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## **Research as a Respectful Practice: an Exploration of the Practice of Respect in Qualitative Research**

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# Research as a Respectful Practice: an Exploration of the Practice of Respect in Qualitative Research

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## Abstract

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This article explores the practice of respect within qualitative research methods. As interpersonal respect plays a significant role in the esteem felt within a relationship, it can also serve to cultivate trust between researchers and their participants in a research study. This article details the findings of a research study examining respect between a teacher and her pupils by extending the investigation into their experiences of feeling respected during the research process. The emerging data found that participants believed respect to be linked with an esteem of their contribution as well as the relational capacity of the researcher to fully convey this esteem. The reciprocation of esteem by participants was cited helping them to trust a researcher and to a more honest engagement with the study. However, unintentional collusion through this increased rapport emerged as a salient issue and therefore possibly diminishing the validity of the research findings.

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**Keywords:** respect, self-respect, reciprocity, trust, collusion

# **Investigación como una Práctica Respetuosa: una Exploración de la Práctica del Respeto en la Investigación Cualitativa**

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## **Resumen**

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Este artículo explora la práctica del respeto dentro de los métodos de investigación cualitativa. Cómo el respeto interpersonal juega un papel importante en la estima sentida dentro de una relación, así cómo también puede servir para cultivar la confianza entre los investigadores y sus participantes en un estudio de investigación. Este artículo detalla los resultados de un estudio de investigación que examina el respeto entre un profesor y sus alumnos mediante la ampliación de la investigación sobre sus experiencias de sentirse respetado durante el proceso de investigación. Los datos emergentes encontraron que los participantes creían que el respeto está vinculado con la estima de su contribución, así como también la capacidad relacional del investigador para transmitir plenamente esta estima. La reciprocidad de la estima de los participantes fue citada ayudándolos a confiar en un investigador y comprometerse más honestamente con el estudio. Sin embargo, la colusión no intencional a través del desarrollo de la relación entre participante(s) e investigador(es) surge como un asunto relevante y, por lo tanto, posiblemente, disminuye la validez de los resultados de la investigación.

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**Palabras clave:** respeto, reciprocidad, confianza, complicidad

**H**ow is respect conceived of, and practiced, by participants and researchers within a qualitative research study and how can it shape the study? This article explores a study that investigated the conceptions and practices of respect, and its place within qualitative research practices, over a three year longitudinal study. I will begin by arguing that the social constructivist underpinnings of interpersonal respect are a central component of the meaning-making process within qualitative research methods. Next, I will detail the methodology of this research and the qualitative research practices within it. The discussion of the findings of this study is then explored through the practice of respectful esteem, its effects on this research, and the possible collusion that might have existed. Finally, the limitations of the study are explored and the conclusions of this research and recommendations from these findings are made.

## **Literature Review**

### **Researcher-Researchee Relationships in Qualitative Research**

What is the purpose of researcher-researchee relationships within qualitative research? Considering the interpretation of qualitative research methods as centred on the belief that ‘people are constantly involved in interpreting their ever changing world [and] researchers...are interpretivists [that] believe that the social world is constructed by people’ (Williamson, 2006, p.84). Qualitative researchers examine the experiences of human beings as they live in the world and how they make sense of it (Morrow, 2007; Schwandt, 2001). It is this meaning that human beings apply to their experiences which is an integral part in human life (Frankl, 1963) as people will impose order on their world in an effort to construct that meaning (Krauss, 2005, p.760). Arguably, the role of qualitative research, and by extension the purpose of a researcher-researchee relationship, is to better understand this meaning-making process (*Ibid*).

Human beings do not create meaning by themselves as they ‘acquire language, knowledge, attitudes ...and value judgements from their society. In short, meaning is owned by the culture and society, and passed along to each new member’ (Baumeister, 1991, pp.25-26). These cultural influences can be communicated through social interactions with others. Through these social interactions human beings can connect with one another in

what Buber (2002) describes as an “I-thou” rather than an “I-it” relationship. In this relationship between human beings, a connection exists where one does not see the other as an object but as a fellow human being. The roles of researchers are particularly significant as they:-

Roles as researchers are socially constructed, as they are enacted in a particular situation with particular affordances. They are grounded in meanings, aims, and values that are shared or inferred, and also within personally held values, aims, and theories that are implicit, and not shared or only partly shared...role perceptions and enactments saturate every other decision, interpretation, and act in the classroom and in the research. They are methodologically fundamental (Lapadat et al., 2005, p. 16).

Put simply, a researcher-researchee relationship is a social meaning-making process designed to understand other social meaning-making processes.

However, the researcher and researchee do not have an equal voice in this exploration of meaning and power relations can distort this process. For example, Kelman's (1972, p.989) analysis of relative power and legitimacy in social research articulates the product and process of social research whereby participants often have little say in how the research is conducted or how they may be represented. Participants, in such an imbalance, have to trust the researcher to act ethically in her practice (Hupcey, 2008). Kelman (1972, p.994) recommends models of research that promote more equal participation in the research process to counteract this power imbalance as well as promoting trust between the researcher and participant. More recently, Plesner (2011, p.480) builds on Nader's (1974) conception of studying up, down, or sideways to explore mutuality within researcher-researchee relationships stating that ‘Power, in such an approach, should not be understood as a priori linked to positions but as possibly emerging in interactions’. It is through interactions between researcher and participant that trust and mutuality can be cultivated.

The place of reciprocity and respect within researcher-researchee relationships is illustrated by Pitts and Miller-Day's (2007, p.179) analysis of the experiences of 16 qualitative researchers. Their study found that ‘throughout this (qualitative research) process participants influence

researchers, researchers influence participants, and all are intersubjectively constructing a relationship' and within qualitative research methods researchers 'must foster a reciprocal balance of trust and respect' (Pitts & Miller-Day 2007, p.180).

Therefore a greater understanding of respect and trust, that should be the mainstay of such a relationship, is explored in this study, but how can the social construction of respect be conceived?

## **Respect**

Respect is a term that people use extensively and in varying contexts. The interpretations of respect that follow outline the varying ways that it can be understood, across various disciplines, and lay the foundations for the social constructivist paradigm that I adopted to frame this study. The etymology of respect derives from the Latin 'respicere' meaning 'to look again' and concerns the focused attention to something (Dillon, 1992). This attention has largely been defined as esteem towards an object that can be regarded as a noun 'as the giving of particular attention, high or special regard' but also in terms of a verb towards other people as 'to respect is to consider another worthy of esteem, to refrain from obtruding or interfering, to be concerned' (Antoniazzi, 2010, p.4). Indeed Richard Sennett (2003) comments that respect is fundamental to how we experience social relations. The social component of respect, how one views and is viewed by others, leads to a focus on the reciprocal dimension within the definition of respect. For example, Ramarjan and Barsade (2006, p.4) define respect 'as the approval and recognition of the self by others'.

Indeed the motivation for a person to respect others has moral implications can be grounded in the concept of self respect (Roland & Foxx, 2003). In contrast to the concept of self esteem, which gauges a person's esteem of their own worth; self respect is a measure of one's capacity to adhere to one's morals (Bird, 2010; Middleton, 2006; Roland & Foxx, 2003). As Roland and Foxx (2003, p.250) argue, a human being has a duty 'to respect the moral law that provides individuals with their rights, and...to respect the self by affirming one's moral rights in one's thought processes and behaviours'. This duty demands a person continually acknowledge the rights of others or else lose their 'moral authority' to claim similar rights (Ibid.). Hence, self respect has been considered by McKinnon

(2000, pp.492-493) as the moral struggle between how one views oneself and the moral person one wishes to be, that therefore ‘requires congruence between a person’s self-conception (how one sees oneself) and (their) self-expression’. It is the accordance of a person to their moral code with their actions that help give a person self respect. Holding to one’s moral code in one’s treatment of others affirms the rights due them (Darwall, 2006). It is the respect for oneself that can motivate one to esteem the dignity of other people as the respect one believes due to them.

### **The Social Construction of Respect**

Although these conceptions describe the moral dimensions of respect, how this respect is conveyed, or perceived, can vary from person to person (Batelaan, 2007). People can come to understand respect through their interactions with others as “respect or disrespect manifests itself in interaction, the only way that it can be learned is through interaction” (Batelaan, 2007, p.238). It is the interactions between people that have led me to frame the conceptual framework underpinning this study as socially constructivist. It is how a person interacts with others informs their view of reality and in consequence any knowledge that emerges from it (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). It is the interactions between the individual and the society he operates within that defines this reality.

Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definitive reality. Its limits are set by nature, but once constructed, this world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism is itself transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p.183).

The shaping of this reality not only informs the knowledge people create but also has the capacity to change how a person thinks of themselves (Ibid.). Therefore, social constructivism is not simply focused on social interactions, but on the dialectic between these interactions and the person as a whole (Beck & Kosnik, 2006, p.13).

Interpersonal respect can be enacted reciprocally, within a social relationship, rooted in the appreciation of a person's dignity (Darwall, 2006) or to the esteem one feels is due other people. As expectation requires a belief in the reciprocation of an action, trust is implicit in relationships where there is an expectation (Wieselquist et al., 1999). As relationships build between people, the capacity to build trust can also grow (Ibid.). It is the continual cultivation of respect between two people in a relationship that can help to foster trust deriving from the mutual esteem of the other. With relationships where people are attempting to make some kind of meaning, such as within research relationships, the creation of social bonds with others helps to 'create a pattern in cognitive processing that gives priority to organising information on the basis of the person with whom one has some sort of connection' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.503). These social bonds help us to gain a mutual understanding that can foster an interpersonal relationship based on mutual trust (Ibid.). Conversely 'dissimilar feelings and unequal involvement prevent the growth of trust and thereby thwart or weaken relationships' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.515). The development of mutual trust within a respectful, meaning-making relationship is discussed by Kenefick (2004, p.22) that describes dialogue as an 'element of respect (which) would also include a sense of trust in one's self and others, especially when taking a perceived or actual risk in any learning activity'. The deeper connection that respect brings is based on trust and understanding which is an essential part of communication within a meaning-making relationship.

However, the perception of respectful actions varies within the context it is used and is dependent on an individual's experiences with others. "Respect should not be thought of as having a single meaning, but means different things in different social settings" (Middleton, 2004, p.236). With different meanings attributed to respect in different social settings, then an individual's action may be subjectively interpreted as 'what one person claims as respectful may be viewed as disrespectful by another' (Goodman, 2009, p.4). Actions that are perceived to be respectful are learnt through interaction with others as respect is manifested through these interactions (Batelann, 2007, pp.237-238). It is the meaning made through interactions with others that inform our understanding of respect.

This social constructivist understanding of respect has implications to cultivate the necessary trust and mutuality within researcher-researchee

relationships. Indeed Pitts and Miller-Day (2007) advocate that ‘the researcher–participant relationship that often emerges in field research is an important human relationship for study, and we encourage other scholars to join us in this investigation’ (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007, p.199). In addition, a study by Clark (2010, p.407) into the reasons for participant engagement in a qualitative research study of experienced researchers concluded ‘there remains little attempt within the literature that seeks to document the experiences of ‘being researched’ from the perspective of those who engage’. This study aims to redress this balance by enquiring from participants of their feeling about being researched.

It is the exploration of respect between researcher and participant that is of interest to this study within this relationship and therefore the methods of investigation are now described.

## **Methodology**

### **Aim of Study**

The aims of this study were to investigate beginning teachers’ perceptions of respect and its impact on teaching and learning, as well as explore participants’ experience and perceptions of respect during the research process to examine the intended coherence of respectful practice. The manifestation of respect, or lack of it, was explored in the qualitative research methods of the interviews and focus groups undertaken in this study.

Interviews were selected as the data collection method because they would facilitate my interpersonal engagement and would allow for greater exploration of the emerging concepts (Patton, 2002). All participants were chosen from the same University. An invitation was extended to all students in the fourth, and final, year of their studies to participate in this study. Participants were interviewed pre, and post, their teaching practicum and twice during their first year of teaching. The interview questions probed the factors that influenced participants’ understanding of respect. To offset the inherent validity issues in the recollection of participants’ memories (Berscheid, 1994; Brewin et al., 1993), focus groups were conducted with the students of participating teachers to gauge those students’ understanding of respect. This research was undertaken between late 2007 and early 2010.

## **Phases of Research and Steps Involved**

This study involved four interviews, of a longitudinal nature, with each participating teacher as well as a focus group with students of participating teachers. There were five phases in total of this research during a three year period.

The first two Phases occurred before, and after, the final practicum in the last year of participants' pre-service teacher education. The third and fourth phases occurred the year after they graduated as newly qualified teachers (NQT). The final phase took place with focus groups of the teachers' students of the teachers during the third year of this study. I also used a research diary (Browne, 2013) to record my own influence on the emerging data and thoughts on the practice of respect within this study. Through this I hoped to explore my own practice concerning the practice of respectful research and therefore I also questioned all participants about the place of respect during this process.

## **Data Analysis**

Based on the procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Ryan and Bernard (2000), the content of all of the interviews and focus groups was analysed. This material was transcribed and coded based on the frequency of emergence as well as their pertinence to the research objectives. In keeping with the social constructivist underpinnings of the study, 'participant validation' was used to enhance the verification of findings during data analysis whereby interview transcripts and research reports were shared with the participants to engage in a dialogue concerning their representation within the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The validity of findings from a qualitative research study can only be enhanced and methods to enhance this validity should be thought of as 'tools rather than reflections of truth' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p.988). This type of validation also has ethical connotations as:

Researchers' ethical responsibilities to conduct meaningful and trustworthy research extend beyond duty, mechanical approaches, and prescribed solutions... Instead, "responsible" researchers

could strive for ongoing and disruptive dialogues with study participants and collaborative communities (Koro-Ljunberg, 2010, p.608).

The ethical practices of a researcher to analyse the data faithfully lies with his responsibility to hold himself accountable to uphold these ethical practices (Ibid.). In addition, to align with the social constructivist underpinnings of this study, during the interviews themes that emerged in a previous phase would be followed up in subsequent interviews to better allow the researcher to clarify and better contextualise the emerging themes.

## **Ethics**

Ethical approval for this study was approved by the University under study. Of the four ethical principles (justice, non-maleficence, beneficence, and respect for persons) outlined by Lobiondo-Wood and Haber (2005) it is "respect for persons" that holds particular resonance for this study. My ethical practices stem from the principle of 'respect for persons' that underpins this study. I believe I have a responsibility to be accountable for my actions during the reciprocal process of gaining trust with participants whilst attempting to ensure the promotion of their autonomy.

To fully reflect on the importance of cultivating trust, participant autonomy, and power relations (and in accordance with the recommendations by Clark (2010) to investigate participants' experiences of being researched) the teachers and pupils who contributed to this research were asked about their experiences of feeling respected in the research process. At the end of the series of interviews and focus groups, participants were asked about their perceptions of respect within the research process and the impact it may have had on their contribution. In addition, I attempted to be aware of my own biases on respect within the research process and therefore I kept a journal cataloguing these beliefs. Notes were recorded in this journal immediately after an interview or a focus group was concluded.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The discussions of these findings are described through the themes of reciprocal esteem, respectful reciprocity, and self-respect and collusion. As I presumed there would be a pre-disposition by participants to possibly conciliate me by stating they felt respected, whether they did or not, these themes are discussed as they emerged organically and consistently from different participants without prompting.

The quotations used are described by a notation stating the person and phase of the study where their contribution was made, for example a quote by Beth during “phase one” would be described as (Beth-1). The notation for the pupil participants of teachers are given by three letters denoting the focus group they participated in, followed by the number assigned to them within that focus group, for example the first student identified in the transcriptions of one focus group might be (FGC-1). Questions asked by the interviewer are bolded.

### **Respectful Esteem**

Across all aspects of the findings, respect within a research relationship pertained to a feeling of esteem paid through such research practices as accommodation to the needs of participants and a perceived appreciation of their contribution.

Participants' understanding of respect as practiced in everyday life coloured their perception of respectful research practices. Participants intimated that their personal values and beliefs motivated them to respect others. They felt that their personal beliefs about the treatment of others informed how they practiced respect. For example when asked what respect was, one participant stated 'if it is going to affect other people you should put in 100%...be genuine in everything you do' (Arthur-3) He stated that this was based on a reciprocal basis as 'when I was selling my car, you are not trying to scam someone out of something because when you go to buy another one you expect that that person would be the same' (Arthur-3). The most common and deeply felt acknowledgement of another person by participating teachers and students was that of courtesy and manners. A few examples below demonstrate the breadth of feeling by most participants of courtesy and manners as respectful behaviours.

Small things, like courtesy or opening a door or saying “thank you”. (Beth-1)

Be nice and courteous, not to be rude or whatever...to be pleasant to people. (Hannah-1)

Be polite and accept them the way they are. (Orla-1)

I suppose abiding by social norms... not to be rude to them. (Fiona-1)

Being nice and kind. (FGM-4)

It's nice to be nice. (FGM-3)

The depth of feeling conveyed through manners echoes the work of Buss (1999) who builds on Diamond's (1978, p. 470) assertion that human beings have duties to each other ‘not as a consequence of what human beings are...(but) which go to build our notion of human beings’. Courtesy and manners are argued by Buss (1999, p.803) as a central duty in conveying respect as:

Good manners are essential to acknowledging the intrinsic value of anyone who deserves to be treated with respect. It is precisely because treating people with courtesy is a direct way of acknowledging their dignity that treating them rudely can undermine their belief in their own intrinsic worth.

The acknowledgement of another person and their opinions was largely held to be through the practice of listening to another other person. This was felt to relay an appreciation of another person and their opinions. As one participant noted ‘I think to show respect to someone you must be able to listen to what they have to say, never undermine anybody by thinking you are better than they are’ (Rose-1). A perceived esteem of their opinion and ideas by feeling listened to was deemed respectful by participants. Some examples are given below.

**What does respect mean to you?**

That you value someone's opinion. (FGC-6)

**Is that important to you that your opinions are valued?**

So that you do not feel like an idiot. (FGC-6)

Like when you are a younger and people don't listen to you and you feel like a dope. (FGC-5)

Listening to people... but it has to be vice versa. (FGC-7)

For participants during this research process, this esteem conveyed through manners and appreciation not only acknowledged their worth as individuals but also of their opinions and contribution to the research. Participants felt that an appreciation of their time and effort was respectful as exemplified through being thankful for their contribution. When asked if and how they may have been respected during the research process one participant stated 'by saying "thanks a million for coming", or saying "thanks for your time" or just saying the word thanks shows that you are not taking it for granted so you appreciate something like that. Thanks is a big word' (David-4). Another participant felt respect was conveyed through an attitude of respectful appreciation.

I suppose through your demeanour and attitude towards it, general graciousness and these are the words I would use because it is hard to answer, that is honestly the answer...That's what I would say your attitude and your attitude in the conversation, just being very thankful and you have been very, very thankful that was the biggest thing. (Arthur-4)

Efforts I made to accommodate the requirements of participants were also cited as respectful. 'Yes I did not feel hassled or nagged or anything like that and you were very easy going and you built around whatever time suited me' (Beth-4). Another participant stated that respectful accommodation helped them to feel more comfortable during the interview. 'I have always felt respected. And as well your manner when you ask to meet up and everything, you always asked so I would never dread an interview with you or anything' (Fiona-4).

Respectful actions were deemed by participants as feeling listened to by me and appreciating their opinions. 'I suppose you always seem interested in what I have to say even if I am talking c\*\*\*. You are...I am trying to

think of another word for respectful, but you are respectful of the answers that I give' (Eleanor-4). Participants also mentioned the dialogical, and not directive, nature of the interviews. 'More like a chat really rather than go through question by question by question you built on what I said' (Hannah-4) and 'I don't feel that it is you pose a question and then I will pose a question and then you will pose a question, I think it is quite fluid. You do not know where it is going to lead which is great' (Geoff-4). The participating pupils of the focus group also felt that "being listened to" was my acknowledgement of their contribution. My perceived attempt to try and include all of the participants in the focus group was acknowledged by second level pupils in the following interchange.

**Did you feel listened to today?**

Well you went and asked everyone of us what they thought.  
(FGC-3)

**Do you think that was important?**

Yes because if you just let us sit back and didn't ask us, then you wouldn't have cared about my opinion, so I would be annoyed.  
(FGC-2)

**So is there a balance then between asking someone and not forcing them to speak?**

Well everyone should have their own say and you can tell when sometimes some people don't know what to say, or don't have an opinion on it, so they would just make up something to say.  
(FGC-7)

A researcher who is sensitive to the participants and their needs was deemed respectful by them, especially if they felt uncomfortable. For example, one participant stated 'if I was interviewing I would try to be aware if they were uncomfortable or if they didn't want to talk about something, that is respectful... just being sensitive' (Beth-4). Participants stated that not feeling under pressure to answer a question in a specific way was respectful. 'I never feel under pressure or anything to say something like you say "you don't have to answer if you do not want to" but they are never very intrusive questions' (Fiona-4). One participant stressed that not forcing the direction of questions was a way of respecting his opinions. 'I think the fact that you are not trying to corral me into an answer, it is very open you are not trying to pin me down...It is left as open as possible and

whatever comes up there maybe something useful there. I suppose it is respecting opinions, whatever opinions I have to express' (Geoff-4). This esteem is of particular importance when conducting interviews. Rapley (2001) discusses the primacy given to the process of conducting an interview, in contrast to the product of what emerges, as the interviewer is an integral part in the interaction and knowledge that is produced in negotiation with interviewees. 'Interview-talk is produced in a specific context and an awareness of that context is vital in understanding the talk, and therefore the 'data', itself' (Rapley, 2001, p.317).

It is the respectful esteem, as illustrated mainly within interviews, which many participants described as causing them to reciprocate respect in various forms to a researcher.

### **Respectful Reciprocity**

A commonly identified theme associated with respect was that of reciprocity, whereby participants conveyed respect in a similar fashion that respect was shown to them. Some typical comments included:

Treat others like you wanted to be treated yourself. (Hannah-1)

I wouldn't be disrespectful to someone I didn't know, so I'd like to see that returned to me. (Beth-1)

To be treated as a person and an individual and do unto you as they would to themselves. (Jennifer-1)

You respect people if they would do the same for you. (FGN-3)

Treating people how you would like to be treated. Being treated fairly. (FGN-4)

Reciprocal respect was felt to be a necessary element of a positive relationship, for example one student stated 'The people you like more, the more you respect them... well anyone you like a bit more you would respect them because they would be nice to you. You would still respect other people but the people you like more are the people you respect more' (FGN-2). This reciprocity of respect within an interpersonal relationship was felt to create an understanding between them people whereby actions that would otherwise be regarded as disrespectful were given greater

consideration if they had built a relationship with that person. An example of an interchange in a focus group is given below.

I think like if my brother or sister ignored me I would not take any notice, I would not really care, as they might be in a bad mood. (FGC-4)

Yeah, like people you know really well, you know what they are like so you would think there is something going on, so they probably did not see me or something. (FGC-2)

If they know you well enough, they would say it to you later on. (FGC-8)

The esteem and trust that was mentioned by participants in the practice of respect appeared to cause them to reciprocate this to me. They stated this emerged from an enjoyment in their experience and greater reported honesty during the research process. Participants identified mutual respect as necessary between an interviewee and interviewer to feel their answers are appreciated. When asked if respect was necessary during interviews participants replied 'Definitely yes, if you are asking the person questions and if the person answering the questions feels that the person interviewing them is respecting their opinions and answers, there is a mutual respect then. Yes you would definitely need to have that bit of respect' (David-4) or 'Definitely because no matter who you are interviewing there is always respect, a person is not going to answer questions with that much interest if they do not feel respected so there would definitely need to be some mutual respect' (Arthur-4). As well as the ethical benefits of ensuring beneficence for participants (Parahoo, 2006), Clark's (2010, p.405) investigation into the reasons for people's participation with qualitative research found that enjoyment was a key reason that also helped to stimulate engagement.

Participants stated that if they felt they could relate to the researcher then they would respect them more and feel more comfortable. One participating pupil stated that everyone in the focus group would not have contributed if I had made no attempt to engage with them or had been confrontational. 'I mean you are a stranger and we are talking to you because you are sound (relatable). If you came in here roaring and shouting at us we would not talk to you. But you came in here sound' (FGM-3). One

participant discussed the importance of an interviewer relationally engaging with a participant during a sequence of longitudinal interviews.

**How have you found being interviewed four times?**

Well at the start I was very nervous but the third or fourth time I just came down and met you and talked away, it is comfortable, it is very natural...Obviously we have built up a relationship and you would feel comfortable talking about whatever but at the start I would have been more nervous. (David-4)

The increased rapport that is cited by Russell (2005) as enhancing the quality of truthfulness of participants' contributions resonates with these findings as both teachers and students stated the ease that the increased rapport gave them and capacity to be trustful and more honest with me. This desire to be more honest with me was stated by participants as grounded in their need to reciprocate esteem. Respectful research practices were cited by participants as being beneficial the research process. As one participant stated when asked if respect was important in the interview process:

Yes if I didn't respect you I wouldn't want to be here, or if I felt disrespected I wouldn't want to be here and I think that is something very important. That is the basis of a relationship between two people who basically have to have a common respect; if you don't have it then you would go away from that person. (Fiona-4)

Participants felt relaxed and could be more honest with a researcher they respected. 'I have always been honest and you make me feel comfortable that I can be honest' (Fiona-4). Participants felt they could be more honest if an interview was more dialogical in nature. When one participant was asked if he felt he could be more honest if he was more respected he said 'Yes, it is much easier to be... let me put it like this it does not feel like you have an agenda. When you are asked me about the education department in (the University that participants graduated from) for instance it does not feel like you have an agenda. It is like "I am just going to ask a question here and see what comes back"' (Geoff-4). Participants stated that because they felt respected it helped them to trust me and open up. Participating

pupils in the focus groups felt respected by the conversation they engaged in and because the researcher assured them of his fidelity to their contribution. 'We now trust and respect you for having this conversation with us' (FGN-5) and 'We trust you because you said you would not tell anyone' (FGN-6). Within the focus groups, creating a respectful environment helped to create an open forum where participants felt they could trust me and stated they could say things that they could not otherwise say in school. Some typical examples are mentioned below.

I would prefer if those teachers (they described as disrespectful) were here and that we could say what we said and go out that door and there would be nothing else said about it. (FGM-4)

You are probably the only person we could talk to about teachers [here]; as if there was a teacher that was always here in the school [who we talked to about these issues] then it would probably get back to them. (FGN-5)

The complexities in cultivating trust between a researcher and participants when they must talk to two related groups such as teachers and students is discussed by Russell (2005, p.197) in her ethnographic study of teacher and students. She states the predicaments of emotional attachment by a researcher and the benefits of being an outsider in a school in establishing a rapport with students. This rapport also emerged in this study as post-primary students felt they could only trust someone that was outside of the school milieu. However, the establishment of trust has many ethical implications for a researcher as well as for the validity of the emerging data.

### **Self-Respect and Collusion**

As the participants stated the practices they believed were respectful during the research process and the impact it had on their contribution, I also recorded my developing comprehension of the practice of respect through a research journal cataloguing my thoughts about respect and this research. One participant felt empathy for me due to her previous experiences conducting research for a project in the final year of her teacher education and so wanted to be respectful as an interviewee.

**Do you think respect plays an important part in interviewing, both as being an interviewee and an interviewer?**

Yes I think it does, because I know what it is like to be in your position and now I know what it is like to be in an interviewee's position so I think I can respect both sides of it. (Beth-4)

Personally, I felt the need to reciprocate the effort shown to him by participants and make a valid contribution of the research. This also extended to a personal need to be ethical in terms of the broader goals of educational research and not be in a deficit to the contribution of the research. For example, I felt respected by the post primary level participants in the depth of their contribution and their appreciation of his efforts and therefore felt responsible to make the best of their contribution to this research and represent it accurately.

I feel very appreciative of the fact that at the end of the focus groups that they all shook my hand ... I think that what I take most from it at a personal level is that I am glad that the students enjoyed themselves and I believe took something from the focus groups because I don't want to be as was mentioned ... [about social science researchers at a recently attended conference] "parasites of the people" and I want to feel that I am giving something to the participants and when they said they felt they gained a bit more of an understanding of what respect is, I appreciated that.

The desire by both teachers and students to convey the esteem they felt to me through a greater degree of honesty and engagement with this research could be argued as rooted in their own sense of self respect. This issue of self respect emerged in my journal also whereby my belief in the need to sufficiently respect participants was stated as being conveyed in a necessary esteem for them and not coercing them.

I felt the need to assure that participants felt respected and never put in an uncomfortable position. This was a central part of my research ethic. 'At the end of the discussions you could tell that they felt respected in the focus group today by the language they used, how much they enjoyed it and they got off their chest' and 'I think I respect myself more for...acknowledging that their voice was listened to...more so than did they like it? Or did they enjoy it? But that they did feel listened to...I think they took something

away from today'. I found some aspects of engaging in this research as ethically challenging and hoped that participants felt their welfare was considered. 'I feel that research ethics are very, very important to me and the ethics as prescribed by committees or books etc. should only be the minimum ethics applied to conducting research and when it comes to research, ethical principles come into play'.

Coercing participants was particularly cited. 'I really hope that I have not coerced students to participate or made any of them feel uncomfortable but I do remember John [pseudonym] telling me how he felt uncomfortable to continue [due to his hesitancy to approach the principal of the school he was working in for the fifth phase of this study] and I hope he understands'. I felt that respect should also be enacted in the research process particularly in the ethical components of the research.

I know that respect is something that has to be enacted not just obviously in the classroom, but in what you research but I have a real qualm about the coercion of participants and although I know I was not coercing the student participant teachers in asking if they would take part as I needed more triangulation, I did find it tough to ask them.

I had wished the findings to be as valid as possible due to my personal engagement with the research question which may result in biasing the findings. 'I am glad thought that I can get the chance to talk to them again about those issues and talk to their students as I know it will make a better project more than anything'. I had a strong belief in the purpose of conducting this research.

Disrespect was mentioned by students and disrespect by other teachers and I still find doing this research worthwhile...I put great personal store in the value of this research can contribute. ...I genuinely want to understand what it means and to try my best to cordon off my own bias about respect but at the same time make mention of it and try and be transparent about that as I can be.

However, research relationships can often distort the intended data (Moje, 2000) and the researcher's belief in the ethical treatment of participants and need to develop a rapport with them may have elicited an

unintended collusion between the researcher and the participants. When participants felt respected by the researcher on other capacities, they wanted to reciprocate this respect. 'I found when I had you as a tutor in University you were very respectful and I wanted to give it back to you in a way. And I wanted to do these interviews and help you out in any way I could, you respected me when you gave me help with an essay or whatever so I think it is give and take' (Carl-4).

For example, Venkateswar's (2001, p.448) investigation into the strategies of power during an ethnographic study of the Andaman Islands found that rapport can reduce the legitimacy of the research and of the claims to truth being made. Wood (2001) also asserts that under the guise of establishing trust in qualitative research, an increased rapport between researcher and participants can lead to a distortion of 'truth'. Within this study, teachers and students statements of not feeling coerced or challenged may lead to a diminished truthfulness of the emerging data. Participating teachers and students may also reciprocate esteem for the researcher by giving the researcher the answers he may want rather than the statements they believe to be true. Although the researcher's motive was to respect participants by providing a space that might empower participants' voices, in keeping with the work of Mishler (1986, p.117) and Clark (2010, p.406), it may have unintentionally diminished the validity of the findings.

### **Limitations of Study**

Within this study the power of the researcher has emerged as a serious limitation in the capacity for the researcher to respect participants, as an inability to establish rapport could have diminished the ability to cultivate trust between them, yet a rapport characterised by a mis-directed sense of esteem for them may have unintentionally inhibited my desire to challenge participants and also their inclination to be truthful. Although I believed that I was endeavouring to challenge participants and the richness of the emerging data speaks to a level of honesty in the findings, the verisimilitude of the data is in greater doubt due to this possible collusion.

In addition, the findings of the study are limited by its explorative aim. As this study aimed to explore the issues of respect within qualitative research, and had no clear studies to compare against, the findings are abductive in their validity and not aimed to frame an exhaustive

understanding but merely highlight the emerging issues for further studies to examine. Also, as the teachers and pupils were all located within Irish schools the cultural limitations in the practice of respect (Lo & Howard, 2009) should be considered.

### Conclusion

For qualitative researchers, the interpersonal capacity to respect their participants should be at the forefront of their research practice as it demonstrates esteem for participants and their contribution. Actions that typified respect in this study emerged as a focus on courtesy, listening, and sensitivity to participants' concerns. The truthfulness of a study may also be increased if a sufficient rapport and trust is established with them. However, as evident in my desire to respect participants, researchers should be cautioned of the possible collusion that might inhibit the validity of their findings and to interrogate their practice accordingly. Building on recommendations from Clark (2010), for researchers to gauge if they have sufficiently respected participants or if aspects of collusion have occurred, they could explicitly enquire from participants at the end of a study about respectful experiences during the research. In keeping with this practice qualitative researchers might foster a reflexive attitude in their own capacity to respect participants in further studies.

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