additional, relatively objective, lens through which the research is able to reflect on the experience. For this study, besides my supervisor, I also shared the study process and report, in various stages, with other fellow students and colleagues, asking for comments or advices.

Thick description— each case was first presented with detailed description (Chapters 5 and 6), then data were cross-examined and further analysed according to the research questions and themes. This yielded thick and vivid information.

Bias—I entered the research with a certain worldview, understanding and expectation of the researcher–practitioner relationship and this influenced the research. For this study, I did not intend to guard against any possible bias on my part. Rather, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I chose to be constantly aware of it and recorded it in my fieldnotes. Altheide & Johnson (1998) describe the field note that records personal research diary as “validity as reflexive accounting”, a process that places the researcher, the topic and the sense-making process in interaction. According to them, researchers have to substantiate their interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of themselves and the process of their research. In other words, bias and self-reflection were recognised, clarified and discussed in order to ensure an openness and honesty. As I was aware of the way in which my own personal characteristics influenced the research process and analysis I also described in detail in chapter 7 reflections on my assumptions, premises and the decision making process throughout the inquiry. Therefore, chapter 7 also enables the readers to detect the possible role my bias had played in this research and therefore judge the validity of my conclusions.

### ***3.7 Ethical issues***

Besides the general call for qualitative research to be sensitive to human nature and to cultural/social contexts and the necessity to remain loyal to the phenomena under study (Altheide & Johnson, 1998) the



focus of this study brought the ethical concerns further into the spotlight.

As discussed and reflected upon in detail in chapter 7, I noticed two tendencies in the academic discourse – while the literature and most research committees tend to be overprotective, certain practices suggest an excess of ignorance. I agree with neither of these tendencies. My understanding of it is RESPECT – respect for my participants as people who are able to make sensible decisions and respect for their voices and their choices. Therefore, my overall strategy in this regard was to discuss various ethical issues with the participants and to act in accordance with their preferences.

The following specific strategies were adopted:

Information session — in order to ensure openness I informed my participants, before the main interview, of the overall purpose of the investigation, the main features of the design, their right to access to the transcription and interpretations (Kvale, 1996), their right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as other possible risks and benefits associated with the study. Ideally, I had wanted to present such information in person during a separate session prior to the main interview in order to allow the participants time to ask questions, digest the information and make decisions. However in certain cases, a separate face-to-face session was either not possible due to circumstances or not preferred by the participants. In these cases the information session took place either electronically, telephonically prior to the main interview, or shortly before the interview on the same day.

Informed consent — Although I considered the information session to be both important and necessary, I was not of the same opinion in respect of the issue of informed consent. In common with Rhodes (2005) I felt that such an exercise, especially in view of the fact that the practice tends to reduce the exercise to a mere formality, could be overemphasised and, indeed, provided more protection to the researcher than to the participants. However, I did realise that informed consent is usually a requirement and many participants are also used to the procedure. Therefore I did present an informed consent form at each interview, but also informed the participants that they needed to sign only if they wanted to (detail discussed and reflected upon in Chapter 7). Furthermore, out of concern that certain people could feel uncomfortable or stressed if asked to sign consent form (Lipson, 1994) – either because they felt such protection was not necessary, or because they did not like the idea of signing a pre-prepared paper that they had to accept as is, or because they were



illiterate and were embarrassed to admit it – I also considered other options, such as an oral agreement and continuity to participate, as possible ways of obtaining consent.

Confidentiality—originally, I planned to ask each participant whether they would like to have their identity concealed in this study and use pseudonym if any participant preferred so and use their real identity otherwise. This approach was based mainly on my own ethical stance that participants are capable persons who are able to make decisions based on adequate information. Hence what was important in this process is to provide adequate information rather than to make the decisions for them. Likewise, if they so preferred, direct quotes were sent back for member checks. Otherwise, the context of the interview, particularly the way in which our interaction had resulted in the flow of the conversation, was made available in case descriptive (Chapter 5 and 6) in order to render the quotes more understandable (Kvale, 1996) and the conclusions more transparent. However, despite that some of my participant did indicate their allowance for me to use their real identity, I was advised by the dissertation committee of university that I should protect all my participants by giving them full anonymity due to the university regulation. Therefore, all the participants reported in this dissertation were presented under pseudonym.

Beneficence—as I was fully aware of a long-standing history of “asymmetries in status, power and resources” (Little, 1993, p. 9) between the researchers and the practitioners, and because of my personal concern for the need to balance *give* and *take* I raised this issue of benefit to my participants, not only as relevant data for this thesis, but also as a practical issue on which to consult. In the information session I had tried to define my expectations of them, also what they could expect to receive in return (knowledge, other ways of empowerment, or merely a sympathetic ear) and also my limitations in terms of engaging in such *give* and *take*.<sup>21</sup> I offered a small gift at the end of interviews, not with the intention of influencing their choice on whether or not to participate, but to show my appreciation of their participation.

Other protection from emotional harm— I come from a discipline that endorses a different paradigm, I did not inherit the traditions in education, or academic in general, uncritically. In fact, a critical attitude has always been an integral part of my personality. And this, together with my assumption that, academics are people who often criticise others and should therefore have a more open attitude towards criticism of themselves, means that my overall attitude towards academics is essentially critical. This, however, differs



greatly from my attitude towards the practitioners. Although I did not accept everything they said, I tended to be more sympathetic towards them, largely as a result of my previous business background which dictated that the customer is always right. Eventually the general guideline I used was to be critical but also to be sensible. I gave due respect and attention to the voices of my participants, but also did retain my critical attitude (more detail was reflected in Chapter 7).

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<sup>21</sup> For example, money was not an option because this study was not sponsored by any funders or bursaries.



## 4. THE WAY IN WHICH DISSERTATION WRITERS DESCRIBE THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP

As the attempt at a conventional literature review showed (see Chapter 2), only limited sources could be identified. As explained earlier I suspect that the limited scope could be due largely to limitations on publication space. As I had expected that dissertation writers would be less constrained by space, I conducted document analysis reported in this chapter in order to provide further empirically reported researcher–practitioner relationships. To this end I examined 28 Masters and PhD dissertations.

This chapter serves mainly two purposes, namely:

- a) to present a critical analysis of the researcher–practitioner interaction from the perspective of the researcher and to lay the foundation for further comparisons with empirical inquiries in which the views of the original participants were also included;
- b) to identify and classify the dissertations into groups, from which cases were selected for further empirical study;

The same boundary and questions that were used for the previous literature review were also used for this document analysis, although, in terms of the time relevance, this document analysis included only dissertations that were submitted in 2004.

The chapter starts with an exposition of the way in which the database for this document analysis was established, and this is followed by an examination of the three main sets of research questions. The chapter concludes with a synthesis.

### *4.1 Sampling frame*

I had initially planned to use all the dissertations that were submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria (UP) in 2004 for this document analysis. Since the University of Pretoria is the university at which I had enrolled for my PhD, I had expected that access to the relevant documents would be relatively easy. This consideration was particularly important to me, as I am a foreigner in the country. The reason for targeting 2004 submissions only, and not submissions prior to 2004, was the heavy dependence of this study on retrospective recollection. My calculation was that the data collection period for 2004-submissions would be approximately late 2002 through 2003, and, if my own data collection started from mid 2005 to



2006 (it actually took place from late 2005 to mid 2006), this would leave a 2–3 year gap in which my participants, both the researchers and their original participants, would have to recall their experiences. If earlier submissions were to be included, the time lag could be too long for accuracy and lucid recollections.

Initially, I had also planned to include a fair representation in this database across different categories, such as Masters and PhDs, different departments within the faculty, different supervisors etc. However, when I started to search the university library catalogue for the hard copies of the dissertations which had been submitted, I found that it was not possible to identify a search via faculty or department, and, moreover, the existing database for hard copies dissertations seemed to be incomplete. I had participated in the Postgraduate Student Indaba in the faculty in 2004<sup>22</sup> and therefore I came across some titles of the dissertations that had been completed in that year. However when I tried to conduct a search in the library catalogue either by thesis title or by author many were not listed. Following the recommendation of a librarian, I resorted to electronic submissions for my second run of searching. Fortunately this system (termed UPeTD) allowed me to search according to faculty. I carried out my first search on 7 April 2005 and it yielded 44 results.

Of these 44 results I excluded 17 for the following reasons:

Table 7: exclusions to the database

| Category | Description                       | Number of exclusion | Reasons  |
|----------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1        | Old completion date               | 6                   | The submission dates were before 2004.   |
| 2        | Unfamiliar language               | 5                   | The dissertations were written in Afrikaans (another official language in South Africa). |
| 3        | Lack of link to the full text     | 1                   | The link to the full text was missing.   |
| 4        | Non-South Africa focus            | 2                   | The empirical study was not done in South Africa.  |
| 5        | Not done under the auspices of UP | 1                   | Not done under the auspices of the University of Pretoria.                               |
| 6        | Pure quantitative study           | 2                   | Used questionnaires only as data collection techniques.                                  |
| Total    |                                   | 17                  |  |

Since I am not able either to read or to understand Afrikaans and the full text was the only access I had to the dissertations the decision to exclude categories 2 and 3 was obvious. The exclusion of categories 4 and 5, however, was more out of a concern about the potential problems related with access to the participants. Since my empirical study samples would come from these dissertations, I excluded these two categories in

<sup>22</sup> An annual student led conference hosted by the faculty, during which students present their completed or in-progress



order to guarantee that I would be able to access the researchers (UP researchers) and their original participants (South Africa participants).

After eliminating these 6 categories, the sample of dissertations stood at 27, among them:

Table 8: the representation of Masters and PhDs in the database

| Masters | PhDs | Total |
|---------|------|-------|
| 14      | 13   | 27    |

Although I was relatively satisfied with this representation across Masters and PhDs, I was still aware of the following problems associated with the sample:

- The sample was still not complete. At least one thesis that I knew of and which had won one of the two best PhD thesis in Indaba 2004 could not be found in the database;
- I had no idea how well the sample actually represented the total number of dissertations submitted. I had tried to access the full list of submission from the faculty administration but was informed that they were not allowed to release such information to students;
- Online database changes. I accessed the same resource again on 26 May. Four more results were yielded, but all four fell into the exclusion categories.

After a discussion with my supervisor, I decided to include the other best PhD dissertation in the database.

Therefore the final distribution of the sample for this document analysis was:

Table 9: the representation of Masters and PhDs in the final database

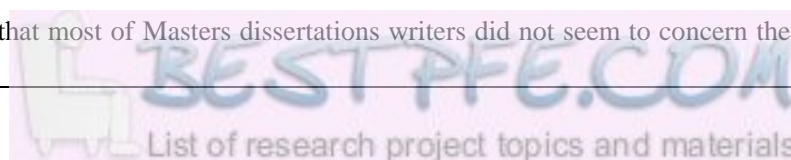
| Masters | PhDs | Total |
|---------|------|-------|
| 14      | 14   | 28    |

I was aware that, although my transdisciplinary interest and experience provided sufficient knowledge on a general basis, my lack of exposure to formal education constituted certain obstacles to carrying out such a document analysis as I was not familiar with many of the topics in the dissertations. As a solution, I started with the Masters dissertations, as I expected them to be relatively easier to handle, both in terms of length and level of difficulty, than the PhD dissertations. I also focused not only on the research design or methodology chapters for the description of the relationship, but also on the introduction chapters in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topics.

My assumption about the ease of understanding the Masters dissertations was proved to be relatively valid;

however, I soon found that most of Masters dissertations writers did not seem to concern themselves much

research to their peers.





with describing the engagement with their participants in their dissertations and, in many cases, few direct disclosure could be identified. This forced me to carry out a more indirect check. Partly on the basis of the relevant debates presented in Chapter 2, the following items were thus added:

- Was improving practice a concern in the statement of purpose and did recommendations contain practical elements?
- In what way were potential benefits to the participants considered?

Likewise, my reading and reviewing extended to include the chapters on data analysis and conclusion.

I noted down all the relevant information in a separate document for each dissertation. In these documents, not only were the relevant original words or paragraphs noted, but also some of my perceptions or comments – I used a different colour or handwriting to distinguish these perceptions and comments of mine.

#### ***4.2 To what extent is the researcher–practitioner relationship revealed in the text of the dissertations?***

To what extent was the researcher–practitioner relationship revealed in these dissertations? The twenty-eight dissertations displayed an extremely wide spectrum in terms of the extent of their disclosure of the relationship – ranging from almost nothing to page after page of descriptions and reflections. The format of the disclosure also varied, as certain dissertations provided direct descriptions, while others needed to be investigated thoroughly through the lines of writing.

In order to facilitate the selection of what I needed to follow up in the empirical study, I categorised the 28 dissertations into three broad groups based on the following two criteria:

- a) was the description indirect or direct; and
- b) was what was revealed substantial or limited.

Table 10: description of categories

| Category | Characteristics   | Number | Researchers  |
|----------|---|--------|--|
| I        | No direct descriptions, all disclosures were indirect;        | 13     | Conco; Francis; Gamede; Machaisa; Mafuwane; Mampane; Mathekgga; Molale; More; Ngwenyes; Ramolefe; Senosi; Tlhagale |
| II       | Direct descriptions existed, but relevant volume was limited; | 12     | De Wet; Du Toit; Griessel-Roux; Lauuwen; Mokoena; Moleletsane; Pienaar; Rampa; Simelane; Sooklal; Thabo; Viljoen;  |
| III      | Yielded direct references and volume was substantial.         | 3      | Hariparsad; Herman; Sehlola  |

A cross-check of this categorisation with the Masters/PhD distribution also showed a pattern of difference.





Table 11: categorization as per Masters/PhD distribution

| Category | Number of Masters | Number of PhD | Total |
|----------|-------------------|---------------|-------|
| I        | 9                 | 4             | 13    |
| II       | 5                 | 7             | 12    |
| III      | 0                 | 3             | 3     |
| Total    | 14                | 14            | 28    |

Masters dissertations showed a clustering around categories I and II, with the majority (9 out of 14 or 64%) fell into category I. Meanwhile, half of the PhD dissertations clustered in category II, while the remaining dissertations showed an almost equal distribution between categories I and III. When the Masters and PhDs dissertations were combined, the majority (25 out of 28 or 89%) fell into categories I and II.

Assuming that my categorisation and judgment had been reasonably accurate, as well as the assumption that dissertations were by nature far less limited by space (pages) compared with published works, the interpretation of the above information could be either that the majority of these novice researchers had displayed a limited understanding of the researcher–practitioner relationship, or that they might had a good understanding of this relationship, but chose not to include descriptions in the dissertations due to the fact that descriptions were only remotely relevant to the main research topic. However, since a methodology section describing the way in which the research had been carried out was a prerequisite for the dissertations, I suspected that the explanation of a limited understanding was more pertinent. This question was examined in the empirical studies and the findings were reported in Chapter 5.

#### **4.2.1 Purpose of the study, recommendations and beneficence as manifested in the dissertation**

As stated above, one criterion of my categorisation was to check whether the description of the relationship was direct or indirect. While the analysis of the direct references in terms of the way in which the researchers experienced the researcher–practitioner engagement is presented in the next section, what follows now is a discussion on those two items which count as indirect reference: purpose of the study and recommendations, and a consideration of beneficences.

##### 4.2.1.1 Purpose of the study and recommendations

By far the most frequently cited purpose for all studies is contained in the words “to address the ‘gap’ in scholarship” (Sehlola, 2004, p. 11), or “to describe, explain and theorise” (Herman, 2004, p. 158). Certain writers also mention a practical contribution and acknowledge this practical contribution as a secondary



purpose or indirect contribution. Typically this dual-purpose appeared as, firstly, to “enhance scholarly understanding ...” and, secondly “the findings of this study will be used to assist policy makers to ensure ...” (Simelane, 2004, p. 2, also see De Wet, 2004; Du Toit, 2004; Francis, 2004; Griessel-Roux, 2004; Machaisa, 2004; Mampane, 2004; Mathekga, 2004; Moletsane, 2004; More, 2004; Ngwenyes, 2004; Pienaar, 2004; Van Wyk, 2004).

Recommendations were proposed largely following the purpose of study. Those dissertations which focused on theoretical contribution typically provided implications for further research only, while those dissertations with dual-purposes usually provided both theoretical and practical recommendations. A further examination of the practical recommendations also indicated that there was no mention of whether any of those recommendations were followed up with the relevant people, possibly because these recommendations were beyond the scope of the dissertation, or else had been proposed only after the dissertation had been completed.

It did, however, come as a surprise that a cross-check of the theoretical-contribution-only dissertations and the three categories which I had earlier derived revealed that all the dissertations in category III aimed at theoretical purposes only, while Hariparsad stated specifically that her study did not aim at providing strategies in practice (2004, p. 3). Although both theory only and dual purpose appeared in both category II and I, in category I the majority aimed at dual purpose. This was surprising because my logic had predicted that a relatively comprehensive understanding of the researcher–practitioner issue, which had manifested in direct description and a substantial volume of description (category III), would result in a higher level of concern for the participants, and therefore in providing practical suggestions that could be of benefit to the practitioners. This question was examined in the empirical studies and the findings reported in Chapter 5.

#### 4.2.1.2 Beneficence

The issue of beneficence had come to the attention of several researchers in the database (Griessel-Roux, 2004; Hariparsad, 2004; Mokoena, 2004; Sooklal, 2004; Sehlola, 2004). Hariparsad discusses her understanding of benefits under the topic of “unequal relationship between the researcher and research participants in terms of who benefits from the research study” (2004, p. 76). Surprisingly, however, she mentioned only the benefit to herself – “I was to benefit not only in advancing academically but also advancing the frontier of knowledge” (2004, p. 76), while there was no mention of any benefit to her



research participants

In accordance with his aim of making a contribution to theory only, Sehlola suggested that the empowerment of the participants with knowledge gained in the research would constitute an incidental benefit for his participants. Griessel-Roux also reflected that “participants (learners in her case) *might* have benefited from the focus groups in terms of giving voice to their experiences and sharing with other group members” (2004, pp. 92-93, explanation and emphasis added), although the word *might* could indicate uncertainty as regards to this statement. Furthermore, the statements of both Sehlola and Griessel-Roux were not supported by any acknowledgement on the part of their participants. And neither made any mention of whether they had indeed asked their participants’ opinion. This leaves one wondering whether the suggested benefits of the participants could be merely their aspirations. Overall, although a respect for the voices of participants was acknowledged, this voice seemed weak.

If the participants’ expectations regarding their participation had indeed been known to the researchers, then the issue of beneficence could also be understood in terms of whether the researchers lives up to these expectations. Sooklal recognised and honoured the fact that “my subjects urged me to convey to the national Department of Education (DoE) and to the Gauteng DoE [provincial department] that they had encountered several problems in implementing the merger. They also wanted their concerns to be addressed so that the next stage of policy implementation would be easier and more or less trouble free” (2004, p. 96). However, while he did acknowledge that his participants “were comfortable with the names of the colleges being disclosed... felt comfortably knowing that they could be identified” (2004, p. 96), he later used the issue of anonymity as the reason why he had experienced the dilemma of “where and how this [to convey the message to the DoE] would be appropriate” (2004, p. 96).

There were also incidents in terms of which the researcher clearly could have done more. In Mampane’s appendix she transcribed one of her interviews with one participant – a girl whose mother had died and who was staying with her aunt. On the day of the interview the little girl had told Mampane “My aunt has just told me to leave her house ... I have to leave by today” (2004, p. 143). She was thinking of going to stay with the uncle, but had not yet informed him of the fact. “I want to go tell him today and ask if I can live with him” (2004, p. 143). Mampane did show her sympathy, “Woe, you do have a lot of bad experiences (2004, p. 144) ... you have a tough life girl” (2004, p. 145). However, she did not offer any help and



concluded their interview with the words “thank you for your cooperation Girl, I really enjoyed the time we spent together. Good-luck with your education and with the visit to your uncle today. I pray to God that your dreams can come true one day” (2004, p. 150).

#### ***4.3 How did these researchers experience the researcher–practitioner engagement?***

Many researchers recognised the need to establish rapport and a collaborative relationship with the respondents. Nevertheless, most of this recognition was nothing more than intention, and started with “I will ...; I must ...”, while what was actually done was not revealed in the text. Among those did reveal what had been done, Simelane’s simple statement that “rapport was established” (2004, p. 38) was typical. A more detailed statement read as follows, “I made time to establish rapport with the principals, demonstrated that their confidence would not be betrayed, their interest would be respected” (Rampa, 2004, p. 105).

Direct descriptions are also closely related with the research process itself. The following presents such direct description according to the way in which a research study usually unfolds: the accessing of participants, data collection and beyond the data collection period.

##### **4.3.1 Accessing the participants**

Access is the first encounter of the researchers with their potential participants. Strictly speaking, the majority of these descriptions reflect the difficulties or failures experienced in securing the participants, therefore does not come under the definition of *the researched* as used in this study. However, I have included this discussion not only because the low response rate itself could be an important indicator of the practitioners’ feelings of being *uncomfortable* and a *lack of interest* (Hunt, 1981), but also because the frustration experienced by the researchers could present further emotional obstacles in their researcher–practitioner engagement.

In common with much of the literature, the major shocks and knocks, as revealed by these student-researchers in their dissertations, involved the control of the gatekeeper and low response rates.

Although permission from the gatekeepers does not automatically guarantee participation, their role is often critical. Among the notable gatekeepers, the principal is usually the first hurdle that many researchers have



to surmount (e.g. Lewison & Holliday, 1997).

After I had explained the purpose of the call [to the principal], explaining the nature of my research study and requesting permission, all responded that they were very busy, but that I should call later... many unsuccessful attempts to gain access into the schools, filled with anxiety and despair (Hariparsad, 2004, pp. 50-51).

Sehlola also experienced similar difficulties although he tried to bypass the principals and asked teachers in person directly, “in many schools I did not even get past the principal’s office to speak to teachers personally” (2004, p. 58).

Numerous letters to different principals, requesting teacher participation, went unanswered. One principal unreservedly told me that he did not think that any principal in his immediate area would sanction this kind of intrusion into his school and into their poor teachers’ classrooms (2004, pp. 58-59).

The low response rate – an inability to secure officials as participants (policymakers or people in high positions in general) – does not come as a surprise, yet many researchers also alluded to “the reluctance of teacher to make themselves available as respondents” (Sehlola, 2004, p. 10).

With the departmental letter of approval in hand, I knocked on the doors of countless schools, marketing the value of the research, its highly confidential nature and my sincere intentions, but had little success... Two teachers agreed to serve as respondents, but when I tried to finalise the details of the project with them, a few days before the schools closed for the December recess, they withdrew... 4 teachers initially committed themselves to opening themselves and their classroom for this inquiry, but withdrew a few weeks later... The overriding response from the Grade 9 educators themselves was something akin to ‘I’m not ready for this, sorry’ or ‘I have too much on my plate, maybe next year!’ (Sehlola, 2004, p. 58)

Despite the assistance from the Quality Assurance Chief Directorate (QACD), teachers were still reluctant to participate in the study. (Mokoena, 2004, pp. 74-75)

Yet, not all researchers encountered this problem. Instead, some were quite successful in their recruiting. Among their successful experiences the most noteworthy was a current or previous personal relationship with the participants.

In Lauuwen’s case, although she left the DoE during the course of her study, “my [prior] connection to the DoE provided me with easy access to the relevant participants” (2004, p. 61). Sooklal also had worked in the Department during the period of his research.

Access to colleges is easy, as all the rectors knew me from my interactions with the colleges which time I had become acquainted with them. Rectors were willing to share documentations, records of deliberations and



discussions that had been held with their staff (2004, p. 80).

As a former school board member, Herman was also successful and “has long association with the schools and connections in the community. Since I was previously in a prominent position, many stakeholders knew my name even if they did not know me personally. This undoubtedly facilitated my access to information” (2004, p. 163). Sehlola’ experience was also interesting. He had three participants, one of whom manifested tremendous enthusiasm about his study that was not matched by the other two participants, but this happened after he had “discovered that we were from the same town and had been acquaintances as university students” (2004, p. 59).

#### **4.3.2 The researcher–practitioner relationship during the data collection period**

Most dissertations writers described the measures they had taken to accommodate their participants.

When the mother tongue of the participants was not English, Senosi translated the correspondence letter into Tsonga (local language) (2004, p. 66). Moletsane also told her participants to ask for translations into their mother tongue if they did not understand (2004, p. 122). The homes of the participants were used in some studies to heighten the atmosphere of an informal environment and to enable the participants to relax (Du Toit, 2004, p. 163; Sehlola, 2004, p. 61). “Due to the participants’ lack of financial resources”, Moletsane made transport arrangements, “supplying the necessary funds for the participants to be transported [back] to their individual homes” (2004, p. 120). Furthermore, “according to the information obtained from the guidance teacher, some of the children cannot afford to bring extra food so that they can eat after school”, Moletsane also provided refreshments to her participants (Moletsane, 2004, p. 120).

The dissertation authors also manifested a common awareness of not disrupting the learning and the teaching. Molale did not disrupt the timetables of each of the school he studied (2004, pp. 129-130). Mampane and Moletsane both conducted their interviews after school hours (Mampane, 2004, p. 121; Moletsane, 2004, p. 112). Likewise, Mokoena stated that “it was important that normal teaching duties and responsibilities of teachers were not disturbed” (2004, p. 75) and Griessel-Roux “restrict[ed] disruption of the flow of events at far as possible” (2004, p. 96).

Sooklal adopted the aim “to respect the rights, privacy, dignity and sensitivities of the researched population” as his main ethical principle (2004, p. 79). Most students from the education psychology



department in the faculty also combined this respect with an awareness of not being judgmental when they interacted with their participants. In many cases, they explained to the participants that the interviews or questionnaire were not being used as a test and that there were no right or wrong answers (Du Toit, 2004, p. 162; Moletsane, 2004, pp. 120-121; Senosi, 2004, p. 54). However, this awareness did not seem to extend to the students from other departments in the faculty.

There were also strategies recorded which were implemented to alleviate the nervousness experienced by some of the participants. In Senosi's case: "At first the learners and their educator were a bit nervous about the researchers' presence even though they were aware why she was present. To avoid being regarded a stranger, the researcher took part in some of the lessons" (2004, p. 59). Moletsane's participants were not familiar with the psychological test she used, so "I informally interviewed the participants about their families, friends, hobbies as well as future career. During these informal interviews, the role of a psychologist was also explained to the participants" (2004, p. 120). Hariparsad's strategy was even more simple – leave it to time, "at first each was nervous but gradually the nervousness gave way to candid responses" (2004, p. 63).

In terms of the involvement/detachment decision, many of the dissertation writers claimed that they "endeavoured to blend in with the setting" (Griessel-Roux, 2004, p. 96) or "became a part of the participants' world" (Viljoen, 2004, p. 16). However, a closer look reveals that most of these efforts were for the sole purpose of conducting the research.

*To avoid confusion and possible problems I arranged an information session with all teachers before the interview phases began (Conco, 2004, p. 63).*

Sufficient time was spent interacting with the respondents on their lived experiences so as *to enhance the authenticity of the data obtained (Molale, 2004, p. 23).*

My initial visits to the schools were to discuss my research plan with teachers and also to request the textbooks or texts *so that I could be familiar with these* before I began classroom observations (Gamede, 2004, p. 68).

The purpose of this relationship (interactive and empathetic) is *to better understand the experiences of learners...I endeavoured to blend in with the setting and to structure my role in such a way as to collect the information required (Griessel-Roux, 2004, pp. 11, 96, original notes).*

In this study's research design the researcher and participants work together to acquire insight into a real-life



problem...*the purpose of this study's second excursion is indeed to enhance the reliability of data* (Viljoen, 2004, p. 15, all emphasis added).

Molale also visited the school in his sample in order to introduce himself to the school principal – the reason for this was that “this is important because of my position as a senior manager in the DoE needed to be clarified so as to avoid confusion and the distortion of the information” (2004, p. 125).

Also significant was the fact that although Du Toit recognised from his pilot study that small talk was a successful tactic to establish rapport, he limited the use of this strategy in his main study because “small talk *took up too much valuable time*” (2004, p. 151, emphasis added).

Overall, extensive descriptions of participants’ engagement (even filtered through the perceptions of the researcher) were missing. It was, however, interesting to note that, those descriptions that were available generally described the participants as showing a positive attitude towards the researcher. Sehlola “detected an openness and excitement ... After classroom observation sessions, he would invariably ask me what I thought of the lesson, and how I thought he could improve it” (2004, pp. 73,75).

Herman’s observation was that the majority of her participants (the community members in her case) were really eager to participate. In fact, there were a lot of “spontaneous outbursts” (2004, p. 171) and “some would even telephone me after the interview to tell me that they had *‘something important for my research’*” (2004, p. 171, original emphasis).

To some stakeholders the interviews were ‘therapeutic opportunities’ in which they were given a space to reconstruct and deal with their experiences. In these cases my role as a researcher almost bordered on that of a therapist, even though I have limited experience in that regard... In other instances interviewees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss their experiences without being contradicted or silenced. (2004, p. 171)

There were even cases where she “received minutes or documents from stakeholders who wanted me to expose certain processes” (2004, p. 187) .

Griessel-Roux also revealed that “the learners opened up in the discussion. They could really voice their opinions and feelings openly and I found it easy for them to talk about parents and their relationship” (2004, p. 143).





Mokoena was among the few who experienced and revealed a negative attitude from the participants.

Despite the fact that I gave teachers guidelines and made follow-ups, the end result was that most teachers were not willing to cooperate...in addition, although I made follow-ups in order to further explore teachers' responses on how the Developmental Appraisal System (DAS) had influenced their professional learning, teachers were not really forthcoming in showing and explaining how DAS influenced them. They talked in vague (2004, pp. 113-114).

#### 4.3.3 The researcher–practitioner relationship beyond data collection

The timeframe beyond data collection includes the periods prior to and post data collection.

Of the 28 dissertations, only one researcher had documented a six-week stay before she proceeded to her formal data collection (De Wet, 2004, p. 19). She lived with the people in their houses and interacted as a member of the families (2004, p. 9) and “I have been in the community over an extended period of time and I was able to establish and sustain relationships of trust with participants” (2004, p. 16). Nevertheless, she did not provide any further details of the way in which she had utilised these six weeks to establish relationships of trust.

Likewise, besides the existence of member checks used in many studies – which are mainly for purposes of validation, descriptions of post data collection relationships were also largely missing. As hypothesised earlier there could be three possible explanations for this phenomenon:

- The post-data collection relationship was carried out but it existed beyond the research report (dissertations). It may have happened after the dissertations had been finalised or else the researchers had regarded it as periphery to the report. As De Laine states, “exit from the field has not traditionally been considered data worthy of inclusion in the text, as the aftermath of relationships between the researcher and informants and other participants. Such matters have traditionally formed part of the ethnographer’s personal experience, to be resolved privately” (2000, p. 142).
- The researcher was not aware of such an issue or need.
- The researcher did not consider it necessary to continue with the relationship after data collection.

Although I suspected that many researchers may have fallen into the latter two categories, this question was posed in the empirical study and reported on in Chapter 5. One case was, however, clear as Viljoen specifically quoted Murphy and Dingwall’s warning that the researcher should not “create expectations of intense involvement in future follow-up excursions” (2004, p. 15), and if such need were necessary, it should “stem from the researcher’s own need for affirmation of collected data and not from the participants’



need to engage in action research” (2004, p. 15).

#### ***4.4 How did researchers reflect on their engagement with their participants?***

What do the researchers describe is one issue, the way in which they go about is another matter altogether. In order to examine further the way in which the researchers viewed their engagement with the participants, this section reports the tones used by these dissertation writers when they were describing their engagement with the participants, and also the extent of self-reflection and self-criticism.

Superficially there did not seem to be many direct complaints. However, few researchers seemed able to maintain an appreciative or even neutral tone. Many were of the opinion that a commitment to teaching would naturally lead to a commitment to research participation. “Their [participants] desire to participate in the study came from their commitment as teachers” (Mokoena, 2004, p. 74). This expectation was sometimes even extended to blaming the participants when they were not very cooperative.

Hariparsad posed many questions as to why certain things had happened and this is a subtle of the fact that she had expected better cooperation from the participants. Although it could be viewed in the light of merely recording the difficulties which she had experienced in conducting her research, the number of pages she had used to describe her difficulties seemed somewhat extreme. Two examples of this endless reflection are given below.

The lesson for me here is that gaining access to schools that are willing to participate in research studies should not be taken for granted by researchers conducting school or classroom based research...the question is why were principals unwilling to allow me access to conduct research in their school. Was it due to subtle forces they only know? Was it because of the potential a research study has of revealing the workings of schools and holding it up for close-up scrutiny? Was it fear of research being a kind of inspection where their school and its practice would be observed and analysed by an outsider in ways that may be intimidating? Was it seen as threatening to the autonomy and professionalism of the school, especially in the controversial context of teacher and school evaluations? Why was promising anonymity and confidentiality not sufficient? (2004, pp. 50-51)

However, with Dinzi [one of her participants], from the township school, it was not possible to complete this interview before the classroom observations because she was unable to find the time to accommodate the interviews. The question is why? What was it about Dinzi in school A that prevented the completion of the interview? Were there inherently unique and complex contextual forces at play, and what were they?...this teacher [Dinzi] was unable to provide the time for the many interviews that I hoped to conduct to elicit her responses about why she practiced assessment the way I had observed. This resulted in limited post-observation data from this teacher. This raises questions: why was she unable to provide the time for the interviews despite



promising to do so? Was she unwilling to provide the time, and if so why? Did the relationship between the researcher and researched change, and if so why? Did I as a researcher play a role in this change if there was a change? Did she now view our relationship as polarised with different motives, priorities and perspectives, that is, me as a doctoral student-researcher focuses on making a scholarly contribution to knowledge, and her as teacher focused on the daily process of educating the youth? How could I know? How does a researcher address this issue? Will this compromise the integrity, rigour and confidence of the research study? (2004, pp. 64-65).

Mampane recorded the following as *practical problems* when conducting her research:

Less than 50% of the learners stayed behind for the research, *even* after an elaborate request by the teachers and the researcher. The school lacked a spacious room/hall to accommodate all the learners which resulted in the administration of the Resilience Scale taking 3 days to administer. The teachers requested the learners to clean the classrooms before they made the venue available for research, *this also prolonged the waiting period* outside the classrooms and resulted in most learners walking away (Mampane, 2004, p. 121).

The venues selected for interviews caused disruptions. At schools, the teacher's offices were used for interviews, and teachers *continuously disrupted* the interview process by coming in unannounced. The participants were not awarded the privacy they deserved at these venues. The interruptions disrupted the flow of the interview (Mampane, 2004, p. 122, both emphasis added).

In the first quote, not only does Mampane not show any appreciation towards those learners who had stayed behind, but the highlighted word also suggests that she had expected that all students should have participated upon the elaborate request of the teachers and the researcher.

In the second quote the teachers were blamed for disrupting the interviews. Although it was understandable that a quiet place in which to conduct the interviews would have been preferred, the selection of the interview venue could have been negotiated between the researcher and the teacher. It sounds strange that the teachers were accorded sole blame for a not so wise decision taken mainly by the researcher.

Other clues are even more subtle.

In addition, although I made follow-ups in order to further explore teachers' responses on how DAS had influenced their professional learning teachers were not *really* forthcoming in showing and explaining how DAS influenced them (Mokoena, 2004, pp. 113-114).

The interviewer *had to* move from Pretoria to Saulspoort [names for places] for this purpose because this was the most suitable time for the clubs to meet (Tlhagale, 2004, p. 124, explanation and both emphasis added).

Besides these subtle dissatisfactions, many of these dissertations writers revealed a low degree of



self-reflection, particularly self-criticism. Many simply described themselves as considerate, professional and appropriate.

I choose a research role *appropriate* for the purpose of data collection (De Wet, 2004, p. 25, emphasis added).

*To counter this perception (that I am an unknown professional outsider, asking questions according to an agenda and audiotape the responses), I took pains to reassure the respondents that there were no ramifications for him/her beyond this single interview, no expectations of right and wrong answers and that their opinions and experiences were unique and respected for that reason. Certain insider perception of the interviewer may also have arisen since it became clear to the respondents that the researcher had sufficient knowledge of their environment to have understanding, if not empathy, for their experiences and points of views. Thus, the interviewees and researcher worked in an interrelated, dialogical fashion (Du Toit, 2004, p. 162 ,original explanation, emphasis added).*

The vast majority of researchers simply lacked any form of self-reflection.

#### **4.5 Synthesis**

This chapter provides a document analysis of 28 dissertations submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria in 2004 in terms of their descriptions of the researcher–practitioner relationship. Initially, direct disclosure only of the content and the way in which the researcher–practitioner relationship had been documented in these dissertations were included in the analysis. However, I soon realised that the direct disclosure was limited and thus indirect disclosure, such as the purpose of the study, recommendations and considerations of beneficence, was added to the discussion.

The analysis of the indirect disclosure was reported first. As far as the purpose of conducting research is concerned, the intrinsic reason was clearly prevalent. However, since the majority of the dissertations have remained on a shelf in the university and have not been published, their value in terms of their contributions to theory contribution has certainly not been fully realised. The vagueness of the theoretic contribution notion itself (assuming that it would benefit society as a whole) has also never been challenged. Certain writers had considered a practical contribution as part of their motive in conducting their studies; however, this was recognised mainly as a secondary purpose, and, in certain circumstances, almost appeared more like a by-product of their primary aim of contributing to theory.

The cross-checking of the theoretical-contribution-only dissertations with the three categories derived of



various degree of understanding of the researcher–participant relationship further revealed the paradox that those who had demonstrated relative deep understanding of the relationship had all focused on theoretical purposes only, while, the lower the understanding of the researcher–participant, the more prevalent the practical consideration. In other words, a paradox existed in that a relative deep understanding of the relationship did not result in a concern about benefits to the participants, particularly in terms of practical suggestions; while those who had aimed at practical contributions demonstrated a very limited understanding of the relationship.

In terms of beneficence, while certain writers had recognised the unequal relationship between the participants and themselves, ironically they demonstrated such concern by discussing their own benefit only. More widespread was the trend of assigning certain benefits to their participants without acknowledgement from the participants. In many cases, the idea of asking what the participants thought about beneficence and what they needed in this regard seemed never to have occurred to these researchers. Furthermore, there were also incidents where the researcher could have done more to help the participants.

The analysis of the direct disclosure of the relationship started with an analysis of the initial encounter of the researcher with the participants—negotiating for access. Two main problems – control of the gatekeeper and low response rates – were reported. As regards the successful recruiting experience, the importance of personal relationships (prior or current) with the participants was highlighted.

The need to establish rapport and a collaborative relationship had been recognised by many researchers, although much of this recognition had either been shown as a plan or reported very briefly. The adoption of measures to accommodate participants was also mentioned in most studies and, indeed, many writers had described that they had blended in with the setting of their participants. However, further examination revealed that much of this effort had been made for the sake of facilitating the research only. The same could also be said about the interactions between the researchers and the participants prior to and post data collection. When a researcher perceived a time conflict, the research itself was favoured at the expense of building rapport.

In common with the findings from the literature review of the published articles in chapter 2, many of the dissertation researchers also did not describe their retreat from the field. Neither could one answer the

question of whether there had been any continuity in terms of the relationship after data collection from what had been described in the dissertations. The views of the participants were also largely missing.

Again in common with the findings of the literature review in chapter 2 was the tendency of the researchers to depict themselves as considerate and professional. Although they had not complained directly about the participants, few researchers seemed to have shown them appreciation and understanding. The insistence on justifying their studies on the basis of theoretic contributions, together with the sentiment of echoing altruism as the motivation to participate, were in some cases extended to subtle blame of the participants when they had not seemed to cooperate unconditionally.

Lastly, most of the researchers revealed very little self-reflection or self-criticism.



## 5 THE WAY IN WHICH DISSERTATION WRITERS AND THEIR PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP

This chapter and the following chapter report in detail on the way in which the researcher–practitioner relationship is perceived and experienced by both the researcher and the original participants in five cases.

The distribution of these five cases was as follows:

- three student-researcher cases: one was chosen from each category classified in the document analysis in the previous chapter;
- two cases were chosen from experienced researchers from the same faculty;<sup>23</sup>

One research project centred each case. For all cases, lengthy face-to-face interviews had been used as the main data collection method. In order to address possible selection bias on the part of the researchers (who could decide which original participants were to be included in my sample), I asked each researcher to provide at least two participants to whom I might gain access. The interviews usually started with the researcher, and were followed by the interviews with his/her participants, and usually concluded with a report back to the researcher with either another interview or certain follow-up questions which had emerged from the original participants' interviews.

On the basis of my theoretical framework, these two chapters were organised around the following three spheres of interest:

- The researcher/practitioner context (including aim of research; reasons for participation; understanding of beneficence<sup>24</sup> and responsibility towards each other);
- The researcher–practitioner relationship (including relationship prior to data collection; the engagement during the data collection period; post-data collection relationship, retreat from the field; and understanding/preference of continuity or closure);
- Evaluation of the relationship.

A comparison of the perceptions of the respective researcher and his/her participants was a common theme in all these cases descriptive, however, the selection of the different categories of these cases was also to

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<sup>23</sup> Detail definition and sampling please see Chapter 7.

<sup>24</sup> Because of the unequal distribution of benefit discussed in Chapter 2 this issue of beneficence was addressed in terms of the benefit to the participants only. Since benefit could also be understood in terms of both an expected benefit and an experienced benefit this issue was investigated via both these avenues.



allow for other types of comparison: the cases of the student-researchers (dissertation writers) provided a further comparison between document (dissertations) and narratives; while the cases of the experienced researchers allowed for an examination of the way in which different power position (novice researcher versus experienced researcher) played a role in terms of the engagement between the researchers and their participants.

In accordance with the three categories formulated in Chapter 4, three cases are reported in this chapter. The detail sampling of the reasons why these three specific cases were chosen is presented in Chapter 7. As was mentioned in the research design in Chapter 1, these two chapters aim mainly at providing detailed descriptions, traces of the way in which the dialogue flowed and conclusions were drawn, while Chapter 7 presents a more detailed analysis.

### ***5.1 Case 1 (category I):***

#### ***Francis—Exploring facilitation skills in asset-based transdisciplinary teamwork (Masters)***

Francis's project aimed at exploring the types of facilitation skills needed in asset-based transdisciplinary teamwork. Her study was situated with a broader course development (early childhood intervention) programme for an MSc degree (2004, p. 2). According to her, "because I got on board of this MSc project, my supervisor and I started speaking about it and (she) said, now you have these people here as part of the panel try to get the MSc going – use them for your own thesis now."

In this study, the focus group comprised the only data collection technique. Two sessions of the focus group were conducted, each lasted about one hour and each participant participated only once. These focus groups took place, as Francis recalls, "in the middle and towards the end of the MSc project... they were trying to wrap it up...it still went on about another year or two before they finalised, but that was just, I think, going back to reflect on the theme and refine things. But first to get the Masters' course going, it was maybe towards the end."

Francis was a Masters student at the time and was studying educational psychology. Her participants were mostly professionals – working in various fields including social work, education pathology, educational psychology, speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupation therapy, etc. Most of them were also lecturers





themselves and conducted their own research. Two of the original participants (Botha and Lee) were interviewed for this case. They were both lecturers in UP.

### 5.1.1 Researcher/practitioner context

The main aim of the study, as stated in the dissertation, was “to inform and enhance asset-based theory” (2004, p. 1). So “a contribution of this study could be a theoretical description of such skills” (2004, p. 3). “Indirectly, a practical contribution could also be possible, regarding the effective implementation of the facilitation skills” (2004, p. 4). As she explained in her interview this practical contribution, “was specially, for example, using it in the training, in service training of certain professions.” Her interview also revealed that she had never actually “never thought about publication. The only thing I thought of, that is why I even started off the project, was that it would be part of the module, for the Masters course. That for me was really big enough. I didn’t even see any thought of publication, because this is already a big thing.” As regards the practical contribution, when I probed further about whether it had ultimately been used in this module she answered, “the information I give, no, no...because actually it took so long for various reasons.”

In fact, “it took so long” was one important characteristic of this study. In practice this meant that she had started her study in 2001 when “I did most of the research, I did focus group interviews, and then there was a stretch”— almost two years when she was away as a result of certain personal issues and did not do anything about the study. Finally, it was in 2003 that she “put everything together”, wrote the dissertation and submitted in 2004. Interestingly, although she had never thought about publication, Francis claimed that, “my dissertations would have more of an impact if I quickly finish it and submit it in 2001 or 2002, because asset-based and transdisciplinary concept was still a fresh concept especially in South Africa, I think I would have made more an impression on the body of theory than I did years later”.

I raised the matter of the practical contribution at which Francis had aimed with Botha, one of her participants.

(If she had finished in 2002, do you think that would be used somehow in the module?<sup>25</sup>) If that was not late, we

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<sup>25</sup> Unless specified otherwise the questions in bracket in quotes represent my probes and questions. This applies to the whole report of all empirical cases. In other quotes I provide a longer record of the interactions for questions and responses between the participants and myself. On these occasions what I said was marked by starting with Y and what the participants said started with the first letter of their surnames.



probably would be able to use some of the information in the module, but the problem was that the module was already been written about that time when she finally finished.

So, according to Botha “it wasn’t formally part of the module”, but she did think that the focus group could have informally informed her teaching for that module. Indeed, for her, this had been one of her expectations when she had agreed to participate in the focus group.

My expectation regarding that was more to do with, it was nice to actually hear how my colleagues also see the process, what they get from it. And because I knew the other participants, it was actually a nice, can I say, closure of the whole project for me, because it was nice to hear how everybody else experienced it, the process...I knew the result from that discussion would probably be useful to my teaching purposes, because we were working on developing a new Master’s programme and using this construct from asset-base... the year after that, in 2002, we actually started implementing the module, so I knew that from the discussion, it would give me, because there were a lot of examples from the discussion, things like that, and I knew that I can use those examples again in teaching...So that was quite nice, because I could draw examples from other professionals.

Francis regarded interest in the research topic as the most likely reason motivating the involvement of the participants. “They had interest, otherwise they wouldn’t be part of the project to start off with.” This was confirmed by both her participants. However, both participants also mentioned other reasons that they regarded as important. For example, the referrer, according to Lee, was very important in her decision on whether or not to participate. In fact, she pointed to the importance of the reputation of the referrer immediately after I had raised the question of why she had agreed to participate. “Because in the busy academic schedule, one has to know, you know, it is not the referrer, it is which department you are, that when one actually wants to *help* somebody in research, but then it would be a worthwhile exercise” (emphasis added). She even ignored my suggestion following this statement of hers that “so indirectly it is because of the interest of the topic?” and continued “though the referrer is important, because if it would be from a department that doesn’t have a good reputation, or somebody that I wouldn’t know, I would think twice.”

Interestingly, the word *help*, as highlighted in Lee’s statement above, continued to surface not only in Francis’s own understanding of the reasons why her participants had participated, but also in my conversations with both her participants.

And I think because some of them, at least half of them, were lecturers as well as being professional people in practice, they were also researching, they had *that kind of understanding of empathy with me*, they knew that it is



a tit-tat, I mean I help you and you help me, *research is to help each other*. You know that is the only way that there is any progression...I know *they are doing it to help me*. (Francis)

It was the topic that I am familiar with, and I thought, you know, that I can contribute. So usually, *I shouldn't say favor, but* (so in a way you do think that you are helping her?) *I was helping her*, yes, yes. (Botha)

I think the benefit for me was, like in the case of you, to *assist somebody*, to be able to do research and develop as an academic. (Is it kind like a circle of me helping you, and you help somebody else?) Yes, also maybe some sort of social responsibility...I know how difficulty sometimes it is to get participants, the whole thing about try to *help* somebody in academic (Lee, all emphasis added).

Probably because Francis had clearly acknowledged that her participants were helping her by agreeing to participate, she did not speak much about her understanding of other benefits that might accrue to her participants. For Botha, as was mentioned earlier, her expectation of the benefit was “to hear how everybody else experienced it, the process [of the module development]” and “that there were a lot of examples, and I knew that I can use those examples again in teaching”. “I wouldn't say that I participated the research because I anticipated these benefits for me, but in retrospect, I mean.”

B: to me, benefit was more in terms of, on the emotional, cognitive sort of level, understanding how other people really experienced the project. That was really the main benefit for me. And then I must say maybe there was some sort of benefit, as a researcher, to see how she conducted her focus group, how she achieved, how she did it.

Y: so you were also learning how she was conducting research?

B: yes, how she was facilitating the project, how she phased the questions, and how she grouped the people together. So yes, at a practical level.

Lee continued to perceive her participation in the light of to “assist somebody, to be able to do research and develop as an academic”, and went on to state that she did not think that any expectations of direct benefit arising from participation would be realistic.

L: not in expectation that I personally would be able to use any of the data.

Y: so whether you will be able to use the data or not is not very much a concern to you?

L: it wasn't there, no.

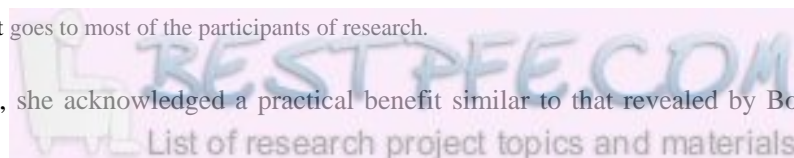
Y: what about the issue of benefit? You said that it was not a concern whether to be able to use the data or not, but in general, is this issue of benefit important to you?

L: It is unrealistic for any participants to think that there is a direct benefit in participating in research. I think the benefit for me was, like in the case of you, to assist somebody, to be able to do research and develop as a academic, so that is an indirect benefit, because I actually don't believe that there is, there is very few research that has any direct benefit to any participants.

Y: so from your side, you are giving more than you take?

L: yes, but I think that goes to most of the participants of research.

Although, in retrospect, she acknowledged a practical benefit similar to that revealed by Botha, “because





you know in the focus group, I could see what she was maybe not doing correctly, so I learn from that, be able to supervise my students, so I find that being very useful.”

As far as the responsibility of the researcher towards the participants was concerned, Francis’s main concern was confidentiality, “keeping my word [particularly in terms of the time required]” and “to give them information afterwards, once I had accumulated data and maybe come to some conclusions to give it back to them and tell them, this is what I got, do you agree with me.” Lee agreed with the view that reporting back is part as the researcher’s responsibility, “her responsibility lies in terms of ethical responsibility, in terms of reporting what we shared in an accurate and correct manner, and acknowledging participation.” While Botha also shared this view, she mentioned other dimensions that she regarded as equally important, such as the researcher’s portraying participants accurately and acknowledging the contributions of participants.

B: I do think that she had responsibility, in terms of portraying my view accurately, and not making implications or assumptions on the things that we didn’t say. And I also think that she has the responsibility not necessary protecting my identity, but protecting the information as such that we gave to her.

Y: in which sense?

B: that she couldn’t present this as her own work, that she need to give credibility to the group. And I also think the whole responsibility was also towards not only the individual that participated, but also the group because I think the group stimulated each other, and how we built on the things.

Since Francis had regarded confidentiality as extremely important, I specifically asked both her participants how they felt about the anonymity promise. Botha did not think that Francis’s anonymity promise “really matters” and she saw it as “just part of the research process”. Lee, on the other hand, did “prefer to be assigned a number or a letter or whatever”, and her reason for this preference was the following:

I consider a code to protect my identity to be an essential part of research ethics—the principle of beneficence—which means that your participants are protected...It is important to me not be identified as I have a high profile [being Head of Department] and do not want my views to be made known to all.

Interestingly, when I continued to question the importance of confidentiality, Francis further suggested that besides the professionalism she attached to the notion of confidentiality, she implemented it mainly to satisfy herself, not the participants. In fact, she was of the opinion that the participants would not have minded whether she had promised confidentiality or not:

To tell you the truth, I do not think that they would have minded that much, because a lot of them were fellow researchers, and because a lot of them work for the same university, they know each other, and a lot of us were from the same project, basically it was just getting together to chat about what we thought. I do not think it was



such a big thing to them, but it was still a big thing to me to let them know that I wouldn't use their names, that I wouldn't even use their initials, in the transcriptions, even though, you know I had tapes, audio tapes and video tapes, I didn't show them to anybody. I keep them totally to myself; I transcribed everything myself, nobody had access to that. So for me, it was important, but to tell you the truth, I do not think that it was that important to them. But it is important for me because as a researcher, I want to maintain that professionalism, they never told me to go ahead and use our names, they never said it, I never asked them. But it is important to me because I am not going to be presumptuous, just because I think they don't really mind confidentiality doesn't mean I am going to spread their names and everything. For me, it was important because I was there as a professional, I was there as a researcher, I had to stick to ethical considerations, for the sake of my dissertation as well...maybe put it this way, it is important, you only realise that something is important when it gets challenged and when you get problems. And I can presume that they wouldn't have a problem with confidentiality, and maybe even they would have said that we don't mind, you can use our names. But anything could happen, I can't figure something now that could jeopardise their reputation, anything like that, but anything could happen, somebody could take their name, could take what they say and turn it around... people can challenge me because I wrote it, but it is unfair to challenge them because I used them just to gain information, so it is unfair if they say something and somebody could take that out of context and twist it around, and challenge them and attack them because of what they said. They came with good intentions, they came to help me, and if there is any possibility that by revealing their names, they could be attacked, I wouldn't want that to happen. That would put me in a bad light. So just for the sake of me feeling ok about it and to protect them. Although honestly, I do not think anything they said would incriminate them in any way, but sometimes you even do not think things and things happens, things that you do not even expect to come your way, so rather just to protect yourself and protect other people.

As far as the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher was concerned, Francis's felt that "they have responsibility to be honest ... I expect them to be honest, to be open, to question me, to challenge me, to validate". While Botha agreed with this sentiment, both participants placed greater emphasis on the practical issues.

I think my responsibility is on a practical level, things like I said I would be there and I was there. And all those practical issues. And then I think the whole issue of truthfulness, to speak honestly, to speak openly, and to really get my best information that I could (Botha).

Because when she explained what her aim was and what participation means, even though we could withdraw , I did realise that I had the obligation later on to go through the transcripts and to validate and say I am ok with how she transcribed the text (Lee).

### **5.1.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship**

As alluded to earlier, in this study "most participants were directly or indirectly involved in the above-mentioned project prior to this study (2004, p. 66) ... most were acquainted with each other to a greater or lesser degree" (2004, p. 69). Prior to the study Francis had known two or three of her participants



personally, although, for these two or three participants the relationship had been on a professional level, or as colleagues, but never personal. “The others I had met at the project, one or two I hadn’t met, but they had been referred by somebody else.” Both Botha and Lowe had met her at a conference prior to the focus group when Francis had presented the intention of her study.

“Adequate information on the goal and procedures of the investigation was given before the meeting (via email) and just before the onset of the interview ... Participants were contacted personally and/or telephonically and received invitations via electronic mail in which the purpose of the study was explicated. In addition to this, participants received a form stating the question to be discussed at the focus group interviews, as well as the assumed existing knowledge” (2004, p. 14, 66, original explanation). According to Francis, this contact was also to make her expectations clear to the participants, particularly the fact that she would want them to go through the transcript and validate it at a later stage. According to both her participants this early contact (prior to the focus group) had been important and they appreciated the fact that the researcher had made this effort. Botha revealed that she usually participated in a research study only if “I knew the person who was conducting the research [through some early communication]”, while Lee also broadened her preference for a good referrer to a similar preference that the researcher clarifies his/her expectations to the participants.

(So you think it is important to have some kind of contact before?) I think so, from a relationship point of view, yes. That you would like to meet somebody, either in person, or by email or telephonically...I think she was very clear, on her approaches and exactly what the expectations were, and I think that is very important to the participants.

Francis’s decision regarding involvement/detachment was closely linked with the data collection method used in her study. The use of a focus group for her topic (group interaction stimulates the range and depth of the discussions) and the nature of the participants (shared similar interests) were obvious. Upon the “recommendation from my supervisor, she told me that it was one of the things of the focus group, that the researchers shouldn’t be the facilitator, because they could come in, bias could come in...according to the rules of the focus group, my supervisor told me that well, I am actually not suppose to be facilitator”, thus an external facilitator was used to moderate her focus group. More specifically Francis described what happened as follows:

Because as a researcher, actually I was not supposed to be the facilitator, I have to get somebody else to be the



facilitator... That one person, because she was from the education psychology department, she volunteered to be the facilitator for the first round. And in the second one, it was also supposed to be another educational psychologist. For the first one, it did happen, and for the second one, the person was supposed to come couldn't make it in the last minute, so I had to take over that role.

I probed her perceptions about the role she thought she should have played and she gave the following answer:

Y: if your role was not to be the facilitator, what role were you supposed to be?

F: just as an observer.

Y: not talking?

F: I can talk, but I need to be very careful, I should rather be an observer, because I am coming in with certain bias, I came in with really certain presumptions, or certain ideas in my head, what are the skills that one needs, and by me asking questions, I could be influencing them, I could ask them, what you think about communication field, but then I already said it.

Y: you mean, by that, you are already offering a choice?

F: so that is why the second one, I didn't want to, but at that stage, I had to because the facilitator couldn't make it for the last minute.

She described her role as researcher in the first focus group and as facilitator in the second focus group as follows – her views were also confirmed by her participants' observation.

The first one, I hardly spoke. In the second one, I had to... though I wasn't completely quiet, even in the first one. In the first one, I was there present, I was sitting down, I spoke in the beginning to clarify the questions, and as they were speaking, and she was summarizing, and I wanted to dig into certain things, and then I posed my probes, I think once or twice, kind of throwing a stone and said, what about this, what do you think (Francis).

She was the facilitator...(so actually she did not participate in the discussion?) no, no, no. She got the conversation going and... you know she would ask us maybe to identify the theme, or request for clarification, but she was a facilitator, she didn't participate in the discussion (Lee).

She continued to elaborate on her understanding of the danger of bias when she drew a comparison between a focus group and a face-to-face interview:

Because I decided to use focus group interview, one of the things that I shouldn't be is to be the facilitator. It just cancels out bias. And even if you don't use a focus group interview, if you use a normal interview, you also have to be very careful, what you are saying and how you are saying it. Researcher's bias is even more a factor in this kind of technique than in a focus group interview.

In other words, she agreed that there had been limited involvement in her focus group and "there is a reason for it".



Both the researcher and her participants described their researcher–practitioner relationship as merely research-based. The friendship was understood more as friendliness, as Francis put it, but not one of the three thought that it had actually been necessary to involve friendship in the research situation.

So I think friendship in the sense of friendliness is important, but I do not think friendship is necessary (Francis).

I think when we spoke earlier about of having contact; I think that is important because that sets the theme for the relationship, and for the participants to be comfortable and to trust. And I think that is important, but I don't think there is a friendship element in it. It is just an interactive relationship and one of trust, so you feel comfortable to share. (Lee)

I don't really think it is that important to have the friendship there. (Botha)

Indeed, according to all three, friendship could be dangerous.

If I have this group people in the focus group now, it might have made a difference, because you tend to be friend with people who think the same way as you did, and that is dangerous, because then basically you are going to get people to say what you want them to say...It could be dangerous to the research because like-minded people become friends and you need challenging minds in research. You really need people challenging and criticizing you... (Why do you think friends can't challenge each other?) They can challenge each other, but sometimes unconsciously, they will say things in certain ways to please the other person. (Does that have to happen?) It is not necessary, I didn't say that it is necessary, what I was saying is that if you try to get people open and sincere opinion and if they are very good friends, then they might be reluctant to be as open with you. I am not saying that they are not open to each other, but especially when it comes to something when they know it is going to affect your career, it is going to affect your study, or you believe in this kind of way or thinking, and they would be worried if they challenge you, then they might offend you, or they might cause problems to the research, they might rather keep quiet. I am not saying that they do this intentionally, but unconsciously, at subconscious level. (What about the other side? if we talk about people, let's say strangers, do you think there is also a possibility that people would not be so open because they want to be polite with strangers?) There is a possibility, but I think the possibility is less, because number one, especially if you tell them from the beginning that their name is confidential, and number two, they know that there is a very slim chance that they will ever meet you again or come across you, that's why sometimes people open up about their personal life, very deep things, to complete strangers, but they struggle sometimes tell their families. (Francis).

Friendship could cloud the issue, because it could be a variable, because you might not give the same answer, because with the friendship, you would want to please somebody, and with the distant relationship, you would be more just to say your truth thinking (Lee).

And sometimes, if there is a friendship issue, I think it also can influence the research, because then you might, it might not come to the forefront, but you might try to please the researcher. (Botha)

As mentioned earlier, there had been a time lag during which Francis had not attended to the results of the





focus groups discussions. However, when she did return to continue with the dissertation, she identified the themes that had emerged from the discussion, and then “I emailed them and I said, look, it has been a long time, I hope you still remember me, this is what I got, what do you think”, “This was however, for the purposes of verification and adaptation” (2004, p. 15). And then “the people that I was able to get hold of, all of them came back very positively, saying of course we remembered you, we remember the interview, thank you for this great thing and what about this and what about that...I got at least three or four people coming back to me, saying, really putting a lot of time to all the notes that I have made and saying, this is good, this is great, what about that, remember this, I wouldn’t put these two together in the category... how about this category, putting this and this heading rather than that heading...”

(Do you think they live up to your expectation?) Yes, their willingness, that is one of the things that I like it a lot, a lot of them were willing to give me feedbacks, even after years later...I think, they really took effort. Not all participants would just sit down and spend a lot of time going through notes, highlighting this and that. It was more than what I expected actually.

This feedback process was also appreciated by both participants.

What I really appreciated was afterwards that she made contacts again and said you know this is how I analysed the data, and if this was your intentions and so on. (So this is important to you?) Yes. Because I don’t want, yes I participated and in the end, I don’t know what happen to it...the analysis, that was quite good for me, then you could see and then also remember oh yes, this is the way that I used, this was exactly what I meant, so that was nice... The analysis part, it was nice, and interesting as well, to see what she did with the information and how she grouped it, so I spent more time on analysis part. (And you liked it?) Yes. I was also a researcher, so it was interesting to see what she did. (Botha).

(She said that she shared with you the transcript and also asked you to validate, so you think it is important to do that?) I think so, like I mentioned earlier, I felt comfortable because I was trusting her, but it was nice to be able to review and to make sure that she hadn’t taken done anything that I hadn’t said, so it is a nice control (Lee).

During the period between the focus group and the sending of the transcript, “for most of them, there was no contact. For about three of them there was still contact, not necessary pertaining to this project, I happened to see them or whatever reason we had contact, but never really about those.”

According to Francis, some kind of a relationship had developed since her study,

If I were to meet them somewhere, they would ask me about my personal life and how I was doing...with one or two, or three of them, I would be able to have conversations about anything else, and maybe about how their families are doing, even though at the stage of the project, I didn’t know them. Over the last two years, I came to know them better...at that stage, even the people that I knew the closest, they were still my superiors, so I still



had this kind of distance with them, even though they were friendly to me. But over the few years, things have changed, especially with two of them, I am coming to them more at a personal level, maybe because I was also qualified, professionally speaking, I was in the same level as they do.

However, the relationship she described above was with other participants, but not with the two whom I had interviewed. For those two, it was the focus group, the thanks email after the focus group, the transcript and “that was it.”

So did the two participants and also the researcher prefer the way in which the research–practitioner relationship had ended after the study had been completed? Or would they have preferred some kind of continuity? I posed these questions to all three. According to Francis

F: in this case, it’s better to have a closure because it was a focus group interview, focus group means that you investigate one thing, quite intensively, and that’s it. So it is not a long-term thing, that you had to go and see how they are doing in two years or three years time. So I would think that closure is better for what I needed for a Masters. But if I were doing a bigger project, like a Doctor, I would use this to create a programme to train other facilitators of transdisciplinary, then I would say maybe continuity is good because then you can go back to them and say five year ago, you said this and this, and this were important, now you have five years of experience, in the transdisciplinary group, what can you tell me and what can you teach me, and I could apply that in my training programme. But for my need, closure was the main thing...In this case, it was closure, even though my actual writing of the dissertation hasn’t finished, there was closure on what they had to do, until after I have given them the feedback and asked them for their opinion.

Y: what do you think of what the participants might want?

F: I didn’t think about what they wanted because right in the beginning, I think I made the intention clear that I need you to give me opinions on this. No, it’s true that I didn’t think about maybe what they needed. As I said, most of them know each other, and they were involved with each other even though they were coming from different discipline, because a lot of them were from the university. So I think in that sense, there is probably still communication between them, if they were to discuss anything about this project or their experience about transdisciplinary or whatever, they probably would have shared it anyway. But no, I didn’t think about what they would need, that’s true...

Lee agreed that closure was what she preferred, at least for this case.

Y: So is it fine to have a formal closure or you prefer to let it continue in any way?

L: I think it depends on the type of the research and what importance is that to the researcher. Because I am in a totally different field, so yes, she was on the early child intervention project, but my role was to teach two modules in that project, so I wasn’t extremely concerned about her findings. I am not into educational psychology, I wouldn’t had the time, what I would have liked was a abstract, yes, but I wouldn’t want to continue the relationship because there wasn’t enough point of it unless if you are in the same field.

Y: what about for example, if she just drop by or say hello, how are you?

L: no, I wouldn’t want to, because one is busy, then there was no reason that I would want to become a friend, for instance, and then there is closure, because I think if you are a busy person, it is important to have closure on stuff. So why would you, from my opinion, I wouldn’t want to drag something out. It is fine. I think she also set



the perimeters, because from the beginning, we were very clear about what my role had to be, what the expectations were, and then finished.

Botha thought slightly differently.

Y: So do you think it is necessary or important to keep some kind of contact afterwards?

B: some sort of relationship is actually nice, yes,

Y: what kind of relationship?

B: I think email once in a blue moon, to just say you know this is what I have been up to now, or if you publish anything after that, just said you know, this was the newest stuff that I have been busy with or whatever, something like that would be nice. If it is a topic, particularly if it is the topic that interests you, I mean that was why we participated in the initial research. I am not talking about other studies that you do on the street. But if you selected specifically, obviously you do share some sorts of interest.

Y: do you think it is necessary to have a kind of closure when a research is finished or you want to continue in some way?

B: the continuation was nice, like I said, if there are certain things you write afterwards or just to say I have done this and send that email. But for a specific project, it's also quite nice if there is formal closure, I think. Just say thank you, I submitted the thesis and blah blah, so that you know. In a sense you need closure but you also need the continuity as well.

### 5.1.3 Evaluation of the relationship

All three viewed the researcher–practitioner relationship as positive.

(How do you find them? You said they lived up to your expectations?) Yes, even more than what I expected. (So, in general, you think it was good?) Oh yes, very positive. Even those people who criticise or challenge some of the things that I did [in the analysis], I appreciate that, because actually I did change some of the things we wrote in the dissertation, because of what they said, so even then, I appreciated it. (Francis)

(So how in general you experienced the engagement?) I must say that it had been a while back, I can't quite clearly remember. (Ok, let's say good or bad?) It was good. It was good... (So how in general you find her as a researcher?) I think it was a positive experience. I think she was down to the point, there was no any un-clarity... so I think it was good. (Botha)

(How in general you experienced the focus group, the engagement?) It is long ago, but I didn't have negative experiences, otherwise I would have remembered it. It was stimulating...(Can I in general say that the relationship was good?) yes, it was very professional. (Lee)

In fact, this positive experience had contributed, according to Botha, to her agreeing to participate in my research.

(So let's assume that she approach you for another study, you might consider?) Yes, definitely, that was also why when she was approaching me to say that you are actually following up on her research, I immediately said I will be willing to participate again, because I thought that if everything was hassle free again, like the first time,



it would be ok.

## 5.2 Case 2 (category II):

***Thabo –The influence of Cross-cultural interviewing on the generation of data (Masters)***

***De Beer—The academic self-concept of learners with hearing impairment in two South African public school contexts: Special and full-service inclusion schools (PhD)***

This case was chosen because of Thabo's study. Although I had understood before choosing his study that it had been based on another study, it was only after I had started inquiring more closely into the details, that I found it difficult to describe his study fully without bringing in the study on which it had been built – the PhD study conducted by De Beer.

The focus of De Beer's research was to "understand the academic self concept (ASC) of grade 7 learners with hearing impairments (HI) in different school contexts" (2005, p. 5). The methodology she used was a combination of quantitative tools such as questionnaires (ASC questionnaires) and qualitative tools such as classroom observations and interviews with the principals, educators and learners with HI (2005, p. summary).

De Beer was white, female, and Afrikaans speaking, while Thabo was black, male, and Sepedi<sup>26</sup> speaking. Since some of the schools De Beer had included in her sampling used Sepedi as the medium of instruction and since she did not understand Sepedi, Thabo's involvement in the study, initially at least, was "to help her. It was only to help her" – helping in the sense of administering the questionnaire, translating and acting as an extra observer and interviewer, particularly "with observations and explanation of the classroom interactions" (De Beer, 2005, p. 99), using the knowledge of the cultural clues.

However, during De Beer's study, Thabo "realised the difference in interaction between me and the information that is happening and the interaction that was happening with her", and this difference, according to him, prompted his decision to embark upon his own research topic "to ascertain whether new and/or more information (or clarification) could be elicited in the absence of the cultural dimensions represented by interviewer A and whether the information elicited would differ from the information

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<sup>26</sup> Both Afrikaans and Sepedi are local languages spoken in South Africa.

generated from the session one interview in aspects such as volume, range, expressions, content and formulation of content and possibly influenced by the dimensions of culture focused on in this study” (2004, p. 55, original explanation).

The roles of Thabo and De Beer in the study, particularly in the interview and observation sessions, are illustrated figure 4, which was adapted from what Thabo had described in his dissertation. Interviewer A in the figure represents De Beer and interviewer B Thabo.

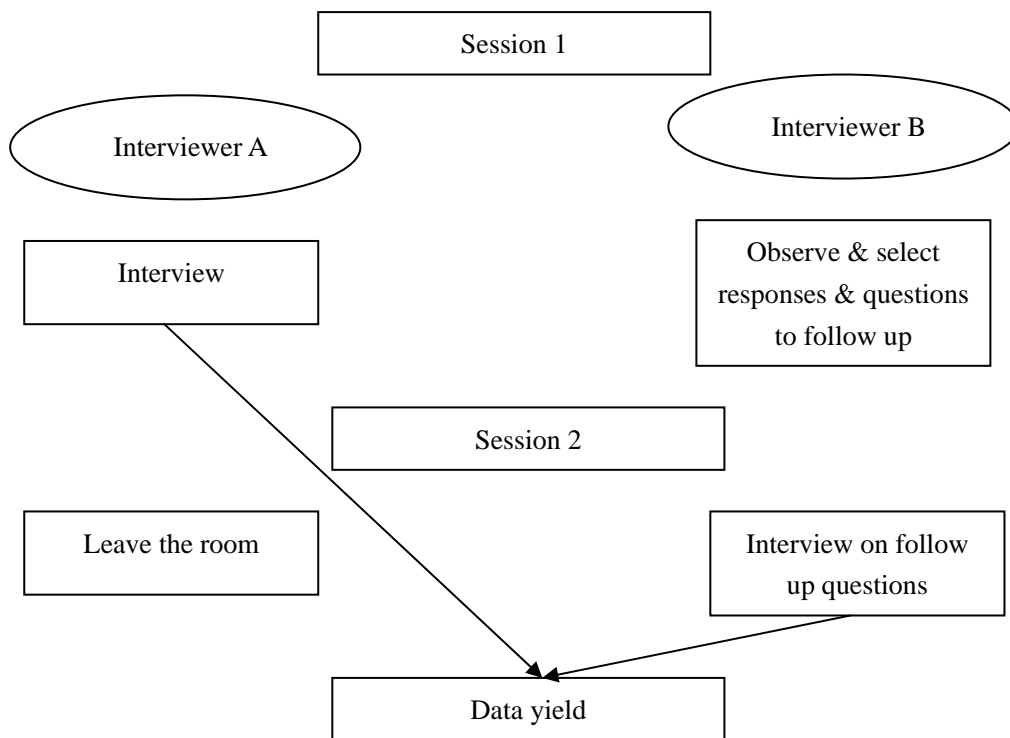


Figure 4: method of data collection, adapted from Thabo (2004, p. 55)

In other words, Thabo followed up on the responses and/or questions raised in De Beer’s interviews. For De Beer, if this follow up session yielded additional information, she used this information part of her data. For Thabo his interest was less on the data per se, but rather on whether there existed any differences between his data and her data.

“Before proceeding with the research, the general aim of the study was explained to the participants” (Thabo, 2004, p. 23), and the purpose of the second session was described to the participants so as “to clarify the researcher on their responses given in session 1” (2004, p. 23). Using his own words in the



interview, “I said that I want to understand further, what they said...what they know is that I want to understand further what they were saying.” So, in fact, “they [the participants] did not know my aim. They only knew her aim ... and knew my purpose of being there as the observer”, even until the whole field work was done.

The unique partnership between Thabo and De Beer also implied that, using Thabo’s words, De Beer was “the face of the whole research”, “she represents both of us” and “she is the leading person”, but, also practically, she was the one to select, approach and contact the participants. In fact Thabo never had any contact with any of the participants himself or went to meet them alone.

As a result of the intertwined nature of these two studies, the case below presents both De Beer and Thabo’s respective and, sometimes intertwined, understanding of their roles and experiences.

De Beer’s original participants included five Grade 7 classes, one each in the following five schools (two full-service inclusion schools with disabled learners and special accommodation for these learners and situated in contrasting socio-economic contexts; two regular schools that have disabled learners but do not provide any special accommodation for them and also in contrasting socioeconomic contexts; and one special school that caters for disabled learners only). Since I was interested in the qualitative part of this project only, I omitted the two schools (the regular schools) in which the ASC questionnaire only had been administered, but included one participant from each of the remaining three schools in which interviews and observation had taken place. The three participants were all teachers. Chisholm was a white female working in the special school. She was an experienced teacher who had taught for a long time. Van der Linde was also a white female working in a full-service school, but she had relatively less teaching experience. Both of them taught in relatively well-resourced schools. Kola was a black male teaching in a full-service school that was poor resourced.

### **5.2.1 Researcher/practitioner context**

The main aim of De Beer’s study, as claimed in her dissertation, was to “provide educationist, educational leaders, managers and educators generally, with information as to what is required to improve the conversion of schools to full-service inclusion schools, and to minimise an inappropriate implementation of



the South African inclusive education and participation policy from casting up additional academic, social and emotional barriers before thousand of learners with impairments already experiencing barriers to their learning and participation” (2005, p. 5). Although this intention manifested a theory contribution element, the practical implication was also clearly visible. During the interview with De Beer she continued to highlight the importance of her practical considerations – “I don’t think research should solely be focusing on theory, it should be a practical spin off as well.”

She attributed this dual concern to her field—educational psychology.

In my field, our aim is to understand a learner in a context. So once you understand the correct theory, what you gonna do with that. And that’s where the more practical side comes in...especially in my field once again, because we are working with children, one needs to have a strong theoretical background, but sometimes I think it is not ethical if there isn’t any practical spin offs. Because when you are working with clients, with learners, so whatever you learn from theory, if theory is understanding of academic self concepts, then what. Now I understand it, what does that mean to that child in that class with that specific barrier to learning. So one tries to make it practical as well.

The practical benefit to participants had clearly been on her mind, not only “one of my final questions was what can I do for you”, but also when certain educators and parents did take her up on her offer she did everything she could to help. “One educator I gave contact telephone numbers that she might find useful, for a member of her family also has hearing impairment. That’s when I asked how can I help you. The other educator said, he expected that he could have problems the following year with the learners with Down syndrome, so I said you are welcome to contact me, and to see if we can work something out.” There was also one learner in the poorly resourced school,

I had extensive contact with her after the research. Well, during the research and after. During the research because I helped her to get an appointment for an audio test, after the research, we investigated several possibilities for school placement for her... At that stage, we went to another university to see an educational psychologist to help with the assessment of her strength and direct where she should go, and we also visited a special school in the same area. I arranged for her an appointment in the special school in town and also arranged for the assessment at a private school for her. The sad thing is that none of these schools wanted or could accept her due to the high numbers of students or due to her age.

Besides the influence emanating from her field, she also attributed her concern about helping with the practical needs of her participants to “I think it goes to the whole thing that they were participants, not objects, so it is not research done onto them, but it should be research done in collaboration with them, and



if there are any people who can benefit from it, it must be so”.

The topic of Thabo’s study indicated that he intended focusing on theory contribution only. He claimed in his dissertation that his study “aimed at sensitising the researchers about the effect that their role and that of the respondents play in the generation of data during a cross-cultural interview” (2004, p. 94). When I asked him about his perception of the relationship between theory and practical contributions he linked it with the level of the study,

If it is a research in the Honors level, as part of the module, and to do it is to get a degree. But one tends to hope that when a student goes to Masters level and PhD level, it is for contribution to knowledge, or it is to answer a certain question that the person has. Again, with Masters, it depends. Whether it is a course based Masters, where I have to do a research and that mostly is done simply because I want the degree. But when one has done that level, the hope is for contribution to knowledge...people at PhD level want to become academic, or they are doing it [they are academic already].

Later when we discussed benefits for the participants, he went on to explain his understanding of the relationship between the practical and theoretic contributions:

T: with your findings, you give them contact numbers for certain places to go if they want something, they can always contact those people, so it opens doors for those kind of people.

Y: are these only the kinds of research with practical aims, or also those that only has theory?

T: the one only has theory? I don’t know, it is bad. They can acknowledge the school, they can mention it in their speech, but confidentiality comes into play then. Because you can’t mention the school unless they agreed. Theory is difficult, remember, theory is abstract.

Y: so in that kind of situations, it is possible that the schools or the participants don’t benefit at all?

T: It can be theory, but you can still give them practical feedback. I remember a study done by a lady on policy of inclusive education, why it is not practical. That is the theory kind of research, but I would hope that the lady would give the schools a guideline on how to implement that policy. It is a theory, because it was meant for the government; but at school level, you can give them the guidelines on how to implement, how to teach a learner who is physically challenging.

Y: So you mean, in a way, the participants might prefer the kind of research that has practical benefit?

T: practical benefit. Yes. And practical benefit does not necessary mean anything physical, it can simply mean a contact number that, since I have done research with you in this particular school, and I have been talking in and out with the district, here is the contact number of the district, if you have any problems, contact this person. That is enough practical benefit to that particular school, to know that they can pick up the phone and phone the district, and the district would remember yes, it is that school, I remember this and that, and here is the findings of that particular school. That is practical benefit. That is why unfortunately we are *failing* (emphasised by his tone) in this. South Africa has a lot of dynamics. That is why it is very important, in South Africa, that the researchers are actually the teachers in the schools, because once we have researcher that are in the schools who is in the classrooms, the benefit, no matter theory or practical, is immediate, for that particular school and for that particular class as well.





Y: So you are suggesting that the focus on theory contribution might create a gap, or some indifference among the participants?

T: For the practitioners yes. But if the practitioners are the ones that are doing the theory research, that theory becomes practical.

Y: But then it is the benefit to the researcher. And only because the researcher is also the practitioner, the benefit indirectly goes back to practice.

T: yes.

De Beer speculated on several possible reasons why her participants had agreed to participate:

They were interested in it, especially I told them that this is about academic self concept, and some of them agree, said yes it is important. So yes, they were interested in that. Some of them I think were really just very nice. Oh, this is a student...I noticed, especially this one, this teacher, whenever I phoned him and said thanks so much, he would say, no you are welcome, phone me at anytime, he was really nice and straight forward and open... I didn't ask them [whether they are just thinking that they are helping me], but yes, perhaps because they are teachers, I think the nature of been teacher is that you help somebody else.

Thabo agreed that the participants would not derive any practical benefit from his part in the study, although "it concerns me, at a personal level, because I did always try to go the extra mile...although not directly. She [De Beer] was the one would speak further, suggest and make meeting, but I would only, maybe read more and try to put my ear on the ground, try to listen to what happens around, or try to come up with one way or another."

Since the participants were aware of De Beer' aim only and that was the only reason why they had participated, Thabo's guess in terms of why they had participated was:

In one particular school [the poor resourced school], they had a particular girl [the same girl that De Beer mentioned earlier who she had extensive contact with] that they really wanted to help...because she had hearing problem, and attending school in a critical environment, what is known as normal school, or normal hearing children. She was over-aging, in a lower grade. So their participation, I think was to get that girl some assistance in one way or the other. Because one, she [De Beer] took her to an audiologist free of charge, the parents, the school was in squatter area, so they couldn't offer all of those, so she [De Beer] exposed the girl to a lot of scientific testing, for her benefit, and they got report and suggestion of what to do. So the school and the class that participated, and the parent, they might participate because they were seeking medical attention that the child was not getting.

This anticipated practical benefit was echoed by the educator from that particular school, Kola.

We thought that after doing some research, maybe we would do some follow up research with that learner, because she is now in high school. And we would also try to help her, because you know she had hearing problems, we thought maybe after that, as a researcher, she [De Beer] can find some sponsors or she can come



and help the learner, like hearing aid and so on. Because the school is in an informal settlement, most of the parents are not employed. You can see that it is a disadvantaged school, so if somebody does research on that particular learner, we expect something, because also the parents are involved, they do have some sort of expectation... maybe after the research, something positive can be done, maybe donating a hearing aid, or a question of referral, you can take the child to a more suitable school. Things like that.

For Kola, concern for the child remained the main motivation for his participation.

For the sake of this girl, we need to do something, so this girl can at the end of the day achieve something, because whilst the other learners learn something, she was having some educational problems, then she might develop that kind of inferiority complex, and at the end of the day, she would drop out, so we need to involve [in research], we need to be involved, to help this kid, as far as the education for this girl is concerned...as long as it involves in the children, then I am happy because my profession is to work with the children. I am paid for that. (And you have a heart for that?) And I have a heart for that. As long as the research is about the child, then I am more than happy, but provided that those particular learners would also benefit from the research.

I probed about whether his personal benefit had played a role in his decision to participate or not.

Not necessary not of my concern, it is my concern, but learners should benefit as well. (So for your personal benefit, what kind of benefit were you anticipating?) As I said, as an educator, or as a person, I appreciate to learn everyday...I expected her [De Beer] at the end of the day, come back to me, report back to me, what are her findings, and recommendations, positive criticism, that was my expectations.

Van der Linde echoed Kola's view of the importance of the benefit to the children in her decision of whether to participate or not. "She [De Beer] was researching about inclusive education. I had a lot of Down syndrome and children with hearing impairment in my class. I actually thought that it was my duty to do that [to participate] for the benefits of the children."

According to Van der Linde, helping the researcher was another reason why she had participated. "I hope so [that I helped her], I hope that I did something helpful...it is not going to help me, but I want to help people, that is my personality. So when she said that you [refer to me] are doing this research, she phoned me as well and asked whether I had a problem, and I said no problem at all, if I can help somebody, it is fine."

Similarly, the notion of *helping* was also mentioned by Chisholm.

(Do you think that you are helping her in terms of her research or finishing her degree?) Well, I would hope so. Otherwise, it would be a waste of time for her and for me. Because it does take extra time from me, it does take something from you, because you got this person in your class and the children do behave differently, so it puts extra stress on you. I would hope that I had helped her.

However, the first reason Chisholm had mentioned when I posed the question "how did you decide to participate" was "the principal asked me." And she went on to explain that "because you've got teachers



who won't allow it [researchers to come into the classroom] ... I don't mind, but you do have the influence from the principal."

Aside from Kola, the other two participants had said that they did not expect any benefit, particularly personal benefit, from their participation. Although in retrospect, Van der Linde did think that her participation had resulted in greater enlightenment – made her think more and acquire more knowledge about inclusive education – and “the more you can do and the more you know, the better you can handle the children in the class... it made me again more aware of these children, how important they were, because you must be reminded about these kids the whole time. So it refreshed my memory”.

Van der Linde did not feel that her participation had contributed to her teaching practice, “you go on with what you always do”. Neither Kola nor Chisholm had perceived any benefit, particularly as regards their own teaching, and both attributed this lack of benefit to the fact that no results had been shared with them, despite promises to do so made by the researcher.

Y: at the end of the day, do you think that you learned anything, especially in terms of your teaching?

C: no, not really. Because we haven't discussed anything about my method. Because after a while, you get used to a method, the method that you use, and you stick to it, and sometimes it is a bit of problem for me because you know, to be teacher for this long...because you just get to work and do the subject each year, so that is a problem of teaching, because you get the same subject, the same children, same Grade, same everything, stays the same. In a way, that is also a good thing, because you know what works, that's the other side. But I think it maybe a good thing for somebody else to say you know what, I have seen this in school.

Y: so if she comes back with the findings, you probably would be able to get something?

C: yes, I think so. Even if it is just to read from what other people are doing. I think so.

Particularly in the case of Kola, his anger about not having been given the results surfaced repeatedly in his entire interview. In fact, even before I had started my interview with him, he raised the question of “what happened to De Beer, she said that she was going to come back to me”

I like researchers come back to me, come back and say we get this, and our findings are 1,2,3. Moreover, if somebody promises to come back, they need to do that.

We need to know what you did achieve with the information, what you achieved in your research and you should also recommend, when necessary. Come up with the recommendations that this is nice, we learned 1,2,3, and we can also improve on 1,2,3. Because if you do research, maybe you come to my class, you attend my lessons, you write something down, but at the end of the day, you don't show me what you have written on your piece of paper. That's why I say people should come back to me, come back with recommendations. (So that kind of feedback is important to you?) Exactly. Feedback, come out with some recommendation.



If you come to me and do research with me, and at the end of the day, come back to me. Come and rectify me, say this thing I think you can improve.

You know I was involved in that research, but I did not know all about this [the extensive contact De Beer had with the girl after the research]. That is why I was saying after the research, nothing was done, it was finished and I was cut off.

I expected her [De Beer] at the end of the day, come back to me, report back to me, what are her findings, and recommendations, positive criticism, that was my expectations.

(Do you feel empowered?) I would if there is the feedback.

As far as the responsibility of the researcher towards the participants, De Beer's main concern was "confidentiality and anonymity on the most basic level, but the other thing is more to value them as persons, especially to value their input. It is important not to look down on them as knowing more or knowing better, because they just think different. In their situation, they are the knowledgeable persons. I come to them for information. So I think one of the responsibilities was to see them as equal, and because they contributed some of their time and their knowledge to me, I felt, not exactly obligated, but to have something to return. Whatever I could do, I would do." She also expressed her concern about her responsibility to share the research results. "In the end, I gave my telephone number, and I told them that they are welcome to contact me for the research result. So I sort of placed the ball in their hands. But I still feel, and hope fortunately not too late, I didn't have the opportunity to arrange that, but I thought and I am still asking myself whether it wouldn't be valuable to arrange something with the school to share the research result."

Thabo thought that his "responsibility as a researcher was to make sure to keep my appointment, my time ... My responsibility towards the participants is I had to be there, I had to make them calm, I had to respect them, things like that." In the second interview after we talked about the possibility of his revealing aim to the participants after the research, he added, "I should have alerted them of my research as well at the end of the interviews, and I did not, I think that is my responsibility to do that". Nevertheless, he still insisted that the responsibility, especially in terms of follow-ups, lay with De Beer since "she was the face of the whole research, she went there for both of us...when she went there, she went to represent both of us. Especially with that girl, she has to do something, because you cannot open the wound and just leave it there".

Thabo did not mention confidentiality as part of his responsibility or as a responsibility of a researcher in general. However when I specifically asked him about the importance of confidentiality he said, "It is very



important, because of the research environment especially in qualitative research, it tends to bring out certain information that you won't easily get, depending on your questions as well. If you ask very touchy, personal questions, then they are not sure whether they are going to stay in the interview, then they will not participate, people will not participate."

Kola, who seemed preoccupied with his anger about not receiving feedback, continued to stress that the researcher has the "responsibility of building me as a person, I want to repeat this, come up with some recommendation, it is the researchers' responsibility, coming back with positive criticism, it is her [De Beer] responsibility, to make sure that me as a person gets that information, that information would build me, you see, that is the researchers' responsibility to do that".

Chisholm included punctuality and respect as the main responsibilities of researchers.

She only get responsibility to be on time, because that could be a problem, if somebody tells you I would be here on Mondays, then you get use to it, and the children get use to it, it is like that kind of responsibility...That is the only responsibility... and I expect respect for me as well. If something is not right in your eyes, then well, use whatever you need, but you don't discuss it with everybody, because sometimes it is a small world, you would get people say you know what. It is like an agreement; you don't go out and say she gets a very bad day today, things like that.

Van der Linde also mentioned respect as the most important responsibility of a researcher.

V: I don't want to look like a guinea pig. Once somebody asked me, I think it was a shower gel or something, you must use it for a month and then fill in a form, I had problem with it. I was not a difficult person, but that lady was difficult.

Y: how?

V: when you give your opinions, it was not respected. But the researcher, the other lady (De Beer) was quite nice. I didn't have any problem with it.

Y: so can I say that you think he/she has the responsibility to respect your opinion?

V: yes. That's all I want. Just respect what you are saying. You need to be able to speak of your opinion. That's it.

Since De Beer had mentioned confidentiality and anonymity as important responsibilities, I enquired whether she had asked her participants for their views and whether they might also have regarded these issues as important. She replied, "that's interesting, because I didn't ask them whether they wanted the work to be confidential. I just told them that I am going to treat the information and your identity with confidentiality and anonymity. I told them if I wanted to connect something they said, then personally I would come back to them for permission. I didn't ask them whether they want it to be anonymous."



I proceeded to follow up on this issue of confidentiality with the three participants and their understanding of the issue varied. Van der Linde “don’t mind [to have my identity concealed in the research or not]. I think if it is something that is really personal or close to you, then it would be important. It wasn’t bothering me”. Chisholm revealed a similar attitude. She did not regard concealing her identity as important, “because she [De Beer] never asked me something very personal”. To her unless the topic was more personal, “I think then it is going to be a problem. But for the children, it doesn’t matter... just talking the way I am teaching... Maybe if it those kinds of personal topics, then it might be a problem, but not teaching.” On the contrary Kola preferred to have his identity concealed and explained his reason as follows:

You know, we are working with the South African government, something needs to be hidden, you don’t need to take everything out, because at the end of the day... the officials would say you said this 1,2,3, you should come to us district directly if you have a problem with this 1,2,3, only then you are aware that whatever you are saying will be problematic.

As for the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher, De Beer did not “even think that they have the responsibility to cooperate, that was just willingness. Their only responsibility was to be as honest as possible, always as accurate as possible.” She also did not regard practical issues such as the keeping of appointments to be the responsibility of the participants:

One can regard that as responsibility, because they said that they would cooperate, so one could see that as part of the cooperation. But I never regard that as not been responsible, I always tried to see from their side... I really regarded it as or tried to explain it in another way, as perhaps resistance, or sometimes they might have other reasons, or perhaps miscommunication. I never thought that it was their not been responsible.

Thabo, however, listed such practical issues as the responsibility of the participants. “For one, we had agreed on time, they had to be there. We agreed on the appointment, on the length, we agreed on engaging both two researchers, so they had those responsibilities.”

The views of the participants on their perceived responsibility towards the researchers centred mostly on the practical issues and on their honesty.

Do the interview as best as you can, if they want something more, want another interview or something, you said you would participate, then you must. (Van der Linde)

To tell her the truth. Otherwise there’s no use in her research. If I just make it like a very good and nice and very good teacher, what is the use. She is not going to see what it is real like. (Chisholm)



To provide proper information that she is looking for, to provide assistance to the researcher. Like been available, been puncture. (Kola)

### 5.2.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship

De Beer had not known any of the participants prior to the data collection. She approached the principals with the consent letter from the department, “informing them this is what I want to do and to ask their permission.” According to her, she did not experience any negative gate blocking. After the principals had granted her access, they introduced the subject to the teachers either in her presence or in her absence. In both situations not one of the teachers had refused to participate, although in both situations there had been one teacher whom she had suspected of feeling a certain amount of resistance about participating – either complaining a lot “whenever she saw me, she started to sigh” or setting the interview time at 6H30 (although she did acknowledge that this might have been the only time the teacher could manage). However, none of the participants refused outright and when she gave them “the opportunity, I told them if you don’t want to me to come, that is ok. They said, no, it is all right.”

Since resistance could have sprung from a lack of power to refuse after the principal had granted the researcher access (Burgess, 1991), I probed the participants about whether they preferred the researcher to access them via the principal. All stated that via the principal was the right way.

If it was about the class and the child, you must ask the permission from the principle. (So you feel more comfortable this way through the principle?) I think this is better if you work through somebody that you know, to introduce you to that person. (So it is good to go via the principle?) Yes. (Van der Linde)

I don’t think you can allow any person just to come here, I think you must go through the principal, because we do get a lot visitors... If somebody just comes in personal, I would be scared why this person doesn’t want to go through the principal, it just makes it official. (Chisholm)

(Do you think that the link through the principal is important to you?) Yes. If she came directly, it would be wrong because you need the right channels. You can not get into the family and talk to the child without talking to the parents, so she used the very good channel. (So you do prefer this way?) Exactly. Moreover, if it involves learner, the head should be aware of that, because the cameras were there, the tape recorder was there, just imagine if the principal is not aware of that. (Kola)

Chisholm continued to explain her understanding of the relationship between the principal and the teachers:

(If the principal said yes, but you personally are not very interested, do you think it might create some problems?)



It depends, but if I am not prepared, I would say it, I don't want to do it. You can't really do that, but (laugh). I think he also knows his staff, I think he asked the people who he thought wouldn't mind that much. (You mean he would keep your interest in his mind?) Yes.

De Beer had thought that it was important to explain her research aim and schedule to the potential participants before starting with the fieldwork "because one of the educators was concerned about how that would add to his workload. If I didn't have the contact they would be wondering for the whole week or so when I may contact. It is going to hang over uncertainty of what is exactly expected, so yes, I think it is important beforehand to clear that uncertainty." Kola specifically expressed his appreciation of these informative sessions.

Y: so before she started the questionnaire, she contacted you several times?

K: exactly.

Y: was that important to you?

K: exactly. Sometimes you need to know in advance somebody came to school and do 1,2,3. And even if somebody is going to interview you, you need to know in advance what does the interview entail... I need people to tell me in advance. What is it going to be...you know what I don't like is that, can I interview you today, in 15 minutes time, I don't expect that. People need to know in advance. On this day, I am going to attend an interview. I am going to be interviewed, and that is all...also the question of not to be inconvenient. Because in most cases, we work with schedules, on this day, I am going to do 1,2,3. So if you just say can I come,

Y: not giving you the choice?

K: exactly. That is kind of a un-professionalism.

De Beer's dual aim also had implications for what she called the dual role experienced in the research progress and the way she handled the involvement/detachment decision. "I had a dual role, I was a researcher, and I was an educational psychologist. And as a researcher I could do certain things, and couldn't do others, but as an educational psychologist, I could do other things. For example, as an educational psychologist, one is to provide support the whole time, but when I am researching I cannot provide too much support in case of influencing my results."

She acknowledged the difficult of maintaining a balance between involvement and detachment:

Y: So, how did you balance that?

D: It was difficult, when I had interviews with the learners and with the educators, one of my final questions was what I can do for you. And some of the educators took me up on that, and some of them said well there is nothing that you can do. But one of them said yes he wanted help with this and that, and I was able to arrange support for him, so that was sort of support. But it was a dual role.

Y: when you were doing research, were you trying to keep yourself distant?

D: Yes, a bit distant, when I did observation in the classes, I try to be a bit more distant, not to be involved in the classes, and sometimes the learners had their own argument, I tried not to be involved, but really just to observe.





Y: What about interviews? How were you handling that? For example, were you trying to not let them ask you questions?

D: No, no. If they want to ask me questions, I let them ask questions. Some of the questions I was able to answer, or suggest a possible way forward, and as I said my final question was what can I do for you.

Y: So less distant in the sense?

D: No, that was more involved. Yes.

She provided most of the feedback or suggestions regarding a way forward after the fieldwork had been done because of her concern that her feedback could influence her data. “For the duration of the observations I could not, and I consulted my supervisor, I couldn’t give the feedback to the educators, because that would have influenced my observations.”

De Beer also had an interesting observation concerning those who asked for suggestions and advice.

Some of them (the teachers) had a lot of experience. I think they had a good sense of their teaching...they were not really concerned about what was going on. Some of the others I think they were unsure... they were slightly more uneasy, I could see, they looked at me or sometimes they tried to explain what was going on...and they would come to me after the class to ask what I think about the class or ask for advice...like this teacher, said well, this is how I do it, and what do I think about him. He mentioned that I must have seen a lot of teachers in different schools and how does his class compare to the others... And the one educator also asked me, tell me what to do and how should I do it, and again there I refrained from telling people things to do, because it could increase their uncertainty, so I told him, I focus on what he did correctly and emphasised them... And my response would always be positive... I like what you are doing, I never said that I think you should change.

In other words, because De Beer had understood that it might be intimidating to have somebody sitting in the class and that criticism might further intensify the insecurity of certain teachers, her strategy was to reassure the teachers about what they were doing and to provide positive feedback only.

De Beer described the following case when she was not happy with what she had observed:

I didn’t handle all of that. Whenever that was related with academic self concept and learners with hearing impairment, that was reflected in my thesis. The one instance, or incident, that I didn’t handle. The one educator in one school, she had a class of 54, and they didn’t do their homework. She went by each and every pupil, and she looked at their work, and they didn’t do it. I think four did it, and the rest of the class didn’t do it. She pinched them. It was terrible to me, you could really see that the children were hurt, that was very bad for me. The learner with hearing impairment wasn’t pinched. I think I said in my dissertations that it was disciplinary action, I didn’t literally say what happened. I just felt that I don’t know what I am not going to do if I am going to address that. Because how was I supposed to address that, first person I could address would be her. She was the one who was there for the class, she was perhaps already intimidated, or afraid, or hesitant resistant to participate, I knew I couldn’t address her about that...I can’t address that with the principal because I said that



the observation was confidential. The moment I address this with anybody else, I am going to break confidentiality. That was a difficult decision.

When I asked the participants how they would respond to criticism from the researcher all said that they would not mind long as it was positive and delivered in a constructive way.

(So if let's say that she has some critiques of what you were doing, and she told you about it, would you feel not comfortable?) It depends whether you want to take it personally or you reflect on it. Actually you need to listen to somebody, not not listen. (So let's say if you get into argument, don't you particularly feel that it is a bad thing?) No, you can give you opinion. I think she can voice her opinion and me mine, I think then we can exchange, it is a matter of opinion, not offending, I don't see it like that. (Does it depend on the way it is said?) Yes. (So if you feel that it was said in a respectful way, then you won't mind?) Yes. (Van der Linde)

If she makes suggestions how I can improve and give new ideas, I wouldn't mind. If she can motivate why she thinks that my methods are wrong and I agree, it will be fine. The point is that the criticism needs to be justified. (Chisholm)

(Will you be afraid if the findings come back and say you should not have done that or come back with some critique?) No, I don't have any problem with that, because we learn everyday. So as long as it is a positive criticism, not a negative one. Come out with something, don't just say this is not good, but not without any suggestions. (You mean alternatives?) Exactly. Otherwise I don't think it is fair. Because we need to learn, we learn every day. The wise man used to say that nobody is perfect. Nobody is perfect, you see. If you come to me and do research with me, and at the end of the day, come back to me. Come and rectify me, say this thing I think you can improve. There are beautiful ways of putting things, you can say this is wrong, or you can also come up with positive criticism. (Kola)

As far as the relationship was concerned during data collection, De Beer thought that "it was a bit of both formal and informal. Some of the educators kept it strictly formal, some of them more informal. The one educator spontaneously shared about her sister who was in bed and ill for quite some time, that I think was more on the informal side." And since it varied from person to person, she "tried to engage per teacher of what they wanted."

Nevertheless, De Beer still classified the researcher-participant relationship occurred in her study as more research based and provided the example of the way in which they addressed each other (although she did recognise that this phenomenon could result from other factors), "I told all of them my full name, I didn't say that I am Mrs so and so, and some of them used my first name, but I think most of them prefer to call me Mrs. That is why I think they tried to keep it more formal."

She herself also preferred a relationship that was more research based.



Personally I think that I would prefer a research-based relationship, the friendship part comes in supporting the research, but I don't think it should overwhelm it... If one doesn't have the friendship part, there isn't much spontaneity or friendliness. You don't share easily if it is merely research based. But if it is too much friendship, it might be that the person participating in research feel that he/she is too much involved, then it would be the friendship that would be researched, not the contribution to the research...So perhaps one should say that one become used to somebody, and because when you are used to someone, you are comfortable in their company...We were not necessary friends in the sense of talking about my parents and my husband and my future plans and etc, but they were used to my presence, and they were used to my doing things, that they were comfortable enough to share...even though we weren't friends, they were just used to me and comfortable with my presence of who I am... but it is not necessary friendship, although I was friendly, I don't think it was necessary friendship.

Thabo also described the relationship with the participants as “semi-formal – they were not too formal and they were not too informal. They were in the middle. As psychologists we know how to put people at ease, the interview setting, how we sit with people, that we make sure that there were no barriers between us, we sit in a certain format that is closer, and our tone of voice.” More specifically he described their relationship as follows:

More of respect, respect the individual in front of you, indicating to them that you are doing research, not retelling, or re-teaching, more about I want to know, that is why I am asking this question. That is why in the beginning, we would explain the reason why we were asking these questions because we want to know, not because we want to teach you anything, we want to mark you, or critique you or whatever, but we want to know. Give them that regard, that respect that every point of time, they have the knowledge that you are looking for.

The participants' perception of the nature of the relationship differed. Chisholm described it as “formal because now I think back, I don't know anything about her really, and that I don't think she knows anything about me as a person, so I think I would say formal.” She clearly expressed her preference for this type of relationship.

I like it...I don't think that you should really get involved...it was good when she was in the class, we really did not have any problems, and she was a really nice lady and we really get along very well. It was no problem at all from my side, but we did not get further. (And you do not want to go a bit further?) No. No. Maybe, say for instance, if she is still involved in our school, on another level, maybe she saw something, she say ok, in my research I saw this, and this and this can be improved, and she came to the school and help me with that, maybe then, we could. But that did not happen in that kind of situation...our relationship is more research based, not personal based, and I like it.

Nevertheless she did express that she needed the comfortable, relaxed environment that friendliness creates, “(so am I right to say that you feel that she is friendly, but you are not necessarily friends?) Yes. (And you



like that kind of situation?) Yes. (But you do need the person to make you feel more comfortable, more relaxed?) Yes. (And a bit not so formal?) Yes.” And she also indicated that she liked to have a researcher who would not only ask questions, but also answer questions, “if I cannot ask what this is about, then it would be difficult for me, I also want to know exactly what it is all about, otherwise I would feel uncertain.”

Van der Linde also described their relationship as research based.

V: more research based. It wasn't a friendship at all. I only saw her when we were at the research and then when she came back for it, and that's it. Not a friendship.

Y: you mean that you only meet in the school?

V: yes.

Y: so do you like that she is doing it more research based?

V: yes. I think it is objective. I think this is better.

Y: so you don't think it is necessary to have friendship in a research?

V: no, I don't think so.

Y: would it make you more comfortable or it won't make any difference?

V: it really doesn't matter. I am actually a people's person, easy to talk. But I think people differ. Some people might talk easier if it is friendship based. Yes, it might make it a bit easy, if you think about it, you talk more easily about your feelings, how you feel with your friends, because they know you. So it differs from personality. It might be more difficult for some people.

Y: but for you, it is not a problem?

V: no, it is not a problem at all.

Y: is it also that your relationship is more formal than informal?

V: yes, I think the interview was more formal than informal.

Y: so there wasn't many chats or?

V: in between? No, not at all.

However, she also expressed a preference for a certain element of informality – such as using first names, “I asked her not [to call me by my surname], I don't like that, so I asked her please call me by my first name. That makes it a bit more informal. If somebody talks in surname, it is a bit formal and then you don't know what to say, then you must think very carefully.” This informal preference was also extended to a preference for a researcher who would also answer questions, “You also need to answer questions as well. Otherwise, it would be a lot too formal, and you would be a bit stressed, if you only ask questions. (So am I right to say that you do think that the relationship should be a bit informal?) Yes. It must be, otherwise it is not going to work, I think. Then you won't be very open and honest... If it is very formal and the person is very arrogant and dominant, I probably would feel used.”

Kola described their relationship as a both a friendship and a research-based relationship, although, on



closer examination, the friendship to which he referred seemed more like friendliness.

It's both friendships and research-based relationship. It was a friendship in the sense that when they came to the school, they tried to create friendship. If a stranger comes to your class, sometime we would be nervous, so they created that kind of friendliness. And in terms of their research, well, they did their job...they were so kind, they were always smiling, that is why I felt so free, unlike somebody coming down with some faces, that would be not fine.

To him friendliness was of the utmost important in creating an informal environment in which he would feel open enough to talk to the researcher.

Y: so that kind of friendly face is very important to you?

K: exactly because it makes you free.

Y: so between a relationship that is more research based and a relationship that is more friendship like, do you have a preference?

K: I think friendship comes first.

Y: so you mean friendship needs to be there?

K: it needs to be there, yes. Let me give an example, you have a kindly face, you welcomed me with a smile, then I become relaxed.

Could friendship have jeopardised the research data? De Beer stated her preference for a research-based relationship was reflected in her answer "if it is too much friendship, then it would be the friendship that would be researched, not the contribution to the research". Thabo overtly expressed his strong opposition to any element of friendship.

Your personal relationship has somehow advantaged you to get in, but it does not have advantage to your data, because they would say things to please you... it might be not only the participants to please you, but also the researchers to please them. The researcher could ask questions in a soft glove, rather than in a hard glove that would have done with another participant that they don't know...it does come to play. People with relation, be it whatever relation it can be, say they know each other, they relate to each other, they bump to each other in town, now they see each other in research interviews, it does effect the way the participants response and it does affect the way the researcher ask question...in a friendship, that would be power that I am your friend, I am not suppose to, or I won't do something to offend you...must I really respond that way to a friend, must I say that, that time lag, that would also affect the data, in one way or another...You might find that with those that you don't know, chances are that the influences would not have been there.

I posed the same question to the participants. Kola stated that friendship would have affected his responses, but not in the negative sense. Rather, he thought that it would have enhanced his spontaneity and the information he had provided would have been more comprehensive.

Y: so let's say if she [De Beer] comes back to you and do another research, do you think the way you respond would be different?

K: yes, I will. I will be freer than the first research.



Y: you would be more free? So it is in the good sense?

K: exactly.

Y: so it is not really if she comes back, you would be more mindful of what you said, hence that you would say less?

K: as I said, there are some things that made me unsettled, like the picture that they took, what are they going to do. But if she can come back now, I am really used to her, so the responses, I would be more free than the first research.

Y: so you are saying that the information you give would be fuller?

K: exactly.

Y: so in that sense, friendship to you is not necessary a bad thing?

K: yes, it is very important because you become freer. Unlike a very tense situation, hence I am saying that if she is coming back, it would be better because it would be more informal.

Y: and you do prefer it to be more informal?

K: yes. Exactly.

Van der Linde expressed a similar attitude, although for her, it was more about the expression, and not necessarily the content of her responses.

Y: do you think if she had been your friend, the answers you give would be different?

V: yes, I think in a way, it would be a bit different because you are more relaxed and you are talking more in a friendship level. So I think it would differ a bit. Yes.

Y: do you mean that if she had been your friend, you would feel more relaxed?

V: yes, I think it is more like expressing yourself.

Y: is it more about the way you express yourself or it is about the content of what you say?

V: I think it is the expression of yourself, not the content.

Y: so what you said to her would not be different?

V: no. Not that much.

Y: is it just that you might express yourself more in a spontaneous way?

V: yes.

After the data collection De Beer had organised an occasion in which to express her appreciation.

When I finished, I gave each of the teachers who participated a small gift, just to say really thank you for what they have done or contributed, the small gift was a small portrait notice that they could put somewhere, and I put their name on it, personalised, and I wrote very personal messages, short but something that they would realise that it was not a mass production, and together with a card. On the card, I said thank you for participation, once again something I learned from them, or enjoyed in their classes...they were very surprised. Very surprised and very thankful. Actually I was taken back or humbled by their reaction to that. Because it was really something that is so small. But their reaction was so overwhelming. So I was thinking if something so small could make them react in such a way, then they really must have felt, I think they must have underestimated how much they helped me. And when I gave them the gift, I think then suddenly they realised, wow, they contributed to something, perhaps that is also the reason why the reaction was very overwhelming. The one lady said that she was going to put it on her bed, bedside table, every night when she close her eyes, that's the last thing she would see, and when she wakes up, that would be the first thing she sees. (Very honored?) Yes. I just got the feeling that it really meant something for her. And that was special to me.



Thabo also wrote messages in the cards and they both signed their names. In one school, "they were very busy at that stage, if I remember correctly, I couldn't hand to them personally, I think I put it on their desks". For other schools, both were there to hand them out.

Thabo also thought that it had been a good thing to express their appreciation. "As a token of appreciation for people who did not have to participate, but participated...another thing about gifts, it is a good practice, apart from being good practice, it is also a good gesture, and future orientated as well. When other people come to do research, they would be willing because they know that people are appreciative, not bribing, but appreciation of their time. You don't do research for your own study alone, and then close it and close all the gates. Researchers as well are gatekeepers, and gate-openers as well, for the future researchers [influencing participants' willingness to participate]."

As rightly indicated by De Beer, the gesture of thanks was appreciated by the participants.

(There was a time that she came back and gave out some gift, was that nice?) Yes, that was nice. I still have that in my class. It was very nice for her to do that. Because I think it was not really necessary. (But you appreciated it?) Yes, very much. (Van der Linde)

In the end, I think it was the last day, she did bring the children sweets, to say thank you, I think that was quite nice of her, I thought she really appreciated our time. (Chisholm)

Like sending card. I think that is an informal friendship as well, which I did appreciate as well. If somebody sends you a card after doing a very good job, then you take it as a token of appreciation, and you feel that you did a very good job. (Kola)

Together with the gifts De Beer also wrote on the cards, "research would be complete by this or anticipated to complete by this and that time. I gave my telephone number, and I told them that they are welcome to contact me for the research result." However no one enquired about the results. In fact, Van der Linde did not show much concern about the results, "(Was it important for you to have that?) No, it was not important to me. (So you don't want to know what the result is?) No. I think it was a very busy time of my life, I only wanted to help. When she came back, she said that she was going to give it to me, but I don't know whether she gave it to the principal and he did not give it to me. But I didn't ask for it." "It was never like a formal agreement: listen, I would send you this and this", for Chisholm, "I think in the end, she said ok, maybe she would let me read it afterwards when she is finished. No, it is not so important, but it would be nice if she had done it."



However, consistent with his desire to participate and his wish that the researcher would come back with suggestions for improvements, Kola expressed his deep concern about not receiving the results.

The expression of appreciation also symbolised the retreat of the researchers from the field in this research. Although Kola said that De Beer did still phone him from time to time, “Hi, how are you? How are you doing fine? I am doing fine”, it was De Beer only who contacted him, not Thabo. The other two participants stated that they had never been contacted by either researcher after the data collection had finished.

Did the researchers and also the participants prefer closure? I posed this question to all five and received the following responses.

De Beer was of the opinion that “consideration is that after the research, if you make it friendly, then it also means that the relationship needs to be continued. To be really classified into friendship, the friendship must continue.”

PhD is a very big thing, but it is not the only research project, and it is not going to be feasible to keep contact with everyone on a continuous base, especially if you want to be honest in your relationship. If it is really about something that I wanted to know, I will phone them and ask them for that, but to keep an official kind of contact with everyone, probably it is not going to work...it might be feasible to scale down to a lesser contact. If you find something, say you read this interesting article, perhaps she might be interested in, that's perhaps the way to keep contact.

Thabo shared a similar view, “Unless somehow fate keeps you to meet them and have contact in some way...the relationship ended because the contract was ended, the contract was from this time up to that time, and I give you the findings, and that is it.”

De Beer suspected that the participants would prefer closure as well, and this was confirmed by both Van der Linde and Chisholm.

(Do you think they might prefer a certain kind of closure instead of continuity of the relationship?) Yes, yes. They are busy enough. I think it is nice to know that they are doing this and then it is over. (And finish?) Finish and something else. Yes. (De Beer)

(Do you think that it is important or necessary to keep a certain kind of contact?) No, I don't think so. Only if she want you to do something for the research, then it is fine. But I don't think it is necessary. (So am I right to say that actually you prefer a closure after the research?) Yes. (Don't want to hang on?) No. I like the closure. (What about if she phones you from time to time just to say hello and how you are?) I don't have a problem with that. But I won't be expecting that, not at all. (Would that make you feel better?) It does not really matter to me.





It would be nice if she does that, fine, it does not bother me at all. I won't be wondering why she is not calling me, it does not bother me at all. (Van der Linde)

(Am I right to say that you decided to participate in a research for a purpose and that's it?) That was the purpose and that is all. (And that only, that is fine for you?) Yes. (So am I also right to say that you actually do not want to have a certain kind of continuity after the research?) No, I don't really think that it is necessary. Unless it was really something that she can help me to improve. (So am I right to say that you do want to have a closure when a research is finished?) Yes, yes. Maybe just say this is what I find and that is what I saw in other schools... (Is it the kind of formal closure important to you, say for example, come back to you and say you participated in my research and now I finished my degree?) Yes, for me as a person yes, it would be nice just to hear that she is finished. Cause I think it is also achievement. So at least you finish the job. No, it is not that important, it would not make a difference, but it would be nice, I would like to know. (Chisholm)

Again, Kola expressed a different opinion to that of the other two participants. He stressed that he would have preferred the relationship to continue, not only in terms of providing feedbacks but also on a personal level.

K: I don't like if somebody after doing that job, just disappear.

Y: so if that happened, you are going to feel?

K: been used. Because truly speaking, sometimes you feel that you have been used, somebody got the information and then she is fine, and then she just disappeared.

Y: so coming back and continuity are important?

K: exactly.

Y: do you also think that you need some kind of closure, like I know this project is finished and it has been closed?

K: not really that type of closure. I need it to go on, we mustn't end there. It must just go on,

Y: go on in which ways?

K: like the she is doing, hello, how are you...

Since Thabo's intention and aim of his research had not been revealed to the participants, there was an additional issue that needed to be addressed here – The way in which participants view research with a hidden agenda.

In his dissertation, Thabo had attributed his decision not to disclose his full intention to "a blunt statement about the purpose of the study might have compromised the data by unduly sensitising the respondents to the issue of culture" (2004, p. 23). In his interview he expressed a similar view. "My research was not as sensitive as it might come out to be [in terms of getting personal information], but it is sensitive methodologically... If I told them, methodologically it would have been affected."

In this regard one question still remained. If the concern had been that disclosure would have affected the





data why had he not disclosed his research after the fieldwork was finished? I asked Thabo whether there was any particular reason why he had chosen not to inform the participants, and he replied, “not particular reasons whatsoever on my side. (So you sort of thought both—disclose afterwards and not disclose at all—are fine and just choose an easy way out?) (pause) Yes.”

The other practical problem regarding his decision not to disclose, even on completion of the fieldwork, was that there was thus no chance that his statement “my research was not as sensitive as it might come out to be” would ever be verified or disputed since in any follow-up studies, such as this study, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to bring up this issue with the participants. His answer to my mention of this potential problem was also rather vague, “it does not create problem as such. Remember what I said in the beginning, we as researches are also gatekeepers and gate openers (gatekeepers in the sense that no follow up can be made? question added).”

So I was left with a dilemma – did I tell the participants or not? After a discussion with both researchers we decided not to disclose his aim specifically, but rather to ask general questions about the participants’ views on research with a hidden agenda. The main rationale behind this decision was that if I now informed them, the original fieldwork had been finished a long time before and they did not have the opportunity to react to this information directly (to the original researchers), this could have left them with feelings of discontent about the relationship. Although it might still be ethically problematic, I was of the opinion that they would be better off not knowing Thabo’s intention, particularly in terms of their emotions.

How, in general, did the participants view the issue of research with a hidden agenda<sup>27</sup>? Interestingly Van der Linde’s reaction was:

Y: sometimes research has to be done with a certain degree of deception, in the sense that if I tell you in advance, you might behave differently. So then I don’t tell you in advance. Do you think that might be a problem for you?

V: I don’t know. I think if they have to do it, they should not tell the person.

Y: they can tell you afterwards, or they can decide not to tell you at all.

V: I think if they are doing that, they must not tell me. I think it’s better to know before-hands than afterwards.

Y: if compare with afterwards and not at all?

V: then better not at all, otherwise, I would be always thinking about it.

On the other hand the other two participants expressed their strong opposition to such a situation.

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<sup>27</sup> The word of *hidden agenda* might have a negative implication. However, as indicated in the quotes, I did mention specifically the situation in which this hidden agenda had occurred.



Y: do you think that it is important that a person come to you to do a research and do not have a hidden agenda?

C: yes.

Y: if they have something hidden, you might not like it?

C: yes. If I get the feeling, if this is about something else, then I would say, I would make a plan (laugh). You see that is experience and my age, you know you don't want to waste your time. That is very important.

Y: what about if the deception is the only choice? For example, in psychology, if they tell you in advance, you might behave differently. Say it is hidden agenda, but it is a good hidden agenda?

C: no, I think then it can't be hidden agenda. I am the adult here, I must know about it, the children don't need to know, if she tells me this is what is actually what I wanted to see, but we can't tell them, but then I can decide if that is all right for the children. But if there is a hidden agenda, but I don't know about it, I wouldn't participate anymore. Even if it is a good intention, but I need to know about it, it cannot be hidden from me.

As Kola had shown strong sensitivity (see the emphasised part in the following quote), his reaction towards a hidden agenda was even stronger.

Y: if somebody comes to you and say that they are doing this research, but actually they want to use the information for another research, do you think you personally would not like that?

K: I will not like that. I will not like that. Hence I talked about transparency. What are you researching about, what are you going to do with the information. What am I going to benefit out of that, that's what I really need to know.

Y: and that is very important to you?

K: yes, that is very important to me. If you are taking this information that I give to you now and use it for another purpose, at the end of the day, me as a person, it means that you put me in a danger. And if somebody takes the information and uses it for another purpose, then it is no good. *So I take your research as a continuation of that one (De Beer's), that's why I am not having a problem. And if there is a hidden agenda, then who is to be blamed.*

Y: *I am not referring to any research, I am just asking in general.*

K: *you need to be sensitive.*

Y: I can see that. But what about if that is a no choice, if they tell you in advance, you would behave differently. If that is the reason, would you accept not telling the full information in advance?

K: no, I won't take it. I need people to tell me in advance. What is it going to be, people need to know.

### 5.2.3 Evaluation of the relationship

Despite some complaints, especially from Kola, the researchers and participants did view the researcher–practitioner relationship they had experienced as positive.

De Beer had noticed that teachers were generally very busy, so, as she had realistically expected them not to be very cooperative, most of the participants had indeed cooperated more than well. “Most of them did, actually all of them did, only two of them were, or might be, a bit resistant.”

All three participants also expressed their positive views of the experience.



It was the first time that somebody actually sit down with me and she recorded it and it was not just a form to fill in. So that was interesting for me, I was a bit scared in the beginning, it is new, that was actually very interesting for me, she was the first one. She was so friendly... it was very relaxed. You can see that it is for the benefit of the child, and that's nice, you can see that she wants the best of the child, so that is nice... (So at all times, you were feeling comfortable?) Yes. (And been respected, you can voice your opinion?) Yes. (Van der Linde)

She was very professional. I don't have a problem with her...I had a good impression of him... (And you said that in general, you experience the interview as positive?) Yes. (Chisholm)

They were so kind, they were always smiling... And they create an environment that is comfortable...there were some sort of professionalism there...(how do you in general find them as researchers?) they were so good. As I mentioned earlier, they were so cooperative, they were trying to make us settled, all those things. Trying to inform us in advance, what are they going to interview us, all those things. (So you find it quite professional?) Exactly. (Kola)

Thabo shared this perception of the positive feeling, "In general, they were very very very cooperative. They were very cooperative...it was positive...they did have positive regard or experience, and I think I can safely, with limitation say, if a researcher goes to these schools, they would be welcomed." This willingness to participate in future research was confirmed by all participants.

(So am I right to say that if you are approached by another person for research, you probably are going to agree to participate?) Yes, I will. I don't have a problem. Even if it is not in my field, it is still fine, as long as I feel that I can help. (Van der Linde)

(So am I right to say that if another person approaches to you and ask you to participate in another research, you probably would say yes?) I think so. You know, if I think it is the way of helping the people, then I would do that. If I think that is a waste of time, if somebody comes here and they are messing around, then I would say thank you very much and good bye. (Chisholm)

(Am I right to say that if another person approaches you for another research, you probably are going to agree?) Yes, I will, whole-heartedly, whole-heartedly. (Kola)

### **5.3 Case 3 (category III):**

#### ***Sehlola-- Sir, on what page is the answer? Exploring teacher decision-making in the context of complex curriculum change (PhD)***

The main purpose of this study was to "understand how and why teachers make particular curriculum decisions at the interface of multiple curricula" (Sehlola, 2004, p. 2). The multiple curricula forming the background to this study referred to:



- 1) An old apartheid curriculum;
- 2) Curriculum 2005 (C2005), initially launched in 1998 by the new South African government, with the underlying methodology of outcomes-based education. The aim of C2005 was to replace the old curriculum and achieve more autonomy in the classroom “to decide what kind of context they are going to teach, what kind of the studies they want to use, not just the subscribe as what it used to be (from interviews with Sehlola)”.
- 3) A streamlined version of C2005. “As a result of the complex structure and design of C2005, tight timeframes, the lack of quality teacher training support materials, and the incapacity of provincial authorities to support teachers effectively (Chisholm, 2000, as cited by Sehlola, 2004, p. 1), a streamlined version of C2005, “a new or thin” version of the curriculum, substantially different from the ‘thicker’ version” (Sehlola, 2004, p. 2), was introduced for discussion in 2001 and finalised in 2004 for implementation in all South African schools.

During the design and data collection phase of this study, these three curricula were, somehow, operating simultaneously in South African classrooms: the old curriculum, although in the process of being phased out, still exerted a powerful influence on daily classroom practice; C 2005 — “the initial implementation schedule of C2005 was still being followed, meaning that C2005 was still introduced in all Grade 9 classrooms in 2002” (2004, p. 2); and streamlined C2005, “towards the end of 2002, anecdotal evidence emerged which suggested that some teachers were already using all or part of the streamlined version of C2005, despite the fact that it was not yet official departmental policy and was still under construction” (2004, p. 2).

In such a context, the main aim of this study was to investigate “how teachers understand the critical differences between the traditional curriculum, the new curriculum and the revised version of this new curriculum? Why and how do these teachers make strategic curriculum decisions at the interface of these three curricula in their classrooms ?” (2004, p. 3)

The data for this study was collected from three Grade 9 natural science teachers at three different schools (2004, pp. 56-57). The data collection methods included two in-depth semi-structured interviews (one at the beginning of the project before classroom observation and the other at the end of the research process); classroom observation (30 lessons for each teacher); pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews (while replaying the videoed lesson to them) and document analysis (including teachers’ diaries and field notes).

The entire data collection period extended over a period of approximately 10 months. In the dissertation,



two out of the three teachers were reported upon because “I came to realise that there were so many commonalities among the three participants that a third comprehensive case report would not have added significant value to my argument” (2004, p. 60).

Both participants (Stevens and Billana) that were reported upon in the dissertation shared their experience and perceptions with me. Both participants were science teachers at the time of Sehlola’s study. Billana had been taking MBA courses at the time, and, by the time I approached them, he had been promoted to the offices of the Department of Education. Stevens and Sehlola were, in fact, from the same town and had studied in the same university, although this relationship had been discovered only after Stevens had agreed to participate.

### **5.3.1 Researcher/practitioner context**

The main aim of this study, as officially stated in the dissertation, was to “addresses the ‘gap’ in scholarship ...” (2004, p. 11). As the intention was clearly to make sense of how and why teachers made certain classroom decision, but not to change teaching practices, this research was largely a theoretical study.

As for the question as to why all those student-researchers who demonstrated a relatively deep understanding of the researcher-participant relationship were only concerned about theoretical contributions, Sehlola provided several possible explanations:

- 1) The reason why his aim was theoretical yet he cared about the researcher-participant relationship could lie in the nature of qualitative study itself:

I think the fact that it was qualitative in nature means that the relationships, how people understand and get connection to each other, was crucial to unfold the story, putting the fresh to the story for the reader. So, I was engaging in this reflection, on our relationship, to give a better picture, to print a broader picture, a better picture, a more colorful picture, and hopefully create a richer story... I want people to see what I was immersed of myself, what I was immersed in, and what these teachers were doing in schools, and to paint that picture or to describe that as comprehensively and as fully as possible, for people to see why I am making the conclusions that I am making, or why I am arguing with the arguments that I am making. Without that broader picture I think, ones arguments will be found wanting and nonsense.

- 2) The reason why he did not aim at changing or improving teaching practice was to be found in the



uniqueness of his topic:

I was to study the teacher and make sense of how they make decisions, without complicating the matter by trying to add another layer onto the complexity that they have already. For that particular teacher, in terms of making sense of the curriculum policies, the different kind of things that they got to face to. You see that my thesis talks about this intensification of teachers' work, so I really didn't want to go in there with another intensifying layer that they got to deal with. I think that could make a complete different study. It was consciousness of my part of not to complexify the matter further than that. I think that would probably have been a worthwhile dimension of it, but I think it will just complexify, complicate the matter, for both the researcher, myself and also the teacher.

- 3) Another reason why he was interested in theory contribution could perhaps be found in the influence from his supervisor. Not only were all three students from category III under the same supervisor, but this supervisor was also known for "always pushing, me and the PhD class as well, to make sure that you advance some knowledge on the particular topic that you are working on".

Obviously I think that probably came out of quite strongly, or that was one of my main drivers, because he was my supervisor and I am not sure if I would have the same emphasis if I had somebody from somewhere else, for example. Yes it was a major thing for him and obviously you do what your supervisor want you to do, because you have to go through him, the product has to go through him before it goes to the external evaluators, so if he is not satisfied that you have done enough for this qualification, then you won't have it.

Sehlola suggested that the different participants might have had different reasons for participating in his study.

One teacher, I think he was willing to expose his own practice to academic with the hope of learning from that person, am I doing right, am I on the right track. Some teachers may just be happy to have somebody to give commentary on what they see in their classrooms; for some people, it is just important to engage with other people about the policy and practice, but for the teachers that I was particularly working, I think it helped them to make the decisions.

More specifically, he suggested that his original participants had participated because "they had the expectation that they would be able to learn from this as well, I think, one or two are quite explicit that this is a learning experience, a learning curve for them." In fact, he held to this statement, as the following quote illustrates.

N<sup>28</sup>: I think I am very convinced that they had learned something.

Y: in terms of what?

N: in making them think about what they are doing and about their practices and about the way that they make certain decisions about practice. It also came out from the thesis that there wasn't a lot of dynamic and active

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<sup>28</sup> I used N to represent Sehlola to avoid confusion with another S, which represented one of his participants – Stevens.



reflection on the curriculum translation by these teachers, and I think through the kind of questions that I was asking and the kind of calling I was doing, it must have made them think a little bit.

Y: did you ask them about it?

N: I am not sure. Initially I wanted to look at how teachers understand the differences between the old curriculum, curriculum 2005 and the revised one, and I got into the schools and got these teachers. It was almost like a year that the revised national curriculum statement was on the table, and these teachers didn't know about what I was talking about, so I think it should have, could have, I am sure it did.

Y: how are you sure?

N: I am sure because I can remember the frowns and the amazement that this thing was already on the table, and there was already a policy document, and they didn't know that this complicated curriculum 2005 had been refined, so I think just from my reading of the body language and the facial expressions. And I suppose also in the interaction with them verbally afterwards, I could pick up that after that point, they had started to pick up a bit more about this revised National Curriculum statement, which I am not sure whether they would have made an effect to if I have not approached the subject with them. And that's just one example. And there are many others that I probably won't be able to recall numerically to all of them. In many practical situations or situations where they were doing practicals, for example, they were doing something with the learners, which I found a little bit,

Y: not so right?

N: interesting (laugh).

Y: in good sense or in bad sense?

N: in both senses. Sometimes in the not so good sense. And I suppose it comes out in the writing as well, for example why they were using the worksheets so mechanically in doing practical work, moving from one question to the other. I found it very interesting, and so I think by the type of questions that I was asking, it made them think whether this is the right way to do it, isn't there a better way. Sometimes I would ask, wouldn't it work better if I have done x y z, instead of just following it this way, and I think through those kind of questions, I cant see how they could not have learned just a little bit.

Y: but you did not specifically confirm with them?

N: I am sure, I must have a hint; I must have asked that question in an informal way, during my debriefing session with them. And I am sure that I did not reflect it in the thesis, because it wasn't one of my major aims, these teachers learned this and that from me or from this action. It wasn't a big thing, but I am sure that was expressed, that there was an indication that was good experience for them.

Interestingly, when I raised the question of what benefit the participants could have anticipated and experienced, Billana's answer was more in the line of research, and not teaching. "(In terms of knowledge or reflection, do you think you benefited?) Very much so, very much so. Because I came to realise how one can best conduct a research, I think now if I were to conduct a research, I will be advantaged compared to a person who has never participated in any research project. I know what type of questions to ask and how to ask them and how to support a person during an interview. "

When I referred specifically to the effect of participation on teaching, the same participant answered:

B: In terms of my actual teaching, there was no benefit, in fact there was disruption. The programme somehow disrupted.





Y: In which way?

B: In the sense that he would come to the class with the video machine and try to capture what is happening in the classroom. He tried to be as passive as possible, but you know how kids are, the mood would change immediately when they see a video camera, they would think the news broadcast has come to shoot them, then I would spend more time on discipline, instead of doing the actual teaching. And then I would have to explain now and then that this is about research, just behave normal. But you know how kids are. With regard to my actual teaching no.

Y: did it make you think back of your way of teaching, in any way?

B: Yes, in the sense that he did show me those videocassettes, then I had a chance to view them and I could pick up some of the areas where I could improve. Yes, in a way I could say it helped me, because usually you will never have a chance to evaluate yourself, you just go to class teach and think what might have gone wrong, but if you could see it, then it is somehow different, you can pick exactly that this is where I should not have done this, I should have done better this way.

Y: Is that part big?

B: No, I could say that most of them were confirmations of what I already knew about myself. Then they were now confirmed that really this area you need to improve, of which some of them you can not change, they are part of who you are. I could say, on a scale of 1 to 10 I could say it 1 or 10%.

Y: small?

B: yes, very small.

Stevens's view was slightly different.

Y: what were the things that you expected to learn?

S: well, the research itself, how it is conducted, that is what I was to learn, also the line of questioning, and what can I gain out of these types of questions, what the person is actually looking at. In Sehlola's case, it was fortunately for me, education. That is my field, so there were some questions that I actually gain some knowledge in the process, I learned something...

Y: what about ways to improve your teaching, or the classroom practices?

S: some of the questions were in that line, like I said, I learned a lot also how to present a lesson, I learned a lot from the questions, and it did help me in teaching. In our final year, when you study to be a teacher, we learn a lot on how to present lessons, how to write out a lesson and so on, Sehlola's questions are addition to what I learned at university, but it was in the back of my mind, I never actually realised it, so in that way, it helped me a lot.

...

Y: so I am right to say that in both ways, teaching and doing research, you learned quite a lot?

S: I learned quite a lot. Like I said, I learned both ways, not actually to say learned completely how to do research, but I learned how research is been done, and also those questions, like he did in many times, came and observed lessons, recorded those lessons, and afterwards we would reflect on those lessons, and then in some instances, he would ask me, whether there is any other ways that I could presented it for that specific topic, it makes me think a little bit, it broadens a person's mind, gives you other alternatives. (emphasis added).

What is significant here was the fact that, although Stevens did agree that participation had contributed to his own learning, both in terms of conducting research and teaching, his first response to my question on benefits and also the part highlighted above, seemed to imply that the benefit of the research aspect was more important to him than the teaching aspect.



When I informed Sehlola about the participants' response in respect of their perceived knowledge gain his responded as follows:

I wouldn't be too worried about himself (Billana) feeling that way, that I did not really help him improving his practice, because that was not the intention from the start. The way that I tried to improve their practice was, it was very accidental. It was not an explicit aim of mine, partly because that was not my main research question, and partly because I wanted them also to do the things as they have done, without feeling that they need to play up to my expectations, and that is why I did not specify that this is the kind of lessons that I want them to do, this is the topic I want to cover, I wanted the didactical processes to proceed itself. So I think my intentional efforts and incidental efforts act one thing to them to be *more reflective about their practice*. It was just that, it was not a major concern of mine. Although I hoped and I do think that they definitely were in a sense a little bit more reflective about what is happening in the class. *I can't see after all these questions that somebody asks you about why you do certain things and why you don't do the other things, and then say that there is no effect on me (emphasis added).*

Since Sehlola seemed to be so emphatic about his claim in respect of his participants' knowledge gain – at least they became more reflective about their teaching practice (as the emphasis in the quote above suggests), I specifically raised this issue again with Billana. “(Did his questions make you more reflective in terms of your way of teaching?) Not really. Watching the video playing back helped somehow for me to look at what I have done and what might be wrong, because usually you do not usually get such opportunities to look back. But that was through my own watching the video, not really from his questions. Actually, he [Sehlola] wanted me to behave as naturally as possible.”

Although Sehlola had pointed out that benefit in terms of his participants' knowledge gain could have been a by-product of his research, his response seemed to suggest that he saw it as an important motive for their participation. In the light of this, I posed this question to his participants. Billana's answer was:

Sehlola did explain to me the nature of his research, what is it all about and I realised that I could help in that regard. And also because he insisted that I should help him, much as I told him that I have a workload, I have many things to do, he insisted that 'Billana please help me'. Because he wanted someone who is experienced in teaching science at this specific type of school, and who is a black person. There are very few black people who are teaching sciences at that kind of school, usually they are teaching other subjects, like languages, then I felt sorry for the guy... He came to the school and said to the principal that he needed a science teacher who can help him in doing the research. Then the principal said Billana can help you, then he approached me, then I found no reason not helping him. (So you agreed because one he insisted, secondly that you think you could help?) Exactly, exactly, yes.

As Sehlola felt that he used the teachers' time after hours and that participation requested had been long and intensive, he had offered a monetary incentive to show his appreciation. According to Billana, this offer of the monetary incentives could “also have been a motivator in a way”.



According to Stevens,

When Sehlola approached me, he in fact recognised me from somewhere, that we actually met at the university, at the time that we were still in undergraduate, and he reminded me about that. Since we are both from the same place, then we started to talk. It wasn't actually a problem for me to participate, but he said that we met before and I thought well, why not give it a try?... Just the fact that I know him, even if it is somebody else, I was still going to participate because to me, it is really something new. And I thought to myself, I might gain, I might learn something in the process, so Sehlola was not the actual reason

His other responses continued to reveal his confusion about whether or not his knowing Sehlola had been the reason for his participation:

In Sehlola's case, I would [participate even if there is no benefit] because he is a fiend, he is my friend, and even if it was not based on education itself, I would still going to help him in a sense, as a friend, I was going to help him.

Reason is just that, like I said, I am quite eager, in fact maybe I should say quite curious, see how certain things are done. Like I said, how research is actually done...because this is my moral duty, to help, to assist ...just feel that it is my moral duty. Whenever it comes to education itself, I feel actually obliged to assist whatever way I can, to put it frankly...like I said, as long as it would not interfere with my own job and if time permits, I would be willing to assist.

As far as the responsibility of the researcher towards the participants is concerned, Sehlola's main concern was that "I have the responsibility that the information that they gave me, the revelation they make, is confidential, that is the main thing." Besides confidentiality he also thought that "they expected from me, as well, that I was not going to paint a bad picture of them, the teachers unable to practise the policy...I think they are also expecting that I will not be unreasonable of the after-hours and interview sessions, in terms of time, duration and so on, expecting some sense of balance, of comprehension of their own context, that I will not be unreasonable."

As for Stevens he extended his rationale about his moral duty to participate in research to stating that he did not think that researchers have any responsibility towards participants, "only that I won't expect you to show up here at any time, say well let's do it now. Just to inform me beforehand, that's probably the only responsibility that I can think of". Billana also thought that "if it [the responsibility] was there, it would be 30 out of 100". When I probed what kind of responsibility he meant he joked, "I think the only responsibility that he [Sehlola] had towards me was to make sure that he gets as much as possible from me. But in terms of other things, I don't think so."



I also followed up the issue of confidentiality with both participants. Stevens labelled it as ‘did not matter’, although he thought that Sehlola had “preferred to cover my identity.” For Billana, who had been promoted to the department, “at the time, that was not very much important, but if it is now, I will say yes...because I realise now that there is much at stake. There were a lot of things that I said to him which did not matter at that time, but now with the position that I am in and with the ambition that I have, I think it is important that whatever is reported about me should only be positive. But then, I was given both, good and bad.” When I probed, “so if you were still a teacher, had not had your position changed, would it be different?” he answered, “It would not be important.”

As for the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher, Sehlola’s understanding was mainly that “since they have agreed...I think they had their responsibility and they understood it very well that they had to make some contribution on a weekly basis, sometimes on a daily basis, open the classrooms to me, and open their minds to me, in terms of how they think about things, make themselves available when I make requests, those are the responsibilities. I must add that another responsibility that they had, I tried to make it clear to them that they had to be honest in their responses to my questions, not try to cover up or try to show only the good part.”

Stevens’ main concern echoed that of Sehlola, “because I committed myself to assist him, let’s say if we make an appointment, I should be available at that specific time, that is my responsibility.” Billana did not think that he had any responsibility towards the researcher and commented, “I think our relationship was just for the convenience for that moment”.

### **5.3.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship**

The difficulty in securing participants had been one of the salient reflections in Sehlola’s dissertation. Initially, his design had been to “employ purposive sampling to identify three articulate Grade 9 teachers in the Pretoria East district, particularly ones who were familiar with the traditional curriculum and the two versions of C2005...Ideally, these teachers were to be active, dynamic and expressive, affording me easy and intelligible access to their deepest thoughts and decision-making processes” (2004, pp. 57-58). However,



Teachers were not really queuing up to have their classroom practices and particularly their grasp of Outcome based education (OBE) scrutinised and exposed for all to see...With the departmental letter of approval in hand, I knocked on the doors of countless schools, marketing the value of the research, its highly confidential nature and my sincere intentions, but had little success...Two teachers agreed to serve as respondents, but when I tried to finalise the details of the project with them, a few days before the schools closed for the December recess, they withdrew...In many schools I did not even get past the principal's office (the secretary's office, in some cases) to speak to teachers personally, for they deftly and persuasively cited their teachers' struggles with the new curricular demands and a host of other administrative overloads. Numerous letters to different principals, requesting teacher participation, went unanswered. One principal unreservedly told me that he did not think that any principal in his immediate area would sanction this kind of intrusion into his school and into their 'poor' teachers' classrooms. (2004, pp. 58-59, extracted)

Looking back Sehlola noted that the principals were "very protective of the teachers... don't want to expose themselves to that kind of scrutiny". Meanwhile, Billana referred to the principal as a familiar source whom he trusted, and went on to state that he preferred a researcher to go through the principal rather than to approach him directly, or "even if you come to me directly, we still need to go back to the principal".

Sehlola's struggle with securing participants continued even after the gatekeepers had granted him permission.

(A few principals) were extremely receptive and benevolent to my cause, and agreed that I could use their school as a base, provided that their Grade 9 natural science teachers were willing to participate. Unfortunately, not many of them were. The overriding response from the Grade 9 educators themselves was something akin to 'I'm not ready for this, sorry' or 'I have too much on my plate, maybe next year!' Four teachers initially committed themselves to opening themselves and their classroom for this inquiry, but withdrew a few weeks later. Two of them said that after due consideration of the full extent of their duties in this research, they would not be able to cope with this 'extra work load', while the other one cited the fact that he wanted to apply for the vacant HOD post at his school later on in the year, and felt an investigation into his classroom practices might jeopardise his chances (2004, p. 59).

Finally, Sehlola "managed to secure three respondents. One of these respondents was very willing; especially after he had discovered that we were from the same town and had been acquaintances at university [Stevens]. The other two were initially somewhat reluctant, but, with the right mix of cajoling and incentives [refer to the monetary compensation that he offered] finally relented]" (2004, p. 59).

Initially, Sehlola had also planned for a continuous and unbroken year-long engagement with each of the participants, however, this materialised for one of them only – Stevens. Billana was doing his first year part-time MBA study at the time and asked to be excused during the second term. Sehlola stated, "So this

one teacher [Billana], he was willing to help, but I understand that he needs to do his MBA and there will be times that he can't make it, and I am willing to take that risk, so I said yes, let's go for it."

According to Sehlola, there had been talks before the data collection. "I made it quite clear to them that this is going to be tiring, I will be sitting in your classroom, we are going to have after-hour interviews, sometimes it is going to be late into the night, so they were quite clear about that." As a result, Stevens had fairly realistic expectations of what Sehlola wanted from him. Stevens also felt "it [informing about the requirement of the research] important or me, because like I said, we are overloaded teachers and most of the time we are busy... so we need to make proper arrangements".

As far as the relationship during the data collection was concerned, Sehlola described it as research based, although, with Stevens, it was more of a mixture of fieldship and friendship.

For me, it was primarily, primarily just theoretical or field relationship, subject related. This is our common purpose. And I didn't want to get too involved with their personal affairs. For the two, it wasn't a problem, the other two. For this one that I know beforehand [Stevens], it was a little different because he would come to my house and eat, I invited his wife over as well, I will be at his house and his wife would be there. (So this is more like friendship?) Yes, more like friendship. I think this kind of friendship still continues, we still phone, I still phone to see how he is doing, so this is a bit different relationship...it comes from other connections, not just from the research. It was only after he agreed that I realised that I know this guy, and then we picked up our relationship. I hadn't seen him for 12, 13 years, we are from same town, he still goes there now and then, we knew the schools that he was talking about, or we could talk about the town in general. And it was a bit stronger relationship than the other two because of this previous relationship that we had.

Stevens clearly echoed Sehlola's perception:

It was, at times research-based, like we will just be doing the job, to get job done, other times we would communicate on a friendly basis, so it was the mixture of the two, but most of the time I was quite relaxed and I could speak openly... sometimes if I go to his house, we would have a cup of tea, have something to eat, after that we go to his study and we start with the questions.

And this was what he preferred as well.

Y: so, you were mentioning that actually your relationship was partly friendship and partly research based. So do you think this way is better or you prefer it to be just research based or you prefer it to be more friendship?

S: to me, the two should go together, I would be nervous, anyone could be nervous, if here is the person coming, I see a serious expression on the face. I don't actually know this person, what this person is up to and what could be the next question, so there should be a time for us to get to know each other a bit better on a personal level and not actually, like just maybe having a cup of tea, talking about life in general, that's what I mean by personal.

Y: a bit informal?



S: informal yes, instead of just a person coming here and staring at me, that would make it intense. Fortunately between the two of us, it was quite relaxed, we would also separating the two, right now it's time to drink tea, next step we start asking questions and focus on that.

Y: so, you think this kind of mixture is the best for you?

S: yes.

Y: And also in terms of formal and informal, you want it to be mixed?

S: yes, if possible. Although I wouldn't mind if the relationship shifts more to research, that's not a problem to me, as long as a person makes me feel relaxed during the interview.

Y: so this informal or the friendliness should at least exist?

S: To a lesser extent than the research.

Y: But it needs to be there?

S: It needs to be there, yes

Y: Otherwise you would feel?

S: less comfortable, and also intimidated, and also curious. I will ask myself what is the next step, and what will happen to this information that I give to this person, so there should be that relaxed atmosphere and also a feedback.

Y: that is important to you?

S: yes.

Billana thought that, at the time of the research, it was a mixture of research-based and friendship, for example, he and Sehlola would go out and drink sometimes, although as regards the friendship element "I would say it did not get much of that". However, he thought that the friendship or the bond was "important, because after doing a research with a person, you should not feel that you were just an object, you should not feel that you were used, you should feel that I contributed towards a human being, who maybe today has developed or today he is a Doctor. That makes you feel important, but if you do a research with a person that just disappears, you don't know what you did was of value or not." So although he "could not say that [I am disappointed that the relationship did not develop further] because my expectations in that regard was not so high, and I could not say that I am disappointed if there is not that relationship, if I myself were to do a research, I would keep the relationship a bit more friendlike."

He went on to substantiate:

(Am I right to say that it would be better if he could have kept it a bit more friend-like?) Yes, especially regarding the manner in which our research was conducted. If the research was conducted at school level and it ended there, it's fine. But it was conducted at home level, we would go out together for a drink somewhere, then it was in a way developing in more than just research. But if it was just kept professional from the beginning, I think there would have been no expectations from me.

So would he prefer this type of mixture or would he have wanted to keep it totally professional? To answer



this question, he highlighted again the importance of clarifying expectations.

B: if you would have kept it professional and then I would be justifying the reason why the relationship just end, but if you keep it somehow social, then you must have the responsibility there after.

Y: so it is like to make the expectation clear?

B: yes. Right at the beginning. This is how it is going to be, and when it ends, it ends.

Y: so if it is like that, you think that is also fine?

B: I think it is fine, in that sense that you don't create unnecessary expectations. If the expectation is that it is professional based, then when it finishes there, it finishes. The only problem came when the expectation is not made clear.

He thought that Sehlola' study, maybe because the fieldwork had been long and intensively interactive, "created a bit more expectations than he actually gave." This slight disappointment had been intensified when Sehlola had not given him a copy of the dissertation as promised.

B: That's where I got angry with him; he knows that even today, he never brought anything back to me. And I don't have any idea what did he say about me.

Y: did he report you badly? (joking)

B: exactly (laugh). That is where I think he just missed it.

Y: He didn't give you anything?

B: No, not the final product.

Y: Not anything in the progress even?

B: He just reported to me verbally, that he was able to do the thesis and then he submitted it, then he got his Doctorate.

Y: But not the contents of the thesis?

B: No the contents, he didn't give me the contents, but he promised, he kept promising that "I will send you the contents".

Y: and you think it is important to do that?

B: It is very important, it is very important. Because after all you have taken something from me, that is part of me, then you should not exclusively own it, even though you have the intellectual property or intellectual right. It is very important that I have a copy of what you have written, whether you have misrepresented what I have said, or you have said exactly how I said it.<sup>29</sup>

Stevens had been given the transcript after the data collection, had read it halfway, and had not wanted to make any changes. "After he gave me the transcript, we never really. There was actually no contact, to put it that way. But he did mention to me that I have done a good job and he was quite happy with that, there was that feedback, the information or the interview itself was seen as positive... he did contact me and he also mentioned that the professor was quite impressed about some of my answers I gave him, and I was quite happy about that I could make that contribution. In that way he contacted me and he gave me a feedback on

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<sup>29</sup> Sehlola claimed that "the transcripts I showed to participants on a regular basis, and then also the final document, the final thesis yes, and I am almost sure that I also given Billana a copy. And Billana is the one who is asking for it...I showed them the analysis, not the full thesis... I think I showed the full one to the friend of mine [Stevens], not to the other one [Billana]."





the research in general.”

On a personal level, Sehlola stated that “with the one [Stevens] there was quite a lot of interactions since then, been to his school, he phoned me and I phoned him, I got some files from him about the support material that they were working with. It was just what friends do, phoning how you are doing or he phoning me to ask whether I was busy. And he said that he had this article and would like me to read through it...he would phone one day and say my mother is here, do you want to talk to her. The other two, Billana, I had not had much contact with him since the end of the research.”

N: after I had finished with his last interview? I can't remember. I was under the impression that I have given him the copy. But in terms of contact him for a cup of tea or anything, no I actually doubt whether we did that.

Y: and so for the other one whom you didn't write, you also didn't contact him?

N: I think I was with him at his school, probably once after that, but never again, it wasn't real follow up friendship or relationship after that. Yes, I did made contact with him after that, I explained to him the trend of the thesis, the shape of the thesis, and that I am not going to use him, for comparison with other two teachers. Because of the repeativeness of the data, I am not going to include him.

Y: so, may I right to say that in general, after the interviews are finished, basically there were not much contact?

N: not much contact, particularly with Billana. I have been to his school, left my number there and said let's communicate, but he never got back to me again. So I am not sure whether he is willing or eager to take the relationship further, although I would see that it probably is my responsibility.

In a slightly joking tone Billana revealed that, “I think our relationship was just for the convenience for that moment [during the research], but thereafter when I was going to marry I invited him, he didn't come, to show that he has no responsibility towards me. Sometimes once in a blue moon he would phone and say Billana how are you, but there is nothing that is keeping two of us together.”

Y: You mentioned that sometimes he would phone you after the data collection was finished?

B: The contact was only me phoning him, and then he would phone back. It wasn't so good, he would only phone when there is something that he needs.

Y: so when you phone him, it is like what? Is it more like just to say hello or it is also something that you want to say to him?

B: Basically it was just to say how are you doing. In fact I was just phoning to find out how he is coping, because by then he was new in town, just to find out how this place was treating him.

Y: how many times did he contact you, do you remember?

B: I think after research, after he had completed that research till now (refer to 2003-2006), he might have called me two or three times, not many.

Y: so you are also a bit disappointed, on this point?

B: yes, I would just say that, but generally I don't let myself to be disappointed because I don't expect much from people sometimes. You know, people are fallible, they are made from flesh and blood, they have weaknesses, now and then. It is important to keep your expectations minimum, when you deal with human beings (laugh).

Y: It sounds very sad.



B: Yes.

The post research relationship with Stevens was, as Sehlola himself also acknowledged, quite different.

(Did he also just contact you for to say hello, how are you?) Yes, yes, in fact, we were invited to a restaurant. He invited us, me and my wife there for supper. And that was his thank you gesture. And I appreciated it. I didn't really expect him to do that, but he felt that he wanted to say thank you in that way. And he also invited us to dinner church service, so it wasn't that I am finished with you and goodbye, he followed up.

Sehlola proposed the following possible reasons to explain this difference

N: I think one of the reasons why there is more with Stevens is because my wife is teaching at the same school as him, so I used to go there and I would see him. He would phone me and ask my wife and I and his wife and him to a lunch or supper after that, so there was much close interaction between us.

Y: between the family?

N: yes. I will probably have to say that the retreat in my case was not seriously attended to. I did not pay sufficient attention to the does and don't of retreating, in terms of what you do with the participants after you finish with them. And mine for Stevens was better and more emotionally, I would say, much more comforting retrieval, than for Billana. Why not so with Billana, I am no sure.

Y: you were mentioning that you think they were not expecting you to go back to them, was that kind of expectation made clear from the beginning?

N: yes, I don't think that there was an expectation that this is going to be a long-term relationship. There was not going to be a next-year follow up kind of interaction.

Y: so, in a way there was only field-ship and after it is finished, it is finished?

N: yes, technically speaking. Look, I paid these participants for their participation. I was thinking why I had a less satisfying relationship with Billana in terms of retreat. I think one of the reasons, I am not quite sure about this, though one of the reasons was that I knew that Billana was very busy, he was busy with the MBA, and he was getting married later on. A few weeks or a few months after that, I got an invitation from him which I couldn't oblige to. And the other factor is that he left the school.

Y: shortly afterwards?

N: it was a few months after our fieldship, that he left he school and joined the department on the district level. I am not sure if those factors contribute to the fact. I know that I was at his school about twice in that period, looking for him. I think it shows that it was not intended, if I have to now make excuses for myself, there wasn't an attempt because I know once or twice I got to the school when he was still there, and he was busy in the class and I left my details to say that I was here and just to say hi, then there was a second time that I was there, then I heard that he has left for somewhere else.

Y: he said that he called you sometimes?

N: he called me yes, he called once in December, I am not sure whether that was 2004 or 2003, that is the time he told me that he was with the department. Yes, I admittedly that there was much better retreats or withdraw with Stevens.

Was formal closure preferred by these two participants and by the researcher? Or did they want to have a degree of continuity? According to Sehlola:

Y: do you think that it is necessary to make contact after the research is finished?

N: I think it is a decent thing to do (laugh). I think it is the right thing to do. You know, to show the people that now



the academic stuff is finished, I still got interest in you, I have certain bonds with you.

Y: to what extent?

N: at phonic level for me is fine. Just to say how things are going at school, how are you coping now at work, how is your wife doing. I think it is important to do that, it is just that I haven't done that kind of follow up, I think it is important. I think it will help teachers generally to be more responsive to research, to see that researcher is not just interested in their little domain. Once they finished with you, they have no further interest or concern about you.

Y: what about the feasibility of doing that?

N: I think it is quite feasible. Just pick up the phone and say, how are you doing?

Y: on the other hand, from their side, do you think they may expect or they may want to have this kind of relationship afterwards?

N: I am not sure. I am not sure, that they will think less of me that I haven't done it. I don't think I created in them the expectation that this is going to be a life-long enterprise relationship, that kind of expectation. I also don't think they would expect me to come back to them, let's go for lunch or things like that, I don't think there is that kind of expectation, I just think that this is the proper and nice thing to do, the follow-ups, in terms of common decency.

Y: but is it still going to die out eventually?

N: I think it depends a lot on the kind of bonds that you had with the participants. I think with the other two, I think it would be a downward curve from here. For the one friend of mine, it could probably be much more flat out relationship.

Stevens, although he had appreciated Sehlola invitation to dinner as a token of his appreciation, had not expected any continuity, "to me it doesn't really matter, if the researcher feels it is finished and is done with me, fine... the person is not under any obligation to contact me afterwards." Billana, on the other hand, thought that both closure and continuity were important.

B: I think closure is fine, it is a closed book now.

Y: is it important for you to have a closure?

B: Yes, it is important because you become part of the research, that research becomes one of your activities. Like myself, usually, if I do a project I want to know where it ends, whether good or bad, but I must know the project was successful or not successful because of the following reason, therefore it is important.

Y: How important is it to continue the relationship or the conversation in any way?

B: According to me it is very important because it gives a researcher a chance to know the participant in more than one way, because if I am participating in your research, I participate as a person and you don't know who I am, you won't have the perspective on some of the answers that I am giving you. I think it is important that there should be that relationship that you will be able to put some of the things that I say into perspective.

He even expanded on this statement to indicate that friendship always comes into play in research because "before you became a participant in a research, I am first a human being, I am first a person, that should not be taken out of the research itself, you should not see a participant as an object from which you get information, you should consider other factors, like those personal aspects."

Looking back on his relationship with Stevens, Sehlola provided more details about the possible influence of the friendship on this research study.



(Do you think friendship is necessary in a research?) No, I don't think it is necessary. I think I had good data, some of the quality data from the other two as well. It does not affect the data at all, it just eased the availability of the participants (refer to Stevens), easier to get to him, easier to phone him and said how things are going and can we get together tomorrow, but not really in terms of the quality of the data. In terms of what he said, I think whether he wasn't a friend of mine, he will still do the same... the fact I was friend with one participant, not so friend with the others, in terms of close emotional relationship, does not affect the level that we are engaged... I think it depends lots on the attitude and approach of the researcher, and I think that I have the communication style and interview style that let people feel comfortable. During the session I can feel that we are talking friendly, not intimidating. I think for me, that was important. Whether it is the friend of mine, or whether for the other two, which was just more theoretic thing or more official research agreement, I think that really did not influence the quality and nature of the responses that I got, the data I got. I think the fact that I was friend of one just made the communication in terms of making appointment, in terms of getting better access, it was just better with him, because we had this emotional thing...in a research, the field-ship is sufficient to let everything go on... but I must point out, I think it depends a lot on the way the researcher approaches, and his ability to make the participant to feel safe. I don't think all the researchers had got that natural ability to let people feel comfortable, that this is not an exercise, not something authority, that I am the one that has expert knowledge, that you are the one should learn from me. I think it takes certain tactic, it takes certain personality (laugh) to understand that."

Yet, as much as he revelled in the above quote that friendship had not influenced his data he was still opposed to the notion of friendship in research.

I think the risk of friendship is that you stand the risk of losing some of the objectivity... I think that one can lose some objectivity in how you interpret the data, if you get too emotional tied up with your participants. I think there must be some level of distance, look at my friend, we got this emotional connection, but I think we shouldn't get too much involved.

Detecting a contradiction, I followed up again on this topic in my second interview with him.

N: I think generally speaking, that if you are too close to your participants, you know the possibility does exist that you are not honest as researcher about things, that data analysis, interpretation that could put the participants or your friends in a suspicious or bad light. You might be intended to hide or to manipulate or to ignore incidents that illustrate things which are not encouraging or not complementing the participant, or you might be tempted to enlarge, to eliminate only those things that complement.

Y: but you said that it didn't happen in your case?

N: no, I would say no. Because I wasn't too close, I was close but not too close. If you read the thesis, and I must be honest with you, I don't think that I painted a better picture of him.

Y: but why you think some people might do it?

N: that's human nature.

Y: why?

N: I think the stakes aren't so high then for you to do that. I think ones' chances of been honest and sincere about the data is much more positive, without that emotional content with your participant.

...

N: I think for me it is better not to be too friendly with the participants. But with that I would also add that the researcher and the ability of the researcher, you need to be honest with yourself, that this friendship is not going to in any way change my line of questioning or change my lens of understanding what the participant is doing or thinking. If the person can to do that self analysis (looking a bit tired) and find themselves to be a person of sound conscious



and objectivity, and if the researcher can make that explicit in her write up, I wouldn't completely converse to that. So mine is not a definite all encompassing no to a close friendship between the participant and the researcher, I reiterate and I think for me generally it is better that it is not.

Y: is it safer?

N: it is safer, for me it makes more sense, the tendency or the probability of more valid and reliable data is greater. But I am sure that there is scope and opportunity for researchers who are able to be honest and forthright to do that, with close friends. I think the main thing is for you to make this friendship with the participants clear in your write-up.

I also asked Stevens whether the friendship with Sehlola had influenced his responses, and he stated that he would not have given a different answer had Sehlola not been his friend.

### 5.3.3 Evaluation of the relationship

Despite some dissatisfaction and hiccups all three rated the researcher–practitioner relationship as positive.

I think it went quite well...if you talk about tension, no, I never had such tensions and experiences. So I think it was quite a good experience for both participants... you knew exactly what the dynamics are in school and what kind of the problems you will encounter with the school teachers, that they were not always going to be available, sometimes I have made appointments with them, and the soccer competition is coming up, or at the end of the month I need to cash my cheque, that sort of things. It was expected. So yes it did happen, but that was overshadowed completely by the substantive contribution that they made, by the expressiveness, by the responsiveness to the questions, to the interviews, by the willingness to be interviewed, the willingness to be observed in the class, even the times when it didn't go well with the lessons. So that was completely overwhelmed by the few times that Stevens was not available or Billana couldn't make it when I planed to meet them there. So, yes there were hiccups, but that was expected, and they did not detract from the quality of data... They lived up to my expectations in the sense of their commitment to the process, in the sense of their contribution to the data. In that sense, yes they lived up to my expectations...I think I was realistic, and they meet those realistic expectations. (Sehlola)

(So how do you in general find him as a researcher)? He is quite enthusiastic, he impressed me at times, he would, like I heard from his wife that he would wake up or just pick the phone at 9 pm and say I am going to Stevens. In that way he quite lived himself into this research and that is something I learned about Sehlola. I would sometimes look at him and say this guy is really eager, he enjoys what he is doing, and that I really learned something from him. He is really serious about this research. And he enjoyed himself, he lived himself into it, that is something I learned form him. (In way he also inspired you?) Yes, very much, very much. Like I said, I learned something about him that I never knew. (Stevens)

I think then the relationship was good, even now I would still regard it to be not bad, because if I call him, then he is still the same Sehlola that I knew then. Only that now it is a bit distant now, the frequency is no more there... As a researcher I would say that he was passionate, and then he did his homework. He knew what he wanted out of you and he made sure that he milk you as much as possible (laugh). My impression of him as a researcher, I think he is good, because he will be able to keep his appointments, and then if he can not make it, he will phone and say I can not make it. And that's what you need. (Billana)



## 5.4 *Synthesis*

### 5.4.1 A brief summary of the cases

#### 5.4.1.1 Francis

Francis claimed that theory contribution was the motive behind conducting the research for her dissertation, yet her interview had revealed that she had never considered publication. She claimed in the dissertation that practical consideration was as an indirect and secondary contribution, but her interview had revealed that this was indeed her main motivation for doing the research.

Francis suspected that interest in the research topic could have motivated her participants to participate. Both of her participants agreed that they had been interested in her topic, however there were indications that helping the researcher had been a stronger factor in their motivation. Both participants claimed that they had not anticipated any benefit from participation, although, in retrospect, the way in which the research had been conducted and the experiences shared in the focus group could certainly count as a practical benefit.

Francis's major concerns regarding her responsibility towards the participants was confidentiality and providing feedback. Whilst providing feedback was also appreciated by both participants, they regarded issues other than confidentiality as more important, for instance, accuracy in portraying them and an acknowledgment of their contribution. It was also interesting that Francis's own understanding of confidentiality was characterised by "I do not think that they would have minded", "I never asked them", and "for the sake of me feeling ok about it", in other words, she focused more on satisfying her own understanding of professionalism rather than on respect for the preferences of her participants.

As for the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher, the researcher highlighted openness and honesty on the part of the participants; while both participants pointed to practical issues, such as being available and adhering to the commitment.

These two participants had not known the researcher personally prior to the study, and they expressed appreciation of Francis's effort to contact them beforehand, to provide relevant information about the study and to share her expectations of the participants. Francis described her involvement in the data collection as



limited, and attributed this low level of involvement to the method used in her study (focus group) and her understanding of bias. Consequently, the researcher-participant relationship in this research was described by both the researcher and her participants as merely research based. According to all three, although friendliness in the process was important, friendship itself was not necessary and could instead constitute a danger.

Francis sent out themes she had identified from the focus group discussion to her participants after the data had been collected, and this was highly appreciated by her participants. She herself, on the other hand, also showed great appreciation of the way in which the participants had taken time to comment on the themes.

In terms of closure or continuity, Francis herself, as the researcher, preferred closure for this study. One of her participants revealed a similar preference, citing reasons of a busy schedule and motivation of participation had been mainly to help the researcher. The other participant expressed a preference for both closure (the project had achieved its aim) and continuity (continuous provision of updates on the research etc).

#### 5.4.1.2 Thabo & De Beer

Thabo's initial involvement in De Beer's study had been to assist her. However, during the process, he had become interested in the different ways in which the participants had reacted to both he and De Beer and had decided to use the same participants and the same data in order to pursue his own research. He claimed that his topic was methodologically sensitive, and for this reason, he had not disclosed the intention of his research to the participants, even after the data collection was completed.

It was not only the intertwined nature of the two studies in this case, but also Thabo's many contradictions that made this case interesting. As the key question guiding his study had been the way in which sensitive cultural background could influence interviewing data and he had also clearly recognised that the participants should be "given the same status (as the researchers) as they both influence the data being generated (2004, p. 50)," my initial expectation had been that he would be sensitive to the researcher-practitioner relationship. Yet throughout his interview, despite his claims about the efforts he had made to go the extra mile for the participants, I could not find any concrete proof of this. He also repeatedly emphasised that it was De Beer, and not him, who was the face of the research, therefore she carried the



greater responsibility in the research. In fact, using the words of one participant, he basically disappeared after data collection. His stated reason that his study was methodologically sensitive did not provide an explanation for why he had never disclosed his research intentions to the participants, even after the data collection had been completed. In addition, he had also not acknowledged any of the participants in his acknowledgments (explained in more detail in Chapter 7).

De Beer had always had a dual aim – to contribute to theory and also to provide practical benefit to her participants. Interestingly, however, although she highlighted her practical concern repeatedly in her interview, besides asking what she could do for the participants at the end of the interviews, she stated that “change them or try to let them improve is not very specifically my intention. It just happened in some instances.” Thabo’s research topic implied that his study was the theory-contribution-only type. However he also claimed in his interview that researchers in theory-only type research should still try to provide some practical benefit.

De Beer speculated on several possibilities as to why her participants had participated – including interest in the topic and that it was inherent in the nature of teachers to help. Thabo suggested that, in one particular instance, the reason for participation could have been that the participant had expected some benefit and that help would be provided by the researchers – this was confirmed by that particular practitioner. Two participants expressed that benefit to the children was their most important motivation for participation, whilst helping the researcher was also mentioned as incentives to participate.

Two participants had not expected any personal benefit from their participation, while the other expressed a strong anticipation of receiving constructive feedback for his own growth purposes. In retrospect, one participant pointed to the enlightenment effect of the research, while the other two stated that if the research result were shared (which had not happened by the time of my interviews with them), benefits might accrue.

De Beer’s main concern regarding her responsibility towards the participants was that of confidentiality at the basic level and an acknowledgment of the value of participation at a higher level. Thabo was of the opinion that De Beer had more responsibility than he did in this research because of their different roles in the research. Therefore for him the major concern was more on the practical side, mainly, in respect of





keeping appointments. One participant regarded feedback as the primary responsibility of a researcher, while the other two listed respect from the researcher as a priority.

As regards the issue of confidentiality, two participants were not of the opinion that confidentiality mattered unless the research topic was personal; whilst the other participant expressed his preference for concealing his identity in the research report, quoting as his reasons the circumstance prevailing in the education system. All three manifested a similar understanding of the responsibility of the participant towards the researcher, namely, honesty and availability.

De Beer had not known any of the participants prior to the data collection; however, she had not experienced either deliberate blocking on the part of the principals nor strong resistance from the teachers.

The dual aim which De Beer had recognised resulted in the dual role that she experienced – as a researcher and a psychologist. She revealed that detachment had been more prominent in her observations, and involvement in her interviews. For fear of influencing the data, she had provided her participants with feedback or suggestions about a possible way forward only after the data had been collected.

She had noticed that experienced teachers were usually not concerned about her presence in their classrooms, while it was the less experienced teachers who would often come to her and ask for her opinions about the class and for advice. In such cases she had provided only positive feedbacks – reassuring them of what they were doing right. Inquiries to all three of her participants, on the other hand, revealed that such a strategy might have been somewhat extreme since all three actually stated that they did not mind criticism, so long as it was delivered with a positive attitude and in a constructive way.

De Beer classified the researcher–practitioner relationship in her study as research based with a mixture of formal and informal elements, as did Thabo. The participants had also viewed the process as friendly research based research combining both formal and informal elements. All the participants expressed their preference for the element of friendliness to be present in the way in which the researchers engaged with them.

Both De Beer and Thabo opposed the involvement of friendship for fear that friendship could jeopardise the data, while the participants expressed the opinion that friendship could either enhance spontaneity with the

result that expression could be freer or it could indeed result in more comprehensive responses.

After data collection, De Beer and Thabo held a session specifically to thank the participants – a gesture which was greatly appreciated by the participants. Together with gifts De Beer also gave her contact details to the participants so that, if they so wished, they could request the research findings. However, although two participants whom I interviewed expressed their interest in the findings, they had never initiated the process of asking for them.

De Beer had contacted one of the three participants several times after the data collection (although not the other two) and expressed her concern that continuing a relationship with all the participants would not be feasible. Thabo's view was that research was a contract and that the contract ended when the research finished. Two of the participants also expressed their preference for closure, echoing their preference for a research-based relationship, while the third participant would have preferred more continuity, particularly on a personal level.

I did not specifically bring up the issue of research with a hidden agenda to the participants, although I did attempt a general exploration of their perceptions of this issue. One participant did not mind, while the other two, one because "me as a adult needs to be provided with full information" and the other more out of his strong preference of transparency, opposed the suggestion that a hidden agenda might be the only way in which certain research could proceed.

#### 5.4.1.3 Sehlola

Sehlola stated unequivocally his aim of theory-contribution only. This, according to him, had resulted not only from the influence from his supervisor and his own personal ambition to advance knowledge, but also from a practical consideration that he did not wish to complicate further the already complicated situations his participants faced by trying to change them or to improve their teaching practice.

Interestingly however, although he did not aim for improvement or change, he was of the opinion that his participants had learned something, particular in terms of their teaching practice, from their participation, and he regarded this expectation of learning as the most likely motivation for their participation. One participant acknowledged this knowledge gain, while both participants pointed more to learning in terms of



the way in which to conduct research, and not to teaching per se. The real motive for their participation, according to one of the participants, was both to help the researcher as a friend and because of his moral obligation to assist any educational research; while, for the other participant, his main motivation was to help the researcher.

Sehlola's main concern regarding his responsibility towards his participants was that of confidentiality, whilst, on the other hand, both of his participants did not think that the researchers had any responsibility towards them. When I probed the importance of the issue of confidentiality with his participants, one regarded it as necessary, specifically because he had been promoted and his image (particularly the negative aspect) needed to be protected; but otherwise, he did not feel it would have mattered. Similarly, the other participant would not have minded had his identity been revealed. The researcher's main concern about the responsibilities of the participants was the fulfilment of their commitment to the research and honesty, whilst the issue of practical commitment only was echoed by the participants.

The difficulty he had experienced in securing participants was one of the salient reflections in Sehlola's dissertation and in his interviews. Interestingly, his perception of the role of the principal role to protect his teachers by blocking the access of researcher was interpreted by one of the participant as the way in a trusted agency guarded them from *harm*.

Sehlola regarded their researcher–practitioner relationship as primarily research-based. However, because of the long term engagement nature of his study, friendship seemed inevitable. This, combined with the fact that certain research activities had taken place in the participants' homes, seemed to have further created the necessity to extend the research-based relationship to include a greater element of friendship, and it appear that Sehlola had not met the expectations which had been created.

After the data collection a degree of interaction between Sehlola and his friend had taken place, mostly as a family bond; while, in the case of the participant who had not been a friend of his, few contacts were reported. Sehlola thought that it would have been appropriate to continue the relationship after data collection, although he himself had not attended to this retreat issue seriously. Interestingly also was the fact that, although there had been continuity with his friend, his friend had not expect this, while the non-friend had expressed a preference for some continuity, but this had not happened.

#### **5.4.2 Similarities and dissonances between the cases**

All three authors claimed in their dissertations that theory contribution had been the main aim of their research, yet, as the interviews had revealed, in some cases this had been accurate (Thabo and Sehlola), while in other cases it had not been accurate (Francis). All researchers had also shown a strikingly similarity in terms of their understanding of confidentiality as their main responsibility towards their participants and also in terms of their opposition to the involvement of friendship in research.

However, of the three cases, Sehlola was the only researcher to have experienced negative gate keeping and a lack of interest on the part of the teachers in participating. While Francis might have benefited from her connections with her participants (not personally, but through the involvement of her supervisor in the project), it is surprising that De Beer had followed the normal accessing channels, and had not had any negative experiences in terms of accessing.

Sehlola was also the only researcher who had had a prior relationship with one of his participants. Although this relationship had been discovered accidentally, the difference between his relationship with this participant and with the other participant with whom he had not had a prior acquaintance manifested in many of the interesting ways in which the researcher-participant relationship developed and was perceived.

The researcher–practitioner relationship during data collections was similar in all the cases, with both formal and informal elements often exhibiting in the course of the research. A friendly research based relationship resulted and was preferred by both the researchers and the participants.

Retreat from the field did not seem to be attended to very seriously in all cases, as most relationships simply ended when data collection had finished. Feedbacks and an expression of thanks took place in some instances.

#### **5.4.3 Similarities and dissonances between the researchers and the practitioners**

To summarise of the similarities between the researchers and their participants:

- Providing feedback was recognised by certain researchers as their responsibility (Francis, De Beer), while the reactions from their respective participants in respect of feedback also suggested that they



also regarded this issue as both necessary and important;

- The views of the researchers and their participants on the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher seemed to be similar – either about honesty and openness or a realisation of the commitment to the research (be available, be on time etc);
- Almost all the researchers and their participants had regarded their relationship during the course of the research as friendly research-based, often both formal and informal; and most of them also indicated their preference for such relationship;
- Most of the researchers and their participants expressed their preference for closure after the research finished, while continuity was preferred mainly in the sense of providing feedback;
- Despite some dissatisfaction or suggestions of ways in which the research process could have been improved, all researchers and their participants viewed the researcher-participant relationship they had experienced in a positive light.

On the other hand, there is also clearly some dissonance between these two groups, including the following:

- Most of the researchers suspected that the motivation for participation was due to the interest of the participants in the research topic (Francis, De Beer) or expected benefits (in terms of knowledge gain in Sehlola's case or other practical benefit as in Thabo's case). While it would appear that both these had played a role, the notion of *help the researcher* dominated the reasons stated by the participants as to why they had participated. Also significant was the fact that, probably because the participants had perceived their participation as helping the researcher, they had often not expected personal benefits.
- Confidentiality was highlighted by most researchers as a fundamental responsibility of a researcher towards his/her participants; yet, with few exceptions, the majority of the participants had not regarded the concealing of identity as necessary;
- With the exception of De Beer no other researchers had mentioned acknowledgement or providing credibility to the participants as their responsibility; while, for the participants, many regarded it as, at least, as something pleasant, while others pointed to it as important;
- All the researchers regarded the role of friendship in a research situation as negative, mainly out of concern for bias; yet most participants (excluding those who were researchers themselves) thought otherwise.

#### **5.4.4 Difference between the written text and oral relevance**

The data from the interviews showed that conclusions reached solely on the basis of written accounts could be limited and, sometimes, even misleading because text is written with a certain audience in mind. In the



case of the dissertation, the expectation is that the audience will consist of supervisors and other academics, hence the purpose of conducting research was often said to be a contribution to theory, complying with the normal academic discourse. However, this process could sometimes lead to a loss of true intentions.

For example, in her dissertation Francis claimed that the main intention of her study was to contribute to the body of knowledge and she had cited the practical contribution as an indirect motivation, yet her interviews had revealed that practical concern was actually “that for me was really big enough” and, in fact, she had never thought about publishing – an essential element of theory contribution. Even her practical concern did not involve a contribution to the improvement of the practical situation, but indeed towards the development of a Masters course. Likewise, although Thabo’s topic and the writing in his dissertation both suggested a moderate level of sensitivity to the researcher–practitioner relationship, his interviews conveyed a totally different impression. Sehlola’s lack of attention to the issue of retreat from the field, particularly in the case of the participant with whom he had not had a prior acquaintance, also did not accord well with his relatively high level of sensitivity to the researcher–practitioner relationship.

The inclusion of interview data to supplement the written text also showed that what was revealed in the interviews could often provide more vivid and detailed information which would not always have been found/understood in the written document. Francis’s case is a good illustration of this as her case had been classified in category I mainly because of the limited information revealed in her dissertation. Yet her own understanding as revealed in the interview was that the method she had used (focus group) had been the main reason for her limited engagement. This would not have come into light in a review of her dissertation only.

#### **5.4.5 Tackle the other puzzles**

Did the limited description of the researcher–practitioner relationship and self-reflection result from the researchers’ limited understanding or from a deliberate choice to leave such description out due to their peripheral role to the study? The latter certainly would have contributed to the limited descriptions, yet the contradictions detected in the perceptions of the researchers, such as De Beer’s high level of concern for practical benefit, and yet “change them or try to let them improve is not very specifically my intention. It just happened in some instances”, or the contradictions detected between the researcher’s perception and



actions, as in Sehlola' case because, despite his words "it is decent to continue the relationship after fieldwork", he did not appear to have paid serious attention to the issue, could suggest that the understanding of the researcher–practitioner relationship was indeed limited.

Yet what remained puzzling is the fact that, if academics were expected to make up the audience for the dissertation, why were descriptions and reflections about the researcher–practitioner relationship, which would seem more relevant for this type of audience than for any other type, often not paid serious attention. Furthermore, why did the call for qualitative study to be more transparent, and the presentation of more relevant details of what the researcher did and why he/she had chosen to act in that particular way, not seem to exert any influence on the novice researchers who had specifically followed the qualitative paradigm.

Why did all those researchers who had showed a relatively deep understanding of the researcher–practitioner relationship (category III) aim their dissertations at the advancement of knowledge only; while those who had claimed the dual aims of research did not manifest much understanding? Based on Sehlola' understanding I would like to propose the following explanations:

- The influence of their supervisors could be one reason;
- If one bears in mind that all the category III studies were PhD studies and that the majority of PhD students wish to advance further in academia, one could reasonably expect the stronger presence of the academic discourse (in terms of the emphasis on theory contribution, new knowledge, etc); while, at Masters' level, the influence of the academic discourse may be less powerful. In addition, since many of the Masters students were also teachers themselves, the focus on a practical topic from the standpoint of their own situations, could also explain their specific attention to this practical dimension of research.

## 5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter provides a detail description of three student-researcher cases from the perspectives of both the original researchers and their original participants.

The main aim of providing this detailed description, sometimes resulting in long quotes, was not only to allow the data speak for itself<sup>30</sup>, but also to provide a record of what had been said, what the reactions had

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<sup>30</sup> My own role (my own voice) there was more of a presenter who made sure that the transition from one piece to another was smooth.

been, what the follow ups were and how conclusions had been drawn.

The chapter then provided an analysis in the form of a synthesis in order to explore the similarities and dissonances between the cases, between the researchers and the practitioners, as well as between the written text and the oral relevance of the written texts. Lastly, explanations for the other puzzles which had emerged in Chapter 4 were proposed.





## **6 HOW EXPERIENCED RESEARCHERS AND THEIR PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP**

This chapter continues with the detailed descriptions of the cases of two experienced-researchers. This description will be followed by a synthesis which will analyse the similarities and differences between these two cases, between the researchers and the practitioners, as well between these experienced researchers and their student-researcher counterparts.

### ***6.1 Case 4: Hendricks—Examining causes of discipline problems in a South African boarding school***

Hendricks’s study examined the possible causes of the disciplinary problems experienced in a boarding school. This study was initiated on a request from the school for assistance as they had been experiencing serious problems with discipline. After several talks with the principal, Hendricks went to the school in late 2004 and spent one day on data collection, during which he interviewed the principal, the School Management Team (SMT) as a focus group and other teachers as another focus group. He also administered an open-ended questionnaire to all the Grade 8 and 9 students at the time, as well as the students’ representative council members. The questionnaire was also accompanied by a suggestion to the students to draw a picture of their perceptions of the school and also a discussion with those who expressed such a wish.

After the completion of his PhD with UP in 1994, Hendricks had been a senior lecturer in the university for many years. He had taught educational management courses. As was later revealed by the principal of the boarding school (Van Wyk), he met Hendricks a few times at the principal meetings. At the time, Van Wyk had also been considering “enroll(ing) at the university (UP) for a Masters degree in education” and Hendricks had been the contact person for the study. Besides Van Wyk, the other original participant included in the interviews for this study had been Tilley, a member from the SMT.

#### **6.1.1 Researcher/practitioner context**

According to Hendricks, the main aim of the study was that “I was interested at discipline at that stage in



general, and I also wanted to help the school, so for me, it was a research one, but it was also a practical one, to get into school and try to improve the situation for them”. Publication had been a consideration of his from the very beginning, “that was the agreement with them from the start”. The aim of this publication was both to contribute to knowledge, “because there is little, not much written about the discipline currently in South Africa”, and also when the research report is published, qualify for a subsidy for publication as the research system in South Africa worked.<sup>31</sup>

Since it was the school that had approached Hendricks for the study, their motivation was rather more straightforward.

They thought there are problems and they needed help. (Hendricks)

To find answers. To find an answer how can we deal with discipline... some educators are not sure how to handle the situation in class. They can not handle the situation on their own, they must get somebody involved to come and handle the problem for them. So the idea was to find an answer on how can we empower the educator to be able to handle the situation in class, so that they can as a whole improve the discipline at school (Van Wyk).

To be able to use the findings (Tilley).

The intention of benefiting the school by solving the disciplinary problems had been obvious to both participants, although they had both also had personal benefit or learning in mind.

You are going to learn out of it anyway, you are going to get a different perspective on what you are doing, and it is always good to see what you are doing from a different side, by getting other people to come and be involved, it is always a learning process. (So your personal benefit is one of your concerns to decide whether to participate or not?) You are looking at what value that research has for you as a school. If it is a research but it is not going to add value to the institution, I don't see the necessity to get involved in it (Van Wyk).

(What about your personal benefit?) Obviously yes, from everything you can always benefit. You can learn something from whatever it is. I feel that anything you do extra as a person is a learning experience, whether you are forced to do, whether you do it willingly, there is always something to learn (Tilley).

Hendricks also referred to their concern for the school and their intention to improve the situation.

(So in a way their reason could be because they are concerned about the situation?) Definitely, I did pick it up,

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<sup>31</sup> The South African government subsidises research publication in accredited journals. When a lecturer affiliated with a university publishes a paper, the university receives a certain amount of the subsidy; then, according to the policies of each university, the faculty, department and the author all receive a share. The money received by the author could be used to finance a conference or other research activities. Since this money was, according to some lecturers, one of the major sources used to finance their research activities, publication in accredited journals was a common motivation for conducting research.



especially the teachers who I interviewed, that was after normal school hours and all of them were there and I could pick up from their discussions that they were concerned about their own classroom and the school in general. They were worried about the school.

Consequently, Hendricks saw providing the teachers with feedback as his main responsibility. Tilley also viewed feedback as one of the main responsibilities of a researcher.

There is no point of doing a research and not coming back to the people, reporting back the findings and providing guidance, otherwise the research would be useless. Although it is more work to them (refer to researchers), I think it is important, then you know where you stand. If they come back to you and told you what happen, then you know where to go from, otherwise you never know whether you are right or wrong. Besides that, I don't think they have other responsibilities.

Van Wyk also thought that providing feedback was important, although the way in which the researchers dealt with the data, as well as giving credit to valuable input, was also important to him.

Y: do you think that researchers have any responsibility towards you?

V: the way in which they deal with your data and information should be their responsibility. For instances, they are doing research on discipline, and *they might find things that are negative, they can not go and tell everybody else, this is such a terrible school*. So I think that responsibility, I wouldn't say confidentiality, but it is sort of ethics. And also the responsibility of giving credit to people, if they find this teacher is doing an excellent job by a new method or different approach, then they should give that person the credit and not take that credit themselves.

Y: what about providing feedback?

V: yes, I think that is also their responsibility. To come back and say this is how we see the situation.

Y: if they do not do that?

V: it might be a problem because you have done something and you don't know what happen to it. Any person I think would need feedback, in the end on what is found, what are the findings after the study (emphasis added, analyse of this emphasis is presented later on).

To what extent were their expectation realised? According to both Hendricks and the participants, they received both feedback and the findings, in which Hendricks stated the possible causes for their disciplinary problems as concluded from the data. However, although Hendricks had expected that "after offering my initial report, they would really go for it and let me work with them for a time. And they didn't, that didn't realise so far."

Van Wyk acknowledged that "the researcher helps to form a better understanding of the whole situation", but he did not equate this with meeting his expectations. In fact he stated "I think it might be an unrealistic expectation to get an answer to something like discipline", and went on to elaborate:

I don't think that we really got answers that we wanted. (What do you think are the reasons that you did not get



the answer, is it because the way the study was done or the findings or?) I think that was too theoretical, the whole study. I also read the report that was published. Theory on that side showing something, but practical to the classroom situation was not there. That I think was lacking, in the sense that you need to get the answers. If we request a research, we need to get answers.

Tilley's answer seemed to reveal an avoidance of revealing her personal reactions to the feedbacks.

We had feedback ... The principal distributed it and called us and told us about the information and findings. (What do you think of the findings in general?) The finding itself, it is a very individual thing, some people tried and some people did not try, I don't think there is always a positive change from everybody ... There was some negative feelings, at that point, it also had some influence.

What is also significant is when asked to explain the reason for non-utilisation of the research findings from this study, Van Wyk attributed mainly to the lack of practical guidance in the research findings, while Tilley pointed out the negativity of the report as another possible reason. Hendricks agreed with the argument about the negativity of the report and further acknowledged that the writing style of the report and the way in which the report had been delivered could also have contributed to the research finding<sup>32</sup> being rejected.

Maybe the first report was too blunt, too direct to the point, that might an effect later on, because I did mention that the teachers were blamed by the children and the principal was also specifically named, so that was too open, too blunt. That might a problem from my side.

However, as much as Hendricks suspected that the reason why the school had not come back to him was that:

I believe that the principal and the people who read the report maybe were becoming scared of something might be coming out, something that maybe implicated that they are the reasons, not the children that they put to me from the start, then they thought, no, let's rather leave it. That was my impression ... I believe at this stage it is the principal who stopped the process, because especially some of the children and some of the teachers implicated that the principal was one of the reasons for disciplinary problem in the school. My feeling is that the principal just decided to let this thing die quietly.

When I asked specifically whether the negativity may have played a role, Van Wyk continued to dismiss this claim, but highlighted the lack of practical suggestions as the reason why the research findings had not been useful.

V: there was some negative comment.

Y: but the reason why that did not go to the classroom is not because of the negative side?

V: no, not really. Actually you needed to say these are the alternatives.

Y: so you think that is lacking.

V: yes. I think that needs to be added to. If you criticise, that is fine, but then you need to take it forward, when



you criticise, you also need to provide guidance, you need to look at this, and that. To improve on.

He also mentioned on another occasion that the fact that the researcher had not spent sufficient time at the school could also have contributed to a lack of understanding of the situation and, consequently, to the lack of useful, practical suggestions.

Y: You are saying that they [researchers] are not spending enough time?

V: yes, you must spend time here, you can't come and spend a day and talk to the learners and get the impression of what is happening. I think you should be here a lot more, more than that, and you should also be looking at why certain things are happening. For example, the discipline research done in our school [refer to Hendricks's study], it was a day spent here, chatting with the educators and the learners, and there was no real understanding of why discipline is a problem, why learners behave in a certain way, why educators behave in a certain way.

Y: and you think by spending more time and having more interactions would help that situation?

V: I think it would give a better understanding of the situation. Because you need to see what is the reality basically.

As far as the responsibility of participants towards the researcher was concerned, Hendricks did not think that the participants had any responsibility towards him. Both Van Wyk and Tilley regarded honesty as the main responsibility of a participant.

One of the responsibilities is to be honest, don't portray anything or say anything that you do not mean, that is not the truth. (They won't be able to tell (joking tone).) Yes, but then you are misleading the person. You would know whether it is true or not. (Van Wyk)

Obviously, you have to be honest, because their findings are going to be based on what you said, so you need to be quite honest with them and to give them the correct information, so they can build on it. (Tilley)

Besides honesty, Van Wyk also regarded objectivity, "to recognise things that are wrong, and insist on finding solutions" as another difficult, but necessary, responsibility of a participant.

### **6.1.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship**

The principal had clearly played an important role in this study. He was the main motivation for the project, and it was also he who had contacted Hendricks "and discussed the issues with me". The principal had not only been Hendricks's first contact, but also most of the subsequent contacts. In fact, "he was the only person that I have contact with".

As indicated earlier, Hendricks had known the principal prior to the project, although not well. On the day

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<sup>32</sup> Since I was personally involved in preparation of this report more detail and reflection will be revealed in Chapter 7.



of the data collection, Hendricks had “arrived in the morning in the school and I discussed it with them [teachers] and said this is what I want to do and this is what we agreed with the principal, are they willing?...Everybody who was at the school at the day, the SMT, and the teachers, all of them attended.” So, although Tilley, and indeed all the other teachers, had not been personally contacted by Hendricks prior to that day, Tilley understood it as “we knew that he would come and address us and listen to us. So we knew that he would come.” So “from that point of view, he contacted”.

Both participants regarded it necessary that the researcher approach with a letter introducing him/her – from either the department of education, the university at which the researcher was registered, or from somebody whom they knew.

If you get a letter of introduction, whether it is from the university or education department, at least you know this person is not coming to fish about things. I think there should be some sort of letter to identify the person and to introduce the study. (Van Wyk)

If it is a school situation like this, normally a certain route has to be followed, so it is normal that it would go to the principal, he would need to give permission for everything that takes place here. I don't mind if somebody approaches me directly, but if it is a situation in school, I would like to have the proper channel to be followed. (Tilley)

Hendricks described the relationship which had evolved in this study as research-based, “but I tried to make it friendship, that I am with them, I am there to listen to them and try to help them. So in that sense friendship support, not just coming there as an outsider, just to look at them and then go away. My idea was right from the start, friendship supportive one.” In order to create an environment of trust, his strategy had been “I first talked in general a little bit about them, shared a few ideas which I saw at the school, share something about myself and my experience”. In Hendricks's own words, it had been “more informal, just to create an informal kind of environment, a relaxed environment before I started with the interviews.”

Tilley also described the relationship as mainly research-based, and stated that this was what she had preferred in this specific research, although she also would also have preferred an element of friendliness.

Y: if you describe the relationship, would you say that it is mainly research-based or has some friendship involved?

T: I think it was professional.

Y: and you like that kind of relationship?

T: in that situation, yes.



Y: would you like to have a bit more friendliness or friendship?

T: not in that situation. I think the person is professional, to do the job and get it done are more than enough.

Y: for this professional based, would you also like the person to create some kind of environment to make you at ease?

T: I think he did, because he is quite a person that you can easily open to and talk to, he got that part of personality.

Y: does that kind of element need to be there?

T: yes, you have to trust the person, it is very easy for you to get into a room and there is a person there, and you just don't feel like talking to him. I think he's got it, the people tend to listen to him and also to speak up.

Y: so you are saying you don't think friendship is necessary but friendliness needs to be there?

T: yes.

Van Wyk manifested a similar understanding of the relationship and also voiced the same preference.

Y: if you need to describe that relationship, is it research-based only or more friendship or friendliness involved?

V: I think it is not only research based, it was a bit of, I don't know whether friendship is the right word, maybe friendliness is better.

Y: there was a relaxed environment around?

V: yes.

Y: so that is what you mean by friendliness?

V: yes.

Y: let's say if you can choose a certain type of the relationship, which type you would prefer, one is totally research-based or one with more friendliness?

V: I think more of a friendliness type of approach, because you feel more comfortable dealing with the person that way, the guy coming to sit down and do research, a, b, c, nothing else, I don't think the link is there. I prefer to be able to talk to a person.

Van Wyk also pointed specifically to the link between this preference and the field of education itself, that "in research, specifically in the educational field, you need a bit more of a human link." He also expressed a preference for two-way communication.

I think it would benefit if it were more like a two-way communication. But I think that should be done after the initial study has been done, to come back and say let us have an interaction on this, this is the problem you experiencing, and this is the solution or possible solutions, or can we approach it this way. If the study had been done and we had identified the problem, then I think there should be a discussion around that, with the people involved, say let's try a different approach and see what would happen. In the initial research, it is basically to find facts, because you are going to find out what is the situation, and you want to redo the situation, and find out what are the problems and so on, therefore you are going to ask a lot of questions. But after you have identified the situation and analysis, you will go from there and you are going to see what are the possible things that you can implement to change, or you can say let's implement something here and see what is going to be the responses. Then you would get more conversation come in ... I understand why sometimes they [the researchers] are not drawn into giving their opinions, but again, you need to give a better guidance and better moral support to the person that you are interacting with ... I think they can say at least, perhaps in the initial questioning, can I give you my opinion later, can we deal with that later, arrange another time.



Since the friendship to which Hendricks had referred in his earlier quote seemed more like friendliness, I specifically probed all three regarding their views of friendship and its possible influence on responses from the participants.

Hendricks was of the opinion that for topics that involved emotions, such as his, friendship was necessary, but went on to say “it is a very fine line, sometimes if you have too much knowledge previously, too much contact with the person outside, it might also revert the situation...People will think that there are things that I want to say which may damage our friendship in the future, or something like that, or this person might be then put in the position that might be too powerful, that I don't want to share information with that person. So sometimes more objectivity, just come in to do the interview, in a comfortable situation, but then don't contact the person anymore, I am not going to see this person again, you might share more sometimes than you would share with the person with a close relationship.”

Van Wyk thought that:

Y: If he had been your friend, or you had known him for some time or had other kinds of connections, do you think that your response or reaction could be different?

V: No, I don't think so. I don't think the friendship would influence the response, because you look at the reality and you respond according to that.

Y: So you are saying that friendship does not necessarily play a negative role there?

V: No, it should not, if both parties have been honest and sincere about the research, I don't think friendship could be a problem.

Y: Some people say that if you are friends, then there are more stakes to what you say and that might make you hesitate or think twice of what you would say.

V: I don't think so. It depends again on the trust that is there between the respondent and the researcher, that is how the researcher would come in asking the questions, and I think it would be more of an open relationship. Friendliness would also come through there.

Tilley had first indicated that friendship could be dangerous, but, when I asked her to explain this in the context of possible scenarios, she had changed her viewpoint.

Y: If you had known him [Hendricks], do you think your reaction could be different?

T: I think so, yes. It is sometimes easy to talk to somebody that you don't know than if you know that person, I think there is more honesty because there is no loss or gain. Even if it is about professional, one might. I think it would have an impact.

Y: Ok, so let's say that it is your principal doing a research, and you are chosen as a participant, do you think the way you react could be different?

T: No if you are serious, no. Actually it won't. Not necessarily, no. It depends on how serious you are about what must be done. Even if you are a friend of your principal, it should not influence your working situation or working





condition. If you are really professional and you have to do something, your approach must be the same.

Y: Let's say if it is not the principal, but one of your friends.

T: No, I don't think so. Although I said in the beginning that it might, come to think about it afterwards, breakdown like that, then it actually should not make any difference, as long as the goal is clear. But I think if it is personal things, then it will be. By personal, I mean the sensitivity of the topic.

Hendricks had returned to the school twice after he had collected the data, to "deliver and discuss the initial report with them [actually refers to the principal]." He had expressed an interest in continuing and "did send one or two e-mails to the principal, suggesting I want to continue and he must talk with his staff." Interestingly, as much as Van Wyk also similarly expressed the wish to continue engaging with the research as could be seen from the following quote:

V: I think there should have been a bit more follow up, more to add to that. Although we were writing emails later on, it was basically like once-off in the school, no further development that took place.

Y: So you would prefer him to have a bit more follow-ups?

V: Particularly on something like discipline, to get a picture, you sit with a lot of learners in the hall, it might give you a negative picture of it, but go through the school routine and sit in the class and see what is happening and so on might give you a different view of what is going on.

And as a staff member, Tilley also agreed:

T: I would like to have him coming to talk to us, personally.

Y: So you think that if that had been done, it would be better?

T: Yes, because the principal might interpret it in his way, and we might have had questions which needed answers on what he wrote. I think it would be fantastic if there were a follow-up, and we can sit down and discuss his findings with us.

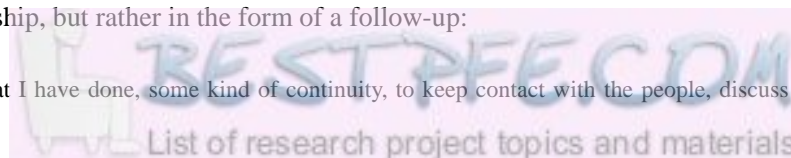
Y: So for what he had done, say only distributed the findings, is that also fine?

T: It is fine, but it can be better...follow-up would be nice, because many of the things that were said were tried for a certain period of time and many of them went back again. Maybe follow-up, just to say how you are doing, is it still working or what are the problems now, to keep it up, should be nice.

"They [the principal] didn't come back to me, never, so at that stage I left it, say all right, I have done it, I am available, and I tried to communicate with them but...so I left them." After the interview with him, I had tried to contact Van Wyk specifically about why the follow up had not happened despite the fact that everyone had expressed a willingness for it, he, despite promise a few times, eventually ignored my request.

In terms of closure or continuity, Hendricks claimed that he would usually go back to his participants and maintain some kind of continuity. This would usually take place, not with the purpose of continuing or developing the relationship, but rather in the form of a follow-up:

H: So far I think what I have done, some kind of continuity, to keep contact with the people, discuss later with





them or maybe also informal. The research that I have done so far, there was not a stage where I say close, get out and done. Especially I think of the research that I have done with school governance, I still have the contact with the people there, specially some of them I met them for the interview, I am now seeing them in other places, we still discuss issues.

Y: Is it kind of follow ups?

H: Well, follow up research yes, because I am still busy with the topic, so I keep, maybe, say we have discussed this at that time, did it develop as you expected, did it really change? It is part of my continuing the research topic, that I keep contact.

Y: So you might go back to them and do another research?

H: Maybe. If necessary, yes. I did go back to one or two schools, but for another project, which I did previously, but that's not the main purpose to continue the relationship or not closing down the official research.

Y: So it is just because you are doing another research and you happen to be able to link it with them?

H: Yes.

Van Wyk expressed his preference for both continuity and closure.

Y: You personally would like to have some relationship after data collection continued in some way or you want a closure?

V: Basically saying that the study is complete and this is the result, this is our finding. And then I think the communication, the channels that have been opened should remain, because you need to constantly have new information coming through.

Y: So in a way you want both?

V: Yes, I want a closure on the study, to say this is now done, but then there should be communication, to give information, to give new information about this is what is happening, this is the new research that has been done on the topic and so on, because there is a lot of research happening that we are not aware of, and it can assist the school to become a better institution of learning...it should also open doors so that you can talk to people. And I think it is necessary to have that type of contact.

Tilley also indicated a preference for continuity. However, although Van Wyk had not referred to continuity in the personal sense, Tilley revealed her preference in this regard in the following quote.

Y: do you think that you would like to have a certain kind of closure, the study is finished, or you would it to continue in any ways?

T: continue afterwards. Follow-ups and reinforcement. And also some personal contact. Because he came here, we saw him, we had a chat, he left, we got the report, and that's it.

Y: what about just to contact and say hello and how are you?

T: that as well. It would be nice as well.

### 6.1.3 Evaluation of the relationship

Despite the fact that the expectation of being able to follow-up the study (the researcher) and use the findings (the participants) was, to a large extent, not realised, all three viewed the researcher-practitioner relationship as positive.



They were really, they want to talk, they want to tell me what are the issues, the problems, so I had no problem to get information from them. At a stage I have to stop to them and say time is up, we can't continue. Well, they trusted me right from the start...I did find that they were supportive and that they were willing to get into some kind of solution, so that part was good communication, open communication. (Hendricks)

I think we had a good relationship, we could talk about a lot of things, quite relaxed as well, I think we had a good relationship, we did not know each other personally, only met through the university. I think the discussion that we had was quite stimulating. (So it is overall positive?) Yes. (Were there any problems?) No, we did not have any problems... I think he knows what he was doing, quite professional, quite friendly. (Van Wyk)

All I remember was that it was quite positive. I think it was fine, people were quite open. He was fine as well, he handled it well. We felt at ease to be able to discuss, and I think we trusted him...(so in general you find him as?) quite professional, quite approachable. (Tilley)

## **6.2 Case 5: Sani—exceptional patterns of desegregation**

“To shift the lens”, or, more specifically, to show the positive image of what was happening in the field of school desegregation whereas “a lot of research that is coming out is looking at negative things”, Sani identified two schools which had exhibited exceptional patterns of desegregation. In late 2004 she started the project of identifying the patterns of changes of desegregation in these two schools, “how they functioned, how the situation in the schools developed from the history of the school” (quote from one of her participants).

Sani described her methodology for the project as unusual in the following aspects:

- “Firstly, we created conversational data through film footage. We hired a film producer and they went in. We agreed that they must capture during break and staff meeting and when there were exchanges. And based on what came back, we went on to do the other interviews and observations”.
- The interviews and observations took 5 waves, meaning that the researcher “kept on going back to the schools, classrooms and teachers” during a period of several months.

A former teacher, Sani had originally been trained as a teacher educator to work in teacher training colleges. However since she had joined UP, she had also been actively involved in research activities, particularly in terms of topics pertaining to her longstanding interests in diversity, social justice and professional development.



One of the two schools involved in this project was situated far<sup>33</sup> away, so eventually the participants whom I chose to interview were both from the same school that had participated in the original study. One of the two participants was the deputy principal of the school (Seager) because the principal had left the school shortly after the original research study). The other participant was a teacher (Danca).

It also so happened that, because of the volume of data collected in this project, at the time when I conducted my study, Sani was still busy writing up the report on the other school. Therefore while she had a close post-research relationship with the other school, her relationship with the school that I accessed was more distant.

### **6.2.1 Researcher/practitioner context**

According to Sani, teacher professionalism was an important motivation for her specific topic. As a former teacher who had also worked in teacher training colleges for a long time, “for me it was how can we make a difference ... to create a better world.”

Aside from the academic side of life she was also actively involved in the community and in teacher empowerment.

I think my nature is such that within the community, every opportunity that they can get, they invite me. If they do not invite me, I am quite proactive as well. When opportunity does come around, I try to bring it up in light of empowering teachers.

Having been a teacher myself, where I can see the benefit to empower and improve the profession of teaching, I seize the opportunities. For instance, for the Youth day, I was invited as a speaker to address the youth, diversity, culture, identity and race. I think it is the field that I am in that is increasingly getting people, getting attention to get me come to address. I was also invited to speak on the Woman’s day, to address woman from various walks of life. So it is those kind of the things that I do, although I know that it is not for academic, for that you’ve got to be in accredited journal and go to world-class conference.

As a result of her community involvement, she was nominated as one of the finalists for a local woman’s award. Thus the dissemination of her work took place from another angle. “There are numbers of teachers that are contacting me now. I was also invited to write an article for a magazine that goes to public schools and private schools, 3500 schools, so that is going to go into a lot of teachers’ hands”.

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<sup>33</sup> For details of why distance was important in my sampling decisions please see Chapter 7.



Yet her passion for the community and for the development of teacher professionalism did not seem to have resulted in a consideration on her part for any practical benefit accruing to her participants. Although she recognised that:

There are teacher who ask when are we going to see this result, some of them say that this should go to the minister, I think this is an important work that you are doing, it must go to the minister of education...very often they would ask how this is going to help, will this go to the minister, or the educational department, because they want to know, ok, I have done this, so who is it going to go to and how is it going to impact on their life, is it going to change things for them.

When I asked her specifically “how do you expect this research would help them”, she stated:

The research that I am doing is not to provide solutions. For me, it is very much an intellectual puzzle, but if they can benefit from that, that is good.

We do research for a particular reason, but they (teachers) do not have an idea of what is the role of research, they see doing it because you can solve the problem. They feel that you are coming there that you are going to take away all their problems, you are going to the department and say this is the problem. But I often say to them, if that is the by-product of this research, then it is good.

I am always saying to them, I am just touching a small piece, it is a very qualitative study, it can not generalise, but if it does benefit, it is fine.

She also expressed her satisfaction that, over the years, the role of researcher had become prominent in her academic activities. She reported a growing effort on her part to use every opportunity to pursue research and academic matters.

S: I use every opportunity for research, that is exactly what I said to the teacher school (she was invited to do training there). I said to her, I know that I will get paid, but for me, it is important in terms of where I am situated right now, *a senior lecturer in a university. For me, it is what research I can get out of this.* So if I am coming to do training, I would use the opportunity to link to research. So if there are assignments or tasks, can I do a survey. So I look for every opportunity for research.

Y: so let's say if somebody comes to you only for the opportunity to speak, not research, do you think you are going to take it?

S: if it is going to benefit the teacher profession, I would take it; *but now, I would still use it for research.*

Y: you mean you would always try to put the research into the picture?

S: yes, because of the field that I am working. If I am going to talk or address 100 teachers, where would I get that opportunity again, even if you get them to do a questionnaire or something, I would link it. But I think because of the emphasis on research now, particularly now in the faculty, I try to link it. So now I am thinking, maybe I should have, when I spoke to the youth on the Youth day, I spoke about negotiating and mediating one's culture, identity and new forms of democracy, I could have used that opportunity, why I didn't, I mean I had this people.



She went on to label some of the influence exerted by her professionalism in her earlier research project a mistake.

The first time, and I went in for research, remember I used to go to classroom to critique teachers, teacher training, and to tell them what they are doing wrong and what they are doing right. So when I went in for research for the first time, it was like if you were my students, you would have failed. And I was very judgmental, and even in my writing, I was very judgmental. So initially, when I started my research, I went with my professional outlook, because I came with the history of teacher training. (So you think that over the years the research experiences that you gain help you to sort of detach yourself from being judgmental?) Now I know what is the role of the researcher. (And you think that helps in how you are dealing with the participants?) Yes. Because you are going in with a different lens. When I first went out, the very first project, I went out with the teacher professionalism lens, and I came back and wrote something and it was very judgmental. I was even asked by a colleague whether I went to critique these teachers or do research. And I couldn't understand because my frame of reference was what I do and I was here to teach. When I went there and if they are not doing their work, I must tell them what's wrong. And it was only afterwards that I realised no, when you go as a researcher, you take a different lens...With the years, the researcher's role becomes prominent, *because you realise that right now, this is what you are supposed to be doing.*

Although dissemination of her research had happened, the question that continued to puzzle was: why a person, so passionate about teacher professionalism, would revert to her role as researcher when practical benefit issue had been raised. Nevertheless, she did mention one practical benefit that her participants may have experienced – because of the relationship which had developed during the project, further communication and collaboration had been facilitated.

Very often based on the interviews that I had, I was invited to the school to deliver a workshop, because I suppose the person involved in the project would go to the authority and management and say I mentioned this, and they would invite me, and I would go back and give back to the school... you develop friendship. This is what happened with this research, particularly with one principal. Now she sees me as a confidant, as a friend. She phones whenever. Relationship has developed over the years. Because I built the relationship with the school, teachers would also come up and say so how is it, how can I do this.

She suspected that the opportunity to voice their feelings had been the main motivation for her participants.

I think particularly for some of the teacher that we interviewed, it was for them to voice their frustration, their joy, their problem; somebody to listen, somebody who is an outsider who doesn't have any authority above me, and I am free to say what I want to say, and knowing that I am going to be anonymous. (So not necessary in the sense that they think that they are going to benefit from you, especially linking with teaching?) No. Not necessary in that aspect, at this particular time, because they were thrown into this situation, so they would appreciate somebody to listen to what they have to say.

Yet both of her participants, upon being asked why they had participated, first indicated that they had done so because they had been asked by the principal. Danca admitted that her interest in the research topic itself



had been another reason, although the connection of the principal “made it easier”. *Helping the researcher*, according to her, had been another important reason.

(So in a way, you do think that you are helping her or helping me to do the research?) Yes, otherwise I would not have spoken to you. If I can't help you, I am wasting your time and mine. (So was that also your reason to participate?) That's right.

Seager perceived his participation as part of his school activities, “because the previous principal asked me, did you want to help, and everybody was willing to give some information or whatever she needed for her research.” Interest in the topic had not been a factor at the start of the project, “I just participated. At that moment, I was not saying that I was interested or whatever, *I was participating to help somebody* (emphasis added).” Although “later on, when we started talking, I started to see the importance of that, the relationship between the different groups in South Africa, and how we change, why we changed etc.”

The reason of *helping the researcher* also kept on surfacing in my interview with Seager:

If I can in any way *help* the person in doing the research, it would be nice.

The previous researcher [Sani], I got no problem with that, it was nice *helping* her.

You [the researcher] can get 3, 4 Doctor's degrees, it does not matter to me, if I can *help* them in whatever way, it is fine with me.

So I said ok, now here is another person asking me about that, why won't I *help*.

(Would participation be helpful to you personally?) I don't know, but if you can *help* somebody, that's my attitude, I will do that. That was the case. (All emphasis added)

Probably because of her interest in the research topic, Danca expected that, as a result of her participation, “I would learn more, I thought that I would learn more about multi-cultural schools and how they operate” This expectation had been realised with the researcher's provision of interim findings and feedback.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, consistent with his reason that he had participated in order to help the researcher, Seager had not expected any personal benefit from his participation. Although looking back, he did feel that he had benefited in some way, particularly as that participation had “open(ed) up some of the ways of how I think”.

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<sup>34</sup> As explained earlier, Sani was busy writing up the report on the other school at the time I was conducting my study. So she has not formally started writing up the findings for the particular school that I accessed, although, according to both the researcher and the participants, some interim findings were given during the research process.



Interestingly enough, however, such “open up thinking” had had nothing to do with teaching or the research topic itself.

There is one big lag in our system. When you graduate, you were sent to a school to apply for what you have learned, they never send you to a course that you can learn more. I am a nice teacher, so I apply for the HOD post. They look at the result and then you are made into HOD. And you are a nice HOD, and then they made you into a vice principal. But never ever they send me to a course where I can learn how to manage a school, how to work with money, those management part. Never ever. So in this research project of hers, here is also something that I learned from her, about management skills.

As far as the responsibility of the researcher towards the participants was concerned, Sani believed:

Before we start the research, I need to get the consent from them. Before I even get the consent, I need to brief them about what the research project is about, whether they want to be involved, and establish a relationship with them. And one of the other conditions is the anonymity of the research...and also giving feedbacks. I believe that the exit of the research is just as important as the entry. So you don't just go there, us them and forget about them, you got to go back and follow up and when you write anything, they need to read it before you can actually publish it.

Danca's main concerns were the practical issues (keeping appointments, keeping to the time limit, and no wasting time) and portraying the participants accurately. Seager also mentioned the following concerns: portraying the participants accurately, not wasting time, and the researcher being “honest with me, open with me”, although “I trust the researcher, therefore, I don't think that they would do this kind of things.”

I followed with the issue of anonymity with all three participants and their respective understandings were the follows.

Sani considered confidentiality as very important: “because they are trusted of their opinions and their ideas and whatever they wanted to say. Especially in the teaching profession, there is a lot of hierarchy and they are always scared if I am going to say this to the principal, and who else is going to hear about this and I will lose the job”. However, during my interview with Sani, the exchange went on as following:

Y: did you ask them about it?

S: in my briefing, I stipulate that this would be anonymous and your names would be changed, pseudonym would be given and so on. But I also said that there is no guarantee that there can be absolute anonymity, somebody somewhere can make an association. And nobody challenged that, nobody actually said it does not matter, you can actually use my name. They just signed.

Y: so the assumption is that they want anonymity?

S: it is not an assumption. It is the ethics of proper research, for me. I am not assuming.

Y: but why you think it would be important for them, it sounds like you are sort of making a decision for them?





S: no, I am not making a decision. They can challenge it and say. Sometime I did ask them, I did bring it up, did it matter to you. And some of them said no, it did not.

Y: so what are you going to do if they say it does not matter?

S: then I would write it up. Like in my scholarly book, the principal very much wants to be known for what she has done because it is good things that she is doing.

Y: so you would use the real name?

S: if she gives the permission, I would use her real name. As I have written, I put the name there, but it is up to her. Because the book is about the positive stuff, so they want. I suppose if it is negativity, people would want to hide behind that.

Y: the reason why I am asking is that I was talking with some teachers and I found that many of them did not care.

S: yes, they just sign it.

Y: so most of the time, anonymity might start from the researcher. We think that it is necessary, but they don't necessarily think so too.

S: I also found that. But with us now, we have to *follow-up research ethics*, got to say this research would not be using their names and so on (emphasis added).

Danca stated that “we gave her [Sani] permission to uncover the school’s identity, ’cause we feel that there is nothing that we should hide. And as a person I don’t feel that I should hide anything either. If I want to say something, I am prepared to give my identity”. She even went a step further:

Y: so it is not so important to cover your identity?

D: no. Not at all, otherwise I think once you start to cover your identity, people tend to say things that they assume rather than what they know. Because I can assume this or that, but I don’t want to have my name adds to it.

Y: is it like not totally accountable?

D: yes, I feel that if you take part in research, you should be accountable for what you say.

And Seager’s view on this was:

Y: she mentioned that she would cover your identify in her report. So from your point of view, is that also important to you?

S: not really, what I want to say, I would say it.

Y: so if in a report, your name, real name would be mentioned?

S: it does not really matter. I am not concerned about that.

Y: so if they want to do it, they do it, if they don’t,

S: that’s fine as well.

Sani regarded the acknowledgement of the participants as very important because “without their participation, there is no research”, but she did not feel they should be acknowledged individually:

Y: so how do you acknowledge them?

S: it would be a footnote in the end, I would like to acknowledge the research site. If the school agrees, then I would say these are the research sites; if they want anonymity, then I would just say I thank the schools that participated in this research.

Y: if participants say that they do not care about anonymity, are you going to acknowledge them individually?

S: not necessarily. It depends how much input they put in. Besides, you have acknowledged the school. I would



not put them individually, personally, I would say the participants at this research site, more generally. I think that is the way that research goes. It is more to *protect the participant than anything else*, if you look at the literature (emphasis added).

However, according to her, this could also be negotiated.

It depends on your participants and it depends on your relationship. Like for instance, I would openly acknowledge one principal, but I don't know to what extent she would want that, so that would have to be a negotiation, a negotiation between the participants and the researcher. Because on the other hand, you also need to caution them, maybe they don't know, maybe they are naïve, but you need to tell them do you really want to have your identity revealed. So it is kind of a negotiation, that's what I would do, I would talk to them first.

On the other hand, both participants were of the opinion that, although acknowledgement was not necessary, it was a nice idea.

On the issue of the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher, Sani and the participants had the following to say:

I think one of the things is their commitment to the project. If they indicated that they are willing to participate, then they need to follow through with it. So if we set up appointment, they don't stay absent from that day, intentionally, of course there are unforeseen circumstances. They need to take care of the practical issues. But also to build that relationship, to see me as a peer, not as oh, you are just a researcher. (Sani)

Just to be honest, there is no use telling stories. I am putting it very frank, but yes, that's how I feel. If you participated in something, you must be honest about it, or otherwise don't participate. (Danca)

To be clear, to be honest, telling the truth, also be on time, not wasting the time. (So actually very similar to their responsibility towards you?) Yes, it is. And respect and all those other things. (Seager)

## **6.2.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship**

Sani had not known any of the participants prior to her data collection. She had followed all the normal channels, “got permission from the department, and then I went to the school with my letter from the department, and spoke with the principal and the governing body chairperson about what I intended to do, they were very interested...it was very easy and the teachers were very cooperative.”

She did not attribute this cooperation to the possibility that the schools selected were model schools, but rather to “I think it is the way in which it is done...I think the project was based on the concerns that they had, and it was important for them to be heard and to say what they wanted to say... I also opened a line of



communication. When I go there, I know that I have a role of researcher, but I also have a role of a listening ear, because they had problems and they wanted to share with us... sometimes you go in there, do nothing, but listen to what they have to say.”

Danca did not foresee a problem should the researcher approach her directly, “it would not have made a difference”, while Seager considered that access through the principal was important.

I would ask why, I would have my doubt if she did not go through the principal, why she is asking. But now it is from the principal, he was telling the situation and what her research is about, so it makes it a lot easier for me and more cooperative. (So you do prefer this kind of channel to be followed?) Yes.

Sani had explained the research design to her participants and had also shared the interview questions before starting the fieldwork. Seager expressed his appreciation of and preference for this approach.

(So before she came, she explained the whole design and everything?) Yes. So I knew exactly what she is going to ask. (Is that session important to you?) Yes. I am better prepared what she was going to ask me. (So you prefer it?) Yes, I prefer it.

Danca also displayed a similar attitude although from a slightly different angle.

(Did she come before the interviews and explain everything?) That’s right. (Was that important to you?) Yes, I think so. It is important to know where you are going to, I mean if you are telling me that you are doing this research, obviously it is of interest to you. And I need to see the interest and passion from you to do a topic like that. Otherwise, why do I participate then, there is no reason for it.

Involvement and detachment were both features of this research, and, according to Sani, “I don’t find it struggle at all.” She said that she would give her own opinions, if asked, “to the principal – if that is not the subject that I am interviewing”, while, for the participants, her strategy was:

S: I won’t give opinions, if that is the case. Say if I am just doing a once-off thing, I give it after I have done my collection of the data. If I am going to go 3 times, let’s say after the 1<sup>st</sup> observation, the teacher say what do you think, then I would take the researchers’ role and say because I am coming to observe you and I am here to see what your practices are, I won’t want to tell you right now, but at the end of my observation, I would give your feedback. Even in the classroom, when I see things went wrong, as much as the professional side of me wants to say, I would just keep quite and realise that I am an observer here, like a fly on the wall.

Y: so you are saying that when you are doing a research, you keep yourself the researchers’ role, and it is only when you have the data that you go back with your opinions.

S: yes.

She also repeatedly emphasised in her interview the importance of establishing a relationship with the



participants.

My impression overall is that people are very willing, but it depends again on how you set it up, and it depends on how you approach them. I think if you approach them with the sense that you are there to learn, and you go with the sense of humility and humbleness, they are more than willing. But if you are going with this I am the authority, I am a senior lecturer, I am a professor, I am here to tell you guys what you are doing wrong, you are already getting this resistance.

One of my responsibilities is to establish the relationship. I set up friendly, like talking to them, not just clinically. It is also listening with a sympathetic ear.

I think the quicker you set people at ease, the better it is. Sometimes you get such good data, because they are not afraid, they know exactly what you are there about, why you are there, it is for research and they know there is anonymity, so they open up and talk. I think the big thing in the whole research is that of trust, and there is no way you can go in there and say, trust me. The relationship begins as getting to know you, and there is a shared understanding, and from that, you develop trust.

This relationship building could be seen as a result from a genuine respect for and interest in the participants. It could, however, also simply serve as a necessary step before data collection (to put the participants at ease so they would talk more freely), so I followed up this issue in my second interview with Sani. The following response suggests that both factors might indeed play a role.

These interviews, I tend to take it as semi-structured, trying to set the interviewee at ease... So for instances, the first theme would be tell me about yourself, how did you get into teaching. In my case, if they say do you agree with what I say, *if it lends to the questions, I would try to have it like a conversation*. But when I look at the data, I would keep that in mind, so that I do not put forward my point of view, *but if I feel that engaging them and I know for the questions that are following, it would be best for them to have that kind of engagement, I would ...* And sometimes it does happen that they do ask, and I will say to them, we will address this after the interview. And I would say to them, the following question is going to draw on your response, and if I say this, it is going to influence their following response. But I do not leave them in alert, so after the interview is done, we would have a more conversation like session, that would happen. (So your strategy is basically trying to do it afterwards, if it is possible?) Yes, because the type of the questions, you do not want to influence the data. Where we talk later informally, then we go into conversation like that. But I try to make it conversation more than clinical, where I just go there and say, tell me about yourself, then I go to the next question. *You can not do interviews that way, you won't get good enough feedback, I believe*. It is when you add this human element, *you make people at ease, and you get them talk about things, then you probe* (emphasis added).

According to Seager, a willingness on the part of the researcher to answer questions was necessary in order to ensure his cooperation, because otherwise, "I would ask myself, why didn't she want to answer, it makes me not so cooperative."



Denman also displayed a similar preference for two-way conversation, although, to her, this could take place during the informal chat, not in the formal interviews.

(Were you sometimes feeling that you want to ask her a question?) Yes, I did. (And she did answer that?) Yes, she did, although that was more in an informal way, when we were having tea. (So let's say if somebody would always try to avoid questions when they are asked, what would you feel?) I would ask them again, I would ask them again please answer me, until they answer me. (So you think that kind of element needs to be there?) Yes. It is a conversation. I mean, it is not one-way.

Sani described the relationship during the research as initially research-based, but that it had gradually developed into friendship.

It initially for me was research based, because I am going there with this whole agenda of research, but as we progress, as we get to know each other and we spend more time, it ends up being friendship. (By friendship, you mean more like friendliness or friendship, friendship in the sense that you would talk about personal things, or it still mainly focuses on the project itself?) It does go beyond that, with some of them. It depends on the personality of the teacher. With some of them, they discuss about the project, and that's it. But with others, it extends beyond that, they would come up to me and said I would like to study further, what do you think. Some of them would even sometimes come up with something more personal, say, this morning was terrible, what do you think I should do. So it does put you in an ethical corner. But when they do that, you also get a sense that they see you more than a researcher.

In terms of the formal or informal, Sani described:

It started as formal, you are doing your research work. But beyond that, when you are going to the staff room and then you share stuff. Maybe because I am a woman, and most of them are female teachers, they would talk about the kids, how to do you manage to fly between cities, do you have kids, that is a different kind of set-up. You are not sitting formal interview, I don't have a tape recorder. It builds the relationship, but it is also like they got something else to talk to besides their colleagues.

Denman described the relationship as "totally research based...when we have tea afterward, we would chat, but I have not seen her since [the interview], so I would call it professional research based" and she also expressed her preference for a research-based relationship. Her understanding of formal/informal and friendliness was:

Y: so the way she spoke to you, the atmosphere was not tense?

D: no.

Y: is this kind of element, let's call it friendliness, important to you?

D: yes, of course it is. If we don't relate to one another, how can we talk to each other.

Y: so there needs to be certain kind of informal element in the process although it is research based?

D: yes, research base but it can still be informal.

Y: so this part of informal is important to be there?

D: yes, otherwise, she could just use the questionnaires. She could have asked the same questions and I could



have written them down

...

Y: we were talking about the relationship and you said that it was basically research based,

D: it was a friendly research based,

Y: to you, do you have a certain preference in these two types, one more research based or the other more friendship based?

D: it must be a friendly research based.

Y: so you do like it to be research based, but it needs to have some friendliness there?

D: yes, of course, if you are very rude when you phoned, when you speak now, or if I feel I am wasting my time on that, I would say I would withdraw from this.

Seager echoed these sentiments:

Y: If you need to describe, is it more like a research-based relationship or is it more like friendship?

S: I would say it was research basically, and then in between the lines, you got the friendliness.

Y: not necessary friendship?

S: no, no, friendliness.

Y: and you personally, do you prefer this kind of a relationship?

S: yes, I would like that.

Y: so between formal and informal, how would you describe that relationship?

S: informal. The questions were formally put to me, but the reactions were informal.

Y: more like a conversation?

S: yes, and this makes it more comfortable.

Y: a two-way conversation?

S: yes. And that makes it better.

Y: and you like it?

S: I like it.

Y: so you don't really like it to be too formal?

S: no, no.

Y: you mean that you need to be relaxed?

S: relaxed, that is a better describer.

Sani was not opposed to the involvement of friendship in a research.

Y: if you are going back to the same school, do you think the relationship that has already developed is going to affect the research, in a good way or bad way?

S: I don't think it would have a negative impact, because now they know who I am and what I do, obviously the project that I would like to do would be different, so it is not going to be contaminate the data that I have collected, it would make it all the more enriching because now we have gone through the hurdle of getting to know each other.

Y: so you think friendship, if we call it friendship, would not make them hesitate, for example because of the stakes of the friendship?

S: it could with some people maybe. But my first impression would be that it does not necessary influence the data. I am just thinking about this now, now me and one colleague are writing a paper for a workshop, and the time is running out, so we say let's look at the school that we have been before, because we don't want to go through the department, that would take a month to do. But this time, we are going to interview the principal. So



entry to the school is much more easy, they know me, they know where I am coming from, they realise that I have opened the trust, they did not have any negative experience, so they are just more willing. I know both of these schools, I just need to pick up the phone and say to the principal that I like to come, and I know that unless they really really can't that they would say no.

Y: so you don't think it is necessary to be a negative factor?

S: unless there was some bad experience, then I would rethink whether I would want to go back to the school.

Danca did not think that a prior relationship or friendship would have influenced either her responses or her attitude, whether positively or negatively, "not for researching purposes".

Seager initially thought that friendship could be negative, but later contradicted himself by stating that friendship could, in fact, lead one to speak more, and to voice one's opinions.

S: I think if a researcher wants to be true and fact based on its own, rather don't have that too friendly relationship, then you are not so accurately in your research.

Y: so in a way, you do think friendship could be negative?

S: it could be, it does not have to, but it can be.

Y: so if you were friends, or you had known her before, do you think you would give a different answer?

S: Much certain. I was holding back certain things, I didn't want to express to her at that moment, but I might have done that if we were more friendly friends. I am still accurate in what I said, but certain opinions I would not have mentioned them, because it is my personal opinion.

Y: then, you are saying that if you were friends, you probably are going to say more?

S: I would say more, yes.

Y: but earlier, you were saying that, you don't prefer a relationship that is more friendship like because you might say less?

S: yes, I understand what you say. Let me try again. If we were friends, certain opinions could be mentioned that would not be said if it is just as researcher with me. I wouldn't say certain things, I would just say the facts, but certain opinions I might keep to myself.

Y: so friendship is not necessary bad?

S: not necessary. It could be bad, but it doesn't have to.

Sani regarded providing feedback as very important, and quoted again her understanding that in the field in which she was working the participants (teachers) often looked for answers. Both participants agreed with her view, but not necessarily because of the solutions that research could offer.

(You said that she came back to you with the analysis. And you appreciate that kind of feedback?) Yes, I did. Because it is very bad, people come here all the time and they want to do this and that research, and you never get the outcome, and you never hear from them again. (So that leaves a) Gap. (Danca)

(So those feedbacks, you find it nice?) Yes. (So that part is important to you?) Yes. (You like feedbacks in which kind of format?) Did she achieve something with the research, how did it benefit her. (So in general, you find feedbacks are important to give back?) Yes. (Seager)



As mentioned earlier, according to Sani, a relationship of sorts had developed since her study, but that was more in respect of the other school which I had not accessed.

S: the relationship with these two schools developed over time, like this one principal always invite me, please come, when are you coming for a cup of tea. She sees me as a very close friend and I am not longer a researcher. Role has shifted. When I write something, I sent it to her by email and I said am I on the right track here, is this what the school looks like, what happened. And she would comment.

Y: did this only happen with one school?

S: the other school (refer to the school that both of my participants come from), I am not writing up now. And that principal subsequently left the school. But it would happen in that way as well, I have all the documentations. But currently, with that school, I am not so much in contact. By the way, the feedbacks I gave them so far were the initial one, when they just wanted to know what we find from the interviews, it was not in any written format. Like what is happening now is also that they invite me in the functions, they would phone me and say that we are having this thing tonight, would you like to come?

Y: that is mainly through the principal or the teachers as well?

S: sometimes it is the teachers that would phone. They are more organizing the function. At one school, it is with the principal, but the teachers and the principal are one. At the other school (refer to where both of my participants come from), it is sometimes the teachers, the principal at that school was not so much involved.

For Sani,

They realise that there is a closure to the study, because I am no longer coming there to do observation and sitting in the class, but they also realise that there is continuity, in the sense that they have someone to turn to, so if there is a problem they would phone, if there is any workshop comes up, or anything happens or they want to know something, they would phone and say we have this problem, do you know anybody, or would you like to comment. But they realise the closure for that research. But I am always open.

Although Seager felt that it would be pleasant if the researcher did come back both participants did prefer closure.

### 6.2.3 Evaluation of the relationship

All three viewed the researcher–practitioner relationship as positive.

They were always very willing and welcome to have me there, to contribute and to give me stuff... it was very easy and the teachers were very very cooperative... (So how do you experience the general relationship?) Quite positive, I have not had any negative one yet, there is a possibility in future (joking). (Sani)

(How in general you experienced the whole relationship?) Very good, very good. She is a very dynamic person and as I said it before you started taping, that questions were well structured, she knows what she wanted to know, she was very direct... (And you were basically feeling comfortable during the whole process?) Yes. (Danca)

Mostly I really find her very nice... (So in general, you have a good feeling about the researchers?) Yes. I am comfortable with that...it was so fascinating to me... also as I learned about the person, the work she was doing





was nice, and she as a person also made it nice... The way she approached me, the way she handled it professionally. (Seager)

## **6.3 Synthesis**

### **6.3.1 A brief summary of the two cases**

#### 6.3.1.1 Hendricks

Hendricks's study had been initiated after the school in question had requested help; hence seeking a solution was clearly a priority and also the main motivation for participation and the anticipated benefit. Consequently, both the researcher and the participants had viewed feedback as part of the expectation and the responsibility of the researcher.

However, what is interesting about this case is that, although feedback had been given, it had not informed practice, neither was a follow up study carried out, despite the fact that both the researcher and the participants had expressed such a wish. Hendricks suspected that the reason for this non-utilisation and lack of continuity was the content of the report (the findings portrayed a negative picture of both the principal and of certain teachers as being the cause of the problems –something which had not been expected by the participants) and also the way in which the report had been delivered (the report was characterised by a blunt honesty). While one participant agreed that negativity could have played a role, the principal disputed such a suggestion and stated that the report had over-emphasised the theory aspect instead of providing practical advice. He also indicated that the way in which the research had been conducted had resulted in a limited understanding of the situation on the part of the researcher. A close examination, however, reveals that the principal was clearly aware of and in fact sensitive to the negativity revealed in the report. When I again specifically inquired whether the negativity of the report had an influence on the fact that the research finding was ignored, the principal hedged.

Hendricks had known the principal before the project had started, although not well, and the role which the principal had played in this case was a key element in understanding the researcher–practitioner relationship in this research.

The data collection had lasted only one day, and the relationship itself during this data collection period had been mainly research-based, although there had been friendliness. Hendricks was of the opinion that for a



topic such as this friendship was necessary, but “it is a very fine line” and, in general, he preferred a relationship that did not entail friendship. When I inquired specifically about the influence of friendship on research, neither participant had perceived friendship in a negative light.

Hendricks claimed that he would usually go back to his participants and allow the relationship to continue, although this had not been the case in this particular research project. However, he usually followed this course of action not to continue the relationship per se, but rather in the form of a follow-up. Both participants had expressed a preference for both continuity (research related or on a personal level) and closure.

#### 6.3.1.2 Sani

Sani claimed that pushing the boundaries of knowledge and tackling an intellectual puzzle had been the main motivations for her research. She mentioned a passion for teacher professionalism and an interest in diversity and social justice as drives, not only to pursue this particular research topic, but also for her active participation in the community and in teacher empowerment. Interestingly, however, this passion did not seem to have resulted in a concern for any practical benefit on the part of the participants and, when she was asked specifically in what way the research would help the participants, she had reverted to her perceived role as a researcher (not to provide solutions). Dissemination in this case had taken place in various ways – some consciously, some as by-products of her academic activity (attending conferences), while others seemed more unintentionally, related more to her commitment to community empowerment.

Sani suspected that the main motivation for participation had been her participants’ desire to speak out of their concerns. Both her participants had mentioned a request from the principal as the primary reason for their participation. They had also mentioned, *helping the researcher* as another important reason. One participant had expected to learn and claimed that this expectation had realised as a result of the researcher’s findings and feedback. The other participant had not expected any benefit at the time, although, in retrospect, he did mention a degree of enlightenment. Interestingly enough, however, this enlightenment had been rather irrelevant to the research topic.

Sani viewed the main responsibilities of a researcher towards the participants as providing informed consent, establishing rapport, confidentiality and providing feedbacks; while both participants had highlighted the



importance of portraying the participants accurately as well as other practical issues.

Both participants had not regarded the researcher's promise of anonymity as important, indeed one participant had specified that she was prepared to be identified in order to demonstrate accountability. Sani was of the opinion that it was important to acknowledge the contribution of the participants to the research, however, she would not acknowledge them individually. Both participants regarded acknowledgement as perhaps not necessary, but felt it would be a nice idea.

On the issue of the responsibility of the participants towards the researcher, both participants mentioned a practical commitment to the research project and honesty.

Sani had followed the normal channels to access the participants whom she had not known prior to the study and she expressed her appreciation of the teachers' high level of cooperation. Involvement and detachment were both features of this research.

The researcher repeatedly emphasised the importance of establishing a cordial relationship with the participants. Friendliness was clearly a factor in this research, although Sani herself had described their relationship as initially research-based (both formal and informal) and gradually evolving into friendship. Both participants had described the relationship as friendly research based. Sani was not opposed to the idea of friendship playing a role in research, because an established friendship could help ease the initial tension and suspicion between the researcher and the participants. One participant was of the opinion that a prior relationship would not have influenced her responses or her attitude; while the attitude of the other participant was less conclusive as evidenced by the contradictions detected in his responses.

Sani regarded the issue of providing feedback as very important, and both participants agreed. According to Sani, a relationship of a kind had developed since her study, although not with these two participants specifically. To Sani closure as regards a research project would manifest in the fact that the researcher would no longer go to the school or to the classroom, but she also considered her involvement with the participants still continuous in the sense that the participants could refer to the researcher and ask for suggestions should the need arise. Both participants appeared to prefer closure.



### 6.3.2 Distinctive features of these two cases

Hendricks's case is distinctive in many ways. It was the only study among the five in this research that had been initiated by the participants. However the interesting fact about this case is that, although both the researcher and the participants had aimed at finding a practical solution to the problem, not only was the research utilisation largely not realised, but despite an interest expressed by all parties in a follow up study, this follow up study also never materialised.

What is also interesting were the possible reasons for this non utilisation and for the fact that a follow up study never took place. Although the principal maintained that he felt the reasons were to found in a lack of practical suggestions and an insufficient understanding of the situation on the part of the researcher, his answers also provided subtle clues that the negative research findings were also a possible reason for the poor reception of the finding.

This feature of the case seems to confirm the prediction in the *demand pull model* that there is a tendency in some user initiated research that the research will be put aside if the research findings are in conflict with the interest of the users. This further points to the importance of the organisational influence (from the users) on research utilisation.

Sani's case is also interesting in that she showed a tremendous passion for teacher professionalism and for community empowerment, yet she also revealed many contradictions in terms of this passion. She clearly recognised the fact that many teachers wish to find solutions from research done, yet simultaneously she also claimed that the aim of research is not to provide solutions. She was proud of her teacher professionalism orientation, yet she criticised its effect on her earlier research. Furthermore, many of her research dissemination efforts seemed to be an incidental extension of her normal academic activities.

### 6.3.3 Experienced researchers versus student-researchers cases

One might expect that tremendous differences would exist between the experienced researchers case and the novice-researchers case. The experienced researchers are usually far more familiar with the art of conducting research, and they could also have more expertise to offer to the school site, in comparison with the novice-researchers, who could not only be perceived as having less to offer, but, often being teacher



themselves, they could also encounter their seniors as their research participants, and therefore would encounter more difficulties in terms of the researcher–practitioner relationship resulted from power hierarchy.

The perceived expertise or knowledge of the experienced researcher could result in an invitation to conduct the research (as in Hendricks’s case), or else in the experienced researcher’s being regarded as a source of advice (as in Sani’s case), but, on the other hand, because many of these experienced researchers were not teachers themselves (or had never even been school teachers), some participants might be doubtful of the relevance and applicability of their expertise within the school scenario. Meanwhile, although the students researchers may not have been invited to conduct the research, being teachers themselves, they were often more concerned about the applicability of the research to the practical situation. Yet again, this insider role may not be preferred, particularly within the traditional academic discourse, because of the close involvement and possible bias.

The lack of popularity of qualitative studies among the experienced researchers, at least in the context of this research<sup>35</sup>, compared to that among the novice researchers may not only suggest the legacy of the traditional quantitative study, but could also point to relative inexperience as regards qualitative methodology, even among the experienced researchers.

Another important fact is that many of the novice researchers included in this study were, in fact, not teachers themselves. Both Ferreria and Thabo were students who had not had any teaching experience. De Beer had had a few years teaching experience, but, after her focus had changed to educational psychology, she was also no longer involved in teaching. Sehlola had been a teacher, but, at the onset of his PhD study, he had already decided to pursue a career in academia.

The reasons given above could explain why there seem to be more similarities between the experienced researcher cases and the student-researcher cases than one would have expected. Organisational culture and academic discourse seems to have exerted an extremely strong influence on both the experienced researchers and their inexperienced counterparts, particularly in terms of the perceived importance of confidentiality and the common practice of reverting to the role of researcher when confronted by the issue

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<sup>35</sup> For details, please refer to Chapter 7 about sampling.



of the practical needs of the participants.

Of course, despite the similarities, there were also notable differences, particularly in terms of the way in which the researcher chose to retreat from the field and the practice of providing feedback.

Lastly, another common practice worth mentioning was that of using students as fieldworkers and retaining experienced researchers to analyse the data and do the write-up<sup>36</sup>. This could imply that the experienced researchers do not regard fieldwork as important, which would indicate a further downplay of this important period of researcher–practitioner interaction.

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<sup>36</sup> For details, please refer to Chapter 7 about sampling.



## 7 HOW MY PARTICIPANTS INTERACTED WITH ME

This chapter furthers the methodology discussion carried out in Chapter 3 that describes the way in which different decisions were made throughout the whole study. It also describes how my participants interacted with me as a researcher as the last empirical case of this study. Furthermore, it also summarises the way in which different issues were perceived by the original researchers and their original participants and provides a critical analysis of their responses.

### *7.1 Researcher/practitioner context*

#### **7.1.1 Purpose of conducting a research study**

The aims of conducting a research study, particularly as a student, could be viewed from both the angle of the aim of pursuing the degree itself and the aim of pursuing the specific research topic.

My reasons for embarking on a PhD study were fairly straightforward. I had moved to South Africa because of my marriage. I knew that, as a foreigner, finding a job within a short time would be very difficult. And I was also aware before I landed in South Africa that I wanted to change my specialisation.

Learning, although not necessarily in the sense of learning in the context of the classroom, but also in the context broader learning through life experience, had been a habit of mine that I had cherished and enjoyed. Although I had never stood in front of a class as a teacher, I had always considered education as a powerful tool with which to alter mindsets and modify behaviour. Therefore although I was not sure whether education would be my final specialisation and also not sure whether I would want to pursue an academic career in the future, I applied for a PhD program at the department of Education Management and Policy Studies at UP and, fortunately, I was accepted.

I spent the first nine months after registration browsing rather randomly through the material that caught my attention in the library and jumping from one possible topic to another, trying to locate my specific interest. However, the more I read, the more confused I became about the value of research itself. It seemed strange



to me that a vast amount of research was produced, at a fairly high social cost<sup>37</sup>, yet, at the same time, both policymakers and practitioners seemed to use research largely in a symbolic way; or even sometimes simply carrying on with practice without research.

When I examined this research–practice gap more closely, it became clear that research dissemination was a problem, as well as the differences between the two communities—researchers on one hand and practitioners on the other. Yet to me, this two-community theory was still not satisfying, especially because it fails to explain not only why differences existed, but also the often reported mistrust and suspicion of the communities towards one another.

Education itself also presented an interesting platform from which to view this research–practice problem. I found it surprising that not only was there very little literature on the topic, but also that the obvious approach, as I saw it, to ask practitioners for their opinions, was also rare to be found.

To summarise, curiosity played an important role in the selection of this research topic, so did the aim of knowledge advancement, although the latter to a lesser degree. Publication had also always been my consideration, although, when I review my intention to publish, it was more about entering the debate, stating my position, and, hopefully, eventually making a difference, but not primarily merely to contribute to the advancement of knowledge. Of course, a higher degree would be an advantage for future, although, at the time, I was not sure whether I wanted to further pursue an academic career upon completion of my degree. I had not considered the possibility of a subsidy as a motivation because the subsidy policy did not make provision for students.<sup>38</sup>

In Chapter 2 I had proposed that the classical argument in respect of the aims of conducting research should be broadened to include three categories: *pure intrinsic* reasons (to advance knowledge), *pure extrinsic* reasons (to improve practice), and *other extrinsic* reasons (for practical reasons benefiting the researcher him/herself). However, when I presented this topic in the previous two chapters, mainly because of the flow of the description and also the traditional understanding that such issues often referred only to *pure intrinsic* reasons and *pure extrinsic* reasons, I did not report my examination into the possible *other extrinsic* reasons.

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<sup>37</sup> Refer to government spending and other contract funding for research output.

<sup>38</sup> According to the university policy, permanently employed lecturers only would qualify for such a subsidy.





Therefore hereafter I will first provide an overview of the way in which the researchers viewed the *other extrinsic* reasons, and then present a summary that synthesise all the possible reasons which I uncovered.

Francis's understanding of *other extrinsic* reasons was:

Y: how important was the reason of finishing the degree?

F: it was important for me because otherwise I couldn't qualify as an educational psychologist. You have to have the Masters, and to have a Masters, you have to have a dissertation. For me, I wanted to register as a psychologist. In the beginning, the project, the big thing was it is gonna be part of the MSC, that is a big thing for me. But towards the end, I finish my theory, I finished my internship, it was just this left, so my focus was to close it. So I just want to have it done so that I can register as a psychologist. So yes, it was a selfish reason, but, I needed it...yes, in this case, it was not just a Masters, without that, I couldn't register as a psychologist.

Y: so it is also part of your career development?

F: and the medical council, now called Health Profession Council in South Africa, I think they have passed a new policy, that only up to a certain year that they could register psychologist as a Masters, after that, you have to get a Doctoral, so that was another thing. If I didn't finish the Master in time, I have to do a Doctor, and it was a lot of stress on me, and I was getting married at that stage, so I had to finish it all before everything.

The need to complete his degree was also clearly important to Thabo, but, for him, the fact of graduating was more important because, at the time, he was planning to open his own psychological practice and a degree could be associated with good credit and reputation. A degree was also important to De Beer, although, to her, the value of the degree was more "in a sense that it opens more opportunities or doors, so now that I can actually have more choices." For Sehlola, finishing his degree "that's obviously very important. If one has to be honest, I suppose one of the main objectives of slopping through these long, endless hours, is to finish the degree and get the qualification". For him a degree was also a necessary step towards his plan of further pursuing an academic career. Thabo, De Beer and Sehlola also mentioned this aim of pursuing an academic career being a reason for them to consider publishing an article on the basis of their dissertations.

Publication was also clearly one of Hendricks's aims. His *other extrinsic* reason for publication was the possibility of obtaining a subsidy once he had had an article published. Sani claimed that publication was "there, as a backdrop" to her mind or as a *by-product* of her other motivations. She never mentioned the issue of a subsidy.

In summary, table 12 provides an overview of the reasons for conducting the research as claimed by the researchers in question.



Table 12: purposes of conducting research

| Researcher | Pure intrinsic (knowledge/curiosity) | Publication          | Pure extrinsic (Improve practice)   | Other extrinsic (Personal gain)                                    |
|------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|---|--|
| Francis    | Yes (in dissertation)                | No                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use it in the training (in dissertation);</li> <li>➤ Be part of Masters module development (both in dissertation and interview)</li> </ul> | Degree/ requirement for registering as psychologist (in interview) |
| Thabo      | Yes (in dissertation)                | Yes                  | Not relevant  | Degree/open own psychological practice (in interview)              |
| De Beer    | Yes (in dissertation)                | Yes                  | Yes (both in dissertation and interview, highlighted more in interview)   | Degree/open doors for career (in interview)                        |
| Sehlola    | Yes (in dissertation)                | Yes                  | Not intended specifically (both in dissertation and interview)  | Degree/ further pursue academic career (in interview)              |
| Hendricks  | Yes                                  | Yes                  | Yes   | Subsidy  |
| Sani       | Yes                                  | Yes, in the backdrop | Yes, about teacher professionalism and empowerment  | Not mentioned  |

One interesting observation arising from this overview is that the role of the motives for conducting a research study contribution was emphasised very differently in the writings (dissertations) compared to the narratives (interviews). While the *pure intrinsic* reason dominated the writings, *pure extrinsic* and/or *other extrinsic* reasons seemed to dominate the narratives. The fact of a different audience could possibly explain this difference; however, the suggestion that *pure intrinsic* reasons only were suitable for an academic audience may imply a widespread view that downplays any instrumental elements in research motivations.

### 7.1.2 Reasons for participation

The reasons for participation may vary according to the type of research. Most research projects investigated empirically in this study were school or classroom research. However, my study, similar to that of Thabo, was a step-back kind of research – researching research. I suspect that, since the participants would be able less likely to use the research findings from this kind of step-back research than from the classroom research, the expectations of the participants could be different.

Since Thabo had never revealed his aim to his participants, it was not possible to ascertain reasons for participating in a step-back research from his study. In order to examine my initial suspicion that the motivation for the practitioners participating in my research had been to speak out their concern or problem encounter in previous research, I specifically posed the question “why did you decide to participate in MY



study?” to all my participants, including the original researchers.

One reason for asking this question of the original researchers was to triangulate the suspicion regarding the way in which participants perceive their motivations, the researcher’s speculation about the motivations of his/her participants, and their own experience as actual participants. Furthermore, since my research addressed research directly, I expected that the relationship between my study and the original researchers would resemble the relationship which had existed between the original research project and their original participants.

The following table provides a summary of all the reasons for participation which were given.

Table 13: motives of participation

| Case            | Participants  | Reasons/presumed-reasons for participating in the original research   | Reasons for participating in my research  |
|-----------------|---------------|---|---|
| Francis         | Francis       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interest in the topic;</li> <li>➤ Empathy and know it is a “help-each-other” situation;</li> </ul>                             | Help-each-other   |
|                 | Botha         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interest in the topic;</li> <li>➤ Help the researcher.</li> </ul>  | ➤ “If everything was hassle free again, like the first time, it would be ok”;   |
|                 | Lee           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The reputation of the referrer;</li> <li>➤ Helping somebody is an academic /social responsibility;</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interest in the topic;</li> <li>➤ Help somebody in academia.</li> </ul>  |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Seek practical benefit from participation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interest in the topic;</li> <li>➤ Help a friend;</li> <li>➤ Assist fellow researcher is ethical responsibility.</li> </ul>   |
|                 | De Beer       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interest in the topic;</li> <li>➤ Helping inherent part of the nature of teachers</li> </ul>                                   | ➤ Help because that know it is difficult to find participants   |
|                 | Chisholm      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The principal asked;</li> <li>➤ Prepared to learn something;</li> <li>➤ Help somebody to finish research and degree</li> </ul> | ➤ Help  |
|                 | Van der Linde | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Help</li> </ul>  | ➤ Help  |
|                 | Kola          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The learner could obtain practical help;</li> <li>➤ Expect personal growth by feedbacks (positive criticism)</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Responsibility to provide assistance;</li> <li>➤ Not want to disappoint the original researcher;</li> <li>➤ Expect to learn</li> </ul>   |
| Sehlola         | Sehlola       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Be able to learn, be more reflective</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ “Greater sense of responsibility to help and assist other researchers” after experiencing difficulties in securing participants;</li> <li>➤ Familiarity also provides some degree of ease (know that the researcher would not take advantage of the goodwill in helping);</li> </ul> |



|           |           |   |  |
|-----------|-----------|---|--|
|           | Billana   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Insistence on part of the researcher;</li> <li>➤ Thinks that he could be of help;</li> <li>➤ Wanted to sharpen interview skills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Insistence from the researcher</li> </ul>   |
|           | Stevens   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Help a friend;</li> <li>➤ Curious about something new</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The friend (original researcher) contacted;</li> <li>➤ Curious about something new;</li> <li>➤ Moral duty to provide assistance</li> </ul>  |
| Hendricks | Hendricks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The participants are concerned about a problem and they need help</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interest in the topic;</li> <li>➤ Responsibility to assist fellow researcher</li> </ul>   |
|           | Van Wyk   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To find answers (to benefit the schools, learners);</li> <li>➤ Personal learning</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Hope that it might help the researcher to improve research and, through that, benefit education in general and possibly result in improvements filtering back to the schools</li> </ul> |
|           | Tilley    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The principal asked;</li> <li>➤ To benefit the schools, learners;</li> <li>➤ Personal enrichment</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Hope that it might have an influence on the working conditions, to make life better</li> </ul>  |
| Sani      | Sani      | Voice frustration, joys & problems to an outsider (no authority);<br>Hope that it would bring changes/improvement;  | Interest in the topic;<br>Help others to do research& develop;<br>Extend knowledge for self  |
|           | Danca     | Asked by the principal;<br>Expect to learn more about the situation;<br>Help the researcher;  | Help the researcher  |
|           | Seager    | Asked by the principal;<br>Help the researcher;   | Help the researcher;   |

In summarising the motives stated above, although interest in the research topic as a motive for participation was mentioned by a number of participants, *help the researcher* seemed to be far more present. This reason was prevalent not only in the student-researcher cases, but also in the case of one of the experienced researchers. It was also prevalent not only in the step-back research where any possible direct benefit was likely to be remote, but also in classroom research in which case direct benefit was much more likely.

It is also interesting to note that the researchers were more likely to assume that an expectation regarding learning or bringing about change being the reason why their participants took part, and yet, when they were in the role of participant, they also all indicated *help the researcher* as the most important motive. Therefore, based on my earlier mentioned expectation that the relationship between my research and the original researchers would resemble that which had existed between these original research projects and their original participants (in terms of the way in which the research topic may/may not directly address the immediate concerns of the participants), the motivation for participation, *help the researcher* could be the most realistic motivation even in the case of research directly relevant to the practitioner's daily practice.

This statement is in direct contradiction to the existing literature that lists the following as possible motives



for participation: people participate in order to gain access to information (Seager, et al., 1998), other benefits expected (for example, therapeutic benefits in medical research) (Brody & Waldron, 2000), anticipated reward for themselves and others or due to feelings of moral obligation (Harrison, 1995), economic gain, the characteristics of the researcher, or interest in or curiosity about the research (Farre, Lamas & Cami, 1995).

It is also significant that there was no evidence to support my own earlier suspicion that speaking out their concerns could be one motivation for participation in a step-back research, although the subsequent finding that all the participants had viewed their researcher–practitioner engagement as positive, made me realise that my initial assumption that the practitioners had had negative and unsatisfactory experiences in terms of their researcher–practitioner relationships could be wrong.

### **7.1.3 Beneficence**

The research topic and my own personal interest meant that beneficence remained one of my primary considerations.

As was argued in chapter 2, although the concept that knowledge is a public good is appealing, it has an assumption that the public is homogenous and this assumption does not fit in the qualitative paradigm. I also demonstrated that, although the hope is that benefit could occur mutually in terms of both the society and the individual, this is also often no more than an aspiration. Rather, in most research, it is the researcher who reaps the greatest benefit, both in terms of knowledge and practical benefit, while, for the participants, both these benefits are often marginal.

As a result of this study I had expected that not only would I benefit as the researcher from satisfying my curiosity and obtaining my degree, but also that the original researchers would also become more reflective as a result of my way of reasoning and my probing. On the other hand, for the practitioners, I hoped that my work could result in improved researchers' behavior and better research utility that could filter back to the schools. In fact both Van Wyk and Tilley had pointed this hope out as well. However, I did recognise that such a benefit, should it ever occur, would be very remote. Although I had also initially suspected that my participants could benefit by voicing their concerns, preferences and dissatisfaction, this reason was

disapproved by the finding of this study (as stated above). Therefore, overall, I anticipated that the benefit (both direct and indirect) for the original practitioners would be minimal.

Although the practice of offering monetary compensation to participants for their time and effort is highly controversial, I had originally considered such an option, specifically because I could not find other ways to balance the *give* and *take* in this research situation. This suggestion was rejected by the ethical committee, as is illustrated by the comment from the letter of rejection that I “have the tendency of inducing the participants”. Coincidentally, I also realised soon that this option was also not practical, not only because this study was not funded in any way, but also because the rather precarious financial situation of my family at that time. It had seemed that all I could offer would be a listening ear.

My final solution was to offer some small gifts to my participants as a token of my appreciation. Of course, I had also made every effort to meet them in a location and at a time convenient to them. If circumstances had made this impossible, I had negotiated with the particular participant well in advance and compensated him/her for any extra expenses.<sup>39</sup> In addition, since the data had shown that the participants regarded feedback as important, I also tried to offer the specific type of feedback that each participant requested. Furthermore, although under the strict norms of confidentiality, I was not supposed to communicate to either the original researcher or his/her participants what the other party had said, I also, from my own ethical stance, acted as a medium on a few occasions, particularly in terms of communicating the unresolved concerns of certain participants to the original researcher (such as in De Beer and Sehlola’s case).

The following table presents the expected and retrospective benefits as perceived by all participants. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this table is that majority of participants had not expected any personal benefit either from the original research or from my study. This corresponds with their reasons for participation as being mainly to *help the researcher*. In retrospect, there were certain benefits (expected or unexpected) that seemed to take place, but overall, these benefits seemed to be rather limited.

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<sup>39</sup> This happened with Kola. In this instance, he had to come to my home for the interview, and I compensated him for his travel.

| Case            | Participant   | Benefits/suspected benefits in the original research  |   | Benefits in my research                               |   |
|-----------------|---------------|---|---|---|---|
|                 |               | Expected  | Retrospective   | Expected  | Retrospective   |
| Francis         | Francis       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Did not talk much about her understanding of the benefits to her participants probably because she regarded their reason for participating as helping the researcher;</li> </ul> |   | No  | “Beneficial to hear and think about certain things that I had not even thought about...More awareness, greater awareness of my role ...be more sensitive to certain things. It is a type of knowledge, self-awareness kind of knowledge.” |
|                 | Botha         | To hear how others experienced the process of module development  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The discussion provided many examples to use in teaching.</li> <li>➤ Beneficial to see how the researcher conducted the research</li> </ul>                              | Not available (later refers to as N/A <sup>40</sup> ) | To hear how others experienced the process of module development  |
|                 | Lee           | Does not think direct benefit for participants would be realistic   | Could see how the researcher conducted her focus group and use it to supervise own students.  | N/A   | Does not think direct benefit for participants would be realistic   |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Thabo suspect that one school, particularly, would expect some practical benefit from participation (like aids...)</li> </ul>  |   | No  | “It acts as a reflection meter...I don’t necessarily agree with you, but it does make me think.”  |
|                 | De Beer       |   |   | No  |   |
|                 | Chisholm      | No  | Would be nice if had been given the findings (might help teaching)  | Not in learning                                       | No  |
|                 | Van der Linde | No  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Be more knowledgeable about the topic</li> <li>➤ No change in teaching</li> <li>➤ Learnt how research could be done (never participated in interviews before)</li> </ul> | No  | No  |

<sup>40</sup> Initially some of the data was missing because I had not followed the interview guidelines strictly, but had rather allowed the flow to determine the path. Later when I tried to go back to certain participants to verify or follow up some left-over questions, some of the follow ups were successful, while others were not, for reasons mostly due to specific circumstances (some could not make more time available, some chose to ignore my request despite several attempts, others could not answer in a clear and meaningful fashion. In these circumstances, I refer to the data as N/A.

|           |           |  |  |  |  |
|-----------|-----------|--|--|--|--|
|           | Kola      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Practical benefit for the learner</li> <li>➤ Expect personal growth from feedbacks</li> </ul>   | No because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Did not know about the follow-up of the learner, was cut off;</li> <li>➤ Not given feedbacks</li> </ul>   | To learn   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Practical benefit for the learner</li> <li>➤ Expect personal growth from feedbacks</li> </ul> |
| Sehlola   | Sehlola   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expect that the participants would benefit from learning or changing thinking, by his questioning;</li> </ul>   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ “Personal growth... think how better I could have approached my participants.”</li> <li>➤ “Help to express my thoughts more clearly”</li> </ul> | As expected  |
|           | Billana   | To sharpen interview skills  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Learned how one may best conduct a research;</li> <li>➤ Mostly confirm, but also reflect on teaching by looking back at video, but not from the researcher’s questions</li> </ul> | No   | To sharpen interview skills  |
|           | Stevens   | Curious of how research is done  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How research is conducted;</li> <li>➤ Learned as regards teaching, reminded what was learned in teacher training.</li> </ul>  | No   | Curious of how research is done  |
| Hendricks | Hendricks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expect that the school would benefit from the findings;</li> </ul>  |  | Learn from other’s experience  | Aware of role and function as a researcher & also the responsibility   |
|           | Van Wyk   | Find answer to a problem   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Obtain a different perspective on the situation</li> <li>➤ Not find answer because the finding is too theoretical, no practical guidance</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Be able to use for further study;</li> <li>➤ Hope to improve work conditions</li> </ul>   | Find answer to a problem   |
|           | Tilley    | Find answer to a problem   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Some change at the time, but no reinforcement, so reverted to original practice.</li> </ul>   | No, Hope to improve work conditions  | Find answer to a problem   |
| Sani      | Sani      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Some findings find way into policy, although this happened rather accidentally;</li> <li>➤ Expected that because of the relationship, researcher would be treated as a familiar source to whom the teachers could turn</li> </ul> |  | N/A  | N/A  |
|           | Danca     | To learn about the situation in connection with the research topic   | Yes because of the feedbacks   | No   | To learn about the situation in connection with the research topic   |



|  |        |   |    |   |   |
|--|--------|---|----|---|---|
|  | Seager | ➤ Did not talk much about her understanding of the benefits to her participants probably because she regarded their reason for participating as helping the researcher; | No | “Beneficial to hear and think about certain things that I had not even thought about...More awareness, greater awareness of my role ...be more sensitive to certain things. It is a type of knowledge, self-awareness kind of knowledge.” | ➤ Did not talk much about her understanding of the benefits to her participants probably because she regarded their reason for participating as helping the researcher; |
|--|--------|---|----|---|---|

Table 14: understanding of benefits in research



My suspicion was also confirmed that it was the original researchers, rather than the original participants, who benefited (both directly and indirectly) more, not only from their original research, but also from my study. In fact, this observation had also been made by several of the original participants (such as Billana) during the interviews.

Lastly, the original researchers’ speculations in respect of the possible benefit to their participants did not seem to always correspond with what their participants had either expected or experienced. For example, certain of the researchers had expected that their participants would be able to learn something from their participation, particularly in the sense of improving their teaching. However, not only did learning not emerge as a strong theme in the original participants’ perspectives, but this aspect of learning, as communicated by the original participants, was often not even related to the research topic itself, neither was related to teaching per se (such as research/interview skills).

**7.1.4 Responsibility of a researcher towards his/her participants—the issue of confidentiality**

The following table presented an overview of the understanding of this issue as demonstrated by the respective researchers involved in this study.

Table 15: researchers' understanding of their responsibility towards the participants

| Case            | Researcher | Understanding of researcher’s responsibility towards the participants  |
|-----------------|------------|--|
| Francis         | Francis    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Confidentiality</li> <li>➤ Giving feedback</li> </ul>   |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Keep appointments</li> <li>➤ Perhaps inform the participants of his research aim in the end</li> </ul>  |
|                 | De Beer    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Confidentiality on a basic level</li> <li>➤ Value the input from the participant, extend it to offer asking and fulfilling “what I can do for you”</li> </ul> |
| Sehlola         | Sehlola    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Confidentiality</li> <li>➤ Accuracy portrayals</li> <li>➤ Be reasonable in terms of time required etc</li> </ul>  |
| Hendricks       | Hendricks  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide feedback</li> </ul>   |
| Sani            | Sani       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Obtain consent beforehand, also establish rapport</li> <li>➤ Anonymity</li> <li>➤ Provide feedback</li> </ul>   |

Clearly, the issue of confidentiality dominated most of the original researchers’ understanding of their responsibility towards their participants. However, this was not reflected in the understanding of the original participants (see the following table).



Table 16: participants' understanding of researcher's responsibility towards them

| Case            | Participants  | Understanding of researcher's responsibility towards the participants   |
|-----------------|---------------|---|
| Francis         | Botha         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Report accurately</li> <li>➤ Accord participants credibility</li> </ul>  |
|                 | Lee           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Report accurately</li> <li>➤ Acknowledge participation</li> </ul>  |
| Thabo & De Beer | Chisholm      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Be punctual</li> <li>➤ Respect participant as a person</li> </ul>  |
|                 | Van der Linde | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Respect voice of participant</li> </ul>  |
|                 | Kola          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide constructive feedback to "build me as a person"</li> <li>➤ Acknowledgement</li> </ul>  |
| Sehlola         | Billana       | None  |
|                 | Stevens       | None  |
| Hendricks       | Van Wyk       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide feedback</li> <li>➤ Be ethical in exposure of data</li> <li>➤ Give credit to valuable input</li> </ul>                               |
|                 | Tilley        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide feedback</li> </ul>  |
| Sani            | Danca         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Practical issues, such as keep to the time limit, not to waste time</li> <li>➤ Portray the participant accurately</li> </ul>                 |
|                 | Seager        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Portray accurately</li> <li>➤ Do not waste time</li> <li>➤ Respect</li> <li>➤ The researcher being "honest with me, open with me"</li> </ul> |

Because of such discovery, I found it imperative to investigate deeper into the issue of confidentiality.

Confidentiality was designed to prevent consequential harm associated with the compulsory disclosure of identifiable research data. It is often considered as affording participants control over their personal information, and therefore an instrument that enhances autonomy (Jones, 2003). From a researcher's point of view, maintaining confidentiality is also said to be important in terms of demonstrating trustworthiness and maintaining integrity in the researcher-participant relationship (Rogers, 2006).

In the medical field where this concept originates, the assumption that patients would be less likely to seek treatment if confidentiality is not assured is fairly widespread (Harvard, 1985; Lee, 1994). In the same field, another, often unspoken, assumption is that the term 'patients', by definition, presumes that they are vulnerable and implies that they need special attention and protection (Levine et al., 2004). Over time, however, as Currie (2005) points out, the scope of the confidentiality requirement has evolved significantly. Not only has the concept spread to almost all research fields and become part of the normal practice of research ethics, but the prescription of confidentiality has been extended to apply to all participants and often operates as default condition.



So are all participants vulnerable, particularly in social science or education research? Unlike the reference to physical vulnerability in the medical field, *vulnerability* in the social sciences usually refers to a lack of knowledge, means or any other element necessary to be able to make decisions in full capacity (Justo, 2004). Although it is true that social scientists often study poor or marginalised individuals, the tendency to view all participants as being vulnerable, lacking power or in need of protection seems to deny that, as poor or marginalised as they may be, they have adequate reasoning ability (Rhodes, 2005).

Do participants indeed appreciate it when they are given extra protection? Pack's (2006) story is interesting to note in this regard:

Based on the mistaken impression that I am a native American, missionaries have attempted to convert me, tourists have asked to make my picture, benevolent-minded professors have offered me special benefits not available to my peers and, in one instance, an anthropologist actually tried to recruit me for an interview. In all of these instances, each of the *perpetrators* treated me in a very distinct way, difficult to describe. *With their overly polite manner of speaking, exaggerated enunciation of words, and friendly body language, I can best compare this treatment to the way adults speak to retarded children* (2006: 108, emphasis added).

Furthermore, in educational research in particular, a large portion of participants are often teachers. It is strange to view teachers, usually viewed as important change agents in the lives of children, as being a vulnerable group. One common topic of educational research, namely investigating various aspects of the teaching profession, also does not seem to call for an unconditional prescription for protection.

It is also interesting to draw a comparison between the role of researchers and that of journalists, in handling one's identity—journalists generally expect that the people they interview or film will be identified by name, unless they specifically request otherwise, while researchers act in a contrary way (Haggerty, 2004). It is true that journalists often interview people from more powerful segments of society, but this different treatment of one's identity would occur even if the subject of interviewing (or research in general) were to be the same individual.

In practice, especially in qualitative educational research, the rigid requirement of confidentiality and anonymity has been questioned. Its limits, particularly in terms of the tension between a detailed portrait and disguising one's identity, have also been recognised (Flinders, 1992). However, the fundamental value of prescribing confidentiality to all participants and the expectation to automatically utilise the



practice, are rarely challenged.

One common myth about confidentiality is that “the revelations they [the participants] make, are confidential” (Sehlola). This implies that confidentiality is about keeping data revealed by the participants to the researcher him/herself, further implying that no one besides the researcher would be able to access the data.

Yet consider that conducting research is usually underpinned by the aim of advancing knowledge, where dissemination—to make the new knowledge known—is at the heart of such advancement, such a goal is best achieved by stating that *the results of this research will be used for academic purposes only*, which is not exactly the common promise given.

Another difficulty with the promise of confidentiality is that it does not correspond with the validation tool of ‘member check’—to validate the research findings with the people among whom the study was carried out. The following quote illustrates such phenomenon.

My decision to ‘go into hiding’ had a number of consequences which I found both unethical and simply annoying. I had kept the outcome of my research study from my informants, ‘for their own good’. On the one hand, I had respected their wish to keep delicate information confidential; on the other hand, I had deprived them of the possibility of reading what I had written about them... They would never be able to ‘talk back’. Though trying to make their voices heard by writing about them, I had effectively silenced them... My concerns about protecting people’s anonymity prevented me from giving them the text which would betray their identities. It also prevented me for many years from returning to the town and the people who had become my friends (Van der Geest, 2003: 16-17).

Against this argument, confidentiality then could/should be practically understood in terms of disconnecting the link between the real identity of a participant and how their identity is referred to in the research report; in other words, using symbols or pseudonym. Therefore, in what follows, confidentiality is investigated in the sense of using pseudonyms.

So do all participants want their real identities to be concealed and to be presented in a research report under a pseudonym? LaRossa (1977) found that while he struggled to write up case studies which protected his subjects from discovery, they were telling friends, relatives, and sometimes strangers about their participation in the research. Van der Geest also reports a preference he detected from his



participants to have their real identity revealed:

The head, a former schoolteacher, expressed his disappointment that the name of the town was not mentioned on the cover or inside the book and that neither his name nor any other appeared in the text... They said they did not like my attempt at confidentiality. They wanted to see their names on paper...my writing about them will help them to be remembered (Van der Geest, 2003: 17).

And there are many more similar occurrences (for example Herman, 2004; Smits, Friesen, Hicks, & Leroy, 1997). Instead, as also pointed out by Barnes (1963), sometimes conveying the message that the research is going to write a book out of a research helps to win over support from the participants.

So to examine the perceptions of this notion empirically, I asked all the original participants whether they would like to have identity concealed in research and the reasons for their choices. The original researchers' answers referred to their position as participants in my research.

Table 17: preference of anonymity

| Case            | Participants            | Want identity covered as participant?  | Reasons  |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| Francis         | Francis (researcher)    | Real name can be used, but leaves such choice to the researcher                    | It is the researcher's responsibility to decide whether to cover (protect) or not  |
|                 | Botha (also researcher) | It does not matter   | Confidentiality is "just part of the research process".  |
|                 | Lee (also researcher)   | Yes, assign a number or a letter   | "A code to protect identity is an essential part of research ethics-the principle of beneficence-which means that your participants are protected... I have a high profile and do not want my views on your research to be made known to all." |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo (researcher)      | First reaction not to use real name, after negotiation, agree to use the real name | "I am doing this willingly, and I am giving you the information that has to do with research"; "my research is public knowledge, it's out there".  |
|                 | De Beer (researcher)    | Yes, as far as possible  | "I just want to prevent someone perhaps linking, via me, linking with the educators... In the 7 <sup>th</sup> sense, having done research, one would think now someone is talking to me, I got to be careful, what I say and all that."        |
|                 | Chisholm (teacher)      | No   | "She [the researcher] never asked me something very personal. So she does not know anything about me."   |
|                 | Van der Linde (teacher) | Don't mind.  | "If it is something that is really personal or close to you, I think then it would be important."  |



|           |   |  |   |
|-----------|---|--|---|
|           | Kola (teacher)                                    | Yes  | Need to be sensitive, “we are working with the South African government, something needs to be hidden, you don’t need to take everything out, because at the end of the day, you take out very crucial information only to be exposed to... At the end of the day, the officials would say you said this 1,2,3, you should come to us district directly if you have a problem with this 1,2,3, only then you are aware that whatever you are saying will be problematic.” |
| Sehlola   | Sehlola (researcher)                              | Fine to disclose real identity   | Understand that it is not feasible in my study. Ideally “it would be depend a lot on how I would be painted in your analysis”, although “at the end of the day, it is what would link to your argument.”  |
|           | Billana (teacher, later promoted to the district) | “At the time, not very much important, but if it was now (after been promoted), I will say yes.” | “I realised now that there is much at stake, there were a lot of things that I said with him which at that time did not matter, but now with the position that I am in and with the ambition that I have, I think it is important that whatever is reported about me should only be positive, but then, I was given both, good and bad.”  |
|           | Stevens (teacher)                                 | No   | “But I think he [the researcher] prefers to cover my identity”  |
| Hendricks | Hendricks (researcher)                            | No, not for this one   | “I don’t think there is any sensitivity about the topic for me, or anything that may harm myself, or my position, or my department and the people that I am working for.”   |
|           | Van Wyk (teacher)                                 | No   | “Especially if it is a good job...but even if it is a bad job, it is just your [the researcher’s] opinion.”   |
|           | Tilley (teacher)                                  | No   | “I think what I feel and what I say can be use or can be sit with, I have to stand up for what I say, even together with my names. It is not like that I am hiding something... I don’t see any needs to do things under the disguise.”   |
| Sani      | Sani (researcher)                                 | Yes  | “I just feel that I like to be confidential. When I do my research, I do it this way, I do not want to disclose people’s identity and I think they have a right for that. And for me, I would also prefer to be treated that way.”  |
|           | Danca (teacher)                                   | No   | Gave permission to uncover the schools’ identity because felt that there is nothing to hide; “as a person I don’t think that I should hide anything either, if I want to say something, I am prepared to give my identity, otherwise I think once you started to cover your identity, people tend to say things that they assume rather than what they know...I feel that if you take part in a research, you should be accountable for what you say.”                    |
|           | Seager (teacher)                                  | Doesn’t matter   | “I am not concerned about that”.  |

To summarise, it is noteworthy that the majority of the original participants labeled the promise of confidentiality as ‘did not matter’, and some even took the stance that revealing one’s identity can be associated with being accountable (such as Tilley and Danca). When viewing the same issue from the point of view of being participants in my study, the original researchers either left the decision to the researcher (me), or mentioned the neutral nature of my research topic as being the reason why concealing their identity did not matter. Similarly, some of the original participants also mentioned the nature of the research



topic as being one determinant for one's preference for confidentiality or otherwise.

There were three original participants who expressed a preference for concealing their identity, and their reasons for such a preference are worthy of further analysis. One was a researcher herself (Lee). She ascribed her preference as being due to her personal profile. Billana's main reason for preferring confidentiality was due to his ambition and concern in his career advancement. Kola was still a teacher, but he had shown strong sensitivity throughout his interview. All these instances seem to be at odds with a situation in which a normal teacher would find him/herself, and therefore such preferences appear not to be an accurate representation of the preferences of a normal teacher.

There is another drawback with the prescription of anonymity. Under the name of confidentiality, participants are often referred to either by a pseudonym or by being hidden within a group. As a result, recognition of the contributions of individual participants in the author's list of acknowledgements is seldom given.

The following are excerpts from the acknowledgement pages of three of the original researchers included in my study (all explanations added):

The unnamed participants of the focus group interviews for your willingness to share your expertise and time [listed at number 2, together with 4 other individual names] (Francis 2004: Acknowledgments).

*Listed 10 individual names, but nowhere mentioned any participants or group names of the participants* (Thabo, 2004, p. acknowledgment).

Principals and educators, for letting me benefit from your experience. Learners, for letting me share in a small part of your lives; I hope that I have given something back to you as well [listed at number 6, together with 10 other individual names] (De Beer 2005: Acknowledgments).

The three Grade 9 respondent teachers, for the many sacrifices they had to make to accommodate me for the after-hours interviews, and for their unbelievable courage in allowing me into their classroom for such an extensive period [listed at number 4, together with 4 other individual names] (Sehlola 2004: Acknowledgments).

Table 18 presented the summary of how their fellow student researchers (the 28 dissertation authors included in the document analysis in Chapter 4, the category also referred to the category derived in the same chapter) presented in their acknowledgement page.





Table 18: how participants were acknowledged in acknowledgement page

| Category | Number | Mentioned individual participants  | Mentioned the group of participants   | The group of participants not mentioned   |
|----------|--------|--|---|---|
| I        | 13     | 1 (officials in the government department individually mentioned, others mentioned in a group) | 9 (1 also specifically mentioned the department who approved the study; 1 also mentioned name of the research site) | 3 (1 listed research site and the gatekeepers who grant access to the participants) |
| II       | 12     |  | 9 (3 also mentioned the research site; 1 also mentioned the department who approved the study)                      | 3   |
| III      | 3      |  | 3 (1 also mentioned the department who approved the study and funder)   |   |
| Total    | 28     | 1  | 21  | 6   |

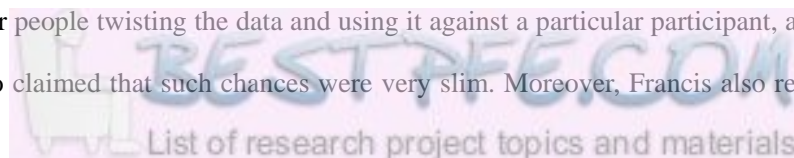
Overall, the most common way of acknowledgment seemed to point to the participant' group, for example "the research school: the principal, teachers, learners and their parents" (Senosi, 2004, p. acknowledgement) or sometimes simpler "all the participants in this study" (Simelane, 2004, p. acknowledgement).

And who were considered to be important enough to be acknowledged individually? Examining these acknowledgement pages, this list included supervisor, family members, technical support members (typing, language editing, financial support, library staff) and fellow researchers. Gatekeepers, particularly those who approved the study (often the department) were also acknowledged by some individually.

However, there were a few more noteworthy points arose from the table above:

- About ¼ researchers did not mention even the group name of their participants in their acknowledgement.
- There was one researcher who mentioned some individual names of his participants, but this only happened with those individuals who hold high positions (officials in the government department), while the remaining were appeared behind their group name. More strangely was that this research was from category I, in other words, those who demonstrated very limited understanding of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

Understandably, there could be personal expectations and institutional ones playing the role in this practice. Researchers, such as Francis, argued that promising confidentiality was better than standing any chance of any other people twisting the data and using it against a particular participant, although in the same time, she also claimed that such chances were very slim. Moreover, Francis also realised that





such practice may serve to protect the researcher or the research institution better (rather than the participants, as often claimed to be).

In the light of the above findings, I specifically probed the original participants and the original researchers in my study as to how they view acknowledgments. The predominant responses were that acknowledgement is not essential, but it would surely be nice. Three participants went further to claim that acknowledgement is in fact important, in that “it would help a person to contribute again” (Seager).

### **7.1.5 Responsibility of a participant towards the researcher**

My own understanding of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher was that the participant be honest in his/her responses. However, because much of the research had focused on the opinions or attitude of the participants, and not on any factual knowledge, it was difficult to be sure about honesty. De Beer revealed a similar viewpoint when she referred to honesty:

When I say honest, I don't imply that they are necessary lying to me, but I mean honest about their perception. Even though, the one guy, I thought he practiced the lesson beforehand with the pupils. Even that, I don't see it as dishonesty, because that was the mechanism that he employed, maybe to feel better, or to be better prepared, or it might be a mechanism for him to think that now he is helping me more. So I am not seeing that as dishonesty. What I mean by dishonesty perhaps, or what I mean by honesty is if I ask them a question, I don't mind if they speculate, they can say it might be this and it might be that, they can speculate, but they shouldn't, I expect of them not to be dishonest. Like If I ask them how many experiences you have, and the one says ten years, and say for example, there is only one year, then I would regard that as dishonesty. I think their responsibility was only be accurate in their information. If they say ten year and actually it was 8 or 9, that wasn't that bad. But a big difference would be.

The literature had also indicated the possibility of the participants not being honest or straightforward (Apple, 1993) and had suggested using prolonged engagement, built-in triangulation, phrasing questions in different ways, or using body language or some other means of triangulation for the purposes of cross-examination. However if a participant makes a decision not to reveal true understanding, it would be not only difficult to ascertain what was not true, but also even more difficult to obtain a sense of what was supposed to be true. Therefore, although these methodological suggestions might be of use, the fact is that honesty would be more the result of a willingness on the part of the participants to be honest, and this, in turn, emphasises the importance of cultivating a trustful and relaxed researcher–practitioner relationship.



The following table summarises the ways in which the participants viewed the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher. Clearly there is much congruence to be detected between the perspectives of the researchers and that of the practitioners.

Table 19: understanding of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher

| Case            | Participants  | Perception of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher                  |
|-----------------|---------------|---|
| Francis         | Francis       | ➤ Honest and open   |
|                 | Botha         | ➤ Be there<br>➤ Speak honestly and openly   |
|                 | Lee           | ➤ Keep promise of the commitment to the research  |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo         | ➤ Be there, on time and available   |
|                 | De Beer       | ➤ Be honest and accurate  |
|                 | Chisholm      | ➤ Tell the truth  |
|                 | Van der Linde | ➤ Do the interview as best as you can<br>➤ Keep promise of the commitment to the research |
|                 | Kola          | ➤ To provide proper information<br>➤ Be available   |
| Sehlola         | Sehlola       | ➤ Keep promise of the commitment to the research<br>➤ Be open                             |
|                 | Billana       | None  |
|                 | Stevens       | ➤ Be available  |
| Hendricks       | Hendricks     | None  |
|                 | Van Wyk       | ➤ Honesty<br>➤ Be objective, recognise own mistakes                                       |
|                 | Tilley        | ➤ Honesty   |
| Sani            | Sani          | ➤ Commitment to the project<br>➤ Allow the researcher to build the relationship           |
|                 | Danca         | ➤ Be honest   |
|                 | Seager        | ➤ Be clear, be honest, tell the truth;<br>➤ Be on time, do not waste time.<br>➤ Respect   |

## 7.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship

I had known some of the original researchers before this study, although mostly only as colleagues. The only exception was Thabo. He and I had developed a personal friendship during my first two years at the university (2004 & 2005).

### 7.2.1 Sampling

Several variables played a role in my sampling strategy. My primary consideration was to follow the categories that I had derived in Chapter 4 for the student researchers' case. When this condition had been met, I tried to find the most variance among all potential cases, for example, in their data collection technique, the intensity of their engagement with their participants, the existence of a prior relationship



between the original researcher and myself, etc (detail follows in this section). I also adhered to the two other guidelines in the selection of my samples: I excluded those participants about whose ways of handling the researcher–practitioner engagement I felt particularly negative (from my review of their dissertations)<sup>41</sup>, and I also approached only those participants (both the researchers and their original participants)<sup>42</sup> who were relatively easy to access.

Sehlola’s case was the first case I decided upon. Not only had he been recruited by the faculty by the time of my study, and thus approaching him was easy; but his study had also been recommended by some lecturers as a classic classroom study. Furthermore, his research design of long engagement also interested me. His selection into my study could also be explained by the reasons why I had chosen not to select the other two dissertations in the same category as his (category III). I had a negative perception of Hariparsad’s dissertation because of the multitude of her questioning the reasons why her participants had behaved in certain ways (see Chapter 4). Meanwhile, although Herman had greatly impressed me by her self-criticism and her honesty in revealing her methodological dilemmas, I foresaw difficulties in selecting her. Her original participants were in Johannesburg, a city 50 km away from Pretoria and thus too far away for me to arrange transport. Her study was community and religious based (school restructuring in the Jewish community), and this could present accessing problems to an outsider. Lastly, her topic had been very sensitive at the time of her study, and this in fact had facilitated her data collection because people had been eager to talk at the time. However, 2-3 years later this would most likely not have been the case.

Thabo’s case was the second to be chosen from category II. I was interested in his study, firstly, because it was not a conventional classroom study, but a step-back methodological case, which could present different findings from conventional classroom studies. Secondly, as I had mentioned earlier, my relationship with him was also much closer and more personal than my relationships with the other original researchers. Although in my third year (2006), he had accepted an offer to work in another university, and we had thus no longer had the opportunity to meet and talk regularly, prior to that, we had been working in the same

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<sup>41</sup> The reason to avoid such a selection was that, since I was clearly aware of my own critical attitude, particularly towards the researchers, a preconceived negative feeling of my part, could further have exaggerated the situation.

<sup>42</sup> As indicated earlier this had been one of my concerns because of my lack of familiarity with the situation in the country and also the inefficient public transport system had greatly limited my mobility. In practice this consideration of access had meant that, not only did I prefer those studies which had taken place in the Pretoria area, but also I would prefer to be able to reach the locations by bicycle—my main means of transport during the duration of my study. I also preferred teachers to learners as the original participants because I had estimated there was a better chance of the teachers (rather than the students) remaining in the same school. Furthermore, 2-3 years in the busy life of a student could simply be too long for them to recall the research instances correctly.



university building<sup>43</sup> and would talk whenever we met in the corridor. Our conversations had touched upon not only academic life— what happened in the department or the faculty – but also on happenings in our own lives. These variances fascinated me so that I did not consider any other studies in the same category.

In respect of category I, the choice was more difficult because I had known nobody in that category and, also, I did not have any particular preferences (except the one study that I felt was too negative to include—Mampane). Of the remaining 12 possible entries, my selection was based mainly on the location at which the study had been conducted. Three candidates (Conco, Francis, Mathekga) had looked promising. Eventually, I had chosen Francis, not only because she had been the first to respond to my inquiry, but also as a result of some unique characteristics of her study: she had used a focus group rather than interviews; her participants had been mostly professionals and often lecturers/researchers themselves; and her study had been fairly small-scale with very limited engagement with the participants – very typical once-off type in educational research (Levin, 2004).

The selection for the *experienced researchers* category proved to be much more problematic, although in this category selection had fewer restraints – as long as the study had been a qualitative study carried out no earlier than 2004, and that accessing the original participants would be relatively easy. Initially, I had also defined the term *being experienced*<sup>44</sup> as those who had completed their PhD more than 5 years.

I had had one particular study in mind from the start. In late 2004 I had been involved in a project on discipline with one of the lecturers in our department – Hendricks. Although his study had used a mixed method, mainly an open-ended questionnaire to both the students and teachers, I was aware that he had also conducted interviews and focus groups with the principal and some teachers. He had finished his PhD in 1994 and had been working in the department ever since, hence he also fitted my definition of *the experienced*. Somehow, I had also thought that the school was not too far away, and it was only in mid 2006, when I was preparing to go to the school, that I suddenly realised that the school was actually more than 100 km away. Since I had realised it very late and it was also found that it was extremely difficult to

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<sup>43</sup> I had been working as a part time research assistant for the department of management and policy study since May 2004. He was not officially studying in our department, but there had been a time when he had been assisting our Head of Department.

<sup>44</sup> I had had this initial definition because the notion of “being experienced” was a very vague and soft term. There was no particular reason why I had chosen five years, although for some reason I had assumed that study carried out for a Phd degree would be a student’s first big project, then, during the next 5 years, a researcher should have carried out a few other projects. Besides, I had also expected that a person who had been working in an academic environment for longer than 5 years could



find other participants for this category, I eventually hired a driver to take to drive me to the school.

Meanwhile, my relationship with this project was also unique – not in the sense of a personal relationship with the researcher, but in terms of my involvement in the project. I had not only been the person to capture the data, but also the person who to provide an analysis and a report. The report he had sent to the school had, in fact, been prepared by me.<sup>45</sup> Although I had never contacted the school myself, I expected that my background knowledge of the project and the unique fact that the project had been initiated by the school provided further interests to my eyes.

However I still needed another *experienced researcher* as a participant. I sent out an email to every member of the faculty staff<sup>46</sup> on 27 March 2006 inquiring whether anyone might be interested in participating in my research. One person responded, but her most recent qualitative project had been in 2001.

Since this method of recruiting was not proving successful, I then contacted lecturers in the faculty in person and asked for references if they themselves were not able to participate. However I soon had another discovery: there were very few potential candidates for this category. There were simply not many researchers in the faculty who carried out qualitative studies.<sup>47</sup> This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that those who did do qualitative studies usually used students to conduct the fieldwork (interviews or other forms of data collection).<sup>48</sup> Many of these projects were also on a larger scale and much of the fieldwork had taken place in other provinces or in other parts of the country.

There were instances where the researchers were prepared to grant me an interview, but not their participants, and stated that it would be too difficult to go through all the correct channels in respect of the getting consent.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes I received a straightforward refusal on the grounds of a busy schedule.

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exhibit stronger institutional influences.

<sup>45</sup> I had prepared two reports at that stage—one so called *academic report*, in which I simply wrote down what I perceived from the data, and the other *principal report*, in which more concrete feedback was given, and most of the negative findings from the data also written in a far more diplomatic and strategic way, compared with the academic report. Later I found that Hendricks had sent the school my *academic report*. I was rather shocked by this, but I had not addressed it because it had been his project and my role was simply that of research assistant.

<sup>46</sup> We have a facility that one email address would be sent automatically to all the staff members in the faculty.

<sup>47</sup> Quantitative methods or the use of questionnaires only seemed to dominate the research methodology of the faculty's staff members. In fact, I was told that probably one reason why there were many student cases from which to choose was because students preferred to do qualitative study.

<sup>48</sup> They were usually projects-based, and the students would be used to collect data, while the role of the lecturer would be that of overall coordination and also data analysis and writing up.

<sup>49</sup> However, this happened despite my explanation that, in my study, accessing the individual teacher should be sufficient without going through the normal channels of department and principal.



Out of desperation I started to consider expanding my original definition of *been experienced* (5 years limit) possibly to include more candidates. Then I came to hear of Sani and her study. She was almost my last resort, so, when she initially refused, I did not give up but insisted until she was able to fit me into her schedule about a few months later. It was also only later that I discovered that she had actually finished her PhD more than 5 years before.

My relationship with both of these two *experienced researchers* was that of colleagues, although I was closer to Hendricks because we were both in the same department and we met and talked more often (mostly about academic subjects, not personal).

### **7.2.2 Accessing the participants & the gate keepers**

Asking the researchers to seek permission from their original participants before I had made my first contact had the disadvantage of bringing in possible bias, because the researchers can choose those participants whom they considered as *favourable*. However, on the other side, it also provided easier access for me as regards the original participants. It not only allowed me to bypass the usual channels of obtaining the permission of various gate keepers, but also incidentally met a preference of the participants in terms of access through a familiar source.

In most cases the original researcher would inform the original participants before I contacted them directly. However there were several cases where this did not happen, for instance, Billana in Sehlola' study and Danca and Seager in Sani's study. I assumed that the original researcher involved in these instances had their reasons not to do so, so I did not specifically question them why they had not informed the participants. Rather I noted the fact and observed whether these participants had reacted to me differently compared with the other participants who had been contacted by the researcher first. My findings were somewhat surprising. Both Billana and Danca accepted my request for an interview very quickly. Danca, in fact, suggested my calling the following day for the interview; while, although Billana had been busy when I first called, he also did not keep me waiting for long. Seager's case was slightly delayed, but as he had not been feeling well for some time when I called and this had continued for a while, the delay did not seem to have resulted from a lack of willingness on his part to participate.



Although it would appear that this finding contradicts the preference for access via a familiar source that many participants had indicated, a possible explanation could be that, although the original researchers had not contacted the participants first, their knowledge of the original research project and researcher had provided the sense of familiarity that they needed. This, together with the overall positive experience of the research, particularly in Sani's case, had created the connection desired by the participants.

Initially, I had planned to have a separate session prior to the main interview to convey information such as the overall purpose of my study, the main features of the design, the right of the participant to withdraw from the study, etc, and also to allow them time to ask questions, digest the information and make decisions. I had also wanted to present this information to them on a face to face basis in order to create a personal connection. However, at the prearranged meeting time, the majority of participants had indicated their preference for starting the main interview immediately and therefore most of this informative session happened via email or telephone. There had been only one occasion on which a separate initial session and meeting of the participant had taken place first. Yet, when comparing this case with all the others, I was not able to detect any differences in terms of attitudes or willingness to participate. In fact, although I had presented the information separately and in person first to this particular participant, it proved more troublesome to secure the real interview with him than with the other participants.<sup>50</sup>

The interviews were either conducted at their homes (Francis, Billana, Stevens), their offices at the university (Sehlola, Botha, Lee, Hendricks, Sani) or school (Van Wyk, Tilley, Chisholm, Danca, Seager), my office at the university (Thabo, De Beer), my home (Kola), or in a park (Van der Linde). Mostly, the location was decided on in accordance with the preferences of the participants, but there were also several occasions when the location was negotiated, particularly when the location which had been preferred initially was not feasible because of my limited mobility.

### **7.2.3 Involvement/detachment**

As the decision regarding involvement and detachment is central to the discussion of the researcher–practitioner relationship, after presenting my overall stance in this regard, four sub themes will be explored further in this section.

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<sup>50</sup> This more troublesome incidence could have happened because of the personality of this particular participant.





As was pointed out in the chapter 2, the literature on qualitative research is often divided on this issue of involvement and detachment – with one side calling for the focus to be on obtaining the insider’s perspective, while the other side advocates detachment in order to minimise bias. Probably because of the prolonged tradition that favors detachment, many qualitative researchers still tend to, in varying degrees, follow the call in favour of detachment.

My overall stance in this debate is similar to that suggested by Elias (1987), namely, that detachment used to be important in advancing human knowledge, however, an increasing interdependence among people has often resulted in human activities becoming more of a “complex, far-flung and closely knit” (1987, p. 10) network, particularly in social science. Furthermore, the consequences of human decisions often have personal implications. Both these claims support the argument that the notion of detachment is not always feasible.

I am of the opinion that this call for detachment is even more problematic in a research process during which the researcher and the participants interact because, in such a scenario, emotions and personal traits always came into play in various ways. Furthermore, detachment in such a case might not even be a good suggestion because it could constitute an impediment to two-way interaction and communication. To me this could not only be unethical, but it could also distract from the main features of the qualitative paradigm.

Although bias needs to be controlled, my own strategy was to deal with the biases or the *damage* of involvement during the data analysis phase, during which traces of the ways in which certain interactions had resulted in certain reactions were provided and reflected upon. During data collection, my focus was kept on maintaining an interactive and meaningful engagement.

#### 7.2.3.1 Judgement, critique and faking friendship

Although I had not been overly concerned about the need to be detached, the questions as to whether I had the right to judge and to what extent I had the right to criticise my participants did surface numerous times during my review of the 28 dissertations. This problem intensified when I started the interviews.

As I was making decisions as to what I considered to be relevant to my analysis, what I thought signalled a



limited or substantial understanding, and what to keep or leave out in my presentation of the data, I started to question myself, not as to the extent I should distance myself from my decisions, but rather as to what authority I had to make judgments and the extent to which I should maintain my critical attitude.

It was relatively easy to deal with the question of whether I had the right to judge. In fact, I soon realised that, although in many ways this study was based on the reports, perceptions and experiences of others, the fact remained that it was my work and I had to maintain my authority – be it *right* or *wrong*. In fact my judgment was essential to the statements that I was making and, consequently, would also determine the quality of this dissertation. Therefore I had to ensure that my decisions and judgments were as transparent as possible and then allow the audience, on the basis on my detailed description, to decide whether they agreed with my judgment or not.

In terms of the researchers whom I was judging, on the one hand, I expected that their exposure to the academic environment would have cultivated an open, or at least tolerant, attitude towards criticism; while, on the other hand, I hoped that, should my descriptions and interpretations have evoked anger or frustration, when life moved on, time would eventually dilute any resentments. Besides, as I joked with a friend, I was merely a student, so probably nobody would bother over much with my judgment.

Nevertheless, the question as to the extent to which I could or should remain critical persisted. I had always known that I tended to have a critical disposition, not only in respect of others, but also in respect of myself. Also my sensitivity, my observant nature and my problem solving orientation tended to focus my attention more on problems than on achievements. I was aware that one of the main motivations behind participation was a desire to help me, and, thus, would criticism on my part either betray or empower my participants?

There are many studies (De Laine, 2000; Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Shaffir, 1991; Walford, 1994) which have documented and discussed the issue of faking friendship, yet solutions to this problem are often not clear. Griffiths (1998) argues that the researcher draws on the ground rules regarding reciprocity and trust that characterise social interactions, but since a researcher make use of these rules for research purposes, he/she risks exploitation and betrayal. Duncombe & Jessop (2002) also point out that researchers, when necessary, tend to barter their trust, empathy and feelings in exchange for what they consider to be good data.



I did not expect myself to fake agreement with the participants deliberately in a way which Wallis describes as “I found it difficult to participate without suggesting a commitment similar to their own, which I did not feel” (1977, p. 155) or as Herman (2004) describes “I sometimes faked rapport to encourage interviewees to trust me with their stories”. I could be explicit in terms of my own views, but, if, for example, I thought that the participants were evading my questions, should I point this out to them and then press them for what I considered to be the real answer?

This problem was relatively easy to handle in the review of the dissertations. Firstly, there was ample time for evaluation and a decision to be made on whether or not to criticise. Secondly, it is far easier to criticise someone on paper than it is to criticise the person face to face. However the interview situation is very different. Although initially I had thought that avoiding arguments was not necessarily a good thing and the welcome of positive criticism expressed by certain participants (such as Kola, Van der Linde and Chisholm) also offered some relief to my worry of offending the participants.

My problems started with Francis when she pointed out that her preference for detachment had been revealed in the method she had used in her study – the focus group. I somehow doubted this statement because I was not sure why a focus group necessarily meant limited interaction, yet, at that moment during the interview, I felt that I could not broach the subject, so I left it and moved onto the next question.

Later, when I reflected on this interview, I realised that one problem in respect of interviews is that decisions have to be made on the spot without much time to consider them. Furthermore, my sudden *inability* to address the doubt could also have resulted from the doubt as to whether addressing it would constitute betrayal while the other person was helping me, my relative inexperience in terms of interview skills at the time, and an unwillingness to exchange profound thoughts (including criticism) with a person whom I did not know well.

However, I also found that I was not able to raise criticism face to face even with those whom I knew well. For example, I did not speak to Thabo about my critical attitude towards his hidden agenda. Neither did I point out all the contradictions that I had detected in my interview with him. I did, however, record my criticisms and I then sent him a copy. I also told him explicitly that I would like him to challenge me if he did not agree with what I had written. When he did not come back to me, I chose not to pursue the issue



further, therefore I did not know whether he had actually read what I had written and agree with my criticism, or whether he had simply not read my report.

Therefore, faking friendship in this context did not necessarily constitute a need to fake a friendship in the research context (or impression management as De Laine, 2000 terms it). Rather it was more about the extent to which it was possible to voice criticism, even positive criticism, during the face-to-face interviews. This dilemma was even more troubling when not only both me and the participants were clearly aware that participation in the research was mainly to help the researcher, but also that the researcher him/herself was the one who would benefit the most. Even worse was that one could question whether the possible unease or embarrassment which could arise from criticism would be ethical and, furthermore, worthwhile, as Seager maintains, “I personally think if I tried my best, and if some people criticise me, you feel sort of embarrassed”.

Although, in a positive light, it is possible that a person may benefit from criticism, I subsequently started to doubt the veracity of this statement. The following anecdote may shed some light on this attitude. I had a close friend and we were working on a project together when I noticed that some behaviour of hers, according to my ethics, was not appropriate. My first reaction was to talk to her about it. Yet, on second thoughts, I started to question myself as to whether this would serve more to relieve my own disappointment (obviously I would have felt better after the talk), or was it really for her benefit (to empower her to become a better person)? Besides, even if I did speak out, would it really result in any changes? It was impossible to change the unethical behaviour that had already happened, but I also suspected that speaking out would not necessary succeed in changing anything in the future unless she accepted and agreed with my criticism wholeheartedly. Yet, if she would have agreed with my criticism, she probably would not have done what she had done in the first place. On the other hand, if I chose not to bring up the subject, there would be no chance whatever of change. So, in this sense, not bringing up the subject could also constitute a denial of any possibility of change. Then again, what authority did I have to impose my view of right and wrong on her. Thus the dilemma continued. Later I realised that this could possibly be the reason why some fellow researchers, such as De Beer, would choose to give only positive feedback.



### 7.2.3.2 Formal or informal?

My overall stance in terms of involvement/detachment positioning translated into action meant that the interviews were conducted rather like conversations. Sometimes, I would explain why I had asked a particular question, sometimes I would give my own view, or even interrupt (some minor interruptions were ignored in the transcription, others may be seen from the quotes). I also sometimes asked leading questions.

My own somewhat casual personality and my personal understanding of ethics informed this mode of conducting the interviews. In other words, I did it not because I deliberately wanted to abandon the usual rules for conducting interviews, but because, to me, these informal elements were simply more natural and comfortable. My observations of the reactions of the participants had also indicated that they were comfortable with this method. In respect of leading questions, I also did not find this practice necessarily harm the quality of data because many of my participants would state bluntly if they did not agree with certain suggestions that I had implied. This could, in fact, have resulted from the informal atmosphere that I had created, but, to me, it was also an indication of their honesty.

Aside from this informal style of questioning, I also took care that the setting of the interviews contributed to a relaxed atmosphere. If the interview took place in my home, I would usually offer drinks or snacks. If the interview took place in the participant's office, I would usually state that I would prefer that we were not disturbed, but, if somebody needed to see the interviewee, I did not mind suspending the interview. I did this because I was aware that the participants' jobs were more important to them than my research, and so, when necessary, I was willing to give way. The result was that not only did they appreciate my attitude, but it was sometimes possible to build a further conversation on the incident of the disturbances.

Overall, my interview questions could be divided into two broad categories: general or specific. Specific questions seek to discover what actually happened, while general questions aim at uncovering the perspectives or preferences of the participants.<sup>51</sup> Although the general questions tended to be somewhat abstract, they were important to my understanding of the relationship particularly in those cases in which what had actually transpired had not matched the expectations of the participants.

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<sup>51</sup> For detailed interview protocol, please see chapter 3.



The interview protocol (see Chapter 3) served as a guideline for my questions. But, as I indicated earlier, I did not slavishly follow the sequence laid down in there, but allowed the conversation and responses to follow their own course. This, of course, also had its disadvantage: that sometimes not all questions were covered. It was also found necessary to add questions in later interviews that had not initially been planned. Although this is an acceptable feature of qualitative studies, it did pose problems when I started to analyse the data and found that those questions with partial answers were difficult to triangulate.

#### 7.2.3.3 Research-based relationship or friendship?

My definition of friendship is that it is a relationship in which people interact on a personal level. It differs from that of colleagues or from a research-based relationship in which work-related issues only constitute the main topics of discussion.

With this definition in mind, I initially set out with my own resistance to a research-based only relationship because to me, it seemed that, in such a relationship, there existed the danger of *using* the participants and not showing them the respect due to human beings. However, during the course of this research, I came to realise that in research, particularly in a small-scale research study such as mine, it was not only difficult to develop friendship because “the field-worker and host barely have time to scratch the surface of one another’s personalities” (Gurney, 1991, p. 55), but it may also not be desirable for both the researcher and the participants.

The length of time the researcher and the participants stay together for a research project is a critical indicator as to whether it will be possible to establish a friendship. Furthermore, it is difficult to set aside time to create bonds when there is simply not enough time to carry out the research. Although in chapter 4 I had criticised Du Toit about his strategy of foregoing small talk because it took up valuable time, the dilemma is that a researcher is not always aware how much time the participant prefers for small talk. This not able to anticipated duration of the small talk could make time management of the research engagement, for example, interview, problematic. Also, although a researcher could start the interview with general questions about the school situation or simply chat a little, it is also difficult to inject the element of friendship into the conversations for the simple reason that the interviewer and the interviewee do not know each other well and therefore do not know what their common interests could be. The personality of the interviewer or the interviewee could also either advance or hinder the situation. For example, with strangers



I am a passive talker and I usually talk little with people that I do not know well. And the same could happen with a certain participant.

On the other side, a personal relationship in the research context may also not be desirable. Although almost all the participants had indicated in their interviews that they would prefer the element of friendliness (a relaxed environment) to be present in the research situation, this did not necessarily constitute friendship. Many participants had also pointed out that the research was the entry point of their participation and therefore the common purpose of the engagement, so unless “fake keeps you together” (Thabo), it would indeed be natural to end the research relationship once the research project was finished.

In revisiting my original idea of the importance of friendship in research, I probably had been over worried.

#### 7.2.3.4 The role of friendship in a research situation

Personal relationships or friendship is often portrayed in literature as a possible cause of the participants displaying less honesty because of what is at stake. As a result, most of the literature, as well as the majority of the researchers in this study, either warn against or exhibit concern about the involvement of friendship in a research situation.

However, real friendship is based on frankness. Even considering the situation where people, such as in a research situation, might know each other, but are not close, this concern about friendship in the research situation could still be groundless. It is possible that one could think more and speak less if stakes were really high, but it may be far less likely that one would fabricate stories in this kind of situation. Hence the reluctance to offend a friend may result in the participant saying less or softening what he/she has to say, but this would not necessarily result in incorrect data.

On the other hand, friendship, which necessarily embraces the element of friendliness, may, as indicated by Sani and other participants, have a positive effect in a research situation in terms of reducing the uneasiness one might feel when facing a stranger.

The following table summarises how all the original researchers and participants viewed the role of friendship in a research situation.



Table 20: perceived role of friendship in a research situation

| Case            | Participants  | View of the role of friendship in a research situation  |
|-----------------|---------------|---|
| Francis         | Francis       | ➤ Negative.   |
|                 | Botha         | ➤ Negative.   |
|                 | Lee           | ➤ Negative.   |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo         | ➤ Negative.   |
|                 | De Beer       | ➤ Slightly negative.  |
|                 | Chisholm      | N/A   |
|                 | Van der Linde | ➤ Positive, expression would be freer, but not necessarily content of responses.  |
|                 | Kola          | ➤ Positive, enhance spontaneity and the information provided would be more comprehensive.   |
| Sehlola         | Sehlola       | ➤ There is a risk of losing objectivity, but this did not affect his data (as one of the participants was his friend); it enhanced the availability of the participant.                   |
|                 | Billana       | ➤ Friendship always comes into play, because “before you became a participant in a research, you are first a human being”.  |
|                 | Stevens       | ➤ Would not give different answer if the researcher were not friend.  |
| Hendricks       | Hendricks     | ➤ Emotional topic would need friendship, however, in general, friendship might have negative influence on data.   |
|                 | Van Wyk       | ➤ Would not give different answer if the researcher were his friend.  |
|                 | Tilley        | ➤ First reaction, it could have negative influence; when break the issue down, expressed that would not give a different answer if the researcher were friend or not.                     |
| Sani            | Sani          | ➤ Not necessarily influence the data, not necessarily negative;<br>➤ “It would make it all the more enriching because now we have getting over the hurdle of getting to know each other”. |
|                 | Danca         | ➤ Would not react and respond differently if it were friend, “not for research purposes”;<br>➤ Would not tell more to a friend as well.   |
|                 | Seager        | ➤ “It could be, it does not have to, but it can be.”<br>➤ Would talk more if it is friend.  |

The interesting finding from the above was that the way in which friendship may exert an influence on research was totally opposite as perceived by the original researchers and their participants. With the sole exception of Sani, all the researchers (as well as those participants who were researchers themselves – Botha and Lee), objected to the involvement of friendship, while almost all original participants were either of the opinion that friendship would have made no difference in terms of their response, or that friendship (should actually be understood as the friendliness element existed in friendship) could indeed have enhanced the quality of their responses, either in terms of an ease in expressing certain opinions or even in the length of their responses.

I also examined the possible influence of my friendship with one of my participants – Thabo – in terms of our interactions. In contrast with Sehlola’ experience, where his friendship with Stevens had made access easier, I myself did not experience this greater ease of access. Yes, Thabo had agreed, in principle, to my





request for his participation speedily, but, on many occasions, he had taken far longer to respond to my requests for a meeting than many of the other participants whom I had not known prior to the research. I would agree with Sehlola's view that the quality of his data had not been affected by his friendship with Stevens in that I could also not see that our friendship had influenced the way in which Thabo had answered my questions nor the way in which I had asked the questions in a negative way. The only instance in which our friendship had played a role had been when I had forgotten to bring the informed consent to the interview and he had mentioned trust already established as one reason why the absence of the informed consent in this case was not that problematic.

#### **7.2.4 Retreat from the field--Continuity or closure?**

A preference for either friendship or fieldship will naturally result in a preference for either continuity or closure. As De Beer stated "if you make it friendship, then it also means that the relationship needs to be continued. To be really classified into friendship, the friendship must continue."

As I had indicated earlier I had initially regarded fieldship as an exploitative type of relationship within the research context. However I later came to realise not only how difficult it was either to pursue or to incorporate friendship in research, and also that research was the common purpose of the engagement, and thus that friendship was not necessarily desirable.

As much as I prefer the personal element in a researcher-practitioner relationship, I also found that not only could the limited interaction resulted from a research design could hinder a continuous relationship with the participants, but that one's personality may also play a role in one's preference for continuity or closure upon the completion of the research. And I also discovered another possible obstacle – a lack of family bonds.

When I reviewed my own friendship patterns, I realised that my closest friendships were usually those people not only to whom I could relate, but also those where I could bring my husband and my friends' partners into the relationship. In this regard I started to understand why Sehlola had had a far easier relationship with Stevens. As his wife had worked in the same school as Stevens and as both families would go to church or dinner together, this family bond had simply produced a better, stronger and longer lasting



relationship.

Therefore in terms of the continuity or closure issue, I also started to understand the reason why, although Sehlola had recognised that it is better to continue the relationship in some way, he had not attended to it seriously himself – there had been a strong temptation not to continue simply because closure was far more convenient. The researcher obtained the data, analysed it, wrote it up, then would be busy completing the other administrative work in connection with handing in the dissertation. Besides, life was not solely about dissertations, other issues needing attention also surface. So, although my initial understanding of fieldship and friendship had also resulted in my preference for continuity, not only had my uneasiness with strangers often prevented me from seeking further relationship with them, but the fact that their purpose in my research had been fulfilled (data had been collected) had also tempted me simply to carry on with my own life, of which they did not form a part.

“Was it fair to stop being a sounding board after I completed the fieldwork and no longer required the information?” (Herman, 2004) My participants had not manifested the strong desire to speak out which had been a salient feature of the participants in Herman’s study. Also the limited engagement in my study could have meant that retreat was less of a problem. However, in terms of my ethical stance, I still needed to know for myself what type of retreat from the field my participants would prefer and also how I should design my own retreat from the field.

The participants’ preferences regarding continuity and closure as perceived through their respective roles had been reported in the descriptions of their respective cases. It is obvious that a preference for closure clearly dominated. Continuity was mentioned a few times only, and mostly in the context of providing feedback. “I know this is the purpose, and I am contributing to that purpose, and that’s that” (De Beer). Commitments outside of the research project (for both the researchers and practitioners) were also often mentioned as another reason for preferring closure.

The following table summarises the indicated preference of closure or continuity from all participants.

Table 21: indicated preference of closure/continuity

| Case | Participants | Preference of closure/continuity |
|------|--------------|----------------------------------|
|------|--------------|----------------------------------|



|                 |   |   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Francis         | Francis (as researcher)                       | Closure, unless doing a bigger project, like a PhD.   |
|                 | Francis (as participant)                      | Closure, though welcome personal contact.   |
|                 | Botha   | Closure for the project;<br>Continuity in updating followup information.  |
|                 | Lee   | Closure, because in a totally different field; do not have time and do not want to drag on; there is no reason to become a friend.  |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo (as researcher)                         | Closure, unless somehow fate keeps you meeting them, research is a contract and the relationship ended when the contract ended.   |
|                 | Thabo (as participant)                        | N/A   |
|                 | De Beer (as researcher)                       | Closure, because it is not feasible to keep contact with everyone on a continuous base.   |
|                 |   | Also assume that participants would like to have closure because “They are busy enough. I think it is nice to know that they are doing this and then it is over.”   |
|                 | De Beer (as participant)                      | Continuity only in the sense of getting feedback;<br>Not feasible to keep other kind of continuity and it will eventually wane .  |
|                 | Chisholm                                      | Closure, it is nice to know that the researcher has achieved what he/she headed for, unless the researcher is still involved in the school or there is something that the researcher could help to improve. |
|                 | Van der Linde                                 | Closure, it would be nice if the researcher kept contact, but it does not matter much.  |
| Kola            | Continuity, especially on the personal level. |   |
| Sehlola         | Sehlola (as researcher)                       | It is decent to continue and it is feasible to do so, just that he had not been doing that;<br>Don’t think that the participants will think less of the researcher because he hasn’t done that.             |
|                 | Sehlola (as participant)                      | “Comfortable if we close the chapter”, and don’t “expect this thing to drag on to eternity”.  |
|                 | Billana                                       | Closure is fine and important;<br>Continuity is also important, “because it gives a researcher a chance to know the participant in more than one way”.  |
|                 | Stevens                                       | Closure is fine, the researcher is under no obligation to contact afterwards.   |
| Hendricks       | Hendricks (as researcher)                     | Usually would go back to his participants and keep some kind of continuity. Usually such takes place not with the purpose of continuing the relationship, but more in the form of followups.                |
|                 | Hendricks (as participant)                    | Mainly closure (because of the topic of the study), although getting the report would be important.   |
|                 | Van Wyk                                       | Closure is important;<br>Continuity is also important in the sense that the channels that have been opened should remain.   |
|                 | Tilley  | Continue in followups and reinforcement; also some personal contact.  |
| Sani            | Sani (as researcher)                          | There is closure, because the research is finished;<br>Also continuity, in the sense that the participants have someone to turn to.   |
|                 | Sani (as participant)                         | Continuity, don’t like clinical closure.  |
|                 | Danca   | Closure, “because I know people are busy.   |
|                 | Seager  | Continuity can be nice, but not necessary;<br>Prefers closure.  |

Therefore in answer to the question of how to retreat from the field, I eventually decided to present gifts to my participants when I had finished the interviews; and then subsequently to provide the type of the



feedback that they had indicated they would like. I had had a few follow up questions for some participants when I had started analyzing the data, so I had either called, emailed, SMSed or written letters to them in order to obtain clarity. Other than that my relationships with them had ended.

However, the differences in the types of feedback that the participants had requested are worth mentioning.

Table 22: types of feedback participants requested

| Case            | Participants  | Type of feedback they asked for   | Reasons for asking for the type of feedback  |
|-----------------|---------------|---|--|
| Francis         | Francis       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Case descriptive;</li> <li>➤ Upon finishing, inform that it is finished</li> </ul>   | ➤ To make sure that there is no misunderstanding   |
|                 | Botha         | N/A   | N/A  |
|                 | Lee           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Transcript</li> <li>➤ Abstract when the dissertation is finished</li> </ul>          | “Not specifically the analysis, but the transcript because that is part of me sharing and I would want that to be accurate, how you use it to analyse is your choice...it is a nice control”     |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Transcript</li> <li>➤ Analysis</li> </ul>  | “It is because of the interest, it is an interesting topic, and because of my name (would be on it)”   |
|                 | De Beer       | Case descriptive<br>Analysis and general findings<br>The implication for further research                                     | “It (the analysis) would make it easier to make sense of the results and findings”   |
|                 | Chisholm      | The general findings  | “It is always interesting. You can always learn something. You know sometimes you read, even if you just get a sentence that impresses you, then it is worth reading”                            |
|                 | Van der Linde | Upon finishing inform that it is finished   | “I don’t think that it is really something that I can use...I don’t like reading stuff... I would like to hear what the result is”   |
|                 | Kola          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Transcript;</li> <li>➤ Case descriptive to comment;</li> </ul>                       | “Part of the transparency”   |
| Sehlola         | Sehlola       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Case descriptive;</li> <li>➤ Cross analysis;</li> <li>➤ General findings;</li> </ul> | Case descriptive to check whether portrayed accurately; Cross analysis and general findings are because of the general interest in the topic.  |
|                 | Billana       | A copy of the thesis when it is finished  | “I don’t mind whether is a final product or not...as long as I can have it (the thesis) at the end.”   |
|                 | Stevens       | ➤ Does not matter   | “Any kind of feedback I would appreciate.”   |
| Hendricks       | Hendricks     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ First written draft of the case to comment</li> <li>➤ General finding</li> </ul>     | “To see that you reflect what I said 100%...just to see if everything is reflected correctly...about I not misrepresented...interested to see how other researchers experience the relationship” |
|                 | Van Wyk       | ➤ General finding   | “It would be interesting to see it...it might be interesting and that you might be able to use it later on.”   |
|                 | Tilley        | ➤ General finding   | “It would be interesting to see some feedback. The general things that you come up with.”  |
| Sani            | Sani          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Case descriptive</li> <li>➤ General findings</li> </ul>                              | “It would be nice to know what has been written.”  |



|  |        |   |   |
|--|--------|---|---|
|  | Danca  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Short description of the case</li> <li>➤ General findings</li> </ul> | “I would like to see the general outcome.”  |
|  | Seager | Upon finishing inform that it is finished   | “(So because of the topic itself, you are not necessarily interested in the finding itself, am I right?) Yes. (So you are more interested in knowing what I generally did with it?) Yes. Achieve something, whether you finished, not necessarily a formal analysis.” |

In summarising the table above, it is clear that the majority of the original researchers wanted to see the case descriptive and they quoted checking the accuracy as their main reason. Among the original participants, Lee and Kola were the only ones who wanted to read the transcription or the case descriptive. Lee had been a researcher herself, and had asked for the transcript as “a nice control”. Kola regarded providing the transcription as “part of the transparency” that he had emphasised throughout his interview.

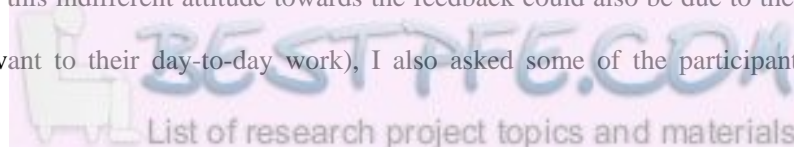
Most of the other participants wanted only to be notified once the thesis had been completed and I had received my degree. They explained the reason for this as, firstly, to obtain a sense of closure in the sense that the research in which they had participated was complete and, secondly, to confirm that they had accomplished one of their own aims in participating – to help me to obtain my degree.

Many of them had indicated a preference to receive the general finding, but most of them had not requested it in order to give comment. For example, Billana asked for a copy of the final thesis, but not the draft versions, on which to comment. I asked him for the reasons and he answered:

Firstly, I do not have much time [to read and comment]; secondly I trust you guys that as researchers, you would portray me accurately. Besides, I know that usually you would have deadline to meet, to hand in the thesis, and I do not want because of my reading and changing that it would make your meeting the deadline difficult.

Although a consideration of his own busy schedule may also have explained his lack of interest in being actively involved in feedback, Danca’s explanation that “if you misinterpreted it, it is not my problem” and Lee’s statement that “how you use to analyse is your choice” could suggest that many practitioners simply regarded the research output as the responsibility of the researcher and that they themselves were not part of it.

In view of the fact that this indifferent attitude towards the feedback could also be due to the nature of my study (it was not relevant to their day-to-day work), I also asked some of the participants about their





reactions towards the original research. Stephens stated that he had been very content when Sehlola had informed him that his contribution had been valuable, but when he had been given the transcript he had gone through about half of it. In Kola's case, although he appeared very dissatisfied about not being given the result, he had also not seemed to be interested in taking any initiative to ask for it, despite the ongoing conversations and interactions between him and the original researcher. So, despite the fact that the participants had listed receiving feedback as one of the most important responsibilities of a researcher, some of the actions pointed out above appeared to belie their words.

### ***7.3 Power hierarchy?***

#### **7.3.1 Power imbalance**

The power imbalance between the researcher and the participants in a research study has been identified by numerous literature sources as a serious problem in social science research. Among them, Kelman's 1972 article is a milestone from which many later works draw.

The main argument Kelman presents is that the individuals or groups that participate in social research (the 'participants', often also called the 'practitioners') are often deficient in power relative to the researcher: "regardless of his position in society, the subject's position within the research situation itself generally places him at a disadvantage" (p. 991). And this disadvantage, as Kelman illustrates, is due mainly to the fact that often "research is carried out in a setting 'owned' by the investigator" (p. 991). Even "when the research is carried out in a setting owned by the subject and takes the form of observing the natural flow of ongoing behavior" (p. 991), where the researcher's control is far less extensive, "since they [the participants] usually have only limited knowledge of what is being observed and to what use these observations will be put" (p. 992), the power deficiency is unavoidable.

Although Kelman (1972) recognises that "potentially, the subject's power in his relationship with the investigator is not inconsiderable, since the investigator's ability to carry out his research ultimately depends on the subject's cooperation" (p. 992), he further points out that "the subject relinquishes control over the situation once he agrees to participate" (p. 992). Combined with another phenomenon, namely that social science studies tend to draw disproportionately on disadvantaged groups as research subjects, where



“subjects who occupy low-status or dependent positions in the society or organization are less likely to see themselves as having the option to refuse participation in the research, or to withdraw once they have entered the situation” (p. 992), Kelman concludes that “a certain degree of discrepancy in power is inherent in the very social role of the researcher” (p. 994).

Since this 1972 article, it has emerged that power differences between researchers and participants have become a concern in social science research (for example, Cornwall, 1996; Dockery, 1996; Green, George, Daniel, Frankish, & Herbert, 1995; Larossa, Bennett, & Gelles, 1981). Authors like Little (1993) attribute such “long-standing asymmetries in status, power and resources” (p. 9) to the history of unsatisfactory relationships between the researchers and practitioners. And in many incidents, such power differences are also reported as a important contributor to participants’ mistrust, anger, suspicion, lack of the interest and hesitation to become involved in research (Reardon, Welsh, Kreiswirth, & Forester, 1993). Consequently, reflections and attempts to address such inequalities, with an emphasis on sharing information, decision making power, and resources have flooded the literature (for example Bishop, 1994; Blodgett, Boyer, & Turk, 2005; Duke, 2002; Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1994; Labonte, 1994; Martin, 1996; Robertson & Minkler, 1994; Yeich & Levine, 1992).

However, although Kelman’s (1972) claim that disadvantaged groups might be problematic (as an earlier discussion of its applicability in social science, particularly in education shows), I had a further interest to find out how both the participants and the researchers involved in this research view this power issue.

In what follows, I first reported the perceptions from the original participants, then that of the original researchers (both as a researcher and a participant in my research).

Botha and Lee were both lecturers and researchers themselves. Botha had finished her own PhD at the time of participating in Francis’s research, while Lee had been a Head of Department, so both had been in higher positions than that of the researcher. Both did not feel powerless. Indeed, Botha’s interview with me showed concern in explaining why she specifically did not feel powerful.

I think if one feels confident enough in oneself, and in the knowledge that you have, you can almost try to help somebody else, particularly a student. And it was actually nice to be able to help her, also be able to finish her studies. But it is very important that it does not become a patronised issue, so that she is a student and you are a lecturer. Because I think everybody is very much on an equal footing, and you realise that the student is actually



the one who is becoming the expert on the specific topic.

She also specifically mentioned that it was nice to be a participant, “just to be on the receiving end, I just talk and I don’t have to go and analyse the data, do the job of transcribing. It is a big job”.

Lee’s understanding was from a slightly different angle, “that [power] depends on a person themselves. Whether you have a very strong personality or a big ego, or whether you are prepared in that situation to let it go [as a participant]”. She claimed that during the original research study she felt comfortable as a participant.

The rest of the original participants were all teachers at the time of their participation. Chisholm suggested that *powerful* might not be the right word to describe a researcher’s role in a research study.<sup>52</sup> “She [De Beer] was in control of the process, but it does not make it powerful. It should go like that. Otherwise I don’t know what she wants, so she must be the one who guides, who is in control”. She also claimed that she felt comfortable as a participant.

Y: And you are comfortable with it [the researcher’s control during the process]?

C: Yes, that’s fine. *It is not like this is making me scared*, what is going on? Not like that.

Kola also agreed with the suggestion made by Chisholm that evidence of friendliness could ease the feeling of being powerless, as highlighted in the emphasis above. “(So during the time, were you feeling powerless?) No, hence I mentioned to you that they are so friendly. I was just normal. It was just me, like any other day”. Stevens also shared this perception of the importance of friendliness.

Similar to Chisholm, Van Wyk also claimed that the researcher should be the one to guide the research process:

Y: During that study, did you particularly feel powerless in the sense he is the one to guide or gear the conversation?

V: No, I don’t think that it is a question of feeling powerless. I think it is also to realise that this is research being done from a view of a specific person, and he needs to find out information.

Y: So in a way, you are fine to follow the flow?

V: Yes, you have to, because you cannot come and predict somebody’s research to suit you. You cannot do that.

Billana specified that as long as he could express what he wanted, instead of what the researcher wanted, he did not feel powerless.





B: At no stage did I feel powerless, because *I think I would have felt powerless if I was aware that I am not saying what I wanted to say. If I am saying what he wanted to me to say, then I would feel dis-empowered. But even though I knew that he wanted me to say this, I would still insist on what I believe that I should say, I never felt like I am losing myself, I always still put it in a way that I believe best reflect my feelings and my experiences.*

Y: were you feeling powerful?

B: I could say I was empowered, I felt powerful.

Y: By powerful, you mean?

B: I would say I in a way gave my contribution to his research. Yes, it has played a role in or added value to his research.

Seager, similar to Billana’s suggestion, said that the feeling of contributing to the research study made him feel powerful: “Yes, I felt powerful. I think I contributed to a right attitude, right perspective”.

Van der Linde also felt being comfortable; however, she did not experience feeling powerful, powerless or empowered, because to her, “It was just a research study and I answered the questions”.

Table 23 summarises the responses from the original participants in terms of how they viewed the power issue in the research studies in which they participated.

Table 23: original participants' view of the power issue in their original research

| Case            | Participants  | Felt powerful?  | Felt powerless?  | Felt empowered? |
|-----------------|---------------|---|--|-----------------|
| Francis         | Botha         | Although higher in position, recognised that the researcher (student) was more knowledgeable on the specific topic. | No   | N/A             |
|                 | Lee           | Depends on the personality  |  |                 |
| Thabo & De Beer | Chisholm      | No  | No<br>➤ Researcher should control the process;<br>➤ Friendliness cancelled powerlessness out;<br>➤ “We could learn from each other, it is equal and mutual”. | N/A             |
|                 | Van der Linde | No  | No   | No              |

<sup>52</sup> Since as suggested, ‘powerful’ might not be the right word, for the remaining interviews with other participants, I tested both the words *powerful* and *empowered*.



|           |         |   |  |  |
|-----------|---------|---|--|--|
|           | Kola    | No  | No<br>➤ Fine to follow the flow;<br>➤ Friendliness cancelled powerlessness out.              | Yes if there had been feedback (which had not occurred by the time I interviewed him). |
| Sehlola   | Billana | Yes, because added value to the research.   | No.<br>➤ Would be 'yes' if lost himself and just said what the researcher wanted to hear.    | N/A  |
|           | Stevens | No  | No<br>Friendliness cancelled powerlessness out.  | N/A  |
| Hendricks | Van Wyk | N/A   | No<br>➤ Researcher should control the process;<br>➤ Fine to follow the flow of the research. | Yes, helped to form a better understanding of the situation.                           |
|           | Tilley  | N/A   | No   | Yes, because there was some feedback.  |
| Sani      | Danca   | Not really, although aware that "I got the experience of the ground floor level which she [Sani] doesn't have". | No<br>➤ Fine to follow the flow because "it is not my research".                             | Yes, "she made me think".  |
|           | Seager  | Sometimes, because "I contribute to a right attitude, right perspective".                                       | No<br>➤ Fine to follow the flow  | Learned something from the feedback.   |

To summarise, all participants felt comfortable having been participants, and none of them felt particularly powerless. Friendliness was suggested as being a strong determinant in easing any feelings of being powerless. The personalities of both the researcher and the participants were highlighted as a possible factor in who felt powerful or powerless. Some participants suggested that the researcher should be the one to control and guide the research process, while others actually felt powerful because of their contribution.

How did the original researchers perceive such issues? I explored not only their perceptions as a researcher in their original research studies, but also as participants in my research study. Surprisingly, many of their perceptions seemed to echo the message conveyed by their own participants.

Francis pointed to her position as a student at the time as one reason why she did not feel very powerful as a researcher: "because I was a student, I hadn't yet registered as a professional, and they – I called them because they had the experience of these things, so obviously they had the upper hand where knowledge is concerned. So where knowledge is concerned, I feel that they had more power than me". But she also



recognised that she “had a bit of power, 'cause I was the reason why they were there. And I got them together, and I set the questions. So in many ways, I did have the power.”

As a participant, Francis felt that “I have power because I feel that I have something to share with you” and further pointed out that one’s personality and the type of research could play an important role in who felt powerful or powerless.

I think it is a very personal thing. You could be interviewing three people on exactly the same topic, and two of them could feel very powerless next to you, and the other one feels very powerful. Depends on how they see themselves, and how you see yourself. It might also depend on the type of the research, like experimental research, the participants probably would feel more powerless, because they just do whatever the researcher says. With an interview, you give more power to the participants, 'cause you basically acknowledge from the start that they have something that you need, so you already put them in the position of power, actually.

De Beer pointed out that a researcher could feel powerless because what happens in the research site (such as the attitudes of the participants) could be beyond a researcher’s control. On the other hand, she also echoed the role of one’s personality in one’s feeling of power or powerlessness, particularly in her case, she often “regard[s] myself as being not good enough.”

Having something to share was also pointed out by De Beer as a factor in the experience as a participant. “It was a nice conversation...in our conversation, I didn’t feel powerful or powerless, I am just sharing... So I think the way you ask questions makes me feel empowered, but not necessary powerful. I think you empowered me to share what I have learned, and some of the questions you have asked clicked things that I have not thought before, which is nice. But it does not necessary makes me feel powerful.”

As a researcher, Sehlola regarded himself as experiencing a bit of both in terms of power and powerlessness. He pointed out that the topic of his research (which had a heavy reliance on participants’ recollection and articulation) made him more powerless:

Sometimes, you feel that you are in control, you got the power, you got the shots; other times you feel that teachers are calling the shots, I mean they can tell you that I can’t see you on such and such day, you scheduled an appointment and you come there, he is not ready for you, or he changes his mind. You are also kind of reliant on his recall of the lesson, so sometimes you feel that you’ve got to work on whatever they give to you, particular with what I was working on, cognitive exercise, how teachers make decisions, so a lot depends on what the teacher could recollect and the decision making process that he could identify, so I have very little control over

that...many times, I felt that I am the one who is being led.

As a participant, Sehlola suggested that ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ were not good descriptors since they are heavy concepts, so “just sharing” would be a better term to describe the experience. He also pointed out that following the flow set by the researcher did not necessarily make him feel powerless, particularly because of “the pattern of the discussion, I say something and then you latch onto the things that I said, that’s the kind of unstructured or semi-structured thing” and that “I think it [how one feels about power] depends a lot on the atmosphere, depends a lot on the way you approach the participant, the way that you allow me to express myself. I think it is very determined on how the interview unfolds.”

Hendricks indicated that his knowledge about other schools and the topic under investigation made him feel rather powerful as the researcher, “but regarding their own practical school situation, there I didn’t feel any power or knowledge for their specific school situation.” He called it ‘less power’, but not necessarily feeling ‘powerless’ as a participant: “if I compare with other interview situations, where I was on the other side of the table, I definitely feel that I have less power now than when I am initiating and doing the interview. For me definitely there is shift in power.”

Sani “made every effort to ensure that we are engaging on an equal basis. I try very hard to get the situation where people can relate to each other on an equal footing.” She also commented that the willingness of her participants prevented feelings of powerlessness on her part. She highlighted the manner of conducting research as being very important in making the participants feel comfortable and not powerless. “I think it is the way in which the researcher sets the tone of the interview. It depends on how you negotiate those roles.”

Table 24 provides a summary of how the original researchers viewed the power issue, both as a researcher in their own project and as a participant in my study.

Table 24: original researchers' view of power (both as a researcher in their own project and as a participant in my study)

| Case |  | Powerful? | Powerless? |
|------|--|-----------|------------|
|------|--|-----------|------------|



|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Francis  | As researcher  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ No, maybe because was a student;</li> <li>➤ Yes, in the sense that had the power of planning and organizing the research.</li> </ul>                   | No<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Participants had more power because of their knowledge.</li> </ul>  |
|  | As participant   | Yes, because have something to share  | No   |
|  | It might also depend on the personality of the people involved and the type of research.   |   |  |
| Thabo  | As researcher  | N/A   | N/A  |
|  | As participant   | N/A   | N/A  |
| De Beer  | As researcher  | Not really, one or two times felt good when see trends from data.   | Yes<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ When don't have control of the situation, like absenteeism;</li> <li>➤ Learners did not regard researcher as authorities (both a good/bad thing).</li> </ul> |
|  | As participant   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ No;</li> <li>➤ Empowered because have something to share (still realises that it is limited to own experience), but not necessary powerful.</li> </ul> | A bit when knowing the possibility of name being mentioned.  |
|  | Educators in research studies might also feel powerless (intimidated) especially during observation sessions.                        |   |  |
|  | Personality-wise, always tend to feel non -powerful.   |   |  |
| Sehlola  | As researcher  | Sometimes   | More often, especially because of the nature of the study (rely on participants' recollection)   |
|  | As participant   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Although it is possible (can fabricate the stories if wanted to), did not happen;</li> <li>➤ Just sharing.</li> </ul>                                  | No, because of the conversation pattern (friendliness)   |
| Hendricks  | As researcher  | Yes, in the sense of the knowledge of the general situation, but not specifically that school's situation   | No   |
|  | As participant   | "Powerful may not be the correct concept".  | Less power, but not powerless  |
|  | Educators might felt powerless in their inability to handle the situation, but not in terms of the relationship with the researcher. |   |  |
| Sani   | As researcher  | No, made every effort to ensure that engaging on an equal basis.  | No, not threatened, did not experience lost of control.  |
|  | As participant   |   | Maybe in the sense that the researcher would know more in the field; but not in the approach of engaging.  |
| "I tried to tell them that I really admire what they are doing". |  |   |  |

To summarise, from the perspectives of both the researchers and the participants a certain degree of discrepancy in power relations does seem to be inherent in social research, but this power imbalance did not seem to bother the participants in this study, in contrast to what the literature often suggests.

It seems natural that in research initiated by the researcher, participants expect the researcher to guide



the research process. Contrary to claims in the literature, my finding was that participants also seemed to be comfortable with this situation and many of them even suggested that the researcher was the one who was supposed to be in control. What is also interesting is that even in research that was initiated by a school, such as that of Hendricks, the participants shared a similar expectation. One reason mentioned was that in such a situation, one purpose of inviting someone to conduct research was to obtain a view from an outsider. And in that sense, the researcher still needed to retain overall control.

Another characteristic that often accompanies qualitative educational research also needs to be pointed out in this discussion. A large number of qualitative research studies aim at understanding a certain phenomenon, which suggests that the participants possess some knowledge that the researcher does not. Qualitative research also often advocates the importance of the emic view, i.e. recognizing the value of the insider (participant)'s view. In this sense, the researcher comes to the participant particularly for their expertise and seeks to understand the phenomenon they want to investigate, particularly from the participants' perspective. Therefore, although it is true that the researcher's influence on the research situation is considerable, it is, in fact, logically strange to consider the participants in qualitative studies as being powerless. Qualitative research also, to a large extent, relies on both the willingness and ability of the participants to share their expertise; thus their control of what to share and what not to, and how to share it, is in fact more than just a minimum influence.

### **7.3.2 Power sharing in research decision making**

Power sharing in research could refer to seeking participants' input on issues such as the research topic, research methodology, ways of presentation (for example, being a co-author) and other issues that may concern the participants.

There are a few research studies that are either initiated by request from the participants (such as in Heystek's case), or during the time of the research, the participant's "agenda became compelling" (for example, Cole & Knowles, 1993:187). However, from my own observation from extensive reading of educational research reports, and as well as concluded by Tooley and Darby (1998) in their review of two years of publications of four leading British educational journals: for the vast majority of research studies, "only some of the research could be said to be informed by the agendas of participants. Of the 41 articles



[their sub-sample, which they reported and analysed in detail to give full justice of their findings], perhaps nine could be said to be thus informed” (1998:66).

Some authors describe other issues that are negotiated between the participants and themselves. For example, Cole and Knowles (1993) mentions a research study in which mutual benefit, logistical matters, the researcher’s participation in the classroom, and representation of the participants were negotiated. Clark *et al.*’s (1996) report documents how issues like entry to the research site, the nature of the collaboration, the relationship with students, and dissemination of research findings were perceived by both the researchers and the participants. However, common in a large number of studies that report a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants, is often a simple claim that “everyone’s voice was heard” (Mould, 1996), without further evidence to substantiate this claim. Indeed, in majority of the dissertations examined in this study, participants’ voices seem to be rather weak at best and invisible in many cases.

It is understandable that methodology and presentation style issues often remain the choice of a researcher. However in the five empirical cases included in this study, none of the researchers even consulted the participants about their views and preferences in terms of certain aspects, for example: whether they preferred a personal (informal) or more professional (formal) relationship in the research process; what kind of feedback they would like to have; whether or not they would like to have the relationship continue in any way after data collection. Rather, these research decisions were based on what the researcher intended to do in terms of his/her own vision. Ironically, the claim that it is “more to protect the participant than anything else” (Sani) has sometimes been used to justify such a lack of consultation.

Not only did many of the original researchers in my study not show much interest in getting to know the views and preferences of their participants in terms of how certain aspects of the research could be conducted, but when they took a guess to explain certain behaviors of the participants, it sometimes emerged that they were wrong. For example, many of the original researchers regarded interest in the research topic as the major motivation for participation, while in fact, the majority of participants mentioned *helping the researcher* as being more relevant motivation. The researchers expected that their research would bring enhanced learning or change to the classroom; however, only a few participants echoed this expectation. Furthermore, the researchers tended to list confidentiality as their major



responsibility towards their participants; while in fact, the majority of the participants showed an indifference as to whether their identity should be concealed or not, and listed other issues as being the responsibility of the researcher towards the participants.

### **7.3.3 Power shift**

Kelman (1972) highlights a process of what he calls ‘power shift’ — beginning at the point at which the participants agree to participate. Thus I made specific observations of this period, when participants were provided with the informed consent and asked to sign it.

Informed consent is often regarded as another way to balance the power deficiency, to provide the participants with information about the research, allow them to ask questions and also the power to decline participation. To give consent is not a static moment, rather it should be an on-going negotiation, particularly in research that has more than one engagement. However the moment of signing the consent form can, to a certain extent, signal the power shift, because after signing it, factors such as group pressure or simply the possible embarrassment to break the promise to participate (Malone, 2003, p. 799) could further compromise a withdrawal during the course of research.

Although it is recognised that to give consent is not a static moment, but an on-going negotiation (particularly in research studies that have more than one engagement), the moment of signing the consent form can, to a certain extent, signal the power shift, because after signing the form, factors such as group pressure, or simply the possible embarrassment of breaking the promise to participate (Malone, 2003, p. 799) could compromise any contemplated withdrawal during the course of the research project. The process of requesting informed consent can be seen as another way to balance the power deficiency, by providing the participants with information about the research, allowing them to ask questions, and offering them the power to decline participation.

So, as Kelman (1972) points out, if participants are aware that such consent procedures may be their ‘last chance’ to hold onto the power that they have, then logically, they should be very careful in handling the informed consent process — reading the given information and asking questions if





anything is not clear to them. However, what usually happens, not only in my own observation, but also as many authors point out (Flory & Emanuel, 2004; Joffe, Cook, Cleary, Clark, & Weeks, 2001; Macklin, 1999; Mason & Allmark, 2000; Stiffler, 2003), is that such a procedure is reduced to no more than a formality: researchers provide a standard form, many participants do not even read the content on the form, but simply provide their signature (Simmerling & Schwegler, 2005). For those who do read the form, asking questions is rarely observed.

As explained earlier, what I did was that I would provide an overview of the research topic and design before asking whether my participants would like to participate (this was usually done through phone call). Then on the day of interview, I provided the informed consent that I prepared. Considering that some people may feel uncomfortable or stressed when asked to sign a consent form (Lipson, 1994), perceiving it not necessary protecting them, or not liking to sign a pre-prepared paper that they can only accept as it is, or being illiterate but embarrassed to admit, I informed the participants that they only needed to sign if they wanted to and also that I would welcome questions if they have any.

It turned out that most participants did read the form and signed it, and only three of the sixteen people asked any questions. Even more interesting was the fact that many did not ask for a copy of the signed form. Even when I prepared two copies and asked them to sign both, most of them said that they did not need to keep one.

Table 25 summarises how all the original participants and the original researchers (as participants in my study) handled the informed consent encounter.

Table 25: how all participants handled the informed consent encounter

| Case            | Participants  | Signed  | Ask questions | Kept a copy |
|-----------------|---------------|---|---------------|-------------|
| Francis         | Francis       | Yes   | No            | Yes         |
|                 | Botha         | Yes   | No            | No          |
|                 | Lee           | Yes   | No            | Yes         |
| Thabo & De Beer | Thabo         | Was not provided with informed consent, reaction was that since we knew each other and had trust, it was fine without the form. |               |             |
|                 | De Beer       | Yes (added something on the form)   | Yes           | Yes         |
|                 | Chisholm      | Yes   | No            | No          |
|                 | Van der Linde | Yes   | No            | No          |
|                 | Kola          | No (very cautious in signing paper in general)  | Yes           | N/A         |



|           |           |                          |     |   |
|-----------|-----------|--------------------------|-----|---|
| Sehlola   | Sehlola   | Yes                      | No  | No  |
|           | Billana   | Yes                      | No  | Yes   |
|           | Stevens   | No (think not necessary) | Yes | N/A   |
| Hendricks | Hendricks | Yes (but did not read)   | No  | No  |
|           | Van Wyk   | Yes                      | No  | Yes (only because I provided an extra copy) |
|           | Tilley    | Yes                      | No  | No  |
| Sani      | Sani      | Yes                      | No  | Yes   |
|           | Danca     | Yes                      | No  | No  |
|           | Seager    | No                       | No  | No  |

Should these results be interpreted to mean that participants did not care about signing the form? Or that they did not realise that their signature could be a signal of relinquishing their already deficient power? Or they simply did not care about the power deficiency issue? The answer would probably not come from those who signed it; but one might glean a possible explanation from the reasons given by those who did not, as discussed below.

Stevens explained the reason he did not sign was that because my research was a once-off engagement, so he did not see the necessity of signing the form. Seager also did not sign and said that he did not see any difference whether he signed or not. Kola claimed his reason for not signing was that people were often asked to sign things, even without knowing what they were signing for; so for him, he always refuses to sign whenever he can.

Kola's reason pointed to a formality that one often associates with signing forms. So for him, refusing to sign could to, a certain extent, indicate his need to retain power. Yet his reason for retaining power did not seem to result from a perceived power deficiency between the researcher and the participants. Both Stevens and Seager had doubts that there was any value of signing the form. But again, neither of them referred to the power deficiency issue.

#### ***7.4 Trust or mistrust?***

The attitude of participants towards the research is reported to be strongly associated with their research related activities, including research utilisation (Bostrom & Suter, 1993; Campion & Leach, 1986; Lacey, 1994; Rizzuto, Bostrom, Suter, & Chenitz, 1994). Despite the recognition of the importance of the relationship ( Caplan, 1979; Dunn, 1980; Huberman, 1990; Nyden & Wiewell, 1992; Oh, 1997; Simmons, 1996; Yin & Moore, 1988) and the frequent effort to equalise the power deficiency, much of the literature



reports that the existing relationships and attitudes of practitioners towards research and researchers are either distrustful, unsatisfactory, antagonistic (Little, 1993; R. F. Rich, 1991), threatening (if weaknesses in teaching is revealed, Ammons, 1970), or, at best, indifferent:

In the normal everyday flow of school life there is little incentive to introduce new ideas and strategies... The attitude of school administrators, as well as teachers, might be 'we're OK' and we are not interested in such a research, and the additional workload it might impose on us (Ben-Peretz, 1994/95).

On certain occasions this attitude is also used to explain "why these constituencies have been quick to blame each other for the existence of the so called gap" (Rafferty, Allcock, & Lathlean, 1996, p. 686).

In my research I asked participants for their general impressions of the research and the researchers, not only as an icebreaker with which to start the interview, but also as an attempt to inquire into whether an attitude of either trust or mistrust<sup>53</sup> existed.

#### 7.4.1 Attitude towards research

Many participants referred to the research as something that needed to be translated into practical solutions.

It (research) should result in something else, you made a study or research, and now you say that I found this and that, so I suggest that this and that should be done. (So you would prefer a research that is more practical?) Yes. Then I can see the result, and I can apply it. (Seager)

(So to you, the studies focusing on one school or one situation would be more valuable?) Yes, I think we need to look at more practical situations, and find answers to the unique problems for each and every school. (Van Wyk)

So, although sometimes the participants did read for the purpose of general enrichment more often it happened that:

Say, for instance, there is certain problem in my school, then I would read about that. (Chisholm)

It depends on the certain problems arising in the school. And you have to do some research and try to get a solution to the problem. (So it is like when you have problems, you would look for information?) Yes and then it is helpful. (Seager)

Echoing this criterion of translating into practice, other participants had also pointed to another type of research about which they would like to read—detailed reporting on what happened in other settings.



For me, I would like to see, how others are doing ... Maybe just say this is what I saw in other schools. Not in the bad way to compare, but to compare what is the difference, because there must be some difference between our school and other schools. Maybe it would be interesting to know. Because we are getting used to this kind of teaching and you don't see other teachers. (Chisholm)

Similarly, this preference for practical elements also translated into some doubt about the value of research, particularly research which did not have practical implications on which they could directly draw.

You get abstract research been done, research to show what is this tendency, what is that tendency, but to get down to the practical things, how to improve education, how to get learners learn, are big questions for nowadays. And you get this and that theory, but you don't get it applied to the practical situation. (you mean recommendations?) Yes. Way forward, or a follow up research to say let's take up this information, we have seen the pass rate for the subject is low, how can it been improved. (Van Wyk)

Limited engagement in schools, resulting in the collection of superficial data, was also pointed out as a reason for the lack of value of some research for the practitioners.

To understand a complex school. Any school is complex. Take this school for example, the complexity of the school, to understand that, and the management of it, you need to be in that situation and you must be able to experience what is going on to be able to put everything together. And you can't count on the bases of a questionnaire. (You are saying that they are spending enough time?) Yes, you must spend time here, you can't come and spend a day and talk to the learners and get the impression of what is happening. I think you should be here a lot more, more than that, and you should also be looking at why certain things are happening. For example, the discipline research done in our school (refer to Hendricks's study that I investigated), it was a day spent here, chat with the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and chat with the educators, with the learners, and there was no real understanding of why discipline is a problem, why learners behave in a certain way and why educators behave in a certain way. (And you think spending more time and having more interactions would help?) I think it would give a better understanding of the situation, because you need to see what is the reality basically. (Van Wyk)

To come to a school like this for maybe just a few times, come and visit me, I don't think you really get it. You could been in this school for maybe one or two years, then I think you could say, oh, this is what it is like. Because you know people tend to make the best of the situation. Because I won't tell you all the problems, because I don't want to look bad, so how can you really experience what is bad only if you are there for a few times. So with the researchers, I think you get more the better side. (Do you mean that it tends to be superficial, especially because of the limited time they spend in schools?) Yes. I think it is because of time. You can come here and but after one hour, I am sure you get some feeling about the school, but what more? (So in a way, you are saying that research in general is not to the point to the problems that you usually experience?) Yes, because I can tell you about the problems, but unless if you could be a teacher here for a year, you won't be able to experience that problem. (Chisholm)

So where did the practitioners usually look for information? Most of the sources mentioned by the practitioners were not the academic channels. Instead, they tended to use either newspapers, magazines, or

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<sup>53</sup> I did not ask both Bornman and Lee because they were also researchers themselves.



“the booklets that the Union gave us (Danca)”. Internet also seemed to be fairly popular. However, many of these sources were chosen simply because they were convenient and ready available. Considering the fact that these sources probably rarely publish detailed case studies from which one could draw comparison and experience, it seemed doubtful that they would, in fact, provide what these practitioners were looking for.

Their patterns of research also often seemed to be rather incidental.

Sometimes people would come and say well, I got this nice piece. We put it up and circulate to each other ... (Is there any specific journal or author that you usually read?) No, not really. I would if I come up with something. (So it is a bit accidental?) Yes. Sorry to say (laugh), but it is. I don't want to lie to you. (Chisholm)

Lastly, despite the claim of a general interest in the findings of the research in which the practitioners had participated (although in different format), it also did not seem as though they would demand these findings should the researcher fail to provide them. They appeared rather to place their reliance on the researchers' initiatives to provide them with the findings.

Therefore despite the many claims that research was generally considered to be useful, it was difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the research utilisation patterns of these practitioners

#### **7.4.2 Attitude towards researchers**

Despite a degree of reservation towards research per se the participants' view of the researchers was overwhelmingly positive.

Chisholm was of the opinion that researchers were a group of people to whom she looked up. This image of friendly, hard-working, "they want to do good thing", also appeared in the responses of other practitioners. Some had even used the words *admire* and *respect* to describe their feelings towards the researchers (Stevens and Seager).

However, at the same time, many of them admitted that they had not had much contact with researchers, and that they had observed a distance between the researchers and teachers in general. For example:

Y: what is your general impression of researchers?

V: if it is a research from university, and they have not been in a practical situation, then it is definitely a lack of



knowledge of what is happening in schools itself because many of the people that are in research have been in schools, but 10 years ago or more.

Y: you are saying the connection is not that strong?

V: it is not that strong. You also get people in schools and not doing research because they are not either studying further or not time to do the necessary research.

Y: so you are saying there is a gap?

V: there is definitely a gap. Also people who are suppose to be doing the research, which is the education department, nothing is happening there. So unfortunately that is where we sit. (Van Wyk)

It is, therefore, difficult to draw a conclusion as to whether their positive attitude towards the researchers that they had expressed earlier was either real or ideal. In addition, despite the many problems that they would like to have seen solved or, at least, be given some suggestions regarding these problems, and also despite their overall limited contact with the researchers, these practitioners did not seem to be interested in taking any initiatives to contact any researchers or to engage with them on a long-term basis.<sup>54</sup>

## 7.5 Synthesis

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the way in which the different methodological decisions were made throughout the study. It also describes the way in which the participants in this study interacted with the researcher. In addition, it provides a summary and critical analysis of how different issues were perceived by the original researchers and their original participants.

The findings included:

- The emphasis on the motivation for conducting the research seemed to differ in the writings (dissertations) and in the narratives (interviews);
- Contrary to literature that points to learning and better practice as possible benefits to the participants, participants in this study revealed they had participated mainly in order to *help the researcher*. In retrospect, for those few who had learned something from their participation, this learning had rarely occurred within the context of their teaching practice.
- In accordance with the reasons for participation as being mainly to *help the researcher*, the majority of the participants had not expected any personal benefit from their participation. They also did not seem to be overly concerned about the rather limited benefit that they might or might not have experienced.
- The researchers' understanding of their responsibility towards their participants centred on the issue of confidentiality. However, the empirical inquiry into the way in which the participants viewed

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<sup>54</sup> Obtaining a better understanding of a situation over time or also a necessary requirement for any reinforcement to happen.



confidentiality demonstrated that many did not mind whether their identity was concealed or not.

The discussion of involvement/detachment was broken down to several sub-themes in terms of which I discussed the questions that had arisen and the doubts that I had experienced during the course of the research and their impact on my perceptions and experience.

Since the worry of power imbalance seemed to be very present in social research, I furthered provide some empirical data to this discussion, revealing that all participants in fact felt comfortable been participants, and none of them in fact felt been powerless. Some participants suggested that researchers should be the one to control and guide the research process, while other actually felt powerful because their contribution. Personality of both the researcher and the participants were also pointed out as possibly a better role player in who felt powerful and powerless.

Finally, the inquiry into the attitude of the practitioners towards both the research and the researchers revealed many contradictions.



## 8 RETHINKING THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP

The departure point for this thesis came as a result of the questions raised regarding the adequacy of the “two-communities” theory. The findings of the study seem to point in contradictory directions: on one hand it became clear during the course of this research that the two communities (researchers and practitioners) are indeed divided, have limited contact with one another and hold different beliefs about the nature, purpose and value of the knowledge produced by research. On the other hand both groups’ perceptions of and preferences for researcher–practitioner engagement are surprisingly convergent.

The findings of this study also suggest the need to revisit the role that organizational culture plays in how researchers and practitioners position themselves in researcher–practitioner engagement. However, viewing the researcher–practitioner interface only as an organizational interaction does not adequately explain why the relationship between the same researcher and various practitioners played out differently, pointing to another seemingly contradictory finding that highlights the individualistic character of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

In this final chapter I reassess the findings of this study in the light of the chosen conceptual framework and then turn the intellectual gaze back on some relevant theories. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for future research.

### *8.1 Revisiting the findings*

The following section departs from customary practice of dissertations. It does not summarise the findings since they have been discussed in previous chapters (see par 5.4 & 6.3). Rather, it focuses on exploring the implications of findings in relation to the relevant theories.

#### **8.1.1 How similar or different are these two communities?**

All cases in this investigation confirmed the traditionally perceived divide that exists between researchers and practitioners. All the participant-practitioners involved in my study had only ever participated in one





other (the original) research project; although some practitioners did express interest in conducting their own research.<sup>55</sup> Many participants of the original practitioners were also aware of the limited interaction between the two groups and some even expressed concern about it.

Table 26 illustrates the many obvious mismatches between the type of research preferred by practitioners and that which is often produced by researchers:

Table 26: research preferred by practitioners/researchers

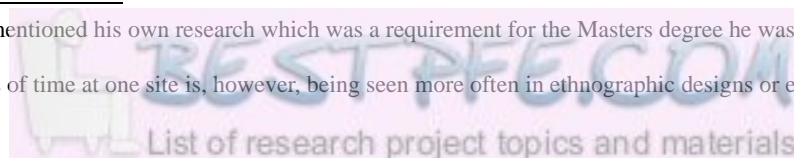
| Research preferred by practitioners  | Research produced by researchers  |
|--|---|
| Practice-orientated research which provides practical recommendations or targets a certain problem.  | Theory-orientated research which develops generalised findings or theories.   |
| Single-site focused research (research involving more than one site can also be interesting provided that the information from other sites is detailed so that one can compare and learn). | Multiple site research.   |
| Long engagement research — spending a long period of time at a particular site in order to evaluate the situation from different angles.   | Limited engagement research—often has one or several interactions only (spending more than six months at one site is rare). <sup>56</sup> |
| Follow-up or reinforcement research.   | Researchers are hesitant to return to the same school, even for a follow-up study, for fear of over familiarity.                          |
| Interview-based research, with participant-interviewer interaction (especially in the educational domain).   | Questionnaire-based research.   |

Surprisingly, however, both the practitioners and the researchers included in this study exhibited many shared perceptions, particularly about the nature of and preference regarding researcher–practitioner engagement. For example, since both groups recognised research as the entry point to their engagement, a research-based relationship rather than a friendship was accepted and preferred. Both groups also expressed the need for some type of closure once the research was completed. For practitioners this would involve, for example, the researcher notifying them when the research was complete. Both groups pointed out the importance of establishing a cordial relationship (particularly in the sense of friendliness) during the research process and their understanding of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher was also similar.

While it was expected that the groups would have different perceptions, the major area of difference between the researchers and practitioners in this study—namely, an understanding of ethical concerns and

<sup>55</sup> For example Van Wyk mentioned his own research which was a requirement for the Masters degree he was pursuing at the time (see par 6.1.1).

<sup>56</sup> Spending longer periods of time at one site is, however, being seen more often in ethnographic designs or ethnographic research.





behavior—came as a surprise since researchers often make bold claims about ethics.

Researchers are well aware that participants often give consent without fully understanding what it means, yet the researchers in this study claimed that providing practitioners informed consent was sufficient to provide opportunity to make informed decisions. This seems to be at odds with concerns raised about ethics.

Another example is that many researchers were aware of the practitioners' desire for practical suggestions, but the researchers believed that giving advice would contaminate the data and was incompatible with the specific purpose of research. As such, the researchers either offered suggestions only once the data collection was complete or chose not to disclose their opinions at all, reverting to the traditional researcher role and stating that “research is not to provide solutions” (Sani, see par 6.2.1). In many cases it seemed that providing useful suggestions to the participants was neither a priority nor a consideration on the part of the researchers. And the possibility of using an audit trail or extensive reflection to reveal whether the researchers' opinions could have influenced the research data was never explored.

Even more concerning is that some of the ethical issues not only accounted for the biggest divergences between the researchers and the practitioners, but they also revealed certain contradictions within the researchers themselves. For example, although the researchers claimed that reciprocity was a major concern vis-à-vis equalizing any power imbalance, in practice the researchers often failed to take cognizance of what that their participants considered to be important and incorporate their participants' voices when it came to decision-making regarding the research.

## **8.1.2. Organizational influences versus personality**

### 8.1.2.1 Organizational influences

Many organizational constraints are placed on all researchers. The increasing importance of the role of university research review boards, particularly ethics committees, could explain the emphasis placed on issues such as confidentiality. In the past there was a strong preference for quantitative methodology in educational research as a means of attaining credibility—which is another possible explanation for the lack of adequate training among many researchers (particularly long-standing staff members who ought to be



experienced) and the ongoing trend for funding that favours quantitative studies. Some of these influences could result from the particular culture of an academic institution, although many stem from the general academic discourse that guides the field of educational research.

Despite the fact that some researchers acknowledge the need to equalise power in the relationship between practitioners and themselves, this commitment is undermined by researchers' failure to incorporate practitioners' voices into the research decision-making process. This seems to perpetuate the view that academia exists within a self-regulating universe and subconsciously reinforces the hierarchy that exists between researchers and their participants, namely that the researcher *can and should* make decisions for the participants. Ironically, the lack of consultation is constantly justified as “more to protect the participant than anything else” (Sani, see par 6.2.1), suggesting that the researcher does not regard participants as competent to make sound decisions for themselves.

The example of confidentiality can be alluded to again. Earlier discussions illustrate that although confidentiality offers more in the way of protection for the organization, it is often portrayed as a device to protect the participants (for example, see par 5.1.1). Furthermore, this has become a requirement for conducting research and therefore every researcher is expected to buy into its relevance; however, it is not internalised with any critical reasoning.

Reverting to the researchers' role is another example. Referring to the example of the researcher who is not supposed to provide solutions when practitioners' practical needs arise, this occurs not only when the practitioners request practical suggestions but also when they express a wish to disseminate the research findings to policy makers in order to potentially improve their working conditions.

This study also reveals that theory advancement as a reason for conducting research is overstated—particularly in research writing—when in fact other extrinsic reasons that benefit the researcher are also important. Since academic writing (including dissertations) is aimed specifically at an academic audience, overstating theory advancement as a rationale for research could further suggest the pervasiveness of expectations created by academic discourse.



### 8.1.2.2 Personal factors—returning to Huberman’s general model

It was noted in the chapter describing the conceptual framework of this research that Huberman’s model is interested mainly in examining the organization as a whole and not in how individual researchers operate. Thus when Huberman refers to the linkage between researchers and practitioners he refers to the inter-organizational link—that between a research institution (or a particular researcher) and a research site. Considering that the subject matter of educational research is often about one’s profession and that the professional activities of teaching usually occur in a school (the research site), such research seems to be well justified. In fact, most of the original researchers in this study shared this notion.

However, observations in the research process of this study suggest that the link between researcher and research site, besides the initial access negotiation, seems to be limited. In fact a link seems to exist more at the individual level between a particular researcher and a particular participant (see, for example, par 5.3.2). In fact, the relationships between a researcher and various participants could differ because the personality of both seems to play a role in terms of how intimately a researcher can relate to a participant and how quickly a participant is able to open up to a researcher. This points to the importance of personal factors that should be taken into account when attempting to understand the researcher–practitioner relationship.

## **8.2 Conclusion**

This section provides my assessment of the nature of the researcher–practitioner relationship as it emerged from the study.

### **8.2.1 The nature of the researcher–practitioner relationship**

#### 8.2.1.1 A power play?

The literature indicates strongly that a power imbalance between the researcher and practitioner/participant is problematical. Kelman (1972) states that a power imbalance mainly manifests in the participants’ perceptions that they lack “both the *capacity* and the *right* to question the research procedures” (p. 992, original emphasis): participants are therefore by nature powerless, while researchers are by nature powerful.



However, contrary to the literature, the original researchers and participants in this study did not see a clear distinction between researchers as powerful and participants as powerless (see par 7.3.1). In many instances, in fact, they described the power imbalance as occurring in the opposite direction— that is, the powerless researcher and the powerful participant.

On the other hand, many participants seemed untroubled about the power imbalance highlighted in the literature, claiming that the word *power* had never come to mind and that the concept of power was inadequate in describing the research situation. Most participants expressed the view that the researcher should guide the research. Furthermore, the participants' apparently careless attitude towards both the informed consent and feedback—which could have been viewed by them as a means of correcting an imbalance of power—suggests their indifference of the power imbalance that troubles many academics (see par 7.3.3).

Nevertheless, although the data from this study does not suggest that the participants specifically regarded the researcher as an elevated authority, many participants accepted the decisions made by the researcher simply because the researcher “prefers to do so” (Stevens, see par 5.3.1). This phenomenon may be a reflection of the participant's subconscious acceptance of a researcher as a legitimate source of authority when it comes to making (research) decisions on their behalf.

Finally, regarding the power play, it is important to examine each party's reasons for being involved in the research process. The researchers either consciously expressed that they were conducting the research to help the practitioners (as in Hendricks's case) or that they expected the practitioners to learn from participating in the research. Meanwhile, most of the practitioners said that their reason for participating was to help the researcher, regardless of whether that researcher was a student or a more senior academic (for example, see par 7.1.2). Both parties seemed to want to be identified as the bestowers of knowledge.

#### 8.2.1.2 A familiar source?

There is consensus that a trusting relationship between a researcher and a practitioner is important. It is, however, unclear as to how this trust could be established. A researcher's ability to make practitioners feel free and confident to disclose information was mentioned by many participants as being critical to forming



a good relationship.

This study highlights another important factor—that of referral from a familiar source. In most cases, school principals act as an important source of referral. Although researchers often portray their role in gatekeeping as negative, the practitioners unanimously regard them as being trustworthy and believable, and if a principal decides to deny a researcher access to teachers, they believe that it is in order to protect the teachers. As Chisholm put it: “He [the principal] always keeps our interests at heart (see par 5.2.2).” Some of the original participants said that they opened their classroom door to the original researcher(?????) because “the principal asked [me to]” (Chisholm, see par 5.2.2 and Tilley, see par 6.2.2).<sup>57</sup> Indeed all of the participants preferred a researcher to ask permission from the principal before approaching them in person.

Besides principals, prior relationships—be they personal, work-related or as a result of a previous researcher–practitioner relationship—are other possible sources of referral, because their familiarity creates a basis for the establishment of trust. In fact, the previous researcher–practitioner relationship was mentioned by some participants as being the reason why they agreed to participate in this research.

This confirms Shaffir and Stebbins’s suggestion that “the sudden presence of a stranger naturally raises suspicion as motives are questioned” (1991, p. 26). However, this study also shows that familiarity works well in terms of facilitating the usage of research findings or suggestions and is clearly demonstrated in Sani’s case (see par 5.2.1).<sup>58</sup>

### **8.2.2 Rethinking involvement/detachment; insider/outsider; friendship**

Although some researchers were confused as to their understanding of *friendship* and *friendliness*, many of them showed a tendency to strive towards becoming *insiders* (see, for example, par 6.1.1). This seems to suggest that qualitative researchers should have more intimate relationships with their participants.

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<sup>57</sup> There are, of course, other reasons but this reason was mentioned first when the question was posed.

<sup>58</sup> Although not the one that I investigated, but the other school that I could not access. This is confirmed not only through Sani’s own account but also through other incidents that I observed. One example is a phone call that she made to the principal from the other school for advice during my interview with her.



However, such a position was often accompanied by a consistent attempt to preserve detachment. For example, some researchers strongly opposed the cultivation of friendship in a research situation. This opposition to friendship was sometimes extended to equate detachment with a typical researcher's role, while at other times a natural consequence of the researchers' professional nature.

In order to resolve this contradiction I would like to revisit the notion of *insider* and then illustrate the necessity of *detachment*.

Merton points out that the *total insider doctrine* assumes that "the outsider, no matter how careful and talented, is excluded in principle from gaining access to the social and cultural truth" (1972, p. 15). Merton therefore regards this ideology as a continuous advocacy for a monopoly of knowledge that is available exclusively to insiders.

We need to ask, however: insider to whom? When a cultural group is the target of an investigation, the assumption is often that such a group exhibits certain homogenous characteristics. Yet to constitute a functional group, different people would need to perform different roles. So the notion of *insider* might be viable if a community is seen as one unit, but within the community it would not be applicable.

The same can be said of numerous classroom research projects where more than one group of participants was included in a study. Even where a study only targets one group of participants (for example, teachers) the tendency is often to adopt a purposive sampling strategy to see whether different participants would convey different perceptions. However, even when the researcher used to be a teacher or was a teacher at the time of the research, where the researcher would have shared the same professional code with the participants, the question remains: to what extent can one person truly become an *insider* to another person? This notion of *insider* may therefore exist only as a theoretical construct.

A focus group could, however, be an interesting example to discuss the importance that is often attached to an attitude of detachment. As can be seen in the case of Francis's research (see par 5.1.2), literature often promotes the use of an outsider (professional focus group moderator, rather than the researcher him/herself) to conduct a focus group, particularly for fear of biases caused by over-familiarity.



Although the literature highlights the necessity of balancing the requirements of sensitivity and empathy on one hand with objectivity and detachment on the other hand (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 69), the trend is to emphasise self-discipline to control personal views (Krueger & Casey, 2000) and “that the moderator maintains a completely objective perspective throughout the process so that the final report accurately reports the factual information from the groups and provides an independent interpretation” (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 69).

So, “whenever the possibility exists of there being a clash between the personal interest of the moderator and objectivity in the focus group discussion, it is best to reduce the risk of moderator contamination and to use an outside moderator” (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996, p. 89). Even when the researcher is allowed to act as the moderator, Morgan further warns that the researcher needs to “walk a tightrope between understanding empathy and disciplined detachment” (1988, p. 50).

Vaughn, et al. (1996) claim that one of the major advantages of a focus group is its *loosening effect*, referring to a relaxed group setting where participants sense that their opinions and experiences are valued, and which therefore helps them to disclose information more freely and openly.

While the ability to speak freely is no doubt important in the researcher–practitioner engagement, my experience in this study does not point to an informal, relaxed atmosphere having to be created in an environment facilitated by an outsider as opposed to by the researcher. In fact, I found that what works best towards this aim is immediately following up on what the participant has just said instead of clinically following the interview schedule.

Furthermore, an external moderator may lack the necessary knowledge that results from an integrated understanding of the relevant literature and other data. In practice, a moderator may tend to follow a planned schedule instead of allowing unplanned topics to be discussed. This can restrict a fluid and interactive relationship with the participants, which contradicts the cultivation of a loosening effect.

To resolve the insider/outsider and involvement/detachment dilemma, my proposal is to adopt a position that many participants in this research expressed a preference for—that of the *friendly outsider*. With this friendly outsider, the researcher remains an outsider—as would usually occur in a research situation—but





more attention is placed on maintaining an informal, fluid and relaxed relationship in the interaction, thereby generating greater feelings of trust but not necessarily developing an insider status or friendship.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding the argument that a researcher, if too emotionally involved, would inadvertently influence the interaction with the participant and subsequently also the final report, I believe that instead of simply advocating a detached stance in data collection that is neither participant-friendly nor feasible, a possible solution could be to focus on rigorous reflection and to conduct an audit trail in the data analysis and final reports.

### 8.2.3 Rethinking research utilization

#### 8.2.3.1 Instrumental and conceptual utilization

Although my argument in Chapter 2 about the importance of revisiting instrumental utilization in a qualitative paradigm is confirmed by the practitioners' indication of and preference for action-orientated, localised, qualitative research, it conflicts with the other findings of this study, which strongly indicate that participation does not lead to any perceived benefit in terms of teaching practice (*instrumental utilization*) and that the only benefit which occurs is the enlightenment effect—the gaining of new ideas resulting in one becoming more knowledgeable (*conceptual utilization*). In other words, the link between research engagement and *instrumental utilization* is not well supported by the data from this research.

In the light of the above, the following *may* offer a possible explanation as to the paradox concerning instrumental utilization and *may* also expand the existing theory of research utilization. However, I need first to re-introduce the thinking that views research utilization as a series of stages, which moves from apprehension, recognition and evaluation to acceptance and adoption (Bostrom & Suter, 1993; Knott & Wildawsky, 1980; Machlup, 1979).

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, as Gurney (1991) suggests, the nature of a study—especially whether it is a short- or long-term engagement—may need to be taken into consideration regarding the extent of involvement and detachment. Although long-term, intensive engagement (as in Sehlola's case, see 5.3) would no doubt yield more of a friendship element, even in this case a friendly outsider stance may be sufficient, as one of his participants (Billana, see par 5.3.2) suggested.

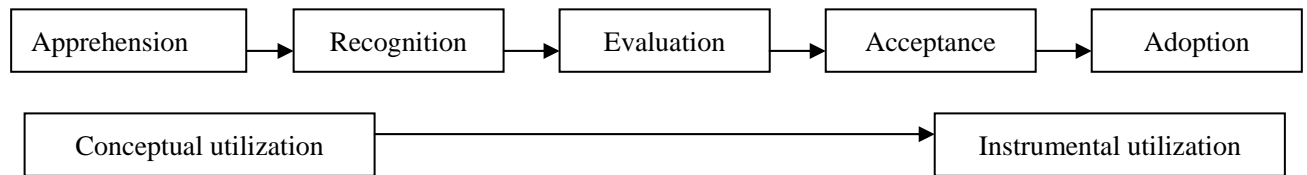


Figure 5: different views of research utilization

As Figure 5 shows, this different stages view unites with the dichotomous views, and suggests that the development from *conceptual* to *instrumental utilization* can be seen as a parallel development from *apprehension* to *adoption*, where *conceptual utilization* relates to apprehension and recognition, while *instrumental utilization* can be understood as the last stage of adoption.

Such an explanation corresponds with Chisholm's observation that "things [enlightenment effect] soon get lost (see par 5.3.1)." And this tendency for things to get lost, compounded with a lack of follow-up research and other reinforcement mechanisms could very likely undermine *instrumental utilization*: "Many of the things that were said [suggested] were tried for a certain period of time and many of them went back again" (Tilley, see par 6.1.1).

This proposed explanation also corresponds with the prevailing view that *conceptual utilization* in social science is more likely to occur, yet the reason for this is different from the traditional view where the nature of social science is cited (see par 2.1.2). Instead, under this new explanation the reason why *conceptual utilization* is more likely to occur could simply be because it constitutes the first in several stages on the way towards *instrumental utilization*. While *instrumental utilization* is the last stage of adoption, *conceptual utilization* constitutes many of the stages from apprehension to acceptance. Thus whichever stage a research finding lands on, *conceptual utilization* can be said to be realised. And the difficulty in realizing *instrumental utilization* could simply be because it requires multi-player involvement at multiple stages, so: "merely because information was timely, relevant, objective and disseminated to the right people in usable form [does] not guarantee its use" (Rich, 1979, p. 20).

All of the following conditions may need to be present to enable research to arrive at the stage of *instrumental utilization*:

- Practitioners must have a generally positive attitude towards research.
- Practitioners must have the time and must be familiar with the culture of academia to the degree that



they can read and understand research.

- The research must be relevant, timely, clear in implementation requirements and easily accessible. It must use plain language in order not to scare away the practitioners.
- Practitioners must be willing to change and must have the skills to apply research findings.
- The organizational environment (for both researchers and practitioners) must be conducive to research utilization activities and mechanisms must be put in place for the two parties to interact successfully (Bandura, 1986; Closs & Lewin, 1998; Hunt, 1997; A. F. Jacobson, 2000; Metcalfe, et al., 2001; Pennington, 2001; Stevens, Liabo, Frost, & Roberts, 2005; While, 2003).

However, meeting all the above conditions and arriving at an *instrumental utilization* is extremely difficult, if not impossible. This is so because, among others:

- a new intervention implies uncertainty and is often accompanied by discomfort (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980);
- teachers already have a heavy workload and view any activity apart from teaching as an additional burden;
- the very nature of knowledge in social science, including education, lacks perceived legitimacy and authority (everyone has his/her own say); and
- the academic culture favors internal activity (research and publishing) over external activity (helping the practitioners to reflect on the results and find better ways of teaching).

#### 8.2.3.2 Symbolic utilization and organizational culture

There is no evidence from this study to suggest that practitioners actively engage in searching for or utilizing research, particularly academic research. This applies to any research they may have participated in as well as educational research in general, including research projects initiated by the practitioners themselves (as in Hendricks's case). This—together with Van der Linde's experience that as a junior teacher research utilization does not easily occur because "I often [did] what I was told (see par 5.2.1)"—makes it imperative that symbolic utilization be revisited.

Symbolic utilization is used mainly to substantiate one's existing views or to justify one's decisions and does not influence decision-making. Yet in many instances *symbolic utilization* is not only influential but could also be more pervasive than conceptual and instrumental utilization (Van Buuran & Edelenbos, 2004; Weiss, 1980).

Time constraints have been mentioned as a factor resulting in the ubiquity of symbolic utilization among policy makers—an entity that typically exhibits symbolic utilization. "Decisions are going to be made either in the presence or absence of information" (Cicirelli, Evans, & Schiller, 1970). However, symbolic

usage also occurs when research information is provided on time.

In the discussion of the possible influences on decision making, Williams & Evans (1969) claim that research information serves merely as one of the many elements that go into policy formulation. In the light of such an argument, *conceptual utilization*—which influences broad assumptions and beliefs underlying a policy rather than specific decisions—is sometimes cited as the way that research ought to influence policies.

Yet as Berry (1982) points out, and as is evident in Hendricks’s case, if a research finding fails to support preconceived points of view, it is often ignored (even if it has been commissioned). This points to another possible over-estimation of the influence of *conceptual utilization* in decision making and suggests that the degree of compatibility of research findings with organizational objectives could be one essential factor in terms of research utilization.

This view corresponds with the user-pull research utilization model that stresses the importance of organizational structures, rules and norms in determining knowledge utilization (Rich & Oh, 1993). However, this model highlights the importance of organizational culture in users’ research utilization and not in the researchers’ context.

Although some universities in South Africa have started to stress the importance of conducting research (compared with their emphasis on teaching during the apartheid era), a specific system to encourage research dissemination, particularly in the form of follow-up research, is largely non-existent.

Examining the six cases, including my own, against Huberman’s proposal of two categories and five scenarios in terms of the possible linkage between researcher and participant prior to and after a research project (1990, pp. 26-27), most of the cases examined here seem to fall into the “hello-goodbye” scenario whereby there has been no follow up or contact after the project (with the exception of Sani, see par 6.2.2). Although most participants still remembered the original researcher, the interface between them and the researchers after data collection was minimal.<sup>60</sup>

Hendricks and Sani’s cases were most interesting. Although Hendricks’s project had the potential for

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<sup>60</sup> In many cases that is also what the participants wanted or expected.



follow-up and both the researcher and the participants expressed such a desire, possibly due to the reasons outlined in Chapter 6, this simply did not happen (see par 6.1.1). Sani was the only case in which a relationship was maintained, developed and even strengthened over time, yet she also stated that she would not go back to a school to follow the same research topic (see par 6.2.2), implying that she is not interested in a follow-up study.<sup>61</sup>

So why is symbolic utilization so pervasive and why, besides the difficulties encountered for both *instrumental* and *conceptual utilization* to occur, as pointed out earlier, is research often powerless to influence decision making?

In attempting to answer these questions I would like to bring Van der Linde's earlier quote (see par 5.2.1) back into the discussion and revisit the possible reasons for the prevalence of *symbolic utilization* and the lack of power that research has in general to influence decision making.

Gitlin, et al. state that "with more experience, teachers are likely to become more set in their ways as opposed to using experience as a basis for increased reflection, knowledge production, and classroom adaptation" (2005, p. 120). One of Gitlin et al's teacher-participants said: "I would think the more experience you had, the less you would use research" and further added: "The ones [teachers] that have been here the longest have no desire to learn anything. You give them ideas, 'Oh yes, tried it before, twenty year ago, didn't work". My own experience and observations echo these sentiments.

Indeed, considering how a person develops and matures over time and through experience, this is quite understandable. For example, the attainment of maturity is viewed as being synonymous with stability. A person who learns from his/her mistakes would over time experience an increase in stability, and partly because of this they would be seen as being more mature. And the building up of self confidence ("I feel good and right the way I do things") and public confidence ("We trust this person who has knowledge and experience to do right") allows an individual's sense of stability to develop further.

Although a mature person is still expected to be open (or at least to not refuse all new information and suggestions), reflecting on my own experience reveals that while many of my perceptions have solidified

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<sup>61</sup> Sani said that the reason for possibly wanting to access the same school in future would mainly be because of the convenience in doing so and not necessary for the benefit of the school or the situation.



over the years. I still change my view sometimes<sup>62</sup>, however, in order to accept a new viewpoint I need to be presented myself with sufficient evidence, and such evidence needs to go through a conscious process of reasoning and sometimes intuitive discernment. Ironically, the more I learn, the quicker and more accurately I am able to form a judgment, and thus I become more set in my opinions.

The lack of conceptual and institutional research utilization is therefore understandable, if not perfectly normal, when it comes to experienced, mature and confident teachers.

The question is then: who indeed needs research? If, due to the reasons discussed above, experienced teachers are excluded as possible research target in educational research, then the logical answer would be to focus on less experienced teachers who are more likely to change because of the presence of evidence. However, this group of practitioners generally seemed to have low levels of confidence—to the degree that their seniors may instruct them specifically what to do (as in the case of Van der Linde, “I often [did] what I was told”). And some researchers (for example, De Beer) observed that they tended to be unsure of themselves and felt insecure. Although they revealed in their interviews that they welcomed positive criticism, and we may therefore expect that they would be more open and willing to adapt to research findings or to others’ suggestions, other ethical dilemmas rise. This is described in the last chapter in more detail and the dilemmas regard the purpose of criticism (being either to relieve the researcher’s frustration or to empower others) and other consequences of criticism (possible uneasiness or embarrassment caused to the participants) and whether it would indeed produce any change in behavior (see par 7.2.3.1). In the light of the above, giving only positive feedback (as done by De Beer) seems to be a better option. And the impact of these different types of research utilization would certainly need further exploration.

### ***8.3 Suggestions for future research***

Based on the findings of this study, future research on the following points could be useful:

- Considering the three types of research utilization, does research utilization really occur and which type of research is indeed most likely to be used, and by whom and how? Cases like that of Hendricks—where the research is initiated by the practitioners yet research utilization still cannot be observed—deserve more attention.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> For example, some of my perceptions changed during the course of my doctoral research.

<sup>63</sup> Although possible reasons have been pointed out, further investigation of such reasons and possible exploration of other



- Owing to the contradictory perceptions expressed by the practitioners, the issue of whether mutual trust and favorable attitude exist needs to be examined in more detail. Furthermore, the reason why participants and researchers would exhibit the contradictions alluded in the earlier chapters could be interesting to explore further.
- Since the elements situated in the researcher and practitioner contexts are largely compiled from my own understanding, further study is needed to examine whether these are indeed the relevant items, and whether some elements should be excluded and additional elements added.
- The impact of participant confidentiality deserves more investigation. Although most participants in this study indicated that they did not mind having their identities revealed and some even stated that to stand up for what one says is to be accountable, to what extent could the assurance of confidentiality make them feel comfortable enough to talk more openly, thereby yielding more insight into the confidentiality debate.
- The negative gatekeeper blocking efforts and participants' low response rates have been reported in a large number of research findings, yet among the five empirical cases under investigation, only one of these cases experienced this while the others—even those who went through all the normal channels to access their participants—did not report negative resistance. Although I have speculated possible reasons for such negative resistance, studies which explore further why and how it occurs would be necessary.
- As indicated in the research design, there are many sub researcher–practitioner relationship areas that deserve further attention and exploration, such as: whether and how long-term and short-term research can result in different variations of the researcher–practitioner relationship; how does selection bias (in this research, only practitioners who had participated previously were included) influence the perceptions of the researcher–practitioner relationship; what is the relationship between the practitioners and the authority (government or policy makers); whether and how contract or practitioner-initiated research, and non-contract research data can result in different relationships; whether classroom research manifests differently from research that is not based in the classroom; if researcher-practitioners (practitioners conducting their own research) conduct their research differently from conventional researchers; and whether policy studies differ from general practice studies in terms of their researcher–practitioner relationship.

#### ***8.4 Suggestions for research practice***

This study calls for more reflections on the part of the researchers when conducting research. It also calls for consultation and negotiation with the participants and incorporating their voice and preference into various research decisions.



To be more specific, this study suggests that researchers could consider the following research practices:

- To establish a cordial relationship with the practitioners in the research process, but not strive for becoming *insiders*. Rather, adopt a position for which many participants in this research expressed a preference— that of the *friendly outsider*;
- Do not discontinue the relationship with the practitioners after the field work is completed. Rather continue the conversation and if the participants so wish, provide the type of feedback in which the practitioners are interested;

### ***8.5 Significance***

This study points to a number of findings that contradict the prevailing literature. For example, while ethics feature heavily in the researcher–practitioner relationship, this study reveals that many researchers exhibit serious inconsistencies in this regard and there is much incongruence in the way researchers and practitioners understand and display the concept of ethics.

Moreover, the relevant literature is concerned that a power imbalance exists between researchers and practitioners and impresses on researchers the need to resolve such imbalance. This study reveals, however, that practitioners are in fact indifferent to this issue.

Contrary to the prevailing “two-communities” theory which emphasises the differences between these two communities, this study shows that the communities actually share many similar perceptions, particularly the way in which they would prefer the relationship to terminate.

Confirming the importance of examining organizational culture when trying to explain researchers’ behavior vis-à-vis researcher–practitioner engagement, this study also brings to light the importance of looking at the individual and peculiar nature of this activity.

While the rich data and detailed descriptions of the six cases studied here provide empirical data on the subject, the extensive accounts drawn from both the researchers and practitioners offer a more holistic description of the researcher–practitioner relationship. In addition, the proposals made here to extend the current theories of insider–outsider positioning and research utilization enrich the debate in the field.

Lastly, this study proves the usefulness and indeed the importance of inquiring into the



researcher–practitioner interface as a first step towards unpacking the research practice enigma.

## ***8.6 Conclusion***

This study led to some expected findings, for example the differences between the two communities, but it also expanded theory by uncovering some unexpected findings, for example that the understanding of ethics divides the researchers and the practitioners the most. More importantly, this study pinpoints certain aspects of the researcher–practitioner relationship that can be addressed in practical terms which could in practice improve the relationship between researchers and the practitioners.



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## APPENDICES

### *A: Informed consent*

Dear Participant (original researcher)

You are invited to participate in a research project about the researcher–practitioner relationship. The aim of such project is to investigate the research under-utilization phenomenon from the angle of researcher–practitioner engagement. Through the lens of perceptions and experiences from both researchers and practitioners, this study aims at unpacking this possible missing link of human interaction that could shed light to the research–practice riddle. This is a project conducted for a PhD degree at University of Pretoria.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You may choose to participate or not and you may choose to withdraw and not to participate at any time without any penalty. Should you willingly decide to take part, your involvement will be in semi-structured interviews. You will be expected to talk about your engagement with your participants for your research and your reflection on that. With your agreement, I will use a recording device for the conversation together with a notepad for the purpose of getting accurate information.

Your identity will be protected to the best of my ability. However, since your dissertation is a public document, you need to tell me whether you want to keep your identity in my research hidden or not. Should the answer be yes, I will assign you a code when referring to you in the research; and should it be no, I will use your real identity in the research report.

The results from this study will only be used for research purpose only.

Having read the contents of this communication, you are requested to attach your signature as proof of consent. If you have any other problems or information pertaining, feel free to contact me.

Your participation in this research will be highly appreciated.

Participant’s signature ..... Date .....

Researcher’s signature..... Date .....

Yours Sincerely

*Yu,ke*  
*Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies*  
*Faculty of Education*  
*University of Pretoria*



Dear Participant (original participant):

You are invited to participate in a research project about the researcher–practitioner relationship. The aim of such project is to investigate the research under-utilization phenomenon from the angle of researcher–practitioner engagement. Through the lens of perceptions and experiences from both researchers and practitioners, this study aims at unpacking this possible missing link of human interaction that could shed light to the research–practice riddle. This is a project conducted for a PhD degree at University of Pretoria.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You may choose to participate or not and you may choose to withdraw and not to participate at any time without any penalty. Should you willingly decide to take part, your involvement will be in the semi-structured interviews. You will be expected to talk about your engagement with your participants for your research and your reflection on that. With your agreement, I will use a recording device for the conversation together with a notepad for the purpose of getting accurate information.

Your identity will be protected to the best of my ability. All the data and tape recording will be kept confidential. If you prefer, I can use your real identity in my report; if not, I will use the code that your previous researcher has given to you for your identity (or assign you a code if your identity was not mentioned in the previous research report), so that your true identity will remain unanimous in the final report.

The results from this study will only be used for research purpose only.

Having read the contents of this communication, you are requested to attach your signature as proof of consent. If you have any other problems or information pertaining, feel free to contact me.

Your participation in this research will be highly appreciated.

Participant’s signature ..... Date .....

Researcher’s signature..... Date .....

Yours Sincerely

*Yu,ke*  
*Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies*  
*Faculty of Education*  
*University of Pretoria*