

CHAPTER 6

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: AN INTERVIEW REPORT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is designed to imbue the reader with the basic concepts that underpin qualitative research, as well as carefully give an exposition of the interview report.

The researcher's constructive comments, guided by an explicit review of the scientific material, will bring the reader close to interpreting his/her work experiences into practical-orientated strategies for survival.

Transformation, per se, cannot be limited to institutional intellectual pronouncements that have no bearing on human agency and social action. It permeates the real world by creating networks that promote quality habits in people's everyday lives.

As a consequence, the researcher has taken careful consideration in employing qualitative research techniques, particularly interviews, with the intention of supporting teaching and management skills in schools. By establishing a rapport with the education managers in their work situation, the researcher was able to "get under the skin" and delve into their management problems.

The stark reality of these individualistic utterances, has opened up "a can of worms" and will initiate debates on whether government or society will continue to provide guidelines in order to shape the future of this national asset – EDUCATION.

6.2 THE NATURE AND OBJECTIVES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research refers to observations that are not easily reduced to numbers. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:15), quantitative research “presents statistical results represented with numbers”, while qualitative research “presents data as a narration with words”.

Borg and Gall (1989:379) assert that methods in qualitative research are mainly subjective in nature, and it is the investigator’s skills of observation and interpretation that validates the information.

The most important objective of the qualitative research is to study “human beings as human beings”, as well as to reject “the ultimately irrational pursuit to quantify all aspects of human belief and experiences” (Bogdan and Bilden, 1982:x). A lot of information is captured in relation to the description of the environment.

Phenomenology has had a vast influence in the qualitative approach to an extent that this approach is often referred to by others as “a phenomenological enterprise” (Niemann, 2000:283). Whilst phenomenologists attempt to grasp the action “silently”, they also gain entry into the subject’s conceptual world (Bogdan *et al.*, 1982:31).

One of the most striking features of qualitative research is that it takes into consideration the natural setting as a direct source of data. It is easy to understand action in its context, because of the setting in which it occurs. The data has to be collected on the premises, thus the researcher has managed to consider data collected during the interview in the school setting (Bogdan *et al.*, 1982:27).

The researcher has viewed the above in a serious light, and has thus made a concerted effort to enter the world of the subject with the intent of conferring meaning to the objects, people, situations and events that unfolded before her.

Various other techniques are used in qualitative research. These include:

- observations
- document analysis
- historical research

The researcher has considered the possibility of engaging the interview technique due to its popularity in the social sciences, its flexibility, adaptability, as well as its intention to intensively examine theoretical underpinnings.

6.3 ADVANTAGES OF THE INTERVIEW

These are some of the advantages of the interview technique, as described by Mahlangu (1987:89-90).

6.3.1 Flexibility

Questions can be repeated by the interviewer in case of misunderstanding.

6.3.2 Response rate

There is no time limit to an interview. People who are unable to read and write can still participate.

6.3.3 Non-verbal behaviour

Such behaviour can be assessed, including the validity of the interviewee's answers.

6.3.4 Control over environment

The interview environment can be controlled by ensuring that privacy and silence prevails.

6.3.5 Question order

The interviewer has full control over the order in which the questions are asked.

6.3.6 Spontaneity

Answers cannot be retracted once spoken due to recording.

6.3.7 Answers from the respondent only

No one else can answer on behalf of the interviewee.

6.3.8 Completeness

It is always possible to ensure that all answers are completed.

6.3.9 Time of interview

Time, date and place of the interview can be recorded.

The above-mentioned advantages, provided a benchmark against which the researcher systematically introduced the interview technique in her quest to find solutions and provide depth into transformation issues.

6.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A variety of research methods have been sought to eliminate weaknesses based on a single method of collecting data. Thus, over and above the questionnaires (quantitative data), an interview technique was used (qualitative data), in order to enhance the validity of this research.

6.4.1 Selection of participants

The participants in this research have been selected from the education managers in the Gauteng Province secondary schools. A purposeful sampling method was used i.e.

- (i) education managers that were willing to grant interviews were considered;
- (ii) education managers were selected from diverse communities, in keeping with the broad aims of this research.

The participants were referred to by letters of the alphabet, for example A, B, C, and so forth; due to a respect for anonymity and confidentiality. Issues surrounding transformation elicited sensitive information, particularly with regard to diversity (and how the education manager interprets it), as well as gender stereotyping.

The respondent's level of education did not bias the interview, as supposition is entertained that relevant qualifications are in order, by virtue of the managerial position occupied.

Fifteen (15) secondary school education managers in the Pretoria area were selected to participate in the interview. The researcher realised that theoretical saturation was reached at that time, leading to the cessation of the interviews. An interview conversation of about forty five minutes (45 mins) to ninety minutes (1½ hours) took place between the researcher and the manager, at which time the questionnaires were already completed.

6.4.2 A qualitative investigation

A semi-structured interview was preferred, because it “has the advantage of being reasonably objective while still permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondent's opinions and the reasons behind them ...” (Borg *et al.*, 1979:313).

Transformational issues have been highly politicised and have a bearing on the education managers' work. There are often bruises and scars when one discusses topics underpinning their involvement and contribution towards the transformation of the school and society. In that way, the conversation during the interview was not void of political connotations.

The introductory question: "How would you describe transformation?" unleashed responses similar to the following: "... adaptation to change; change of the education system; deracialization of education". The researcher has an understanding of the respondent's environment, making its interpretation less difficult.

6.4.3 Objectivity of the researcher

Bogdan *et al.* (1982:217) declare objectivity to be "giving equal weight to all the information one gathers, or as having no point of view when one undertakes research". Contrarily, a subjective researcher might be faced with bias interfering with his/her prejudices and attitudes. Ideally, an attempt should be made to "objectively study the subjective states of their subjects" (Bogdan *et al.*, 1982:42).

A lot of weight is carried by the data collected from the subjects. The researcher's integrity as an experienced member of a school management team, particularly as having conducted interviews with parents and learners for various reasons, provides sufficient groundwork for the success of the research. The above-mentioned factors generated an intention to understand the subject's point of view easily.

The researcher's presence in situations that exposed the lack of transformation amongst some secondary schools, has led to the desire to develop an understanding, as well as find solutions to the problems that are prevalent in secondary schools during this era.

The researcher is not a "tabula rasa", but has certain ideas in mind, which originate from her practical experiences in a school setting. Careful consideration was taken not to employ a post-positivistic approach by empathizing with the education managers.

6.4.4 Data collection

A list of open-ended questions focusing on the core aspects embedded in transformation and management was formulated. The aim was to familiarize the subjects with the most important issues contained in the research. The questions also acted as “ice breakers”. A careful selection of the education managers who did not participate in the quantitative research was made. This was intended at broadening and diversifying data, which would validate the research outcome. Such questions were faxed after a telephonic appointment and discussion with the subjects.

The education manager’s office, which was free of noise and disturbances was used as an interview venue. This was done mostly after hours. Pen and paper were used to record the responses, because “note taking or tape recording are usually methods for preserving the information collected in the interview” (Borg *et al.*, 1979:314). The advantage of note taking is that as the interview progresses, the interviewer jots down the information as it is made available by the respondent. “The chief advantage of the note-taking method is that it facilitates data analysis, since information is readily accessible” (Borg *et al.*, 1979:314). In view of the above-mentioned reasons, the researcher found note-taking to be convenient and worthwhile.

The researcher avoided the use of gestures that represent shock, surprise or dismay at the respondent’s answers. Answers were probed in case of the lack of clarity, for example “What do you mean by that?” or “Can you provide further clarification?”

6.4.5 Validity and reliability

Validity is defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:105) as an instrument that “measures what it purports to measure”. In qualitative research, however, validity refers to “the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the

researcher” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:105). The effects of the threats to validity can be minimised by paying attention to validity and reliability.

“Reliability is a measure of consistency over time ...” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:117). According to Niemann (2000:283) reliability is associated with the following: accuracy, stability, consistency and repeatability of the research.

This research, to a large degree, was comprehensive and accurate in its collection of data. Similarly, it has measured what it was supposed to measure. On the other hand, triangular techniques were employed, intending to map out human behaviour from various standpoints. The above-mentioned aspects have rendered this research reliable and valid.

6.4.6 Reporting qualitative data

The data collected during interviews with secondary school education managers were subdivided into themes as follows:

1. How would you describe transformation?
2. How would you differentiate between management during the previous dispensation and the present one?
3. In which way can educators be empowered in order to deal with the changes envisaged?
4. How do you sensitize your learners around gender issues?
5. How involved and participative is the School Governing Body with regard to school matters?

6. Does your SGB know and implement the Employment Equity Act (1998)?
7. How do issues of crime and substance abuse affect the culture of learning and teaching at your school?
8. What challenges are you faced with regarding transformation?
9. Do you think you are on track in as far as transformation is concerned?

The following responses came about during the interview, according to the sequence in which the above questions are asked.

Question 1. How would you describe transformation?

- Respondent D. Transformation refers to doing things in a different way. It refers to a paradigm shift.
- Respondent E. It is a major adjustment. It necessitated the introduction of Curriculum 2005, which people don't understand. The new Curriculum creates problems for the educators, and they resist it. They have to attend workshops, when they have qualified long ago.
- Respondent F. Transformation refers to a change from old to new. It also involves restructuring.
- Respondent I. Transformation started in 1994 when schools were declared open. Classes are bigger because educators are few. More educators are required to teach in both languages especially OBE.
- Respondent J. Transformation refers to changes that rectify all the problem areas.

Respondent K. Transformation has brought about positive changes in management, driven by national policies.

Respondent M. It refers to change of the education system from apartheid. The attitude of the learners should also change to make teaching easier.

Respondent O. Transformation is a drastic movement from the old way of teaching. Issues like understaffing create difficulties for transformation. It is expensive to change the old curriculum to the new one.

Question 2. *How would you differentiate between management during the previous dispensation and the present one?*

Respondent A. It is not easy to assess. Presently we are able to market the school as well as interact.

Respondent B. The previous education management was outdated.

Respondent D. There is little change. The major changes are brought about by unions. Educators have more rights, they speak with a common voice. Transformation has brought them together. The new acts, namely, Labour Relations Act, South African Schools Act, Employment Equity Act, Public Servants Act, encourage us to be democratic and be on equal footing.

Respondent E. There is negative transformation. In the past the Superintendent did the job for us, but now principals must do the job. The tasks have shifted. There is bad blood amongst the educators and the system is subject to abuse. The role of the unions has declined. There is laxity on the part of the educators.

Respondent F. The previous system was autocratic, now there is no longer Top Down. There is involvement of all stakeholders, negotiations and transparency. There is a change in the manner of doing things, the approach is different.

Respondent G. Management is now more difficult. GDE is not settled. Some leaders, for example the Institutional Development Support (IDS) are inefficient and not flexible. The law is there to guide us.

Respondent H. In the past the policies were compiled from DET. Now the guidelines from GDE are vague. The principal has to take the initiative and motivate.

Respondent I. Management is the same. There is democratic decision making. The staff and learners give more inputs.

Respondent J. GDE is dynamic, encourages development, we keep track and there is progress. DET was old-fashioned.

Question 3. *In which way can educators be empowered in order to deal with the changes envisaged?*

Respondent D. HOD's plan their work. There is teamwork, and this has resulted in an improvement with our matric results. Matric results have improved from 25% (1999) to 64% (2000), and thanks to Future Link. It has helped to empower the educators. Learners are treated like customers. The general respect has improved. The customer-care approach has brought a great change. Trees and the lawn have been planted. Our school is like a home.

- Respondent F. The school raises funds. We once invited a District Official who is knowledgeable about the School Development Plan, and we achieved our goals. Educators do a SWOT analysis, and then come up with suggestions.
- Respondent B. We engage the services of experts with knowledge around issues of responsibility, and discipline. Educators gain information with regard to the conditions of services. Team building is also encouraged.
- Respondent G. The introduction of the parallel medium of instruction was done early. The majority of the residents are Black. Most parents are former exiles who are now in the army. There is a wall between the educators and the learners. Managers are on the alert. We are sitting on a time bomb.
- Respondent H. Meetings are arranged to equip the educators with new skills especially in terms of new approaches to teaching. Educators must be able to manage change all the time. Educators are coping, but it is not easy.
- Respondent J. Educators are notified of the new developments. Each Head of Department holds workshops for educators. A book, namely, Classroom Management by A.G. Kruger and O.J. van Schalkwyk was bought to guide us.
- Respondent K. There is a committee dealing with OBE issues and they are coordinating workshops. We have not yet started with our own programmes because time is a problem.
- Respondent L. St Mary's Outreach programme enables us to develop the staff. We hold staff meetings and have introduced "A re bue" (Let's speak) forum which enables us to review existing programmes.

Respondent M. We hold daily staff meetings of about 30 minutes to address educators' frustrations. Educators are encouraged to improve their skills through private studies. Outsiders like Paragon are often invited.

Respondent N. Educators are empowered in order to change the school's culture. We have formed an alliance with Pretoria Technikon and Deimler Chrysler to ensure capacity building. St Mary's Outreach programme also assists.

Respondent O. There is a general change of attitude from the learners as well as the educators. Educators have to be motivated in order to influence the learners' attitude.

Question 4. How do you sensitize your learners around gender issues?

Respondent A. Our Representative Learner Council (RCL) is gender sensitive.

Respondent B. For the past two years the RCL had mainly female learners. Girls have good leadership skills if well-trained. Boys resort to crime.

Respondent D. Learners have their rights and limits. The RCL varies every year, but they have good intentions. They have a bargaining voice. The educators talk to the learners through them.

Respondent F. RCL is dominated by girls (60%). Girls excel at school even academically. Female educators are role models.

Question 5. *How involved and participative is the School Governing Body with regard to school matters?*

Respondent G. The SGB comprises no English-speaking people. Blacks do not attend meetings, they also do not sit on committees, but react on impulse.

Respondent L. The SGB is a little less empowered. There is not clear demarcation and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The SGB does not know about the Employment Equity Act (1998), but they are gender-sensitive.

Respondent J. The SGB is willing to assist, but inexperienced.

Respondent E. The SGB is partly committed. They are always at loggerheads, and there is a power struggle. They undermine one another. I am addressing the problems to improve relationships.

Respondent N. The SGB is supportive and effective. It is inefficient when it comes to fundraising and attendance of meetings. Parents do not attend events, even an informal invitation to a picnic.

Question 6. *Does your SGB know and implement the Employment Equity Act (1998)?*

Respondent B. The SGB would approve any educator of colour. The SGB knows about the Employment Equity Act (1998).

Respondents A - O: The SGB knows about the Employment Equity Act (1998).

Question 7. *How do issues of crime and substance abuse affect the culture of learning and teaching at your school?*

- Respondent D. I have never apprehended any learner being in possession of drugs, because they are taught life skills. Crime is minimal in the area.
- Respondent F. Learners use drugs, even girls. We involve the police. There are gangster activities outside the school premises.
- Respondent G. There are a lot of gangsters around the school. Parents are alerted about drug abuse. We send the learners to SANAP for rehabilitation.
- Respondent H. Drug abuse is not rife. The school is on the alert. The school has a drug policy.
- Respondent I. Learners abusing drugs are discovered late. Parents are made aware and learners are sent for rehabilitation.
- Respondent K. Drug abuse is rife. Cops are helping. Workshops are held. There are dangerous weapons in the schools because of the squatter area nearby. Parents are not responsive. There is a lack of support from the parents.
- Respondent L. The abuse of drugs is rife. Learners are referred to the Child Protection Unit. The socio-economic conditions of the learners worsens the problem. Some learners are orphaned and have no food. There is a lack of involvement from the parents.
- Respondent N. The school knows the culprits dealing in drugs. Drugs are sold through the fence. There is a lot of gambling around.

Respondent J. The school is a hot spot for criminal activities. It is strangely situated and caters for many schools in the area. For example, a teacher was robbed of a cellphone in the school.

Question 8. *What challenges are you faced with regarding transformation?*

Respondent C. There is a generation gap between educators and the learners. I have not yet transformed. The boys' appearance challenges me. I wish to be computer literate. Educators are lazy.

Respondent F. To reach the school's vision. All educators have to work, and learners should pass. We expect good matric results.

Respondent G. If the culture of learning and teaching is established.

Respondent H. If the school maintains discipline, and there is less disruption of classes.

Respondent I. Good quality education for the learners and good behaviour.

Respondent K. Morale is low amongst the educators and the learners. As a result, we have to review programs. We need commitment from both learners and educators. Absenteeism and latecoming are serious problems.

Respondent L. The school needs a strong community structure, where everybody must have the knowledge. Team building is also important because people do not share ideas. The above are achievable.

Respondent O. If the school can produce good matric results in five years' time, and the school is rated amongst the best.

Question 9. Do you think you are on track in as far as transformation is concerned?

Respondents A - O. We are on track as far as transformation is concerned!

6.4.7 Key issues on the management of transformation in education emanating from interviews

- Transformation is a movement from the old way of teaching and relates to a positive change in management.
- Transformation refers to a paradigm shift.
- Team work and good planning result in improved matric results.
- Learners are gender-sensitive with regard to their selection of the RCL.
- Girls have good leadership skills.
- Black parents do not attend meetings and do not want to sit in committees.
- The SGB is willing to assist but lacks experience.
- The SGB does not help with fundraising.
- The SGB is engaged in a power struggle and is thus at loggerheads.
- The SGB is informed about the Employment Equity Act (1998).
- Schools are plagued by criminal activities, like gangsters around the school, drug dealings, especially where the squatter camps are close by.

- ❑ Parents are unsupportive when it comes to resolving drug-related problems involving their children.
- ❑ Education managers are on track when it comes to transformation.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has advanced the customary distinction between the quantitative and the qualitative research methods, with particular focus on the interview technique.

The chapter has sought to present different views of education managers with regard to perspectives that enrich and cohere transformatory ideas forming an essential element of education in the country.

Transformation has incorporated the democratic way in which education managers involve the stakeholders in decisions arrived at, with the intent to ensure ownership, responsibility and accountability.

Notwithstanding the fact that teacher unions have brought about changes in the way educators have become “legalwise” and “speak with one voice”, they have also encouraged respect of the law.

Drug and substance abuse, gangsterism and related activities are undesirable as well as have an inclination to wrestle back the progress made by transformation so far. Education managers must continue to further entrench in the youth a sense of social responsibility and respect of own life.

Of significance, is the education managers’ continued attempt to affirm and validate the role played by the School Governing Bodies and other legal structures in collectively engaging themselves in school matters.

The education managers' effort to interactively mediate between the school and the community must continue to indicate the change envisaged in the South African education.

GUIDELINES FOR THE EFFECTIVE

The next chapter will extensively give relevance to the practical efforts of this research by encouraging implementation of the guidelines in order to give the management of transformation a face and to assist education managers to manage transformation in their schools more effectively.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to the literature survey and the empirical investigations conducted in the 1000 sample of secondary schools in the Orange Free State, the following guidelines can be established. If education managers could implement the guidelines of management of their schools, they should be able to manage transformation more effectively.

2.2 GUIDELINES FROM THE LITERATURE STUDY

The following guidelines, affecting all the stakeholders, are derived from the literature study:

2.2.1 Quality management as a transformation measure

Whitaker and Moss (1994:50) (cf. Chapter 3 paragraph 3.2) explain quality management as a means of ensuring that the standards of performance are high and set high enough for all concerned, in order to ensure that school personnel have a greater degree of consciousness and accountability towards authority.

The education manager will be able to fulfil the above conditions obligations by paying particular attention to the following areas of concern: