CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I discussed the findings of this study against the background of existing literature on partnerships, power and Gaventa's power cube. In this chapter, I present conclusions in terms of my research questions, based on the findings I obtained. I also reflect on the study in terms of the challenges I faced and the potential value that the knowledge generation holds. I conclude by making recommendations for training, practice and future research.

6.2   OVERVIEW OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS

In chapter 1, I introduced the study by setting the background of what the study entailed and explaining the rationale to undertake the study. I described my interest in PR and subsequently gave an overview of the STAR project. I justified my choice to focus particularly on partnerships and power relations in the STAR project. The purpose was to gain insight into the experiences of teachers who had been participating in the project, with the view of understanding issues of power and partnerships in PR from the perspective of co-researchers. I explained that I would use the power cube theoretical framework (Gaventa, 2003a, 2006) to investigate power relations and partnerships in PR.

I indicated the purpose of the study and formulated relevant research questions. The main research question focused on insight into teachers as co-researchers' experiences of power relationships to elucidate knowledge about partnerships in participatory methodology. After briefly introducing the foreseen contribution of the study, I contextualised key concepts and provided an overview of the paradigmatic perspectives I relied upon. Additionally, I provided an overview of the research design, ethical considerations and quality criteria that applied.

In chapter 2, I discussed existing literature as background to the study, and presented underlying theory on partnerships, power, empowerment and leadership, as well as the theoretical framework of Gaventa's power cube (2003a). I explained partnerships in PR, the functions of partnerships and the context of partnerships between academics and

communities, extending the concept to include discussions on empowerment and participation. In addition, I explored existing literature on power. In particular, I investigated literature on power theorists' view (Lukes, 2005; Bourdieu, 1980; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1970; Mills, 1959), as background to the empirical study I undertook.

In chapter 3, I explained how I followed a PRA approach to explore the experiences of co-researchers (teachers) participating in a longitudinal participatory intervention, where I specifically examined issues of power and partnerships. I elaborated on the research methodology and strategies I used. Subsequently, I justified my choices of feminist standpoint theory as epistemology and a PR approach as methodological paradigm. I described the selection of participants and sites of the study, the data generation and analysis I completed, as well as ethical guidelines I considered. I concluded the chapter by explaining the quality criteria I aimed to adhere to.

Chapter 4 reported on the results of the study, structured according to three main themes that emerged during thematic analysis. These themes relate to (1) the nature of power in participatory partnerships; (2) participants' understanding and meaning making of power and partnership; and (3) the role of agency in relation to power and partnership. Each theme was unpacked in terms of related subthemes. Throughout, I substantiated results from the data sources, namely verbatim transcriptions, my research journal and visual data.

In chapter 5, I interpreted the results I obtained against existing literature. I highlighted correlations as well as discrepancies between the findings of this study and those reflected in existing literature. I also indicated the silences I noticed when comparing the results of this study to existing literature. Throughout, I highlighted the potential contributions of this study to the existing knowledge base, indicating where new knowledge was obtained.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS IN TERMS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I now use the findings of the study to answer the secondary research questions. In section 6.4, I address the primary research question.

6.3.1 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How do teachers perceive themselves as co-researchers in a collaborative research project in terms of power relations?

In this study, co-researchers perceived themselves holistically as participants in a collaborative research project. Co-researchers indicated that their experiences changed over time based on their participation in the collaborative research project. Initially, co-researchers reportedly felt powerless. They felt that they did not know which roles were expected of them and what purpose they were to serve in the project. The more they interacted with the university researchers, and could express their voice, the more they experienced a shift in power relations. The findings of this study reveal that when spaces of participation were opened in a democratic manner, the personal, organisational and political change permitted a shift in mental landscapes that allowed for equal power relations, where co-researchers gradually perceived themselves as part of a community of practice where all fulfilled an equal role as co-researchers.

From a co-researcher perspective, power is fluid, with partners adjusting to change over time. Participants were significantly affected by their experiences as co-researchers in the collaborative research project. In their view, they became community change agents facilitating transformation. Participants thus perceived themselves as co-researchers with equal power relations by virtue of their full participation in decision-making and acting on decisions. Co-researchers experienced power because they could initiate ideas and implement activities. Furthermore, by perceiving themselves as equal co-researchers in a partnership, participants regarded power gained as 'power with' (a collective action of working together in synergy). The 'power with' synergy is a horizontal relationship underpinned by values of equity, cooperation, equal regard of multiple voices, and decision-making.

This illustrates that participants perceived themselves as co-researchers. In this role, they embraced a collective identity as agents of change who were in turn able to empower others. This capacity to empower others reminds one of 'power within'. According to co-researchers, 'power within' capacitated them to reach out to others. The capacity to empower others was rooted in participants' confident sense of self-worth and enriched self-knowledge, which seemed to manifest as the demonstrated power of co-researchers. The capacity to empower others can further be seen as an agency to engender hope in themselves and others, that they were able to bring about change in communities.

Closely related to their drive to empower others to facilitate social change, co-researchers in this study indicated that they expressed power by providing leadership. As community leaders, co-researchers perceived themselves as having a voice based on power emanating from the partnership. They felt they were able to share their knowledge with the community and come up with solutions to address psychosocial challenges. Co-researchers became aware of ways to address circumstances and conditions within their communities. In this, they provided leadership, transferred knowledge and created networks. Co-researchers thus saw themselves as community change agents, able to assert ongoing social reconstruction in communities. The powerful perception of themselves as community leaders and change agents was rooted in an enabling environment, characterised by opportunities to negotiate openly, decide on a shared agenda, establish more partnerships and mentor others.

Through a collaborative research project, co-researchers thus enriched their awareness of their own existing strengths. As co-researchers, they experienced themselves as tools to help others and assist with social change. Co-researchers became critical collective resources that supported the community in addressing challenges. This perception of themselves as agents of change who could unlock potential made them experience a sense of well-being, also reflecting their role as partners with equal power. Their collective resources helped relational networks to evolve and increased awareness of change processes and a strengthened commitment to the community.

Given the above context, co-researchers therefore perceived themselves as having 'power with' university researchers and 'power within' themselves. The power was rooted in an enabling environment in the collaborative research project. Co-researchers expressed power in leadership they provided as a community of practice to facilitate social transformation in new partnership spaces they created.

6.3.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How do teachers conceptualise power and partnership in participatory research?

From this study, it emerged that participants conceptualised power as fluid and available, based on various descriptive characteristics they identified. These descriptive characteristics extend existing notions of power by emphasising an alternative view of power in PR. For co-researchers, power entailed the means to provide community leadership for capacity building.

Accordingly, for participating teachers, power in PR was underpinned by the ability to take initiative, implement actions and empower others.

For participants, the opportunity to voice decisions in PR constituted 'power within'. By voicing decisions, co-researchers embodied power to achieve goals, towards transformation change. In this way, participants appropriated power whilst achieving their personal goals.

Participants furthermore viewed power as a form of leadership to voice their experiences and freely negotiate. To them, power was about opening up new ways of thinking and working, and creating an environment to enable empowerment opportunities. I therefore found that for the participating teachers, partnership was about working together in synergy to achieve a common vision. For co-researchers, working together in synergy may thus result in collective strength, in turn culminating in commitment to a project and deepened appreciation for each other as colleagues. Findings indicate that interdependency on each other's expertise, experience and knowledge is critical. The higher the levels of commitment, the more trust will be present, resulting in mutual relationships that may typically last long. As such, for participants, partnership is about translating the benefits of mutual relationships to mobilise networks and further enhance community development that could in turn promote transformation.

Finally, co-researchers equated power and partnership to an enabling participatory project environment. Such an enabling environment is evident in opportunities for participation and empowerment. To achieve partnership and power implies the creation of a symbiotic relationship to promote trust and foster a joint spirit of knowledge creation. Therefore, power and partnership in collaborative research implies a process of finding potential synergies in voice, based on valuing trust and knowledge sharing to unlock partners' mutual strengths for social change.

6.3.3 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 3
How can power be expressed by teachers asco-researchers within a participatory process?

In this study, co-researchers expressed power as being able to share expertise and have their voices, knowledge and experiences valued in a collaborative research project. For them, equality of voice promoted inclusive participation. The latter implied full engagement,

resulting in a leadership platform for making decisions and identifying opportunities to implement these.

The notion of 'power as leadership' among co-researchers allowed for opportunities to give direction and scope to achieve the mission and vision of a partnership. Co-researchers believed that as leaders they were empowered and could in turn empower others. For example, co-researchers taught other teachers how to use the asset-based intervention in their schools. To them, empowerment was being responsive to the environment. Empowerment meant seeking their own solutions and developing new ways of addressing challenges by relying on resources (assets and strengths) in their immediate environment. Additionally, for co-researchers, empowerment implied commitment and building confidence and competence. When co-researchers felt empowered and able to be involved in multiple aspects of the project, they experienced a sense of ownership. Sense of ownership was thus achieved through immersion in a project with the view of a transformative endeavour.

6.3.4 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What are the relations of power at play in the specific activities of the STAR intervention?

Change in power distribution requires varying levels of power to facilitate participation. Consequently, spaces of participation need to be created across the spectrum of partners. In this way, power is typically demonstrated when partners contribute meaningfully and equally towards the realisation of the vision of a partnership. Co-researchers in the current study expressed that they became members of a collective community of practice. They gained confidence as they participated in the collaborative project. Co-researchers realised that a few factors contributed towards forming a community of practice. The community of practice levelled the field of play, and thus equalised power relations between teachers as co-researchers, and university researchers. Two main contributing factors are consequently described.

First, teachers attributed trust that evolved over time as a contributing factor to establishing a community of practice. The more teachers (co-researchers) and university researchers interacted, the more the former were afforded a platform to direct the agenda of the project, resulting in the relationship deepening. Nurturing trust by allowing partners to relate easily with one another plausibly solidified interdependence on each other. Partners' realisation of

being interdependent on each other's expertise and roles seemed to strengthen mutual respect for one another's voice and contributions, inevitably building trust as well. With trust both a cause and outcome of interdependence, exclusive power became inclusive power as both partners appreciated the value that other partners added. As mentioned earlier, I found that through trust, co-researchers could feel confident in their capabilities and responsibilities, and developed a sense of ownership of the project.

Secondly, co-researchers (teachers) categorised the acquisition of asset-based knowledge as an opportunity that unlocked their abilities to contribute collectively to a community of practice. The more teachers participated and interacted with university partners, the more confident they were about ways to address different problems faced by the community. Co-researchers (teachers) viewed themselves as able to solve problems and seek solutions. In fulfilling the role of co-researchers, teachers developed confidence in their ability to change a situation that had previously been a challenge. In this manner, teachers chose to use the knowledge they had by sharing it with other community members to address challenges. Their appropriation of power was visible when they used asset-based knowledge to influence decisions, action and empowerment of others. Teachers were thus positive decision makers, directing action and providing leadership. They indicated that, in this project, they located themselves as co-researchers who experienced power equal to that of their university counterparts.

6.3.5   SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 5

In which manner might teachers as co-researchers benefit from participation in an asset-based intervention?

As stated, co-researchers viewed contextual issues (emotional, physical and social) as significant for enabling participation. Co-researchers indicated that an enabling environment influenced partners' emotions, and depended on how partners related to each other. Building and nurturing relationships were important to create an emotionally enabling (supportive) environment. In such an environment, free participation can be promoted where co-researchers can feel that they are accepted and their contributions recognised. In this manner, co-researchers may benefit when they feel appreciated and their experiences, knowledge and voices are treated as valued contributions. Furthermore, an emotionally enabling environment may promote learning and openness about issues, particularly when dealing with highly stigmatised topics such as HIV and AIDS. A supportive environment may then facilitate

opportunities to generate solutions in a spirit of mutual understanding. An enabling emotional environment will in turn allow partners to attain goals for capacity building and empowerment (where partners come together for collective action). Subsequently, co-researchers will probably benefit as a supportive environment appears to enable leadership directed at social change.

The social and physical enabling environment that was evident in this study, implied that co-researchers could expand opportunities to build networks beyond working only with university researchers. The social environment of a funded collaborative research project provided teachers, in the role of co-researchers, with opportunities to share experiences, ideas and knowledge with other co-researchers (in this case teachers from other schools) and the wider community like businesses, social service providers and parents. As network opportunities increased, more knowledge could be shared. Consequently, collective action could be taken to address problems and transform communities. Co-researchers felt that they benefitted by gaining skills (such as research skills), and learning how to mobilise these. Newly acquired skills and competencies seemed to boost their confidence which they in turn used to lead and guide others to mobilise change. In addition, co-researchers seemed to become more aware of strengths which they had not mobilised in the past. Co-researchers subsequently recognised and appreciated their knowledge as a resource for facilitating change.

6.3.6   SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 6

Which factors can facilitate or hinder the process of partnership between teachers as co-researchers and university researchers in a research partnership?

From their perspective, a couple of factors served as barriers to co-researchers during the partnership process. Co-researchers firstly identified time as an obstacle to establishing and maintaining partnerships. The STAR collaborative research project constituted an additional commitment to existing obligations, such as teachers' teaching cadre, family time and other social responsibilities. For them, an additional project, in their already tight schedules, posed a threat to the stability they were accustomed to. More specifically, the collaborative project implied responsibilities and courage, as co-researchers had to make action plans, implement and monitor the project – which they had not necessarily done before. These activities occurred after school hours, with co-researchers even contributing during weekends. This

interfered with personal (family) time and caused some co-researchers to be less committed than the others.

Additionally, co-researchers were required to network and facilitate access of certain social services to children and/or families. Networking activities occurred either during or after school hours. Consequently, in their role as co-researchers, teachers occasionally had to sacrifice teaching time to accommodate these activities. In this regard, teachers also had to do counselling or assist as special needs teachers when the need arose. This increased their workload and occasionally detracted them from their core role as facilitators of learning. All these competing demands could have had an adverse effect on the commitment of a few of the co-researchers.

Initially, co-researchers distrusted their university partners and viewed them as intruders/outsiders in their lives. In the initial partnership phase, co-researchers were somewhat sceptical of the intentions of the university partners. Language differences between co-researchers and university partners meant that co-researchers were initially not completely comfortable when university researchers spoke in their mother tongue (Afrikaans) during informal sessions/encounters. This tended to confirm some socialised doubts and fears, and contributed to initial mistrust of intentions and expectations.

Finally, at the beginning of the partnership, co-researchers were unsure if they were regarded and treated as equal research partners. They were not sure if their particular skills and abilities were valued by university researchers. In addition, co-researchers stated that they initially did not feel confident of coping with the challenges they and the communities faced. During the first stages of the collaborative project, co-researchers were thus hesitant to voice their opinion as they held a preconceived notion that they could be ridiculed.

6.4   FINAL REFLECTIONS

In this section, I discuss the findings relating to the primary research question as indicated in chapter 1. In this manner, I indicate the contributions of the study to existing theory on power and partnerships, as well as research methodology and other applications to the profession of educational psychology. I conclude the section by reflecting on the limitations of the study.

6.4.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

How can insight into teachers as co-researchers' experiences of power relationships broaden knowledge about partnerships in participatory methodology?

This study revealed findings on teachers' experiences of power and partnerships in PR. When I entered the research field, the participating teachers had been involved in the STAR participatory project since 2003. Teachers had experienced different phases of the PR process. Initially, they were not sure if their knowledge was valued, which translated into their perception of not having power and fulfilling the envisaged role. In the initial phase of working with university researchers, participating teachers thus relied on university partners to facilitate and provide guidance during workshops. Additionally, teachers seemed unsure of what was expected of them as co-researchers and did not completely trust the university researchers. While university partners engaged participating teachers to identify challenges and plan for solutions, the teachers initially did not mobilise existing assets and resources to provide solutions. As such, there was a period when co-researchers experienced limited power, not sharing ownership of the research. This experience was exacerbated by issues of conflicting agendas and actions potentially undermining the goal of PR through established partnerships.

As the participating teachers continued to collaborate with the university researchers, trust was built. Simultaneously, participants were seeking to fit in and understand their roles in the collaborative project. Gradually they were able to identify, mobilise and manage assets (their own and the community) to provide psychosocial support in their community contexts. This involved dialogue, frequent interaction and building rapport. As co-researchers, teachers seemed to gradually perceive themselves as a group of people who were skilled and knowledgeable, and who could fulfil a collaborative role in the school-community context. Co-researchers began to see themselves as members of a community of practice who could lead a process to build community capacity by empowering others. This process manifested as co-researchers built capacity in their local neighbourhood by giving guidance, based on shared decisions, enabling structures and empowering mechanisms to involve others at different levels.

The above actions indicate co-researchers' determination, because they believed that they had what it takes for a new beginning of hope and light to challenged school-communities. Co-

researchers perceived themselves as equal partners in the research and consequently took ownership of what they were doing. Inclusion and equality, in terms of voice and authority, was evident in co-researchers' regard of a levelled playing field in terms of power relations. To teachers, collective equal efforts were a signal of synergy in partnership for change. For them, the partnership was grounded in values that allowed partners to define and take control of challenges they faced as a community, using their valued knowledge to facilitate change.

Based on my findings related to teachers as co-researchers in a participatory partnership, I now construct the concept of *power-sharing partnerships*. Constructing the concept of power-sharing partnerships, is innovative as it adds to an extension of Gaventa's power cube framework that goes beyond the forms, spaces and levels of power by arguing for inclusive participation in participatory projects. The study thus adds insight to participatory competencies which are critical to partnerships that enable participants to act as agents of change in PR.

I summarise this insight of power-sharing partnerships in a framework for effective power-sharing partnerships (Figure 6.1). This framework, with five interrelated elements (community of practice achieved through the power of leadership, identifying vision and mission, synergy, interdependent role of partners, and determination), incorporates themes that emerged in this study (see section 4.1) and provides insight into the way that teachers (as co-researchers) conceptualised power in PR. Power-sharing partnerships posit power as holistic and sustainable participatory partnerships due to synergies and unlocked power relations.
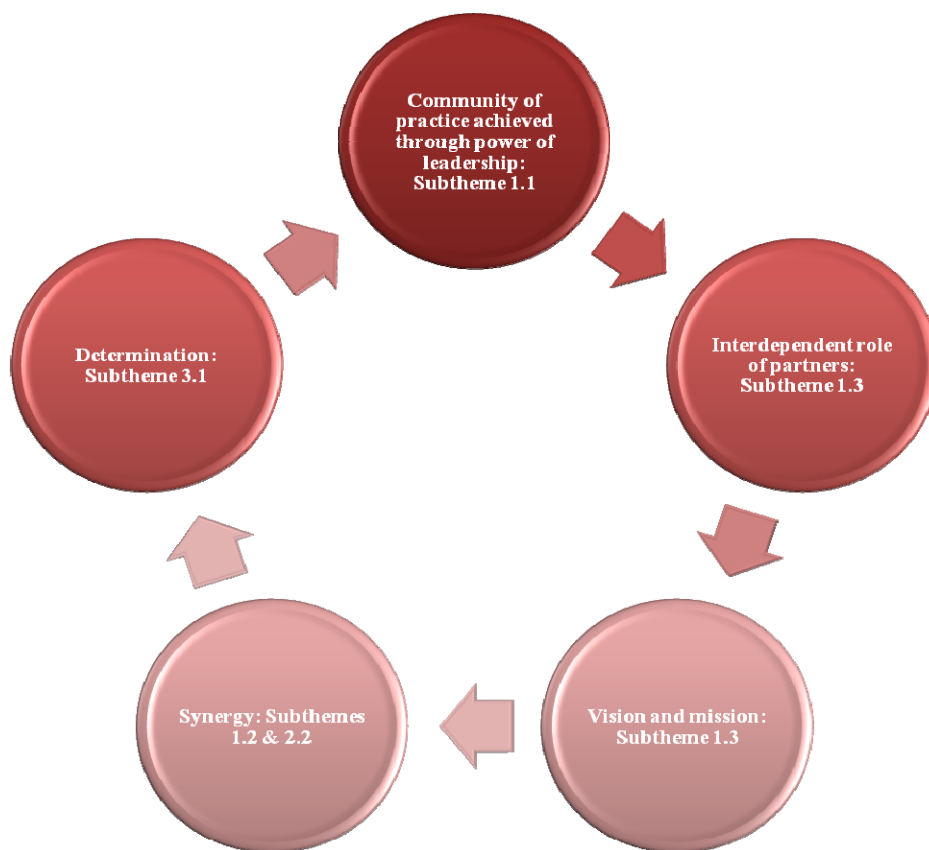
Figure 6.1:   Power-sharing partnership framework

As explained in chapter 2, power-sharing partnership anchors the concept of power, partnerships and community capacity building within Gaventa's power cube framework. Based on the findings of this study, I define power-sharing partnership as the ability of co-researchers to view themselves as a community of practice. This community of practice regards individual voices and experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. The varied frames of experience and knowledge may be mobilised to provide leadership, aimed at transforming a community. Collectively, power-sharing partnerships are a platform for community capacity building and a catalyst for transformation, where partners can create synergy for collectively working together with the understanding that each partner can have equal influence in a partnership. The partnership will be guided by concerted vision and regard for the interdependence of each other's strengths, assets, roles and capabilities. In a power-sharing partnership, participatory projects culminate in positive synergy in partnerships. Power-sharing partnerships emphasises equal participation. Similarly, in power-sharing partnerships the role of agency to implement decisions will result in partners achieving their vision. Partners in power-sharing partnerships will thus create inclusive spaces, levels and forms of power to become co-researchers. In this manner, the power-

sharing partnership framework can enable partners to leverage power relations at play to achieve equality as co-researchers.

In the following paragraphs, I unpack the new concept of power-sharing partnership. First, in PR partnership, developing sound ***leadership*** is important. By definition, leadership as power requires collaboration among the partners that promotes confidence, competence and regard for prior knowledge. Such leadership is based on having a deep, intuitive sense of passion about facilitating transformative change and fulfilling a role that builds communities to come together. Power as leadership is about being able to make a difference in a community, as mirrored by the aspirations of the participants in this study. For example, teachers as co-researchers played the role of facilitators, thus embracing leadership. They worked together in synergy with university partners, community and parents to provide guidance with the goal of community capacity building. The synergy of working together was demonstrated by their willingness to work with, and learn from, other individuals and the community at large. Each partner's role was thus recognised in promoting community interest.

In such a relationship, the core is to promote a non-dominating, transforming power with the ultimate goal of community development. Additionally, through this synergy, voices will be heard, spaces of co-empowering participation created and decisions acted upon. In this study, co-researchers indicated that they had leadership as power as they decided on activities, implemented and monitored projects, thereby indicating that their voice, experience and knowledge were valued. Members of the partnership became a community of practice where spaces of participation were open and everyone perceived themselves as equal co-researchers, armed with relevant skills, assets and strengths to contribute and thus provide guidance with the view to drive and achieve the vision of the partnership. Findings from this study therefore support the first element of power as leadership, as participants indicated that power is about having the capacity for leadership, based on the knowledge and experience that one possesses and ultimately making decisions which will translate into taking action.

Secondly, insight into power-sharing partnerships in PR implies the creation of a ***vision and mission***, thereby staying focused on the big picture. Partnerships implies leaders who possess the power to look beyond the narrow interests of their own, beyond the interests of the partnership itself, and focus primarily on the needs and priorities of the community as a whole. In this study, co-researchers indicated that once their potential was unleashed, they could take charge of the project, providing the scope in terms of the vision and mission of the

project. Such a perspective embraces the variety of aspects of a community and will inevitably result in the desired social transformation. I propose that establishing the vision and mission of partnership, is an opportunity for both partners to ask themselves if they have the desire, capacity and structural support to engage in meaningful research partnerships. Additionally, such an opportunity allow for partners to develop a well-conceived vision based on an envisioned future, a future that is defined in terms of what the partnership stands for (core values) and why it exists (core purpose). A community of practice, through leadership, uses vision as the criterion against which to judge the suitability of a proposed course of action, because it clearly represents that which is central and enduring to the partnership. Findings in this study reveal that co-researchers' conceptualisation of partnership and power was based on the ability to have a vision for the partnership and establishing an enabling environment that could nurture and sustain the partnership to unlock its efficiency and realisation.

Thirdly, through power-sharing partnerships, leaders may create a framework for action-based partnership that aim to achieve high levels of *synergy*. A high level of synergy is based on synchronised responsibilities and actions of partners to create visible spaces of achieving the established vision of the partnership. Additionally, through vision and leadership, partners can communicate such a framework compellingly, mobilise resources, and guide action toward long-term aims. In a power-sharing partnership, vision is leadership's most powerful medium, not merely based on its message, but as a passage for achieving high-level synergy. I therefore argue that high-level synergy is about the power to find potential synergies to be empowered, to make decisions and take action, unlock potential and thereby facilitate transformation. Moreover, the success of a partnership will be judged by the ability and capacity to deliver on commitments. The findings of this study reveal that participants valued the role of agency in relation to power and partnership, by being able to achieve high levels of synergy among partners and deliver on commitments as espoused in a shared vision.

Fourth, I propose that power-sharing partnerships are based on the *interdependent role of partners,* who work within visible power structures that embrace a fresh perspective and knowledge. My argument, supported by findings of this study, is that in a partnership the need exists to create an enabling environment, through which all partners are valued as important stakeholders who generate enthusiasm and creativity, and keep members engaged and on task. Co-researchers in this study worked hand in hand with all partners and thus indicated that the skills that were brought in by others complemented theirs. In a partnership, the voice and

experience of each partner is critical and treated as valuable knowledge. Partners visibly acknowledged the complementary skills, knowledge and experience that they brought to the fore and further acknowledged that they needed each other's leadership as a community of practice to realise the vision of the partnership. As such, the findings of this study revealed the importance of forging equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships based on the complementary skills of each partner to contribute to achieving a broad goal.

Such a symbiotic relationship will promote and acknowledge the diversity that partners bring in, their capacity to mobilise resources, and the diversity of their interests, needs, and assets. Most importantly, all partners will be interdependent on each other's strengths, thereby complementing the systemic, visionary leadership exercised by each. Together, partners will thus become a community of practice who view partnerships as personal since they begin with, rely on and nurture personal contacts. Finally, partners will realise that their interdependence is based on loyalty and the continuous nurturing of trust, building relationships, and thus jointly facilitating the desired social transformation in PR.

Leadership as power is thus about having a well-conceived mission and vision, achieving high levels of synergy, interdependent roles of partners as well as ***determination,*** going hand in hand to achieve power-sharing partnerships. Of these five interrelated elements, I argue that determination is the core mechanism through which participatory partnership may create and build the broad base of power-sharing partnerships that multisectoral collaboration typically requires. Teachers in this study indicated that they had the drive and passion to persevere to the end, to ensure that they realised their dream and vision. Power-sharing partnerships should foster a sense of determination of all partners, joint ownership and collective responsibility, from which leadership emerges. With time and experience, determination of all partners will thus result in the insight that power is not a fixed quantity and that power sharing does not resemble a zero-sum game. Determination to achieve transformation will subsequently create a sense of power sharing, which will in turn create a sense of shared ownership and mutual benefits that may empower all partners. The nature of power in participatory partnerships is thus about the determination of all partners who view power sharing as an authentic move to achieve transformation. This study reveals that participants perceived themselves to be equal co-researchers and thus achieve their goals by means of agency of determination.

6.4.2   REFLECTING ON LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I henceforth reflect on the limitations of this study with regard to differences in language, culture, selection of participants, researcher's background as an educational psychologist, complexity of teachers' competencies, facilitating group discussions and the topic of power relations and partnerships and limited to the perspective of teachers as co-researchers.

I entered the research field as an African from a foreign country (Botswana) speaking predominantly English and being a middle-class graduate woman. My culture, background and home language was thus different from that of the teachers who participated in the study. The manner in which I experienced differences from the participants, who mostly speak Xhosa and Zulu, could have affected my views and interpretations. Additionally, due to language differences, I occasionally had to rely on interpretations. In order to address this potential limitation of language and culture differences, I had to acknowledge it first. I also relied on regular reflections on my viewpoints and remained open on expanding my understanding of the participants' perspectives (as suggested by Moss, 2002; Sultana, 2007; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). I built an open relationship with the participants, which was based on trust and as such assisted me with verifying possible uncertainties. I also used member checking in an attempt to understand and represent the teachers' perspectives instead of my own.

All selected teachers participating in the study were purposely selected, due to their participation in the STAR longitudinal study. This could have resulted in a possible Hawthorne effect (Cohen *et al*., 2003) in the sense that the teachers were familiar with the logistics and conduct within STAR. Subsequently, they could possibly have modified their behaviour and provided responses to please the research team. A possible positive response could thus have been influenced by the fact that teachers in this study have built and nurtured good relationships with the research team of the university. In an attempt to avoid the Hawthorne effect from occurring, I used a variety of data collection techniques, relied on reflexivity and employed member checking (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002; Creswell, 1988).

While the participating teachers were unique, they also shared similar characteristics in that they taught at schools faced with similar socio-economic challenges such as poverty, which may limit the generalisability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, generalisability was not the aim of the study. Findings may be transferred to other similar

contexts based on the reader's judgement. The participants were also predominantly female teachers, meaning that the study is limited to a specific career (teaching profession) and possibly to a certain extent to gender. Again, I did not intend to generalise the findings. Yet, I included an audit trail so that similar and further research may be conducted in an attempt to obtain more findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

I further faced the challenge of facilitating group discussions on the sensitive topic of power relations. Power is usually used with descriptive words such as 'power over', denoting dominance of those of the upper class. The perceptions presented in this study are those that teachers themselves attributed to their experiences with PR, working with university researchers. An important limitation in this regard is the possibility that teachers might have presented a biased view. Teachers had invested considerable time in this project and developed positive relationships with facilitators who came from the university. However, I believe that the findings are trustworthy. I continuously reflected, adhering to the principles of conducting research from a feminist perspective. Feminists encourage reflexivity as an opportunity to critically examine power relations and politics in research and to assume responsibility and accountability during data generation and interpretation (Falconer Al-Hindi, 2007; Sultana, 2007).

In addition, this was my first experience using qualitative research applying PRA principles. At times I was not sure as to whether my communication was well conceived and understood by the participants. I addressed this potential limitation by means of continuous consultation with my supervisors and reflections in my research journal. In this regard, Chambers (1994b) encourages reversal of learning between researchers and participants, with the aim of sharing information and ideas among partners. During such role reversals, reflexivity can be relied on as important strategy.

In terms of my role, I had to differentiate between being a researcher and a trained educational psychologist. It was important for me to distinguish between these roles due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. I have been trained to read emotions and provide counselling. I faced the challenge of distinguishing between interviewing as researcher and as counsellor, particularly when I had to do group discussions and interviews on issues of power relations and trust. I addressed this challenge by borrowing from the concept of empathetic identification (Schwandt, 1994) by means of self-awareness, self-reflection and debriefing with my supervisors. Additionally, through the relationships that had been established in the

STAR project, teachers seemed comfortable with expressing their views and opinions and as such shared their experiences in an open and candid manner. In the same manner, I too remained open and welcoming.

Lastly, the scope of my study merely covered the perspectives of teachers as co-researchers. Partnering with all stakeholders as equal members is one of the principles and values of participatory research and researchers' choices about when to collaborate are multifaceted (Armstrong, Loomis, & Mairena-Torres, 2012). As a researcher, I had to decide when and how to collaborate. As a result, I did not include the perspectives of all stakeholders involved in the STAR intervention project, but narrowed my study to perspectives of teachers only. Even though participatory research is about working with all stakeholders in order for them to fulfil more active role in the process (Patton, 2002), the value of equal partnership should also be weighed in terms of other values (Armstrong *et al*., 2012). In my case, I could not include teachers in the design of the study, as the participating teachers were already active participants of the STAR intervention. My goal was to determine the extent to which they experienced their role as equal co-researchers of the STAR project. My study was therefore limited to focus on the perspectives of teachers as co-researchers in the STAR intervention project only. Additionally, I could not include participants in the study design and planning since I wanted to investigate the degree to which they have been involved in the research design and planning of the STAR project.

6.5   RECOMMENDATIONS

At the conclusion of this study, I offer some recommendations for future research, practice and training.

6.5.1   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Building on the findings of this study, future studies may focus on**:**

- Using participatory partnerships to map the structures of partners using the power-sharing partnership framework in understanding dynamics and interactions of partners.
- Involving other stakeholders such as the wider community that was co-opted by the teachers to partner with them and exploring their experiences of collaborating in addressing community psychosocial problems using the asset-based approach in PR.

- Investigating the meaning and understanding of power and partnerships from the perspective of university researchers and peers.

- Investigating the impact of empowerment and the gain for co-researchers in such a process of empowerment.

- Exploring contributions that teachers could make through scholarship by participating in collaborative research.

- The area of agenda and incentive conflict as a benefit for engaging in collaborative PR.

- Investigating to what extent teachers could be psychologically influenced to report on only positive experiences in a collaborative project.

- Exploring the feasibility of establishing committees within a collaborative project with the aim of efficient administration and management of partnerships.

6.5.2   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

When developing a power-sharing participatory partnership, the framework that I developed may be adopted as university researchers engage community (e.g. teachers) in PR. The framework may assist with understanding how equal power relations can be achieved in a manner that will benefit the partners. Special attention needs to be paid to the design of collaborative participatory projects in a manner that the vision and mission are clearly articulated and understood by all partners.

It is critical to investigate all partners' understanding and conception of power in collaborative projects. Many decisions are based on whether partners feel that they have the power to be equal members of a partnership, thus making them members of a community of practice. With the conception of power established, the use of participatory methodology can facilitate consensus-building and social interaction among co-researchers. The concept of power strongly emphasises the standpoint of voice and a sense of feeling valuable in terms of one's prior knowledge. Furthermore, by understanding all partners' understanding of power, social cohesion and trust may be built, which in turn is important for partnerships to flourish and achieve a mutually beneficial synergy that is based on power sharing.

Additionally, co-researchers should be given constructive feedback on their practice while using the asset-based approach in PR. Such feedback could enable them to reflect and ensure that they are still in line with the proposed framework on power-sharing partnerships.

Teachers should be regarded as possessing the necessary experience and knowledge for identifying psychosocial problems in communities and ultimately fulfilling a significant role in assisting with solutions. They are social change agents and should be valued as members of a community of practice that could contribute meaningfully to facilitate social change in communities.

Co-researchers should thus be seen as self-inquirers and reflectors of their practice. I regard the STAR intervention as a meaningful tool and model that could be used to implement the asset-based approach with the view of bringing about social change in communities. Therefore, the need exists to be intentional in the design of research efforts, to ensure that interventions such as the asset-based approach have positive effects among participants.

6.5.3   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING

The proposed framework I developed could be incorporated and adapted in teacher training curricula to teach teachers on implementing collaborative projects. This could equip teachers with competencies that may assist them in engaging in collaborative partnerships. Furthermore, the framework could be extended to the training of psychologists and people in other helping professions, equipping them with alternative intervention strategies for assisting communities to seek solutions while undergoing social change.

In addition, the power-sharing framework could be used to teach researchers and methodologists techniques and skills for conducting collaborative research projects with communities. This framework could serve as an introduction to PR methodology being incorporated with PRA principles. The framework may assist researchers and methodologists in avoiding challenges such as being referred to as outsiders when working with communities. Additionally, it could allow for researchers and methodologists to regard the voice, experience and knowledge of communities as valid, resulting in communities experiencing a sense of power and partnership as co-researchers.

6.6   CONCLUSION

PR partnership implies the possibility of communities and university researchers working in a synergistic manner that could result in social change if both partners value each other's prior experience and situated knowledge as legitimate. In this study, I attempted to explore how teachers have perceived themselves in a collaborative project as co-researchers, with particular emphasis on issues of power relations and partnerships.

I determined that no neutral field of knowledge production exists and that all knowledge production is influenced by various standpoints in social class. It is through the various standpoints and collective experiences that the total sum of partnership may be achieved based on reciprocal empowerment. As such, co-researchers (teachers) in this study perceived themselves to be the collective ray of hope for their communities, where they could promote social change. They perceived themselves as having the power that unlocked realities. As an outcome of their determination and perseverance based on their collective experiences of being empowered, they created an environment that facilitated ease of addressing psychosocial problems, thereby transforming communities. Furthermore, they perceived themselves to be equal partners who could inquire, reflect and contribute meaningfully by breaking frontiers and taking action. They became the keys that unlocked potential that everyone could gain from, based on their equal participation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates through the collective voices, experiences and situated perspectives and knowledge of the participating teachers, that achieving power-sharing partnerships in collaborative research is possible. The study further demonstrates that power-sharing partnerships is about power being fluid and positive, bringing about change in communities and providing opportunities for community capacity building. I end this journey by expressing my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for the situated knowledge of the teachers' experiences as valuable knowledge that allowed me some insight into their participatory power-sharing partnerships.