

Situated Accounts: Qualitative Interviews with Women Educational Managers

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ABSTRACT Generally, researchers do seem to pay attention to the manner in which social and contextual attributes may transform interpersonal sensitivities and communication in the interview. This paper argues that qualitative interviews cannot be divorced from their contexts and therefore it is a 'situated account'. This means that the interview is shaped by the fact that the 'cast' is the researcher, that particular woman/man, and that it is happening in a particular place, at a particular time, in response to particular shaping questions. Ten methodological issues are highlighted by the description of interview processes of the case study that explored the subjective accounts of five of the six women who were principals of secondary schools in Venda, Limpopo Province in South Africa, in 1996, in order to understand how they accessed managerial positions. The methodological issues discussed confirm that an interview cannot be separated from its context. Thus the interviewer must be aware of the contextual factors and be able to go around them. The article suggests that maintaining a "situated friendship" and employing reflexive approach as a form of localism can reduce the risk of 'harmful effects' when doing qualitative interviewing.

INTRODUCTION

There is a need to critically look and understand qualitative interviews as they have become a popular mode of knowledge production. An interview is a face-to-face encounter between the researcher and one or more informant(s), directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words. Therefore qualitative interviewing does not set out to get answers to questions, nor test hypothesis, and to evaluate, but rather to understand contextualized causal processes (Babey 2013).

It is therefore important to understand the context within which the interaction is taking place because the situation can affect perspectives and behaviour and perspectives can affect behaviour. Generally, researchers do seem to pay attention to the manner in which social and contextual attributes may transform interpersonal sensitivities and communication in the interview.

Qualitative interviews facilitate a more evocative communication of people's life experiences, activities, emotions and identities and their answers are not pre-categorised in the interview schedule. Qualitative interviews allow the interviewees space to expand their answers and accounts of their experiences and feelings.

According to Schensul and LeCompte (2012), qualitative research interviews aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants. In this case the respondent's experience has diverse qualities and meanings and the interview can explore these and their social organisation (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). Moreover, a qualitative interview is used to draw information about lives, opinions, and attitudes (Roulston 2013). The success of the qualitative interview lies in the skill of the interviewer than on the quality of the questionnaire and, thus, the interviewer should ensure that she/he asks questions in a way that will encourage respondents to provide answers in their own words and also provide them with leeway to diverge into other areas of their experience (Mucillpatrick et al. 2006; Patton 2002; Bernard 2005).

Interviews are done for extracting data for case studies, life histories, oral histories, and ethnographies. Though interviews are generally easier, they are time consuming and resource intensive and the interviewer has to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency. The three major types of interviews are structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. These types are fundamentally the same in that they all include dis-

cussion, detail, and description. The difference lies in how much control a researcher has over the respondents' answers (Patton 2002). Furthermore, these types of interviews are similar in that they all are purposeful and systematic, that is, the researcher has an object and a plan for gathering the intended data (Bernard 2005).

Structured Interviews

Here the interviewer prepares the questions prior to the interview and these questions often have a limited set of response categories. Interviewees get asked the same questions in the same way with the same probes. Structured interviews facilitate cross-comparison of answers across time and can compensate for variability in research skills across different interviewers (Roulston 2010).

These interviews are most useful if the researcher has collected most of the information about the topic, which, may have been gathered in the previous open-ended interviews. The main challenge of a structured interview is that it does not allow the interviewer to probe on topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview instrument was written (Roulston 2010).

While researchers represent the results of structured interviews in the form of different statistical analyses, researchers using structured conception of qualitative interviews are likely to present findings thematically supported by extracts from interview transcripts sometimes complemented with models or diagrams (Roulston 2010).

Unstructured Interviews

Although this is called unstructured interview, it is a formal interview in that the researcher and the respondent have a scheduled time to sit and talk to each other and both parties recognise it to be an interview (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). Moreover, the interviewer has a clear plan in mind regarding the focus and the goal of the interview which guides the discussion. It is very similar to guided conversation (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). According to Turner (2010) this kind of interview is also called Informal Conversational Interview. Even though unstructured interviews are seen as unstable or unreliable because of the inconsistency in the interview questions, thus making it difficult to code data

(Creswell 2007), they may serve as preliminary step toward the development of more structured interview guide.

Semi-structured Interviews

Other researchers call them General Interview Guide Approach or Standardized Open-Ended Interviews (Turner 2010). These are more structured than the unstructured or informal conversational interview although there is still quite a bit of flexibility in its composition. The ways that questions are potentially worded depend upon the researcher who is conducting the interview. The interviewer uses a set of predetermined open-ended questions called "interview guide" with other questions rising from the conversation between the parties. According to Bernard (2005), semi-structured interviews can be used to acquire and gain a keen understanding of the topic that has been explored in unstructured interviews as well as providing reliable comparable qualitative data.

The standardized open-ended interviews are extremely structured in terms of the wording of the questions. Participants are always asked identical questions, but the questions are worded so that responses are open-ended (Creswell 2007). Like unstructured interviews, there could be the difficulty with coding the data (Creswell 2007). Moreover, it can be a more cumbersome process for the researcher to sift through the narrative responses in order to fully and accurately reflect an overall perspective of all interview responses through the coding process (Turner 2010).

This paper argues that qualitative interviews are situated accounts and cannot be divorced from their context. The interview's meaning is shaped by its context (Neuman and Kreuger 2003). The power relationship embedded in the interview context is culturally constructed and hence subject to the influences of gender, race, educational background, relationships and seniority. The emotional circumstances in which the interviewees find themselves on the day of the interview greatly affect how they will respond and what they will say at that time. Their attitude towards the researcher and their understanding and knowledge of the topic of discussion has impact on the kind of data they will provide.

The researcher will tease out the “situatedness” of the interview by discussing the interview processes of the case study the researcher conducted in 1996 in Venda, Limpopo province (then, Northern Province), South Africa.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research as one of the modes of knowledge production deserves to be understood theoretically. In fact, according to Alvesson (2003), “without a theoretical understanding, any use of interview material risks being naïve, and interpretations of it rest on shaky ground”. Researchers base their interviews on one or the combination of the three main positions, which according to authors who use qualitative research methodology (Silverman 2011; Silverman 2001; Alvesson 2003; Welch and Piekkari 2006) are identified as neopositivism, romanticism, and localism.

Neopositivism sets out to extract accurate information from the interviewees which is a “context – free truth about reality” (Alvesson 2003:15). Objectivity, reliability, repeatability and validity are qualities that are emphasised in this position. Researcher influence and other sources of bias are minimised (Roulston 2010). The essence here is to achieve maximum transparent research process, branded by objectivity and neutrality. The main challenge with this position is that interviewees may produce only superficial and cautious responses (Alvesson 2003) which may not necessarily be a representation of the actual reality.

The romantic position emphasises a more human interaction where an atmosphere of rapport, trust, and commitment between the researcher and the respondent in an interview situation is established in order to generate genuine and open responses (Welch and Piekkari 2006; Roulston 2010). They again argue that this position does not agree with the neopositivist’s notion of researchers maintaining objectivity and neutrality in the interview situation which then requires the interviewer to create a “situated friendship”.

Like romanticism, the localist position recognises the fundamental nature of an interview as kind of social interaction. However, localism expands its view by regarding the conversation generated in interviews as inherently bound by the social context in which it takes place. The

data are derived from the interviewer and the interviewee in a specific time and place while at the same time both the interviewer and interviewee draw upon their shared knowledge of the social world to make sense of each other (Welch and Piekkari 2006). Localists like Silverman (2012) advocate that an interview is a situated accomplishment because interviewees “are not reporting external events but producing situated accounts, drawing upon cultural resources in order to produce morally adequate accounts” (Alvesson 2003).

While this paper acknowledges the three positions, the researcher’s argument is more in line with the localist position. The researcher is largely drawing on a localist perspective when critiquing the interviews the researcher held with the educational managers.

METHODOLOGY

The case study was conducted in 1996 and it explored the subjective accounts of five women who were principals of secondary schools in Venda, Limpopo Province in South Africa. The aim of the study was to understand how they came to be principals. The sixth woman could not be accessed at that time and only five were interviewed. In the study the researcher also tried to tease out which aspects of these subjective experiences might be explained through the frame of gender and what aspects of their experiences might be common to any principal, male or female. All the names used in the research are pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Qualitative research was used in understanding women educational managers’ experiences. Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were employed in order to allow the interviewees to use their own ways of defining their own worlds, and to raise other issues important to them that may not be contained in a schedule prepared by a researcher (Bell 2010; Patton 2008; Silverman 2011).

The researcher needs to make clear that in dealing with the subjective material, she was not in any way trying to discover the “true attitude or sentiment” (Silverman 2011) of the interviewees, as people can and do hold conflicting sentiments at any given time according to the situations in which they find themselves. Consequently the

context of the production of the interviews was intrinsic to understanding the data that were obtained. In order to understand the logic of these women's accounts, the researcher looked at the women principal's social positions in relation to her and their position in social space and their trajectories there. For this reason, the description of the principals, schools, and the interview processes was given. What the researcher also did was to ask life history questions in the first interview.

To underscore the notion that the context is integral to conducting and analysing qualitative in-depth interview data, Power (2004:864) points out that 'interpretive listening process leads to a truth of understanding'. She goes on to say that "A truth of understanding is a contextualised truth, with no claim to certainty that, nevertheless, holds the potential to illuminate both the logic of the interview process and the rich, complex social logic of human life" (Power 2004:864).

The researcher chose to use an interview as a tool to gather data, because of its adaptability. Interviews are much easier to use, because the interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which would not be easy or even not possible to do when using questionnaires or surveys.

DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Ten methodological issues will be highlighted by the description of the interview processes conducted with the women school principals and these methodological issues confirm that an interview cannot be separated from its context. Drawing upon her own experiences whilst conducting interviews with school principals, the researcher will show how the interview cannot be separated from its context. Issues such as race, ethnicity, class, age, being a researcher, familiarity with culture, usage of the tape recorder, had noteworthy impact on both the data collection and the interpretation processes.

Trust

Trust is very critical when conducting interviews, because the informants may withhold information or give false information if they do not trust the interviewer. Lack of trust has cardinal

influence on what and how much people are prepared to say to the researcher.

One way of establishing trust may be to get to know the informants by becoming part of them. However, as researchers try to get inside and be part of the group studied, there is a simultaneous pull to remain objective and maintain a perspective as an outsider (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). The two extremes of the roles are those of the 'friend' and the 'stranger'. This gives rise to a tension as one tries to balance these roles.

Developing personal relationships of trust has cardinal bearing on what and how much people are prepared to say to the interviewee. In fact, according to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006: 316), a researcher must establish "a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee's personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred". In this case it is important for the researcher to ensure that non-manipulative research relationships are promoted in order to make well-grounded judgments concerning what is to be reported in the research report (Clarke 2006:23).

In the study, the researcher tried to generate trust by assuring the women that were interviewed that interviews would be anonymous and confidential. As a result, all the names used in the study were pseudonyms.

The women interviewed in this research were not well known to the researcher. This, of course, shaped the interviews because they were less likely to trust a stranger. Indeed being a certain kind of insider, wherever there are "areas of commonality", is very helpful in creating a rapport and creating a relationship with interviewees (Jones 2006). At the same time, levels of trust varied among the women, for example, Theresa and Iris were more trusting. Two interviews were conducted with each one of them. This was done in order to try and minimise the social distance between the researcher and the women. Two days may not be sufficient to build a relationship but, when the researcher went back to interview them for the second time, they were more relaxed than the first time. Andrea demonstrated the most suspicion in the first interview. She did not say much and in most cases she gave brief answers even when the questions required her to elaborate. This is how part of the conversation went:

T: *Can you tell me about any good day that you had recently in your work situation.*

A: Those days are rare, very rare, something exciting?

T: Even if it is not exciting but, any good day, let me say good moment, situation even if it carried on maybe for some days, but just what you can say was good in your work.

A: I don't know what to say.

T: Okay.

A: I don't know what to say.

T: Okay.

A: Let me say most of the days are quite good more especially that last year we did have strikes and more so I still get the necessary co-operation from members of staff.

T: Okay. Then, can you describe to me what for you was a critical incident in your principalship?

A: Bad?

T: It may be bad or good, but, something that was a critical or critical incident.

A: It is only strikes that occurred. That is the time that pupils were not so good.

T: And also, can I take what you said before the interview about your experiences as critical incidents? Wasn't it critical in a way? Going up and down with the pupils and all the like, when you had to take them to the hospitals, talk to the parents and the like, wasn't it critical in a way?

A: It was not, we are used to that. In fact the majority of the students are misbehaving. We are having very similar cases almost every day.

Two days may not be sufficient to build a relationship but, when the researcher went back to interview them for the second time, they were more relaxed than the first time.

Using a Tape Recorder

The use of a tape recorder in the interview sessions might also have shaped the kinds of information provided by the women. The use of tape recorder is advantageous because it helps correct the researcher's natural limitation of her/his memories; it allows more thorough examination of what people say; it allows the researcher to take notes of key information that has been said; and it permits repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers. However, even if the interviewees agree to the use of a tape recorder, they may be disturbed and become self-conscious at the prospect of their words being re-

corded. Based on that, the respondents make a decision on what to reveal and what not to reveal and they may withhold information which is critical to your research.

The vignette given in the paragraph about "trust", also illustrates that the use of a tape recorder may affect the researcher to a point of giving very little information. Apart from lack of trust, Andrea's response might also have been due to the use of the tape recorder. She may also have been self-conscious and did not want to give "wrong" or "foolish" answers while being recorded. Andrea did not answer the questions in any depth and the researcher found herself doing most of the talking.

Prior to the interview, when the tape recorder was not on, the conversation that we had generated the kind of information needed to understand her experiences. She related her story freely and gave information that was critical for the research, so what the researcher did was to obtain her permission to write field notes and use those.

Cultural Patterns

Ethnographers view shared cultural meanings as crucial for understanding behaviour (Merry et al. 2011; Roulston 2013). However, shared cultural meanings and behaviours are not static; they are created, continued, changed and are transmitted through social interactions. Thus they can sometimes create a dilemma for the interviewer, as the researcher experienced when doing this research.

The researcher's own familiarity with the context, especially culture and the language used by the principals did put her in both a good and a bad position when they were communicating. The five women interviewed were all older than the researcher. The fact that she was a younger Venda woman thus shaped the interview to a certain extent. Firstly, at times, it was difficult for her to probe for more information because she was very aware of the age differences, and according to Venda culture, it is not very acceptable to question an older person. So, as a person sharing the same cultural attitudes, she at times, felt uncomfortable.

Secondly, it was easier to access them, knowing the nuances of the Venda language, and how to ask critical questions while remaining sensitive. As Welch and Piekkari (2006) clearly explain, interviewers have a challenge of creating

a 'situated friendship' by engaging with the interviewees at a personal level in order to establish rapport and trust. Together with other methodological issues discussed in this paper 'situated friendship' can be built by communicating in the interviewee's first language or the language in which the respondent is most comfortable to express her/himself. Using the interviewee's language is of importance as it gives them an opportunity to fully express themselves, to establish good rapport, and it also allows the researcher to interpret the accounts with cultural understanding (Merry et al. 2011). It should be noted that language is viewed as a conduit for transferring information between interviewer and interviewee and this calls for the interviewer to put more effort on making sure that she/he elicits authentic responses and draws as much information as possible using the language that is most appropriate for that interview.

In cases where the researcher has to use a foreign language, for example, English, because he/she does not share the same language with the interviewee, the challenge for the interviewer would be to word questions precisely and appropriately to reduce potential misunderstandings and ensure accurate information retrieval (Welch and Piekkari 2006).

In addition to using the language that is comprehensible and relevant to their participants, interviewees must ensure that they are familiar with the setting in which interviewees work or live or engages in so as to draw as much information from them as possible (Bryman 2009).

In this research, it might have made a difference if the researcher had been the same age with the respondents, or even older. For example, they might have felt comfortable talking about issues of culture that are discussed with the elderly; they might also have shared some embarrassing experiences with the researcher not minding that they are belittling themselves because the researcher was younger, especially family related issues. Nonetheless, the researcher tried ways of probing, respectfully. It might have made a difference if the researcher was a woman from a different culture, as that researcher could have hidden behind a cloak of ignorance as to appropriate norms.

Gender

It is not always easy for the researcher to secure the "gender based positional space"

(Mullings 1999). Mullings (1999) goes on to show that while researchers make choices about aspects of their identities that they wish to disclose during interviews, their representation is not always in their control. Social differences like gender affect and shape the manner in which people talk to each other considerably. The content of the discussion is also greatly configured by the social differences. Shared or different gender status is a basis of different social relationships.

The fact that the researcher was a woman interviewing other women might have also made a difference. Her gender was simultaneously enabling and disabling as a researcher. It might have generated some advantages in that they might have said things they would not have said to a man, for example this is what one of the managers said about women accessing managerial positions, which might have been put in a different and maybe a polite way if the interviewer was a man:

So, I think the problem is that, we are undermined by these male people. They think maybe, we as ladies we cannot head a school and that we are not competent and then we cannot solve the problems, and they are forgetting that at home we are leading our families; we are also solving the problems at home. So, as ladies, most of the problems at home are solved by us. And then we are also leading our families. So, I think that's why most of the males are principals here in Venda, they undermine us.

They think we are not competent, just like that (Theresa).

They have chances to succeed. They are always subjected to pressures. They are being pressured by the husbands at home; they are being oppressed even in the church, that's why there are no female church elders. ...So, they are used to pressures (Andrea).

At the same time, the researcher thinks that if the research had been done by a man, the interviews would have been skewed by male power, and that the women might have searched even harder for the 'right' answer because culturally, these women are socialized to believe that men know more than them.

The disadvantages might be possible resentment against a young woman already so advanced in her studies. Sometimes women have problems accepting other women, especially if

they are in a position of power. This has been expressed by Diko (2007) who argued that in some cases females are not well supported by their female colleagues on the basis that they have challenged the established patriarchal order. In a research context, some women tend to be negative and sometimes do not provide the information needed by the woman researcher. Thus, gender has shaped the type of information generated by the interview, in the researcher's view in ways more positive than negative.

Ethnicity and Race

Race and ethnicity too have shaped the type of information generated by the interview, in the researcher's view in ways more positive than negative.

In this research study, being Venda (ethnic group) was again both positive and negative. It was positive in that there was a shared language. Adesina (2000) shows the disadvantage of not sharing the language, by saying that the lack of knowledge of a particular vernacular often places a researcher firmly as an outsider at the onset of the research. Although it is true that the principals speak English, there were certainly some experiences that were better expressed in their own language. The point here is that the researcher may not get all the information if the interviewees are not allowed to express themselves freely in their mother tongue or if the researcher's mother tongue is different from that of the interviewees. To underscore this, researchers (Bender et al. 2001; Squires 2008; Wallin and Ahlstrom 2006) state that language and cultural barriers add greater complexity to data collection and analyses because they necessitate working with interpreters/translators to ensure meaning is not lost.

In addition, there were shared cultural attitudes, so that it was easy to understand their behaviour and to know how to approach them, for example, knowing how to greet and how to talk to an elderly person, and so on, which some non-Venda person would not be aware of. Merry et al. (2011) show that data gathering presupposes a certain familiarity with the subjects' culture and therefore attention to peculiarities such as proper attitudes and manners is critical.

Race and the knowledge of living in a race conscious society was the factor that the participants and the researcher shared. In broader 'ra-

cial' terms the researcher was an African researcher researching African subjects. This was an advantage in that the researcher was not 'other' to the women, as a White researcher would have been. On the other hand, a possible disadvantage could be an assumption on the part of the principals that Black people are less skilled as researchers because they are assuming a role that is commonly done by White people. That is why there is a tendency for most of the Venda people to take seriously and positively what is done by White people. South Africa has already undergone much transformation in terms of changing social identities, including racial categorisation. However, even though fundamental changes have already occurred South Africans still have much learning and un-learning to do (Booyesen 2007). While this is clearly highly problematic, and needs to be contested in multiple ways, from a research point of view, the point here is that perceptions of me as a Black researcher were equally being framed by the ways the apartheid baggage, that is, White are superior and know more than blacks do, which still shaped how the researcher and the women saw each other.

Thus these women clearly perceived me in a particular way, shaped by culture, ethnicity, race and gender. On the basis of this they made decisions as to how much they would be prepared to reveal, and when they would remain silent.

Research as Strange

This research project was conducted in a community where by and large educational research was still very unfamiliar. Most people were unfamiliar with academic research, so that when somebody said to the principal that she/he wanted to go to the school to do 'research': there was not necessarily a shared understanding of what 'research' meant. Moreover, there was a lack of familiarity with qualitative research in particular, as opposed to surveys and questionnaires. For example, it could be that the women wondered what was in it for them; they might have had no clear idea of what the research 'product' would 'look' like. This uncertainty, even unfamiliarity, with educational research meant that the women spoke freely about their experiences outside the parameters of the formal interview, but they held back from pro-

viding similar details when the actual interview started! In the first interview, where the researcher had semi-structured questions, the women did not provide as much information as they did in the second interview which was more of a 'conversation' where they related their 'stories' to her.

As an inexperienced researcher who only had the theoretical knowledge on how to conduct interviews, the researcher was nervous and anxious about not offending the interviewees. The researcher also wanted and strived to be seen as friendly and knowing what she was doing. Such anxieties and desires could greatly affect the outcomes of the interviews. The researcher however made sure that she prepared thoroughly for the interviews by also preparing questions to probe in case she felt she was running out of questions and when necessary.

Ethical Issues

An act of seeking 'insider' perspective often gives particular significance to interpersonal ethical issues. Issues such as confidentiality, anonymity, reciprocity, and exploitation should come to the consciousness of researchers.

This created an ethical problem for the researcher as well, because whenever a researcher enters into a research relationship with people from whom she wishes to gather data, and who possibly do not understand the power of a research account, there is more of a responsibility to protect their interests. So, as stated earlier, the researcher had to give the women and the schools pseudonyms to protect their privacy. In describing the women and the schools, the researcher then mixed up their descriptions and those of the schools. On the one hand, the researcher wanted, from a methodological point of view, to provide a description of these women, how they struck her, how they appeared to behave in the interviews and the kind of schools that they work in, but the researcher did not want them to be easily identified. The researcher protected their privacy by not identifying a particular principal with a particular school.

Ethical issues are complicated where people are unfamiliar with research accounts. Where people are familiar with research, the researcher returns a draft account so that they can say if they are happy with it, and for them to suggest changes. In this case, the informant is likely to

be much more conscious of the difference it makes if the accounts reflect one point rather than another, or if it presents a point in a particular way. Although they were school principals, the women researched had the public domain within which research activities could be contextualized. Therefore, in this case study, since most women seemed not to appreciate the power of research accounts, the researcher had a greater ethical responsibility to be as fair as possible about the meaning that she made of what the women told her. This then created a dilemma for the researcher: on the one hand, as a researcher she wanted to provide a rigorous account, and an account cannot be rigorous unless it is critical. On the other hand, providing a rigorous and critical account may mean being critical of the women, what they do and how they do it. There is thus always tension between critique and solidarity with one's own community, as an African, and loyalty as a woman to other women.

A Gendered Agenda

Research is conducted because the researcher wants to obtain data on predetermined issues and questions although some of the themes may be generated during the research process itself. Thus interviewers bring their own agendas and interests to the interview reinterpreted, managed or resisted by the respondents (Bornat et al. 2000)

The researcher introduced the question of gender into her set of questions because she wanted to find out if the principals' experiences could be explained in terms of gender. So the questions that she asked are at least partially responsible for the answers that she received, as in the case with Jane:

T: *How is your relationship with the pupils?*

J: *I cannot say they are afraid of me. I think they respect me. They take my instructions and the teachers' instructions. It is only when I am away that they misbehave because when I come back I get a lot of reports about what the children were doing during my absence, problems like when the pupil is differing with the teacher.*

T: *Do boys and girls behave differently towards you?*

J: *Girls are very cooperative and positive. Boys who are coming for the first time are un-*

cooperative and aggressive at the beginning and later on after two to three months, they get into tune and cooperate. I see that when I tell them to pick up the papers lying around you always see the new boys hesitating to do what I am telling them to do. But after two to three months they carry out my instructions without problems.

T: *How was the reaction of the staff and the parents when you arrived at the school?*

J: *The school was started by me. I was the first principal of the school. The staff members were very receptive of me and I did not encounter serious problems. The school committee was very cooperative and as such I got the parents' support.*

T: *What about the male teacher's reaction?*

J: *They were all positive towards me. They were the children that I taught at school. Even when we had some misunderstandings I could see that it was because of the stage (youth) and I sat down with them and talked with them nicely until they understood.*

T: *And the female teachers reaction?*

J: *There were no ladies. All were men.*

This further underscores the point that the interview is a situated account. This means that the interview was shaped by the fact that the 'cast' was myself, that particular woman, and that it was happening in a particular place, at a particular time, in response to particular shaping questions.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity as stated by Spencer et al. (2003) is "showing awareness of the importance of research on the researcher and vice versa; recognizing how values, assumptions and presence of the researcher may impact on data". It therefore requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings from the beginning of the research process until the end. It is important for the researcher to be aware of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Thus, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005), recognizing the concurrence of these identities is useful in constructing relationships with respondents."

To explain further what reflexivity is, Willing (2001) talks about two types of reflexivity: personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity.

'Personal reflexivity' involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. 'Epistemological reflexivity' requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found?' How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? Thus, epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings.

Qualitative interview situates the researcher's subjective experiences as part of the text account. This research account was obviously also shaped by the researcher's own assumptions and her position, the self-in-the research. The researcher's assumption underlying the research she conducted was that issues in management must be more equitable; the researcher started this research with the view that more women ought to have access to managerial positions. The researcher needed to understand why they do not end up in such jobs, and she was committed to finding ways in which gender can be taken into account in policy formulation. The point is, as a researcher, one needs to be aware of these assumptions.

Insider/Outsider Status

Issues around being an insider or outsider, or both at different times also shape the research process. Therefore, there is a need for researchers to be constantly self-conscious about their role, interaction, and their theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates (Delamont 2009). In this study the researcher had to be reflexive when interviewing the principals. The researcher was always conscious of the fact that her "position-alities were not mutually exclusive and that she could be both an insider and an outsider in the same time and space" (Rubin 2006: 308).

This is what the researcher has tried to do in this particular study.

Recent discussions are increasingly discovering that insider/outsider status is fluid. When collecting data, there is a good bit of slippage and fluidity between these two statuses (Rabe 2003). Insider/outsider status has a great impact on the interview account in the way the researcher is treated by the community, the way in which the researcher is approached, the information given or not given, and the feelings portrayed or not portrayed towards them. All tell the story of their own. What is critical for a researcher though, is that as much as an insider is able to obtain meaningful information, the outsider can obtain different yet valuable information precisely because of his/her insider/outsider status (Rabe 2003).

Thus it may be correct to argue that concerning knowledge construction, an insider's understanding will be different from, but as valid as, what an outsider understands. It can further be argued that a richer fuller picture can be obtained by incorporating, where possible, both insider and outsider perspectives and both statuses require additional persuasion to ensure understanding.

It is also crucial to present oneself as a 'temporary insider' by actively displaying the knowledge of the subject under discussion (Gregory and Ruby 2011). This can also be done firstly, by constantly displaying aspects of your identity that are non-threatening regardless of whether you are an insider or an outsider. Building rapport (Turgo 2012) is important in presenting oneself as a 'temporary insider'. Planning to have more than one interview with chief respondents is important to establish trust. In cases where the researcher comes across interviewees who are reluctant to provide information, they may open up when researchers talk to them for the second or third time.

In this study, the researcher considered herself as an insider in the world of management. While the researcher had never been a school principal, and could not be 'inside' the experience, she had worked in schools and taught School Management (as a subject) in a college, so, she had some theoretical views of what it might be like to be a principal, even if she did not have direct experience. She was an insider in that she had been in the schools, been in similar kinds of schools herself. So, the researcher was

positioned sometimes as an outsider and sometimes as an insider.

CONCLUSION

All the methodological issues discussed in this paper indicate that an interview is indeed a situated account, and that qualitative interviews cannot be divorced from their context. This means that the interview is shaped by the fact that the 'cast' was the researcher, that particular woman/man, and that it is happening in a particular place, at a particular time, in response to particular shaping questions. All the researcher experiences regarding the ten methodological issues discussed in this paper, positive or negative, enabling or disabling, advantaging or disadvantaging, demonstrate the influence of the context upon research activities, and, particularly the qualitative interview. The issue here is that the interviewer must be aware of the contextual factors and be able to go around them irrespective of whether the interviewer is experienced or not. A reflexive approach can reduce the risk of 'harmful effects' when doing qualitative interviewing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To establish trust, it is important for the researcher to ensure that non-manipulative research relationships are promoted in order to make well-grounded judgments concerning what is to be reported in the research report. To take care of the different cultural patterns which may include language and behaviour, together with other methodological issues discussed in this paper, 'situated friendship' can be built by communicating in the interviewee's first language or the language in which the respondent is most comfortable to express her/himself. In addition to using the language that is comprehensible and relevant to your participants, interviewees must ensure that they are familiar with the setting in which interviewees work or live or engage in order to draw as much information from them as possible.

To ensure that issues of race and ethnicity do not influence the research negatively, data gathering presupposes a certain familiarity with the interviewees' culture. This therefore requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings from the begin-

ning of the research process until the end is required. As a researcher, one needs to be aware of all the assumptions. Moreover, a richer fuller picture can be obtained by incorporating, where possible, both insider and outsider perspectives and both statuses require additional persuasion to ensure understanding. Searching for 'shared positional space' is critical if a researcher is to collect data that is useful using interviews. This is done by the process of self-representation where you create a space during interviews that allows respondents to share information freely.

Researchers are advised to practice reflexivity by reflecting, or thinking critically, carefully, honestly and openly, about the research experience and process. Furthermore, it is important to practice firstly, 'transparent reflexivity' when analysing and interpreting data. In this case the researchers have to share the writing of the text, or make an explicit disclosure of the circumstances surrounding the collection of data and their analyses. Secondly, the context within which the research was conducted has to be made explicit by revealing the circumstances that surrounds data collection and analysis.

According to localists, the data are derived from the interviewer and the interviewee in a specific time and place while at the same time both the interviewer and interviewee draw upon their shared knowledge of the social world to make sense of each other. It is therefore advisable to use the above mentioned guidelines while conducting a qualitative interview.

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