

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS ON MY FACILITATION OF THE R@I PROJECT

Writing about action research...is much more than mere writing. It is about constructing a language for reporting on collaborative knowledge creation activities in which the first person voice is primary and in which process is as central to the research story as are the results.

(Greenwood, 2002, p.132)

This chapter deals with the results of the thesis project in which I analyse the data and provide evidence of transformations pertaining to the research question: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” I provide evidence of what I regard as pivotal moments that show how I have lived in the direction of my values (inclusion, creativity and respect for individual contributions) during my facilitation of the project spanning the period May 2004 to March 2006. The evidence is presented in two sections. In the first section I select excerpts from the records of the R@I meetings that demonstrate a progression in my own learning of how to facilitate the R@I project in response to its development. The second section contains the verbatim responses from the five team members regarding the educational influences they experienced as a result of their participation in the R@I project. These are organised in terms of possible shifts that occurred in their values; identity; way of working; and perception of resources.

My answer to the research question lies in the insights I derived, personal development and transformations that took place in my own learning, and the evidence that suggests that I have had an influence on the learning of the other five team members as a result of my facilitation of the R@I project. Whitehead (2008b) uses the term *educational influence* in describing living theory as “an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work” (p.104). The R@I group can be regarded as one such social formation. Within a systemic ontology, unidirectional

influence is problematic as it assumes linear causality in which A causes (or influences) B. Bateson (1970) states that “any complex person or agency that influences a complex interactive system thereby becomes part of that system, and no part can ever control the whole” (p.362). Since I convened, coordinated and facilitated the R@I meetings, nurtured the project as a whole and participated fully as an equal member in the group, it becomes very difficult to isolate and evaluate *my influence* in this complex interactive system. Becvar and Becvar (1996) describe reciprocal causality as alternative in which people and events are seen in the context of mutual interaction and mutual influence. Causality, and by association influence, is regarded as reciprocal and only to be found in the “interface between individuals and systems as they mutually influence each other. Responsibility or power exists only as a bilateral process, with each individual and element participating in the creation of a particular behavioural reality” (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p.64). Being a member of the group meant that we both contributed and were subject to a process that reciprocally influenced us and changed the process in turn. As we changed, so the process changed.

I focus therefore in this chapter on my own learning and the learning of others as a result of our participation in the R@I project. I also reflect on decisions I took related to my facilitation of the R@I meetings, based on my values. Consequently, when I refer to *my educational influence*, it is to punctuate any actions on my part that likely contributed to the R@I project being a space that enabled learning and development of each of the participants, myself included. This punctuation is undertaken for the purpose of inquiring into my academic practice. It is furthermore done with the acknowledgement of the many actions from each of the other participants that contributed to the same outcome: co-creating the R@I project as an environment for personal and group development and transformation.

Progression of my own learning in how to facilitate the R@I project

At the outset

My intention in establishing a research forum was to create an opportunity where my five colleagues and I could attempt to integrate our research, teaching and community engagement practices, and in the process generate locally relevant knowledge that

would be immediately useful to the co-creators of this knowledge. My invitation to my Mamelodi campus colleagues to join me in establishing a research forum also involved my offer to organise and facilitate regular monthly meetings, and to record our discussions in terms of the plans we made and the reasoning that supported these plans. I suggested that our research forum take the form of an action research project and I offered to facilitate the project. I also stated my intention to submit a research report on the process and content of the project as a whole towards a PhD degree. Evidence of my offer to facilitate this project and declaration of my intent with the project appears in the record of the first R@I meeting (Box 23).

Box 23. Offer to be the facilitator of the R@I project

I convened this meeting in an attempt to formalise some of the ideas that were expressed in conversations that I have had the privilege to share with most of you on various occasions around the research potential and opportunities at Itsoseng. I have a passion for action research and believe that if we pool our unique creative resources and apply this to practical problems/opportunities that we see at our place of work (passion), that this could lead to many benefits for all of us.

I see this project as varying in size for each participant. I myself am interested in the project as a whole (establishing an action research centre at the Mamelodi Campus that is able to do research on various focus areas (or practical problems) with the aim of producing research products that are relevant and useful to the participants of each of the research projects.) This I plan to document in the format of a PhD research report.

A key aim for me is to record the work that we do and problems that we deal with everyday in such a format that we can publish this as legitimate research – whether in accredited journals or other archives, which keep records of meaningful events/actions/processes that took place.

I undertake to arrange the logistics/pragmatics of the meetings and to make available and distribute my documentation of the process.

From the record of the 1st R@I meeting held 2004-05-26, p.1 of 5

As all of the members of the R@I team were involved with Itsoseng Psychology Clinic, we decided to take the functioning of the clinic as our first project. My first strategic challenge to the R@I team was to ask each member: “What is your most important or urgent concern regarding Itsoseng Clinic?” (Appendix E, Record of the 1st R@I meeting, p.2). I recorded in as much detail as possible every member’s response. This way of facilitation and recording allowed me to match ideas with their authors, but prevented me from joining in the conversation and hampered the natural flow of the conversation as I sometimes asked speakers to slow down and repeat ideas that I had not managed to pen. For the second R@I meeting I decided to let go of the idea of recording individual contributions linked to their authors and as a result the conversation flowed more freely. In the third meeting I started using flip charts in our discussion to take down main points as well as writing down some ideas in more detail. The focus of the discussions was improved by using the flip chart, but trying to facilitate a discussion by writing main points on a flip chart and jotting down detail in a notebook proved too arduous and again prevented me from actively contributing to the discussions. In discussions with my promoter (Gerhard), he suggested that I use audio or video recording equipment for the meetings with every team member’s consent. After doing this I audiotaped our R@I meetings from the fourth meeting onwards. This allowed me much more freedom to actively participate in the meetings. I could therefore attend to both the content of the conversations as well as the nonverbal communications present in the interactions between people and the group process as a whole, without fear that I would fail to record the content accurately. I could also concentrate on how our discussions linked with our original goals and other related processes. The freedom to participate fully further allowed me to subject myself more completely to the transformative potential that participation in this group offered. The decision to audio record our conversations rather than taking notes freed me to learn and develop in a more equal relationship in the company of others.

Experiencing the dual role of an insider action researcher

When I asked “what is your most important or urgent concern regarding Itsoseng clinic?” during the first R@I meeting, I did not realise that the mere fact of asking this particular

question placed me in a critical relationship *vis-à-vis* the two operational clinic managers, both of whom were members of the R@I team. One of the operational clinic managers made the following comment: “First of all I get defensive when you start asking about what is not working at the clinic because [the other manager] and I have done everything that is necessary to ensure the efficient running of the clinic” (Appendix E, record of 1st R@I meeting, p.2). This sentiment was not shared by the other operational clinic manager who stated that: “I do not feel defensive when we talk about what is not working at the clinic. There are a lot of things not working and that is a great concern for me” (Appendix E, record of 1st R@I meeting, p.2). Notwithstanding their respective stances towards my question, I sensed the importance of clarifying and being sensitive to my dual role as facilitator and team member. This is an issue that is germane to insider action research projects (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan, 2007). Indeed, as Coghlan (2007, p.298) points out:

Undertaking an action research project in one’s own organization is political and might even be considered subversive. Action research may be considered to be subversive because it examines everything. It stresses listening. It emphasizes questioning. It fosters courage. It incites action. It abets reflection and it endorses democratic participation. Any or all of these characteristics may be threatening to existing organizational norms.

To acknowledge my dual role and in an attempt to make it transparent and subject it to regular scrutiny, in the second R@I meeting I made the following remarks (Box 24):

Box 24. Acknowledging my dual role as insider action research facilitator

A shift in focus

One of the first issues that were raised was the importance of making a clear distinction between a management focus and a research focus of the R@I meetings. Since we tackled the issue of improving the service delivery and efficient functioning of Itsoseng as a first action research project, the danger existed of seeing these research meetings as an attempt to exercise control over the clinic management team.

Clarification of my (Willem’s) role

I see myself as the research facilitator or primary researcher. I have taken it upon myself to set up a research wing at Mamelodi campus (psychology subdepartment), with the core aim to make it easier to publish the work that we do anyway. I believe that action research is ideally suited to this purpose and that we are surrounded by relevant research questions that would be beneficial to find answers to.

From the record of the 2nd R@I meeting held 2004-06-09, p.1 of 4

In a further attempt to explain my critical and strategic questions as originating from my role as action research facilitator, I presented my understanding of action research and the AR process during the third R@I meeting (Appendix E, record of the 3rd R@I meeting, p.3).

The concern expressed by Member 6 about my questions on the functioning of the clinic led me to consider that the privilege (i.e., more freedom to ask critical questions) attached to my role as facilitator could inadvertently lead to some perceived advantage (i.e., the liberty to question another colleague about their practice) in my role as colleague; and that this advantage might not be favourably regarded by all participants. In other words, my role as facilitator of the R@I project provided me with more legitimacy to ask and encourage potentially uncomfortable questions about the functioning of clinic, which could be perceived as veiled criticism of the clinic operational managers. Coghlan (2007) refers to the insider action researcher's dilemma of augmenting your normal organisational membership roles with a researcher role: "Insider action researchers are likely to encounter role conflict in trying to sustain a full organizational membership role and the research perspective simultaneously" (p.339). I was fortunate, however, in that three of my colleagues were more senior faculty members and frequently asked critical and challenging questions themselves, so that within a short period of time a culture of asking challenging questions was established in the R@I meetings. Their relative seniority (measured in terms of the years they had dedicated to develop learning content relevant to the unique needs of the student population, as well as their role in establishing the clinic) lent them, in my opinion, more legitimacy to question the management practices relevant to functioning of the clinic. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter three, the practice of action research necessitates the development of "habits of

counterintuitive thinking, questioning definitions and premises, linking findings and process analyses to other cases, and attempting to subject favourite interpretations to harsh collaborative critiques” (Greenwood, 2002, p.130). Therefore, while encouraging the hard questions in my facilitation of the R@I meetings, I also made an effort to regularly acknowledge and affirm each participant’s contributions in an attempt to protect their dignity (Tuhuwai Smith, 2005). Some evidence of these efforts appears in an excerpt from the record of the 15th R@I meeting (Box 25) where I encourage one of the members of the team to share more of her research ideas with us:

Box 25. Evidence of respect for individual differences and contributions

Member 6: I want to register and start working on my PhD this year. I have some ideas in place but my focus now is not there, I’m going on leave next week. But when I get back from leave I am keen to start on it.

Willem: I would be keen to hear about it – maybe discussing it here could be helpful to you and us.

Member 6: That would be nice but not likely because you do qualitative research and I cannot stand qualitative research and you do not like quantitative research.

Ilse, Linda, Terri assured Member 6 that they are not against quantitative research, they just don’t do it.

Gerhard: I am scared of quantitative research maybe, but not against it at all.

Member 6: That is so weird for me, for in my mind quantitative research is the easiest thing in the world.

Willem: Well, it would be great if R@I could have a research output that is balanced in terms of quantitative and qualitative research. At present our focus is heavily biased towards qualitative research as you rightly pointed out.

Gerhard: I would be keen to see if we could do quantitative research that is not trying to be value-free but fully declaring our values and biases in doing it.

From the record of the 15th R@I meeting held 2006-01-20, p.4 of 6

Initial insights and transformations

In facilitating the R@I meetings, I had to develop a style of recording the discussions that would allow my own active participation as well as provide me with documentation not only of the content of our plans and actions, but also the process of our and my developing understanding. As an insider action researcher, the challenge to participate as a team member and to facilitate an emergent process was significant. It took me about four to six meetings to develop a style of facilitation that also allowed me to participate with some spontaneity. My sensitivity to the dual role (Coghlan, 2007) I assumed as an insider action researcher was further developed as a direct consequence and in response to one team member's expressed discomfort with my questions about what was not working in the clinic.

As the R@I project fell within a larger thesis project, I also had to learn to document my own role in the process in order to provide an account not only of our learning, but also my learning as well as my educational influence. This required the production of documents that recorded the meeting agenda, the reflections and plans made as well as reporting on progress from previous plans made. At times it was useful to record ideas independently of their authors, particularly when it was important to form a group identity and to record "our learning". At other times it was useful to have a record showing the development of an idea in dialogue with particular members. The style and content of the records of the meetings held some power to mobilise passion, build trust, convey strategic challenges and encourage emergent outcomes (Burns, 2007). Apart from the letterhead that changed relatively little, at a glance, it is apparent that the records of the 17 R@I meetings vary significantly in terms of structure and type of content. This variability in structure reflects not only the difference in the structure of the various meetings but also my experimentation with the document as both a record and a strategic catalyst to most effectively mobilise our collective and individual action.

Adjusting to the implications of the incorporation

After the fourth meeting, the team agreed that we had established a research support forum. I was keeping record of our efforts at improving the functioning of the Itsoseng clinic. We had already experienced some success with issues relating to the clinic

functioning (see chapter five), but now a new concern surfaced. We were confronted with the need to adjust to and consider the implications of the incorporation of the Mamelodi campus into the University of Pretoria. The challenge of facilitating the R@I meetings now became one of maintaining momentum while allowing the direction of our focus to develop naturally in response to the daily challenges we faced.

Facilitation of R@I during an uncertain future for the Mamelodi campus

During the latter part of 2004, all staff members from the various faculties on the Mamelodi campus were invited to discussion meetings on the potential future of the Mamelodi campus in its new position within the University of Pretoria. One of the future scenarios discussed was closing down the campus and moving all the students to the main campus of the University of Pretoria.

Having recently established a research forum committed to creating locally relevant knowledge, we experienced intensely this first threat to our continued existence. The campus might be closed down, and with it, Itsoseng Clinic and our psychology training programmes, which had been developed and refined specifically for the educational needs of the student community that the Mamelodi campus attracted (i.e., African students from an impoverished educational background). The potential closure of the Mamelodi campus was a significant threat to our identity as lecturers working in a historically black university, as well as a threat to our sense of self-determination and agency. In response to this threat, the R@I team decided to approach selected members of various levels of university management with our vision (in the form of presentations and discussions) for a potential future for the Mamelodi campus. This included using the R@I initiative as an example of a “centre of excellence” that could produce locally relevant research, teaching innovations and serve as a flagship for the University of Pretoria’s community engagement projects. Some evidence of this decision is reflected in the record of the 6th R@I meeting (Box 26):

Box 26. Presentations to various levels of University of Pretoria management

Presentation to the Dean

Terri expressed again the urgency with which we have to act in this matter, especially considering the uncertainty about the future of this campus and the continual decisions that get taken in ignorance of the potential that exists. By doing this presentation it is assumed that we will give some people with executive power some info to act on.

This is our hope anyway, and perhaps the best we can do so far. It was agreed that by Wednesday 13 October 2004 we would send a one-page letter summarising our main arguments and attractions to:

- Psychology Department, main campus (Head of Department)
- Head of the School of Social Sciences
- The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
- Two Vice Chancellors of the University of Pretoria)

From the record of 6th R@I meeting held 2004-10-08, p.3 of 6

By the end of 2004 we had done more than send one-page letters; we had delivered Powerpoint presentations and attended various meetings with people we had identified as important decision makers. A great deal of our energy and focus during the R@I meetings in this cycle went into designing presentations to sell our vision to the incorporating institution. The record of the 8th and 9th R@I meetings reflects some of the content and outcomes of the total of six meetings and presentations we were involved in towards the end of 2004 and in the beginning of 2005. What is perhaps not clear from our reflections in Box 26 is that we planned these interventions in the context of feeling disempowered and marginalised; yet we still had the courage to take our ideas to this level of management in an institution where we were the outsiders, and which had an extremely rigid hierarchical order where ordinary lecturers seldom met the people in the upper echelons. In the words of one of the R@I team members: "I am not sure if we were stupid or brave but I do believe the R@I initiative contributed largely to our confidence to attempt this! I wonder if this has something to do with the clinic still surviving today?" (T. Bakker, personal communication, March 26, 2011).

According to Burns (2007), the key principles of good action research facilitation are mobilising passion, building trust, strategic challenges and the encouragement of emergent outcomes rather than pushing for a predetermined solution. To adhere to these principles requires a flexible facilitation process, as the directions to take are neither set nor random:

We can never predict the detailed outcomes but we can make judgements about the direction of travel when we can see more of the picture. Despite this, things will not happen as we expect, so we need a process that allows us to change course flexibly and quickly. (Burns 2007, p.39)

My flexibility as facilitator was tested with regards to our drive to sell the R@I initiative, which did not feature in the original purpose of our meetings. In my role as facilitator I sometimes experienced frustration in this regard and during the 8th R@I meeting I started to question whether we really needed anybody's support for our initiative. The response I received from some of the team members (Box 27) made me realise that this drive to sell ourselves was part of the process and that as a facilitator of the R@I meetings I needed to respect this.

Box 27. Questioning whether we really needed anybody's support

Willem: ... why can't we just live our solipsistic existence on this campus? Why do we need any support from the top to do what we are doing here?

Ilse: We want to engage in something that is going to last and not just terminate after a year or two.

Terri: It is also about marketing and making visible what we do. We want to influence the decision makers that decide on the future of this campus.

Record of the 8th R@I meeting held 2005-01-25, p.3 of 11

Our focus was no longer primarily on finding ways to integrate research, teaching and community engagement, nor was it solely on increasing our research output or improving the functioning of Itsoseng clinic. By presenting our vision and work to others, based on an urge to survive the incorporation, we were forced to continually define our intentions and values, not only to others but also for ourselves. In this way the R@I meetings

became a place for self-preservation of who we wanted to be amidst the threats of becoming “other” or different. This context of self-preservation likely contributed to a sense of belonging and building a group research identity, which, looking back, seems to me to have been a necessary precursor to our further evolution into individuated researchers.

Maintaining a research focus

In my facilitation of the R@I meetings, one of the challenges was to allow for the natural development of one of the foci we had as a team (i.e., the emergent drive to sell our vision), while at the same time co-creating a context in which we could discuss and develop our research initiatives, teaching innovations and community engagement projects. Amidst our work on the various presentations and meetings which happened in addition to our daily teaching and administrative duties, we were also busy with research projects that came into being as a result of earlier R@I meetings. Two of these projects were a programme evaluation of the SOS Children’s Village Educare programme for daycare mothers, and a research project involving using third-year psychology students as receptionists for Itsoseng Clinic. The record of the 9th R@I meeting contains feedback provided by three members on some of the research projects that were current at that time. An excerpt of this is presented in Box 28.

Box 28. Feedback on research projects in early 2005

Feedback on current research projects

- SOS Educare project: Last Thursday & Friday (17&18 Feb 2005) Willem and Gerhard conducted focus groups with the 36 daycare mothers. A critical question that came up for us during the process was “how is what we do action research – what elements are present to make this action research?” “Do we structure our questions in the later focus groups based on our conversations in the first couple of focus groups?” – “not sure whether the repetition of information is due to the specific spaces the facilitators open up through the questions or whether there is a sameness inherent in the respondents’ experience.”
- SLK 391 project: Ilse: 3rd year students have to volunteer as a receptionist and

to observe over a couple of months what sort of clients come in and decide for themselves what type of problem is prevalent at Itsoseng and then design an intervention according to that.

Record of the 9th R@I meeting held 2005-02-21, p.4 of 6

Strategic challenges

One strategy I used to ensure we maintained our original focus albeit in a flexible manner was to structure the meeting agenda to allow for emergent and developing foci, as well as to maintain our research focus. In addition, I needed to manage the time spent on each discussion in such a way that we could have meaningful discussions on each agenda point without feeling restricted. As the meetings also functioned to offer peer support, it was often difficult to punctuate animated and lively discussions in the interest of moving on to the next agenda point.

After I completed typing up the record of the 14th meeting based on the audio recordings, I noticed on the first page that Terri was the only person whose research was specifically listed in the agenda (Box 29):

Box 29. Agenda showing Terri's research in addition to general topics

Discussion points / Agenda:

1. Taking stock
2. Unisa partnership
3. Itsoseng clinic
4. Book chapters
5. Terri's study – the Testimonio
6. Conferences in 2005
7. The next meeting

Record of the 14th R@I meeting held 21-11-2005, p.1 of 5

It seemed to me that Terri was defined as an individual researcher within the larger group (whose junior members especially defined themselves in terms of a group

researcher identity). This focus on individual projects and progress struck me as something that might be useful to the rest of us too. In preparation for the 15th R@I meeting therefore, I structured the agenda (Box 30) in a way that might facilitate greater individuation in terms of research involvement and experience between the various team members. My motivation was firstly, to allow us to use each other's research experience and creativity as a resource; and secondly, to gently redirect our energy towards one of our aims, namely to increase our research output.

Box 30. Agenda of the 15th R@I meeting

Discussion points / Agenda:

1. Revisiting the original focus of the R@I and redirecting our energy flow
2. Gerhard's research
3. Member 6's research
4. Linda's research
5. Ilse's research
6. Willem's research
7. General comments
8. Completed dissertation at Vista Mamelodi
9. Some good ideas to be followed up
10. Itsoseng Clinic

Record of the 15th R@I meeting held 20-01-2006, p.1 of 6

As can be seen from the agenda, each R@I member was encouraged to discuss their own research as distinct from the group projects. As Terri's research was discussed during the 14th R@I meeting, I decided to also put the rest of us on the spot during the 15th meeting. During this 15th R@I meeting I invited each team member to provide the rest of the team with an overview of any research projects that they were working on at the time. As is evident from the record of the 15th R@I meeting (Appendix E), each member provided very different presentations. Some provided a list of articles and book chapters they were working on, some a list of finished articles they had submitted and were awaiting feedback on, and some members discussed their plans for future research. One team member reflected: "I wonder why one of the goals, namely, to help us to

publish, has not happened for me yet? A need for me is to look at why that has not happened for me yet.” (Appendix E, Record of the 15th R@I meeting, p.2). This member used this opportunity to start a reflection process on why the R@I process had not yet helped him to increase his publication record. A perusal of the notes suggests that the conversation that followed this critical question had a significant influence on the direction that my facilitation of the R@I project took. On the last page of the record of the 15th R@I meeting, two short notes (Box 31) reflect some of my own learning as a facilitator of the R@I project.

Box 31. Two notes to myself, reflecting my own learning

Notes to myself:

- I was tempted to write “what prevents us from publishing” and what “enables us to publish” – the decision to differentiate this brings to life for me the fact that different things enabled and prevented each of us this far.
- Shift from our research output to my and each of your research output – *differentiation* and *individuation* facilitates personal responsibility.

From the record of the 15th R@I meeting held 20-01-2006, p.6 of 6

The first note reflects the awareness that my facilitation of a peer support initiative necessitated sensitivity to each member’s individual needs versus a collective need only. What would have enabled or prevented one team member to increase their publication record might not have had the same effect on the next person. The first note furthermore contains a subtle commentary on the difference between asking “what *enables* me?” versus “what *prevents* me?” The first question requires an identification of obstacles and assumes that the removal of obstacles will lead to a better outcome. The second question requires an identification of resources and assumes that the presence and utilisation of resources will lead to a better outcome.

We had spent a significant amount of time discussing perceived collective obstacles to publishing as a group (e.g., the incorporation process and uncertain future of the campus, limited or no research funding and support, high volume of teaching and administrative duties, etc.). We had also discussed, albeit less rigorously, what we

regarded as collective resources (e.g. the Mamelodi campus and the psychology clinic as a rich source of locally relevant research questions, our network of like-minded academics from neighbouring universities, etc.) that enabled us as a group to publish. What we had not yet explored by the end of the 14th R@I meeting was how we could act as enabling resources to each other, based on an awareness of each other's individual needs and obstacles.

The second note makes a commentary on personal versus diffused responsibility. A critical shift in the question from “what enables us?” to “what enables me?” could allow each member to become aware or discover his or her own individual resources and obstacles to publishing. By individuating and differentiating within our team, we could also become available to each other as resources and request help from each other. It moved the question from “how can we improve our research output?” to “how can I increase my own research output?”

Following up on this reflection, in the 16th R@I meeting, I designed a table with columns for projects, goals, needs and comments (Appendix E, Record of the 16th R@I meeting). We spent the whole meeting filling in the blank spaces in this form. This was done on a laptop computer connected to a data projector that allowed all members to view the screen. I asked each member to provide me with a list of their projects, including intended completion dates and what they needed from the rest of our team to make it easier to complete the project. There was also a space for any comments on this project to provide additional information to the rest of the team. The completed table prepared the ground for the 17th and final R@I meeting of the core AR project. Facilitation of this 16th meeting required non-judgemental questioning and affirming responses to each team member's sharing of their current research projects. An example of this facilitation process appears in dialogue form on page three of the record of the 16th R@I meeting. I transcribed some of the dialogue between Gerhard and myself, in which I invited Gerhard to state what he needed from the R@I team members in order to get his articles ready for publication. I reproduce an excerpt of this dialogue in Box 32.

Box 32. Origin of the four strategic questions of the 17th R@I meeting

Willem addressing Gerhard: Okay, how I have divided this form is in four columns: projects, goals, needs and comments/concerns. Is there anything you need from us that would make it easier for you to reach your goals with each project?

Gerhard: What I would need to do is to approach you and talk about possible places for publications, but I think maybe the social constructionist paper would be good in the SAJP¹³ for two reasons: the fact that M is the editor means that that kind of article would probably be considered and secondly I think it is good in South Africa – it is very popular in South Africa (social constructionism), everybody applies it willy-nilly – so, I think it might be a useful article in a South African context. The translation article I am not sure at all. Maybe it could be published in some kind of interdisciplinary language based sort of journal.

Willem: Okay, so for you to finish this by the end of May, if I understand you correctly, you will have had to select a couple of journals to see how to write this article, because from our discussions last time, it sounds like that is where you start. You start with this is the idea that I have, this is the journal where this idea would get accepted, so in what format would they want the article.

Gerhard: Okay, so what you are saying is that I must actually, now, before I take those rough drafts and put them in the shape of an article, I must identify the journals.

Willem: And it would work well then, because you are also facilitating and coordinating the list of journals in which we can publish, you already have two then. So this is a list that can grow as we submit. It need not start out as a list of 20 journals.

Gerhard: Okay, well, this is helpful to me now, because I still had it in the back of my mind that I must have a finished article and then go shop around for a journal.

Willem: Yes, it makes sense to know your audience so that you can write for them. Would it be possible for you in future R@I meetings to discuss these three articles as research projects and say “this is my research question, this is my design” that

¹³ South African Journal of Psychology

kind of thing, just to share a bit of what you do and how you conceptualise your research project?

Gerhard: Okay.

Willem: That would be valuable for me. Would it be possible and valuable for you?

Gerhard: Yes, I think this is an interesting thing. I think it will be valuable for me, because we always in the research committee look at the specific format in which something is presented such as the research questions, what is the methodology, how are you going the answer the research questions, what is the theoretical base and so on. If I have to sit here and say these are my questions, this is my method and this is my theoretical base, I think it will be useful to reflect on what am I actually doing, and what makes it research, that it is not just an opinion piece.

From the record of the 16th R@I meeting, p.3 of 5

After typing up this dialogue I decided to structure the 17th R@I meeting by inviting each of the team members to answer four questions on each of the projects that they had listed in the previous meeting: (1) the main argument, statement or question of the project; (2) the research paradigm; (3) the research method; and (4) the names of journals that might be interested in publishing this research. These questions had their clear origin in the dialogue between Gerhard and myself in the 16th R@I meeting.

The results of asking these four questions appear in table format in the record of the 17th R@I meeting (Appendix E). Examples of the responses from two R@I team members (Gerhard and Terri) appear in chapter five in the section on the individuation of our research identities (tables 4 and 5). The structure of this table developed in an emergent fashion over 16 meetings and enabled us to critically engage with each other on these four and other questions. We were now more able to be available to each other as resources, and as a result, we become assets to each other.

Evaluating my educational influence in facilitating the R@I project

I discuss my educational influence on my own learning and the educational influence of the R@I project on my learning in chapter seven. In this section I provide another form of evidence of the educational influence of the R@I initiative on my colleagues and team

members in the R@I project. I present this evidence in the form of the verbatim responses I received from a member check that I performed using a list of questions that I emailed to every member. This member checking process represents an important part of establishing the validity and legitimacy of the knowledge created in this project, as explained in chapter four. As such, it represents validation through second person evaluation. I present the responses of each of my five colleagues on their experiences of being part of the project and their experiences of my influence in this project.

Invitation to team members to evaluate my educational influence

Towards the end of the 16th R@I meeting I discussed conducting semi-structured individual interviews with each of the R@I team members to discuss their individual perceptions of the value of the R@I project to them. My question to each member was: “What do you gain and have already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?” I broke this question down into subsections (Box 33) so that I inquired specifically about any increased awareness and/or shifts that occurred for each member as a result of their participation in the R@I initiative in terms of their values, ways of working, identity, abilities and preferences, and resources.

Box 33. Semi-structured interview questions to evaluate my educational influence

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS (30-50 MINUTES)

Dear colleagues,

The purpose of your response is to get evidence from everybody participating in the R@I initiative regarding my educative influence and the value that this initiative held so far for everybody individually.

My main question to you is:

What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?

In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:

Your values (what is important about research for you)

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

Your identity (how you think about yourself as a researcher)

Your own unique abilities and preferences

Resources available to you as researcher

What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)

I will greatly appreciate your willingness to contribute in this way.

Kind regards,
Willem Louw

From the record of the 16th R@I meeting held 2006-02-28, p.5 of 5

By the end of June 2006 I had managed to conduct an audio recorded interview with only one team member (Ilse) and had spent a significant amount of time transcribing the entire interview. In a discussion with the remaining four team members I proposed that it would be more time efficient if I rather emailed each of them a list of the questions and they would then answer these questions at their leisure. By the end of June 2006 I received Terri's response, by middle July I received Gerhard's. With some gentle reminding, Linda and Member 6 sent me their responses by March and May 2008 respectively. I present below the responses from the five R@I team members to the questions that appear in Box 33.

Responses from my five team members

Ms Ilse Ruane (transcribed interview, conducted 16 March 2006)



What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?

For me the biggest thing was being the most junior lecturer, coming into R@I, it's the first time that I actually saw that, even though I was the most junior one, everyone else is in a similar boat. Even though they've published and one assumes they know exactly what's going on, they actually feel the same fears that I'm feeling. Which I think, in any academic setting where you're a newer person, it's nice to know. Because it's overwhelming when you get told you are a researcher – who me?... It's nice to know people who can tell you. People who have been 18 years in the field and are as scared as I am. It's comforting.

Your values (what is important about research for you)

One of the values is feeling I can belong here. And it makes me feel closer to the rest of the department, not only the six Mamelodi people, because I am assuming that similar feelings will be there [on main campus] also. Chances are they're in the same situation, with the same fears and worries. It's nice to feel less intimidated by others' supposed research competence. It's nice to have a possible link to colleagues. I don't feel I'm so behind, or so different from my colleagues.

Your identity (how you think about yourself as researcher)

I've started feeling more like a potential researcher, for the first time ever. Before, research was the furthest thing on my mind. I regarded myself firstly as a psychologist, then as a lecturer – not even an academic. Maybe not even an academic yet now. The researcher [identity] comes even before that of 'academic'. I would only feel like an academic when I have some research output. That I feel that I've achieved something within the researcher identity and have the output as proof.

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

Before I didn't have a research identity, so I had no way of approaching research; there was just fear of involving myself because I didn't know where to start. Whereas now, if there is a project, I would first take the idea to a few people and discuss it with them: it's given me an avenue to start research. Before, even if I had an idea, I wouldn't take it anywhere because it just wasn't part of who I was. It's great to have ideas, but it's taking the first step that's the big thing. What is the first step to making something happen? I

battle to do this on my own. R@I gives me the space to take it and first have a chat to see what everyone else thinks, whether it's a valuable idea, and decide how to start. It was also nice to have the ISTP¹⁴ deadline, because it forced us to find time for research. And once you've done that, and have the time and space in your week to do research for a deadline, then that time is there and you can keep it open afterwards for other projects. But for me the big shift was a sense of belonging, or developing an identity of a researcher, because I can be confident that I can do it. Before, it wasn't really that I didn't have the time. I just didn't know where to start.

Your own unique abilities and preferences

I prefer locally relevant research, things that influence me on a daily basis. I see I don't have the same interests, say, as someone like Gerhard. In that way, my preferences have crystallised, and R@I helped me to do that. Although even last year I knew that I preferred locally relevant kinds of topics – I think all of us working here in this environment do so – but I wonder if it weren't for R@I whether I would have had the opportunity to think further and say okay, take what you have here and publish. I don't think so. Because only the academic articles get published, no one writes about little community clinics and counselling and whatever, so I think that was a great encouragement, and something that was unique; I don't think it would have happened otherwise.

Resources available to you as researcher

Firstly, it's the people. But that's a personal thing for me, with anything: it's the people as resource. In terms of physical resources like books and stuff, I think we still have a long way to go. But that might change in future, what with the Internet having been down the last while and so on. The Internet is great, especially for community-based things: overseas they've done a lot, there's a lot of great ideas to be found there. In terms of the people again, on main campus and that group of people, I don't feel I can phone one of them up and ask my questions; so the people I'm referring to are the R@I people. You [the R@I team] have more experience in research and starting projects, in finding that

¹⁴ International Society of Theoretical Psychology Conference in Cape Town, 2005.

initial foot in the door. I don't have a problem once I'm in, but to get going, to take that initial step – how to do it, when to do it, what's the appropriate way, what's needed, all of that. And I think here [on the Mamelodi campus], a lot of projects have been done over the years. And you can link with others who are busy with a project, and that makes it easier.

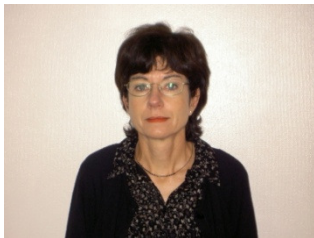
What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

Just starting it. That's why I said last year that I hope it's not going to end with your doctorate, because I think it gives a platform for finding out where other people are at and also for putting yourself in the spotlight, in the hot seat. Because otherwise you could get away with speaking about your publications once a year with the head of the psychology department at the performance management meeting and then you can get away with it by saying, 'No I'm too busy, I have too many lectures' and this and the next, but now it's a case of once a month it's, 'Ok, how far are you? Where are you going? You're not publishing right now, but have you found out which journals interest you? Have you found out what to do with the stuff that interests you?' It's not necessarily just stimulating publication, it's stimulating you to find out more about research as an academic. For example, I'd never considered finding out what journals are out there. Before you would write the article and see who wants it, now you actually think: what is out there, who is the audience that will read it; and that is very valuable. And that wouldn't have been done if you don't think of all your ideas. And that you [Willem] have facilitated. And it's a comfortable hot seat. But there's still the expectation from all members that you've committed to doing something, and by the next meeting you should have done it. It's not like sitting with management. But it's a motivating hot seat, it's good. Otherwise most of us would just not get around to it. Well, I wouldn't. It's not a case of it being another boring meeting – it's a meeting where you get a lot out of it personally, which I don't think happens in many meetings. And it's stimulating. It's a luxury. It's okay to bring an idea that doesn't amount to anything, and bring it and get the criticism. And it's okay to take the criticism, maybe it's not a good idea, but maybe there's a spin-off that would work, that you didn't think of on your own.

Any other comments about R@I you feel is important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)

The only frustration was last year when we went off on a bit of a tangent, when there were personnel issues that weren't actually part of it, and then it wasn't so much about research. But this year especially it's been a lot more research-focussed, and not so much linked to other issues. To me it's exciting to make this more part of my research identity than my other identities as a lecturer, clinic supervisor or all of that out there; and to only come in as a researcher and talk about how research is done. And that to me is very scary and very exciting as well. Now the true doors open.

Professor Terri Bakker (email, 26 June 2006)



What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?

I have gained mostly community-in-research – a support structure and forum for validation and energising research efforts. I was busy with my research project already, before R@I, and would probably have completed it on my own anyway, but enjoyed the joint efforts and our conversations. Also the confirmation of our work together and strengthening the clinic and our image in the university during a time of adversity and when messages from outside were very disconfirming of us.

I also would probably not have been as involved in the Cape Town ISTP conference if we had not decided to offer the joint symposium on Itsoseng. I would have anyway been involved in the other symposium with a colleague from the University of South Africa (UNISA). This involvement as well as the meetings with Unisa were valuable, again in terms of forming part of a validating and challenging community to exchange ideas that are relevant to our context here.

In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:

Your values (what is important about research for you)

I did not really shift from my initial position as activist-in-research (for lack of a better word) but received much confirmation (and enrichment in terms of thinking things through and being challenged to substantiate) of it.

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

Not really a big change because I was involved in my project already. However, it helped to see it through and get an article out.

Your identity (How you think about yourself as researcher)

More confirmation than change (am I rigid?).

Your own unique abilities and preferences

Same.

Resources available to you as researcher

Lists of journals to publish in were welcome. Mostly the discussion forums as resource. Sounding of ideas. Being able to share and talk (a luxury in our current context).

What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

I liked your insistence on the regular meetings and your facilitation of these sessions. There was space for us all to develop. I also think you raised the level of functioning of the 'subdepartment'¹⁵ as a whole - in terms of functioning also in the clinic¹⁶ for example, and in general, beyond the research focus.

Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)

I am still looking for a website that is regularly updated and has our work displayed on it. Maybe in future we could take this up again?

¹⁵ Psychology subdepartment on the Mamelodi Campus as part of the larger University of Pretoria Psychology Department

¹⁶ Itsoseng Psychology Clinic

Dr Gerhard Viljoen (email, 11 July 2006)



What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative? In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:

Your values (what is important about research for you)

I have always felt that South Africa is too small and too troubled to have space for ‘pure’ or basic research. In some ways R@I confirmed this view for me: research should be useful to someone somewhere. (This argument is complex and I hear the knowledge-for-knowledge’s-sake voices, but they do not sit easily with me as a person). This value of usefulness is bigger than saying it should be useful in promoting the researcher’s career. Because of the great need in our communities it needs to be useful to people who are downtrodden, disenfranchised, disadvantaged and in need for change. Change or transformation therefore is a core value for me in research. This also means that research should primarily be an ethical endeavour. (This resonates with values found in AR and critical psychology like distributive justice. To claim neutrality is unethical!). A constant investigation into and reflection on one’s own values and ethics as a researcher is thus needed. It is interesting that I do not experience myself as having these values upfront, but they come out in conversations such as the dissertation supervision meeting you and I had with one of the Master’s in Counselling Psychology students. I sound more and more like an activist to myself in meetings like that and I am even considering joining some activist group like the TAC¹⁷.

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

My way of working is still wayward. I still need to structure and focus more. It’s a little like knowing what the problem is, but not really knowing what to do about it or how to resolve it. This is probably the aspect of research that needs the most attention now. At the

¹⁷ Treatment Action Campaign: A South African AIDS activist organisation

moment I feel like a disorganised intellectual pretending to be an anarchist (maybe this is answering the next question?).

Your identity (how you think about yourself as researcher)

Through supervising your thesis, I think more and more about how my (our) identity (-ies) as a therapist(s) inform my (our) identity (-ies) as researcher(s). Important here is the kind of therapists we are – reflexive practitioners with a political awareness. So, does the kind of therapist you are influence the kind of researcher you become? I think this will inevitably happen if one follows a synthetic process where different identities (perhaps linked to the three tasks of the university) are to be skilfully integrated. If one sees these tasks as separate, well, then you will become either a technician or a bureaucrat. I suppose one can look for cues for this identity much further (deeper) just than to look at professional contexts that shape us.

Let me tackle this question from a different perspective. When things do not go well in an organisation, it is quite easy to respond outwardly to those things that one perceives as hampering you. One loses sight of one's own identity, whatever that may be. Perhaps more in keeping with what I believe, one constructs one's identity in terms of the problem-saturated context in which one functions – a context, by the way, that also came about as a result of one's own construction through language. R@I was to me useful in challenging that construction of my identity. Once that was challenged, I had to ask more 'me' questions and less system questions. In some way 'I' could not hide anymore. (I know I'm walking in an epistemological minefield here.) I have to now challenge my constructions of my identity as researcher by artificially separating that from the construction of a hampering context.

Your own unique abilities and preferences

I am, as usual ambivalent about this. Although I am a supporter of applied research, I am not a very practical or hands-on person. I think that I'm good at generating ideas, but I am not good at following these through. I'm not a good finisher. I must find a way in which my abilities can be harnessed as part of a bigger process that will lead to the production of products (published articles). To do this I will have to challenge my world

champion ability for ambivalence that inevitably leads to over inclusion and sometimes over complication of issues. I need to become more minimalist in my approach to academic writing.

On the other hand, I am interested in how one can translate complex theory and philosophy into praxis. Perhaps my contribution should be to work on the conceptual level and to let others apply the ideas – not because I’m a better thinker, but because I believe they might be better doers. For me to sit on the behind and write is difficult. My thoughts are too divergent all the time. I must learn to use that ability in the part of the process where it is useful and develop through discipline and practice abilities (e.g. reading literature, writing the actual article) that would serve the bigger purpose better at other times.

In summary, my preference would be to work alongside other people where the combination of strengths can result in products.

Resources available to you as researcher

I think that the phrase, “Turning resources into assets” represents a changed mindset. It makes one realise that there are very many resources available, but that the trick is to activate them and let them work for you. If one adopts this attitude, it becomes more difficult to mope and complain about not getting support from anywhere. I think that more than the minimum amount of resources necessary for publishing is available. It does put a huge responsibility on me if I accept that I can’t blame the system.

What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

Structuring our talking around these issues. One can think about these things endlessly, but when there is a shared forum in which knowledge can be created through conversation, something might, in the end, actually be done. It would have been nice if you could have written a few articles on my behalf though.

Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)

I am putting out feelers for overseas posts and sometimes I have to submit what they call a statement of research and teaching interests. R@I helped me to formulate these statements.

How can R@I be improved? It may be easier if we have more formal recognition from the Department, Faculty and the University for the work done here and the potential that can be developed.

In the words of Jethro Tull:

"This was how we were playing then, but things change, don't they."

Dr Linda Blokland (email 23 May 2008)



What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative? In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:

Your values (what is important about research for you)

With the R@I initiative I appreciated and came to value the community holding of our team. Teamwork is something I have always valued and striven to create. I find that I need other creative ideas to fire my own creativity and it is in the dialogue that I discover the joy of working and the worth of working.

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

I don't know that I can say that working communally (as a team) is a shift for me in terms of preference but R@I endorsed this way of working for me in the team. I came to see overlaps in research projects and started to see research as no longer individual

separate entitled projects, but as defined and focussed efforts in a landscape of possibilities.

Your identity (How you think about yourself as researcher)

I think more of my work as valuable and worthwhile. That's not identity, I know. If I can do worthwhile work of shared interest to my colleagues then it must be valuable to the participants, too. And yes, my sense of myself as a researcher is more prominent – I'm no longer a clinician only. So the two aspects (three actually, if we count community work) become integrated. This is more congruent with who I want to be.

Your own unique abilities and preferences

I like the way I have been thinking as a researcher and the freedom I have found in creative thought around research. I do believe that the R@I initiative has facilitated this process. I used to think that it was not possible to be creative and allow my thinking to stretch as it has done in research. I feel encouraged to challenge the boundaries further for worthwhile purposes. I do believe that it was not only the group comprised of the persons it was, but also the context in which we worked and dialogued – dialogued with each other and with the context itself. This has been tremendously exciting for me.

Resources available to you as researcher

The most valuable resource by far has been the collegial contact, the dialogues. No amount of material resources, fancy PC programmes, smart laptops or data analyses at my fingertips could approach the value of the dialogues in the context. It has really been for me living research leading to living theory. I do not think that I could ever revert to writing research from the confines of a remote office. It has been a privilege to live in the context of my research.

What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

Convening the meetings. Facilitating the discussions. The coffee and goodies to eat creating a comfortable and nurturing context.

Any other comments about R@I you feel are important to mention (e.g., how R@I could be improved)

Yes. That possibly it started too late to gather enough momentum to ensure its growth and continuation. I do believe that it will continue but it feels as if the momentum is weak right now and some of us will have to drag it through to the other side. I said to my class today (Master's students): "I'm not very good at keeping rules". They all burst out laughing.

Member 6 (email 26 May 2008)



What do you gain and have you already gained from participating in the R@I initiative?

Honestly Willem, I know you did a lot and tried with all. However with regard to me, an immense amount of dynamics happened between me and the rest of the Mamelodi personnel in the last 2 to 3 years, where I was not made to feel part of anything, and was broken down on every possible level. For this reason I saw the meetings we had as more of a further possibility that would have been used to belittle me by some of the members of staff on Mamelodi, and chose not to participate.

In answering this question, please describe any increased awareness and/or shifts (or not) that you have noticed in terms of:

Your values (what is important about research for you)

What is important to me as a researcher and person - more ethical behaviour to the whole field, especially research, as it feels terrifying to think that if they can treat colleagues the way they do, how will they treat patients or research participants?

Your way of working (how you approach your research projects)

My way of working, how I approach research projects - at the end it caused me to lose faith in myself and my abilities, however I'm stronger than that and will always overcome, and started with my own PhD now.

Your identity (How you think about yourself as researcher)

A newbie again.

Your own unique abilities and preferences

The whole experience made me see my own abilities again and I know I prefer to work on my own.

Resources available to you as researcher

Unfortunately I have not gained anything in regards to knowing more about the resources available to me.

What is there that I (Willem) specifically do or did that makes R@I valuable or not for you?

I truly appreciate the fact that you did try to pull me into the group, to participate. That is an integral part of any group functioning and I know you did a wonderful job with all.

Overview of the R@I members' responses

From the team members' responses, the R@I project had been a positive experience for all but one member (Member 6), who nevertheless indicated an appreciation of my attempts to include her and an increased awareness of her own values related to research. There were certain commonalities, as well as unique aspects, in what the rest of the R@I team expressed in terms of an increased awareness or shifts they noticed as a result of their participation in the R@I project. I discuss these briefly below.

The first theme refers to a sense of belonging or community-in-research in a time of adversity (incorporation of Vista into the University of Pretoria), when we were subject to disconfirming discourses about our value as academics to the receiving institution. Belonging to a group of people in a similar situation (other like-minded academics who also struggle to conduct research) provided opportunities for normalising experiences, to

feel less intimidated, and as a result, to dare to do research. Belonging to a research group invited the formation of a group research identity – we were more comfortable in calling ourselves researchers by virtue of our membership of a research group. In this way a sense of belonging to the R@I group also facilitated the first step towards developing a research identity for some of us, or for affirming or refining this identity, for others.

A second theme relates to the value of critical dialogue where ideas or ideological positions can be challenged and where creative ideas expressed within the group inspire more creativity. As we strove to find solutions to *our* concerns with the clinic and *our* research output, I believe that we put more energy and creativity into our discussions than would have been the case had we tried to come up with solutions for others. As such, the critical and creative dialogue was more in service of survival and moving towards flourishing than of the intellectual pursuit of clever ideas.

A third noticeable theme was the absence of any changes in values, ways of working and abilities and preferences. Rather, most team members developed an *increased awareness* (Bhana, 2004) of what they value. Similarly, the R@I project seemed to provide an opportunity to develop a preferred way of working as a result of this heightened awareness of one's own abilities and preferences. In particular, Gerhard and Linda expressed a preference for working alongside other people where the combination of strengths can lead to better results than working by themselves – a concept also known as synergy.

Where shifts were expressed by the R@I members, it was in the formation of individuated research identities and the utilisation of resources. With regards to identity, most members reported the development and crystallisation of a research identity alongside other more established identities like lecturer, psychologist, clinician, practitioner. Gerhard went further in mentioning how he was challenged in the R@I project to ask more probing questions of himself as a researcher than questions about a hampering context.

Concerning the utilisation of resources, most members regarded the group members as their most important resource. Interestingly, prior to the R@I group, we had also worked alongside each other and had always potentially been available to each other. However, the R@I group provided a forum or social formation (Whitehead 2008) in which we became more available to each other as resource than we had been in our individual capacities. The idea of transforming resources into energising assets (Burlin, 2001) led to another shift. This was expressed by Gerhard when he stated that his heightened awareness of the multiple resources available for publishing made him realise that he could no longer blame “the system” for his research output, and had to take more personal responsibility.

With regards to my influence on the learning of others in the R@I project, most members regarded my coordination and facilitation of the regular meetings as well as providing a physically nurturing space (good coffee, fresh muffins, undisturbed meeting time and space) as being the main contributions that set in motion a process in which each member could influence and be influenced in their own and others’ learning. This perception is illustrated in phrases such as “*just starting it*” (Ilse), “*convening the meetings*” (Linda), “*facilitating and structuring our talking*” (Gerhard, Linda), “*providing a space for us all to develop*” (Terri), “*trying to include me*” (Member 6), and “*creating a comfortable and nurturing context*” (Linda, Terri). These comments resonate with Tuhiwai Smith’s (2005) discussion of the concept of “community-up” (p.98) approaches to researcher conduct, where the researcher creates opportunities to discuss and negotiate respectful conduct, and allows participants to “define their own space and meet on their own terms” and enacts “sharing, hosting and being generous” (p.98) which enables collaborative knowledge sharing and knowledge creation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented my response to the research question: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” This response was presented in two sections. The first section dealt with the progression of my own learning in facilitating the R@I project. The second section presents the evaluation of the five other R@I team members in terms of their perception of the value of the R@I project, and their view of my role in this process.

In the next and final chapter, I revisit my living contradiction and provide my own testimonial of the value of the R@I project. I develop my living theory of how I improved my practice as an academic by facilitating the R@I project. Finally, I discuss the contribution of the study to the fields of higher education, action research and psychology.