



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.³¹

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,

³¹ 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 finding³² 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

³² 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 far³³ 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”.

³³ 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.³⁴

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”.

³⁴ 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 1st 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 student 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 research³⁵, 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

³⁵ 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-up³⁶. 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.

³⁶ For details, please refer to Chapter 7 about sampling.