7 HOW MY PARTICIPANTS INTERACTED WITH ME

This chapter furthers the methodology discussion carried out in Chapter 3 that describes the way in which different decisions were made throughout the whole study. It also describes how my participants interacted with me as a researcher as the last empirical case of this study. Furthermore, it also summarises the way in which different issues were perceived by the original researchers and their original participants and provides a critical analysis of their responses.

7.1 Researcher/practitioner context

7.1.1 Purpose of conducting a research study

The aims of conducting a research study, particularly as a student, could be viewed from both the angle of the aim of pursuing the degree itself and the aim of pursuing the specific research topic.

My reasons for embarking on a PhD study were fairly straightforward. I had moved to South Africa because of my marriage. I knew that, as a foreigner, finding a job within a short time would be very difficult. And I was also aware before I landed in South Africa that I wanted to change my specialisation.

Learning, although not necessarily in the sense of learning in the context of the classroom, but also in the context broader learning through life experience, had been a habit of mine that I had cherished and enjoyed. Although I had never stood in front of a class as a teacher, I had always considered education as a powerful tool with which to alter mindsets and modify behaviour. Therefore although I was not sure whether education would be my final specialisation and also not sure whether I would want to pursue an academic career in the future, I applied for a PhD program at the department of Education Management and Policy Studies at UP and, fortunately, I was accepted.

I spent the first nine months after registration browsing rather randomly through the material that caught my attention in the library and jumping from one possible topic to another, trying to locate my specific interest. However, the more I read, the more confused I became about the value of research itself. It seemed strange

to me that a vast amount of research was produced, at a fairly high social cost[37], yet, at the same time, both policymakers and practitioners seemed to use research largely in a symbolic way; or even sometimes simply carrying on with practice without research.

When I examined this research–practice gap more closely, it became clear that research dissemination was a problem, as well as the differences between the two communities—researchers on one hand and practitioners on the other. Yet to me, this two-community theory was still not satisfying, especially because it fails to explain not only why differences existed, but also the often reported mistrust and suspicion of the communities towards one another.

Education itself also presented an interesting platform from which to view this research–practice problem. I found it surprising that not only was there very little literature on the topic, but also that the obvious approach, as I saw it, to ask practitioners for their opinions, was also rare to be found.

To summarise, curiosity played an important role in the selection of this research topic, so did the aim of knowledge advancement, although the latter to a lesser degree. Publication had also always been my consideration, although, when I review my intention to publish, it was more about entering the debate, stating my position, and, hopefully, eventually making a difference, but not primarily merely to contribute to the advancement of knowledge. Of course, a higher degree would be an advantage for future, although, at the time, I was not sure whether I wanted to further pursue an academic career upon completion of my degree. I had not considered the possibility of a subsidy as a motivation because the subsidy policy did not make provision for students.[38]

In Chapter 2 I had proposed that the classical argument in respect of the aims of conducting research should be broadened to include three categories: *pure intrinsic* reasons (to advance knowledge), *pure extrinsic* reasons (to improve practice), and *other extrinsic* reasons (for practical reasons benefiting the researcher him/herself). However, when I presented this topic in the previous two chapters, mainly because of the flow of the description and also the traditional understanding that such issues often referred only to *pure intrinsic* reasons and *pure extrinsic* reasons, I did not report my examination into the possible *other extrinsic* reasons.

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[37] Refer to government spending and other contract funding for research output.
[38] According to the university policy, permanently employed lecturers only would qualify for such a subsidy.

Therefore hereafter I will first provide an overview of the way in which the researchers viewed the *other extrinsic* reasons, and then present a summary that synthesise all the possible reasons which I uncovered.

Francis's understanding of *other extrinsic* reasons was:

> Y: how important was the reason of finishing the degree?
>
> F: it was important for me because otherwise I couldn't qualify as an educational psychologist. You have to have the Masters, and to have a Masters, you have to have a dissertation. For me, I wanted to register as a psychologist. In the beginning, the project, the big thing was it is gonna be part of the MSC, that is a big thing for me. But towards the end, I finish my theory, I finished my internship, it was just this left, so my focus was to close it. So I just want to have it done so that I can register as a psychologist. So yes, it was a selfish reason, but, I needed it…yes, in this case, it was not just a Masters, without that, I couldn't register as a psychologist.
>
> Y: so it is also part of your career development?
>
> F: and the medical council, now called Health Profession Council in South Africa, I think they have passed a new policy, that only up to a certain year that they could register psychologist as a Masters, after that, you have to get a Doctoral, so that was another thing. If I didn't finish the Master in time, I have to do a Doctor, and it was a lot of stress on me, and I was getting married at that stage, so I had to finish it all before everything.

The need to complete his degree was also clearly important to Thabo, but, for him, the fact of graduating was more important because, at the time, he was planning to open his own psychological practice and a degree could be associated with good credit and reputation. A degree was also important to De Beer, although, to her, the value of the degree was more "in a sense that it opens more opportunities or doors, so now that I can actually have more choices." For Sehlola, finishing his degree "that's obviously very important. If one has to be honest, I suppose one of the main objectives of slopping through these long, endless hours, is to finish the degree and get the qualification". For him a degree was also a necessary step towards his plan of further pursuing an academic career. Thabo, De Beer and Sehlola also mentioned this aim of pursuing an academic career being a reason for them to consider publishing an article on the basis of their dissertations.

Publication was also clearly one of Hendricks's aims. His *other extrinsic* reason for publication was the possibility of obtaining a subsidy once he had had an article published. Sani claimed that publication was "there, as a backdrop" to her mind or as a *by-product* of her other motivations. She never mentioned the issue of a subsidy.

In summary, table 12 provides an overview of the reasons for conducting the research as claimed by the researchers in question.

Table 12: purposes of conducting research

Researcher	Pure intrinsic (knowledge/curiosity)	Publication	Pure extrinsic (Improve practice)	Other extrinsic (Personal gain)
Francis	Yes (in dissertation)	No	➢ Use it in the training (in dissertation); ➢ Be part of Masters module development (both in dissertation and interview)	Degree/ requirement for registering as psychologist (in interview)
Thabo	Yes (in dissertation)	Yes	Not relevant	Degree/open own psychological practice (in interview)
De Beer	Yes (in dissertation)	Yes	Yes (both in dissertation and interview, highlighted more in interview)	Degree/open doors for career (in interview)
Sehlola	Yes (in dissertation)	Yes	Not intended specifically (both in dissertation and interview)	Degree/ further pursue academic career (in interview)
Hendricks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Subsidy
Sani	Yes	Yes, in the backdrop	Yes, about teacher professionalism and empowerment	Not mentioned

One interesting observation arising from this overview is that the role of the motives for conducting a research study contribution was emphasised very differently in the writings (dissertations) compared to the narratives (interviews). While the *pure intrinsic* reason dominated the writings, *pure extrinsic* and/or *other extrinsic* reasons seemed to dominate the narratives. The fact of a different audience could possibly explain this difference; however, the suggestion that *pure intrinsic* reasons only were suitable for an academic audience may imply a widespread view that downplays any instrumental elements in research motivations.

7.1.2 Reasons for participation

The reasons for participation may vary according to the type of research. Most research projects investigated empirically in this study were school or classroom research. However, my study, similar to that of Thabo, was a step-back kind of research – researching research. I suspect that, since the participants would be able less likely to use the research findings from this kind of step-back research than from the classroom research, the expectations of the participants could be different.

Since Thabo had never revealed his aim to his participants, it was not possible to ascertain reasons for participating in a step-back research from his study. In order to examine my initial suspicion that the motivation for the practitioners participating in my research had been to speak out their concern or problem encounter in previous research, I specifically posed the question "why did you decide to participate in MY

study?" to all my participants, including the original researchers.

One reason for asking this question of the original researchers was to triangulate the suspicion regarding the way in which participants perceive their motivations, the researcher's speculation about the motivations of his/her participants, and their own experience as actual participants. Furthermore, since my research addressed research directly, I expected that the relationship between my study and the original researchers would resemble the relationship which had existed between the original research project and their original participants.

The following table provides a summary of all the reasons for participation which were given.

Table 13: motives of participation

Case	Participants	Reasons/presumed-reasons for participating in the original research	Reasons for participating in my research
Francis	Francis	➤ Interest in the topic; ➤ Empathy and know it is a "help-each-other" situation;	Help-each-other
	Botha	➤ Interest in the topic; ➤ Help the researcher.	➤ "If everything was hassle free again, like the first time, it would be ok";
	Lee	➤ The reputation of the referrer; ➤ Helping somebody is an academic /social responsibility;	➤ Interest in the topic; ➤ Help somebody in academia.
Thabo & De Beer	Thabo	➤ Seek practical benefit from participation	➤ Interest in the topic; ➤ Help a friend; ➤ Assist fellow researcher is ethical responsibility.
	De Beer	➤ Interest in the topic; ➤ Helping inherent part of the nature of teachers	➤ Help because that know it is difficult to find participants
	Chisholm	➤ The principal asked; ➤ Prepared to learn something; ➤ Help somebody to finish research and degree	➤ Help
	Van der Linde	➤ Help	➤ Help
	Kola	➤ The learner could obtain practical help; ➤ Expect personal growth by feedbacks (positive criticism)	➤ Responsibility to provide assistance; ➤ Not want to disappoint the original researcher; ➤ Expect to learn
Sehlola	Sehlola	➤ Be able to learn, be more reflective	➤ "Greater sense of responsibility to help and assist other researchers" after experiencing difficulties in securing participants; ➤ Familiarity also provides some degree of ease (know that the researcher would not take advantage of the goodwill in helping);

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	Billana	➢ Insistence on part of the researcher; ➢ Thinks that he could be of help; ➢ Wanted to sharpen interview skills	➢ Insistence from the researcher
	Stevens	➢ Help a friend; ➢ Curious about something new	➢ The friend (original researcher) contacted; ➢ Curious about something new; ➢ Moral duty to provide assistance
Hendricks	Hendricks	➢ The participants are concerned about a problem and they need help	➢ Interest in the topic; ➢ Responsibility to assist fellow researcher
	Van Wyk	➢ To find answers (to benefit the schools, learners); ➢ Personal learning	➢ Hope that it might help the researcher to improve research and, through that, benefit education in general and possibly result in improvements filtering back to the schools
	Tilley	➢ The principal asked; ➢ To benefit the schools, learners; ➢ Personal enrichment	➢ Hope that it might have an influence on the working conditions, to make life better
Sani	Sani	Voice frustration, joys & problems to an outsider (no authority); Hope that it would bring changes/improvement;	Interest in the topic; Help others to do research& develop; Extend knowledge for self
	Danca	Asked by the principal; Expect to learn more about the situation; Help the researcher;	Help the researcher
	Seager	Asked by the principal; Help the researcher;	Help the researcher;

In summarising the motives stated above, although interest in the research topic as a motive for participation was mentioned by a number of participants, *help the researcher* seemed to be far more present. This reason was prevalent not only in the student-researcher cases, but also in the case of one of the experienced researchers. It was also prevalent not only in the step-back research where any possible direct benefit was likely to be remote, but also in classroom research in which case direct benefit was much more likely.

It is also interesting to note that the researchers were more likely to assume that an expectation regarding learning or bringing about change being the reason why their participants took part, and yet, when they were in the role of participant, they also all indicated *help the researcher* as the most important motive. Therefore, based on my earlier mentioned expectation that the relationship between my research and the original researchers would resemble that which had existed between theses original research projects and their original participants (in terms of the way in which the research topic may/may not directly address the immediate concerns of the participants), the motivation for participation, *help the researcher* could be the most realistic motivation even in the case of research directly relevant to the practitioner's daily practice.

This statement is in direct contradiction to the existing literature that lists the following as possible motives

for participation: people participate in order to gain access to information (Seager, et al., 1998), other benefits expected (for example, therapeutic benefits in medical research) (Brody & Waldron, 2000), anticipated reward for themselves and others or due to feelings of moral obligation (Harrison, 1995), economic gain, the characteristics of the researcher, or interest in or curiosity about the research (Farre, Lamas & Cami, 1995).

It is also significant that there was no evidence to support my own earlier suspicion that speaking out their concerns could be one motivation for participation in a step-back research, although the subsequent finding that all the participants had viewed their researcher–practitioner engagement as positive, made me realise that my initial assumption that the practitioners had had negative and unsatisfactory experiences in terms of their researcher–practitioner relationships could be wrong.

7.1.3 Beneficence

The research topic and my own personal interest meant that beneficence remained one of my primary considerations.

As was argued in chapter 2, although the concept that knowledge is a public good is appealing, it has an assumption that the public is homogenous and this assumption does not fit in the qualitative paradigm. I also demonstrated that, although the hope is that benefit could occur mutually in terms of both the society and the individual, this is also often no more than an aspiration. Rather, in most research, it is the researcher who reaps the greatest benefit, both in terms of knowledge and practical benefit, while, for the participants, both these benefits are often marginal.

As a result of this study I had expected that not only would I benefit as the researcher from satisfying my curiosity and obtaining my degree, but also that the original researchers would also become more reflective as a result of my way of reasoning and my probing. On the other hand, for the practitioners, I hoped that my work could result in improved researchers' behavior and better research utility that could filter back to the schools. In fact both Van Wyk and Tilley had pointed this hope out as well. However, I did recognise that such a benefit, should it ever occur, would be very remote. Although I had also initially suspected that my participants could benefit by voicing their concerns, preferences and dissatisfaction, this reason was

disapproved by the finding of this study (as stated above). Therefore, overall, I anticipated that the benefit (both direct and indirect) for the original practitioners would be minimal.

Although the practice of offering monetary compensation to participants for their time and effort is highly controversial, I had originally considered such an option, specifically because I could not find other ways to balance the *give* and *take* in this research situation. This suggestion was rejected by the ethical committee, as is illustrated by the comment from the letter of rejection that I "have the tendency of inducing the participants". Coincidentally, I also realised soon that this option was also not practical, not only because this study was not funded in any way, but also because the rather precarious financial situation of my family at that time. It had seemed that all I could offer would be a listening ear.

My final solution was to offer some small gifts to my participants as a token of my appreciation. Of course, I had also made every effort to meet them in a location and at a time convenient to them. If circumstances had made this impossible, I had negotiated with the particular participant well in advance and compensated him/her for any extra expenses.[39] In addition, since the data had shown that the participants regarded feedback as important, I also tried to offer the specific type of feedback that each participant requested. Furthermore, although under the strict norms of confidentiality, I was not supposed to communicate to either the original researcher or his/her participants what the other party had said, I also, from my own ethical stance, acted as a medium on a few occasions, particularly in terms of communicating the unresolved concerns of certain participants to the original researcher (such as in De Beer and Sehlola's case).

The following table presents the expected and retrospective benefits as perceived by all participants. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this table is that majority of participants had not expected any personal benefit either from the original research or from my study. This corresponds with their reasons for participation as being mainly to *help the researcher*. In retrospect, there were certain benefits (expected or unexpected) that seemed to took place, but overall, these benefits seemed to be rather limited.

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[39] This happened with Kola. In this instance, he had to come to my home for the interview, and I compensated him for his travel.

Case	Participant	Benefits/suspected benefits in the original research		Benefits in my research	
		Expected	Retrospective	Expected	Retrospective
Francis	Francis	➢ Did not talk much about her understanding of the benefits to her participants probably because she regarded their reason for participating as helping the researcher;		No	"Beneficial to hear and think about certain things that I had not even thought about…More awareness, greater awareness of my role …be more sensitive to certain things. It is a type of knowledge, self-awareness kind of knowledge."
	Botha	To hear how others experienced the process of module development	➢ The discussion provided many examples to use in teaching. ➢ Beneficial to see how the researcher conducted the research	Not available (later refers to as N/A[40])	To hear how others experienced the process of module development
	Lee	Does not think direct benefit for participants would be realistic	Could see how the researcher conducted her focus group and use it to supervise own students.	N/A	Does not think direct benefit for participants would be realistic
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo	➢ Thabo suspect that one school, particularly, would expect some practical benefit from participation (like aids…)		No	"It acts as a reflection meter…I don't necessarily agree with you, but it does make me think."
	De Beer			No	➢ The feedback from the original participants is beneficial; ➢ Sensitise further ethical issues; ➢ Think more deeply about the participants & their contribution.
	Chisholm	No	Would be nice if had been given the findings (might help teaching)	Not in learning	No
	Van der Linde	No	➢ Be more knowledgeable about the topic ➢ No change in teaching ➢ Learnt how research could be done (never participated in interviews before)	No	No

[40] Initially some of the data was missing because I had not followed the interview guidelines strictly, but had rather allowed the flow to determine the path. Later when I tried to go back to certain participants to verify or follow up some left-over questions, some of the follow ups were successful, while others were not, for reasons mostly due to specific circumstances (some could not make more time available, some chose to ignore my request despite several attempts, others could not answer in a clear and meaningful fashion. In these circumstances, I refer to the data as N/A.

	Kola	➢ Practical benefit for the learner ➢ Expect personal growth from feedbacks	No because: ➢ Did not know about the follow-up of the learner, was cut off; ➢ Not given feedbacks	To learn	➢ Practical benefit for the learner ➢ Expect personal growth from feedbacks
Sehlola	Sehlola	➢ Expect that the participants would benefit from learning or changing thinking, by his questioning;		➢ "Personal growth… think how better I could have approached my participants." ➢ "Help to express my thoughts more clearly"	As expected
	Billana	To sharpen interview skills	➢ Learned how one may best conduct a research; ➢ Mostly confirm, but also reflect on teaching by looking back at video, but not from the researcher's questions	No	To sharpen interview skills
	Stevens	Curious of how research is done	➢ How research is conducted; ➢ Learned as regards teaching, reminded what was learned in teacher training.	No	Curious of how research is done
Hendricks	Hendricks	➢ Expect that the school would benefit from the findings;		Learn from other's experience	Aware of role and function as a researcher & also the responsibility
	Van Wyk	Find answer to a problem	➢ Obtain a different perspective on the situation ➢ Not find answer because the finding is too theoretical, no practical guidance	➢ Be able to use for further study; ➢ Hope to improve work conditions	Find answer to a problem
	Tilley	Find answer to a problem	➢ Some change at the time, but no reinforcement, so reverted to original practice.	No, Hope to improve work conditions	Find answer to a problem
Sani	Sani	➢ Some findings find way into policy, although this happened rather accidentally; ➢ Expected that because of the relationship, researcher would be treated as a familiar source to whom the teachers could turn		N/A	N/A
	Danca	To learn about the situation in connection with the research topic	Yes because of the feedbacks	No	To learn about the situation in connection with the research topic

| | Seager | ➢ Did not talk much about her understanding of the benefits to her participants probably because she regarded their reason for participating as helping the researcher; | No | | "Beneficial to hear and think about certain things that I had not even thought about…More awareness, greater awareness of my role …be more sensitive to certain things. It is a type of knowledge, self-awareness kind of knowledge." | ➢ Did not talk much about her understanding of the benefits to her participants probably because she regarded their reason for participating as helping the researcher; |

Table 14: understanding of benefits in research

My suspicion was also confirmed that it was the original researchers, rather than the original participants, who benefited (both directly and indirectly) more, not only from their original research, but also from my study. In fact, this observation had also been made by several of the original participants (such as Billana) during the interviews.

Lastly, the original researchers' speculations in respect of the possible benefit to their participants did not seem to always correspond with what their participants had either expected or experienced. For example, certain of the researchers had expected that their participants would be able to learn something from their participation, particularly in the sense of improving their teaching. However, not only did learning not emerge as a strong theme in the original participants' perspectives, but this aspect of learning, as communicated by the original participants, was often not even related to the research topic itself, neither was related to teaching per se (such as research/interview skills).

7.1.4 Responsibility of a researcher towards his/her participants—the issue of confidentiality

The following table presented an overview of the understanding of this issue as demonstrated by the respective researchers involved in this study.

Table 15: researchers' understanding of their responsibility towards the participants

Case	Researcher	Understanding of researcher's responsibility towards the participants
Francis	Francis	➢ Confidentiality ➢ Giving feedback
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo	➢ Keep appointments ➢ Perhaps inform the participants of his research aim in the end
	De Beer	➢ Confidentiality on a basic level ➢ Value the input from the participant, extend it to offer asking and fulfilling "what I can do for you"
Sehlola	Sehlola	➢ Confidentiality ➢ Accuracy portrayals ➢ Be reasonable in terms of time required etc
Hendricks	Hendricks	➢ Provide feedback
Sani	Sani	➢ Obtain consent beforehand, also establish rapport ➢ Anonymity ➢ Provide feedback

Clearly, the issue of confidentiality dominated most of the original researchers' understanding of their responsibility towards their participants. However, this was not reflected in the understanding of the original participants (see the following table).

Table 16: participants' understanding of researcher's responsibility towards them

Case	Participants	Understanding of researcher's responsibility towards the participants
Francis	Botha	➢ Report accurately ➢ Accord participants credibility
	Lee	➢ Report accurately ➢ Acknowledge participation
Thabo &De Beer	Chisholm	➢ Be punctual ➢ Respect participant as a person
	Van der Linde	➢ Respect voice of participant
	Kola	➢ Provide constructive feedback to "build me as a person" ➢ Acknowledgement
Sehlola	Billana	None
	Stevens	None
Hendricks	Van Wyk	➢ Provide feedback ➢ Be ethical in exposure of data ➢ Give credit to valuable input
	Tilley	➢ Provide feedback
Sani	Danca	➢ Practical issues, such as keep to the time limit, not to waste time ➢ Portray the participant accurately
	Seager	➢ Portray accurately ➢ Do not waste time ➢ Respect ➢ The researcher being "honest with me, open with me"

Because of such discovery, I found it imperative to investigate deeper into the issue of confidentiality.

Confidentiality was designed to prevent consequential harm associated with the compulsory disclosure of identifiable research data. It is often considered as affording participants control over their personal information, and therefore an instrument that enhances autonomy (Jones, 2003). From a researcher's point of view, maintaining confidentiality is also said to be important in terms of demonstrating trustworthiness and maintaining integrity in the researcher-participant relationship (Rogers, 2006).

In the medical field where this concept originates, the assumption that patients would be less likely to seek treatment if confidentiality is not assured is fairly widespread (Harvard, 1985; Lee, 1994). In the same field, another, often unspoken, assumption is that the term 'patients', by definition, presumes that they are vulnerable and implies that they need special attention and protection (Levine et al., 2004). Over time, however, as Currie (2005) points out, the scope of the confidentiality requirement has evolved significantly. Not only has the concept spread to almost all research fields and become part of the normal practice of research ethics, but the prescription of confidentiality has been extended to apply to all participants and often operates as default condition.

So are all participants vulnerable, particularly in social science or education research? Unlike the reference to physical vulnerability in the medical field, *vulnerability* in the social sciences usually refers to a lack of knowledge, means or any other element necessary to be able to make decisions in full capacity (Justo, 2004). Although it is true that social scientists often study poor or marginalised individuals, the tendency to view all participants as being vulnerable, lacking power or in need of protection seems to deny that, as poor or marginalised as they may be, they have adequate reasoning ability (Rhodes, 2005).

Do participants indeed appreciate it when they are given extra protection? Pack's (2006) story is interesting to note in this regard:

> Based on the mistaken impression that I am a native American, missionaries have attempted to convert me, tourists have asked to make my picture, benevolent-minded professors have offered me special benefits not available to my peers and, in one instance, an anthropologist actually tried to recruit me for an interview. In all of these instances, each of the *perpetrators* treated me in a very distinct way, difficult to describe. *With their overly polite manner of speaking, exaggerated enunciation of words, and friendly body language, I can best compare this treatment to the way adults speak to retarded children* (2006: 108, emphasis added).

Furthermore, in educational research in particular, a large portion of participants are often teachers. It is strange to view teachers, usually viewed as important change agents in the lives of children, as being a vulnerable group. One common topic of educational research, namely investigating various aspects of the teaching profession, also does not seem to call for an unconditional prescription for protection.

It is also interesting to draw a comparison between the role of researchers and that of journalists, in handling one's identity—journalists generally expect that the people they interview or film will be identified by name, unless they specifically request otherwise, while researchers act in a contrary way (Haggerty, 2004). It is true that journalists often interview people from more powerful segments of society, but this different treatment of one's identity would occur even if the subject of interviewing (or research in general) were to be the same individual.

In practice, especially in qualitative educational research, the rigid requirement of confidentiality and anonymity has been questioned. Its limits, particularly in terms of the tension between a detailed portrait and disguising one's identity, have also been recognised (Flinders, 1992). However, the fundamental value of prescribing confidentiality to all participants and the expectation to automatically utilise the

practice, are rarely challenged.

One common myth about confidentiality is that "the revelations they [the participants] make, are confidential" (Sehlola). This implies that confidentiality is about keeping data revealed by the participants to the researcher him/herself, further implying that no one besides the researcher would be able to access the data.

Yet consider that conducting research is usually underpinned by the aim of advancing knowledge, where dissemination—to make the new knowledge known—is at the heart of such advancement, such a goal is best achieved by stating that *the results of this research will be used for academic purposes only*, which is not exactly the common promise given.

Another difficulty with the promise of confidentiality is that it does not correspond with the validation tool of 'member check'—to validate the research findings with the people among whom the study was carried out. The following quote illustrates such phenomenon.

> My decision to 'go into hiding' had a number of consequences which I found both unethical and simply annoying. I had kept the outcome of my research study from my informants, 'for their own good". On the one hand, I had respected their wish to keep delicate information confidential; on the other hand, I had deprived them of the possibility of reading what I had written about them... They would never be able to 'talk back'. Though trying to make their voices heard by writing about them, I had effectively silenced them... My concerns about protecting people's anonymity prevented me from giving them the text which would betray their identities. It also prevented me for many years from returning to the town and the people who had become my friends (Van der Geest, 2003: 16-17).

Against this argument, confidentiality then could/should be practically understood in terms of disconnecting the link between the real identity of a participant and how their identity is referred to in the research report; in other words, using symbols or pseudonym. Therefore, in what follows, confidentiality is investigated in the sense of using pseudonyms.

So do all participants want their real identities to be concealed and to be presented in a research report under a pseudonym? LaRossa (1977) found that while he struggled to write up case studies which protected his subjects from discovery, they were telling friends, relatives, and sometimes strangers about their participation in the research. Van der Geest also reports a preference he detected from his

participants to have their real identity revealed:

> The head, a former schoolteacher, expressed his disappointment that the name of the town was not mentioned on the cover or inside the book and that neither his name nor any other appeared in the text... They said they did not like my attempt at confidentiality. They wanted to see their names on paper…my writing about them will help them to be remembered (Van der Geest, 2003: 17).

And there are many more similar occurrences (for example Herman, 2004; Smits, Friesen, Hicks, & Leroy, 1997). Instead, as also pointed out by Barnes (1963), sometimes conveying the message that the research is going to write a book out of a research helps to win over support from the participants.

So to examine the perceptions of this notion empirically, I asked all the original participants whether they would like to have identity concealed in research and the reasons for their choices. The original researchers' answers referred to their position as participants in my research.

Table 17: preference of anonymity

Case	Participants	Want identity covered as participant?	Reasons
Francis	Francis (researcher)	Real name can be used, but leaves such choice to the researcher	It is the researcher's responsibility to decide whether to cover (protect) or not
	Botha (also researcher)	It does not matter	Confidentiality is "just part of the research process".
	Lee (also researcher)	Yes, assign a number or a letter	"A code to protect identity is an essential part of research ethics-the principle of beneficence-which means that your participants are protected... I have a high profile and do not want my views on your research to be made known to all."
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo (researcher)	First reaction not to use real name, after negotiation, agree to use the real name	"I am doing this willingly, and I am giving you the information that has to do with research"; "my research is public knowledge, it's out there".
	De Beer (researcher)	Yes, as far as possible	"I just want to prevent someone perhaps linking, via me, linking with the educators... In the 7th sense, having done research, one would think now someone is talking to me, I got to be careful, what I say and all that."
	Chisholm (teacher)	No	"She [the researcher] never asked me something very personal. So she does not know anything about me."
	Van der Linde (teacher)	Don't mind.	"If it is something that is really personal or close to you, I think then it would be important."

	Kola (teacher)	Yes	Need to be sensitive, "we are working with the South African government, something needs to be hidden, you don't need to take everything out, because at the end of the day, you take out very crucial information only to be exposed to… At the end of the day, the officials would say you said this 1,2,3, you should come to us district directly if you have a problem with this 1,2,3, only then you are aware that whatever you are saying will be problematic."
Sehlola	Sehlola (researcher)	Fine to disclose real identity	Understand that it is not feasible in my study. Ideally "it would be depend a lot on how I would be painted in your analysis", although "at the end of the day, it is what would link to your argument."
	Billana (teacher, later promoted to the district)	"At the time, not very much important, but if it was now (after been promoted), I will say yes."	"I realised now that there is much at stake, there were a lot of things that I said with him which at that time did not matter, but now with the position that I am in and with the ambition that I have, I think it is important that whatever is reported about me should only be positive, but then, I was given both, good and bad."
	Stevens (teacher)	No	"But I think he [the researcher] prefers to cover my identity"
Hendricks	Hendricks (researcher)	No, not for this one	"I don't think there is any sensitivity about the topic for me, or anything that may harm myself, or my position, or my department and the people that I am working for."
	Van Wyk (teacher)	No	"Especially if it is a good job…but even if it is a bad job, it is just your [the researcher's] opinion."
	Tilley (teacher)	No	"I think what I feel and what I say can be use or can be sit with, I have to stand up for what I say, even together with my names. It is not like that I am hiding something… I don't see any needs to do things under the disguise."
Sani	Sani (researcher)	Yes	"I just feel that I like to be confidential. When I do my research, I do it this way, I do not want to disclose people's identity and I think they have a right for that. And for me, I would also prefer to be treated that way."
	Danca (teacher)	No	Gave permission to uncover the schools' identity because felt that there is nothing to hide; "as a person I don't think that I should hide anything either, if I want to say something, I am prepared to give my identity, otherwise I think once you started to cover your identity, people tend to say things that they assume rather than what they know…I feel that if you take part in a research, you should be accountable for what you say."
	Seager (teacher)	Doesn't matter	"I am not concerned about that".

To summarise, it is noteworthy that the majority of the original participants labeled the promise of confidentiality as 'did not matter', and some even took the stance that revealing one's identity can be associated with being accountable (such as Tilley and Danca). When viewing the same issue from the point of view of being participants in my study, the original researchers either left the decision to the researcher (me), or mentioned the neutral nature of my research topic as being the reason why concealing their identity did not matter. Similarly, some of the original participants also mentioned the nature of the research

topic as being one determinant for one's preference for confidentiality or otherwise.

There were three original participants who expressed a preference for concealing their identity, and their reasons for such a preference are worthy of further analysis. One was a researcher herself (Lee). She ascribed her preference as being due to her personal profile. Billana's main reason for preferring confidentiality was due to his ambition and concern in his career advancement. Kola was still a teacher, but he had shown strong sensitivity throughout his interview. All these instances seem to be at odds with a situation in which a normal teacher would find him/herself, and therefore such preferences appear not to be an accurate representation of the preferences of a normal teacher.

There is another drawback with the prescription of anonymity. Under the name of confidentiality, participants are often referred to either by a pseudonym or by being hidden within a group. As a result, recognition of the contributions of individual participants in the author's list of acknowledgements is seldom given.

The following are excerpts from the acknowledgement pages of three of the original researchers included in my study (all explanations added):

> The unnamed participants of the focus group interviews for your willingness to share your expertise and time [listed at number 2, together with 4 other individual names] (Francis 2004: Acknowledgments).

> *Listed 10 individual names, but nowhere mentioned any participants or group names of the participants* (Thabo, 2004, p. acknowledgment).

> Principals and educators, for letting me benefit from your experience. Learners, for letting me share in a small part of your lives; I hope that I have given something back to you as well [listed at number 6, together with 10 other individual names] (De Beer 2005: Acknowledgments).

> The three Grade 9 respondent teachers, for the many sacrifices they had to make to accommodate me for the after-hours interviews, and for their unbelievable courage in allowing me into their classroom for such an extensive period [listed at number 4, together with 4 other individual names] (Sehlola 2004: Acknowledgments).

Table 18 presented the summary of how their fellow student researchers (the 28 dissertation authors included in the document analysis in Chapter 4, the category also referred to the category derived in the same chapter) presented in their acknowledgement page.

Table 18: how participants were acknowledged in acknowledgement page

Category	Number	Mentioned individual participants	Mentioned the group of participants	The group of participants not mentioned
I	13	1 (officials in the government department individually mentioned, others mentioned in a group)	9 (1 also specifically mentioned the department who approved the study; 1 also mentioned name of the research site)	3 (1 listed research site and the gatekeepers who grant access to the participants)
II	12		9 (3 also mentioned the research site; 1 also mentioned the department who approved the study)	3
III	3		3 (1 also mentioned the department who approved the study and funder)	
Total	28	1	21	6

Overall, the most common way of acknowledgment seemed to point to the participant' group, for example "the research school: the principal, teachers, learners and their parents" (Senosi, 2004, p. acknowledgement) or sometimes simpler "all the participants in this study" (Simelane, 2004, p. acknowledgement).

And who were considered to be important enough to be acknowledged individually? Examining these acknowledgement pages, this list included supervisor, family members, technical support members (typing, language editing, financial support, library staff) and fellow researchers. Gatekeepers, particularly those who approved the study (often the department) were also acknowledged by some individually.

However, there were a few more noteworthy points arose from the table above:

➢ About ¼ researchers did not mention even the group name of their participants in their acknowledgement.

➢ There was one researcher who mentioned some individual names of his participants, but this only happened with those individuals who hold high positions (officials in the government department), while the remaining were appeared behind their group name. More strangely was that this research was from category I, in other words, those who demonstrated very limited understanding of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

Understandably, there could be personal expectations and institutional ones playing the role in this practice. Researchers, such as Francis, argued that promising confidentiality was better than standing any chance of any other people twisting the data and using it against a particular participant, although in the same time, she also claimed that such chances were very slim. Moreover, Francis also realised that

such practice may serve to protect the researcher or the research institution better (rather than the participants, as often claimed to be).

In the light of the above findings, I specifically probed the original participants and the original researchers in my study as to how they view acknowledgments. The predominant responses were that acknowledgement is not essential, but it would surely be nice. Three participants went further to claim that acknowledgement is in fact important, in that "it would help a person to contribute again" (Seager).

7.1.5 Responsibility of a participant towards the researcher

My own understanding of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher was that the participant be honest in his/her responses. However, because much of the research had focused on the opinions or attitude of the participants, and not on any factual knowledge, it was difficult to be sure about honesty. De Beer revealed a similar viewpoint when she referred to honesty:

> When I say honest, I don't imply that they are necessary lying to me, but I mean honest about their perception. Even though, the one guy, I thought he practiced the lesson beforehand with the pupils. Even that, I don't see it as dishonesty, because that was the mechanism that he employed, maybe to feel better, or to be better prepared, or it might be a mechanism for him to think that now he is helping me more. So I am not seeing that as dishonesty. What I mean by dishonesty perhaps, or what I mean by honesty is if I ask them a question, I don't mind if they speculate, they can say it might be this and it might be that, they can speculate, but they shouldn't, I expect of them not to be dishonest. Like If I ask them how many experiences you have, and the one says ten years, and say for example, there is only one year, then I would regard that as dishonesty. I think their responsibility was only be accurate in their information. If they say ten year and actually it was 8 or 9, that wasn't that bad. But a big difference would be.

The literature had also indicated the possibility of the participants not being honest or straightforward (Apple, 1993) and had suggested using prolonged engagement, built-in triangulation, phrasing questions in different ways, or using body language or some other means of triangulation for the purposes of cross-examination. However if a participant makes a decision not to reveal true understanding, it would be not only difficult to ascertain what was not true, but also even more difficult to obtain a sense of what was supposed to be true. Therefore, although these methodological suggestions might be of use, the fact is that honesty would be more the result of a willingness on the part of the participants to be honest, and this, in turn, emphasises the importance of cultivating a trustful and relaxed researcher–practitioner relationship.

The following table summarises the ways in which the participants viewed the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher. Clearly there is much congruence to be detected between the perspectives of the researchers and that of the practitioners.

Table 19: understanding of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher

Case	Participants	Perception of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher
Francis	Francis	➢ Honest and open
	Botha	➢ Be there ➢ Speak honestly and openly
	Lee	➢ Keep promise of the commitment to the research
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo	➢ Be there, on time and available
	De Beer	➢ Be honest and accurate
	Chisholm	➢ Tell the truth
	Van der Linde	➢ Do the interview as best as you can ➢ Keep promise of the commitment to the research
	Kola	➢ To provide proper information ➢ Be available
Sehlola	Sehlola	➢ Keep promise of the commitment to the research ➢ Be open
	Billana	None
	Stevens	➢ Be available
Hendricks	Hendricks	None
	Van Wyk	➢ Honesty ➢ Be objective, recognise own mistakes
	Tilley	➢ Honesty
Sani	Sani	➢ Commitment to the project ➢ Allow the researcher to build the relationship
	Danca	➢ Be honest
	Seager	➢ Be clear, be honest, tell the truth; ➢ Be on time, do not waste time. ➢ Respect

7.2 Researcher–practitioner relationship

I had known some of the original researchers before this study, although mostly only as colleagues. The only exception was Thabo. He and I had developed a personal friendship during my first two years at the university (2004 & 2005).

7.2.1 Sampling

Several variables played a role in my sampling strategy. My primary consideration was to follow the categories that I had derived in Chapter 4 for the student researchers' case. When this condition had been met, I tried to find the most variance among all potential cases, for example, in their data collection technique, the intensity of their engagement with their participants, the existence of a prior relationship

between the original researcher and myself, etc (detail follows in this section). I also adhered to the two other guidelines in the selection of my samples: I excluded those participants about whose ways of handling the researcher–practitioner engagement I felt particularly negative (from my review of their dissertations)[41], and I also approached only those participants (both the researchers and their original participants)[42] who were relatively easy to access.

Sehlola's case was the first case I decided upon. Not only had he been recruited by the faculty by the time of my study, and thus approaching him was easy; but his study had also been recommended by some lecturers as a classic classroom study. Furthermore, his research design of long engagement also interested me. His selection into my study could also be explained by the reasons why I had chosen not to select the other two dissertations in the same category as his (category III). I had a negative perception of Hariparsad's dissertation because of the multitude of her questioning the reasons why her participants had behaved in certain ways (see Chapter 4). Meanwhile, although Herman had greatly impressed me by her self-criticism and her honesty in revealing her methodological dilemmas, I foresaw difficulties in selecting her. Her original participants were in Johannesburg, a city 50 km away from Pretoria and thus too far away for me to arrange transport. Her study was community and religious based (school restructuring in the Jewish community), and this could present accessing problems to an outsider. Lastly, her topic had been very sensitive at the time of her study, and this in fact had facilitated her data collection because people had been eager to talk at the time. However, 2-3 years later this would most likely not have been the case.

Thabo's case was the second to be chosen from category II. I was interested in his study, firstly, because it was not a conventional classroom study, but a step-back methodological case, which could present different findings from conventional classroom studies. Secondly, as I had mentioned earlier, my relationship with him was also much closer and more personal than my relationships with the other original researchers. Although in my third year (2006), he had accepted an offer to work in another university, and we had thus no longer had the opportunity to meet and talk regularly, prior to that, we had been working in the same

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[41] The reason to avoid such a selection was that, since I was clearly aware of my own critical attitude, particularly towards the researchers, a preconceived negative feeling of my part, could further have exaggerated the situation.

[42] As indicated earlier this had been one of my concerns because of my lack of familiarity with the situation in the country and also the inefficient public transport system had greatly limited my mobility. In practice this consideration of access had meant that, not only did I prefer those studies which had taken place in the Pretoria area, but also I would prefer to be able to reach the locations by bicycle—my main means of transport during the duration of my study. I also preferred teachers to learners as the original participants because I had estimated there was a better chance of the teachers (rather than the students) remaining in the same school. Furthermore, 2-3 years in the busy life of a student could simply be too long for them to recall the research instances correctly.

university building[43] and would talk whenever we met in the corridor. Our conversations had touched upon not only academic life– what happened in the department or the faculty – but also on happenings in our own lives. These variances fascinated me so that I did not consider any other studies in the same category.

In respect of category I, the choice was more difficult because I had known nobody in that category and, also, I did not have any particular preferences (except the one study that I felt was too negative to include—Mampane). Of the remaining 12 possible entries, my selection was based mainly on the location at which the study had been conducted. Three candidates (Conco, Francis, Mathekga) had looked promising. Eventually, I had chosen Francis, not only because she had been the first to respond to my inquiry, but also as a result of some unique characteristics of her study: she had used a focus group rather than interviews; her participants had been mostly professionals and often lecturers/researchers themselves; and her study had been fairly small-scale with very limited engagement with the participants – very typical once-off type in educational research (Levin, 2004).

The selection for the *experienced researchers* category proved to be much more problematic, although in this category selection had fewer restraints – as long as the study had been a qualitative study carried out no earlier than 2004, and that accessing the original participants would be relatively easy. Initially, I had also defined the term *being experienced*[44] as those who had completed their PhD more than 5 years.

I had had one particular study in mind from the start. In late 2004 I had been involved in a project on discipline with one of the lecturers in our department – Hendricks. Although his study had used a mixed method, mainly an open-ended questionnaire to both the students and teachers, I was aware that he had also conducted interviews and focus groups with the principal and some teachers. He had finished his PhD in 1994 and had been working in the department ever since, hence he also fitted my definition of *the experienced*. Somehow, I had also thought that the school was not too far away, and it was only in mid 2006, when I was preparing to go to the school, that I suddenly realised that the school was actually more than 100 km away. Since I had realised it very late and it was also found that it was extremely difficult to

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[43] I had been working as a part time research assistant for the department of management and policy study since May 2004. He was not officially studying in our department, but there had been a time when he had been assisting our Head of Department.

[44] I had had this initial definition because the notion of "being experienced" was a very vague and soft term. There was no particular reason why I had chosen five years, although for some reason I had assumed that study carried out for a Phd degree would be a student's first big project, then, during the next 5 years, a researcher should have carried out a few other projects. Besides, I had also expected that a person who had been working in an academic environment for longer than 5 years could

find other participants for this category, I eventually hired a driver to take to drive me to the school.

Meanwhile, my relationship with this project was also unique – not in the sense of a personal relationship with the researcher, but in terms of my involvement in the project. I had not only been the person to capture the data, but also the person who to provide an analysis and a report. The report he had sent to the school had, in fact, been prepared by me.[45] Although I had never contacted the school myself, I expected that my background knowledge of the project and the unique fact that the project had been initiated by the school provided further interests to my eyes.

However I still needed another *experienced researcher* as a participant. I sent out an email to every member of the faculty staff[46] on 27 March 2006 inquiring whether anyone might be interested in participating in my research. One person responded, but her most recent qualitative project had been in 2001.

Since this method of recruiting was not proving successful, I then contacted lecturers in the faculty in person and asked for references if they themselves were not able to participate. However I soon had another discovery: there were very few potential candidates for this category. There were simply not many researchers in the faculty who carried out qualitative studies.[47] This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that those who did do qualitative studies usually used students to conduct the fieldwork (interviews or other forms of data collection).[48] Many of these projects were also on a larger scale and much of the fieldwork had taken place in other provinces or in other parts of the country.

There were instances where the researchers were prepared to grant me an interview, but not their participants, and stated that it would be too difficult to go through all the correct channels in respect of the getting consent.[49] Sometimes I received a straightforward refusal on the grounds of a busy schedule.

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exhibit stronger institutional influences.

[45] I had prepared two reports at that stage—one so called *academic report*, in which I simply wrote down what I perceived from the data, and the other *principal report*, in which more concrete feedback was given, and most of the negative findings from the data also written in a far more diplomatic and strategic way, compared with the academic report. Later I found that Hendricks had sent the school my *academic report*. I   was rather shocked by this, but I had not addressed it because it had been his project and my role   was simply that of research assistant.

[46] We have a facility that one email address would be sent automatically to all the staff members in the faculty.

[47] Quantitative methods or the use of questionnaires only seemed to dominate the research methodology of the faculty's staff members. In fact, I was told that probably one reason why there were many student cases from which to choose was because students preferred to do qualitative study.

[48] They were usually projects-based, and the students would be used to collect data, while the role of the lecturer would be that of overall coordination and also data analysis and writing up.

[49] However, this happened despite my explanation that, in my study, accessing the individual teacher should be sufficient without going through the normal channels of department and principal.

Out of desperation I started to consider expanding my original definition of *been experienced* (5 years limit) possibly to include more candidates. Then I came to hear of Sani and her study. She was almost my last resort, so, when she initially refused, I did not give up but insisted until she was able to fit me into her schedule about a few months later. It was also only later that I discovered that she had actually finished her PhD more than 5 years before.

My relationship with both of these two *experienced researchers* was that of colleagues, although I was closer to Hendricks because we were both in the same department and we met and talked more often (mostly about academic subjects, not personal).

7.2.2 Accessing the participants & the gate keepers

Asking the researchers to seek permission from their original participants before I had made my first contact had the disadvantage of bringing in possible bias, because the researchers can choose those participants whom they considered as *favourable*. However, on the other side, it also provided easier access for me as regards the original participants. It not only allowed me to bypass the usual channels of obtaining the permission of various gate keepers, but also incidentally met a preference of the participants in terms of access through a familiar source.

In most cases the original researcher would inform the original participants before I contacted them directly. However there were several cases where this did not happen, for instance, Billana in Sehlola' study and Danca and Seager in Sani's study. I assumed that the original researcher involved in these instances had their reasons not to do so, so I did not specifically question them why they had not informed the participants. Rather I noted the fact and observed whether these participants had reacted to me differently compared with the other participants who had been contacted by the researcher first. My findings were somewhat surprising. Both Billana and Danca accepted my request for an interview very quickly. Danca, in fact, suggested my calling the following day for the interview; while, although Billana had been busy when I first called, he also did not keep me waiting for long. Seager's case was slightly delayed, but as he had not been feeling well for some time when I called and this had continued for a while, the delay did not seem to have resulted from a lack of willingness on his part to participate.

Although it would appear that this finding contradicts the preference for access via a familiar source that many participants had indicated, a possible explanation could be that, although the original researchers had not contacted the participants first, their knowledge of the original research project and researcher had provided the sense of familiarity that they needed. This, together with the overall positive experience of the research, particularly in Sani' case, had created the connection desired by the participants.

Initially, I had planned to have a separate session prior to the main interview to convey information such as the overall purpose of my study, the main features of the design, the right of the participant to withdraw from the study, etc, and also to allow them time to ask questions, digest the information and make decisions. I had also wanted to present this information to them on a face to face basis in order to create a personal connection. However, at the prearranged meeting time, the majority of participants had indicated their preference for starting the main interview immediately and therefore most of this informative session happened via email or telephone. There had been only one occasion on which a separate initial session and meeting of the participant had taken place first. Yet, when comparing this case with all the others, I was not able to detect any differences in terms of attitudes or willingness to participate. In fact, although I had presented the information separately and in person first to this particular participant, it proved more troublesome to secure the real interview with him than with the other participants.[50]

The interviews were either conducted at their homes (Francis, Billana, Stevens), their offices at the university (Sehlola, Botha, Lee, Hendricks, Sani) or school (Van Wyk, Tilley, Chisholm, Danca, Seager), my office at the university (Thabo, De Beer), my home (Kola), or in a park (Van der Linde). Mostly, the location was decided on in accordance with the preferences of the participants, but there were also several occasions when the location was negotiated, particularly when the location which had been preferred initially was not feasible because of my limited mobility.

7.2.3 Involvement/detachment

As the decision regarding involvement and detachment is central to the discussion of the researcher–practitioner relationship, after presenting my overall stance in this regard, four sub themes will be explored further in this section.

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[50] This more troublesome incidence could have happened because of the personality of this particular participant.

As was pointed out in the chapter 2, the literature on qualitative research is often divided on this issue of involvement and detachment – with one side calling for the focus to be on obtaining the insider's perspective, while the other side advocates detachment in order to minimise bias. Probably because of the prolonged tradition that favors detachment, many qualitative researchers still tend to, in varying degrees, follow the call in favour of detachment.

My overall stance in this debate is similar to that suggested by Elias (1987), namely, that detachment used to be important in advancing human knowledge, however, an increasing interdependence among people has often resulted in human activities becoming more of a "complex, far-flung and closely knit" (1987, p. 10) network, particularly in social science. Furthermore, the consequences of human decisions often have personal implications. Both these claims support the argument that the notion of detachment is not always feasible.

I am of the opinion that this call for detachment is even more problematic in a research process during which the researcher and the participants interact because, in such a scenario, emotions and personal traits always came into play in various ways. Furthermore, detachment in such a case might not even be a good suggestion because it could constitute an impediment to two-way interaction and communication. To me this could not only be unethical, but it could also distract from the main features of the qualitative paradigm.

Although bias needs to be controlled, my own strategy was to deal with the biases or the *damage* of involvement during the data analysis phase, during which traces of the ways in which certain interactions had resulted in certain reactions were provided and reflected upon. During data collection, my focus was kept on maintaining an interactive and meaningful engagement.

7.2.3.1 Judgement, critique and faking friendship

Although I had not been overly concerned about the need to be detached, the questions as to whether I had the right to judge and to what extent I had the right to criticise my participants did surface numerous times during my review of the 28 dissertations. This problem intensified when I started the interviews.

As I was making decisions as to what I considered to be relevant to my analysis, what I thought signalled a

limited or substantial understanding, and what to keep or leave out in my presentation of the data, I started to question myself, not as to the extent I should distance myself from my decisions, but rather as to what authority I had to make judgments and the extent to which I should maintain my critical attitude.

It was relatively easy to deal with the question of whether I had the right to judge. In fact, I soon realised that, although in many ways this study was based on the reports, perceptions and experiences of others, the fact remained that it was my work and I had to maintain my authority – be it *right* or *wrong*. In fact my judgment was essential to the statements that I was making and, consequently, would also determine the quality of this dissertation. Therefore I had to ensure that my decisions and judgments were as transparent as possible and then allow the audience, on the basis on my detailed description, to decide whether they agreed with my judgment or not.

In terms of the researchers whom I was judging, on the one hand, I expected that their exposure to the academic environment would have cultivated an open, or at least tolerant, attitude towards criticism; while, on the other hand, I hoped that, should my descriptions and interpretations have evoked anger or frustration, when life moved on, time would eventually dilute any resentments. Besides, as I joked with a friend, I was merely a student, so probably nobody would bother over much with my judgment.

Nevertheless, the question as to the extent to which I could or should remain critical persisted. I had always known that I tended to have a critical disposition, not only in respect of others, but also in respect of myself. Also my sensitivity, my observant nature and my problem solving orientation tended to focus my attention more on problems than on achievements. I was aware that one of the main motivations behind participation was a desire to help me, and, thus, would criticism on my part either betray or empower my participants?

There are many studies (De Laine, 2000; Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Shaffir, 1991; Walford, 1994) which have documented and discussed the issue of faking friendship, yet solutions to this problem are often not clear. Griffiths (1998) argues that the researcher draws on the ground rules regarding reciprocity and trust that characterise social interactions, but since a researcher make use of these rules for research purposes, he/she risks exploitation and betrayal. Duncombe & Jessop (2002) also point out that researchers, when necessary, tend to barter their trust, empathy and feelings in exchange for what they consider to be good data.

I did not expect myself to fake agreement with the participants deliberately in a way which Wallis describes as "I found it difficult to participate without suggesting a commitment similar to their own, which I did not feel" (1977, p. 155) or as Herman (2004) describes "I sometimes faked rapport to encourage interviewees to trust me with their stories". I could be explicit in terms of my own views, but, if, for example, I thought that the participants were evading my questions, should I point this out to them and then press them for what I considered to be the real answer?

This problem was relatively easy to handle in the review of the dissertations. Firstly, there was ample time for evaluation and a decision to be made on whether or not to criticise. Secondly, it is far easier to criticise someone on paper than it is to criticise the person face to face. However the interview situation is very different. Although initially I had thought that avoiding arguments was not necessarily a good thing and the welcome of positive criticism expressed by certain participants (such as Kola, Van der Linde and Chisholm) also offered some relief to my worry of offending the participants.

My problems started with Francis when she pointed out that her preference for detachment had been revealed in the method she had used in her study – the focus group. I somehow doubted this statement because I was not sure why a focus group necessarily meant limited interaction, yet, at that moment during the interview, I felt that I could not broach the subject, so I left it and moved onto the next question.

Later, when I reflected on this interview, I realised that one problem in respect of interviews is that decisions have to be made on the spot without much time to consider them. Furthermore, my sudden *inability* to address the doubt could also have resulted from the doubt as to whether addressing it would constitute betrayal while the other person was helping me, my relative inexperience in terms of interview skills at the time, and an unwillingness to exchange profound thoughts (including criticism) with a person whom I did not know well.

However, I also found that I was not able to raise criticism face to face even with those whom I knew well. For example, I did not speak to Thabo about my critical attitude towards his hidden agenda. Neither did I point out all the contradictions that I had detected in my interview with him. I did, however, record my criticisms and I then sent him a copy. I also told him explicitly that I would like him to challenge me if he did not agree with what I had written. When he did not come back to me, I chose not to pursue the issue

further, therefore I did not know whether he had actually read what I had written and agree with my criticism, or whether he had simply not read my report.

Therefore, faking friendship in this context did not necessarily constitute a need to fake a friendship in the research context (or impression management as De Laine, 2000 terms it). Rather it was more about the extent to which it was possible to voice criticism, even positive criticism, during the face-to-face interviews. This dilemma was even more troubling when not only both me and the participants were clearly aware that participation in the research was mainly to help the researcher, but also that the researcher him/herself was the one who would benefit the most. Even worse was that one could question whether the possible unease or embarrassment which could arise from criticism would be ethical and, furthermore, worthwhile, as Seager maintains, "I personally think if I tried my best, and if some people criticise me, you feel sort of embarrassed".

Although, in a positive light, it is possible that a person may benefit from criticism, I subsequently started to doubt the veracity of this statement. The following anecdote may shed some light on this attitude. I had a close friend and we were working on a project together when I noticed that some behaviour of hers, according to my ethics, was not appropriate. My first reaction was to talk to her about it. Yet, on second thoughts, I started to question myself as to whether this would serve more to relieve my own disappointment (obviously I would have felt better after the talk), or was it really for her benefit (to empower her to become a better person)? Besides, even if I did speak out, would it really result in any changes? It was impossible to change the unethical behaviour that had already happened, but I also suspected that speaking out would not necessary succeed in changing anything in the future unless she accepted and agreed with my criticism wholeheartedly. Yet, if she would have agreed with my criticism, she probably would not have done what she had done in the first place. On the other hand, if I chose not to bring up the subject, there would be no chance whatever of change. So, in this sense, not bringing up the subject could also constitute a denial of any possibility of change. Then again, what authority did I have to impose my view of right and wrong on her. Thus the dilemma continued. Later I realised that this could possibly be the reason why some fellow researchers, such as De Beer, would choose to give only positive feedback.

<u>7.2.3.2 Formal or informal?</u>

My overall stance in terms of involvement/detachment positioning translated into action meant that the interviews were conducted rather like conversations. Sometimes, I would explain why I had asked a particular question, sometimes I would give my own view, or even interrupt (some minor interruptions were ignored in the transcription, others may be seen from the quotes). I also sometimes asked leading questions.

My own somewhat casual personality and my personal understanding of ethics informed this mode of conducting the interviews. In other words, I did it not because I deliberately wanted to abandon the usual rules for conducting interviews, but because, to me, these informal elements were simply more natural and comfortable. My observations of the reactions of the participants had also indicated that they were comfortable with this method. In respect of leading questions, I also did not find this practice necessarily harm the quality of data because many of my participants would state bluntly if they did not agree with certain suggestions that I had implied. This could, in fact, have resulted from the informal atmosphere that I had created, but, to me, it was also an indication of their honesty.

Aside from this informal style of questioning, I also took care that the setting of the interviews contributed to a relaxed atmosphere. If the interview took place in my home, I would usually offer drinks or snacks. If the interview took place in the participant's office, I would usually state that I would prefer that we were not disturbed, but, if somebody needed to see the interviewee, I did not mind suspending the interview. I did this because I was aware that the participants' jobs were more important to them than my research, and so, when necessary, I was willing to give way. The result was that not only did they appreciate my attitude, but it was sometimes possible to build a further conversation on the incident of the disturbances.

Overall, my interview questions could be divided into two broad categories: general or specific. Specific questions seek to discover what actually happened, while general questions aim at uncovering the perspectives or preferences of the participants.[51] Although the general questions tended to be somewhat abstract, they were important to my understanding of the relationship particularly in those cases in which what had actually transpired had not matched the expectations of the participants.

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[51] For detailed interview protocol, please see chapter 3.

The interview protocol (see Chapter 3) served as a guideline for my questions. But, as I indicated earlier, I did not slavishly follow the sequence laid down in there, but allowed the conversation and responses to follow their own course. This, of course, also had its disadvantage: that sometimes not all questions were covered. It was also found necessary to add questions in later interviews that had not initially been planned. Although this is an acceptable feature of qualitative studies, it did pose problems when I started to analyse the data and found that those questions with partial answers were difficult to triangulate.

7.2.3.3 Research-based relationship or friendship?

My definition of friendship is that it is a relationship in which people interact on a personal level. It differs from that of colleagues or from a research-based relationship in which work-related issues only constitute the main topics of discussion.

With this definition in mind, I initially set out with my own resistance to a research-based only relationship because to me, it seemed that, in such a relationship, there existed the danger of *using* the participants and not showing them the respect due to human beings. However, during the course of this research, I came to realise that in research, particularly in a small-scale research study such as mine, it was not only difficult to develop friendship because "the field-worker and host barely have time to scratch the surface of one another's personalities" (Gurney, 1991, p. 55), but it may also not be desirable for both the researcher and the participants.

The length of time the researcher and the participants stay together for a research project is a critical indicator as to whether it will be possible to establish a friendship. Furthermore, it is difficult to set aside time to create bonds when there is simply not enough time to carry out the research. Although in chapter 4 I had criticised Du Toit about his strategy of foregoing small talk because it took up valuable time, the dilemma is that a researcher is not always aware how much time the participant prefers for small talk. This not able to anticipated duration of the small talk could make time management of the research engagement, for example, interview, problematic. Also, although a researcher could start the interview with general questions about the school situation or simply chat a little, it is also difficult to inject the element of friendship into the conversations for the simple reason that the interviewer and the interviewee do not know each other well and therefore do not know what their common interests could be. The personality of the interviewer or the interviewee could also either advance or hinder the situation. For example, with strangers

I am a passive talker and I usually talk little with people that I do not know well. And the same could happen with a certain participant.

On the other side, a personal relationship in the research context may also not be desirable. Although almost all the participants had indicated in their interviews that they would prefer the element of friendliness (a relaxed environment) to be present in the research situation, this did not necessarily constitute friendship. Many participants had also pointed out that the research was the entry point of their participation and therefore the common purpose of the engagement, so unless "fake keeps you together" (Thabo), it would indeed be natural to end the research relationship once the research project was finished.

In revisiting my original idea of the importance of friendship in research, I probably had been over worried.

7.2.3.4 The role of friendship in a research situation

Personal relationships or friendship is often portrayed in literature as a possible cause of the participants displaying less honesty because of what is at stake. As a result, most of the literature, as well as the majority of the researchers in this study, either warn against or exhibit concern about the involvement of friendship in a research situation.

However, real friendship is based on frankness. Even considering the situation where people, such as in a research situation, might know each other, but are not close, this concern about friendship in the research situation could still be groundless. It is possible that one could think more and speak less if stakes were really high, but it may be far less likely that one would fabricate stories in this kind of situation. Hence the reluctance to offend a friend may result in the participant saying less or softening what he/she has to say, but this would not necessarily result in incorrect data.

On the other hand, friendship, which necessarily embraces the element of friendliness, may, as indicated by Sani and other participants, have a positive effect in a research situation in terms of reducing the uneasiness one might feel when facing a stranger.

The following table summarises how all the original researchers and participants viewed the role of friendship in a research situation.

Table 20: perceived role of friendship in a research situation

Case	Participants	View of the role of friendship in a research situation
Francis	Francis	➢ Negative.
	Botha	➢ Negative.
	Lee	➢ Negative.
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo	➢ Negative.
	De Beer	➢ Slightly negative.
	Chisholm	N/A
	Van der Linde	➢ Positive, expression would be freer, but not necessarily content of responses.
	Kola	➢ Positive, enhance spontaneity and the information provided would be more comprehensive.
Sehlola	Sehlola	➢ There is a risk of losing objectivity, but this did not affect his data (as one of the participants was his friend); it enhanced the availability of the participant.
	Billana	➢ Friendship always comes into play, because "before you became a participant in a research, you are first a human being".
	Stevens	➢ Would not give different answer if the researcher were not friend.
Hendricks	Hendricks	➢ Emotional topic would need friendship, however, in general, friendship might have negative influence on data.
	Van Wyk	➢ Would not give different answer if the researcher were his friend.
	Tilley	➢ First reaction, it could have negative influence; when break the issue down, expressed that would not give a different answer if the researcher were friend or not.
Sani	Sani	➢ Not necessarily influence the data, not necessarily negative; ➢ "It would make it all the more enriching because now we have getting over the hurdle of getting to know each other".
	Danca	➢ Would not react and respond differently if it were friend, "not for research purposes"; ➢ Would not tell more to a friend as well.
	Seager	➢ "It could be, it does not have to, but it can be." ➢ Would talk more if it is friend.

The interesting finding from the above was that the way in which friendship may exert an influence on research was totally opposite as perceived by the original researchers and their participants. With the sole exception of Sani, all the researchers (as well as those participants who were researchers themselves – Botha and Lee), objected to the involvement of friendship, while almost all original participants were either of the opinion that friendship would have made no difference in terms of their response, or that friendship (should actually be understood as the friendliness element existed in friendship) could indeed have enhanced the quality of their responses, either in terms of an ease in expressing certain opinions or even in the length of their responses.

I also examined the possible influence of my friendship with one of my participants – Thabo – in terms of our interactions. In contrast with Sehlola' experience, where his friendship with Stevens had made access easier, I myself did not experience this greater ease of access. Yes, Thabo had agreed, in principle, to my

request for his participation speedily, but, on many occasions, he had taken far longer to respond to my requests for a meeting than many of the other participants whom I had not known prior to the research. I would agree with Sehlola' view that the quality of his data had not been affected by his friendship with Stevens in that I could also not see that our friendship had influenced the way in which Thabo had answered my questions nor the way in which I had asked the questions in a negative way. The only instance in which our friendship had played a role had been when I had forgotten to bring the informed consent to the interview and he had mentioned trust already established as one reason why the absence of the informed consent in this case was not that problematic.

7.2.4 Retreat from the field--Continuity or closure?

A preference for either friendship or fieldship will naturally result in a preference for either continuity or closure. As De Beer stated "if you make it friendship, then it also means that the relationship needs to be continued. To be really classified into friendship, the friendship must continue."

As I had indicated earlier I had initially regarded fieldship as an exploitative type of relationship within the research context. However I later came to realise not only how difficult it was either to pursue or to incorporate friendship in research, and also that research was the common purpose of the engagement, and thus that friendship was not necessarily desirable.

As much as I prefer the personal element in a researcher–practitioner relationship, I also found that not only could the limited interaction resulted from a research design could hinder a continuous relationship with the participants, but that one's personality may also play a role in one's preference for continuity or closure upon the completion of the research. And I also discovered another possible obstacle – a lack of family bonds.

When I reviewed my own friendship patterns, I realised that my closest friendships were usually those people not only to whom I could relate, but also those where I could bring my husband and my friends' partners into the relationship. In this regard I started to understand why Sehlola had had a far easier relationship with Stevens. As his wife had worked in the same school as Stevens and as both families would go to church or dinner together, this family bond had simply produced a better, stronger and longer lasting

relationship.

Therefore in terms of the continuity or closure issue, I also started to understand the reason why, although Sehlola had recognised that it is better to continue the relationship in some way, he had not attended to it seriously himself – there had been a strong temptation not to continue simply because closure was far more convenient. The researcher obtained the data, analysed it, wrote it up, then would be busy completing the other administrative work in connection with handing in the dissertation. Besides, life was not solely about dissertations, other issues needing attention also surface. So, although my initial understanding of fieldship and friendship had also resulted in my preference for continuity, not only had my uneasiness with strangers often prevented me from seeking further relationship with them, but the fact that their purpose in my research had been fulfilled (data had been collected) had also tempted me simply to carry on with my own life, of which they did not form a part.

"Was it fair to stop being a sounding board after I completed the fieldwork and no longer required the information?" (Herman, 2004) My participants had not manifested the strong desire to speak out which had been a salient feature of the participants in Herman's study. Also the limited engagement in my study could have meant that retreat was less of a problem. However, in terms of my ethical stance, I still needed to know for myself what type of retreat from the field my participants would prefer and also how I should design my own retreat from the field.

The participants' preferences regarding continuity and closure as perceived through their respective roles had been reported in the descriptions of their respective cases. It is obvious that a preference for closure clearly dominated. Continuity was mentioned a few times only, and mostly in the context of providing feedback. "I know this is the purpose, and I am contributing to that purpose, and that's that" (De Beer). Commitments outside of the research project (for both the researchers and practitioners) were also often mentioned as another reason for preferring closure.

The following table summarises the indicated preference of closure or continuity from all participants.

Table 21: indicated preference of closure/continuity

Case	Participants	Preference of closure/continuity

Francis	Francis (as researcher)	Closure, unless doing a bigger project, like a PhD.
	Francis (as participant)	Closure, though welcome personal contact.
	Botha	Closure for the project; Continuity in updating followup information.
	Lee	Closure, because in a totally different field; do not have time and do not want to drag on; there is no reason to become a friend.
Thabo & De Beer	Thabo (as researcher)	Closure, unless somehow fate keeps you meeting them, research is a contract and the relationship ended when the contract ended.
	Thabo (as participant)	N/A
	De Beer (as researcher)	Closure, because it is not feasible to keep contact with everyone on a continuous base.
		Also assume that participants would like to have closure because "They are busy enough. I think it is nice to know that they are doing this and then it is over."
	De Beer (as participant)	Continuity only in the sense of getting feedback; Not feasible to keep other kind of continuity and it will eventually wane .
	Chisholm	Closure, it is nice to know that the researcher has achieved what he/she headed for, unless the researcher is still involved in the school or there is something that the researcher could help to improve.
	Van der Linde	Closure, it would be nice if the researcher kept contact, but it does not matter much.
	Kola	Continuity, especially on the personal level.
Sehlola	Sehlola (as researcher)	It is decent to continue and it is feasible to do so, just that he had not been doing that; Don't' think that the participants will think less of the researcher because he hasn't done that.
	Sehlola (as participant)	"Comfortable if we close the chapter", and don't "expect this thing to drag on to eternity".
	Billana	Closure is fine and important; Continuity is also important, "because it gives a researcher a chance to know the participant in more than one way".
	Stevens	Closure is fine, the researcher is under no obligation to contact afterwards.
Hendricks	Hendricks (as researcher)	Usually would go back to his participants and keep some kind of continuity. Usually such takes place not with the purpose of continuing the relationship, but more in the form of followups.
	Hendricks (as participant)	Mainly closure (because of the topic of the study), although getting the report would be important.
	Van Wyk	Closure is important; Continuity is also important in the sense that the channels that have been opened should remain.
	Tilley	Continue in followups and reinforcement; also some personal contact.
Sani	Sani (as researcher)	There is closure, because the research is finished; Also continuity, in the sense that the participants have someone to turn to.
	Sani (as participant)	Continuity, don't like clinical closure.
	Danca	Closure, "because I know people are busy.
	Seager	Continuity can be nice, but not necessary; Prefers closure.

Therefore in answer to the question of how to retreat from the field, I eventually decided to present gifts to my participants when I had finished the interviews; and then subsequently to provide the type of the

feedback that they had indicated they would like. I had had a few follow up questions for some participants when I had started analyzing the data, so I had either called, emailed, SMSed or written letters to them in order to obtain clarity. Other than that my relationships with them had ended.

However, the differences in the types of feedback that the participants had requested are worth mentioning.

Table 22: types of feedback participants requested

Case	Participants	Type of feedback they asked for	Reasons for asking for the type of feedback
Francis	Francis	➢ Case descriptive; ➢ Upon finishing, inform that it is finished	➢ To make sure that there is no misunderstanding
	Botha	N/A	N/A
	Lee	➢ Transcript ➢ Abstract when the dissertation is finished	"Not specifically the analysis, but the transcript because that is part of me sharing and I would want that to be accurate, how you use it to analyse is your choice…it is a nice control"
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo	➢ Transcript ➢ Analysis	"It is because of the interest, it is an interesting topic, and because of my name (would be on it)"
	De Beer	Case descriptive Analysis and general findings The implication for further research	"It (the analysis) would make it easier to make sense of the results and findings"
	Chisholm	The general findings	"It is always interesting. You can always learn something. You know sometimes you read, even if you just get a sentence that impresses you, then it is worth reading"
	Van der Linde	Upon finishing inform that it is finished	"I don't think that it is really something that I can use…I don't like reading stuff… I would like to hear what the result is"
	Kola	➢ Transcript; ➢ Case descriptive to comment;	"Part of the transparency"
Sehlola	Sehlola	➢ Case descriptive; ➢ Cross analysis; ➢ General findings;	Case descriptive to check whether portrayed accurately; Cross analysis and general findings are because of the general interest in the topic.
	Billana	A copy of the thesis when it is finished	"I don't mind whether is a final product or not…as long as I can have it (the thesis) at the end."
	Stevens	➢ Does not matter	"Any kind of feedback I would appreciate."
Hendric ks	Hendricks	➢ First written draft of the case to comment ➢ General finding	"To see that you reflect what I said 100%…just to see if everything is reflected correctly…about I not misrepresented…interested to see how other researchers experience the relationship"
	Van Wyk	➢ General finding	"It would be interesting to see it…it might be interesting and that you might be able to use it later on."
	Tilley	➢ General finding	"It would be interesting to see some feedback. The general things that you come up with."
Sani	Sani	➢ Case descriptive ➢ General findings	"It would be nice to know what has been written."

	Danca	➢ Short description of the case ➢ General findings	"I would like to see the general outcome."
	Seager	Upon finishing inform that it is finished	"(So because of the topic itself, you are not necessarily interested in the finding itself, am I right?) Yes. (So you are more interested in knowing what I generally did with it?) Yes. Achieve something, whether you finished, not necessarily a formal analysis."

In summarising the table above, it is clear that the majority of the original researchers wanted to see the case descriptive and they quoted checking the accuracy as their main reason. Among the original participants, Lee and Kola were the only ones who wanted to read the transcription or the case descriptive. Lee had been a researcher herself, and had asked for the transcript as "a nice control". Kola regarded providing the transcription as "part of the transparency" that he had emphasised throughout his interview.

Most of the other participants wanted only to be notified once the thesis had been completed and I had received my degree. They explained the reason for this as, firstly, to obtain a sense of closure in the sense that the research in which they had participated was complete and, secondly, to confirm that they had accomplished one of their own aims in participating – to help me to obtain my degree.

Many of them had indicated a preference to receive the general finding, but most of them had not requested it in order to give comment. For example, Billana asked for a copy of the final thesis, but not the draft versions, on which to comment. I asked him for the reasons and he answered:

> Firstly, I do not have much time [to read and comment]; secondly I trust you guys that as researchers, you would portray me accurately. Besides, I know that usually you would have deadline to meet, to hand in the thesis, and I do not want because of my reading and changing that it would make your meeting the deadline difficult.

Although a consideration of his own busy schedule may also have explained his lack of interest in being actively involved in feedback, Danca's explanation that "if you misinterpreted it, it is not my problem" and Lee's statement that "how you use to analyse is your choice" could suggest that many practitioners simply regarded the research output as the responsibility of the researcher and that they themselves were not part of it.

In view of the fact that this indifferent attitude towards the feedback could also be due to the nature of my study (it was not relevant to their day-to-day work), I also asked some of the participants about their

reactions towards the original research. Stephens stated that he had been very content when Sehlola had informed him that his contribution had been valuable, but when he had been given the transcript he had gone through about half of it. In Kola's case, although he appeared very dissatisfied about not being given the result, he had also not seemed to be interested in taking any initiative to ask for it, despite the ongoing conversations and interactions between him and the original researcher. So, despite the fact that the participants had listed receiving feedback as one of the most important responsibilities of a researcher, some of the actions pointed out above appeared to belie their words.

7.3 Power hierarchy?

7.3.1 Power imbalance

The power imbalance between the researcher and the participants in a research study has been identified by numerous literature sources as a serious problem in social science research. Among them, Kelman's 1972 article is a milestone from which many later works draw.

The main argument Kelman presents is that the individuals or groups that participate in social research (the 'participants', often also called the 'practitioners') are often deficient in power relative to the researcher: "regardless of his position in society, the subject's position within the research situation itself generally places him at a disadvantage" (p. 991). And this disadvantage, as Kelman illustrates, is due mainly to the fact that often "research is carried out in a setting 'owned' by the investigator" (p. 991). Even "when the research is carried out in a setting owned by the subject and takes the form of observing the natural flow of ongoing behavior" (p. 991), where the researcher's control is far less extensive, "since they [the participants] usually have only limited knowledge of what is being observed and to what use these observations will be put" (p. 992), the power deficiency is unavoidable.

Although Kelman (1972) recognises that "potentially, the subject's power in his relationship with the investigator is not inconsiderable, since the investigator's ability to carry out his research ultimately depends on the subject's cooperation" (p. 992), he further points out that "the subject relinquishes control over the situation once he agrees to participate" (p. 992). Combined with another phenomenon, namely that social science studies tend to draw disproportionately on disadvantaged groups as research subjects, where

"subjects who occupy low-status or dependent positions in the society or organization are less likely to see themselves as having the option to refuse participation in the research, or to withdraw once they have entered the situation" (p. 992), Kelman concludes that "a certain degree of discrepancy in power is inherent in the very social role of the researcher" (p. 994).

Since this 1972 article, it has emerged that power differences between researchers and participants have become a concern in social science research (for example, Cornwall, 1996; Dockery, 1996; Green, George, Daniel, Frankish, & Herbert, 1995; Larossa, Bennett, & Gelles, 1981). Authors like Little (1993) attribute such "long-standing asymmetries in status, power and resources" (p. 9) to the history of unsatisfactory relationships between the researchers and practitioners. And in many incidents, such power differences are also reported as a important contributor to participants' mistrust, anger, suspicion, lack of the interest and hesitation to become involved in research (Reardon, Welsh, Kreiswirth, & Forester, 1993). Consequently, reflections and attempts to address such inequalities, with an emphasis on sharing information, decision making power, and resources have flooded the literature (for example Bishop, 1994; Blodgett, Boyer, & Turk, 2005; Duke, 2002; Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, & Zimmerman, 1994; Labonte, 1994; Martin, 1996; Robertson & Minkler, 1994; Yeich & Levine, 1992).

However, although Kelman's (1972) claim that disadvantaged groups might be problematic (as an earlier discussion of its applicability in social science, particularly in education shows), I had a further interest to find out how both the participants and the researchers involved in this research view this power issue.

In what follows, I first reported the perceptions from the original participants, then that of the original researchers (both as a researcher and a participant in my research).

Botha and Lee were both lecturers and researchers themselves. Botha had finished her own PhD at the time of participating in Francis's research, while Lee had been a Head of Department, so both had been in higher positions than that of the researcher. Both did not feel powerless. Indeed, Botha's interview with me showed concern in explaining why she specifically did not feel powerful.

> I think if one feels confident enough in oneself, and in the knowledge that you have, you can almost try to help somebody else, particularly a student. And it was actually nice to be able to help her, also be able to finish her studies. But it is very important that it does not become a patronised issue, so that she is a student and you are a lecturer. Because I think everybody is very much on an equal footing, and you realise that the student is actually

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the one who is becoming the expect expert on the specific topic.

She also specifically mentioned that it was nice to be a participant, "just to be on the receiving end, I just talk and I don't have to go and analyse the data, do the job of transcribing. It is a big job".

Lee's understanding was from a slightly different angle, "that [power] depends on a person themselves. Whether you have a very strong personality or a big ego, or whether you are prepared in that situation to let it go [as a participant]". She claimed that during the original research study she felt comfortable as a participant.

The rest of the original participants were all teachers at the time of their participation. Chisholm suggested that *powerful* might not be the right word to describe a researcher's role in a research study.[52] "She [De Beer] was in control of the process, but it does not make it powerful. It should go like that. Otherwise I don't know what she wants, so she must be the one who guides, who is in control". She also claimed that she felt comfortable as a participant.

> Y: And you are comfortable with it [the researcher's control during the process]?
> C: Yes, that's fine. *It is not like this is making me scared*, what is going on? Not like that.

Kola also agreed with the suggestion made by Chisholm that evidence of friendliness could ease the feeling of being powerless, as highlighted in the emphasis above. "(So during the time, were you feeling powerless?) No, hence I mentioned to you that they are so friendly. I was just normal. It was just me, like any other day". Stevens also shared this perception of the importance of friendliness.

Similar to Chisholm, Van Wyk also claimed that the researcher should be the one to guide the research process:

> Y: During that study, did you particularly feel powerless in the sense he is the one to guide or gear the conversation?
> V: No, I don't think that it is a question of feeling powerless. I think it is also to realise that this is research being done from a view of a specific person, and he needs to find out information.
> Y: So in a way, you are fine to follow the flow?
> V: Yes, you have to, because you cannot come and predict somebody's research to suit you. You cannot do that.

Billana specified that as long as he could express what he wanted, instead of what the researcher wanted, he did not feel powerless.

B: At no stage did I feel powerless, because *I think I would have felt powerless if I was aware that I am not saying what I wanted to say. If I am saying what he wanted to me to say, then I would feel dis-empowered. But even though I knew that he wanted me to say this, I would still insist on what I believe that I should say, I never felt like I am losing myself, I always still put it in a way that I believe best reflect my feelings and my experiences.*

Y: were you feeling powerful?

B: I could say I was empowered, I felt powerful.

Y: By powerful, you mean?

B: I would say I in a way gave my contribution to his research. Yes, it has played a role in or added value to his research.

Seager, similar to Billana's suggestion, said that the feeling of contributing to the research study made him feel powerful: "Yes, I felt powerful. I think I contributed to a right attitude, right perspective".

Van der Linde also felt being comfortable; however, she did not experience feeling powerful, powerless or empowered, because to her, "It was just a research study and I answered the questions".

Table 23 summarises the responses from the original participants in terms of how they viewed the power issue in the research studies in which they participated.

Table 23: original participants' view of the power issue in their original research

Case	Participants	Felt powerful?	Felt powerless?	Felt empowered?
Francis	Botha	Although higher in position, recognised that the researcher (student) was more knowledgeable on the specific topic.	No	N/A
	Lee	Depends on the personality		
Thabo & De Beer	Chisholm	No	No ➢ Researcher should control the process; ➢ Friendliness cancelled powerlessness out; ➢ "We could learn from each other, it is equal and mutual".	N/A
	Van der Linde	No	No	No

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[52] Since as suggested, 'powerful' might not be the right word, for the remaining interviews with other participants, I tested both the words *powerful* and *empowered*.

	Kola	No	No ➢ Fine to follow the flow; ➢ Friendliness cancelled powerlessness out.	Yes if there had been feedback (which had not occurred by the time I interviewed him).
Sehlola	Billana	Yes, because added value to the research.	No. ➢ Would be 'yes' if lost himself and just said what the researcher wanted to hear.	N/A
	Stevens	No	No Friendliness cancelled powerlessness out.	N/A
Hendricks	Van Wyk	N/A	No ➢ Researcher should control the process; ➢ Fine to follow the flow of the research.	Yes, helped to form a better understanding of the situation.
	Tilley	N/A	No	Yes, because there was some feedback.
Sani	Danca	Not really, although aware that "I got the experience of the ground floor level which she [Sani] doesn't have".	No ➢ Fine to follow the flow because "it is not my research".	Yes, "she made me think".
	Seager	Sometimes, because "I contribute to a right attitude, right perspective".	No ➢ Fine to follow the flow	Learned something from the feedback.

To summarise, all participants felt comfortable having been participants, and none of them felt particularly powerless. Friendliness was suggested as being a strong determinant in easing any feelings of being powerless. The personalities of both the researcher and the participants were highlighted as a possible factor in who felt powerful or powerless. Some participants suggested that the researcher should be the one to control and guide the research process, while others actually felt powerful because of their contribution.

How did the original researchers perceive such issues? I explored not only their perceptions as a researcher in their original research studies, but also as participants in my research study. Surprisingly, many of their perceptions seemed to echo the message conveyed by their own participants.

Francis pointed to her position as a student at the time as one reason why she did not feel very powerful as a researcher: "because I was a student, I hadn't yet registered as a professional, and they – I called them because they had the experience of these things, so obviously they had the upper hand where knowledge is concerned. So where knowledge is concerned, I feel that they had more power than me". But she also

recognised that she "had a bit of power, 'cause I was the reason why they were there. And I got them together, and I set the questions. So in many ways, I did have the power."

As a participant, Francis felt that "I have power because I feel that I have something to share with you" and further pointed out that one's personality and the type of research could play an important role in who felt powerful or powerless.

> I think it is a very personal thing. You could be interviewing three people on exactly the same topic, and two of them could feel very powerless next to you, and the other one feels very powerful. Depends on how they see themselves, and how you see yourself. It might also depend on the type of the research, like experimental research, the participants probably would feel more powerless, because they just do whatever the researcher says. With an interview, you give more power to the participants, 'cause you basically acknowledge from the start that they have something that you need, so you already put them in the position of power, actually.

De Beer pointed out that a researcher could feel powerless because what happens in the research site (such as the attitudes of the participants) could be beyond a researcher's control. On the other hand, she also echoed the role of one's personality in one's feeling of power or powerlessness, particularly in her case, she often "regard[s] myself as being not good enough."

Having something to share was also pointed out by De Beer as a factor in the experience as a participant. "It was a nice conversation…in our conversation, I didn't feel powerful or powerless, I am just sharing… So I think the way you ask questions makes me feel empowered, but not necessary powerful. I think you empowered me to share what I have learned, and some of the questions you have asked clicked things that I have not thought before, which is nice. But it does not necessary makes me feel powerful."

As a researcher, Sehlola regarded himself as experiencing a bit of both in terms of power and powerlessness. He pointed out that the topic of his research (which had a heavy reliance on participants' recollection and articulation) made him more powerless:

> Sometimes, you feel that you are in control, you got the power, you got the shots; other times you feel that teachers are calling the shots, I mean they can tell you that I can't see you on such and such day, you scheduled an appointment and you come there, he is not ready for you, or he changes his mind. You are also kind of reliant on his recall of the lesson, so sometimes you feel that you've got to work on whatever they give to you, particular with what I was working on, cognitive exercise, how teachers make decisions, so a lot depends on what the teacher could recollect and the decision making process that he could identify, so I have very little control over

that…many times, I felt that I am the one who is being led.

As a participant, Sehlola suggested that 'powerful' and 'powerless' were not good descriptors since they are heavy concepts, so "just sharing" would be a better term to describe the experience. He also pointed out that following the flow set by the researcher did not necessarily make him feel powerless, particularly because of "the pattern of the discussion, I say something and then you latch onto the things that I said, that's the kind of unstructured or semi-structured thing" and that "I think it [how one feels about power] depends a lot on the atmosphere, depends a lot on the way you approach the participant, the way that you allow me to express myself. I think it is very determined on how the interview unfolds."

Hendricks indicated that his knowledge about other schools and the topic under investigation made him feel rather powerful as the researcher, "but regarding their own practical school situation, there I didn't feel any power or knowledge for their specific school situation." He called it 'less power', but not necessarily feeling 'powerless' as a participant: "if I compare with other interview situations, where I was on the other side of the table, I definitely feel that I have less power now than when I am initiating and doing the interview. For me definitely there is shift in power."

Sani "made every effort to ensure that we are engaging on an equal basis. I try very hard to get the situation where people can relate to each other on an equal footing." She also commented that the willingness of her participants prevented feelings of powerlessness on her part. She highlighted the manner of conducting research as being very important in making the participants feel comfortable and not powerless. "I think it is the way in which the researcher sets the tone of the interview. It depends on how you negotiate those roles."

Table 24 provides a summary of how the original researchers viewed the power issue, both as a researcher in their own project and as a participant in my study.

Table 24: original researchers' view of power (both as a researcher in their own project and as a participant in my study)

Case		Powerful?	Powerless?

Francis	As researcher	➢ No, maybe because was a student; ➢ Yes, in the sense that had the power of planning and organizing the research.	No ➢ Participants had more power because of their knowledge.
	As participant	Yes, because have something to share	No
	It might also depend on the personality of the people involved and the type of research.		
Thabo	As researcher	N/A	N/A
	As participant	N/A	N/A
De Beer	As researcher	Not really, one or two times felt good when see trends from data.	Yes ➢ When don't have control of the situation, like absenteeism; ➢ Learners did not regard researcher as authorities (both a good/bad thing).
	As participant	➢ No; ➢ Empowered because have something to share (still realises that it is limited to own experience), but not necessary powerful.	A bit when knowing the possibility of name being mentioned.
	Educators in research studies might also feel powerless (intimidated) especially during observation sessions.		
	Personality-wise, always tend to feel non -powerful.		
Sehlola	As researcher	Sometimes	More often, especially because of the nature of the study (rely on participants' recollection)
	As participant	➢ Although it is possible (can fabricate the stories if wanted to), did not happen; ➢ Just sharing.	No, because of the conversation pattern (friendliness)
Hendricks	As researcher	Yes, in the sense of the knowledge of the general situation, but not specifically that school's situation	No
	As participant	"Powerful may not be the correct concept".	Less power, but not powerless
	Educators might felt powerless in their inability to handle the situation, but not in terms of the relationship with the researcher.		
Sani	As researcher	No, made every effort to ensure that engaging on an equal basis.	No, not threatened, did not experience lost of control.
	As participant		Maybe in the sense that the researcher would know more in the field; but not in the approach of engaging.
	"I tried to tell them that I really admire what they are doing".		

To summarise, from the perspectives of both the researchers and the participants a certain degree of discrepancy in power relations does seem to be inherent in social research, but this power imbalance did not seem to bother the participants in this study, in contrast to what the literature often suggests.

It seems natural that in research initiated by the researcher, participants expect the researcher to guide

the research process. Contrary to claims in the literature, my finding was that participants also seemed to be comfortable with this situation and many of them even suggested that the researcher was the one who was supposed to be in control. What is also interesting is that even in research that was initiated by a school, such as that of Hendricks, the participants shared a similar expectation. One reason mentioned was that in such a situation, one purpose of inviting someone to conduct research was to obtain a view from an outsider. And in that sense, the researcher still needed to retain overall control.

Another characteristic that often accompanies qualitative educational research also needs to be pointed out in this discussion. A large number of qualitative research studies aim at understanding a certain phenomenon, which suggests that the participants possess some knowledge that the researcher does not. Qualitative research also often advocates the importance of the emic view, i.e. recognizing the value of the insider (participant)'s view. In this sense, the researcher comes to the participant particularly for their expertise and seeks to understand the phenomenon they want to investigate, particularly from the participants' perspective. Therefore, although it is true that the researcher's influence on the research situation is considerable, it is, in fact, logically strange to consider the participants in qualitative studies as being powerless. Qualitative research also, to a large extent, relies on both the willingness and ability of the participants to share their expertise; thus their control of what to share and what not to, and how to share it, is in fact more than just a minimum influence.

7.3.2 Power sharing in research decision making

Power sharing in research could refer to seeking participants' input on issues such as the research topic, research methodology, ways of presentation (for example, being a co-author) and other issues that may concern the participants.

There are a few research studies that are either initiated by request from the participants (such as in Heysteck's case), or during the time of the research, the participant's "agenda became compelling" (for example, Cole & Knowles, 1993:187). However, from my own observation from extensive reading of educational research reports, and as well as concluded by Tooley and Darby (1998) in their review of two years of publications of four leading British educational journals: for the vast majority of research studies, "only some of the research could be said to be informed by the agendas of participants. Of the 41 articles

[their sub-sample, which they reported and analysed in detail to give full justice of their findings], perhaps nine could be said to be thus informed" (1998:66).

Some authors describe other issues that are negotiated between the participants and themselves. For example, Cole and Knowles (1993) mentions a research study in which mutual benefit, logistical matters, the researcher's participation in the classroom, and representation of the participants were negotiated. Clark *et al.*'s (1996) report documents how issues like entry to the research site, the nature of the collaboration, the relationship with students, and dissemination of research findings were perceived by both the researchers and the participants. However, common in a large number of studies that report a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants, is often a simple claim that "everyone's voice was heard" (Mould, 1996), without further evidence to substantiate this claim. Indeed, in majority of the dissertations examined in this study, participants' voices seem to be rather weak at best and invisible in many cases.

It is understandable that methodology and presentation style issues often remain the choice of a researcher. However in the five empirical cases included in this study, none of the researchers even consulted the participants about their views and preferences in terms of certain aspects, for example: whether they preferred a personal (informal) or more professional (formal) relationship in the research process; what kind of feedback they would like to have; whether or not they would like to have the relationship continue in any way after data collection. Rather, these research decisions were based on what the researcher intended to do in terms of his/her own vision. Ironically, the claim that it is "more to protect the participant than anything else" (Sani) has sometimes been used to justify such a lack of consultation.

Not only did many of the original researchers in my study not show much interest in getting to know the views and preferences of their participants in terms of how certain aspects of the research could be conducted, but when they took a guess to explain certain behaviors of the participants, it sometimes emerged that they were wrong. For example, many of the original researchers regarded interest in the research topic as the major motivation for participation, while in fact, the majority of participants mentioned *helping the researcher* as being more relevant motivation. The researchers expected that their research would bring enhanced learning or change to the classroom; however, only a few participants echoed this expectation. Furthermore, the researchers tended to list confidentiality as their major

responsibility towards their participants; while in fact, the majority of the participants showed an indifference as to whether their identity should be concealed or not, and listed other issues as being the responsibility of the researcher towards the participants.

7.3.3 Power shift

Kelman (1972) highlights a process of what he calls 'power shift' — beginning at the point at which the participants agree to participate. Thus I made specific observations of this period, when participants were provided with the informed consent and asked to sign it.

Informed consent is often regarded as another way to balance the power deficiency, to provide the participants with information about the research, allow them to ask questions and also the power to decline participation. To give consent is not a static moment, rather it should be an on-going negotiation, particularly in research that has more than one engagement. However the moment of signing the consent form can, to a certain extent, signal the power shift, because after signing it, factors such as group pressure or simply the possible embarrassment to break the promise to participate (Malone, 2003, p. 799) could further compromise a withdrawal during the course of research.

Although it is recognised that to give consent is not a static moment, but an on-going negotiation (particularly in research studies that have more than one engagement), the moment of signing the consent form can, to a certain extent, signal the power shift, because after signing the form, factors such as group pressure, or simply the possible embarrassment of breaking the promise to participate (Malone, 2003, p. 799) could compromise any contemplated withdrawal during the course of the research project. The process of requesting informed consent can been seen as another way to balance the power deficiency, by providing the participants with information about the research, allowing them to ask questions, and offering them the power to decline participation.

So, as Kelman (1972) points out, if participants are aware that such consent procedures may be their 'last chance' to hold onto the power that they have, then logically, they should be very careful in handling the informed consent process — reading the given information and asking questions if

anything is not clear to them. However, what usually happens, not only in my own observation, but also as many authors point out (Flory & Emanuel, 2004; Joffe, Cook, Cleary, Clark, & Weeks, 2001; Macklin, 1999; Mason & Allmark, 2000; Stiffler, 2003), is that such a procedure is reduced to no more than a formality: researchers provide a standard form, many participants do not even read the content on the form, but simply provide their signature (Simmerling & Schwegler, 2005). For those who do read the form, asking questions is rarely observed.

As explained earlier, what I did was that I would provide an overview of the research topic and design before asking whether my participants would like to participate (this was usually done through phone call). Then on the day of interview, I provided the informed consent that I prepared. Considering that some people may feel uncomfortable or stressed when asked to sign a consent form (Lipson, 1994), perceiving it not necessary protecting them, or not liking to sign a pre-prepared paper that they can only accept as it is, or being illiterate but embarrassed to admit, I informed the participants that they only needed to sign if they wanted to and also that I would welcome questions if they have any.

It turned out that most participants did read the form and signed it, and only three of the sixteen people asked any questions. Even more interesting was the fact that many did not ask for a copy of the signed form. Even when I prepared two copies and asked them to sign both, most of them said that they did not need to keep one.

Table 25 summarises how all the original participants and the original researchers (as participants in my study) handled the informed consent encounter.

Table 25: how all participants handled the informed consent encounter

Case	Participants	Signed	Ask questions	Kept a copy
Francis	Francis	Yes	No	Yes
	Botha	Yes	No	No
	Lee	Yes	No	Yes
Thabo &De Beer	Thabo	Was not provided with informed consent, reaction was that since we knew each other and had trust, it was fine without the form.		
	De Beer	Yes (added something on the form)	Yes	Yes
	Chisholm	Yes	No	No
	Van der Linde	Yes	No	No
	Kola	No (very cautious in signing paper in general)	Yes	N/A

Sehlola	Sehlola	Yes	No	No
	Billana	Yes	No	Yes
	Stevens	No (think not necessary)	Yes	N/A
Hendricks	Hendricks	Yes (but did not read)	No	No
	Van Wyk	Yes	No	Yes (only because I provided an extra copy)
	Tilley	Yes	No	No
Sani	Sani	Yes	No	Yes
	Danca	Yes	No	No
	Seager	No	No	No

Should these results be interpreted to mean that participants did not care about signing the form? Or that they did not realise that their signature could be a signal of relinquishing their already deficient power? Or they simply did not care about the power deficiency issue? The answer would probably not come from those who signed it; but one might glean a possible explanation from the reasons given by those who did not, as discussed below.

Stevens explained the reason he did not sign was that because my research was a once-off engagement, so he did not see the necessity of signing the form. Seager also did not sign and said that he did not see any difference whether he signed or not. Kola claimed his reason for not signing was that people were often asked to sign things, even without knowing what they were signing for; so for him, he always refuses to sign whenever he can.

Kola's reason pointed to a formality that one often associates with signing forms. So for him, refusing to sign could to, a certain extent, indicate his need to retain power. Yet his reason for retaining power did not seem to result from a perceived power deficiency between the researcher and the participants. Both Stevens and Seager had doubts that there was any value of signing the form. But again, neither of them referred to the power deficiency issue.

7.4 Trust or mistrust?

The attitude of participants towards the research is reported to be strongly associated with their research related activities, including research utilisation (Bostrom & Suter, 1993; Campion & Leach, 1986; Lacey, 1994; Rizzuto, Bostrom, Suter, & Chenitz, 1994). Despite the recognition of the importance of the relationship (Caplan, 1979; Dunn, 1980; Huberman, 1990; Nyden & Wiewell, 1992; Oh, 1997; Simmons, 1996; Yin & Moore, 1988) and the frequent effort to equalise the power deficiency, much of the literature

reports that the existing relationships and attitudes of practitioners towards research and researchers are either distrustful, unsatisfactory, antagonistic (Little, 1993; R. F. Rich, 1991), threatening (if weaknesses in teaching is revealed, Ammons, 1970), or, at best, indifferent:

> In the normal everyday flow of school life there is little incentive to introduce new ideas and strategies… The attitude of school administrators, as well as teachers, might be 'we're OK' and we are not interested in such a research, and the additional workload it might impose on us (Ben-Peretz, 1994/95).

On certain occasions this attitude is also used to explain "why these constituencies have been quick to blame each other for the existence of the so called gap" (Rafferty, Allcock, & Lathlean, 1996, p. 686).

In my research I asked participants for their general impressions of the research and the researchers, not only as an icebreaker with which to start the interview, but also as an attempt to inquire into whether an attitude of either trust or mistrust[53] existed.

7.4.1 Attitude towards research

Many participants referred to the research as something that needed to be translated into practical solutions.

> It (research) should result in something else, you made a study or research, and now you say that I found this and that, so I suggest that this and that should be done. (So you would prefer a research that is more practical?) Yes. Then I can see the result, and I can apply it. (Seager)

> (So to you, the studies focusing on one school or one situation would be more valuable?) Yes, I think we need to look at more practical situations, and find answers to the unique problems for each and every school. (Van Wyk)

So, although sometimes the participants did read for the purpose of general enrichment more often it happened that:

> Say, for instance, there is certain problem in my school, then I would read about that. (Chisholm)

> It depends on the certain problems arising in the school. And you have to do some research and try to get a solution to the problem. (So it is like when you have problems, you would look for information?) Yes and then it is helpful. (Seager)

Echoing this criterion of translating into practice, other participants had also pointed to another type of research about which they would like to read—detailed reporting on what happened in other settings.

For me, I would like to see, how others are doing … Maybe just say this is what I saw in other schools. Not in the bad way to compare, but to compare what is the difference, because there must be some difference between our school and other schools. Maybe it would be interesting to know. Because we are getting used to this kind of teaching and you don't see other teachers. (Chisholm)

Similarly, this preference for practical elements also translated into some doubt about the value of research, particularly research which did not have practical implications on which they could directly draw.

You get abstract research been done, research to show what is this tendency, what is that tendency, but to get down to the practical things, how to improve education, how to get learners learn, are big questions for nowadays. And you get this and that theory, but you don't get it applied to the practical situation. (you mean recommendations?) Yes. Way forward, or a follow up research to say let's take up this information, we have seen the pass rate for the subject is low, how can it been improved. (Van Wyk)

Limited engagement in schools, resulting in the collection of superficial data, was also pointed out as a reason for the lack of value of some research for the practitioners.

To understand a complex school. Any school is complex. Take this school for example, the complexity of the school, to understand that, and the management of it, you need to be in that situation and you must be able to experience what is going on to be able to put everything together. And you can't count on the bases of a questionnaire. (You are saying that they are spending enough time?) Yes, you must spend time here, you can't come and spend a day and talk to the learners and get the impression of what is happening. I think you should be here a lot more, more than that, and you should also be looking at why certain things are happening. For example, the discipline research done in our school (refer to Hendricks's study that I investigated), it was a day spent here, chat with the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and chat with the educators, with the learners, and there was no real understanding of why discipline is a problem, why learners behave in a certain way and why educators behave in a certain way. (And you think spending more time and having more interactions would help?) I think it would give a better understanding of the situation, because you need to see what is the reality basically. (Van Wyk)

To come to a school like this for maybe just a few times, come and visit me, I don't think you really get it. You could been in this school for maybe one or two years, then I think you could say, oh, this is what it is like. Because you know people tend to make the best of the situation. Because I won't tell you all the problems, because I don't want to look bad, so how can you really experience what is bad only if you are there for a few times. So with the researchers, I think you get more the better side. (Do you mean that it tends to be superficial, especially because of the limited time they spend in schools?) Yes. I think it is because of time. You can come here and but after one hour, I am sure you get some feeling about the school, but what more? (So in a way, you are saying that research in general is not to the point to the problems that you usually experience?) Yes, because I can tell you about the problems, but unless if you could be a teacher here for a year, you won't be able to experience that problem. (Chisholm)

So where did the practitioners usually look for information? Most of the sources mentioned by the practitioners were not the academic channels. Instead, they tended to use either newspapers, magazines, or

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[53] I did not ask both Bornman and Lee because they were also researchers themselves.

"the booklets that the Union gave us (Danca)". Internet also seemed to be fairly popular. However, many of these sources were chosen simply because they were convenient and ready available. Considering the fact that these sources probably rarely publish detailed case studies from which one could draw comparison and experience, it seemed doubtful that they would, in fact, provide what these practitioners were looking for.

Their patterns of research also often seemed to be rather incidental.

> Sometimes people would come and say well, I got this nice piece. We put it up and circulate to each other … (Is there any specific journal or author that you usually read?) No, not really. I would if I come up with something. (So it is a bit accidental?) Yes. Sorry to say (laugh), but it is. I don't want to lie to you. (Chisholm)

Lastly, despite the claim of a general interest in the findings of the research in which the practitioners had participated (although in different format), it also did not seem as though they would demand these findings should the researcher fail to provide them. They appeared rather to place their reliance on the researchers' initiatives to provide them with the findings.

Therefore despite the many claims that research was generally considered to be useful, it was difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the research utilisation patterns of these practitioners

7.4.2 Attitude towards researchers

Despite a degree of reservation towards research per se the participants' view of the researchers was overwhelmingly positive.

Chisholm was of the opinion that researchers were a group of people to whom she looked up.   This image of friendly, hard-working, "they want to do good thing", also appeared in the responses of other practitioners. Some had even used the words *admire* and *respect* to describe their feelings towards the researchers (Stevens and Seager).

However, at the same time, many of them admitted that they had not had much contact with researchers, and that they had observed a distance between the researchers and teachers in general. For example:

> Y: what is your general impression of researchers?
> V: if it is a research from university, and they have not been in a practical situation, then it is definitely a lack of

knowledge of what is happening in schools itself because many of the people that are in research have been in schools, but 10 years ago or more.

Y: you are saying the connection is not that strong?

V: it is not that strong. You also get people in schools and not doing research because they are not either studying further or not time to do the necessary research.

Y: so you are saying there is a gap?

V: there is definitely a gap. Also people who are suppose to be doing the research, which is the education department, nothing is happening there. So unfortunately that is where we sit. (Van Wyk)

It is, therefore, difficult to draw a conclusion as to whether their positive attitude towards the researchers that they had expressed earlier was either real or ideal. In addition, despite the many problems that they would like to have seen solved or, at least, be given some suggestions regarding these problems, and also despite their overall limited contact with the researchers, these practitioners did not seem to be interested in taking any initiatives to contact any researchers or to engage with them on a long-term basis.[54]

7.5 Synthesis

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the way in which the different methodological decisions were made throughout the study. It also describes the way in which the participants in this study interacted with the researcher. In addition, it provides a summary and critical analysis of how different issues were perceived by the original researchers and their original participants.

The findings included:

➢ The emphasis on the motivation for conducting the research seemed to differ in the writings (dissertations) and in the narratives (interviews);

➢ Contrary to literature that points to learning and better practice as possible benefits to the participants, participants in this study revealed they had participated mainly in order to *help the researcher*. In retrospect, for those few who had learned something from their participation, this learning had rarely occurred within the context of their teaching practice.

➢ In accordance with the reasons for participation as being mainly to *help the researcher,* the majority of the participants had not expected any personal benefit from their participation. They also did not seem to be overly concerned about the rather limited benefit that they might or might not have experienced.

➢ The researchers' understanding of their responsibility towards their participants centred on the issue of confidentiality. However, the empirical inquiry into the way in which the participants viewed

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[54] Obtaining a better understanding of a situation over time or also a necessary requirement for any reinforcement to happen.

confidentiality demonstrated that many did not mind whether their identity was concealed or not.

The discussion of involvement/detachment was broken down to several sub-themes in terms of which I discussed the questions that had arisen and the doubts that I had experienced during the course of the research and their impact on my perceptions and experience.

Since the worry of power imbalance seemed to be very present in social research, I furthered provide some empirical data to this discussion, revealing that all participants in fact felt comfortable been participants, and none of them in fact felt been powerless. Some participants suggested that researchers should be the one to control and guide the research process, while other actually felt powerful because their contribution. Personality of both the researcher and the participants were also pointed out as possibly a better role player in who felt powerful and powerless.

Finally, the inquiry into the attitude of the practitioners towards both the research and the researchers revealed many contradictions.

8 RETHINKING THE RESEARCHER–PRACTITIONER

RELATIONSHIP

The departure point for this thesis came as a result of the questions raised regarding the adequacy of the "two-communities" theory. The findings of the study seem to point in contradictory directions: on one hand it became clear during the course of this research that the two communities (researchers and practitioners) are indeed divided, have limited contact with one another and hold different beliefs about the nature, purpose and value of the knowledge produced by research. On the other hand both groups' perceptions of and preferences for researcher–practitioner engagement are surprisingly convergent.

The findings of this study also suggest the need to revisit the role that organizational culture plays in how researchers and practitioners position themselves in researcher–practitioner engagement. However, viewing the researcher–practitioner interface only as an organizational interaction does not adequately explain why the relationship between the same researcher and various practitioners played out differently, pointing to another seemingly contradictory finding that highlights the individualistic character of the researcher–practitioner relationship.

In this final chapter I reassess the findings of this study in the light of the chosen conceptual framework and then turn the intellectual gaze back on some relevant theories. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for future research.

8.1 Revisiting the findings

The following section departs from customary practice of dissertations. It does not summarise the findings since they have been discussed in previous chapters (see par 5.4 & 6.3). Rather, it focuses on exploring the implications of findings in relation to the relevant theories.

8.1.1 How similar or different are these two communities?

All cases in this investigation confirmed the traditionally perceived divide that exists between researchers and practitioners. All the participant-practitioners involved in my study had only ever participated in one

other (the original) research project; although some practitioners did express interest in conducting their own research.[55] Many participants of the original practitioners were also aware of the limited interaction between the two groups and some even expressed concern about it.

Table 26 illustrates the many obvious mismatches between the type of research preferred by practitioners and that which is often produced by researchers:

Table 26: research preferred by practitioners/researchers

Research preferred by practitioners	Research produced by researchers
Practice-orientated research which provides practical recommendations or targets a certain problem.	Theory-orientated research which develops generalised findings or theories.
Single-site focused research (research involving more than one site can also be interesting provided that the information from other sites is detailed so that one can compare and learn).	Multiple site research.
Long engagement research — spending a long period of time at a particular site in order to evaluate the situation from different angles.	Limited engagement research—often has one or several interactions only (spending more than six months at one site is rare).[56]
Follow-up or reinforcement research.	Researchers are hesitant to return to the same school, even for a follow-up study, for fear of over familiarity.
Interview-based research, with participant-interviewer interaction (especially in the educational domain).	Questionnaire-based research.

Surprisingly, however, both the practitioners and the researchers included in this study exhibited many shared perceptions, particularly about the nature of and preference regarding researcher–practitioner engagement. For example, since both groups recognised research as the entry point to their engagement, a research-based relationship rather than a friendship was accepted and preferred. Both groups also expressed the need for some type of closure once the research was completed. For practitioners this would involve, for example, the researcher notifying them when the research was complete. Both groups pointed out the importance of establishing a cordial relationship (particularly in the sense of friendliness) during the research process and their understanding of the responsibility of a participant towards the researcher was also similar.

While it was expected that the groups would have different perceptions, the major area of difference between the researchers and practitioners in this study—namely, an understanding of ethical concerns and

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[55] For example Van Wyk mentioned his own research which was a requirement for the Masters degree he was pursuing at the time (see par 6.1.1).
[56] Spending longer periods of time at one site is, however, being seen more often in ethnographic designs or ethnographic research.

behavior—came as a surprise since researchers often make bold claims about ethics.

Researchers are well aware that participants often give consent without fully understanding what it means, yet the researchers in this study claimed that providing practitioners informed consent was sufficient to provide opportunity to make informed decisions. This seems to be at odds with concerns raised about ethics.

Another example is that many researchers were aware of the practitioners' desire for practical suggestions, but the researchers believed that giving advice would contaminate the data and was incompatible with the specific purpose of research. As such, the researchers either offered suggestions only once the data collection was complete or chose not to disclose their opinions at all, reverting to the traditional researcher role and stating that "research is not to provide solutions" (Sani, see par 6.2.1). In many cases it seemed that providing useful suggestions to the participants was neither a priority nor a consideration on the part of the researchers. And the possibility of using an audit trail or extensive reflection to reveal whether the researchers' opinions could have influenced the research data was never explored.

Even more concerning is that some of the ethical issues not only accounted for the biggest divergences between the researchers and the practitioners, but they also revealed certain contradictions within the researchers themselves. For example, although the researchers claimed that reciprocity was a major concern vis-à-vis equalizing any power imbalance, in practice the researchers often failed to take cognizance of what that their participants considered to be important and incorporate their participants' voices when it came to decision-making regarding the research.

8.1.2. Organizational influences versus personality

8.1.2.1 Organizational influences

Many organizational constraints are placed on all researchers. The increasing importance of the role of university research review boards, particularly ethics committees, could explain the emphasis placed on issues such as confidentiality. In the past there was a strong preference for quantitative methodology in educational research as a means of attaining credibility—which is another possible explanation for the lack of adequate training among many researchers (particularly long-standing staff members who ought to be

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experienced) and the ongoing trend for funding that favours quantitative studies. Some of these influences could result from the particular culture of an academic institution, although many stem from the general academic discourse that guides the field of educational research.

Despite the fact that some researchers acknowledge the need to equalise power in the relationship between practitioners and themselves, this commitment is undermined by researchers' failure to incorporate practitioners' voices into the research decision-making process. This seems to perpetuate the view that academia exists within a self-regulating universe and subconsciously reinforces the hierarchy that exists between researchers and their participants, namely that the researcher *can and should* make decisions for the participants. Ironically, the lack of consultation is constantly justified as "more to protect the participant than anything else" (Sani, see par 6.2.1), suggesting that the researcher does not regard participants as competent to make sound decisions for themselves.

The example of confidentiality can be alluded to again. Earlier discussions illustrate that although confidentiality offers more in the way of protection for the organization, it is often portrayed as a device to protect the participants (for example, see par 5.1.1). Furthermore, this has become a requirement for conducting research and therefore every researcher is expected to buy into its relevance; however, it is not internalised with any critical reasoning.

Reverting to the researchers' role is another example. Referring to the example of the researcher who is not supposed to provide solutions when practitioners' practical needs arise, this occurs not only when the practitioners request practical suggestions but also when they express a wish to disseminate the research findings to policy makers in order to potentially improve their working conditions.

This study also reveals that theory advancement as a reason for conducting research is overstated—particularly in research writing—when in fact other extrinsic reasons that benefit the researcher are also important. Since academic writing (including dissertations) is aimed specifically at an academic audience, overstating theory advancement as a rationale for research could further suggest the pervasiveness of expectations created by academic discourse.

8.1.2.2 Personal factors—returning to Huberman's general model

It was noted in the chapter describing the conceptual framework of this research that Huberman's model is interested mainly in examining the organization as a whole and not in how individual researchers operate. Thus when Huberman refers to the linkage between researchers and practitioners he refers to the inter-organizational link—that between a research institution (or a particular researcher) and a research site. Considering that the subject matter of educational research is often about one's profession and that the professional activities of teaching usually occur in a school (the research site), such research seems to be well justified. In fact, most of the original researchers in this study shared this notion.

However, observations in the research process of this study suggest that the link between researcher and research site, besides the initial access negotiation, seems to be limited. In fact a link seems to exist more at the individual level between a particular researcher and a particular participant (see, for example, par 5.3.2). In fact, the relationships between a researcher and various participants could differ because the personality of both seems to play a role in terms of how intimately a researcher can relate to a participant and how quickly a participant is able to open up to a researcher. This points to the importance of personal factors that should be taken into account when attempting to understand the researcher–practitioner relationship.

8.2 Conclusion

This section provides my assessment of the nature of the researcher–practitioner relationship as it emerged from the study.

8.2.1 The nature of the researcher–practitioner relationship

8.2.1.1 A power play?

The literature indicates strongly that a power imbalance between the researcher and practitioner/participant is problematical. Kelman (1972) states that a power imbalance mainly manifests in the participants' perceptions that they lack "both the *capacity* and the *right* to question the research procedures" (p. 992, original emphasis): participants are therefore by nature powerless, while researchers are by nature powerful.

However, contrary to the literature, the original researchers and participants in this study did not see a clear distinction between researchers as powerful and participants as powerless (see par 7.3.1). In many instances, in fact, they described the power imbalance as occurring in the opposite direction— that is, the powerless researcher and the powerful participant.

On the other hand, many participants seemed untroubled about the power imbalance highlighted in the literature, claiming that the word *power* had never come to mind and that the concept of power was inadequate in describing the research situation. Most participants expressed the view that the researcher should guide the research. Furthermore, the participants' apparently careless attitude towards both the informed consent and feedback—which could have been viewed by them as a means of correcting an imbalance of power—suggests their indifference of the power imbalance that troubles many academics (see par 7.3.3).

Nevertheless, although the data from this study does not suggest that the participants specifically regarded the researcher as an elevated authority, many participants accepted the decisions made by the researcher simply because the researcher "prefers to do so" (Stevens, see par 5.3.1). This phenomenon may be a reflection of the participant's subconscious acceptance of a researcher as a legitimate source of authority when it comes to making (research) decisions on their behalf.

Finally, regarding the power play, it is important to examine each party's reasons for being involved in the research process. The researchers either consciously expressed that they were conducting the research to help the practitioners (as in Hendricks's case) or that they expected the practitioners to learn from participating in the research. Meanwhile, most of the practitioners said that their reason for participating was to help the researcher, regardless of whether that researcher was a student or a more senior academic (for example, see par 7.1.2). Both parties seemed to want to be identified as the bestowers of knowledge.

8.2.1.2 A familiar source?

There is consensus that a trusting relationship between a researcher and a practitioner is important. It is, however, unclear as to how this trust could be established. A researcher's ability to make practitioners feel free and confident to disclose information was mentioned by many participants as being critical to forming

a good relationship.

This study highlights another important factor—that of referral from a familiar source. In most cases, school principals act as an important source of referral. Although researchers often portray their role in gatekeeping as negative, the practitioners unanimously regard them as being trustworthy and believable, and if a principal decides to deny a researcher access to teachers, they believe that it is in order to protect the teachers. As Chisholm put it: "He [the principal] always keeps our interests at heart (see par 5.2.2)." Some of the original participants said that they opened their classroom door to the original researcher(??????) because "the principal asked [me to]" (Chisholm, see par 5.2.2 and Tilley, see par 6.2.2).[57] Indeed all of the participants preferred a researcher to ask permission from the principal before approaching them in person.

Besides principals, prior relationships—be they personal, work-related or as a result of a previous researcher–practitioner relationship—are other possible sources of referral, because their familiarity creates a basis for the establishment of trust. In fact, the previous researcher–practitioner relationship was mentioned by some participants as being the reason why they agreed to participate in this research.

This confirms Shaffir and Stebbins's suggestion that "the sudden presence of a stranger naturally raises suspicion as motives are questioned" (1991, p. 26). However, this study also shows that familiarity works well in terms of facilitating the usage of research findings or suggestions and is clearly demonstrated in Sani's case (see par 5.2.1).[58]

8.2.2 Rethinking involvement/detachment; insider/outsider; friendship

Although some researchers were confused as to their understanding of *friendship* and *friendliness,* many of them showed a tendency to strive towards becoming *insiders* (see, for example, par 6.1.1). This seems to suggest that qualitative researchers should have more intimate relationships with their participants.

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[57] There are, of course, other reasons but this reason was mentioned first when the question was posed.

[58] Although not the one that I investigated, but the other school that I could not access. This is confirmed not only through Sani's own account but also through other incidents that I observed. One example is a phone call that she made to the principal from the other school for advice during my interview with her.

However, such a position was often accompanied by a consistent attempt to preserve detachment. For example, some researchers strongly opposed the cultivation of friendship in a research situation. This opposition to friendship was sometimes extended to equate detachment with a typical researcher's role, while at other times a natural consequence of the researchers' professional nature.

In order to resolve this contradiction I would like to revisit the notion of *insider* and then illustrate the necessity of *detachment*.

Merton points out that the *total insider doctrine* assumes that "the outsider, no matter how careful and talented, is excluded in principle from gaining access to the social and cultural truth" (1972, p. 15). Merton therefore regards this ideology as a continuous advocacy for a monopoly of knowledge that is available exclusively to insiders.

We need to ask, however: insider to whom? When a cultural group is the target of an investigation, the assumption is often that such a group exhibits certain homogenous characteristics. Yet to constitute a functional group, different people would need to perform different roles. So the notion of *insider* might be viable if a community is seen as one unit, but within the community it would not be applicable.

The same can be said of numerous classroom research projects where more than one group of participants was included in a study. Even where a study only targets one group of participants (for example, teachers) the tendency is often to adopt a purposive sampling strategy to see whether different participants would convey different perceptions. However, even when the researcher used to be a teacher or was a teacher at the time of the research, where the researcher would have shared the same professional code with the participants, the question remains: to what extent can one person truly become an *insider* to another person? This notion of *insider* may therefore exist only as a theoretical construct.

A focus group could, however, be an interesting example to discuss the importance that is often attached to an attitude of detachment. As can be seen in the case of Francis's research (see par 5.1.2), literature often promotes the use of an outsider (professional focus group moderator, rather than the researcher him/herself) to conduct a focus group, particularly for fear of biases caused by over-familiarity.

Although the literature highlights the necessity of balancing the requirements of sensitivity and empathy on one hand with objectivity and detachment on the other hand (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 69), the trend is to emphasise self-discipline to control personal views (Krueger & Casey, 2000) and "that the moderator maintains a completely objective perspective throughout the process so that the final report accurately reports the factual information from the groups and provides an independent interpretation" (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 69).

So, "whenever the possibility exists of there being a clash between the personal interest of the moderator and objectivity in the focus group discussion, it is best to reduce the risk of moderator contamination and to use an outside moderator" (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996, p. 89). Even when the researcher is allowed to act as the moderator, Morgan further warns that the researcher needs to "walk a tightrope between understanding empathy and disciplined detachment" (1988, p. 50).

Vaughn, et al. (1996) claim that one of the major advantages of a focus group is its *loosening effect*, referring to a relaxed group setting where participants sense that their opinions and experiences are valued, and which therefore helps them to disclose information more freely and openly.

While the ability to speak freely is no doubt important in the researcher–practitioner engagement, my experience in this study does not point to an informal, relaxed atmosphere having to be created in an environment facilitated by an outsider as opposed to by the researcher. In fact, I found that what works best towards this aim is immediately following up on what the participant has just said instead of clinically following the interview schedule.

Furthermore, an external moderator may lack the necessary knowledge that results from an integrated understanding of the relevant literature and other data. In practice, a moderator may tend to follow a planned schedule instead of allowing unplanned topics to be discussed. This can restrict a fluid and interactive relationship with the participants, which contradicts the cultivation of a loosening effect.

To resolve the insider/outsider and involvement/detachment dilemma, my proposal is to adopt a position that many participants in this research expressed a preference for—that of the *friendly outsider*. With this friendly outsider, the researcher remains an outsider—as would usually occur in a research situation—but

more attention is placed on maintaining an informal, fluid and relaxed relationship in the interaction, thereby generating greater feelings of trust but not necessarily developing an insider status or friendship.[59]

Regarding the argument that a researcher, if too emotionally involved, would inadvertently influence the interaction with the participant and subsequently also the final report, I believe that instead of simply advocating a detached stance in data collection that is neither participant-friendly nor feasible, a possible solution could be to focus on rigorous reflection and to conduct an audit trail in the data analysis and final reports.

8.2.3 Rethinking research utilization

8.2.3.1 Instrumental and conceptual utilization

Although my argument in Chapter 2 about the importance of revisiting instrumental utilization in a qualitative paradigm is confirmed by the practitioners' indication of and preference for action-orientated, localised, qualitative research, it conflicts with the other findings of this study, which strongly indicate that participation does not lead to any perceived benefit in terms of teaching practice (*instrumental utilization*) and that the only benefit which occurs is the enlightenment effect—the gaining of new ideas resulting in one becoming more knowledgeable (*conceptual utilization*). In other words, the link between research engagement and *instrumental utilization* is not well supported by the data from this research.

In the light of the above, the following *may* offer a possible explanation as to the paradox concerning instrumental utilization and may also expand the existing theory of research utilization. However, I need first to re-introduce the thinking that views research utilization as a series of stages, which moves from apprehension, recognition and evaluation to acceptance and adoption (Bostrom & Suter, 1993; Knott & Wildawsky, 1980; Machlup, 1979).

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[59] Of course, as Gurney (1991) suggests, the nature of a study—especially whether it is a short- or long-term engagement—may need to be taken into consideration regarding the extent of involvement and detachment. Although long-term, intensive engagement (as in Sehlola's case, see 5.3) would no doubt yield more of a friendship element, even in this case a friendly outsider stance may be sufficient, as one of his participants (Billana, see par 5.3.2) suggested.

| Apprehension | → | Recognition | → | Evaluation | → | Acceptance | → | Adoption |

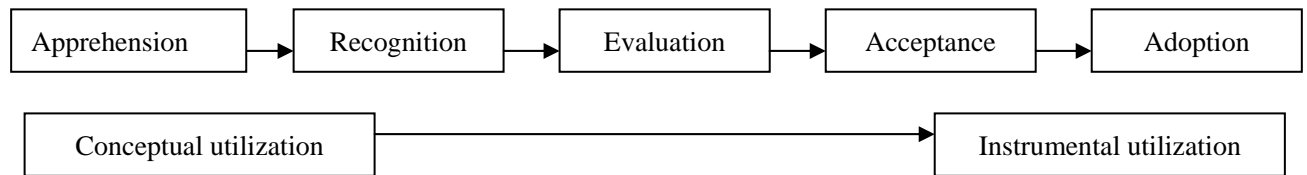| Conceptual utilization | ⟶ | Instrumental utilization |

Figure 5: different views of research utilization

As Figure 5 shows, this different stages view unites with the dichotomous views, and suggests that the development from *conceptual* to *instrumental utilization* can be seen as a parallel development from *apprehension* to *adoption*, where *conceptual utilization* relates to apprehension and recognition, while *instrumental utilization* can be understood as the last stage of adoption.

Such an explanation corresponds with Chisholm's observation that "things [enlightenment effect] soon get lost (see par 5.3.1)." And this tendency for things to get lost, compounded with a lack of follow-up research and other reinforcement mechanisms could very likely undermine *instrumental utilization*: "Many of the things that were said [suggested] were tried for a certain period of time and many of them went back again" (Tilley, see par 6.1.1).

This proposed explanation also corresponds with the prevailing view that *conceptual utilization* in social science is more likely to occur, yet the reason for this is different from the traditional view where the nature of social science is cited (see par 2.1.2). Instead, under this new explanation the reason why *conceptual utilization* is more likely to occur could simply be because it constitutes the first in several stages on the way towards *instrumental utilization*. While *instrumental utilization* is the last stage of adoption, *conceptual utilization* constitutes many of the stages from apprehension to acceptance. Thus whichever stage a research finding lands on, *conceptual utilization* can be said to be realised. And the difficulty in realizing *instrumental utilization* could simply be because it requires multi-player involvement at multiple stages, so: "merely because information was timely, relevant, objective and disseminated to the right people in usable form [does] not guarantee its use" (Rich, 1979, p. 20).

All of the following conditions may need to be present to enable research to arrive at the stage of *instrumental utilization*:

➢ Practitioners must have a generally positive attitude towards research.
➢ Practitioners must have the time and must be familiar with the culture of academia to the degree that

they can read and understand research.

- ➢ The research must be relevant, timely, clear in implementation requirements and easily accessible. It must use plain language in order not to scare away the practitioners.

- ➢ Practitioners must be willing to change and must have the skills to apply research findings.

- ➢ The organizational environment (for both researchers and practitioners) must be conducive to research utilization activities and mechanisms must be put in place for the two parties to interact successfully (Bandura, 1986; Close & Lewin, 1998; Hunt, 1997; A. F. Jacobson, 2000; Metcalfe, et al., 2001; Pennington, 2001; Stevens, Liabo, Frost, & Roberts, 2005; While, 2003).

However, meeting all the above conditions and arriving at an *instrumental utilization* is extremely difficult, if not impossible. This is so because, among others:

- ➢ a new intervention implies uncertainty and is often accompanied by discomfort (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980);
- ➢ teachers already have a heavy workload and view any activity apart from teaching as an additional burden;
- ➢ the very nature of knowledge in social science, including education, lacks perceived legitimacy and authority (everyone has his/her own say); and
- ➢ the academic culture favors internal activity (research and publishing) over external activity (helping the practitioners to reflect on the results and find better ways of teaching).

8.2.3.2 Symbolic utilization and organizational culture

There is no evidence from this study to suggest that practitioners actively engage in searching for or utilizing research, particularly academic research. This applies to any research they may have participated in as well as educational research in general, including research projects initiated by the practitioners themselves (as in Hendricks's case). This—together with Van der Linde's experience that as a junior teacher research utilization does not easily occur because "I often [did] what I was told (see par 5.2.1) "—makes it imperative that symbolic utilization be revisited.

Symbolic utilization is used mainly to substantiate one's existing views or to justify one's decisions and does not influence decision-making. Yet in many instances *symbolic utilization* is not only influential but could also be more pervasive than conceptual and instrumental utilization (Van Buuran & Edelenbos, 2004; Weiss, 1980).

Time constraints have been mentioned as a factor resulting in the ubiquity of symbolic utilization among policy makers—an entity that typically exhibits symbolic utilization. "Decisions are going to be made either in the presence or absence of information" (Cicirelli, Evans, & Schiller, 1970). However, symbolic

usage also occurs when research information is provided on time.

In the discussion of the possible influences on decision making, Williams & Evans (1969) claim that research information serves merely as one of the many elements that go into policy formulation. In the light of such an argument, *conceptual utilization*—which influences broad assumptions and beliefs underlying a policy rather than specific decisions—is sometimes cited as the way that research ought to influence policies.

Yet as Berry (1982) points out, and as is evident in Hendricks's case, if a research finding fails to support preconceived points of view, it is often ignored (even if it has been commissioned). This points to another possible over-estimation of the influence of *conceptual utilization* in decision making and suggests that the degree of compatibility of research findings with organizational objectives could be one essential factor in terms of research utilization.

This view corresponds with the user-pull research utilization model that stresses the importance of organizational structures, rules and norms in determining knowledge utilization (Rich & Oh, 1993). However, this model highlights the importance of organizational culture in users' research utilization and not in the researchers' context.

Although some universities in South Africa have started to stress the importance of conducting research (compared with their emphasis on teaching during the apartheid era), a specific system to encourage research dissemination, particularly in the form of follow-up research, is largely non-existent.

Examining the six cases, including my own, against Huberman's proposal of two categories and five scenarios in terms of the possible linkage between researcher and participant prior to and after a research project (1990, pp. 26-27), most of the cases examined here seem to fall into the "hello-goodbye" scenario whereby there has been no follow up or contact after the project (with the exception of Sani, see par 6.2.2). Although most participants still remembered the original researcher, the interface between them and the researchers after data collection was minimal.[60]

Hendricks and Sani's cases were most interesting. Although Hendricks's project had the potential for

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[60] In many cases that is also what the participants wanted or expected.

follow-up and both the researcher and the participants expressed such a desire, possibly due to the reasons outlined in Chapter 6, this simply did not happen (see par 6.1.1). Sani was the only case in which a relationship was maintained, developed and even strengthened over time, yet she also stated that she would not go back to a school to follow the same research topic (see par 6.2.2), implying that she is not interested in a follow-up study.[61]

So why is symbolic utilization so pervasive and why, besides the difficulties encountered for both *instrumental* and *conceptual utilization* to occur, as pointed out earlier, is research often powerless to influence decision making?

In attempting to answer these questions I would like to bring Van der Linde's earlier quote (see par 5.2.1) back into the discussion and revisit the possible reasons for the prevalence of *symbolic utilization* and the lack of power that research has in general to influence decision making.

Gitlin, et al. state that "with more experience, teachers are likely to become more set in their ways as opposed to using experience as a basis for increased reflection, knowledge production, and classroom adaptation" (2005, p. 120). One of Gitlin et al's teacher-participants said: "I would think the more experience you had, the less you would use research" and further added: "The ones [teachers] that have been here the longest have no desire to learn anything. You give them ideas, 'Oh yes, tried it before, twenty year ago, didn't work". My own experience and observations echo these sentiments.

Indeed, considering how a person develops and matures over time and through experience, this is quite understandable. For example, the attainment of maturity is viewed as being synonymous with stability. A person who learns from his/her mistakes would over time experience an increase in stability, and partly because of this they would be seen as being more mature. And the building up of self confidence ("I feel good and right the way I do things") and public confidence ("We trust this person who has knowledge and experience to do right") allows an individual's sense of stability to develop further.

Although a mature person is still expected to be open (or at least to not refuse all new information and suggestions), reflecting on my own experience reveals that while many of my perceptions have solidified

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[61] Sani said that the reason for possibly wanting to access the same school in future would mainly be because of the convenience in doing so and not necessary for the benefit of the school or the situation.

over the years. I still change my view sometimes[62], however, in order to accept a new viewpoint I need to be presented myself with sufficient evidence, and such evidence needs to go through a conscious process of reasoning and sometimes intuitive discernment. Ironically, the more I learn, the quicker and more accurately I am able to form a judgment, and thus I become more set in my opinions.

The lack of conceptual and institutional research utilization is therefore understandable, if not perfectly normal, when it comes to experienced, mature and confident teachers.

The question is then: who indeed needs research? If, due to the reasons discussed above, experienced teachers are excluded as possible research target in educational research, then the logical answer would be to focus on less experienced teachers who are more likely to change because of the presence of evidence. However, this group of practitioners generally seemed to have low levels of confidence—to the degree that their seniors may instruct them specifically what to do (as in the case of Van der Linde, "I often [did] what I was told"). And some researchers (for example, De Beer) observed that they tended to be unsure of themselves and felt insecure. Although they revealed in their interviews that they welcomed positive criticism, and we may therefore expect that they would be more open and willing to adapt to research findings or to others' suggestions, other ethical dilemmas rise. This is described in the last chapter in more detail and the dilemmas regard the purpose of criticism (being either to relieve the researcher's frustration or to empower others) and other consequences of criticism (possible uneasiness or embarrassment caused to the participants) and whether it would indeed produce any change in behavior (see par 7.2.3.1). In the light of the above, giving only positive feedback (as done by De Beer) seems to be a better option. And the impact of these different types of research utilization would certainly need further exploration.

8.3 Suggestions for future research

Based on the findings of this study, future research on the following points could be useful:

> Considering the three types of research utilization, does research utilization really occur and which type of research is indeed most likely to be used, and by whom and how? Cases like that of Hendricks—where the research is initiated by the practitioners yet research utilization still cannot be observed—deserve more attention.[63]

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[62] For example, some of my perceptions changed during the course of my doctoral research.
[63] Although possible reasons have been pointed out, further investigation of such reasons and possible exploration of other

➢ Owing to the contradictory perceptions expressed by the practitioners, the issue of whether mutual trust and favorable attitude exist needs to be examined in more detail. Furthermore, the reason why participants and researchers would exhibit the contradictions alluded in the earlier chapters could be interesting to explore further.

➢ Since the elements situated in the researcher and practitioner contexts are largely compiled from my own understanding, further study is needed to examine whether these are indeed the relevant items, and whether some elements should be excluded and additional elements added.

➢ The impact of participant confidentiality deserves more investigation. Although most participants in this study indicated that they did not mind having their identities revealed and some even stated that to stand up for what one says is to be accountable, to what extent could the assurance of confidentiality make them feel comfortable enough to talk more openly, thereby yielding more insight into the confidentiality debate.

➢ The negative gatekeeper blocking efforts and participants' low response rates have been reported in a large number of research findings, yet among the five empirical cases under investigation, only one of these cases experienced this while the others—even those who went through all the normal channels to access their participants—did not report negative resistance. Although I have speculated possible reasons for such negative resistance, studies which explore further why and how it occurs would be necessary.

➢ As indicated in the research design, there are many sub researcher–practitioner relationship areas that deserve further attention and exploration, such as: whether and how long-term and short-term research can result in different variations of the researcher–practitioner relationship; how does selection bias (in this research, only practitioners who had participated previously were included) influence the perceptions of the researcher–practitioner relationship; what is the relationship between the practitioners and the authority (government or policy makers); whether and how contract or practitioner-initiated research, and non-contract research data can result in different relationships; whether classroom research manifests differently from research that is not based in the classroom; if researcher-practitioners (practitioners conducting their own research) conduct their research differently from conventional researchers; and whether policy studies differ from general practice studies in terms of their researcher–practitioner relationship.

8.4 Suggestions for research practice

This study calls for more reflections on the part of the researchers when conducting research. It also calls for consultation and negotiation with the participants and incorporating their voice and preference into various research decisions.

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reasons are needed.

To be more specific, this study suggests that researchers could consider the following research practices:

➢ To establish a cordial relationship with the practitioners in the research process, but not strive for becoming *insiders*. Rather, adopt a position for which many participants in this research expressed a preference— that of the *friendly outsider*;

➢ Do not discontinue the relationship with the practitioners after the field work is completed. Rather continue the conversation and if the participants so wish, provide the type of feedback in which the practitioners are interested;

8.5 Significance

This study points to a number of findings that contradict the prevailing literature. For example, while ethics feature heavily in the researcher–practitioner relationship, this study reveals that many researchers exhibit serious inconsistencies in this regard and there is much incongruence in the way researchers and practitioners understand and display the concept of ethics.

Moreover, the relevant literature is concerned that a power imbalance exists between researchers and practitioners and impresses on researchers the need to resolve such imbalance. This study reveals, however, that practitioners are in fact indifferent to this issue.

Contrary to the prevailing "two-communities" theory which emphasises the differences between these two communities, this study shows that the communities actually share many similar perceptions, particularly the way in which they would prefer the relationship to terminate.

Confirming the importance of examining organizational culture when trying to explain researchers' behavior vis-à-vis researcher–practitioner engagement, this study also brings to light the importance of looking at the individual and peculiar nature of this activity.

While the rich data and detailed descriptions of the six cases studied here provide empirical data on the subject, the extensive accounts drawn from both the researchers and practitioners offer a more holistic description of the researcher–practitioner relationship. In addition, the proposals made here to extend the current theories of insider–outsider positioning and research utilization enrich the debate in the field.

Lastly, this study proves the usefulness and indeed the importance of inquiring into the

researcher–practitioner interface as a first step towards unpacking the research practice enigma.

8.6 Conclusion

This study led to some expected findings, for example the differences between the two communities, but it also expanded theory by uncovering some unexpected findings, for example that the understanding of ethics divides the researchers and the practitioners the most. More importantly, this study pinpoints certain aspects of the researcher–practitioner relationship that can be addressed in practical terms which could in practice improve the relationship between researchers and the practitioners.