



**Power-sharing partnerships:  
Teachers' experiences of participatory methodology**

by

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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**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**.....



## ABSTRACT & KEY CONCEPTS

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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<sup>1</sup>. The goal of STAR is to investigate how teachers can promote resilience in scarce-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.

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<sup>1</sup> STAR (Supportive Teachers, Assets and Resilience): Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 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



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