Power-sharing partnerships:  
Teachers’ experiences of participatory methodology 

by 

Bathsheba Basathu Mbongwe 

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree 

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR 

Department of Educational Psychology 
Faculty of Education 
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA 

PROMOTOR 
Prof. Dr. Ronél Ferreira 

CO-PROMOTOR 
Prof. Dr. Liesel Ebersöhn 

2012 
PRETORIA 

© University of Pretoria
Quite a number of people shared my dream of taking a doctoral journey and believing in me in acquiring a PhD. It was a journey of sacrifice, hard work, commitment and scholarship. Together, we shared and believed in my vision - that’s the power of synergy in a partnership.

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the participating teachers who brought this story to reality, for sharing their experiences. Through their eyes and standpoint I got to appreciate, recognise and value their world, knowledge and voices. They are a dedicated community of practice who displayed power for determination.

I am forever indebted and grateful to my supervisors, professors Ronél Ferreira and Liesel Ebersohn who took me under their wing, by mentoring, supporting and believing in me. You encouraged and inspired me from the beginning to the end of this endeavour. Your timeless commitment, dedication and passion in producing yet another stellar doctoral product is humbling. You equipped me with research skills that will always be assets that I will treasure and contribute towards community capacity building as well.

A very special thank you to Mr. William Kemotho Sentshebeng, who was part and parcel of this endeavour from conceiving the idea to the final product. Your dedicated time to dialogue made me reflect on complex issues of power dynamics.

I want to thank Dr. Connie Kekwaletswe, Dr. Hermina Olivier and Dr. Tilda Loots, my friend and schoolmates who inspired me to endure to the end, as I strived to become an academic researcher. Your support and accommodation of my various needs is truly appreciated.

I want to express my love and appreciation to my parents, especially my dear mother Fiona Mbongwwe, who believed in me and supported me throughout. This work of thesis is dedicated to my mother who never had the opportunity to put on a graduation cap at the highest academic level, but through me, she did. She sacrificed a lot for me. Your strength and faith gave me the courage to carry on to the end and keep soaring like an eagle. Mum I love you.

Thank you to my siblings: Southwood, Southwell, Braithwaite, Southill, and Anita, for showing interest and support in my work. May I be the role model to inspire good conduct and the spirit of perseverance in all of you. Thank you also for my sisters in law for your support and love.

To all my friends (you know who you are), I am thankful for your support and encouragement. Thank you for understanding that I could not always be available for social life, but for availing yourselves when I needed you.

Most importantly, I would not have made it without almighty God. I am grateful that I looked up to God for faith, strength and courage. Above all, I sought his almighty and Jesus the Christ to bless me with wisdom and surpassing intelligence and knowledge. Thank you God and Jesus the Christ.
I, Bathsheba Basathu Mbongwe, declare that –

*Power-sharing partnerships: teachers’ experiences of participatory methodology*

is my own work and that all sources and citations from literature have been acknowledged in text and referenced in full.

Signature........................................................................................................

Date............................................................................................................
I investigated the experiences of teachers as co-researchers in a long-term partnership with university researchers in an asset-based intervention project known as STAR\textsuperscript{1}. The goal of STAR is to investigate how teachers can promote resilience in scare-resource and high need schools. To inform participatory research methodology, I explored and described how co-researchers (teachers) experience power relations. I conducted the participatory reflection and action (PRA) study by using feminist standpoint theory as guiding epistemological paradigm, Gaventa’s power cube as theoretical framework and participatory research as methodological paradigm.

I conveniently chose two cohorts (schools) in the STAR project to partner as the unit of analysis. I thus applied convenience sampling to select information-rich cohorts. The school-cohorts included a primary school in the Eastern Cape Province and a secondary school in a remote area in the Mpumalanga Province. I then purposefully selected participating co-researchers (n=15: 14 females, 1 male) from the participating schools.

Over a two year period, I employed multiple PRA data generation techniques (observation, four focus groups and two semi-structured interviews) and documentation procedures (field notes, research journal, visual data and verbatim transcriptions). I used thematic analysis and categorical aggregation for data analysis, with three themes emerging.

In terms of the nature of power in participatory partnerships, co-researchers expressed factors which influenced power and partnership in a participatory project. For co-researchers, these factors enabled them to experience a sense of power-sharing. Regarding the role of agency in relation to power and partnerships, co-researchers indicated that agency resulted from power-sharing and partnerships they had established. The agency meant that they took action through leadership to empower others in school-communities. Co-researchers’ meaning-making of power and partnerships culminated in their construction of power in a participatory project as both a way in which their working environment enabled them to do what they wanted to do, and also as a personal space where they felt capable and had initiative to coordinate project activities.

\textsuperscript{1} STAR (Supportive Teachers, Assets and Resilience): Ferreira & Ebersohn, 2012.
Findings of this study correlate with existing literature where (i) power is seen as the ability of actors to express and act on desires, (ii) power can be redistributed as action for inclusive benefits, (iii) partnerships imply balancing time, and (iv) partnerships evolve over time, are dynamic and involve issues of trust and confidence. In contrast to existing knowledge on power in participatory research, I found that teachers did not view power as dominance or as exclusively owned.

I developed a framework of **power sharing partnerships** to extend Gaventa’s power cube theory. This framework, and its five interrelated elements (leadership as power, identifying vision and mission, synergy, interdependent role of partners, and determination), provide insight into the way co-researchers shared their experiences of participatory research methodology. I posit an evidence-based conceptualisation of power as leadership where community partners play influential roles as co-researchers. I theorise power sharing partnerships as a complimentary platform hosting partners’ shared strengths, skills and experience, creating synergy in collaborative projects. I argue that synergy in power sharing partnerships relies on recognition, appreciation and mutual respect inherent in interdependent roles of partners. Furthermore, the power sharing partnership framework explains how power and partnership depends on determination amongst partners which manifests as agency to drive social change.

**Key Concepts**

- Change agents
- Collaborative research
- Community capacity building
- Co-researchers
- Feminist standpoint
- Participatory Reflection and Action/ Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)
- Participatory research
- Partnership
- Power
- Power relations
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1. **INTRODUCTION** .......................................................... 1

2. **CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY** .......... 4

3. **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY** ...................................... 6

4. **PURPOSE AND POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY** .......... 8

5. **RESEARCH QUESTIONS** ........................................... 9

6. **KEY CONSTRUCTS** .................................................. 10
   - **PARTNERS IN RESEARCH** ........................................ 10
   - **POWER** .................................................................. 11
   - **TEACHERS** .......................................................... 12
   - **EXPERIENCE** ....................................................... 12
   - **COLLABORATION** ................................................. 13
   - **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH (PR) PROJECT** ............ 13

7. **PARADIGMATIC ASSUMPTIONS** ............................... 13
   - **METATHEORETICAL PARADIGM: FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY** ........................................ 14
   - **THEORETICAL PARADIGM: GAVENTA’S POWER CUBE** ...................................................... 15
   - **METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM: PARTICIPATORY APPROACH** ........................................... 16

8. **WORKING ASSUMPTIONS** ........................................ 17
1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGIES .............................................. 18
  1.9.1 RESEARCH DESIGN .............................................................................. 18
  1.9.2 SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS ....................... 19
  1.9.3 DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION ......................................... 19
  1.9.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .............................................. 20

1.10 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY .......................................................... 21

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ..................................................................... 23

1.12 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS ........................................................................... 24

1.13 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................... 25
CHAPTER 2
EXPLORING EXISTING LITERATURE AS BACKGROUND
TO THE STUDY

2.1  INTRODUCTION

2.2  POWER IN PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH (PR)

2.2.1  OVERVIEW AND MEANING OF POWER

2.2.2  OVERVIEW OF POWER THEORISTS

2.2.2.1  Mills (1916-1962)

2.2.2.2  Foucault (1926-1984)

2.2.2.3  Freire (1921-1997)

2.2.2.4  Bourdieu (1930-2002)

2.2.2.5  Lukes (1948–current)

2.2.3  POWER AND PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES

2.2.4  POWER AND PARTICIPATION

2.2.4.1  Participation in PR

2.2.4.2  Participation and agents of change

2.3  EMPOWERMENT AND PR

2.3.1  A PHILOSOPHY OF EMPOWERMENT AS CENTRAL TO PR

2.3.2  EMPOWERMENT AND POWER

2.3.3  EMPOWERMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

2.4  PARTNERSHIPS IN PR

2.4.1  NATURE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN PR

2.4.2  FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

2.4.3  FUNCTIONS OF RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

2.4.3.1  Partnerships as knowledge generation, research education and training

2.4.3.2  Partnerships as knowledge sharing: communities of practice
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.4.4 Benefits and Challenges of Partnerships</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.5 Community and University Partnerships</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Theoretical Framework: Gaventa’s Power Cube</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Spaces of Power in the Power Cube</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2 Forms and Degrees of Power in the Power Cube</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3 Levels of Power in the Power Cube</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4 Theoretical Assumptions flowing from understanding</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Power Cube and power relations in PR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 72

3.2 PARADIGMATIC APPROACH ................................................................................... 73
  3.2.1 META-THEORETICAL PARADIGM: FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY ............. 73
  3.2.2 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ................. 79

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN .................................................................................................. 82
  3.3.1 CONCEPTUALISING PRA ................................................................................. 82
  3.3.2 SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS ......................... 86

3.4 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND ACTIVITIES ......................... 87

3.5 DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION ....................................................... 89
  3.5.1 VISUAL PRA-BASED DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION TECHNIQUES 90
  3.5.2 FOCUS GROUPS .............................................................................................. 96
  3.5.3 INTERVIEWS ................................................................................................. 100
  3.5.4 OBSERVATION .............................................................................................. 101
  3.5.5 FIELD NOTES (RESEARCH JOURNAL) AND AUDIO/VIDEO-RECORDINGS .... 103

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .............................................................. 103

3.7 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER ....................................................................................... 106

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .................................................................................. 108
  3.8.1 INFORMED CONSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION ....................... 110
  3.8.2 PROTECTION FROM HARM ......................................................................... 111
  3.8.3 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY ......................................................... 111
  3.8.4 TRUST ........................................................................................................... 112
3.9 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY ................................................................. 112

3.9.1 CREDIBILITY ......................................................................................... 113

3.9.2 TRANSFERABILITY .............................................................................. 114

3.9.3 DEPENDABILITY ................................................................................ 114

3.9.4 CONFIRMABILITY .............................................................................. 115

3.9.5 AUTHENTICITY .................................................................................. 116

3.10 CONCLUSION ....................................................................................... 116
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 117

4.2 THEME 1: THE NATURE OF POWER IN PARTICIPATORY PARTNERSHIPS ............. 118

4.2.1 SUBTHEME 1.1: CHARACTERISTICS OF POWER .............................................. 120
  4.2.1.1 Category A: Leadership ........................................................... 121
  4.2.1.2 Category B: Decision-making .................................................. 122
  4.2.1.3 Category C: Empowerment ..................................................... 122
  4.2.1.4 Category D: Achieving personal goals .................................... 123
  4.2.1.5 Category E: Appropriating (owning) power ............................ 123
  4.2.1.6 Category F: Trust .............................................................. 123

4.2.2 SUBTHEME 1.2: FACTORS IMPEDING POWER AND PARTNERSHIPS .......... 124
  4.2.2.1 Category A: Time constraints ............................................... 124
  4.2.2.2 Category B: Lack of commitment ......................................... 125
  4.2.2.3 Category C: Work overload .................................................. 125
  4.2.2.4 Category D: Limited self-confidence .................................... 125
  4.2.2.5 Category E: Lack of role clarity ........................................... 126

4.2.3 SUBTHEME 1.3: POWER DYNAMICS .............................................................. 127
  4.2.3.1 Category A: Trust and confidence ....................................... 127
  4.2.3.2 Category B: Knowledge brings ability .................................... 128

4.3 THEME 2: PARTICIPANTS’ UNDERSTANDING AND MEANING-MAKING OF POWER AND PARTNERSHIPS ........................................ 129

4.3.1 SUBTHEME 2.1: FORGING EQUITABLE AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIPS .............................................................. 131
  4.3.1.1 Category A: University researchers ...................................... 132
  4.3.1.2 Category B: Peers (fellow participants) ................................. 134
  4.3.1.3 Category C: Wider community ............................................. 135
4.3.2  SUBTHEME 2.2: ESTABLISHING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT ........................................... 136
  4.3.2.1  Category A: Local level enablement ................................................................. 137
  4.3.2.2  Category B: National level enablement ............................................................ 138

4.4  THEME 3: THE ROLE OF AGENCY IN RELATION TO
      POWER AND PARTNERSHIP ....................................................................................... 140
  4.4.1  SUBTHEME 3.1: AGENCY ...................................................................................... 142
    4.4.1.1  Category A: Capacity to empower others ......................................................... 144
    4.4.1.2  Category B: Capacity for leadership .............................................................. 146
    4.4.1.3  Category C: Taking action (‘lighting the fire’) ................................................. 147
  4.4.2  SUBTHEME 2.2: TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION .......... 149
    4.4.2.1  Category A: Transferring knowledge ............................................................... 150
    4.4.2.2  Category B: Providing resources ..................................................................... 155
    4.4.2.3  Category C: Creating community networks ..................................................... 156

4.5  CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 158
CHAPTER 5
RELATING RESEARCH FINDINGS TO EXISTING LITERATURE

5.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................ 159

5.2 LITERATURE CONTROL: TOWARDS FINDINGS .......................................................... 159
5.2.1 RESULTS THAT CORRELATIONS WITH EXISTING LITERATURE ON POWER AND PARTNERSHIPS

5.2.1.1 Power as capability for leadership ........................................................................ 166
5.2.1.2 Challenges of partnerships .................................................................................. 169
5.2.1.3 Partnership relationships evolving over time ....................................................... 170
5.2.1.4 Mutual collaboration in partnerships ................................................................. 172
5.2.1.5 Visible spaces of participation .......................................................................... 176
5.2.1.6 Community capacity building in partnerships .................................................. 177
5.2.1.7 Community of practice in partnerships ............................................................... 179

5.2.2 RESULTS THAT CONTRADICT EXISTING KNOWLEDGE ON POWER AND PARTNERSHIPS

5.2.2.1 Power as dominance ......................................................................................... 186
5.2.2.2 Partnerships as platform for political negotiations ............................................. 186
5.2.2.3 Hierarchy system based on creation of decision-making bodies ....................... 188

5.2.3 SILENCES IN THE DATA OF THIS STUDY ................................................................. 189

5.2.3.1 Psychological manipulation of power ............................................................... 190
5.2.3.2 Communities not homogenous ....................................................................... 190
5.2.3.3 Governance in partnership structures ............................................................. 191

5.2.4 NEW INSIGHTS FLOWING FROM THIS STUDY FOR KNOWLEDGE ON POWER, PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY .................................................. 192

5.3 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 197
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 198

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS ....................................................... 198

6.3 CONCLUSIONS IN TERMS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS ............................................ 199
6.3.1 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 1 ................................................................. 200
6.3.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 2 ................................................................. 201
6.3.3 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 3 ................................................................. 202
6.3.4 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 4 ................................................................. 203
6.3.5 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 5 ................................................................. 204
6.3.6 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 6 ................................................................. 205

6.4 FINAL REFLECTIONS ............................................................................................... 206
6.4.1 PRIMARY QUESTION .............................................................................................. 207
6.4.2 REFLECTING ON LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .................................................. 213

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................................................................... 215
6.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .................................................. 215
6.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE ................................................................. 216
6.5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING .................................................................. 217

6.6 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................. 218

LIST OF REFERENCES ..................................................................................................... 219

ADDENDA ........................................................................................................................ 254
## LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table/Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Dimensions of power and implications for empowerment</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Outline of methodological choices</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Summary of participants at each site</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Summary of research process</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Summary of themes, subthemes and categories</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Inclusion and exclusion indicators for Theme 1</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Inclusion and exclusion indicators for Theme 2</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Inclusion and exclusion indicators for Theme 3</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Results that support existing knowledge</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2</td>
<td>Comparing results to existing knowledge: contradictory evidence</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3</td>
<td>Comparing results to existing knowledge: silences in data</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.4</td>
<td>Comparing results to existing knowledge: new insights</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1</td>
<td>Power-sharing partnership framework</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 3.1:
School 1: 1 March, 2009 ................................................................. 86

Photograph 3.2:
School 2: 19 May, 2010 ................................................................. 86

Photograph 3.3:
Teachers’ drawing, depicting how they perceived their role as a cow with an udder that the community could drink from, school 1: 19 March, 2009

Photograph 3.4:
Conceptualisation and meaning making of concepts, school 1: 18 March, 2010 ................................................................. 91

Photograph 3.5:
Photo poster to indicate power retrospectively: school 1: 18 March, 2010 ................................................................. 92

Photograph 3.6:
Photo poster to indicate power retrospectively: school 2: 15 November, 2010 ................................................................. 92

Photographs 3.7:
Using sunrays to indicate factors that enabled power and partnerships, school 2: 15 November, 2010 ................................................................. 93

Photographs 3.8:
Using clouds to indicate factors that impeded power and partnerships, school 1: 15 November, 2010 ................................................................. 93

Photograph 3.9:
Focus group discussion to augment PRA visual activities, school 1: 19 March, 2010 ................................................................. 94

Photograph 3.10:
Focus group, school 1: 19 March, 2010 ................................................................. 97

Photograph 3.11:
Focus group, school 2: 15 November, 2010 ................................................................. 97

Photograph 4.1:
Conceptualisation of the concept ‘power’, school 1: 18 March, 2010 ................................................................. 121

Photograph 4.2:
Conceptualisation of the concept ‘power’, school 2: 15 November, 2010 ................................................................. 121
Photograph 4.3:
An activity illustrating participants’ ideas around limited role clarification as an impeding factor in PR, school 1: 19 March 2010

Photograph 4.4:
Participants using drawings of clouds and sun rays to indicate movement/shift in power, school 1: 19 March 2010

Photograph 4.5:
Participants using drawings of clouds and sun rays to indicate movement/shift in power, school 1: 15 November 2010

Photograph 4.6:
Conceptualisation of the concept of partnership, school 1: 18 March 2010

Photograph 4.7:
Conceptualisation of the concept of partnership, school 2: 15 November 2010

Photograph 4.8:
Participants gave beaded products to university researchers to sell on their behalf, school 2: 15 November 2010

Photograph 4.9:
Participants at a group seminar in Amanzingwe where they met fellow teachers, who participated in the project from different schools, viz. school 1 & 2: 3 March 2009

Photograph 4.10:
Information Centre to discuss HIV and AIDS issues openly, school 1: 18 March 2010

Photograph 4.11:
Beaded AIDS ribbons showing an enabling environment to discuss AIDS and HIV issues openly, school 2: 15 November 2010

Photograph 4.12:
Participants sharing experiences at a national seminar, demonstrating the presence of enabling environment, schools 1 & 2: 3 March, 2009

Photograph 4.13:
Photo poster activity illuminating participants’ perception of how they gained power, due to their perceived empowerment of others in their role as facilitators, school 1: 18 March 2010

Photograph 4.14:
Vegetable garden established by teachers taking action, school 1: 19 March, 2010
Photograph 4.15:
Clothes donated and produce from vegetable garden, signifies participants’ capacity to take action, school 1: 19 March, 2010

Photograph 4.16:
Participants’ view of themselves as keys unlocking realities and being agents of transformation, school 2: 3 March 2009

Photograph 4.17:
Drawing of the sun that emits light and hope as source of knowledge transfer to the community, school 1: 3 March, 2009

Photograph 4.18:
Using PRA visual activity of sun rays as an indication of having the power to give light to parents, school 1: 19 March 2010

Photograph 4.19:
Using PRA visual activity of sun rays as an indication of having the power to give light to parents, school 2: 15 November 2010

Photograph 4.20:
Umbrella that depicts bringing the community together, school 2: 3 March 2009