

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM , SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

The Participant - Researcher Relationship in Educational Research

MPhil. thesis

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Abstract

This dissertation presents the outcomes of an empirical study of participation in educational research. Through individual interviews, the research explored the experiences and perceptions of a group of fifteen current or former teachers who had taken part in the educational research of others. This study suggests that the majority of this group of participants had been involved in research which did not conform to the expectations laid down in the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association. Participants' reported experiences, however, were not generally associated with concerns over research ethics but were often strongly influenced by the attitude of the individual researchers with whom they had contact. It also emerged that participants' past histories of research involvement played a significant part in shaping their expectations and experiences of research involvement. This suggests that knowledge of the participation histories of those who take part in educational research might be a productive means for informing the development of research methodologies and could also suggest methods to target future recruitment of participants more effectively

1. Introduction and justification for the study

1.1 Introduction

This is an empirical study of participation in educational research. It seeks to explore something of how it feels and what it means to take part in the research of others through the first hand accounts of those who had experience of being research participants in this way prior to taking part in this study. The field of inquiry covered by this work could be considered as research ethics, but with 'ethics' here conceived of in a broader sense than is generally implied when, for example, it is used in connection with regulatory ethical frameworks. I feel it is important to make the point right at the start that the aim of this study was not to bring to light what might be seen as examples of ethical shortcomings on the part of researchers but rather to inform a refinement of the way researchers approach participants both in the sense of ethical regulation and also in broader methodological terms. Indeed, I argue that an attitude on the part of the research community, in which relations with participants are seen primarily in ethical terms, contributes to the difficulty faced by those seeking to recruit participants to studies such as this. Research on participation should be a legitimate area of research *per se* but, as I will attempt to show, an understanding of the complexities of this relationship would be more secure were it based on empirical research and not on researchers' own, at best indirectly informed and frequently theory laden speculations about the relationship. Empirical research, I suggest, offers the prospect of informing research methodologies that are more responsive to what participants bring with them to the research encounter.

It is generally accepted that an ethical relationship between researchers and their participants should be one in which researchers seek to avoid harm occurring to participants as a result of their involvement in research and, moreover, this relationship should be one in which the researcher demonstrates respect for participants through a concern for their dignity and privacy (British

Educational Research Association 2004; Social Research Association 2003). Whilst this investigation does indeed explore the perceptions of research participants in relation to concerns of this nature, it also considers wider aspects of the relationship between researcher and participant which, I argue, are perhaps of more significance to participants in respect of how and whether they volunteer to take part in educational research in the future.

This study presents an account of the experiences of fifteen qualified teachers who had previously participated, in differing ways, in educational research. Both the nature of those experiences and the disposition of the individuals concerned, before and following their experience of participation are explored. These experiences and perceptions are presented both thematically and, in the case of four participants, through extended case studies. This study of a small group of participants in educational research aims to complement existing knowledge in this area by presenting research carried out by myself with no connection to the original research and using as its primary subject matter participants' direct accounts of their experiences of educational research.

Any conclusions based on such a small sample of participants are clearly highly provisional. In the methodology (section 3) and discussion (section 5) sections, I discuss the likely sources of bias in the recruitment of the sample and the potential consequences for the findings of this research. The study also aims to identify areas in which further research might potentially be directed and identifies some areas which do not appear to have been explored to date in the literature on participation. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the role that previous experience as a research participant and/or as a researcher plays in conditioning participants' responses to their subsequent research involvement.

One of the themes that emerges from the literature review section and to an extent, from the empirical data generated for this study is that it would appear that those who carry out research involving participants rarely enquire into the previous research experience of those participants, either in respect of their history of previous participation in research or of carrying out research themselves. Indeed, if we were to take many research accounts at face value, we might believe that all participants in educational research come to that research without any acquaintance with the written products of research, textbooks on research methodology or previous contact with members of the research community. To the extent that these are prevalent assumptions which potentially influence the design of educational research, there is an argument for exploring the nature and validity of such assumptions. This review would seem to be timely since it would appear that teachers in schools in the United Kingdom are, at the time of writing, being encouraged to undertake Masters studies involving the study of and participation in educational research, most recently through the proposed Masters in Teaching and Learning.

We will introduce a wholly new programme leading to a Masters Qualification, known as 'Masters in Teaching and Learning' (MTL). Our aim is that the qualification over time should be open to all teachers and our expectation is that every teacher would want to complete it at some stage in their career. (Department of Children Families and Schools 2008)

The relationship between researcher and participant is perhaps a more complex one than some published accounts might suggest. There is, for example, a substantial vein within the literature on researcher-participant relationships viewing that relationship in terms of the distribution of power between the two parties. This inquiry will consider this dimension of the relationship in passing, but as this is a study that is primarily data-led, it will focus to a larger extent on the perceptions of participants. Issues of power relations, in spite of their prominence in the research

literature, did not assume great importance in the accounts of those who took part in this research project. One important point to make here is that a decision was made at the start to restrict this study to those participants who might be considered *Gillick competent*¹ i.e. none of the participants in this study were children or those who might, for other reasons, be considered 'vulnerable' in the sense of being participants. Had this not been the case, the question of power relations between myself as researcher and the participants in this study might have assumed greater significance and this might have been reflected in the emphases throughout the work overall. As such questions did not seem to arise in any prominent way in this research, they have not been substantially addressed and the account that follows should therefore be read with that proviso in mind.

The aim of this research project is to explore the congruence between the unmediated accounts of the experiences and perceptions of those who participate in educational research and i) the ethical guidance that governs and informs the educational research community, and ii) the perspectives on research participation in the published literature.

1.2 Justification for study

Ethical research is self-evidently built upon an ethical relationship between researcher and participant yet in spite of the increased prominence of ethics as a constituent of sound educational research, this relationship appears to be poorly understood and has rarely been the focus of investigation by the educational research community. As Sieber (2004) points out, there is little empirical research in the area of research ethics across all of the social sciences. The comparative absence of 'research into research' in this context is, she argues, surprising since ethical research may be carried out using precisely the same methodologies as those employed in social research

¹ For a more extensive discussion of this test of competence see Wiles et al. (2005).

as a whole. A better understanding of that relationship might bring benefits for the research community as a whole, for researchers and for potential participants. Sieber goes on to argue that ethical decision making should not be based on ‘hunches and anecdotes’ about such matters as what information potential research participants would want to know and what they understand, or what they consider to be acceptable risks in social research (Ibid.). An enhanced understanding of the participant-researcher relationship might inform ethical guidance and practices that are responsive to the actual concerns of participants themselves about their involvement in research.

Improving the knowledge base in this area might bring benefits for the educational research community beyond those related to the framing of ethical procedures. A better understanding of the experience of participation might have four potential effects. Firstly such knowledge could inform recruitment techniques that encourage wider and more sustained participation in educational research. Secondly, an improved understanding of participants’ experience of the research process could support the development of more effective research instruments and means of data generation, both directly through the refinement of methodologies and indirectly through informing the professional development of researchers. Thirdly, an enhanced appreciation of the experience of participants could contribute towards research methodologies that produce more meaningful and rewarding experiences for research participants who might themselves be more likely to participate in future research and potentially encourage colleagues to volunteer their participation. Finally, more satisfying research participation experiences might have wider benefits for the research community in terms of encouraging participants’ use of research to inform their own practice or in informing research undertaken by participants themselves.

1.3 Inquiry strands addressed in this study

This is an open-ended study and, as such, it is not directed at specific research questions. Its aim is, rather to present a descriptive analysis of the relationship between participants, researchers and educational research as an enterprise. Within this overall frame, the inquiry centres around three areas; which I have called inquiry strands:

- I. Participants' experiences and/or perceptions of educational research encounters and of educational researchers
- II. Participants' perceptions of educational research
- III. The relevance of ethical guidance for participants in educational research

The relationship between researchers and participants is, however a complex one and the inquiry strands should accordingly be seen as in the light of an attempt to unify rather than limit this study.

1.4 An overview of sections 2-5

In the literature review (section 2) that follows, I survey the knowledge in the area of the participant-researcher relationship. What we know about the relationship at the moment is overwhelmingly based on the knowledge that individual researchers have of their participants, a knowledge that is often heavily mediated through work within particular research traditions such as those of feminist and narrative research. Research in different, but related fields, such as psychology and medical and social sciences can provide some relevant insights for instance, into how participants make the decision to participate and how they understand the process by which they consent to take part in research. In the methodology (section 3) that follows, an account is given of the way in which this study was conducted; particular concerns being the way in which

participants were recruited and the way in which the relationships between myself and those who participated was negotiated and sustained. The findings section (section 4) that comes next presents data from the study in a thematic way, structured around the issues that emerged prominently from that data. To complement this approach, the stories of four participants are next presented as detailed case studies, enabling the reader to appreciate each as an episode of participation in its own right. Finally, in the discussion section (section 5), the various strands of the research are brought together, questions arising from the study are considered in the context of relevant literature, implications are drawn out and suggestions for further investigation are made.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introduction, the literature of educational research has rarely focused, at least directly, on the relationship between participant and researcher. This literature review has, therefore to adopt an indirect approach by considering literature, some of which has apparently been written with other purposes in mind, but which has a bearing on the nature of the relationship between those who carry out educational research and those who take part in that research.

The review begins by considering first the relationship between researcher and participant as reflected in published ethical guidance devised by and directed at the research community. It goes on to explore informed consent; an aspect of ethics which has been addressed most of all in the literature. Next the question of actual or potential harm to participants and how such harm might come about or be avoided is discussed. This is followed by an exploration of the various explicit or implicit, intended or unintended characterisations of participants that are evident in the accounts of educational researchers. Finally, constructivist views of educational research are explored and the potential contribution such approaches might make towards understanding research participation is considered.

The literature review draws largely, but not exclusively, on literature relating to educational research. However, the literature search strategy (see section 2.2 below) included research from psychology and social science where the literature was felt to offer insights with relevance for an understanding of the researcher-participant relationship. The literature review is, however, limited in dealing almost exclusively with majority adult participation in research: as the introduction

section above stated, questions relating to participation by children, by those not considered Gillick competent or by other ‘non-mainstream’ groups are not systematically included in the survey here, although particular studies within the literature primarily concerned with such participants, but which also illustrate points of more general relevance for the discussion, are included.

2.2 Literature search strategy

The literature review began with a search for relevant literature. The British Education Index, Educational Resources Information Center and Australian Education Index databases were searched for relevant works from educational research contexts. This search was widened to include relevant social science and psychological research by using Academic Search Complete.

My view was that this combination of databases would offer access to: a) a comprehensive range of educational research literature in English and b) a wide range of literature from a number of other related disciplines such as sociology and psychology².

In such searches, a recurrent problem was the difficulty of adequately circumscribing the required area in which to look. In particular, the word ‘participation’ when added to a search string with ‘education’ or ‘educational research’ will typically return results related to research around

² The British Education Index is an ‘independent subject and author index to the contents of significant education journals published in the UK’. (Source www.leeds.ac.uk/bei - accessed 4.8.09)
The Education Resources Information Centre indexes 1.3 million bibliographic records of journal articles and other education-related materials. (Source <http://www.eric.ed.gov> – accessed 4.8.09)
The Australian Education Index gives access to more than 130,000 documents relating to educational policy, research and practice with relevance for Australia. (Source <http://ds.datastarweb.com/> - accessed 4.8.09)
Academic Search Complete offers access to 7,000 full-text periodicals, including nearly 6,000 peer-reviewed journals. In addition to full text, this database offers indexing and abstracts for more than 11,000 journals and a total of more than 11,600 publications including monographs, reports, and conference proceedings. (Source <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost> - accessed 4.8.09)

participation in education, such as widening participation for example. Similarly, the terms ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ when combined with ‘educational research’ tend to lead to citations of studies on empowerment *through* research rather than empowerment *within* the process of research. Interestingly, though, the use of the term ‘research subject’, although avoided in this study³, proved a productive means of accessing literature on participation, especially that in connection with psychology research where the term has apparently remained in use for longer than has been the case for educational research. Appendix 1 presents an indicative list of the search strings that were used in the literature search for this project.

Literature searches were generally limited to post-1992 works as it was felt that the publication of the first set of British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines on Educational Research (BERA 1992) represents something of a watershed in ethical governance in British Educational Research. Of course, this does not apply to research conducted elsewhere but the publication of the BERA (1992) guidelines perhaps indicates something of a general trend in the international educational research community. A systematic exploration of the history of the development of ethical guidance in international educational research is beyond the scope of this work but would perhaps be necessary fully to justify a decision to select a particular date from which to consider literature for this review. It will be seen, in any event, that literature from before 1992 is sometimes adduced in the sections that follow where such literature is considered to have particular resonance for the discussion.

³ The term ‘research subject’ is generally avoided, as here, in discussions of research participation as it is felt the term ‘implies subjugation and a lessening of the status of those who participate in research’ Smyth & Williamson (2004 p4)

2.3 Ethical guidance and participants

In so far as such a view could be said to exist, ethical guidance can provide some insight into the views of participants held within the research community as a whole. The BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004), is a discursive document and as such represents a view, albeit implicit, of how those responsible for drafting guidelines for the research community understand the relationship between researchers and participants. These and other similar guidance documents⁴ are, as Wiles et al. (2005) point out, intentionally vague and open to interpretation by individual researchers depending on the nature of their particular research and their own orientation to research ethics. They do not set out to model a particular approach to research or human relationships within that research but they are influential and have some claim to represent the research community.

The principles of informed consent, voluntary participation and avoidance of harm to participants are evident in the published ethical guidance documents referred to above, albeit in some cases tempered by the consideration that these principles need to be applied flexibly in particular cases. Wiles et al. (2005) describe this as a ‘situational relativist’ approach where individual researchers effectively make ethical judgements informed by their own moral stance and their perception of the particular characteristics of each individual research project. In doing so, researchers must balance a number of considerations including; a commitment to participants’ rights (for example, the protection of privacy), a commitment to respect participants in a broader sense (for example, by protecting their dignity), the pursuit of knowledge, the promotion of respect for social science (to avoid ‘spoiling the field’) and the legal and physical protection of the researcher (Alderson 2004; Homan, 1991; Homan and Bulmer 1982).

⁴ E.g. the Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines (2003) and the Economic and Social Research Council Research Ethics Framework (REF) (2005)

The implicit approach contained in the BERA guidance might be described as a catholic stance on research: self-consciously attempting to avoid universally prescriptive definitions and to be fundamentally permissive of research. In this, these guidelines seem to have gone some way towards countering Small's (2001) contention that ethical codes institutionalise a 'top-down' approach to ethics.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005), however, present a critique of ethical frameworks based around two points: that they do not conceive research in a participatory or collaborative way and that they show a simplistic understanding of the meaning of 'respect' for the participant. As an illustration of the former, they cite the notion of consent in ethical guidance, which, they argue, is generally related to the individual and not to the group of which he or she is a member. As Smith (2005) points out, this concentration in ethical guidance on the individual relationship between the researcher and his or her participant effectively excludes from its ambit cases where the individual participant gives collective information about other members of a group. The information covered by this notion of consent is thus located exclusively with the individual participant since, in this sense, ethics codes are conceived in order to protect the individual, not the group. As an example, it is difficult to identify any ethical guidance that would prevent or even discourage an individual from consenting to participate in research of which their wider group did not approve. In a critique developed through his work with those researching indigenous communities, Smith also contends the meaning of 'respect' in this context. Like Small (2001), Smith views ethical codes as being top down and dependent on the perspectives of the powerful about the meaning of 'respect for the participant' and he accordingly advocates the bottom-up community-led development of definitions of respect for the participant.

As an ethical principle, respect is constructed as universal ..., partly through a process of distancing the social value and practice of respect from the messiness of any particular set of social interactions. The practice of respect in research is interpreted and expressed in very different ways on the basis of methodology, theoretical paradigms, institutional preparation, and individual idiosyncrasies and 'manners.'
(Smith 2005, pp. 98-99)

Judgements made by researchers about the ethical conduct of their research, are *de facto* informed to an extent by their perceptions of 'respect' for their participants. As Busher (2002) writes:

Ultimately it is the researcher who has to decide how to carry out research as ethically as possible to minimise the intrusion to other people's working and social lives that social and educational research implies. (Busher 2002, p. 87)

The decisions taken by researchers in this way, however, would seem to rest very much on their understanding of their participants and this understanding could be seen to be problematic in a number of senses.

First, researchers may not be universally competent in making such judgements, particularly those with little experience of conducting field research. In this sense, the nature of guidelines intended to inform the research community as a whole implies universal assumptions about the

experience and competence of those interpreting the guidelines or, at least, about the qualities of those charged with overseeing those researchers within individual organisations.

Secondly, given that researchers' contacts with participants are often limited, one might question the basis upon which researchers make the judgements about those participants they are called on to make in interpreting ethical guidance. Situational relativism implies a series of decisions on the part of researchers about what and how their participants should be told about the research in which they are engaged. Researchers are hence expected to adapt the way in which they conduct their research with reference to the characteristics of those who take part in that research but such a process seems to suggest the necessity of extended contact between researcher and his or her participants, which anecdotally does not appear to always be the case.

Thirdly, the extent to which researchers' understanding of ethical guidelines and accompanying procedures is shared by their participants is open to question since there is little evidence from published accounts of researchers routinely drawing questions of ethical conduct to the attention of their participants.

The literature contains few, if any accounts of participants' views on questions of ethical regulation and it appears that the BERA and ESRC ethical frameworks at least were drawn up with little or no substantive input from participants. Certainly the preamble to this document does not suggest such a process of consultation.

Since contacts between researchers and their participants are often limited, there are therefore questions about whether situational relativism is practically possible in many research projects and this limitation equally calls into question the requirement expressed in the BERA guidelines (2004) to:

Ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged... (BERA 2004, p. 6)

Whilst the basis upon which researchers are able to exercise situational relativism could therefore be questioned, another challenge to the principle comes, in a very different way, from the mechanisms of ethical governance. The literature evidences a debate within the educational and social research community about the extent to which situational relativism is being compromised by prescriptive ethical regulation. Corrigan (2003) argues that formalised consent procedures do not, of themselves ensure that participants are in a position to make informed choices about whether they choose to participate or not in research. Given this, he describes the ethical procedures that researchers are required to follow as ‘empty ethics’ and instead advocates procedures that enable researchers to interpret ethical guidance in a way that recognises the idiosyncrasy of the social context within which episodes of research participation take place.

Some researchers have identified the differing degree of research awareness amongst participants as potentially problematic for universal ethical regulation. Put simply, participants with more experience of conducting and participating in research might participate differently to those who do not have such experience. Wiles et al. (2006) list a small number of studies in which academic researchers have conducted research on their peers with a view to exploring the influence of research experience on participation. In the same paper Wiles et al. present the findings of their own study in which a group of participants with experience of conducting qualitative research were questioned about the ethical management of their own research activities. The study was therefore innovative in that it gave an opportunity for researchers to report the perceptions of their participants but it also offered a window on the responses of experienced researchers to finding

themselves in the role of research participants. Wiles et al. describe how, knowing the ‘tricks of the trade’, this group of participants understood the importance of the ethical conduct of the research in which they were involved. They contrast this understanding on the part of the ‘research wise’ with the comparative lack of awareness that the same group of researchers reported amongst their own participants. Wiles et al conclude that ethical procedures might be more responsive to the social context within which research participation takes place since the concerns over ethical procedures evident amongst their research wise participants differed significantly from those expressed by their less experienced participants.

As the meaning of the ethical guidance which informs research practice is determined by the research community in the absence of the sort of underpinning that might, for instance, be provided by empirical research on participation, the view that guidance suggests about the participant- researcher relationship is therefore a limited one. Its significance for an understanding of the participant-researcher relationship lies in its importance in defining that relationship through codifying the responsibilities of researchers towards their participants. Those responsibilities find their most obvious practical application in the area of informed consent, which this review turns to next.

2.4 Informed consent

As we have seen above, the principle of situational relativism invites researchers to approach every research situation contextually yet there are some features of the research process that are present in all research projects but for some exceptional cases: informed consent is perhaps the clearest example here. Masson (2004) claims that on one interpretation of the law (and in particular the Human Rights Act), informed consent is required for all research involving human participation. Again, the absence of empirical research in this area, discussed below, limits our

understanding of practice in this area. In addition, for the purposes of this discussion, informed consent may provide another revealing, if indirect, perspective on the relationship between researchers and their participants.

Wiles et al. (2005) give a comprehensive account of the background and literature surrounding informed consent in social research. It is not my intention here simply to repeat their thorough analysis but rather to explore what the literature tells us about how informed consent has been seen by researchers and by their participants.

The discussion around informed consent in the community of social and educational researchers has in general centered around the voluntary nature of informed consent, the competency of participants to give such consent and the extent to which participants have the knowledge upon which to base their decisions over participation (Murphy et al. 1998). Most formulations of the principle of informed consent (e.g. Oliver 2003; Homan 2001) describe a similar requirement to that set out in ethical guidance that participants should be fully informed about a research project before agreeing to take part. Much of the literature on informed consent is concerned with the ways in which the informed consent process may be considered provisional. Cassell (1982), Eisner (1991) and Evans and Jakupsek (1996) all make the observation that the granting of informed consent can only be conditional given that the nature of many inquiries is emergent. Amongst others, Eisner (1991) and Clark (1995) argue that the principle of informed consent needs to be weighed against the potential benefits of educational research for society.

In certain forms of research, as Mulhall (2003) and Punch (1998) indicate, participants may not be informed either as a result of a conscious decision on the part of researchers or because of the practical difficulties of informing participants. Being informed about the focus of a study might, of course, alter the behaviour of participants (Homan and Bulmer 1982) and in 'open' research

contexts, for instance where observation of a public space is being undertaken, it may not be feasible to inform all those who enter the space. In rare circumstances, researchers have argued that a requirement to inform participants can prevent the investigation of some aspects of 'fringe' social activity, which can only be researched through covert means (Scruton 2004). However, as the BERA guidance suggests, in most educational research, the expectation is that the participant will be informed in some degree about the research in which their participation is solicited.

Indeed, the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) document goes further in suggesting that participants should have some understanding of the research process itself.

Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. BERA (2004, p. 6)

On this view, the researcher is called on not only to offer information about the particular research project itself but also about components of the research process as a whole, including the way in which data supplied by participants will be used and reported. Also implicit in this exchange is that participants should understand the nature of the informed consent procedure itself since they presumably could not give informed consent without understanding that they were doing so. This aspect of participation has been little studied but what little empirical research has been conducted hints at a different understanding of both the content and process of social and educational research between researchers and those who take part in their research. This in turn perhaps calls into question the motivation or efficacy of researchers in communicating the content of their research, details of the research process and an understanding

of the meaning of the informed consent procedure itself. These are in themselves, however potentially challenging tasks for a researcher. The following examples illustrate something of the complexities surrounding the process of informing participants in relation to their involvement in research.

Kass and Sugarman (1996) carried out a large-scale study of participant perspectives on informed consent as part of a historical analysis of biomedical research. It appeared that many participants reported having made the decision to participate in the research before they were approached by the researchers to seek consent. Consequently, participants found the informed consent form which they were asked to sign to be, in their view, irrelevant. Similarly Brody et al. (1997), in their work with psychology students, discovered that some participants believed they had given their consent simply by expressing an interest in participating. Strikingly, less than 20 per cent of the participants questioned viewed the informed consent procedure as a decision point. A common misconception they found amongst the participants with whom they worked was that the consent form was a sort of liability waiver which would limit their subsequent legal rights. Harth and Thong (1995) similarly reported an inadequate understanding amongst participants of their legal rights. In their study, they found that only a small percentage of parents who volunteered their children's participation in a clinical drug trial understood that the consent form was intended to protect their rights.

Differences in ethical judgments between participants and researchers have been well documented in psychological research for several years. Michaels and Oetting (1979) found a distinct difference between perceptions of the likely costs and benefits of participation between researchers and their participants. Brody et al. (1997) show that participants' willingness to take part in research was related to their own judgments of the study's risks and benefits rather than to the experimenter's expressed judgments. In the same vein, Skinner and Biro (1991), exploring

participants' perceptions of the likely cost and benefit of taking part in a research project found that:

Subjects (sic) do use a cost-benefit analysis when evaluating research and making participation decisions. However, the ratio they use may not be the one intended by the researcher. Compared to the researcher-determined ratio, the subject-determined ratio was considerably more predictive of both perceived ethicality and participation willingness.

(Skinner and Biro, p. 89)

Stone (2004) carried out research on the decision making process associated with involvement in a randomised controlled drug therapy trial. Her initial hypothesis was that people make such decisions in a normatively rational way. Participants in her study were asked to answer a series of questions about their involvement and their ideas of possible outcomes of their participation. Stone reports a negative response to such questions from her participants who reported that they could not see the point of the researcher's questions and many said they found it difficult to think about their participation in abstract terms.

In this small qualitative project, the participants reported making initial intuitive decisions which they supported by selective use of information.

(Stone 2004, p. 13)

The participants in Stone's 2004 study gave a variety of reasons for how they made their decisions about participation. Stone reports that the reasons behind those decisions did not always appear to be rational. Perhaps, Stone argues, it was significant that all the participants in the study reported giving an almost instant reaction when asked whether they wished to participate in the randomised trial.

Even assuming that there is a shared understanding between researcher and participant of the nature of the informed consent procedure, in order to satisfy the requirement that participants should be ‘informed’, the researcher then has to communicate an understanding of the content of the research project. This can, in some accounts appear to be an unproblematic process: in a standard text on ethics, Oliver (2003) gives the following descriptions.

A way should be found to explain the basics of the research project to the participants, in a manner which they can understand. Any simplification of ideas should not be so excessive as to distort the ideas themselves (Oliver 2003, p. 28)

One strategy is to prepare a card or flyer which describes the key aspects of the research ...This may well be supplemented by oral discussion and conversation but at least you can feel reassured that a core of information has been disseminated. (Ibid, p. 31)

Informing participants may not, however, be as straightforward as Oliver’s account suggests. His relatively unproblematic description of an information sharing procedure contrasts with the account given by Vincent and Warren (2001) of their attempts to inform the participants in their study.

Although over the course of the time we spent with the group we tried out various ways of explaining the study, and what we hoped to achieve, none of them seemed completely satisfactory. we remain doubtful as to whether we could claim that we had fulfilled the basic ethical principle of obtaining informed consent. (Vincent and Warren 2001, p. 106)

Ogloff and Otto (1991) reviewed the reading level of a large number (n=108) of consent forms used in research in psychology and other areas (including educational research) using standardised tests of readability. They concluded that the consent forms were typically written at a higher reading level than was appropriate for the intended research participants. They made a number of suggestions about how the informed consent procedure might be improved; most obviously by paying attention to the readability of consent forms, by researchers reading out the forms, by allowing potential participants the opportunity to ask questions and by allowing a ‘cooling off’ period between the presentation of information and the signing of consent forms.

An account by Boothroyd and Best (2003) however, questions the effectiveness of such measures. In their fieldwork, a sample of 287 women were given a three page, 999 word consent form explaining both the nature of the research (which was a study on healthcare reform) and the informed consent process. The form was read aloud to participants and the researchers invited and answered any questions from participants. When the women were subsequently given a six question multiple choice recognition test, only 64% of their participants correctly answered six questions but interestingly, the comprehension varied depending on how far down the consent form the information had been placed. Participants were more likely to give correct answers for information presented in the first third of the form and least likely to comprehend and recall information placed in the last third.

In an article concerned primarily with the informed consent procedure as it applies to children, but which has obvious resonance for the discussion here, David et al. (2001) make the point that most discussions treat the presentation of information to participants within the informed consent process as relatively unproblematic and neutral whereas we should see such information as socially constructed, containing messages about what participation means and as intended to sell the research to potential participants, all of which in some way define the information that researchers decide should be passed on to their participants.

There is therefore a suggestion that the basis of informed consent in the comprehension of participants may not be as sound as the guidelines and some textbooks would imply. Brody et al. (1997) conclude that important details about the studies they examined were not accurately communicated to participants. The comments of participants suggested that they had not had enough information at the initial informed consent stage to estimate the degree of personal discomfort they were likely to experience in the psychological experiments in which they took part. The authors indicate that their evidence suggested that participants experiencing distress were highly unlikely to ask to withdraw. Such participants, they discovered were more likely to respond to this discomfort by providing inaccurate data. Corden and Sainsbury (2005) echo this concern, stressing that it is important for the conduct of research activity, as well as for meeting on a fundamental level the requirement for informed consent, that ways should be identified in which participants are able to gain a clear understanding of what their involvement in the research in question might entail.

Adair et al. (1985) carried out research into participants' perceptions of commitment suggesting that a requirement to give formal consent may generate a pressure on the participant to honour that commitment and accordingly make them less likely to withdraw.

The requirement that subjects give a formal, public consent to participate ...may introduce such pressure on the subject to live up to that commitment that it may negate what is hoped to the subject's perceived freedom to withdraw at any time. (Adair et al. 1985, p. 61)

The authors add that such a pressure to participate and to continue to participate may well be heightened when the individual is part of a group.

The above discussion has generally implied an intention on the part of researchers to inform their participants. Research by Brody et al. (1997) however, suggests that the limitations in the informed consent procedure might not always be unintentional on the part of researchers and may indicate an intent to mislead participants.

Even more problematic are those consent forms that are written in such a way as to attempt to disguise, through the use of vague language, important aspects of a research project that might influence a participant's decision to take part. Motivations for researchers to disguise negative aspects of their studies are varied but they include likely concerns about threatening the validity of the study, recruiting sufficient participants to obtain meaningful data, and the possibility of systematic selection bias if potential participants decline to take part. (Brody et al. 1997 p. 287)

It has been observed (Malone 2003) that informed consent serves two purposes: to protect the 'lay' subjects of research: the participants, and to protect the professionals involved: the members of the research community. The first purpose is shaped by principles of autonomy of the

individual and non-maleficence towards participants. The second purpose is institutionally oriented and refers to the need to deal with participants in a way that conforms to the policies of the research community and affords a degree of legal protection to researchers. In this sense, any informed consent process has to be a servant of two masters and there is accordingly a tension between these two purposes. It is not necessary to look at studies where researchers practise deception to observe that the signing of a consent form may meet the needs of the institution and the wider research community whilst marginalising those of the individual participant. Thus Sieber (2004) argues that the consent form can be seen as a signed receipt for the information supplied by those who take part in research, primarily offering protection to the researcher and Malone (2003) observes that whilst effective as a purely legal device, informed consent does not protect either researchers or participants from ethical dilemmas that arise in the course of research projects.

Wiles et al (2008) discuss the tensions experienced by researchers when making ethical decisions around informed consent. They describe a background of increasing ethical regulation and concern over possible litigation but they also identify a simultaneous trend towards greater involvement by participants in research in ways that might be seen as analogous to that of consumers in lifestyle decisions, much as indicated by Giddens (1991). The result of this tension, they suggest, is that researchers face a dilemma: on one hand they might feel some responsibility towards protecting their participants and feel that they are capable of doing so but on the other hand, many want to work participatively and provide choice to research participants about the ways in which their data are used. The authors' suggest that the best way to manage this and other dilemmas is through effective ethical education and training for researchers.

On this evidence, the process of informing participants is problematic but once again, the paucity of empirical research into participation does not allow for any robust and substantive conclusion

to be drawn on either a qualitative or quantitative level about the experiences of participants in relation to the granting of informed consent to participate in educational research.

2.5 Protecting participants from possible harm

One of the considerations that Wiles et al. (2005) cite as underpinning ethical decision making is the protection of participants' rights and one of the ways in which this has been discussed in the literature is in relation to the avoidance of harm to participants as a result of their research participation.

Warwick (1982), Cassell (1982) and Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) give accounts of the harm that social research may potentially cause participants. They argue that people can feel wronged without actually being harmed by research: they may feel they have been treated as objects of measurement without respect for their individual values and sense of privacy. Psychological injury might be the consequence of both data collection and publication. Merriam (1988) speculates on the negative long-term effects of participants coming to uncomfortable self-realisation through taking part in interviews whilst Cassell (1982) argues that the publication of research data may damage the interests of individual participants or the groups to which they belong. Busher (2002) writes that particular research methods, such as the use of video recording or research strategies involving a degree of deception carry greater risk of harm for participants.

There remains however, a question about the evidence base upon which such claims rest. Boothroyd and Best (2003) point out that our knowledge here is limited since information is not routinely collected from research participants. They carried out a quantitative investigation of emotional reactions to participation amongst a group of women involved in a study on welfare reform in the USA. The authors found that whilst 93% of respondents (n = 227) rated the

experience as positive overall, one in five admitted to some form of negative emotional response including: considering that their privacy had been invaded, feeling pressure to participate, expressing concern over confidentiality and generalised perceptions of anxiety. From an analysis of their studies, the authors suggest that this level of adverse response may be typical although they do raise the possibility that this figure may understate the true level because of reluctance on the part of participants to report adverse perceptions to the same researchers who initially carried out the research. This has a resonance with the findings of Emerson and Pollner (1988), who argue that relationships of trust that develop between researcher and participants may affect the willingness of the latter to be critical.

Both Kent et al. (2002) and Van den Berg (2001) comment on the lack of research that has attempted to explore the impact of research on participants and the scarcity of contributions from participants themselves in discussions concerned with their welfare. As Van den Berg points out.

The discourse regarding the protection of subjects takes place between researchers, not between researchers and their subjects. (Van den Berg 2001, p. 84)

Such insights as we do have into participants' views of the research in which they are involved can run contrary to expectations suggested by a reading of ethical guidelines. Grinyer (2002), working with young cancer patients and their families found that a majority of participants did not wish to remain anonymous but wished instead for 'their story to be heard'. She concludes:

While it is essential that the interests of research participants should be protected, there does appear to be a risk that accepted practice embedded into ethical guidelines and legal requirements may not always be experienced by respondents in the ways anticipated by the researcher. (Grinyer 2002)

I am also aware of anecdotal evidence from educational researchers that organisations have requested to be named in research accounts in order to attract what some within the organisation feel is good publicity from being associated with academic research. So there may be a number of cases where participants or their institutions might wish to waive their anonymity.

One of the limited ways in which we do have evidence about research participation, albeit negative evidence, is the fact that educational researchers have not thus far been the subject of complaints from participants.

BERA has had a set of ethical guidelines since about 1998 and since that time it has had virtually no complaints of ethical misconduct brought to its attention. Furlong (2005, p. 5)

It might be argued that this absence of complaint from participants suggests that harm as a result of engagement in educational or social research is at least unusual. Alternatively, this might equally reflect the unwillingness of participants to complain in this way, as Emerson and Pollner (1988) indicate.

In passing, it may be noted that there is little or no discussion to be found in educational or social research literature about the protection of the researcher although there are instances where this is suggested as a consideration for researchers Wright et al. (2004), Goodson and Sikes (2001).

2.6 Researcher perspectives on participants

The above discussion has focused on possible ways of mapping the relationship between researcher and participant through the themes of ethical guidance associated with, and developed by, the research community. The relationship between participant and researcher has, however, been explored in other ways in the literature. Whilst published accounts by participants concerning their research experiences are rare, there is a rich tradition, within the educational and social research literature, of accounts written by researchers about their participants. For the purposes of what follows, the discussion is organised around four themes that emerged from the literature in this area: the empowerment and emancipation of participants, equality between researchers and participants, representing the participant in research accounts and the participant as a source of information. This is not primarily an attempt to classify traditions within the literature: it will be seen that these themes overlap with each other to some extent, but the structure here is intended to help illustrate some of the various perspectives on participants that are reflected in research accounts.

2.6.1 Empowerment and emancipation of participants

One of the most forceful interpretations of the relationship between researcher and participant is the idea that the research process as a whole can in some way be empowering for participants. A number of authors have considered the question of how and to what extent educational research and research in similar fields can work in this way. Several accounts describe empowerment as being an intended and sometimes unintended outcome of their research, whilst other authors take a more sceptical line on this question. In general, the position taken on this question is partly related to the research tradition to which researchers are affiliated. In the absence of substantial direct input from participants on this question, however, the literature cannot support any general

view on the parallel question of whether participants themselves see involvement in educational research as empowering. Nevertheless, the accounts of researchers can offer important insights into the researcher- participant relationship and the ethical questions that arise.

Perhaps the strongest support for the influence of research in emancipation has been evident in work with the disabled. Barnes (2003) claims that research into disability has had the effect of empowering the disabled and of precipitating political and social change. Crucially, he argues that this has come about because the research agenda in this area has been led by organisations controlled and run by disabled people. The findings of disability research have been rapidly assimilated by organisations promoting political change and as a result, Barnes argues that emancipation research played an important part in the passing of anti-discrimination legislation. Such studies with the disabled illustrate the potential of research to empower individuals and to promote wider social change but there are reasons to believe that research in this area may be an atypical example that tells us little about empowering research participants in a wider sense.

Claims made for empowerment of research participants have stressed the significance of 'giving voice' to individuals who would not otherwise have access to a medium of communication. McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) for example saw empowerment of their participants through publicising accounts of their lives as a means to challenge what they saw as inequalities in society. Other authors have, however, been more sceptical about the potential of research in this respect. Troyna (1994) and Sikes et al. (1996) describe claims for the empowering role of research in general as 'overstated, naïve and ethically questionable', suggesting that researchers may sometimes mislead participants by overstating the potential of research to effect social and political change.

Griffiths (1998) explicitly claims that research has the capacity to contribute to social justice through the empowerment of participants. Indeed, she argues that social justice is not only one of the aims of research but can also form part of the subject matter of the research itself.

In social justice research, it is precisely the effects of the justice of the relationship between the participants and the researchers that constitute some of the data. (Griffiths 1998, p. 71)

Moreover, Griffiths indicates that there can be a tension between pursuing social justice in an investigation and the need to protect the participant. Researchers, she writes, need to work *'within, against and through existing power differentials'* and adopt the role of *'change agent'* within a school even when this is in tension with being open about research with participants. Accordingly Griffiths judges that informed consent can occasionally be waived in the interests of promoting research that furthers social justice. Griffiths is not the first to make the point that informed consent is not always possible or desirable in research situations (c.f. Eisner 1991), but such an approach assumes a different dimension when it is linked to the aspiration of empowerment on behalf of participants. Griffiths also argues for a distinction between *'giving voice'* to participants and empowerment, claiming that direct reporting of participants may, paradoxically, be disempowering.

Griffiths' view of empowerment research here stands in contrast to the Kantian principle, supported by Cassell (1982) and Kelman (1982) amongst others, that subjects of social research should be treated as ends in themselves, not as a means to an end. However, it could be argued, as Griffiths effectively does, that when the end of research is the empowerment of the participant and the participant's community, ethical considerations surrounding the protection of the participant need to be weighed against potential benefits for the participant and their community

deriving from empowerment and improved social justice. This conception of empowerment, however, contrasts strongly with the emancipation paradigm associated with disability research with its stress on the research agenda being led by the participant community. Indeed, Barnes (2003) argues the point that social research on its own does not achieve social and political change and goes on to claim that many social researchers have undertaken research without substantial reference to the needs and interests of their participants. For similar reasons, (Oliver 1999) argues that it is the researchers themselves who benefit most from social research. More forcefully, Hammersley (1992) asks what right researchers have to claim to represent a community in this way.

One could make a case for saying that in this type of social justice oriented research, given the apparent absence of evidence of participant input into decisions over the conduct of research; it is the researcher who is being empowered to make ethical judgments on the strength of their own perspective of social justice. In this sense, researchers can appear to take for granted the participant's wish for empowerment and assume a synergy between themselves and their participants about the particular view of empowerment that informs the research process. A number of authors have commented on a tendency in some accounts to treat participants as passive actors in the research process without appearing to reflect on how the participant themselves may construct their role in research. Scheurich (1997) argues that the power relationship between researchers and their participants is not always as clear as some advocates of empowerment would claim. Participants, he says, are not always powerless, passive subjects nor are researchers always dominant. For Ritchie and Rigano (2001), the empowerment view of participation can be seen as implying a static power relationship between researcher and participant. In their account, they conceptualise this relationship instead as a dynamic and fluid one in which the researcher and participant adopt changing positions within the course of the research.

Vincent (1996) makes a more fundamental critique of empowerment research, describing how the term emerged in the 1980's and 1990's. She goes on to examine some of the ambiguity around the use of the term and shows that what might be called the extreme view of empowerment which refers to a transfer of power from the strong (assumed to be the researcher) to the weak (assumed to be the participant), reflects what she sees as a simplistic view of power relations in society.

Even if the claims to 'extreme' empowerment of participants are questionable, it has been argued that research participation can be empowering in a weaker sense. The view that participants might benefit from an increased sense of self worth through having somebody 'listen to their story' is recurrent in the literature (Vincent and Warren 2001; Clandinin and Connelly 1998), although the lack of a significant study of participant perceptions here means that support for this view tends to be anecdotal. There is perhaps more evidence for the opposite view: that participants resent being (ab)used in research (Clough 2004). Other authors such as Plummer (1995), claim that sharing similar experiences with others can be empowering in that it shows the individual that they are not alone. Munro (1998) argues that participation could be empowering since it might indicate to individuals the effect of social forces in their lives and hence mitigate any feeling of personal responsibility.

The 'empowerment tradition' in educational research raises a number of ethical questions about the relationship between researcher and participant. In particular, it appears to throw into relief the contrast between views of power relations in society as a whole and those within the research process itself. Ethical guidelines have generally set out to privilege the latter; the empowerment movement, whilst linking the two inequalities, has sometimes emphasised the former, viewing the participant as in some way indistinguishable from the society of which she or he is part. Yet what little is understood about participants, given the lack of unmediated accounts of participation in

the literature, may indicate that their perspective on ethics may differ from that of the educational research community and from society as a whole. Participant responses have been shown to defy the expectations of researchers; on questions of anonymity for example. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that participants involved in research aimed at empowerment might wish their contribution to be recognised and hence would wish to waive their anonymity. As noted above, Grinyer (2002) found that this was indeed the case for a particular group of participants with whom she worked.

Wiles et al. (2006) present a rather different critique of participatory research arguing that the development of such approaches to social and educational research might result in a separation of the skills of research from their disciplinary underpinning. On this view, 'research' might come to mean a wide collection of activities in which researchers from within the research community participate along with others from outside that community; participant-led research being an example. This wider definition of 'research' might be contrasted with the narrower set of activities controlled, validated and sanctioned by the research community that, it might be argued, constitute educational and social research at present. Such participatory activities, in which control of the research is shared between researchers and their participants, might offer two challenges to educational and social research as currently and historically understood. Firstly participative research in which some responsibility for the direction of research is effectively devolved to or shared with participants might compromise possibilities for building on established knowledge through having regard to the continuity of any research with previous published work. Secondly, the involvement of participants in activities such as research design, data generation and report writing all appear to curtail possibilities for researchers to apply critical perspectives towards their participants and their institutions.

Empowerment of participants is therefore a contested conception both in so far as empowerment is achievable and to the extent that it might be seen as a desirable objective in educational and social research.

2.6.2 Equality between researchers and participants

Although most research is a joint enterprise involving researcher and researched, the inequality of the relationship has been acknowledged by many authors. In some cases, this inequality has been conceived of as a simple power differential between the two and this understanding has informed some of the attempts to empower and emancipate participants through their research involvement. However, the empowerment tradition could be questioned on two levels, firstly, it could be argued that empowerment presupposes an unequal relationship between researcher and participant; and secondly, it could be accused of emphasising only one dimension of what is a complex and dynamic relationship. Recognising this complexity, some authors (e.g. Vincent and Warren 2001) have preferred the less ideologically loaded term of 'asymmetry' to describe the relationship.

Accounts of research have explored the question of how and in what ways researchers and researched can be equal partners, of how this may be achieved or approached and finally and more rarely, the question of the extent to which participants themselves see themselves or would wish to see themselves as equal partners. How ethics may guide researchers in questions relating to collaboration is another question considered in the literature.

The feminist tradition has been prominent in identifying the question of power asymmetry as part of its research project. Oakley (1981) suggesting the notion of 'reciprocity' in research interviews with the researcher sharing personal information with the interviewee. The expectation was that this would lead to interviews that were less hierarchical and exploitative for the participant.

However, as Sikes (1997) points out, such reciprocity may be seen as a form of manipulation in itself. Finch (1984) similarly argues that women may be lulled in this way into disclosing information that is not in their interest to disclose.

Acker et al. (1983) explored the relationship of women with the job market. The authors adopted three strategies to mitigate what they saw as an inequality of power between themselves and their participants in this research project. They encouraged interviewees to determine the interview agenda, established reciprocity by sharing information about their own lives and shared the written outcomes of the research with their participants. By their own admission, however, these attempts to equalise the relationship between researcher and researched met with only partial success recognising a tension between friendship with participants and their research goals. They similarly found that sharing their written material with participants was also problematic as they the reported success of this process depended on their perceptions of participants' closeness to their own ideological position.

The extent to which researchers are indeed able to effect genuine change in their participants through collaborative research projects is perhaps limited. Johnston (2000) describes a research project with the unemployed where the explicit objective of the research, was to find jobs for those who took part. The author found, however, that this emphasis actually limited the sense of common participation because however much the researchers empathised with the participants and wished to help in changing their situation, the unalterable fact was that researchers had jobs and moreover, jobs that were perceived by the participants as being dependent on their own co-operation. Some participants even described the researchers for this project as 'parasites'.

Researchers have, in some cases, aimed to 'collaborate' with their participants through inviting more active involvement on the part of those that take part in their research. This wish, however,

has not always been shared by the participants concerned. Munro (1998), for example, reports that she wished her research to be collaborative and non-hierarchical but her participants themselves did not think that their role in the research project demanded the level of involvement that Munroe had envisaged. Vincent and Warren (2001) carried out interviews with mothers about their involvement with parent organisations. The researchers' attempts to explain their research to their participants as part of the process of obtaining informed consent led them to the insight that their research actually had limited meaning for those women. Vincent and Warren point out that this was not due to lack of involvement in discussions by participants or, they claim, any lack of understanding of the research process.

We came to the conclusion that the research and ourselves were just not particularly important in these women's lives. At best we offered a period of undivided interest in and attention to what they had to say. At worst, we asked a series of questions of which they did not really see the point.

(Vincent and Warren 2001, p. 106)

Yet the complex nature of the participant researcher relationship was shown in this study when, despite this initial apparent lack of engagement with the research project, many participants expressed strong feelings of dissatisfaction when they were shown a final written report for the project. Vincent and Warren here describe their response to this reaction.

We had overlooked the power that accrued to us as authors through the process of fashioning an account. This was strongly brought home to us when we sent a draft of the paper to the group's tutor. The tentativeness, the openness to other readings, the nuances of academic writing was, to her, a chimera. Instead, she read our account as sweeping and insensitive, the theorising as alienating and abstract. Her anger and feelings of betrayal were evident. (Vincent and Warren 2001, p. 115)

2.6.3 Representing the participant in research accounts

Vincent and Warren's (2001) experience above has resonance with what Clifford and Marcus (1986) have termed the 'crisis of representation' which centres around the right of authors to interpret the reality of others. Josselson (1996) argues that in accounts based on interview data, researchers are usurping participant's rights to self-definition Smythe and Murray (2000) discuss similar concerns over research associated with life history interviews. In the context of such research, the validity of the data rests on a close involvement between the researcher and participant but, the authors argue, whatever the perspective taken by the researcher, there are methodological reasons why the partnership is asymmetric. The central ethical problem here is the ownership of the life history narrative. This has a particular ethical sensitivity since the data involved is frequently invested by the participants with personal meaning and sense of identity. The analysis of researchers is frequently received critically by participants who do not recognise their own life story in what is ultimately published but this is in some sense inevitable given, as Smythe and Murray write:

The purpose of narrative analysis normally is not to clarify what participants intended to say but, rather, to interpret the underlying, implicit meanings behind what they say. (Smythe and Murray 2000, p. 181)

They argue that researchers can themselves aspire to an understanding of an informant's experience that goes beyond the individual participant's own understanding.

It is widely agreed amongst narrative researchers that, given their unique perspective on people's stories, it is imperative they [the researchers] claim some ownership and control over the narrative they study. (Ibid, p. 181)

Price (1996) speaks here in terms of the 'interpretative authority' of the researcher. Scott and Usher (1999) make the same point that however close a collaboration may be, researchers have ultimate control over the research process through writing the final report. Hammersley (1992) and Eisner (1997) both question the assumption that researcher control is necessarily wrong or ethically questionable. Smythe and Murray (2004) point out that there are no established guidelines on the involvement of participants in the process of analysis and practice varies from study to study.

Such questions of ownership could clearly be categorised as ethical, yet they lie beyond the scope of ethical guidance. Smythe and Murray (2004) discuss the inappropriacy of procedurally driven, regulative approaches to ethics in such contexts and they survey a number of authors who have perceived the need for a more intuitive view of ethics. This is a similar perspective to the situated ethics approach (Simons and Usher 2000) which argues that universal ethical principles are inappropriate as such principles have value only when mediated through different research practices. Smythe and Murray argue that both intuitive and rational dimensions of ethics need to

be considered in making decisions such as those over interpretation of life history data. This has some resonance with the view of Pring (2001) that ethics in research rests fundamentally on the virtues of the researchers rather than on the application of principles.

It could be argued, however, that even an intuitive or situated view of ethics still represents a researcher-centred view of the research process. The issue of ownership of data in research here has an ethical dimension because of the consideration that participants should in some way be treated equally in research, yet this cannot be considered an absolute right held by the participant. As Oliver (2003) illustrates, even the right to privacy is not itself a fundamental right in the same sense as for instance the right to freedom and ethical guidelines such as those published by BERA accept this in countenancing the deception of participants in certain cases.

Implicit in many accounts is the view that participants would wish to be treated as equals with their researchers. However, as Ribbens (1989) points out, this perception rests on essentially untested assumptions. Acute though ethical conflicts arising from participants' response to written accounts might be on occasion, another common observation from participants as we have seen is disinterest or non-engagement with the research, at least in a way in which researchers might hope or expect (as Vincent and Warren 2001, for example, report). In the comparative absence of participant input into this debate, there remains the possibility that ethical discussion here might be based around the small number of cases in which the role of the researcher as interpreter of data was seen by the researchers concerned (and perhaps by their participants at the time) as critical whilst, at the same time, this might not be a significant concern for the majority of those who participate in educational research. In other words, it seems plausible that the generality of participants would not necessarily recognise Clifford and Marcus's 'crisis of representation' in relation to their own personal experiences of research participation.

The limited nature of participant involvement in the research process; beyond that implied by taking part in data generation activities, has been seen by some in the context of power relations between researcher and researched. Truman (2003) argues that ethical regulation whilst overtly taking a distanced, independent perspective of the production of knowledge is actually reflective of relationships of power. Ethical guidelines, she argues, promote the interests of those in power and alienate and/or pacify research participants. Other authors, however, would dispute the premise of such claims of inequality between researcher and participant. In the context of research interviews, Scheurich (1997) argues that the conventional view of the relationship of the dominant researcher and the passive participant is simplistic since interviewees are active participants, who often exert control within the interview. Neal (1995) who carried out her PhD research interviewing university vice-chancellors, points out that interviewees can wield considerable power; whilst Thapar-Björkert and Henry (2004) write that research participants can manipulate researchers and exercise power over the final research product.

Such insights might suggest the need for a complex modelling of the relationship between participant and researcher which might have some resonances with the approach of Foucault (1982). Power, it is generally accepted, is the capacity of certain individuals or groups of individuals ('the strong'), to secure outcomes with or without the consent of other parties ('the weak'). The analyses of authors such as Griffiths (1998) or Oakley (1981) have tended to concentrate on how power is exercised by those individuals or groups identified as strong: in other words, what capacities they are able to bring to bear in order to obtain the outcomes in social interactions that they wish to obtain. Foucault regarded this 'capacity-outcome' model as simplistic: for example, such a view does not give sufficient account of the means by which the supposed 'weak' can subvert those attempting to exercise power. Foucault suggested that power was not enacted as the result of the fixed capacities of actors but instead it is bound closely to knowledge. In a society where power operates through scientific knowledge (Foucault here

includes the 'life sciences' within this description,) strategies and technologies of power generate knowledge which in turn becomes the basis of power. In this approach, power is seen to stem from knowledge, rather than the positions held by individuals. Understood in this way, knowledge of educational research and of its procedures might be a significant factor in constructing the power relations in a research encounter with power associated with knowledge of that context.

Other commentators suggest that a degree of equality between researcher and researched may create ethical difficulties of its own. Smyth and Williamson (2004) commenting on user-led research in mental health suggest that although such research potentially benefited participants who were able to make disclosures to researchers with whom they felt a degree of reciprocity, the researchers who elicited those accounts and who themselves had a history of mental health problems, felt that lack of distance between researcher and researched raised the possibility of emotional harm to those conducting the research. The boundary between research and support roles created tension for some of the interviewers who contributed to the data generation for this study. Mirza (1998) adds an epistemological consideration here; a close association between researcher and participant may, she suggests, lead the participant into the assumption of implicit shared understandings with negative consequences for the researcher's understanding of the participant. In effect the closeness of the relationship might have potentially distorted the research process.

Vincent and Warren (2001) advocate extending the relationship between researcher and participant beyond the publication phase of research in order to counteract what they describe as 'hit and run research'. However, Patai (1991) points out that the level of interest amongst participants for such extended involvement may not be high and researchers should also consider the burden they are imposing on participants in so doing. Wolf (1996) points out that the

participant- researcher relationship can only be reciprocal to a degree, since the researcher nearly always has the opportunity to leave the environment in which the participant lives.

In contrast with the above accounts given by researchers concerning their participants, comparatively little has been written about participants' perceptions of the researchers with whom they have contact. Indeed this study is a small attempt to fill this gap in the literature. One of the few insights we have in this area is that of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) who report that participants in a study showed a change in attitude towards a researcher when they came to know that he was an experienced teacher. This might suggest that relative perceptions of status within particular contexts could be part of the complex relationship between participants and researchers.

2.6.4 The participant as a source of information

Another dimension of the relationship between researcher and researched concerns the role of the participant as a source of research data an aspect of the relationship which can raise particular ethical tensions. In the preamble to the BERA guidelines, this question of the validity of data supplied by participants is described as 'problematic' and a potential source of 'creative tension'. Some of these ethical concerns are linked to questions of epistemology and it could be argued that there is a correlation between the stance taken by authors on questions of validity and their views of the role of the participant in their research.

A number of authors, including Murphy at al. (1998) and Hammersley (2003) have rehearsed the arguments over qualitative interviews as a source of valid research data and many of the debates in this area revolve around the dynamics of the participant researcher encounter in this arena. It has been claimed by Denzin (1997) that through the interview process, participants can reveal truths that lie behind the accounts that they give. Denzin argues that there is no *a priori* reason to assume that respondents will be truthful in research interviews and he writes of the need for

‘penetrating fronts’ that participants may present to the interviewer. There is also the possibility that both perceived expectations and self-justification might act as influences on interviewees. According to Silverman (1993), the content of interviews is not necessarily an exchange of ‘unique human experiences’, and may often reflect the attempt by participants to justify behaviour. Dissonance theory (Festinger 1957; Cooper and Fazio 1984) may here offer insights into how participants could react to the perceived threat of inquiries relating to their professional practice. Similarly, the interview may be understood as ‘dance of expectations’ where the context of the interview weighs considerably more heavily than its content (Miller and Dingwall 1997).

Although the debate concerning interviews in social research is centred around the perceptions, understandings and behaviour of informants, there is a striking lack of direct input from participants themselves in this discussion, a fact recognised by Ritchie and Rigano (2001). Their approach was informed by positioning theory which gives a particular emphasis on the shifting roles adopted by researcher and participant in interviews and has something in common with the notion of reciprocity (Oakley 1981). Where this approach is distinctive here is that Ritchie and Rigano extend this methodological approach beyond the data collection phase to encompass a shared analysis of the interview data in which both parties to the research are involved in ‘making meaning’ from the interview. This draws upon Holstein and Gubrium’s (2004) conception of the ‘active interview’, where the interview is viewed as an interpretative co-collaboration. The authors recognise that this view of meaning as a joint creation between researcher and participant is in tension with ‘conventional’ views of data validity. Indeed they say:

Our identification, articulation, renegotiation of possibilities and the discussion of these with [the participant] was our “validation” process. (Holstein and Gubrium 2004, p. 752)

What is described here is can be seen in the context of other accounts of ‘respondent validation’ which are surveyed by Murphy et al. (1998). The concept of respondent validation relates to the potential of the participant as a validator of research, verifying that the data and interpretations presented by a researcher accord with their own impressions. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1986) regard an *isomorphism* between the findings of a study and the perceptions of participants as an ultimate test of the validity of that study. Later authors have been more sceptical about the potential of respondent validation in this respect. For Emerson and Pollner (1988), the possibility of direct comparison between the accounts of researchers and participants is problematic in itself. From their work with psychiatric patients in California, USA, they describe various ways in which the perceptions of participants and researchers might be divergent. They argue that research participants are not always motivated to engage with the subject matter or the process of the research and that even where they do there are concerns about how the respondent validation itself is carried out. Interviews with participants aimed at carrying out this form of validation are subject to the same epistemological concerns as any interview; specifically in this case there is the suggestion that such interviews may bias participants towards identifying inaccuracies in researchers’ accounts. Validation may be compromised, they argue by the relationship between researcher and participant, the latter perhaps in some cases being unwilling to impugn the work of the former. The political context of the institution within which research is conducted may also have an influence of the responses of participants. Finally, Emerson and Pollner point out the ambiguous and contradictory nature of participants’ responses to viewing research reports which they observed. Murphy et al. (1998) conclude that respondent validation cannot be treated as an unproblematic test of validity but rather as data itself, additional equivocal evidence that may be used to support validity claims.

Clough (2004) deprecates the sanitizing effect of a preoccupation with validating data and the use within research accounts of negating ‘academic’ language which, for him, is driven by a concern

for the validation of the research community. For him, it is the ability of research to speak to our experience, not its claims to validity that makes research persuasive. Smyth and Williamson (2004) comment on the parallels between such forms of social research and journalism. It could be argued that questions of validity, although important are secondary in both cases to the aim of creating resonance with the reader. A significant difference appears to lie with the ethical stances associated with the two professions. The codes that regulate journalism (PCC website) do not address ethical conflicts such as that between the freedom of the press and the rights of the individual. Rafferty (2004) illustrates how journalists frequently take an instrumental view of their relationship with their informants. In contrast, Clough (2004) says that social research may involve:

...the conscious theft of glimpses of people's lives in the interests of research. We steal in the name of research. We often report – without permission- those critical incidents, and because we suitably disguise and anonyms, we justify our theft. (Clough 2004, p. 376)

Smythe and Murray (2000) draw parallels here with journalism when they say that researchers should consider the consequences for participants of reading accounts in which they are portrayed by researchers. Ethical guidance in social research, with its emphasis on questions of confidentiality is marginalized to an extent here since what is at issue is not the researcher-participant relationship in general but, as Clough (2004) illustrates, the relationship between individual researchers and individual participants. This again has resonance with the situated ethics approach (Simons and Usher 2000) which would argue the importance of context in ethics but again, since the engagement of participants in this debate has been limited, it is difficult to form a view on such questions as participant's understanding of the respective roles and methods of journalism and social research. In general terms, it might be concluded that the relationship

between validity and ethics is complex and potentially contested; whilst there would seem to be some support in the literature for the claim that ethical research is valid research, at the same time, it is plainly possible to conceive both of unethical but valid research and invalid but ethical research.

Having considered some of the perspectives on participants and participation that are reflected in researcher-authored accounts, I turn now to what I feel might be a productive but apparently neglected potential theoretical frame, that of constructivism, which appears compatible with findings of this study and could inform a more responsive model of research participation.

2.7 A constructivist view

The above perspectives on participation suggest that the participant researcher relationship within educational research has not been seen as a context in which participant learning is taking place. There is, of course, some implicit irony that this should be the case where researchers and participants are most often professionally concerned with education but as I shall argue, in this section, seeing the relationship in this sense may offer a more participant-centric view of participants' research involvement and hence suggest a productive basis for extending our understanding of the participant researcher relationship. A perspective on participant learning that I feel perhaps has an obvious potential to add to our understanding of the participant researcher relationship in this respect is that of constructivism.

Constructivism is a term with a number of meanings, many of which have found application in educational contexts. In this section, I wish to start by outlining two of these different emphases of constructivism that have been developed by authors and then show how these constructivist approaches might generate insights into participation in educational research. In an educational sense, constructivism is the name given to a view of epistemology whose first use is commonly

credited to Piaget in 1967 and which has been developed more recently by authors such as Von Glasersfeld (1988). Although it has made a powerful contribution to epistemology, constructivism has perhaps been most influential in education over the past twenty years through its development as a learning theory. This form of constructivism has been labelled *personal constructivism* (Baviskar et al. 2009) because it positions the individuality of and prior experience of learners as central to learning. Personal constructivism sees learners as constructing their own individual theories of reality through which new experiences are interpreted. Learning that takes place in any given situation is shaped by interaction of the prior ideas, motivations and knowledge scheme brought by the learner to an encounter and what they experience in the course of that encounter (Driver et al. 1994).

A second strand of constructivism has been termed *social constructivism*. Authors working within this tradition such as Wertch (1997) would argue that learning is a fundamentally social activity and takes place through a process of acculturation involving the exchange and challenge of individual theories of reality. Since cultural influences play a significant part in the development of those theories of reality held by individuals, such theories therefore reflect the relationships individuals have with others as much as they reflect experiences.

Both of these strands of constructivism appear to offer insights into the participant researcher relationship. It should perhaps be pointed out that the two terms used above do not necessarily preclude overlap between these two different dimensions of constructivism. It is, of course, perfectly possible to view learning as taking place simultaneously as a personal and social activity. I have emphasised the contrast between the two strands in order to illustrate different ways in which constructivist perspectives might inform an understanding of the researcher-participant relationship.

Firstly then, research participation can be seen in the light of personal constructivism, with each episode of research involvement forming part of a cumulative process of personal development. It is, as I comment elsewhere in this study, self-evident that the participant does not come to educational research, nor to educational researchers as a *tabula rasa*, without some view, however provisional, and however it might have been formed, on the activity of educational research. Equally, participants' conception of educational research which they carry forward following episodes of research participation, are, to an extent, formed by their experiences which therefore carry implications for the future. Those experiences might prevent or deter further participation in research by an individual or in the case that such a participant agrees to take part in educational research again, one researcher's ex- participant so to speak, become a fellow researcher's future participant.

The participant approaching a research encounter necessarily has expectations of that encounter, however formed or articulated these might be. Such expectations are constructed around the participant's prior knowledge of educational research, of its purposes and methods and possibly also informed by their prior knowledge of researchers and of the features of such research encounters. Personal constructivism would argue that it is the interaction of this prior knowledge and associated expectations with their experiences during that encounter that shape what participants learn as a result of their involvement. It might be helpful here to distinguish between two types of learning that participants might derive from involvement in research activity. The first sort of learning is research subject-related in that it is associated with knowledge building linked to the subject matter of the research. Thus a participant who, for instance, takes part in a project exploring pupil assessment might plausibly gain knowledge in this area through conversations with researchers and colleagues, the written products of research and/or personal reflection. A second category of learning to emerge from such encounters is the development of participants' research process-related knowledge. Through taking part in research, participants to

varying degrees, develop their knowledge of research methodology and ethics. Whilst it is readily acknowledged in the literature that researchers learn in this way from their experience of conducting research, what is perhaps not so frequently accepted is that the same applies, as a result of their research encounters, to participants.

Participant learning is, however, recognised by Schwandt (1997) and Guba and Lincoln (2004) who argue that education of the participant is a necessary, even if unintended, consequence of participatory research and, it might be argued, of educational research in general. They point out that all participants are altered to some degree by their contact with researchers in a way that develops those participants' understanding of the research process, even though the researchers with whom they have contact might not be conscious that such a process is taking place.

In addition to the above dimension of learning that participants might plausibly derive from research encounters, they also learn socially from their experiences of participation about what it means to be a participant and a researcher. This area of learning seems to fall under the social constructivism outlined above and, indeed, such participant learning has been described by Mills et al. (2006) in the field of nursing. This sort of development of participants' understanding would seem to be particularly significant in relation to the transmission, as a result of research encounters, of the philosophy and values of educational research and of the relationship between research and practice. As Wertch (1997) might have it, researchers and participants both bring with them to the research encounter culturally sustained theories of reality about their respective communities of practice and the research encounter is therefore a place of social learning for both parties. From the point of view of the participant, the main focus of this work, episodes of research involvement present a potentially powerful means of learning about what educational research is, what educational researchers do and the relevance of research for practice. In all three

areas, it would seem that that learning might be shaped, as constructivist perspectives would suggest, by participants' prior experiences, if any, of research involvement.

The nature of the learning that participants take from encounters with researchers has not, to my knowledge, been explored to date but I would suggest two characteristics. Firstly, as we have seen, such learning might fruitfully be explored through applying a constructivist perspective as prior experiences and dispositions would seem potentially to play a significant role in shaping what participants take away from such encounters. In a personal constructivist sense, participants might develop their knowledge of the subject matter of the research in which they are involved and they might equally develop their understanding of the processes by which research is carried out. In both respects, prior experience has an influence on what participants bring to the research encounter and hence an influence in the way in which they participate in research encounters. In a social constructivist sense, participants develop their understanding of the culture of educational research which equally builds on the participant's prior understandings in this respect and this understanding also affects how participants see the enterprise of educational research as a whole.

Secondly the participant learning that takes place is, it would appear, almost exclusively unintended, informal and not directed towards particular learning goals. However, as writers such as Eraut (2000) and McNally et al. (2004) have shown, such informal learning may have a particularly important function in professional development in a number of settings and research encounters might play a hitherto unsuspected role in shaping the professional identity of those who take part. Episodes of research participation might be associated with intense personal and social learning on the part of participants, albeit such learning may be unstructured and generate no obvious observable outcomes, save those which relate to their research participation in the future. The challenge here for the research community, as the discussion section (section 5) will suggest, is to draw upon that learning as a potential resource to enhance educational research.

Finally, it might be added as a footnote that participant learning could equally happen on an interpersonal social level within institutions. Colleagues who are involved in educational research represent potential influences in developing and shaping participants' learning about educational research. The consequences of this and of the use of a constructivist model of participation are also developed in the discussion section (section 5).

2.8 Summary

At the risk of labouring the point, this discussion has been limited by the absence of relevant literature dealing directly with the relationship between participants and researchers. What literature does exist on this subject either deals with participant researcher relationships *en passant* as a feature of an account of research whose focus was other than those participants who contributed towards the research or, in the rarer cases where the relationship is the focus of a piece of literature, that literature consists of a theoretical description of the relationship written by a researcher and with little or no input from research participants. Given this literature base, this survey has been almost exclusively based on accounts by researchers and the present study represents a small attempt to redress that evidence base.

Ethical guidance, as set out in documentation, although perhaps influential in shaping researcher perceptions and predispositions towards participants, can directly tell us little about that relationship in its totality as such guidance has been developed by and for the research community. The notion of informed consent can be seen as potentially problematic, not least because of the practical difficulties of informing participants about the nature of research in which they are about to participate, but once again literature on the subject is focused almost exclusively on the concerns of the research community rather than predicated in an appreciation of the nature of participation. Similarly, although there exist theoretical discussions of potential

harm to participants as a result of taking part in research, accounts of such harm resulting from participation in educational research and/or empirical studies seeking to find and explore such cases are few or absent from the literature.

Ethical guidance and the literature surrounding ethical guidance, provides limited insight into the researcher-participant relationship. There are, however, two points that emerge in this respect: firstly, that researchers might see the relationship in a narrow personal context in terms of a 'contract' between themselves and those with whom they carry out research, and secondly that ethical procedures might sometimes involve universal assumptions on the part of the research community about participants.

Where the relationship between researchers and their participants has been a more central focus of literature, discourses that centre on the empowerment and emancipation of the participant have been prominent. There are authors, however, who question both the sense in which and the extent to which research can be either emancipating or empowering to participants. The wider question of the balance of power within research activities involving personal contact, such as interviews, and in the process of research as a whole, including the production of research accounts has also been addressed by several authors. Writers have explored the questions of how and in what ways researchers and participants can be equal partners, of how this may be achieved or approached and finally, and more rarely, of the extent to which participants see themselves or would wish to see themselves as equal partners.

The issues of the role of the position of the participant as a source of research data and the ownership of data generated in the course of research also have clear resonances here for the balance of equality in the relationship between participants and researchers. The concept of respondent validation is significant, yet contested, with some authors sceptical about the

implication that the perceptions of participants can act somehow as an ultimate test of validity. At the same time, there are parallels between the relationship of researchers with their participants and journalists with their informants. Similar issues of representation arise in both sets of relationships, although one feature of educational and social research seems to be that participants, unlike journalists' informants, do not universally obtain access to the published products of the research in which they are involved.

A general observation that might be offered of much of the literature on participation is the tendency to present each episode of participation as distinct and unconnected with previous and future experiences of participation. Research perspectives presented in the literature do not generally consider the effect of participation in shaping participants' attitudes towards educational research in general, but an approach towards a constructivist understanding of participation might offer insights through the education of the participant being seen as a necessary, even if unintended, consequence of research participation. A view of the relationship that privileges participant learning as an outcome of research involvement might offer a way to develop more holistic appreciations of the participant researcher relationship.

Finally, there is, in so far as could be established through this literature review, an absence of any literature on what I have called *vicarious research*. I use this term here and elsewhere in this work to describe instances where researchers ask participants to administer research instruments (questionnaires in the case of two participants in this study) to a second group of participants (school pupils in both cases here). In such episodes, the 'true' participant is he or she who supplies the data, not the individual approached by the researcher or research organisation, who are acting here as a surrogate researcher. This practice seems to raise some questions which are discussed in section 5.3 below, but to date, this form of participation seems not to have formed part of discussions in the literature relating to the area of this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This was a study that presented one particularly acute methodological challenge: that of recruiting sufficient numbers of participants with relevant experience of taking part in educational research. Recruitment by means of gaining access to participants known to have taken part in educational research, which might at first sight have seemed the most effective means of doing this, was problematic on grounds of the ethical principle of protecting the anonymity of participants. Asking colleagues to facilitate such access either directly through putting me in contact with former participants or indirectly, through a release of participants' contact details might have placed me in the paradoxical position of asking others to compromise their ethical standards in order to allow research into research ethics to progress. Some implications of this methodological bind for similar studies seeking to research into ethics is pursued in the discussion section (section 5.1) but the significance for this inquiry of such an avenue of participant recruitment being closed was that the success of the project as a whole therefore had to rest on attempts to reach participants in the educational community using an untargeted 'scattergun' approach.

Ultimately, the process of recruitment for this study was unsuccessful in obtaining the hoped for number of participants: only fifteen people were eventually recruited against an initial target of forty. This might suggest either: that the recruitment effort for this project was not conducted vigorously or skilfully enough; or that recruitment from such a population in this way is not, in general, feasible and that potential participants are simply too thinly spread and not inclined, for whatever reason, to participate in research of this sort. Both these possibilities are discussed in this section and in section 5.1 which also describes the means employed to contact and recruit

participants, the possible reasons for the eventual lack of success of the recruitment strategy and possible lessons to be drawn from this study in this respect.

Given the compromised nature of this recruitment, it is arguable that the findings of this research might be conditioned by the means of recruitment themselves since, as section 3.2 indicates, the limited participant sample for this research was eventually recruited largely through personal contacts. No definitive response to this challenge can be offered on the basis of the data generated for this research although it is perhaps of interest to note in this connection that six of the fifteen participants in this study had experience of conducting educational research themselves either in the course of their Initial Teacher Education or at a later stage of their career. Some of the potential implications of this for this research and for educational research in a wider sense are taken up in section 5.

3.2 Ontological and epistemological approach

This study was informed by what I understand to be a post-modern ontology which sees many aspects of the world as essentially unknowable in the sense that facts about ‘reality’ are fluid, elusive, conditional upon the knower and subject to unforeseeable change when and if paradigm (Kuhn 1970) shifts occur. Whilst I would not rule out all possibility of ‘truth’ in the sense, for example, that mathematical axioms can be shown to be true or that scientific observations can, within certain limits, be seen to yield knowledge that approximate to truth, I would argue that the terms knowledge and truth cannot be used in the same way in connection with research in the social sciences. I here agree with Eisner (1991) that social science researchers can claim neither ontological nor procedural objectivity in their work. Verifying ontological objectivity would require researchers to have access to conceptions of reality independent of themselves and, as Eisner (1991) famously wrote, securing ontological objectivity in this way would, in any case, obviate the need for such research. Similarly, the impossibility of defining procedures of research

activity that would eliminate the operation of personal judgement undermines any claim by researchers to procedural objectivity.

I take it therefore that the 'truth' of research such as that presented in this work can only rest, as Hammersley (1992) writes, on the presence amongst its readers, of a broadly common framework of understanding. Whilst, for the reasons described above, I consider that in the context of social research, we have no access to knowledge whose validity is certain, we can, as individuals sharing this common framework, make judgements about the extent to which the claims to knowledge presented here accord with commonly held ideas of truth within the context of educational research. I anticipate that the reasonable reader will make those judgements on the three following criteria. The first is plausibility: how true the reader judges this account as a whole to be given his or her personal knowledge of similar research settings and of similar social interactions to those described here. The second criterion by which this account may be judged is the credibility of myself as a researcher and of the research methods employed both of which can only be determined by the reader on the basis of what is presented in this account. The third criterion relates not directly to myself as a researcher or to the account itself but to the plausibility and credibility of the data presented here and readers may accordingly make judgement about potential sources of bias in what is presented here.

These considerations and others which, in the author's opinion might materially influence any dependent knowledge claims will be commented on at points in what follows and the conclusions section (Chapter 5) will include a personal evaluation of the claims to knowledge presented in this work, informed by the above principles and criteria.

3.3 Recruitment of participants

Recruiting participants is a challenge faced by any social science research project and there are a number of general accounts in the literature of educational and social research of the difficulties faced by researchers in this respect. Walford (1991) gives a compelling account of his attempts to negotiate the participation of a college principal. More recently, Aitken et al. (2003) present an overview of recruitment methods in the context of clinical trials in which they write that:

Recruitment of participants often represents the largest single component of workload in a research project. (Aitken et al. 2003, p. 338)

Other authors acknowledge that recruitment may be more problematic when, as here, participants are required from particular groups. For example, Scott et al (2006) and Lennox et al. (2005) consider recruitment from amongst the population of children with learning disabilities.

Many educational research projects face the task of recruiting from a pool of prospective participants and recruitment difficulties in this respect are generally concerned with optimising levels of recruitment from that pool. For projects such as this, which seek to investigate participants' experiences of prior participation in research, issues of recruitment are exacerbated since access to that pool is itself problematic and hence there is no obviously apparent sampling frame. Given that participant contact details are rightly protected by ethical guidance (BERA 2004)⁵ and data protection legislation (Data Protection Act 2003), simply identifying the group of those eligible to participate in research of this type is, to all intents and purposes, impossible.

⁵ Not all who took part in this study participated post-2004 and so their participation was governed by the 1992 BERA guidelines. As a convention, I refer to the later guidelines in the discussion that follows although I have not been able to report the precise dates of participation for participants as few were able to offer an accurate memory in this respect. There is, however, some congruity between the two sets of guidelines so the points made about participants with respect to the 2004 guidelines will generally still be valid even though the participants concerned actually took part in research before this particular set of guidelines were published.

Research of this nature, therefore faces two types of barriers to recruitment: those restricting access to the pool of potential participants who might be approached with a view to soliciting their participation in such a study and those familiar to all educational researchers that act to limit take up by members of that potential pool.

Gaining access to prospective participants through professional researchers with whom they had previous contact was therefore not possible in this study. Two institutions that were approached refused to allow me indirect access to former participants through the forwarding of my contact details. Those involved refused this access on the basis that they considered that such contact could itself compromise participant confidentiality. This appears to me to be a challengeable interpretation of the guidance and legislation since in this process, the researcher would not directly have access to any contact details. In the absence of any further explanation from either institutions, there are two possibilities that suggest themselves as motives for an institution in taking this decision: a wish not to lead former participants to believe their privacy had been compromised by the use of their contact details for such as purpose by a third party and/or a wish to protect themselves from any potential adverse consequences of their former participants taking part in such a study.

Sieber (2004) argues that specialised methods of recruitment might prove necessary for studies such as this into participation. Her suggestions for recruitment include the use of parallel or post-study evaluations built into larger studies where participants' perceptions of their research involvement might be probed alongside the subject matter of the larger investigation. Another suggested recruitment strategy involves some degree of subterfuge on the part of the researcher: participants might be recruited to 'surrogate' studies ostensibly directed at some other research objective but whose real purpose is to explore participation itself. There are objections that might be raised to both approaches: in the former, the responses of participants might be influenced by

the connection between the two studies even if the evaluation is conducted and seen by participants to be carried out by researchers independent of those who ran the 'main' study. In the latter case, deception of participants in this way would have to be carefully justified with reference to ethical guidance.

As an active researcher myself, I was in possession of the contact details of a number of those whom I knew to have participated in research conducted by myself and by others. I took the decision not to pursue these individuals as potential participants in this research project both because of the possible ethical implications of involving such people who had participated in research in which I myself had been involved either directly or indirectly. I considered that I had, in effect, entered into an agreement with past participants: an agreement that did not extend to me retaining their contact details potentially for the purposes of future research. In addition, I saw methodological challenges associated with gathering data which might relate to my own activity as a researcher. It appeared to be at the least to be problematic for me to obtain reliable data about my own research activity through a research study such as this: how could I expect past participants to reflect on their past impressions of me as a researcher to my face?

In the absence of such means of targeting the recruitment efforts for this research project, efforts to recruit had to be made to the wider population of those who *might* have had some previous involvement in educational research. It is, of course, impossible to compare the success of this recruitment strategy to what might have been achieved by a more closely targeted approach but it seems at least plausible that the latter would have been more effective in recruiting participants. There is, however, a potential advantage in recruiting directly from this general pool of ex-participants in that it avoids the potential selection by researchers of those amongst their former participants whose names and contact details they forward. In this way, the researchers might act as gatekeepers in the sense in which Homan (2001) uses the term: they could, for their fellow

researchers, facilitate contact with some participants and deny access to others. Whilst the group of participants who respond to direct recruitment might have its own characteristics, there is in this method of recruitment, no prospect of a filter being applied by a third party.

Recruitment for this project accordingly took the form of attempts through a variety of means, to recruit participants from the pool of those people who had already participated in educational research projects in some way. At an early stage of this research there was a consideration, following initially low recruitment, to extend the scope of the investigation to cover those who had participated in psychological or social research but it proved just as difficult to recruit from this pool too. For this reason, and because of the methodological challenges that might have stemmed from cross-disciplinary perspectives, recruitment was limited to those who had taken part in some form of educational research. One early participant in this study had previously participated in psychological research and was not included in the final group of fifteen participants.

Within this group of former educational research participants, it was initially hoped to recruit those who had experienced a sustained involvement in educational research, for example, those who had taken part in face to face interviews, rather than participants who had, for example, simply completed questionnaires. In the face of continuing poor recruitment, this condition was subsequently relaxed and two of those who agreed to participate in this study had this nature of involvement in the research with which they were associated. When these participants were interviewed, however, it emerged that their involvement in the research process as a whole, and their contacts with the research institution were of a substantially similar nature to those of participants who had been involved in more protracted data generation activity.

Recruitment for the study continued throughout the period of the study in parallel with data generation and other activity. The first attempts to recruit through personal contacts and e-mail began in the summer of 2005 and recruitment efforts finally ended in March 2008, the first of the fifteen participants who contributed to this research was recruited in September 2005 and the last in February 2008.

Table 1 below details the attempts made to recruit and the means by which the participants for this research were eventually recruited. Perhaps the most obvious inference to draw from this data as a whole is that the response rate for the different recruitment methods was generally low in relation to the number of attempts made, although clearly an overall response rate cannot be meaningfully calculated because of the varied nature of the recruitment methods, such as the advertisements in the press. The table also illustrates something of the dual barriers to recruitment alluded to above: although the extensive recruitment effort outlined below succeeded in producing 47 potential participants who made contact, the second barrier to recruitment, namely that participants had to have had previous personal experience of taking part in the educational research of others, excluded thirty two of these potential participants: only fifteen of this group were to go on to take part in this study.

The low response rate is particularly true of the direct speculative e-mails and conventional mailings. These were sent to a number of schools, colleges and City Academies (simply referred to for shorthand as 'schools' in what follows) and addressed to the Headteacher, unless the school website indicated that a colleague had responsibility for research involvement. In the case both of 'conventional' mail and e-mail, these messages included a text explaining the nature of this research, an indication of what would be required of participants and a text making the case that research of this sort could potentially contribute to the development of educational research methods. Messages of this sort were mailed or e-mailed together with an accompanying poster

that could be displayed in the school. These were sent to schools chosen on the basis of: past known participation of the school in Department for Children Families and Schools' (DCFS) research; known participation of school staff in teacher research activities; or because of their status as specialist schools or Academies⁶. A total of 221 schools were mailed in this way (those schools conventionally mailed were also e-mailed) and this generated a total of eight responses from whom only one eventual participant emerged. The other seven respondents were from individuals who had conducted research themselves but had not participated in the research of others. This was a recurrent issue in recruitment since those teachers who had carried out their own research work, often as part of study towards a higher degree, were perhaps more willing to be involved in the research of others and hence more likely to offer participation for this project. Whilst this suggests an approach to recruitment that might be used in future by other research projects, it did not contribute to recruitment for this study since none of potential participants still have to have previously participated in research conducted by other researchers. E-mail was the least successful means of recruitment, perhaps because of the volume of e-mails routinely received by recipients or the fact that most were mostly sent to generic school e-mail addresses rather than to known e-mail addresses of individuals and hence may not have been passed on to potential participants.

Postings (see appendix 2) on web-based notice boards run by the Times Educational Supplement (TES) and the DCFS (see table 1) were also used and these provoked discussion, but attracted no participants. The discussion threads that arose as a result of these postings were neither protracted nor substantial but they did perhaps highlight another recruitment issue in that a recurrent response was that this project was dismissed as 'research about research' and therefore perceived as of little value to the education community. The most successful means of recruitment other

⁶ For the purposes of this selection, schools were identified through the DCFS website.

than personal contacts were two postings on an HEI discussion board⁷ which generated a total of six responses and two eventual participants. A group mailing of an HEI postgraduate community⁸ was less successful and only led to three contacts, none of whom went on to become participants in this study. This is perhaps another area where research on participation might be productive: the internet seems to offer great potential for recruiting participants but it may be that targeting needs to be more effective than was the case here. It is possible, for instance, that the cultures of the different notice board users are reflected in the differing responses that were obtained, with some user groups more positively disposed towards research participation in particular areas of research. E-mail and direct mailings (see appendices 3, 4 & 5) proved the least productive methods of recruitment.

In view of the evident challenges faced in recruiting participants for this project, the decision was taken between me and my supervisors, to place an advertisement in a specialist educational publication in order that the recruitment message should reach a large number of potential participants. On June 16th 2006, an 8cm X 2 columns advertisement (see appendix 6) appeared in the Times Educational Supplement, the highest circulation specialist educational newspaper in Britain with a claimed weekly readership of 500,000.⁹ This was considered to be the most effective way to reach large numbers of potential participants. The advertisement only attracted two responses, one of whom was a suitable participant who took part in this study. This was disappointing, particularly given the financial cost of placing the advertisement. A possible reason for the poor response might have been the placement of the advertisement which appeared within a specialist section of the newspaper and not within sections which are accessed by the highest number of readers, such as the recruitment section.

⁷ The Open University Tutorhome discussion board is accessible by Open University students and staff.

⁸ The University of Nottingham School of Education

⁹ Source TES website – accessed 3.3.08

A second attempt to reach the TES readership was made on October 5th 2007, when an article 'Probing the Original Probers' (see appendix 7) appeared in the Times Educational Supplement. The article was based on some early findings from the study which I had supplied to the newspaper. The decision to use this method of recruitment was taken in the summer of 2007. A text of an e-mail was prepared, agreed with my supervisors and then e-mailed to the education correspondents of the Guardian and the TES. These two publications were chosen because of their circulation within the education community. The TES showed interest in the story and I was telephoned by a journalist from the newspaper. On the basis of that conversation and a subsequent e-mail in which I supplied some additional material, the journalist from the TES wrote an article which then appeared in the TES. It was interesting for me, given the theme of this research, that I was given no opportunity to approve or edit the article which was finally published; this is perhaps something of which researchers using this means of publicising research should be aware. After a brief discussion of some of the themes emerging from this research, the article which appeared in the newspaper pointed out that the study was seeking participants with experience of taking part in educational research. Given the effort necessary to produce such an article, the response in terms of participant recruitment was again disappointing with the piece elicited only one response from a reader and which did not lead to any additional participants for the study.

The most effective means of recruitment, by some way, proved to be the use of personal contacts which delivered eleven of the fifteen final participants. Aitken et al. (2003) draw the same conclusion from their own experience in participant recruitment. They argue that an advantage of personal approaches is that the researcher is better able to explain the nature of the research to potential participants. It might be the case that verbal explanations of research are inherently more easily understood, or trusted, than those in writing. Another potential factor here seem to be that

recruitment is more likely where a relationship of trust is already established between researcher and potential participant.

Recruitment method	Numbers of postings/mailings etc.	Potential participants who made contact as a result	Actual participants recruited
Advertisement in TES	N/A	2	1
Article published in TES	N/A	1	0
TES Noticeboard	4 postings	2	0
DCFS Teachernet	3 postings	1	0
DCFS Governonet	3 postings	4	0
HEI Noticeboard	2 postings	6	2
Group E-mailing of HEI Postgraduate research community	1 mailing to 25 recipients	3	0
Direct mailing of schools	43	3	0
Direct Speculative e-mail	221 emails	5	1
Personal Contact	N/A	20	11
Total		47	15

Table 1 – Recruitment Methods Employed

Of the total of 47 people who established contact with me by whatever means, to discuss possible participation in this research, 32 ultimately did not participate in the study. For all of these, the reason was that they had not themselves previously taken part in research as a participant. These respondents had either conducted their own research, were themselves

recruiting participants or had apparently misinterpreted the contact material. Responses by those interested in discussing their own research came to be seen as an unavoidable effect of the recruitment message that was being sent out by e-mail or otherwise. At the start of the recruitment effort, the material being sent out did include a sentence to the effect that teachers who had carried out their own research were not being sought. After months of poor recruitment, however, this message was removed because of its possible effect in deterring individuals with relevant experience (for example those who had both conducted and taken part in research) from making contact. In effect the decision was taken that rejecting potential recruits who made contact was better than inhibiting potential participants. These contacts, even if they did not lead to people taking part in the research, had a value in sustaining the researcher throughout the long and dispiriting process of recruitment and, in one case a recommendation from a potential participant did then lead to an actual participant being recruited for the study. I offered all those who contacted me, and were rejected as participants, the option of receiving an edited copy of the final report, although none have subsequently contacted me with regards to the progress of the study.

3.4 The recruited sample of participants

Details of the fifteen participants recruited are given in appendix 8 which summarises some of the characteristics of each participant, as well as outlining some of the responses that are detailed in the findings section below (section 4.1). All of the participants held Qualified Teacher Status, all were, or had been, teachers and all had participated in educational research projects with institutions external to the school or other institution in which they worked. As the table shows, at the time the data generation phase of the research was conducted, seven participants were working in secondary schools, five in the primary sector and three were in HEIs but had previous experience of working as teachers. Six participants in this study had taken part in more than one educational research project and the same six reported having carried out their own research in

education (two as part of their ITE and four since leaving ITE¹⁰). Of the participants in this study, twelve had been interviewed and two had completed questionnaires one had both acted as an interviewee and had administered questionnaires to pupils as part of a research project and another had only administered a questionnaire survey in the course of her research participation.

All participants in this study are represented through the use of pseudonyms. These pseudonyms that are used are indicative of gender only and are not intended, for example, to suggest the cultural background of the individuals who took part in this study.

The overall purpose of this research is not to offer a representative account of what research participants experience in general but to explore a small number of individual examples of research participation in order to understand something of the nature of participants' experience and how that experience is constructed and understood by those individuals. On that level, the representative nature or otherwise of the achieved sample of participants in this study is not considered of central relevance. The approach taken here, including the presentation of individual case studies seeks to explore the experiences of this sample and any conclusions drawn from this small study relating to the overall population of participants in educational research are highly tentative.

3.5 Research ethics

In an investigation of this nature, ethical conduct throughout the research process should be a prime consideration and so it was during the course of this project. The initial research proposal was submitted to and approved by the University of Nottingham School of Education Ethics

¹⁰ One oblique way to reference this figure is through the 2005 DCFS statistics on the teaching force in England and Wales which reports that 18% of the teaching workforce held either a BEd, PGCE or higher qualification and hence could have had the opportunity to conduct some form of research.

Committee (the ethics statement that was submitted and approved is reproduced as appendix 9). The recommendations of the 2004 BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines of Educational Research (BERA 2004) were the starting point in designing this research study, especially paragraphs 10 and 11 which deal with informed consent, paragraph 13 considering the right of a participant to withdraw their participation and data and paragraphs 23 to 25 on privacy. Prior to their involvement with this research, all participants were e-mailed a document explaining the nature of the research (Appendix 10).

For the eight participants who were contacted face-to-face, a signature on a consent form was obtained (see Appendix 11) whilst for those participants interviewed by telephone, consent was obtained through e-mail exchanges. The consent form set out the likely demands that would be made of participants as a result of their taking part in the research, informed or reminded participants of their right to withdraw themselves and their data from the research at any stage and without offering an explanation, and also included contact details for the researcher and for the sponsoring department.

All participants who were asked to give consent agreed to do so. Participants' willingness to take part was then reconfirmed verbally immediately prior to data generation. The privacy of those who took part has been respected in this account and all participants are identified by a pseudonym. Similarly, no institutions with a connection to participants are identified in any part of this document. In this research project, confidentiality has been particularly carefully respected because it is recognised that in one sense, research of this nature can only be conducted in an environment where participants feel they can come forward and speak about their experiences confident that all aspects of their participation will be treated in confidence. Participants were reminded of this commitment to confidentiality immediately prior to interview.

Conducting a research project with the experiences of participants at its centre suggested that care for the experiences of participants in this study should go beyond the requirements of the BERA guidelines. Participants to this study have been e-mailed throughout the course of this investigation, a summarised copy of this final report will be offered to each participant and, should participants wish to be sent such a report then their comments will be invited. It is hoped, should these comments be substantial, that an addendum to this report will be produced allowing those participants who respond in this way to have a voice in the final product of the research to which they contributed.

3.6 Data generation

Part-structured interviews were the sole means of data generation for this study. Interviews of this sort offered the potential to explore participants' experiences in a variety of areas. Since it was a characteristic of this research project that those participants who were recruited reported divergent experiences, interviews were felt to be the best way to probe those heterogeneous experiences in a time-effective way. In the discussion that follows, I explore my personal understanding of the interview as a means of data generation and, as such, the section as a whole represents a justification of my methodological choices in this respect.

Research of this kind into participation has as an inescapable corollary in that, in addition to exploring the experiences of participants, it must also to some extent consider the process by which this and other educational research is carried out. In the course of this project, therefore, I could not but reflect on the methodology employed, especially in so far as it concerned the way in which information was obtained from those who took part. A concern for the experiences of participants informed the ethical conduct of this research outlined above but it also necessitated asking questions about my own relationship as a researcher with these people and, in that context,

about the form and function, the epistemology and the sociology of the research interview. I found one text to be particularly influential in developing my stance in this respect: the review by Hammersley (2003) of what he describes as the 'radical critique' of interviews. As Hammersley shows, interview data can be used by researchers in a number of ways, three of which are relevant to this project. Firstly, participants can offer 'witness accounts' of events and situations that the researcher himself or herself has not experienced. Secondly, interviews may provide a source of participant self-analysis in that interviewees are asked to reflect on their feelings and interpretations. And thirdly, the researcher uses interview data as a basis upon which to draw inferences about participants' intentions and motives. It might be worth restating at this point that the object of using interviews as the primary means of data generation in this research project was to gain an understanding of the experiences of participants in connection to their involvement in research and the interview instrument, and more particularly, the way in which I employed it was designed with these three forms of data in mind as potential outcomes of the interview and subsequent analysis process.

Hammersley argues that there is a fundamental distinction between the first two types of data use where participants are effectively acting as surrogate researchers, and the third where the interview is being used by the researcher as a source of observational data. In the literature review I similarly suggested that a number of authors had called into question the capacity of the research interview to generate data that represents participants' actual experiences and perceptions. Silverman (1993), for example suggests that interviews may be conditioned by participants' wish for self-justification and Dingwall (1997) writes of the influence of expectation on both parties in the interview. Perspectives such as this may play a part in informing any researcher who makes use of interviews as a data source, but it seems to me that there are additional considerations that apply to research such as this.

As more than one potential participant succinctly put it, this is research about research and therefore would appear to fall within Giddens' formulation of reflexivity when he writes that:

The concepts, theories and findings of the social sciences continually circulate in and out of what it is they are about. (Giddens 1990, p. 43)

In the sense that participants were asked to speak about a previous activity: involvement in research, that was highly similar to that in which they were engaged, they were being asked about their experiences of taking part in research by means of participating in a second research project and hence there is the real possibility that both perceived expectations and self-justification would be potential influences on interviewees. The participant who carries with her a particularly vivid memory of a previous research interview might well relate an account of that interview that privileges a rationalisation of her conduct during the interview and the account given in this, the second interview, might also reflect expectations around research interviews that could be influenced by that previous encounter. At the same time, the researcher who studies participation in this way might be likely to be affected in the course of a research interview by expectations and a wish for self-justification emanating from an understandable concern for the perceived impression that he or she appears to be making on the participant.

Whilst the first two categories of interview data use seem to fall within the implicit description of research activity offered by the BERA guidelines, Hammersley's third use of interview data sees the researcher engaging in the sort of interpretation of participant data alluded to in Clifford and Marcus' (1986) 'crisis of representation'. Researchers who interpret the words of their participants in this way are, as I argued in the literature review, acting in a similar way to journalists in that they can be seen as abrogating to themselves the power to edit and, in some ways to transform the meaning of participants' words. I also point out that there is a strong

counterargument from writers such as Price (1996); Scott and Usher (1999); Hammersley (1992) and Eisner (1997) that researchers should, in this sense, control their own research. Given the stance of this research project it was therefore important to consider these methodological questions as they applied here.

The data generation for this project was therefore informed by a wish to solicit accounts from participants that reflected their past experiences of research involvement whilst minimising, in so far as was possible, the influence of the present data generation on the participants' accounts. At the same time, the written account of this research project attempts to reflect a dialogue between my own interpretation of participant data, informed by an understanding of theoretical models of participation, and participants' own perspectives around what it means, for them, to take part in educational research. In so far as the methodology of this study is concerned therefore, the relationship between researcher and participant is seen as complex and dialectical in that it is built around an extended discourse between researcher and participant. The approach that seemed best able to reflect this, given constraints of time and resources was a combination of part-structured interviews supplemented by subsequent e-mail contacts.

Data generation for this study was accordingly in the form of in-depth individual interviews, from each of which digital audio recordings were made. As described above, six of these interviews took place face-to-face at the institution at which the participant was employed (five schools and an HEI), the remaining nine interviews were conducted by telephone. These interviews were followed by e-mail exchanges which served to: i) offer participants the opportunity to see and edit a transcript of their interview, ii) continue a dialogue that followed up any points that arose from that interview, iii) as described above, to present participants at the end of the project with a final written account of the research and iv) support discussion on the final report. As indicated below, the reality of participant involvement in this study was that this channel of communication did not

assume the importance that had been hoped or expected. This perhaps suggests another methodological challenge for researchers in this area: how to sustain on-line correspondence with participants. For the four case study participants, the texts presented in section 5 were e-mailed to the participants concerned, of these, three of the four replied to the message, agreeing the text here presented.

The intention at the start of this project was to carry out a number of pilot interviews which would in turn then be used to inform the development of an interview script for use in a main data generation phase. Accordingly three, of what were then conceived of as pilot interviews took place in late 2005 and early 2006. It became apparent, however, in the course of 2006 that recruitment for this study was problematic that a sufficient number of participants would not be forthcoming in order to allow two studies to take place and the participants in the pilot study were therefore included in the main, or only, data generation round. One practical effect of this was that, in order to maximise comparability between interviews (which was important to preserve since participants had been offered the opportunity to 'personalise' the interview script by editing), the outcomes of the pilot study could not be used to inform development of a new interview script.

The interviews probed participants' prior experience of and views on educational research, participants' relationships with researchers, their views on the informed consent process and their perceptions of any personal costs and benefits arising from their participation. It was considered important to allow interviewees to contribute according to their own impressions of the research process and of the representatives of research organisations with whom they had come into contact so the questions were therefore designed to be open-ended and opportunities were given throughout the interviews for participants to add comments on aspects of their participation that had not been addressed in the questions interviewees had been asked. The script upon which the

interviews were based (see appendix 11) accordingly consisted of a series of simple questions on the various areas to be probed, without predetermined prompts. The questions in the interview script were informed by an analysis of themes from the initial literature review and intended to address areas of participant experience not previously explored in the literature. As indicated above the intention was originally for the interview script to be refined by means of a pilot study but limited recruitment made this impractical. The interview script was designed to allow the interviews to be as open-ended as possible whilst still preserving some continuity between the questions asked to different participants and hence achieving some comparability in the data generated. The interviews each lasted between 35 minutes and one hour ten minutes.

Two particular difficulties arose in the course of the interviews. Participants recalled their experiences of research participation that had taken place at any time currently or in the past. Two participants in this study were currently participating in research, and the remaining thirteen related experiences ranging from six months ago to as long as five years ago in one case. Arguably, much educational research relies on the memories of participants but this is particularly so with research such as this. In three interviews, in which interviewees spoke about interviews that had taken place a significantly long time ago, participants said that there were aspects of the research in which they were involved that they simply did not remember. The same participants, however, were able to give detailed accounts of other aspects of their involvement in the same research. One possible way to address this issue of partial recollection in future research could be to recruit a number of participants who had been involved with the same research project and whose account could therefore be cross referenced. The possibilities of triangulation would be enhanced further if either researchers who had been involved or publications produced in connection with the research were used as ancillary sources of data. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of the methodology of this study was this lack of a means of triangulation by which participant accounts could be cross-referenced. Given, however, the reluctance of researchers to

take part in such studies (Sieber 2004), this remains a methodological challenge for all research such as this into participation.

The second issue that arose in the interviews in connection with the accounts given by participants was that for the six participants who had previously taken part in more than one educational research project, there was some uncertainty regarding whether in the interview, to focus on one particular episode of participation and, if so, how that episode should be selected. In order to generate in-depth data concerning participation, interviews in these cases generally focused on individual episodes of research participation. Questions that probed participants' disposition towards educational research in general, however, brought responses from participants that sometimes touched on more than one research involvement and these experiences were sometimes contrasted by participants.

All the interviews were digitally recorded and manually transcribed.

3.7 Data analysis

The data arising from the interviews was subjected to a thematic analysis. First, a coding frame for the data was developed through a grounded analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of emergent themes from the three earliest interview transcripts. The 'constant comparison' method, suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was used to generate a number of themes which emerged from an examination of the data. These themes were then revised and expanded in the light of a consideration of the emphases and theoretical models that were apparent in the literature review.

Following the completion of data generation, the interview transcripts were imported as Word documents into an Nvivo software environment. The coding frame generated in the way

described above, was set up in the software and the data was thereby coded. The coding approach was analogous to what Hodkinson et al (2005) describe as a 'realist' or 'thematic' approach. The essence of this approach is summarised by the authors as follows:

The standard way of approaching realist analysis is to break down interview transcripts, observation notes etc. into standard component parts, for example through coding. One argument is that this forces the researcher's attention to detail, helping to avoid being biased by first impressions. Often this initial coding is followed by one or more analytical algorithms – set and predetermined procedural protocols that work on the coded data to develop patterns and produce both understanding and the single most plausible and verifiable truth. Such algorithms, it is claimed, tame the subjectivity of the researcher, allowing the data to speak almost for itself. (Hodkinson et al. 2005 p. 5)

It might be objected that such a quasi-positivistic approach to analysis is, to some extent, at odds with the interpretative, dialectical relationship between the researcher and the participant discussed above. The methodology of the analysis used here, however, is considered appropriate here in that it could be seen as offsetting the perception that in individual research such as this where there is a lack of triangulation, and given the challenges arising from the reflexive nature of research about the research mentioned above, the 'subjectivity' of the individual researcher becomes more problematic, hence the need of this sort of methodological rigour.

All fifteen transcripts were accordingly coded using this framework at the level of segments within the text. These segments varied in length from small groups of word to paragraphs. Comparatively little resulting quantitative analysis, for example, of coding density is reported

here since, with a relatively small amount of data, such detail is potentially misleading in that the experiences of individual participants might have a skewing effect on such secondary data and care should be therefore be exercised in interpreting such figures where they are given. The results of the thematic analysis are presented in the findings section that follows and are organised around the themes in the coding frame.

At the same time as considering the data in terms of particular themes associated with participation, it was considered important to acknowledge the personal and autobiographical nature of interviewees' experiences as reflected in their interviews. For this reason the thematic analysis presented in the findings section includes a case study section in which the experiences of four participants are presented as holistic accounts. This seemed appropriate for this type of research as participants' previous research experience and the research process in its entirety, including the various components of participation (initial contact, data generation, impressions of researchers with whom participant had contact and subsequent contacts with researchers or institutions) appear from the evidence of this research study, to contribute to the overall disposition of participants both towards particular researchers and institutions but also towards educational research in general. In seeing these experiences in their context, as well as analysed by theme, it is hoped to offer some insight into the meaning of participation for these participants.

A particular theme which arose early in the analysis process was the significance of participants' past experiences as previous participants and in carrying out their own research. This is a common theme running through the findings section (section 4) that follows.

3.8 How the methodology of this study addresses the inquiry strands.

The three inquiry strands around which this account is organised are:

- I. Participants' experiences and/or perceptions of educational research encounters and of educational researchers
- II. Participants' perceptions of educational research
- III. The relevance of ethical guidance for participants in educational research

Interviews appeared to me to present a potentially productive way to generate data which would address these three research strands. In a review of literature on qualitative research methods, Murphy et al. (1998) identify the following advantages of interviews in this context: First, they offer the possibility of exploring the way in which respondents themselves define the subject matter of the research. Interviews, it is argued give access to the complexity of participants' personal understanding using their own words and structured through their own perceptions, offering what Giddens (1991) describes as 'coherent, yet continuously revised narratives' (p5) which reflect the engagement between their own self identity and the institutions that surround them. In a study such as this, where there was a notable absence of previous accounts or of accompanying theoretical models that might have informed my understanding of how participation is understood by participants, I felt it was particularly important that participants' be allowed to reflect on their own understandings in a way that might have been curtailed by more structured methods of data generation such as some forms of questionnaires. I also felt that observation of participation in research, even if permissible under existing ethical guidance, would not have necessarily given me access to the meaning systems of those who I observed.

Secondly, it has been argued that part-structured interviews, such as those employed here, are more likely to generate 'truthful' accounts than those that might result from more heavily structured means of data generation. In this way, Denzin (1970) claims that such interviews enhance the possibility of 'penetration into their (respondents') relational worlds' (Denzin, 1970: p133). This view, has, however been questioned by, amongst others, Silverman (1993), who suggests that interviews may not always give privileged access to participants thinking but instead may perhaps represent exercises in self-justification by participants. I would have to conclude that there is therefore no reliable basis upon which I could make the claim that I had succeeded in gathering anything other than accounts from participants in this study justifying the terms of their past participation in research rather than reflecting 'genuine' accounts of that participation. All claims to knowledge made in this study are thus undermined by its reliance on the interview as the sole means of data generation. However, if this criticism could, justly, be made of the use of the interview here, then the same might have been said of other potential methods of data generation such as questionnaires.

The semi-structured interviews that formed the sole data generation method for this study could therefore be seen as offering an advantage in terms of accessing participants' understandings and to carry no less in the way of disadvantage in terms of giving me access to valid participant accounts. Interviews would therefore seem appropriate for strands I and II, which centre on perceptions and accounts of experiences whilst for Strand III, the interviews conducted potentially gave access to participant accounts which reflected their own understanding of ethical guidance both in relation to the research in which they were involved and more generally.

The following section outlines what emerged from those interviews.

4. Findings

This section is organised into two related sections. The first discusses the results of a thematic analysis of the data generated in connection with this research project. The findings presented in this way in section 4.2 are broadly structured around the areas probed in the interviews with participants and represent an exploration of participants' experiences in relation to particular episodes of involvement but also probe their more general attitudes towards educational research as an enterprise and towards educational researchers. The extent to which particular experiences might play a part in forming overall impressions of educational research is explored.

This discussion is then followed in section 4.3 by four case studies which are intended to complement the thematic findings presented earlier. The intention of this section is to present the findings in such a way as to enable the perceptions and attitudes alluded to above to be seen in the context of episodes of participation. In doing so, it is hoped that the narrative here will move towards an appreciation of the complex interrelationship between prior experience, attitudes and episodes of participation.

4.1 Participation histories

As was mentioned above (section 3.3), one thing that became apparent in the course of the interviews conducted for this project was that amongst the fifteen participants there were widely differing experiences of research involvement. Six participants in this study had taken part in educational research on more than one previous occasion prior to their contact with me and all of these participants in this study had previous experience of conducting educational research of their own, which had all included some contact with participants. In other words, all six of this group had themselves acted as researchers and therefore had experience, as it were, of the other

side of the participant researcher relationship¹¹. For reasons of clarity this group of six will be referred to as *research experienced participants*. The remaining nine participants in this study only reported being involved in one research study prior to their participation in this study and, for clarity, they are sometimes referred to as *first-time participants*.

Two of the participants, one of whom was a research experienced participant and one a first-time participant, illustrated another mode of participation in that they could be seen both in the role of participants and as co-researchers in that they were involved in the research of others. One of these participants (see case studies 2. Oprah) was asked to administer questionnaires to pupils at her school on behalf of an external research institution with whom the participant concerned had no contact. A second (see case studies 4 Beverley) was also asked to administer questionnaires to pupils, this time in addition to being interviewed herself. These two participants in this study, perhaps especially Oprah, might be seen as distinct from the other participants in this study in that their connection with the research organisation concerned was different since they did not participate directly. There appears, however, to have been significant similarities between this two and the others in this study, not least in terms of the effect of research involvement on their disposition towards the possibility of them participating in future research, one of the themes that arises strongly in these findings and accordingly they have been included in this study although the text does draw attention to where their experiences diverge from those of other participants in this study.

The characteristics of the sample of fifteen participants are summarised in the grid included as appendix 8. This sets out in summary form for each of the fifteen participants in this study the

¹¹ Two of the participants who reported previous experience of carrying out research (Andrew & Lesley) said that research had formed part of their Initial Teacher Education (ITE). It is possible, given the research content in some ITE courses, that other participants, too had some research experience that they did not recall. However, it could be argued that those participants who offered no recollection of such research experience would be less likely to be influenced by any research experience that they did not recall.

prior experiences of research and some of the characteristics of their research involvement as are discussed below. Some of those experiences are also summarised in figures to assist the reader.

What follows in section 4.2 is a descriptive analysis of participants' responses in a number of areas in which they were directly questioned in the course of their interviews. Section 4.3 then draws out some themes arising from those responses and from their analysis.

4.2 Analysis by Participant Response

The findings that follow present a descriptive analysis of the interview data generated for this project. They are organised around seven areas which map closely onto the questions participants were asked in the course of their interviews (see appendix 12 for the interview schedule).

- 4.2.1 how participants came to be involved in educational research;
- 4.2.2 participants' prior views on educational research;
- 4.2.3 whether participants' views on educational research altered following their research involvement;
- 4.2.4 how the nature of the research in which they participated was explained to participants;
- 4.2.5 questions of anonymity and participants' right to withdraw;
- 4.2.6 participants' views on researchers and the data generation process; and
- 4.2.7 the availability of transcripts and written accounts.

4.2.1 How participants became involved in educational research

Interviewees were asked to say how they had become involved in the research project in which they participated and which formed the subject matter of this inquiry. Their responses are presented in simplified form in the flow diagram below which gives a visual indication of the way

the participants divided into the various categories of response and how those responses might have been influenced by their prior experience of participation. This is accompanied by a more detailed discussion of the findings including selective illustrative quotes.

Of the fifteen participants who agreed to be interviewed for this study, twelve indicated in broad terms that they had voluntarily agreed to take part in research. Three participants, however, gave accounts of their research participation that suggested an element of compulsion in their decision to be involved in the research project concerned¹². For two of the three, the episode of participation discussed at interview came about as a result of approaches by senior colleagues.

I was completely co-opted by the then deputy head who just said 'they're doing some research in school, you're free that period and so you're doing it' – it was as basic as that. Beverley

Well [Headteacher] volunteered me! As SENCO¹³, I was really the first in line so to speak and there wasn't much I could do about it.

Karen

Beverley (see case study 4), who here reports this feeling of being co-opted into research participation, also expressed concerns about other features of her research participation, including, in particular, the question of anonymity (see sections 4.6 and 4.8). In this sense, the ability of a participant freely to choose to take part in research seems to act as an important part in reassuring participants on other questions relating to their participation. The other two participants who suggested that their participation was non-voluntary were first-time participants

¹² Two of these three participants are included as case studies in section 5 where the research experiences of these interviewees are presented in more detail.

¹³ Special Needs Co-Ordinator.

in educational research: neither of these participants suggested concerns over anonymity but both gave negative assessments of the data generation activity associated with the research. (See section 4.7). A third participant in this study, who suggested non-voluntary participation (Oprah), spoke about her involvement in a large scale questionnaire survey. The participation of the teacher concerned seemed to have been subsumed within a wider participation by the school, which appeared to have been negotiated at some time in the past although in her interview, the participant reported that neither she nor her line manager were aware of the school having agreed to take part in the large-scale study in which they were collaborating. This is interesting in itself as the literature of participation does not directly consider such instances of vicarious research.

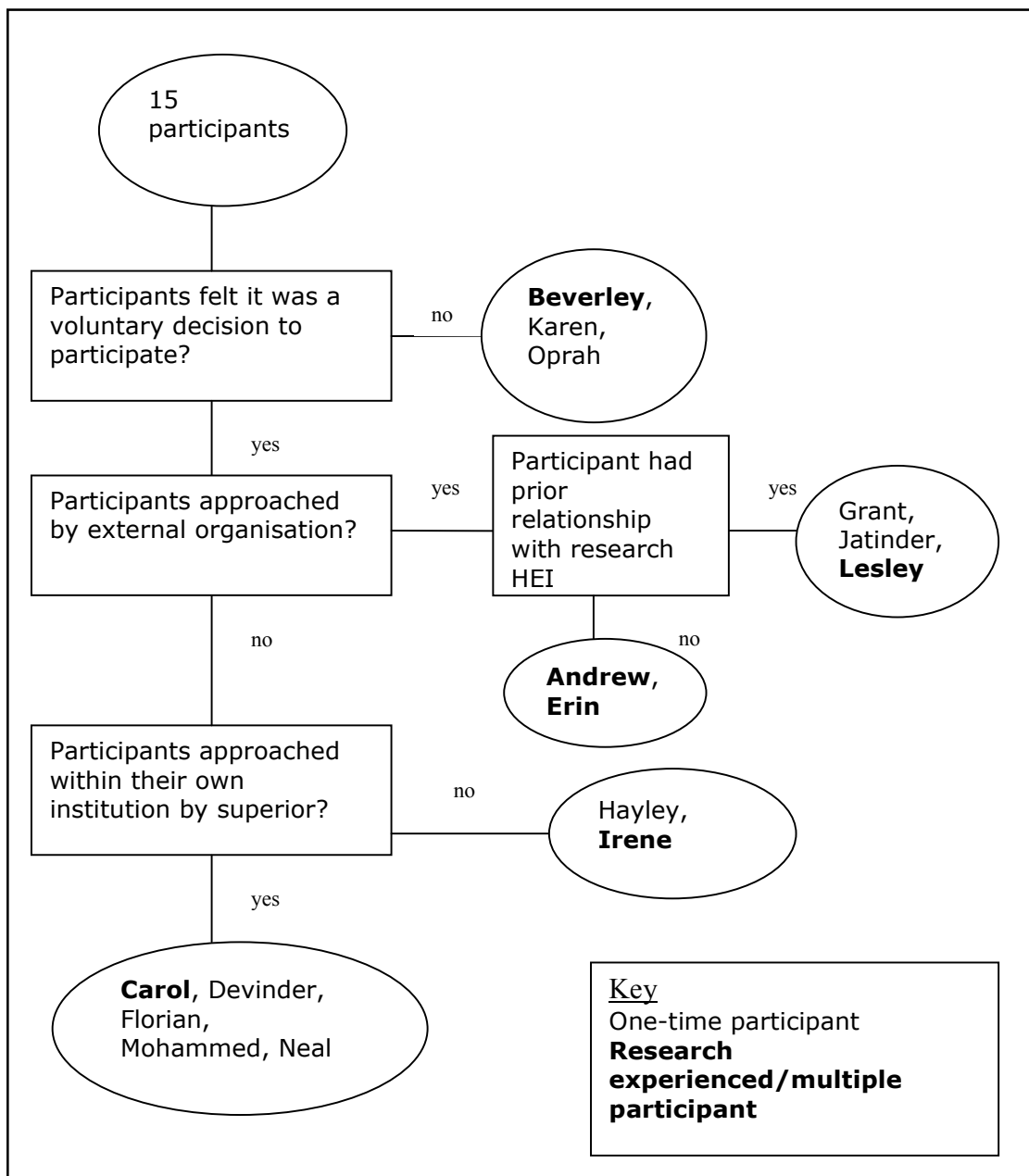


Figure 1 – Participants’ decisions to participate

The participation of the teacher concerned here was, in a sense, indirect here in that her role in the research was to administer questionnaires for pupils but the question of voluntary participation appears to arise here with at least equal force as it does in the case of those participants who directly provide data for researchers. On her own account, this participant (whose case is

developed in more detail in the case studies section) took part in the research study in question because she felt she could not refuse the request from her line manager.

I didn't feel that I could say no because I was being asked to by our HOD and he's much more senior than I am. I just didn't feel that I could refuse even although I couldn't see why we were being asked to do this. [HOD] said that as the school has agreed to this in the past, we couldn't really back out. Oprah

A similar situation emerged from the interview with Beverley who, in addition to being interviewed for a research project, was also asked to conduct a questionnaire surveys with pupils. In neither components of participation, Beverley indicates, did she feel that option of refusing to collaborate was open to her.

...part of the process involved me administering surveys to the kids which was a complete pain because it was year 9 and it really annoyed me because there was no consultation about when the surveys could be done, they just said – they have to be done today and I happened to be doing what I thought was a key lesson for the Shakespeare paper – there wasn't any negotiation. Beverley

Hence in three of the cases amongst the sample of fifteen a decision for the participant to take part in research seems to have been effectively taken at the level of the school, although the case of Oprah indicates that this decision itself may be less than clear as the personnel at the school in this instance did not appear, from the comments of Oprah to have been those who originally consented to participation. Further research could focus on this sort of co-research in which

schools as a whole are involved in research and the decision over participation can effectively be removed from individuals or even from the school as a whole which considers itself to be bound by an earlier decision to take part in a particular piece of educational research.

An obvious test to apply in questions of voluntary participation in research such as here is to view these findings in the context of the BERA guidelines which state that:

The association takes voluntary informed consent to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress prior to the research getting underway. Article 10, BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004)

Considered in this way, it seems that the test of voluntarism as suggested in this extract appears to have been fully met for twelve of the fifteen participants in this study and, seemingly not met in three instances, one of which was a ‘vicarious researcher’, one a ‘direct’ participant and one was both. Whilst one should clearly be cautious in claiming that the findings here are in any way representative of educational research as a whole or in any extrapolation from such a small scale study it seems unlikely that these three participants were mistaken about the nature of their participation and thus there is clearly some cause for concern here in that this research has discovered three participants who feel they were unable to refuse to participate in research, despite the clarity of the BERA guidelines on this point.

As suggested above, however, the majority (12/15) of those interviewed categorised their participation in research as voluntary. Of this group, seven were contacted about the research by colleagues from within their organisation, whilst five were directly approached by an external institution. Amongst the latter group, three interviewees spoke of a continuing relationship with a

local HEI from which the invitation to participate appears to have arisen. In two of these three cases, this was the HEI at which the teacher concerned had completed their initial teacher education and in one case the participant involved was studying for an MA at the institution.

You have to remember that I have what I consider being a close relationship with the University over the years and so I was quite flattered when [name] approached me. Grant

Perhaps significantly, in the case of five of the seven interviewees who said they had been approached to participate from within their institution (i.e. school or HEI), the interviewee had been approached by a more senior figure, for example a Headteacher or deputy. This raises at least the possibility of some coercion in the recruitment of these participants, who may have felt that a refusal would compromise their career prospects at the school. This does not seem to be the case for three of this group of five interviewees, however, for whom a participation in research appears to have been entirely voluntary. When the three were questioned directly on this point, they indicated that, at the time of being approached, they had felt able to refuse participation. One of these three participants indicated that involvement in research was perceived by them as part of continuing professional development and hence of benefit to them as an individual in their career.

The head knew I was interested in leadership and wanted to support me to do research as part of my career progression. Mohammed

I was identified by my head of department who had been approached to identify three members of staff who he felt might be suitable participants in this study. Carol

Participants were then asked why, assuming their participation was voluntary, that they had decided to take part in the research in which they had been involved. Of the group of twelve who has suggested voluntary participation on their part, four gave answers suggesting that they felt research had an importance for the educational community and their participation could be seen as linked to a sense of altruism and/or a sense of being part of a professional community. For some respondents here, research was seen in some ways as a professional obligation if it led to developments in education of either a practical (in the response of Grant) or theoretical nature (in that of Carol below).

I don't mind being part of something like this that might lead to some sort of improvement in teachers' lives. Grant

I think it's almost a duty that we all as teachers have to become involved in research that might possibly be of some value to educational thinking. Carol

Three interviewees presented rationales for this participation that referred to a sense that there was some value for their own professional practice in them taking part in research. These participants indicated, on the face of it, less altruistic reasons for their choice but again, these participants reflected a felt sense of responsibility towards the profession but for these participants that responsibility was expressed through a commitment to their own professional development.

I've come to realise that research can inform your practice, can improve your practice. Devinder

I'm a professional and I see being involved in this sort of project as supportive of my professional development. Lesley

In a slight variation on the above theme, two of the group of five interviewees who were research experienced participants with research experience gave justifications for their participation linked to their own research experience and practice.

I think at one level, I will always volunteer to take part in research because I'm a researcher myself and I know how much we depend on volunteers. Andrew

I think if you act as a participant in research that gives you a reflection because you get sat in the participant's seat. I think that's quite important, that's why I volunteer for research. Irene

To summarise, three of the fifteen participants in this study said that they felt their participation in the study concerned was not voluntary. For a further group of five, who were approached by superiors in their institutions, there might have been some question as to the extent to which the voluntariness of their participation might have been compromised by the influence of relations of power on their decision. For those who chose voluntarily to take part in the research of others, a sense that taking part was a professional expectation played a part in that choice, this sense of duty might either be expressed in relation to the profession as a whole, in relation to their own professional development or in relation to their development as researchers. This final point is taken up in the discussion section below as it seems potentially significant for researchers to

understand that their participants might be taking part in order to develop their own research skills.

Finally in connection with decisions to take part, participants in this study were asked whether they would consider taking part in educational research in the future, i.e. following this participation. Ten participants said that they felt would take part in research again, two participants said they definitely would not and three were not sure. There was a methodological problem here in that I felt it would be problematic to ask participants whether they would participate following the episode of research involvement discussed, not since they were self-evidently agreeing to participate in this study. The question therefore became simply, 'Do you think you would participate in educational research in future?' Two of those who said they felt they would not participate in future (Neal and Oprah) belonged to the group of three who reported both a negative experience of data generation and a negative attitude change following research involvement in that they reported that the experience discussed here had adversely affected their view of educational research and/or educational researchers. On the other hand, out of the seven participants who gave what were judged to be negative accounts of their experience of data generation, three said they would participate again in future and two were undecided. Adverse experiences of participation therefore did not necessarily preclude future participation.

An interesting footnote here is to compare the problematic recruitment for this study with the accounts of recruitment given here by participants in this study. As reported in the methodology section, the most effective form of recruitment for this project proved to be word of mouth; in other words, participants who were known to researchers indirectly through a third party were more likely to agree to being recruited for this study. The influence of such relationships might also be apparent here in that none of the participants appeared to have been approached in the way that much of the recruitment for this study was attempted: by mailings and e-mailings.

Relationships with people or with institutions seemed to be the basis for the overwhelming majority of recruitment in connection with the episodes of participation discussed in this small study thirteen of the fifteen interviewees indicated that they had been approached to solicit their participation by either an individual known to them or by an representative of an institution within whom they had a prior relationship. Some possible implications of this are considered in the discussion section later but in passing it seems that what this study suggests about the means by which people become involved in educational research projects perhaps underlines the importance of the researcher-participant relationship for future recruitment as much as in connection with questions of involvement in current research projects.

4.2.2 Participants' prior views on educational research

Participants' general views on research were also probed in the interviews. Participants were asked to outline their views on educational research prior to and following the episode of participation which was the focus of the interview. Experience of research both as a participant and, perhaps more significantly as a researcher, appeared to be a factor in forming participants' views of the research process as a whole.

Participants' views on educational research in general (and not specifically connected to the particular instance of participation that formed the main subject matter of the interview for this research project) could be divided into three categories:

Those who were generally sympathetic to the aims of research. Seven participants, of who six were identified above in connection to their reasons for participating in research, indicated they felt some sense of the worth of educational research to the educational community as a whole.

I think it's important as teachers that we do help with researchers who are trying to add to our knowledge. I think that's how the profession moves forward, isn't it? Lesley

Four participants gave responses suggesting some cynicism about the purposes and direction of educational research. Of these four interviewees, three had previous experience as researchers and research experienced participants.

..because I'd been involved in educational research, I have some fairly fixed views on it, I suppose and I had some fairly cynical views on it, I suppose because the project I had been involved in as a researcher was not an independent evaluation, it was so much in the hands of the government so I kind of, I suppose had a negative view of it. Irene

[My view of educational research] Was that either it was going to feed an existing agenda whatever that was or that the data would be twisted to fit a political agenda. Beverley

Four interviewees suggested that, to them, educational research had little or no relevance to classroom teaching. Three of this group were first-time participants. The main point here seemed to be the lack of relevance of research for classroom practice.

I suppose that was my view beforehand that maybe the people doing the research were a little too removed from actual teaching practice.

That they maybe didn't understand what it was like to try and implement their ideas in practice. Devinder

'when is it going to impact me as a person?' and that's the sort of view I took before and I do actually slightly take that view now because I feel that researchers go on and on doing research and I think 'when do we see the value and the impact of this research. Erin

Participants' responses here show some correlation with the reasons they gave for participation. Those participants who indicated that saw a role for educational research in knowledge generation were the participants who said (section 4.2) that they had agreed to be participants for the same reason. Note the subtle distinction however; whilst those who were positive towards educational research saw value in the development of practical and theoretical knowledge; those who gave responses suggesting a negative view of educational research took in some ways an opposite stance, in that they were concerned at the lack of practical relevance in educational research and did not seem to value knowledge building associated with educational research as an intrinsically valuable activity.

4.2.3 Whether participants' views on educational research altered following their research involvement

The majority of the fifteen participants interviewed suggested that their involvement in the particular episode of research participation being discussed for this project had not altered their views on educational research as a whole. However, four participants indicated that their views on educational research had changed as a result of their participation; three negatively and one positively.

The three participants whose views on educational research had become more negative expanded on their reaction to participation. The first reported feeling that the process had been unsatisfactory and the sacrifice that she as had made as a participant in giving of her time had not, in her opinion been acknowledged by the researcher with whom she had contact. For this teacher, this was her first reported participation in educational research.

I just found the whole thing very time-consuming and really very unsatisfying. I didn't really feel like my contribution was particularly appreciated. [...] I might think twice about being involved again. I suppose it depends on what time of year and how busy I am. Grant

The second participant whose views on research became more negative was also a first-time participant. This interviewee was a teacher whose comment suggests some caution on his part about the purposes of the research to which he was contributing, a caution which did not appear to have been resolved by his experience of participation in this instance.

I do think this felt like we were being inspected and I had no idea who was going to see the results of this research so I suppose I was quite careful in what I said because I always had this at the back of my mind. Neal

The third participant (Oprah – see case study 2) whose attitude towards educational research was less favourable following their involvement was asked to administer a questionnaire on behalf of an institution. In her interview for this project, Oprah describes what she sees as the futility of the particular example of a data generation process in which she was involved (and not voluntarily – see section 4.2 above). She implies that this experience made her less likely to take part in such

research in the future, although interestingly it was the negative impact of the research process on the pupils with whom she has contact that weigh more heavily than her own feelings.

After having had this experience, I wouldn't want to put the kids through something like this again. I really think I would say 'no' next time. I can't see that it has achieved anything. Oprah

In contrast to the two negative responses discussed above, one participant gave a particularly positive response when asked to talk about her participation in research. This teacher was a first-time participant in educational research: she relates a favourable account of her experience (see case study 1 – Devinder), and suggests that this experience might make her more willing to engage in future research projects.

I've come to realise that research can inform your practice, can improve your practice and certainly, it's something I would wish to be involved in myself. Devinder

The accounts given by the admittedly small sample of participants in this study might suggest that first experiences of research participation play a significant part in shaping both attitudes to research in general and willingness to participate in research, although this should self-evidently be qualified by bearing in mind that all the participants whose views are discussed here had chosen voluntarily to take part in this study, in spite of these previous negative episodes of participation here related.

Again, the effect of part participation might be evident since amongst the group of six research experienced participants, none indicated that their experience in the particular research project

discussed in interview for this study had materially affected either their views on educational research or their willingness to participate in future research. This might suggest the relative importance of first experiences of research in comparison to later experiences although all such conclusions must necessarily be speculative given the evidence base here.

4.2.4 How the nature of the research in which they participated was explained to participants

Interviewees were asked to comment on how they were informed about the research in which they participated prior to their taking part in the project which formed the basis for their contributions to this study. A breakdown of participants' experiences in this respect is given in figure 2 below. Of the fifteen interviewed, thirteen responded to this question, with the other two saying that they could not remember the details of this aspect of their experience. Of the thirteen substantive respondents, eight said that they felt the research had been adequately explained to them prior to the data generation in which they were involved; five were given documents, either on paper or through an e-mail, explaining something of the aims of the research project and another four reported receiving verbal explanations relating to the research in which they participated, although no participant could recall signing a document in connection with the giving of their consent to participate.

I met up with [name] and he took me through what would be expected of me. Grant

There was an information sheet attached to an email that came round.
Mohammed

Further questioning of the group of nine who said they were content with the explanation of the research they had received showed that six of this group reported having an opportunity at some stage to ask questions about the research. The other three interviewees did not recall an opportunity to question either the researcher or a representative the researcher's institution in this way. None of the three, however, indicated that they had wished to ask questions in this way.

Five participants said that the explanation of the research they had received was, in their view, inadequate. Four of these five were research experienced participants and had experience of conducting research themselves. One interviewee described a situation in which the research was explained immediately prior to the data generation activity and as a result, the participant felt poorly prepared for the experience.

There was just a quick verbal explanation at the time of the interview so I wasn't given any time to inwardly digest the information and think about it. Beverley

Another participant said that he had asked for some information relating to the research in which he was taking part but he was not satisfied with the information that was forthcoming.

I asked for some background material so that I could find out what he wanted to know and why he wanted to know it and I didn't get much information out of that. Andrew

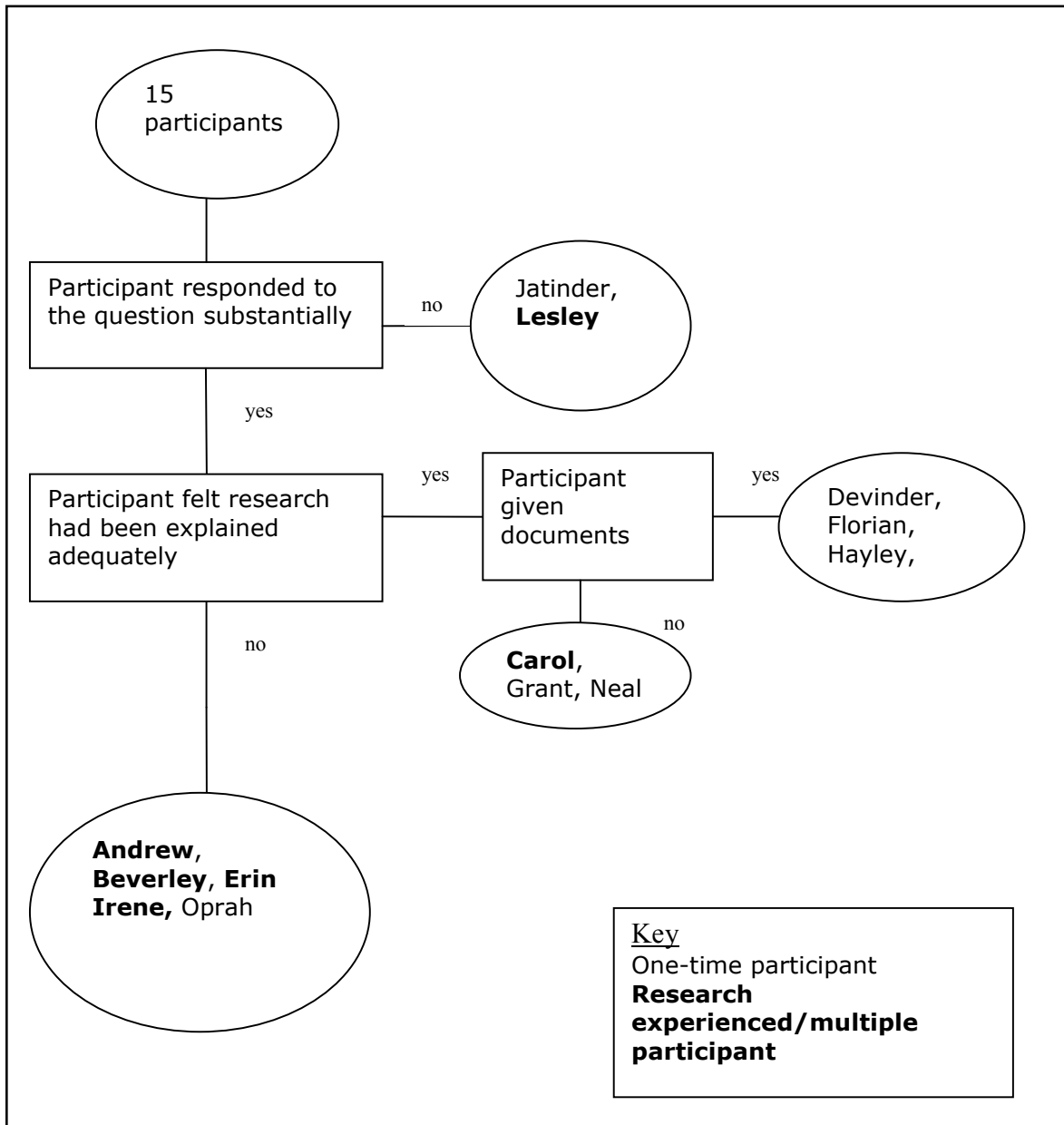


Figure 2 Explanation of research to participants

A third, again a research experienced participant with previous experience as a researcher, perhaps indicated some methodological sophistication in her thinking about the information she received in connection with her research involvement. Erin's comments in interview suggest an awareness of the possibility that knowledge of the research aims by those who take part might somehow affect the outcomes of the research process. What is striking here, and of relevance for

a consideration of the participant-researcher relationship is that at the time she was supplying data to the researcher, Erin seemed to be forming her own conclusions as to the aims of the research; something that seems important for her in connection with her participation. This is an example perhaps of the sometimes indirect nature of communication between researcher and participant with each making informed guesses about the motivations and aims of the other party; much as Dingwall (1997) suggests in his 'dance of expectations'. At the end of this section, there is another similar example from the experience of participant Lesley.

[The researcher] more or less went straight into the research and it was afterwards in the debrief when you got told why they were doing it. I don't know whether they though it would sort have confounded what they were trying to do if they told me before hand. It was more or less put across afterwards. Erin

A fourth interviewee in this category was the indirect participant who was asked to administer questionnaires to pupils (Oprah - see case study 2). This participant reported receiving no information about the purposes of the research in which she was involved or concerning her own participation or that of the pupils in her school to whom she was intended to administer a questionnaire. There was some contact information given on the questionnaire itself to enable Oprah to contact the researcher concerned, but she reported a similar lack of knowledge about this research on the part of others at the school. As noted earlier, hers is an interesting case that raises questions about vicarious research. Specifically here, in respect of the information provided about the research, it might be argued that somebody in this position, who is being asked to act as a proxy researcher, by administering questionnaires should be given at least some information about the purposes of the research in which he or she was involved, both to meet the needs both of the 'proxy researcher' and of any associated participants (in this case pupils) who might wish

to be so informed. This phenomenon, which I have called vicarious research, is explored further in the discussion section (section 5).

The remaining three participants who felt that the research in which they had been involved was inadequately explained all suggested that they felt they would have been able to contribute more to the research had they been better informed about the purposes of that research.

The research was explained very badly! I asked for some background material so that I could find out what he wanted to know and why he wanted to know it and I didn't get much information out of that. It wasn't clear until about half way through what he was looking for.

Andrew

[The researcher] more or less went straight into the research and it was afterwards in the debrief when you got told why they were doing it. I don't know whether they thought it would sort of confound what they were trying to do if they told me before hand. It was more or less put across afterwards. Erin

It wasn't very well explained to me and looking back, I didn't really understand what they were trying to find out. Karen

All three of these interviewees made links between their understanding of the purposes of the research and their contribution to that research. All felt that their responses in the interview in which they each took part during their research involvement under discussion here could have been more informative had they been aware of the nature and aims of the inquiry to which they

were contributing their data. Comments in the interviews for this research project suggest that neither understood what the researcher with whom they had contact was 'looking for'.

This perhaps suggests that the participants did not feel that they had opportunities to influence the interview agenda which seems, at least on the evidence available in relation to these two cases, to be analogous to the sort of closed guessing game or, as I suggest above, something akin to Dingwall's (1997) 'dance of expectations'. A clear conclusion suggested here is that participants are not the 'passive' participants in educational research that, as might be implied by ethical guidance such as BERA (2004). Participants such as Andrew, Erin and Karen seemed to come to the episodes of research participation referred to here with expectations of that encounter which included being provided with what they see as a reasonable amount of information about the research project in which they were taking part.

A concern about the participants' understanding of prior to their engagement in the data generation phase of the research was also shared by one of the participants who reported himself satisfied with the way the research had been explained. His view was that knowledge prior to participation might compromise the data generation phase.

Sometimes, I imagine, it's best if the person who's being interviewed for some research knows as little as possible about the research, it makes them more objective; otherwise, we might just be saying what you expect us to say. We could be influenced into particular answers.

Lesley

It appears significant in itself that four of the thirteen participants had given consideration to the relationship between the information they received prior to taking part and the effectiveness of

the data generation for that research. Again, it is perhaps telling that three of this group of four had themselves conducted educational research before they became involved in the research project discussed in their interview.

4.2.5 Questions of anonymity and participants' right to withdraw

There was considerable variation in the reported experiences of participants with respect to their recollections of any discussion prior to participation of their right to anonymity or to withdraw from the research. It is maybe important in the context of the discussion that follows to draw a distinction between participants' right to anonymity and their right to withdraw, as articulated in BERA (2004). The guidelines state that researchers must *accord* participants their rights to confidentiality and anonymity¹⁴ but researchers should *inform* participants of their right to withdraw from research. Hence a literal interpretation of the guidelines would suggest an active responsibility on the part of researchers to ensure that the process of informing of participants takes place whilst the responsibility to ensure anonymity does not necessarily need to be communicated to participants.

Six of the interviewees could not recollect whether a discussion about these two themes had taken place or not and hence no conclusion can be directly drawn from this. This perhaps suggests that either the informing on this subject did not take place or participants could not recall such a discussion. Such recollection might itself be related to awareness of this aspect of research conduct since two participants with prior experience of having conducted research report that, although they could not recall a discussion on the matter, they were aware of the significance of anonymity and confidentiality and of giving informed consent in this context.

¹⁴ The distinction is that confidentiality applies to the control of data supplied by participants whilst anonymity applies to identification of a person through data supplied.

I'm aware of these issues because I work as a researcher myself. I work with kids so I would be aware that these things exist but I wasn't sent ethical guidelines. As I remember it, I wasn't asked to sign any consent form or being sort of asked or told that I had the right to withdraw at any point or that sort of stuff. I think I took it for granted that I would be anonymous but I don't think that was said. Andrew

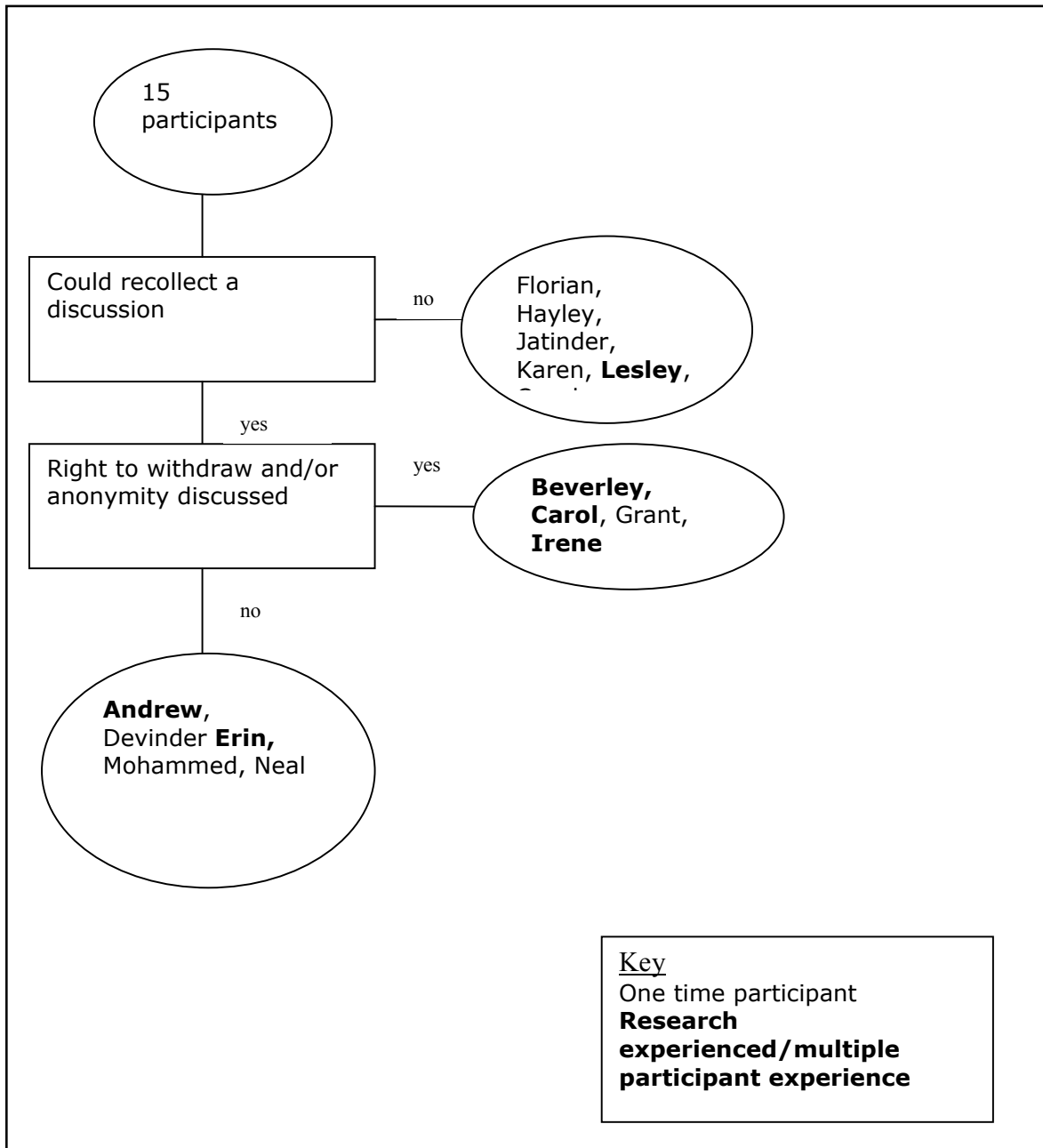


Figure 3 Discussions of anonymity and right to withdraw

I can't remember that being raised although it's a long time ago. I do know that it's something that as a researcher, one should be aware of but I can't remember the issue being raised. Lesley

Of the remaining nine participants who were able to offer a definite answer to this question, six said that they recalled that neither the right to withdraw nor the question of their anonymity was discussed. For one of the group, this was a cause for concern and, in the interview; the participant suggested that her response to the data generation part of the research might have been affected by this consideration.

I think that although they might have mentioned anonymity, I felt a little self-conscious about that and therefore non-trusting. Beverley

Four interviewees recalled verbal discussions: in the case of three participants, this conversation included reference to both the right to withdraw and the right to anonymity, in one case only the right to withdraw was mentioned and in the fourth, the interviewee reported a discussion on anonymity only.

At each stage, I was reminded that I had the option of withdrawing from the research. Carol

One participant, with previous experience of participation in more than one research project and with conducting her own research appeared sceptical of the value of the offer of anonymity given by a researcher.

She said she was going to anonymise it but I think you've always got that in the back of the head and if she'd played the tape to somebody, particularly as I don't have a local accent, you've got quite a distinctive voice. So that sort of thing might go through your head.

Irene

None of the participants interviewed for this research reported the completion of a written consent form.

These are, on the face of it, striking findings when set alongside the following two extracts from the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2004).

Researchers must recognise the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason and at any time and they must inform them of that right. BERA (2004) Paragraph 13.

Researchers must recognise the participant's right to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity unless they or their guardians, or responsible others specifically and willingly waive that right. BERA (2004) Paragraph 23.

There was, however, an interesting contrast in the reaction of one interviewee when asked about the ethical procedure that had been followed in connection with the research in which he had taken part. Whilst this was a single dissenting voice, this view nevertheless indicates forcefully

that participants do not necessarily see ethical considerations in educational research as appropriate or even necessary.

It sounds like you're talking about risk assessments! That's what we have to fill in every time we go on a school trip, a huge form. There are some things in life that don't involve risks and I can't see that there's anything dangerous in taking part in research, in sitting being questioned by a fellow teacher or some researcher. There's a lot of dangerous things we do, there are kids carrying knives and so I don't think research like this is risky really. Mohammed

The evidence of this small study therefore clearly suggests that the BERA guidance was not universally observed in respect of participants' rights to anonymity or the requirement of researchers to obtain informed consent. It is equally true that this was not generally a cause for concern for those who took part in this research: perhaps the number of participants who could not recall such a discussion suggests that this is neither a significant concern for some researchers nor for their participants. Note also that the lack of such a discussion self-evidently did not prevent participation in the research discussed, by any of those who took part in this study, nor is there any evidence of any 'harm' being occasioned to participants in any sense in which the word might be understood (this theme is elaborated in the discussion section (section 5)). There is, however, a suggestion here that the absence prior to their research participation of a substantive process of reassurance on anonymity and consent was a source of what might be described as discomfort for two participants (Beverley and Irene above), discomfort that might have had an impact on the data they supplied. A further potential cause for concern might be the reaction of Andrew, who assumed, without any substantiation from the researcher involved, that the necessary safeguard of anonymity and informed consent were in place.

4.2.6 Participants' views on researchers and the data generation process

Twelve of the fifteen participants in this study gave accounts relating to the data generation associated with their involvement in research. The remaining three said they could not recall the events in sufficient detail to offer an account. Participants' views of the data generation process were in two broad categories: those relating to the overall experience of data generation as a whole and those concerning the individual researcher with whom the participant had contact. In some cases there was an overlap between the two, suggesting that the individual researcher with whom the participant had contact might play an important role in shaping participant attitude to the research as a whole.

Participants' responses are illustrated in figure 4. Of the group of twelve who gave substantive responses when asked about this, a high proportion: seven of the eleven interviewees who described the process of data generation in relation to their research involvement offered what might be seen as negative accounts, whilst five offered positive accounts of their experience. Amongst the seven who gave generally negative accounts of participation, three interviewees centred their comments on the researcher with whom they had contact describing what appeared to them to be unsympathetic researchers.

Once he had finished the interview, it was as if he couldn't wait to go and during the recording he was quite forceful in asking me things, almost backing me into a corner, you might say. Karen

The researcher almost seemed to have written his conclusions before he came to us. I got this impression and then I spoke to [name] who was also taking part in the project and he said the same – that he felt

that we were almost unnecessary and it was almost as if the whole research thing was being used as window dressing. Grant

Another participant appeared unconvinced that the researcher was familiar and comfortable with the educational setting in which the research took place.

They looked like a scared rabbit in a frightening inner city school. I was very conscious that they felt uncomfortable in the environment.
Beverley

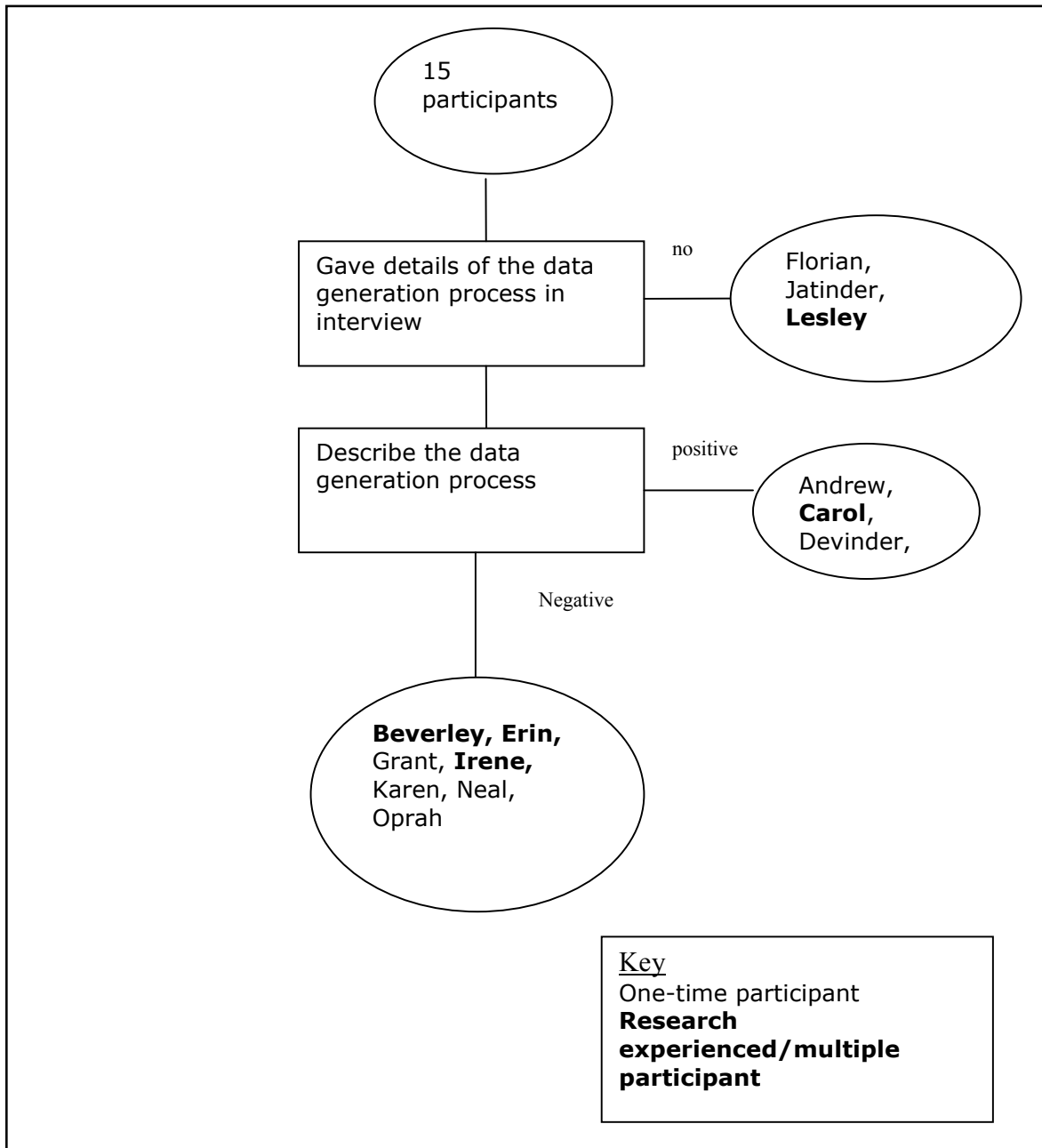


Figure 4 Participants' views on researchers and the data generation process

One participant with previous experience in conducting research gave a description of being involved what appeared to her to be a naïve methodology.

You know that when interviewers interview, often they will give off really the answer they expect. And for me it was sort of, 'been there, done that, I'm not playing that game! Irene

[The researcher] was young. I don't think sometimes they realise there is an interpretation going on, they ask a question and what it is going to mean is what it means to them. Irene

The words of Irene here indicate that here she is comparing this episode of participation with previous episodes and in this context, the behaviour of the researcher is being seen, and judged, in the light of her previous experiences of participation.

Another participant reflected what appeared to be a more general unease with the data generation process and with her perceptions of the underlying power relations.

I mean I wouldn't like to say that I felt like a laboratory rat because that would be unfair, but I felt that they held the higher ground. Erin

Three of this group of seven reporting negative overall experiences of data generation had previous experience of conducting their own research but whilst experience of research seems to be a possible factor in informing participants' response to research, unfamiliarity with educational research might also contribute to a misapprehension of the purposes of research. One first-time participant seemed unsure of the nature and purpose of the data generation activity in which he was engaged.

I do think this felt like we were being inspected and I had no idea who was going to see the results of this research so I suppose I was quite careful in what I said because I always had this at the back of my mind.....It was obvious from a fairly early stage in the interview that the researcher, he wanted to find out if we were teaching to the government's schemes of work – at least that's what it felt like. Neal

The fifth participant, who gave a critical account of her participation, linked her concerns with what she saw as the lack of information on the research that she had received.

I felt a little uncomfortable because I hadn't had the opportunity to reflect on the project and decide if I wanted to be a part of it, I was just told to go along and be interviewed. Beverley

For four of the five interviewees who gave positive overall accounts of their experience of the data generation process with which they were associated, the personal qualities of the researcher were important.

The approach was very good, clear and supportive... They were very pleasant and sympathetic. Carol

[The researcher] was very polite and seemed very knowledgeable.

Mohammed

For one participant, the background of the researcher and in particular her familiarity with the reality of life in school seemed important in creating a favourable impression.

The researcher who came was a woman, and she had obviously been or still was a teacher because you could tell from the way she was with the pupils. ...She was business-like. She seemed to understand that our time was short and she seemed to make an effort not to get in the way. Devinder

A fourth participant who gave a positive assessment of the data generation process had experience of conducting educational research and saw involvement in research as way of developing his own practice.

Well it gives some insight into what it must be like for the people I work with as a researcher because I was at the receiving end of it.
Andrew

Evidently, a significant proportion (7/15) of those who agreed to take part in this study reported experiences of the data generation part of their involvement in research. Once again, it is impossible to make any judgement, given the small sample, of how these experiences are typical. Such accounts, do, however suggest some of the ways in which participants might be left with negative impressions following contact with a researcher or taking part in a data generation process and the account equally highlight those characteristics of research encounters that do not induce such negative responses in participants.

These negative experiences described by participants here seemed to be associated with: the perceived attitude of the researcher with whom the participants had contact; the perceived qualities and experience of that researcher; unease at the research situation itself and/or of the

purposes of the underlying research and uncertainty about anonymity. Some of these perceptions might be influenced in part by participants' prior experience as researchers; especially those (such as those of Beverley and Irene) where participants were critical of the research methodology being employed. Other cause of unease, such as a conflation of research involvement with being a subject of an inspection process, seems in contrast, to be related a lack of research experience.

Positive experiences of the data generation process were experienced by four of the fifteen participants. These favourable experiences were mostly related to the perceived personal qualities of the researcher involved although in one case, the participant saw in the process an opportunity to develop their own understanding of educational research.

4.2.7 The availability of transcripts and written accounts

Thirteen of the fifteen participants in this study gave substantive (i.e. they were able to supply a definite answer to the question; not, for instance, indicating that they were unable to remember) responses when asked if they had seen any written material (following their direct research involvement) relating to the research in which they had participated, for example an interview transcript or a copy of a report associated with the research project. Four interviewees said they had seen such a written account relating to the research project. Another participant in this study reported that he understood at the time of being interviewed for this study that no reports had yet been published relating to the research in which he participated. Amongst this group who had access to written material, one had seen the final project report published on a website and had had his attention drawn to this by the a member of the project team. A second participant did receive a written report but this interviewee, with previous experience of conducting research himself, said that he would have wished to have been involved more closely in the production of the report; a possibility, he says, that was never discussed.

I was sent a copy of the published paper and I felt that the analysis was methodologically sound but I should have liked to have been able to participate in the data analysis stage. Carol

For the third participant, access to a report published following her research involvement was offered in a way which she felt might have compromised her anonymity (see case study 4).

There was one sent to the school and it was put on the general notice board. [...]I felt it was a bit insensitive and I was concerned that I might be identified from the report – anybody could have worked out who we were. Beverley

The majority of participants (ten) said they had not seen any transcript or publication associated with the research discussed in this study. Within this group, four participants indicated when asked that they wished to see such a report.

Andrew *I have never heard back from this. I did ask several times, 'could I please be told what happened or what they found?'*

NM *Would you like to see some written outcome of this research?*

Andrew *Yes, of course. That's kind of quite important actually.*

In summary, only a relatively small proportion of those who took part in the study (4/15) had at the time of the interview for this study had access (or facilitated access, as some of the written material in question may have been published at some stage) to accounts of the research to which they had contributed. When the nine participants who had not received or been directed to such written material were asked if they wished to have had such access, four said they would have wished to see something. This might be seen as surprising in that less than half the participants in this category actually wanted to read about that research. Of the remaining two participants, one could not recall whether he had seen any material and one knew that material from the project in which he participated had not been published at the time of being interviewed. There is the possibility that this might have also applied for some of the nine who reported they hadn't seen any published material: it might not have been published at the time.

One possible explanation here for the apparent lack of interest in seeing published research was that out of this group of five who said they did not wish to access published material, four were first-time participants, perhaps indicating an uncertainty about the procedures around research. For example, they might not have been clear that research findings might be publicly available or they might not have been led to believe that they had any entitlement to see their data or the outcomes of the research in which they took part. The individual case of the participant (Beverley – see case study 4) where material was published on a school notice board raises questions of the protection of anonymity which are discussed above. In addition, only a small minority of two participants were offered sight of an interview transcript relating to their involvement.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

Some of the general points that arose in this study are as follows:

- First, participants' prior experience of participation in and conducting research seems to play some part in shaping attitudes to research participation. The group of five research experienced participants in this study were: more likely to express cynicism in their views on educational research prior to the episode of participation being discussed; more likely to regard the explanation of the research given to them as inadequate and more likely to be critical of the research methodology.
- Secondly, only four of fifteen participants could recall a discussion of their rights to anonymity or of their rights to withdraw, and none were asked to complete a written consent document. Of course, such a low level of recall on this point amongst participants could suggest this is a finding of questionable validity, especially given the size and nature of the sample but on the other hand, the low numbers of participants who could recall such a discussion might be significant in and of itself in implying a relatively low profile of this process within the conduct of the research in question. Three of the fifteen participants in this study said that they felt their participation in the research discussed was not the result of a voluntary decision on their part. In two of these cases, participants described being co-opted by senior colleagues and in the third (see case study 2 - Oprah) the decision to participate in the research had been taken at a school level and the participant in this study felt unable to refuse to take part. In a further five cases, the invitation to participate came to the participant through a superior, perhaps suggesting the possibility that participants might have felt under some pressure to take part in the research
- Thirdly, seven of fifteen participants described the data generation part of their research involvement in negative terms. These negative experiences described by participants here

seemed to be associated with: the perceived attitude of the researcher with whom the participants had contact; the perceived qualities and experience of that researcher; unease at the research situation itself and/or of the purposes of the underlying research and uncertainty about anonymity. This appears a high proportion of the sample but it seems that negative experiences do not necessarily translate into more negative perceptions of educational research as a whole than those previously held by participants nor do they predict an unwillingness to participate in future research. This might suggest that these experiences, although classed here as negative, were not perceived as harmful by participants; in fact, as the discussion section later considers, such experiences were not necessarily at odds with participants' overall views of the practice of educational researchers.

- Finally, there is relatively little evidence of research dissemination to participants since only four of the fifteen participants recalled seeing, or being given the opportunity to see, written material relating to the project in which they had participated. Only a minority of participants who said they hadn't seen such material wished to have had the opportunity, perhaps suggesting a relatively low level of interest amongst participants in seeing published findings relating to those studies in which they take part. The case of one participant in this study suggests that anonymity can be compromised by some means of dissemination.

These findings were derived from interviews with individuals and whilst they identify common themes between participants' experiences, the individual perceptions and experiences of those individuals should also be seen in their own context. In order to allow some contextualisation, there now follow four case studies of individual participants. These participants have been chosen to illustrate something of the range of experiences and attitudes revealed in the course of the interviews for this study.

The first case study of Devinder has been chosen to show the case of a participant who had a broadly positive experience of participation. The second case, that of Oprah, follows the story of a teacher who was required to act as a vicarious researcher, carrying out research on behalf of others. Irene, the third case, portrays an experienced researcher who is taking part in the research of others. Finally, Beverley was chosen because she illustrates both the influence of previous experience as a researcher and participant and she was also asked to carry out vicarious research. It would also perhaps be disingenuous of me not to indicate that these particular cases were also chosen because they offered what appeared to me to be some of the most interesting interviews that I conducted.

4.4 Case Studies

The first case study concerns a participant identified as Devinder who seems to have had a positive experience of involvement in research. Devinder appears to have felt able to make a voluntary decision to participate in the research with which she was involved. When data generation took place through an interview, she formed a favourable impression of the researcher with whom she had contact, and the evident understanding of teachers' lives shown by the researcher seemed to have played a part here. Finally, Devinder had an opportunity to see a transcript of her interview and was then directed to a published report. Devinder indicates that she would consider taking part again in research of this sort.

The second study is of Oprah, who is not a direct participant in research but might be considered rather as a proxy researcher. Oprah was asked to administer questionnaires to pupils whom she taught. The request came indirectly through her Head of Department and originated from a research institution whose relationship with the school, on Oprah's account, seemed to have been

limited to sending the questionnaires along with a brief covering letter. Not only did Oprah consider that she; and by extension, her pupils, did not have an opportunity to refuse, but the same appeared to be true at the level of her school, which seem to have felt bound by a previous agreement to participate. Oprah found the experience of administering the questionnaires difficult as little or no consideration appeared to have been given to the accessibility for the intended target audience of the research instruments concerned. Oprah's case suggests how a lack of communication between research institution and those who are asked to participate, either directly or indirectly, can affect not only how that research project is perceived but also influence the quality of the data obtained and influence participants' disposition towards future research participation.

Irene is an experienced researcher now employed at an HEI. She relates the story of a research project in which she was involved, giving a highly critical account both of the overall design of the research and of the performance of the researcher with whom she came into contact. Irene's case illustrates how the a research literate participant can view research and those involved in research and perhaps suggests at least missed opportunities for research organisations in not allowing any avenues by which they might make use of that experience.

The fourth study is of Beverley, who was 'volunteered' by a senior member of staff at her school to take part in a piece of research on teacher development. Beverley feels that the research was poorly explained, conducted using a questionable methodology and suspected that her anonymity was under threat, a view that was exacerbated later when research findings from the project in which she participated were published on the school notice board in spite of the associated risks of participant identification. Beverley's case shows how research allowing the participant little or no power in negotiating the terms of participation can border on the coercive.

4.3.1 Case Study 1 - Devinder

This participant had a positive reaction to her involvement in research. She had no experience of research participation prior to this episode and held no strong prior views on research in general. A teacher with management responsibility at the school, she was involved in a study of girls' involvement in science education. Through her involvement, Devinder became more positively disposed to educational research.

At the time the field work was carried out for this research project, Devinder was a teacher in her sixth year of teaching at a large comprehensive school in the South of England. Devinder is a teacher of Science. In 2003, she participated in a study by a non-HEI research organisation relating to girls' take-up of Science education.

Devinder was recruited as a research participant through the school's Continuing Professional Development co-ordinator who received a request through the post. The material received by the CPD co-ordinator, and forwarded to Devinder, consisted of a letter briefly explaining the research and giving an indication of the demands that would be placed on participants. Devinder's comments regarding her choice to participate and the fact that the request had been dealt with by the person with a role supporting CPD at the school might suggest that for Devinder, participation in the research could be seen as an activity related to her professional development.

[CPD co-ordinator] stopped me one day and said, 'I've something you might be interested in'. I still don't know why [CPD co-ordinator] thought of me when she got the letter but I suppose she knows that I'm sort of... interested in that area – why girls don't do science and I am curious by

nature. We had talked about me doing an MA in the past, now I think about it.

Devinder reports that she saw her choice to participate as entirely voluntary and this view appears to be plausible given that for Devinder, the CPD co-ordinator was not perceived to be in any sense a superior at the school and at the point at which Devinder decided to take part, she had had no contact with anybody connected with the research organisation.

At this point, Devinder made contact by phone with a representative of the research organisation expressing her wish to participate and an appointment for a researcher to visit the school and interview Devinder was arranged at that point. It was apparent from the interview conducted for this project that Devinder was not aware of any formal procedure either during this phone conversation or during the researcher's visit that might amount to a granting of informed consent to participate, neither were the issues of anonymity nor that of any right to withdraw from the research discussed.

NM *Were anonymity or your right to withdraw raised in the course of your research?*

Devinder *No, that was never made an issue to me at all. Nothing like that was ever discussed.*

The account given above regarding these issues surrounding the granting of informed consent were subsequently confirmed and clarified in an e-mail exchange between myself and Devinder.

Although she had no knowledge of any informed consent procedure, formal or informal, having taking place, Devinder's remarks in the interview suggest no expectation or wish on her part to formalise the agreement to participate in this way.

I just agreed to take part in this, I wasn't really concerned with being anonymous – I'm not bothered who knows what I think.

Devinder was one of the nine out of fifteen participants in this study who reported having had no previous experience of taking part in educational research. This might be associated with her willingness to participate in this research without reassurances about anonymity or concerning the right to withdraw from the research. The views of Devinder on educational research in general both before and after this episode of participation were explored in the interview. These views suggest that involvement in this research had a significant effect on Devinder's attitude in this respect. Asked about her views on educational research prior to this involvement, Devinder said:

It was something I probably thought wasn't of much use. You know sometimes when you have research presented to you in training sessions, that sort of thing, you tend to think of it as something a little bit separate from teaching practice and maybe not that much use really in practice. So yes, I suppose that was my view beforehand that maybe the people doing the research were a little too removed from actual teaching practice. That they maybe didn't understand what it was like to try and implement their ideas in practice.

Following her research participation, Devinder's attitude seems to have changed.

I've come to feel that research can inform your practice, can improve your practice.

Devinder's description of the research process and of the researcher with whom she was involved might offer some explanation for this change. The account given by Devinder describes a process in which she came to feel a sense of involvement in the research through her contact with the researcher who interviewed her for this particular research project, which was investigating the engagement of girls in science education and later on, as a result of the access Devinder was afforded to an interview transcript and to the full report.

Devinder formed a favourable impression of the researcher from the educational institution responsible for the research. Interestingly a factor here seemed to be that the researcher appeared to Devinder to be credible from the point of view of appearing to have teaching experience. This was, to Devinder, apparent in the way the researcher related to the pupils with whom she, the researcher, had contact in the course of the research. This has clear parallels with the Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) study commented on in the literature review section above where knowledge of a researcher's status as a teacher influenced participants' attitudes towards that researcher.

The researcher who came was a woman, and she had obviously been or still was a teacher because you could tell from the way she was with the pupils.

The researcher also appeared, from Devinder's account, to understand the pressures, and perhaps especially, the time pressures experienced by teachers in schools.

She was business-like ... she seemed to understand that our time was short and she seemed to make an effort not to get in the way.

The interview was quite brief. Which I appreciated because I have a very heavy day that particular day but I didn't feel like I was being rushed and I had a chance to say what I wanted to.

The favourable impression continued after the contact between Devinder and the researcher. Devinder was promptly sent a transcript of the interview.

I was sent a transcript of the interview within two weeks I think and it was interesting to read what I'd said and I was quite happy with it but I think it's a courtesy. I wasn't aware before but it made me think, 'yes, why shouldn't I have this chance to correct what I'd said.'

Finally, Devinder was directed to a published report arising from the research on the internet and in the interview, she gave an indication that this had been welcome and perhaps contributed to a sense of the value of taking part in research.

When I saw it in print, I was quite proud, in a funny way that I had helped this to happen; do you know what I mean?

Devinder seems, then to have had favourable experience of participation. She felt that she had been given a choice whether or not she engaged in the research. Although Devinder did not receive the invitation to take part herself, the relationship between herself and the recipient of that invitation was not, according to Devinder, a relationship of power and she therefore did not report

feeling under any obligation to co-operate. The decision to participate appears, therefore, to have been her own. This might perhaps have contributed to the favourable overall impression conveyed by Devinder in spite of the apparent absence of a formal or informal informed consent procedure which clearly did not feature as a concern for this interviewee.

Devinder's experience of contact with the researcher from the institution concerned was positive, and the understanding of the practicalities of teachers' lives shown by the researcher seemed here to have been both noticed and appreciated by Devinder. Receiving a transcript and being directed to a published report on the research was seen favorably by Devinder and, she indicates, by the pupils who also took part as participants. In conclusion, Devinder saw benefits for her own practice and perhaps benefits for pupils from participating and indicated that she would consider similar involvement in the future.

In terms of costs, the only thing I can think of is the time but with hindsight, the time was very well spent. For me, it was interesting seeing how another professional from outside teaching looks at an issue like this. ... I would certainly consider taking part in research again.

4.3.2 Case Study 2 - Oprah

Research participation for Oprah was limited to distributing a questionnaire at the 11-16 school at which she worked in connection with a large scale research into mathematics education being carried out by an external organisation. Oprah felt the questionnaire was inappropriate for the pupils she taught but did not feel able to refuse participation either on her own behalf or on that of her pupils.

At the time of interview Oprah was (and still is) a Maths. teacher in an 11-16 school in the North of England. Oprah was not involved herself in a research project in the sense that she was not a direct participant in the research project concerned here but she did administer questionnaires on behalf of an external institution. The issues that arise in Oprah's account, therefore, do not bear directly on the experience of giving personal data or even having personal direct contact with a researcher or institution but are germane to questions around the relationship between schools as institutions and those external to schools who conduct research. In Oprah's account, perhaps the most telling feature is that the external institution appears only as an institution and no individual from that institution is referred to by Oprah since she had no such individual contact. Oprah's story may have resonances for those who take part as surrogate or co-opted researchers in the sort of large-scale project that is clearly being described here.

Oprah first learnt of her involvement in a research project as follows.

My head of department was sent these bundles of questionnaires. I'm not sure how we became involved in this [HOD] says that she thinks it was her predecessor who signed us up for this and the Head's always keen to take on things like this.

Neither Oprah, nor her Head of Department, were aware of the reason for the selection of their school as a participant in this research project. From Oprah's account, a brief letter accompanying the bundle of questionnaires giving some contact details was the only contact between the research organisation and the school. Oprah was not aware of any attempt on the school's part to contact the research institution at any point and her assumption is that the feeling at the school was that they had some obligation to administer the questionnaires but, perhaps not seeing themselves as fully 'partners' in the research, they felt they had no standing on which to

renegotiate the terms of a participation that had been agreed in advance. There was also an impression according to Oprah, amongst those at the school with whom she had spoken about this matter, that the research would be beneficial for mathematics education in general and hence it was something in which the school should be involved. This sense of a lack of communication between research institution and school is evident in Oprah's comment here.

I don't know why we've been chosen. Anyway, these questionnaires arrived and we were just told that they had to be given to our pupils...I've asked the Head of Department and she doesn't know what it's all about, all we know is that we've agreed to do this.

Not only was Oprah in a position in which she could have little understanding of the background to the research in which she was involved, but she was also apparently in a position in which she felt it difficult to refuse co-operation with the research.

I didn't feel that I could say no because I was being asked to by our HOD and he's much more senior than I am. I just didn't feel that I could refuse even although I couldn't see why we were being asked to do this. The [HOD] said that as the school has agreed to this in the past, we couldn't really back out.

Hence, the question of consent in relation to this episode of participation appears to have been obviated for Oprah, who was not aware of the purposes of the research, nor did she experience a direct relationship with any individual from the researching institution and did not feel that she had the option of refusing collaboration. Indeed, it is not clear from Oprah's account or from subsequent contacts, that anybody at the school had one-to-one communication with individuals

at the institution responsible for the research. The question of informed consent with its accompanying corollaries of informing the participant of the nature of the research and of the participant's right to withdraw were not discussed. It is, however, possible to claim that Oprah and those in a similar position were aware of the likely demands that collaborating in the research would place on them as it seems to have been apparent from the limited communication between research institution and school that research involvement would be limited to the administering of a questionnaire.

The process of administering the questionnaire proved to be stressful for Oprah. The questionnaires were lengthy 'like a tax return' and even to adults appeared to contain a large number of words. Moreover, the wording of the questionnaires seemed in this case to be inappropriate for the reading age of those pupils who were being asked to complete the surveys. Although Oprah teaches across the age and ability groupings at the school, for reasons of timetabling, she was expected on this occasion to conduct the questionnaire with a low ability year 8 group who she taught regularly. As Oprah points out, many of the pupils in this group struggle with numeracy and literacy and are working at a level far below the norm at Key Stage 3 (Oprah indicates that the majority of pupils in the group concerned were at the time working at National Curriculum level 3 or 4 in English and Maths, the norm for this age group would be level 5 or 6).

Most of our children, they're very low ability the ones that I teach and I was almost in tears because as soon as I looked at the questionnaires, I realised that they just wouldn't be able to read them. The questionnaire was six pages long and just had lots of words that our kids just couldn't read. I just said to them, 'don't worry about it if you can't understand a question just write, 'don't understand' on it.

In addition, Oprah indicates that she felt there was an apparent identification by pupils of the questionnaire with some sort of academic testing procedure, Oprah says she did all she could to convince the pupils concerned that this was not the case. Oprah comments that her perception was that this sort of data generation activity could perhaps be best dealt with by a sympathetic teacher, known to the pupils and armed with a full understanding of the purposes of the test. However, given the way in which the school and therefore Oprah came to be involved with this research, the understanding of the purpose of the research amongst teachers at the school was very limited. Nor, from Oprah's account does there seem to have been any obvious conduit for information about the circumstances in which the questionnaire was completed or the potential effect on pupils or on the quality of data that was ultimately being returned to the research institution. For instance, Oprah reported no knowledge of any follow-up activities on behalf of the research institution such as gathering feedback on the administration of the tests. It might be that such contact did take place between the school and representative of the research institution but that these contacts did not extend to Oprah is clear from this interview.

In the context of this investigation, it is the effect of this example on Oprah's perceptions of education research in general that is of particular relevance. It is apparent from her comments when interviewed for this research project that this episode of research participation by proxy has affected Oprah's views. When asked to describe her views on educational research prior to this episode, Oprah remarks.

I didn't really think much about research but if I did, I suppose I thought that the people who did it were experts in education and understood something about pupils.

Oprah then gives a more extensive response about what she sees as the futility of this particular example of a data generation process. She implies that the experience has made her less likely to take part in such research in the future.

After having had this experience, I wouldn't want to put the kids through something like this again. I really think I would say 'no' next time. I can't see that it has achieved anything.

4.3.3 Case Study 3 - Irene

This participant is an experienced researcher now employed at an HEI. She relates the story of a research project in which she was involved, giving a highly critical account both of the overall design of the research and of the performance of the researcher with whom she came into contact.

Irene was a primary school teacher for five years and now works part-time at an HEI. With a background in Psychology, Irene has considerable experience of conducting her own research projects and of taking part in the research of others, both in the context of psychology and of education. This case study largely derives from an interview in which Irene focuses on a particular episode of participation in educational research which took place in 2004 in the context of an HEI setting. The research in question was sponsored by the HEI in which both Irene and the researcher work.

During the interview, it emerged that for Irene, the agenda behind the research and quality of the data generation part of the research experience were significant. Irene's overall participation, and in particular, her involvement in the data generation activity part of the research, were related to her own research practice.

Irene describes her involvement in the research project discussed, in which she was interviewed by a researcher from the same HEI, as being the result of a ballot.

I took part in a piece of research here last year and basically I was picked out of a hat to answer questions about widening participation and how well the university had dealt with it. I think that within the department I was the only person who was asked, it was pretty much a pick a name job all around the Uni.

So Irene's involvement was not, in this sense, voluntary. However, as we see below, Irene is generally willing to take part in research so this lack of choice appears not to have been a concern for her. Of greater concern appears to have been the reasons behind the research. Since this was, in-house research, Irene was interested to understand the purpose of the investigation.

I thought I did but I really didn't know in the end what their agenda was. I suppose had I been full time here, had I a lot of career aspirations invested here I might have found it threatening.

This concern seems to have affected the attitude that Irene had towards anonymity in connection with this research. The fact that the results of this research and the data would potentially be available to colleagues at the same institution seemed to make the question of anonymity more prominent for Irene as did her own experience of working in the field of education and hence having a connection with educational researchers and some understanding of the research process.

NM. *Was that issue discussed with you, the issue of anonymity?*

Irene *Not really, I think there was a line on the e-mail that said, you know, data will be anonymised but I think when you work in education you're always a bit paranoid.*

Nor were Irene's concerns over anonymity allayed during the course of the data generation itself and through access to the tape recording of the interview.

She said she was going to anonymise it but I think you've always got that in the back of the head and if she'd played the tape to somebody, particularly as I don't have a local accent, you've got quite a distinctive voice. So that sort of thing might go through your head.

Later in the interview for this project, Irene expressed a more complex appreciation of anonymity, discussing one of the potential consequences of a lack of attention to this.

I'll go along with it but being misquoted really bugs me. If I was I would say something about it. It's never happened to me but I would imagine being anonymous and being misquoted, that would be even more annoying. I'm not bothered so long as I'm not misrepresented, I'll stick by it.

Some of Irene's most forceful comments on the data generation activity associated with this research were in connection with the researcher who conducted the interview. In this account, it

seems that Irene regards herself, perhaps with some justification, as a more experienced researcher than the person interviewing her and her perception of the power relationship is therefore affected by this view. Irene reflects that this is not the only time when she has had this impression which perhaps might be seen as reflecting her own perception of her status.

NM *About the researcher you had contact with. You would have said she was inexperienced?*

Irene *To be honest, I can't think of a sort of research I've been involved with where that hasn't been the case.*

Irene then goes on to make observations about researchers in general. Her assessment of relative status in relation to research expertise is linked to the researcher's experience in the classroom.

This is a lot of my thing about educational research, people who do it often are not teachers and they ask you questions where you think, 'd'uh yes, you know', and you think, 'why are you wasting my time with this? Go and teach a class and find out'.

Irene's critique of the researcher who conducted the interview extended to the questioning style and this again prompted some general comments about interviewing technique.

You do get some very naïve questions sometimes. I think [the questions] were begging the traditional response. You know that when interviewers interview, often they will give off really the answer they expect. And for me it was sort of, 'been there, done that, I'm not playing that game!' and

she seemed to quite like it. I'm not sure how that's gone back into the research into the report or whatever.

Although critical of the interviewer and of the interview questions, there was clearly a value for Irene as a researcher in participating. For her, the decision to participate in research was related to her own research practice and, indeed, part of the value of participation was as a way of informing her own research practice.

It gives you access to somebody else's thinking and I think even the fact that found some of the questions naïve is useful. I think it's very good for people who interview to be interviewed. ... I think if you act as a participant in research that gives you a reflection because you get sat in the participant's seat. I think that's quite important, that's why I volunteer for research.

The question of providing transcripts was relevant for Irene who referred back to her own experience as a researcher and once again, the value of this was related back to her own research practice. Irene gave a similar response in relation to seeing published products of the research.

NM. *Would you be interested in seeing the published products of this research?*

Irene *Yes. I'd also be interested in seeing how other people responded to the same questions. I think that's always interesting.*

4.3.4 Case Study 4 - Beverley

Beverley is an experienced classroom teacher who, at the time of the episode of research participation referred to here, worked at an inner-city comprehensive in the Midlands. She was 'volunteered' by a superior at school to take part in a piece of research on teacher development. Beverley feels that the research was poorly explained, conducted using a questionable methodology and suspected that her anonymity was under threat.

In comparison with Irene, at the time of this episode of research involvement, Beverley had no experience of conducting her own research. However, the reflection given here are those of a person with research experience since Beverley had carried out research herself after the episode of participation under discussion in the interview for this project but before she participated in this investigation on participation. Beverley therefore offers a perspective on her own approach at the time that has been developed and conditioned by later experience.

Beverley indicates quite strongly that the decision to take part in this instance of educational research was not a voluntary one on her part.

I was completely co-opted by the then deputy head who just said 'they're doing some research in school, you're free that period and so you're doing it' – it was as basic as that.

As indicated in Irene's account, Beverley did not feel that the research was explained to her at this point or any other point during her involvement in the research, nor was any formal informed consent procedure apparently followed in this case.

NM. *How was the research explained to you?*

Beverley *It wasn't. Certainly in any way , now that I know about research and I know that you have to go through various procedures, I don't feel that I experienced those procedures shall we say and I've a vague recollection of there being a piece of paper explaining some general bits about the project. I don't remember signing a participant's consent form although that might be my memory and there was just a quick verbal explanation at the time of the interview so I wasn't given any time to inwardly digest the information and think about it.*

Beverley refers to this later in the interview as a reason for her unease during the interview she gave to the researcher involved. Again there is an interesting comparison with Irene here who experienced similar concerns over the preservation of her anonymity. In the case of Beverley, the significant factor appears to have been the short period of time in which she was expected to make the decision about whether to participate or not. Beverley here suggests that she did not feel she had what she saw as a reasonable opportunity to consider the likely costs and benefits of her participation.

I felt a little uncomfortable because I hadn't had the opportunity to reflect on the project and decide if I wanted to be a part of it, I was just told to go along and be interviewed. I think that although they might have mentioned anonymity, I felt a little self-conscious about that and therefore non-trusting.

In her description of the data generation phase of the research in which she was involved, Beverley goes on to imply that she felt uncomfortable with the questions that she was being asked in the interview in which she participated. Again questions of the voluntary or non-voluntary nature of her participation and of the confidentiality of any data given in the interview seemed to come to the fore in a data generation process that appeared to be, in some respects, a threatening one for the participant.

The nature of the [project] questions, they were quite personal so I felt a bit on the spot I suppose and I wondered the deputy who had pushed me into it would have any access to the information and also, as I've just described, I was fairly unique in the Local Authority, I felt I was fairly identifiable.

This uneasiness also seemed on the part of Beverley to be related to the subject matter of the data generation exercise in which she was involved.

I felt like a small cog in a big machine that I didn't feel part of and the nature of the questions were quite personal and that felt quite inappropriate, about decisions you'd made about your own career and about you work-life balance. It was the fact that I had just been told to do it that made it worse, really.

Beverley's comments on the data generation associated with this research also give some insight into the quite pragmatic thought processes of teachers who participate in this way.

I honestly can't remember much except that I was very conscious of time because it was my free period and I didn't want to be there for longer than 20 minutes. Although I remembered thinking if I spin this out for an hour I'll miss my next lesson.

In Beverley's case, one of the motivations for participating in this exercise was a wish to express a political view on the nature of education and on the role of teachers within the system.

Beverley *I was just sick of all the paper chasing the data generation, the forcing kids to meet targets that I felt were unrealistic, that put pressure on not just the kids but the team that I was in charge of. I wanted to get that across because I wanted that to be said.*

NM. *Did you think you had an opportunity to get that in?*

Beverley *I think I got it in, I don't know whether it was valued or they used it*

Given that this wish to express a potentially controversial view seems to have been at least part of Beverley's reason for taking part in this research, and given the concerns over anonymity that she seems to have experienced in the course of her participation, the subsequent means of communication adopted by the research organisation seems to have been rather surprising.

NM. *Have you seen a written account of the research?*

Beverley. *There was one sent to the school and it was put on the general notice board.*

NM. *Just put on the notice board?*

Beverley. *Yes, because there were six or seven of us interviewed at the time but we weren't given individual transcripts and I don't remember seeing a copy of the report until it was put on the notice board.*

NM. *So you said earlier about your concerns on anonymity*

Beverley *Yes, I felt it was a bit insensitive and I was concerned that I might be identified from the report – anybody could have worked out who we were. I was surprised at the way this was done.*

This appears from the account given by Beverley, to be a potentially rather insensitive way of disseminating findings from research. Although one might justify such a public presentation of a research publication on the grounds perhaps of raising the profile of research within the school, the response of Beverley suggests that questions of anonymity are raised. This incident perhaps underlines the perception that appears in Beverley's earlier responses that she, as the participant, felt her participation in the research was in some ways beyond her control just as she had not felt

that she exercised choice over her decision to participate. To some extent, she was uncomfortable with the questions put to her in the interview and did not feel able to shape the interview agenda, although there is some suggestion that Beverley was given an opportunity to express her views. Finally, Beverley implies, in her account that control over the use of her data was taken from her, through concerns over anonymity and, most strikingly, through the public manner in which the outcomes of the research were disseminated to the school.

Beverley was an interesting case because she allows some insight into the effect of research involvement both as a participant and as a researcher on developing personal views on educational research. When asked about her views on educational research prior to the episode of involvement referred to in this investigation, Beverley said that she felt she had little understanding of the purposes of research and seemed particularly concerned with the application of research to practice.

I suppose I thought I couldn't really see the point of research that wasn't going to help teachers like me.

It should perhaps be noted here as a general point that such recollections of past attitudes, which were invited from all those who participated in this research, are open to some question about the extent to which participants' recollections of previous attitudes and views do present a reliable perspective of their previous perceptions. As Hammersley (2003) suggests, the further interviewees seek to move their participants beyond 'factual' recall of the recent past towards relating more impressionistic and affective views or those relating to events in the more distant past, the more potentially significant becomes the nature and situation of the interview: especially in terms of the relationship between participant and researcher, in which such recollections are

sought and the more the data arising from such an interview might be seen as a product or artifact of the interview itself.

Given that caveat about the validity of data about past attitudes, it would perhaps be questionable to attempt to separate Beverley's attitudes into three phases: before any form of research involvement, after involvement as participant and following her own research experience. Beverley herself was, however, aware of a change in attitudes towards educational research as her experience grew. When asked to describe her current views on research in general, Beverley spoke of what she called in herself a 'cynical' attitude linked to an underlying mistrust of the uses of educational research.

Beverley *It's difficult, because I've now been involved on the other end of it, because since I've been involved in educational research, I have some fairly fixed views on it, I suppose and I have some fairly cynical views on it, I suppose because the project I had been involved in as a research was not an independent evaluation, it was so much in the hands of the government so I kind of, I suppose had a negative view of it.*

NM. *And your negative view was what?*

Beverley *Was that either that it was going to feed an existing agenda whatever that was or that the data would be twisted to fit a political agenda.*

Asked directly whether her experience as a whole might have affected her likelihood of considering participating in future research, Beverley did however say that she felt she probably would take part in educational research again.

4.5 Links between the case studies and thematic analysis

The case studies presented here underline some of the themes developed earlier. Prior experience of participating in and/or conducting research seemed to play some part in the responses of Irene and Beverley to the episodes of research participation they describe here. Irene's attitudes towards researchers, for instance, seem particularly strongly conditioned by the preconceptions of researchers that she brought to this research encounter. Beverley also reports '*cynical views*' on educational research, the result, she herself says, of previous involvement in educational research. The highly positive response of Devinder to her research involvement might perhaps be seen to be linked in some way to the fact that this was her first experience of participation in this way. First experiences aren't always positive, however, as the case of Oprah suggests.

The procedures around informed consent in relation to participation seem not to have been as one would have expected given the BERA (2004) guidance. None of the four case study participants appear to have been given an opportunity to give their informed consent to take part although what comes out of the holistic view that the case studies give is the subsequent relevance of this ostensibly flawed process of consent for the episode of participation as a whole. Devinder cannot recall giving informed consent but reports a highly positive experience of participation, due, it seems to the attitude of the researcher concerned. Oprah was placed in a position where informed consent was not apparently a possibility either for herself as a vicarious researcher or for the pupils with whom she administered the questionnaires. Oprah appears not to have been aware that there was an informed consent procedure to be followed; but her concerns, however, related more

to the effect of participation for her pupils and, perhaps indirectly for herself, rather than being knowingly centred around the question of consent.

Irene presents an interesting contrast in this respect; a research experienced participant, she is aware of the expectations of an informed consent procedure and equally, it seems, realises that those procedures have not been followed as might have been expected. With her research experience, however, Irene seems more than capable of protecting what she sees as her own rights as a participant and takes what appears to be a proactive, and perhaps what might be seen as a rather assertive stance as a research participant. Irene is a good illustration of what Neal (1995) and Thapar- Björket and Henry (2004) describe as the power exercised by the interviewee in research encounters. For Beverley, however, the apparently absent consent procedure is more problematical and causes concerns. These four cases might be seen as suggesting that situational relativism in relation to the informed consent procedure is appropriate since one might make the case here that the four case study participants had differing requirements in terms of the sort of procedure that they expected or felt they required. The studies, also, however, could be seen as suggesting that the operation of such a policy of situational relativism leaves the power to decide how and when to inform participants sometimes rather too much in the hands of researchers.

The third theme discussed in section 4.2.9, that of the perception of data generation process seems, on the basis of these case studies to be closely related to the perceived qualities and attitudes of the researcher with whom the participant had contact. Devinder's positive experience is in the context of a researcher with whom she seems to have felt some empathy and, who, perhaps significantly, she regarded as demonstrating an understanding of what it is to be a teacher. The concerns of Beverley, which were associated with doubt around the preservation of her anonymity, seem to have been to an extent, exacerbated by her perception of the researcher who interviewed her as well as her feeling that her participation was not voluntary. Irene, on the

other hand seems, from the account she gives here, to have felt in control of the encounter with the researcher, for whom she seems to at times to exhibit an attitude with an element of contempt. In any event, all three of these case study participants who had personal contact with a researcher seem to have formed a clear opinion of the researcher which perhaps suggests the importance of such contacts for the individual participants concerned at the time but which might also have significance for the development of enduring attitudes. Irene is an example here; she indicated strong generalised views on researchers which might appear to colour all her contacts with educational researchers.

Participants' attitudes towards the possibility of seeing published work seem similarly shaped by prior experience of research participation and research activity. Beverley and Irene both have some expectation of seeing an output from the research with which they were involved and Irene explicitly links this with developing her own practice which Beverley is aware of the potential risks to her anonymity, which were subsequently proved somewhat founded when research findings were publicly displayed in the school. On the other hand, Devinder and Oprah, with less experience of educational research, do not seem to have had such an expectation or, if they did, then their awareness of this as an issue linked to participation seems on the evidence of their interviews, to have been somewhat limited.

4.6 Findings with respect to the inquiry strands

- I. Participants' experiences and/or perceptions of educational research encounters and of educational researchers

As we have seen in section 4.3, negative experiences described by participants in this study seemed to be associated with: the perceived attitude of the researcher with whom the participants had contact; the perceived qualities and experience of that researcher; unease at the research

situation itself and/or of the purposes of the underlying research and uncertainty about the preservation of their anonymity.

II. Participants' perceptions of educational research


A finding in relation to this strand was that participants' negative experiences did not necessarily translate into more negative perceptions of educational research as a whole than those previously held by participants nor did they seem to be associated with any unwillingness to participate in future research. This might suggest that what might be seen as negative experiences were not perceived to be associated with any personal harm by participants. In fact, as the discussion section later considers, such experiences were not necessarily at odds with participants' views of the practice of educational researchers.

III. The relevance of ethical guidance for participants in educational research

It appears from the evidence of participants in this study that ethical procedures were not universally observed by the researchers with whom the participants in this study had contact. Only four of fifteen participants could recall a discussion of their rights to anonymity or of their rights to withdraw, and none were asked to complete a written consent document. None of the four participants whose case studies are presented above appear to have been given an opportunity to give their informed consent to take part although what comes out of the holistic view that the case studies give is the subsequent relevance of this ostensibly flawed process of consent for the episode of participation as a whole.

It might appear that the low numbers of participants who could recall such a discussion might imply that this process had a relatively low profile within the research experiences described. Furthermore, three of the fifteen participants in this study said that they felt their participation in the research discussed was not the result of a voluntary decision on their part and in a further five

cases, the invitation to participate came to the participant through a superior, perhaps suggesting the possibility that participants might have felt under some pressure to take part in the research.



5. Discussion

This inquiry reports the experiences of a small number of participants who took part in educational research. The limitations of this group as a sample are discussed in the methodology section and the findings of this research project accordingly should be treated with some caution. There are nevertheless, I believe, implications of this study for future research in this area and for the ways in which the community of educational researchers conduct their research activities and for how they interpret and enact ethical guidance.

The discussion that follows considers the conclusions that I believe may be drawn from this study with respect to the three research strands outlined in section 1.3 above and then explores some of the difficulties associated with conducting research on participation and in particular the challenges faced in recruiting for such studies.

5.1 Inquiry Strand I - Participants' experiences and/or perceptions of educational research encounters and of educational researchers

In the literature review section, I suggested that the existing literature on educational research participation shows authors adopting a variety of theoretical frames in connection with accounts of the relationship between researchers and participants. Such frames, to an extent rest on disparate theoretical models of participation linked to different traditions within educational research but they do, however, provide a starting point for considering the extent to which the existing literature on research participation offers views of participation that align with the evidence of the sort of empirical research such as that presented here.

Relationships of power

When some correlation is attempted between the experience of participants in this study and the theoretical perspectives offered by the (almost exclusively researcher-authored) accounts of participation explored in the literature review section, a key question that arises that of the distribution of power between the two parties in the research relationship. Views of the participant as an equal partner in research (e.g. Oakley 1981, Acker et al. 1983), or of researchers engaging the participant in a process of emancipation or empowerment (e.g. Barnes 2003, Griffiths 1998) and the more nuanced stances of Scheurich (1997) or Vincent (1996) all foreground power as a, if not the, significant issue in the participant researcher relationship. As the literature review section notes, these perspectives appear to flow from a combination of a small number of case studies and/or anecdotal evidence heavily interpreted by means of theoretical structures. The following is an attempt to complement these insights with an empirical exploration of participants' perspectives of the researcher-participant relationship.

A view of the participant as an equal partner in the research process would seem to be potentially applicable to one participant in this study in particular: Devinder (see case studies 1). Devinder suggests that she, to an extent, had the impression of being a partner in a research process. The personal characteristics of the researcher were perceived to be important by Devinder but not necessarily in the same way as that implied by some researcher accounts of relationships with their participants (e.g. Griffiths 1998). It seemed to be more important here for Devinder that she felt was taking part in research with somebody she regarded as a fellow professional (c.f. Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) and who, in some senses she perceived to be an equal, rather than her being *treated* as an equal by a researcher. The suggestions of writers such as Acker (1983), for example, that the sharing of personal information by researchers might be a means to equalise the relationship seems to reflect a different understanding of the research relationship than Devinder is suggesting here. On Devinder's view, being treated as an equal relates as much

to the perceived status of the researcher and/or the courtesy and understanding shown by the researcher towards the participant as to notions of equality in an abstract sense of power relations. A paradox of such understandings of the relationship would seem therefore to be that views that on one level could seem to be promoting equality in the relationship might be flawed in being located in a researcher-centric view of what an equal relationship between researchers and participants might be. The example of Devinder suggests that researchers' and participants' perceptions of power in the relationship might be informed by divergent models of assessing relative power in such encounters.

That is not to say, however, that the influence of power relations between researchers and participants was not apparent in this study. The account of Beverley (see case studies 4) is underpinned by an awareness of the significance of relations of power in the relationship between herself and the researcher with whom she had contact. The dominant impression given by Beverley is one of concern over her personal lack of control in connection with research participation. This case study therefore presents a portrait of a type of research involvement where the participant is aware of a power imbalance between the researcher and themselves as a participant. Crucially, however, Beverley appears to accept this as in some ways an intrinsic feature of educational research itself and this perhaps resonates with Truman's (2003) conception that relationships of power are an intrinsic part of educational research which ethical guidelines simply formalise. Beverley, as somebody with an experience of being a researcher herself, clearly sees the roles of researcher and participant as interchangeable, not necessarily *within* an individual episode of research participation as Thapar-Björket and Henry (2004) suggest but *between* episodes. This perhaps suggests another sense in which accounts of power balance in educational research can oversimplify the relationship by not paying sufficient attention to considering participants' possible past and future experiences and consequently tending to consider each episode of participation in isolation rather than in some ways the outcome of past

experiences and a precursor to future experiences within what might be a sequence of research participation episodes.

As in the case of Beverley, the views of Erin suggest the possibility that those who take part in research, although perceiving power imbalances in the research relationships they experience, do not necessarily see these as a product of a dysfunctional research relationship but rather as an inherent characteristic of educational research as a whole. For such participants, what would appear to be an obvious power imbalance in the research relationship did not appear to be problematic for the participant. In spite of her experience of ‘unequal’ research participation, Erin said that she felt she would volunteer to participate in future research. For participants such as Beverley and Erin what seems, for them, acceptable educational research practice is clearly not incompatible with power imbalances between researcher and participant, as a reading of Truman’s (2003) study would suggest. Again, it is perhaps helpful to see these views in a longitudinal perspective, as informed by and informing past and future episodes of participation and, for these participants, perhaps their own activity as researchers. It is beyond the scope of this study to track how attitudes shaped by participation might be translated and enacted by the same people when they act as researchers but this at least suggests a means by which researcher attitudes might potentially be propagated by their participants.

The case of Neal suggests another possible working out of the influence of power within the relationship between researcher and participant. He was a participant in this study without experience of taking part in research prior to the episode discussed here and he spoke in his interview of a perception that he was taking part in something similar to an OfSTED inspection. Whilst this might be seen, to some extent, as an extreme and perhaps unfounded interpretation of the research encounter, this is also an interesting reaction in that it raises a possibility, absent from researcher-authored accounts, that participants, as here, might misconceive the role of

educational research. Of course, without a knowledge of the research project through contact with the sponsoring research institution, it is not possible to come to a judgement as to the extent of Neal's misconception but investigations with purposes analogous to inspections might be considered rare. Neal was, moreover, unclear as to the purposes of research since, he points out that he although there was a verbal discussion of the research prior to his agreeing to take part, he could not recall any formal consent procedure or discussion of any right to anonymity. It seems reasonable to suppose in such circumstances that uncertainty about the research process might be a consequence of limited information being offered to participants. This in turn suggests the relevance here of Foucault's (1982) analysis of such interactions: in which knowledge is closely linked to and forms the means by which power is transmitted and propagated. On such a view, researchers might, consciously or otherwise, use the withholding of information from participants as a means of asserting their power within the relationships. It is also conceivable that the same dynamic might be applied to the educational research community as a whole. The sort of demystifying of research that Kellett and Ding (2004) describe might be seen by some researchers as undermining the status of the educational research community and in this context, a Foucauldian analysis would suggest that one of the roles of that community is to establish and sustain itself as 'other' from the community of its research participants.

Neal's experience, as somebody relatively unacquainted with educational research seems to align more with accounts of disempowerment in the literature (e.g. Dubish 1995, Oliver 1999) than those of participants such as Beverley and Erin with previous research experience. This might suggest an interpretation of the power imbalance here since Neal, unlike those who had taken part in more than one research project and conducted research themselves, was relatively unempowered in the sense that without comparative knowledge of educational research practice, he does not see the particular episode educational research in which he was engaged as part of a larger whole. Without the qualification of past experience and/or understanding of educational

research prior to involvement, consideration of power relations within single episodes of participation might therefore be seen as a rather limited analytical frame offering at best a partial and potentially researcher-centric view of the relationship. Researchers understand that they and their colleagues hold a trans-episodic perspective of participation but not necessarily that the same might apply to their participants.

Participants' contacts with researchers

One of the striking aspects of this research study was the high proportion of participants describing their research involvement was described in critical and/or negative terms (see section 4.7). The elements that were associated with such perceptions were; the attitude of the researcher with whom the participants had contact, the qualities and experience of that researcher, unease at the research situation itself and/or of the purposes of the underlying research and uncertainty about anonymity (see section 4.6). Clearly there are a number of possible themes through which such experiences could be analysed, aggregated or compared but it seems to me, having considered power relations as a possible frame, that there remain a number of experiences here described where participants were not obviously directly motivated in their accounts by feelings of disempowerment, or indeed, by possible ethical compromise so much as by reported perceptions of an unsympathetic relationship between themselves and the researcher. It would require a wider study including perhaps elements of observation and accounts from both parties to the research relationship to develop understanding of how and why some research relationships seem to be more successful than others but this small scale study suggests that this might be a fruitful area of study, especially given that the literature on participation, as we have seen, seems to present rather limited means of understanding this complex and shifting relationship.

Those who have taken part in this study have not related what seemed to me, apparently still less to them, examples of mistreatment amounting to harm or even to ethical compromise. What participants describe are what appear to be quite trivial examples of discourtesy by the researchers with whom they had contact. These included: participation being sought by superiors so that participants had little opportunity to refuse to (see section 4.2), being asked to administer research instruments without any negotiation, the lack of an adequate explanation of the research (see section 4.5), discomfort associated with an unsympathetic researcher or uncertainty about what was expected of a participant (see section 4.7) or unconvincing assurances of anonymity (see section 4.6). As discussed above, some of these perceptions might be seen by other researchers as evidence of harm being suffered by participants, particularly perhaps the incident where information about the research was revealed publicly. The common factors here in many of these incidents was that these discourtesies seem to have been avoidable had the research been conducted with a more sympathetic understanding of the perceptions of participants. This might suggest the need for a re-appraisal of practice by some researchers based around an enhanced understanding of what it means to take part in the research of others and perhaps provides some rationale for the more collaborative approaches described by Kellet and Ding (2004) amongst others.

So, whilst some episodes of participation described by participants in this study could potentially be understood in terms of power relations, albeit not always in the sense in which the literature on participation might conceive them; other participants' experiences seemed simply to reflect encounters with unsympathetic researchers. In his interview for this project for example, Grant reports feeling that his voluntary participation was unappreciated by the researcher with whom he was in contact. Perhaps as a consequence, he reports a feeling of being involved in research that did not appear meaningful to him; where the researcher failed to make a favourable connection on a personal level and where his perception (and reportedly that of a colleague) was that they were

not taking part in what they understood to be a genuine process of knowledge seeking and the results of the research process seemed, in some sense, predetermined. It would appear that Grant is not suggesting that he felt himself to have been an object of harm and/or of potential ethical compromise: rather his account suggests that he perceives that he has been a victim of discourtesy. This experience might have consequences for Grant's willingness to participate in future: he implies he might be less likely to take part as result of this experience in spite of a seemingly favourable attitude towards participation in general (see section 4.2).

The conception of discourtesy evident in such accounts might be understood as an outworking of the conception of Giddens' (1991) reflexive individual. Participants in research present examples of encounters between experts and 'lay' individuals and, Giddens suggests, can be understood in terms of the interaction between the individual and an expert system but one in which the negotiation of trust might be seen to be rather looser than in other such encounters. Trust in the context of educational research, unlike, for instance in the context of medical treatment could be seen as a fluid conception. The rationales behind participants' trust or lack of trust in researchers have not been widely explored in the literature, although Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) might suggest that perceived expertise as a teacher might be one basis for such trust.

Karen also describes an encounter with an unsympathetic researcher (see section 4.7), giving an account of a rushed interview in which the researcher appeared to be forcefully determining the course of the interview in such a way that Karen did not feel entirely comfortable. There is no suggestion from either of these participants or from the other participants in the study that conceptions of power relations were, for them, a consideration in their understanding of the research process. No informant suggests here that their experience as a participant was associated with any reflection on such issues by themselves. This might, of course, be seen by some to reflect a lack of consciousness on the part of informants for this study, a lack of understanding of

how power might mediate research encounters. The empirical evidence from this study, however, might equally imply that models of the researcher-participant relationship informed by power relations offer at best a partial means of understanding these dynamic and contingent encounters and their currency in the literature on participation could reflect a predominantly researcher-genic understanding, one associated with theoretical frames adopted by researchers and which does not closely articulate with the concerns and understanding of participation held by participants themselves.

The published research and commentaries on participation, which are discussed in the literature review section, include accounts of research self-consciously intended to be collaborative (e.g. Chase 1996, Munro 1998, Vincent and Warren 2001 and Kellett and Ding 2004). Such accounts argue for extending the relationship between researcher and participant beyond the publication of research findings. All three of these accounts, however, describe difficulties in achieving genuinely participatory research and the unwillingness of participants to engage in research in ways that are seen by researchers as participatory. This study, to an extent, confirms that reticence amongst participants; for example only 4 of the 11 participants who said they had not seen written accounts of the research in which they had taken part said they would have wished to read such material and only one of the participants in this study suggested that she would have wished to extend the relationship with the researcher. Hence participating in collaborative research seems from the evidence of this study not to be an aspiration for many participants, although for some in this study, a wish to inform their own research activity seems to have been a motivation for initial participation and for wishing to extend research involvement. Such participation related to research activity by participants does not seem to be obviously considered in published accounts of collaborative research, even when like Wiles et al. (2006); they have explored the perceptions of experienced researchers acting as participants. Most accounts of research participation tend

instead to be predicated on models of participation that assume little or no research activity on the part of the participant.

In the section above, I have suggested a number of ways in which current models of researcher-participant relationships might represent only a partial understanding of that relationship. One insight from this research in particular might be helpful in rethinking that understanding. Encounters between researchers and their participants should be seen, I would argue, not as isolated episodes but rather as part of a longitudinal series where a participant's relationship with a researcher may be shaped by past experiences of taking part in and/or conducting research. When participants bring such experience with them to the research encounter, their views of that encounter might well be informed by a reciprocal understanding of educational research and of the researcher's role therein. In other words, some participants in educational research could be making informed critiques of the conduct of the research in which they are involved, viewing their current role as participant in the context of their identity as researchers themselves. A Neal (1995), Scheurich (1997) and Thapar-Björket and Henry (2004) argue that research participants can exercise power over the research encounter. The evidence of this research project suggests that one dimension in which participants perceive and potentially exercise this power derives from their research literacy. This might imply that to understand the relationship between researchers and their participants, it is necessary to adopt a less researcher-centric view of the relationship, one in which the participant is viewed not as a *tabula rasa*, but as an actor in the research encounters who may bring some understanding of research procedure and whose attitude to participation and to educational research in general is partly shaped by prior experiences of participation. I shall conclude by discussing this view of the participant.

5.2 Inquiry strand II - participants' perceptions of educational research

In the findings section (for a summary see section 4.6), I present evidence that for a third of the participants in this study, their attitude to educational research, as reflected in the accounts they gave, appeared to have been shaped by prior experiences of taking part in and/or conducting research themselves.

Prior research and/or participation experience seems potentially to influence future participation in several ways. It may in itself provide a rationale for participation: for both Andrew and Irene, the decision to participate in research was related to their own research practice and, for them, part of the value of participation was the prospect of informing that research practice. Prior experience also seems to condition the nature of participation. As reported in section 4.10, the group of five research experienced participants in this study were: more likely to express cynicism in their views on educational research prior to the episode of participation being discussed; more likely to regard the explanation of the research given to them as inadequate and more likely to be critical of the research methodology. A striking illustrations of this effect are given by Irene describing her reading of the 'signals' given by interviewers about their expectations and Beverley's view that research findings could be manipulated for political ends (section 4.3 and case study 4). The responses of participants in this group, such as Irene and Beverley indicate that their evaluations of research involvement episodes are informed by comparison with their previous experiences. In this context, it also seems significant that some of those participants in this study with single experience of involvement in educational research suggested that their future attitudes towards educational research might have been shaped by this experience or by the experiences of colleagues (see section 4.7).

The apparent significance of the influence of prior experience on participation amongst those who contributed to this study appears to contrast with the literature review presented earlier where prior experience is at most a marginal issue in the published work. As I have attempted to suggest, accounts of the participant researcher relationship have variously been informed by models of the relationship implying empowerment and/or emancipation (e.g. Griffiths 1998, Barnes 2003), collaboration and co-construction of knowledge (e.g. Oakley 1981, Kellett and Ding 2004). Whilst such theoretical frames might provide insights into some aspects of the relationship, they seem to me to be vulnerable to criticism in the sense that each of these approaches might in their various ways be seen as centred around a fundamentally instrumental view of the research encounter, where the participant-researcher relationship appears primarily of concern to researchers in the context of methodological and epistemological problems of data generation. In consequence, good relationships between researchers and their participants are functional relationships and seen as a means to an end serving the methodological aims of the researcher and/or research. This suggests that accounts influenced by such models are not necessarily rooted in understanding the meaning of participation for those who take part in research but are, rather, predicated on the needs of the researcher, narrowly defined in so far as they relate to particular episodes of research.

The evidence of this research project suggests an alternative, or complementary, way to understand the relationship through constructivist perspectives. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Schwandt (1998) indicate, in the course of their successive involvement in research, through the involvement of colleagues, and through their own research activity, those who volunteer to take part in research develop their understanding of research and of researchers hence each episode of participation in educational research is both informed by previous experience and informs future experience. The participant approaching a research encounter hence necessarily has expectations of that encounter, however coherently formed or articulated these might be. Such expectations are

constructed around the participant's prior knowledge of educational research, of its purposes and methods and possibly also informed by their prior knowledge of researchers and of the features of such research encounters. The constructivist approaches of authors such as Von Glasersfeld (1988), Driver et al. (1994) and Wertsch (1997) would suggest that it is the interaction of this prior knowledge and associated expectations with their experiences during that encounter that shape what participants learn as a result of their involvement

The participant learning that takes place in this way is, it would appear, almost exclusively unintended, informal and not directed towards particular learning goals. However, as writers such as Eraut (2000) have shown, such informal learning may have a particularly important function in professional development in a number of settings and research encounters might play a hitherto unsuspected role in shaping the professional identity of those who take part. Episodes of research participation might be associated with intense personal and social learning on the part of participants, albeit such learning may be unstructured and generate no obvious observable outcomes, save those which relate to their research participation in the future. Whilst it is readily acknowledged in the literature that researchers learn in this way from their experience of conducting research, what is perhaps not so frequently accepted is that the same applies, as a result of their research encounters, to participants.

Drawing on the discussion of constructivist approach to educational research in the literature review section, I suggest that a productive model for understanding the relationship between researchers and their participants would see that relationship in a longitudinal context: not as a relationship contingent only on an individual relationship with an individual researcher but influenced by participants' dispositions towards educational research and researchers, dispositions which are in turn shaped by past experience. Each episode of participation is, hence, in a sense, a contact with the educational research community as a whole and whilst much of

what has been written about participants' relationship with researchers has concentrated on what takes place within episodes of research participation, it would also seem to be important to broaden this view to include an appreciation that participants make individual journeys between such episodes. Understanding the researcher participant relationship in this way emphasises the research encounter as a place where the generation of knowledge about educational research is taking place for both parties. The context in which participants provide data is one in which they are at the same time actively negotiating the meaning of the research encounter and also, to an extent, of educational research as a whole.

5.3 Inquiry strand III - The relevance of ethical guidance for participants in educational research

This study aimed to explore the ways in which ethical guidance, which is necessarily generalised, articulated with the idiosyncratic experiences of those who have taken part in educational research. This question could be divided into two parts: firstly on the limited evidence of this investigation, to what extent are educational researchers observing the letter and/or spirit of the BERA guidelines? Secondly, to what extent are such ethical guidelines of relevance to the experiences of participants in educational research?

This is only a small study and, for the reasons given above, the sample of participants could not be claimed to be representative of the population of those taking part in educational research in this period and furthermore, the recollection of participants in this inquiry could be unreliable in some cases, particularly when those recollections related to the details of research participation that took place several years previously. With those caveats, however, on the evidence of this study it appears that educational researchers do not seem to be universally adhering to the letter or

to the spirit of the BERA guidelines. In the findings section, details are given of two ways in which the guidelines appeared not to have been observed in the episodes of research participation which formed the subject matter for this study.

Firstly, in some cases, participation in research was not entirely voluntary. This raises a number of questions about how ethical guidance is interpreted and enacted by research institutions which, although they might form the basis for a future study, are beyond the scope of this inquiry. Perhaps central to these considerations here is the tension between a need to recruit participants and, what seems to be an aspiration that participation should be entirely voluntary. Given, as noted above, that recruitment through ‘connections’ might be, for many research projects, the predominant means of obtaining participants, the level of coercive participation might be more prevalent than a reading of the BERA guidelines would suggest. It is perhaps relevant in passing to note that in none of the three cases were participants claim to have been recruited involuntarily was a formal or informal consent procedure in place whereby the researcher or research institution could affirm that the participant was agreeing to take part voluntarily.

Secondly, some participants said that they felt poorly informed about the research process in which they were engaged and were not helped to understand their rights in relation to their participation. Given the content of the BERA guidelines, which indicate that participants in educational research should be informed of their right to anonymity to withdraw from the research in which they are involved, it is perhaps surprising that six participants in this study could not recollect any discussion on this subject having taken place in the course of their research involvement. This might, of course, simply reflect the recollections of participants rather than whether such an exchange took place but the fact that a further six of those who took part in this study suggested that no such conversation had taken place indicates that observance of this element of the BERA guidance is, on the evidence of this study, somewhat uneven. Only three of

the fifteen participants who took part in this study were able definitely to recall a discussion of their right to withdraw and/or of their rights to anonymity. Similarly rare amongst this group seemed to be the provision for participants of written information by researchers; I noted above that only five out of fifteen participants were given documentation relating to their participation but furthermore not a single participant from the fifteen could recall being asked to sign a written document of consent to participate.

Once again, the principle discussed by Wiles et al. (2005), of situational relativism suggests some complexity in generalising here about the question of how much and what sort of information should have been provided by researchers in such encounters. In spite of the individuality of each research encounter, as Holman (2001) and Oliver (2003) suggest, participants should be sufficiently informed about the nature of their proposed participation prior to their taking part such that their decision to take part meets the criterion from their perspective of granting informed consent. It is worth noting in passing here that from the accounts given by participants in this study, none of these research projects in which they were involved would have made problematic giving information to participants in connection with granting informed consent as in the examples given by Mulhall (2003) and Punch (1998). Hence, there appears to have been no obvious reason why information that might have allowed participants to make an informed choice about whether to volunteer was apparently not offered to at least six of the fifteen participants here. Whatever the motives of the researchers concerned here, one inference that may be drawn is that researchers attached low significance to providing this sort of information to their participants. This might, in turn, as Brody et al. (1997) suggest, call into question the commitment of some researchers to inform their participants, perhaps especially when the researcher concerned might feel that such information could make potential participants less likely to agree to take part.

As reported in section 4.2.4 above, of the group of fifteen participants, only eight indicated that they felt the nature and purpose of their research involvement had been adequately explained to them prior to their taking part. Wiles et al. (2005) suggest in their extensive study that ethical guidance allows researchers to make judgements about the appropriate manner in which to inform their participants but equally the exercise of this judgement by researchers also raises questions, for example about the competence and/or experience of the researcher concerned as well as about the time resources allocated for such explanations.

Like the participants in Vincent and Warren's (2001) study, participants in this study generally did not reflect on their expectations of being informed in this way and this would perhaps be a possible basis for a further study. Four participants did, however suggest interpretations linked to this process of information sharing. Two suggested that they felt it legitimate for the researcher not to inform them about the research in which they took part lest such an understanding on their part might affect the validity of the data they provided. In other words, they seemed to be implying on behalf of the researcher, a rationale similar to advanced by Homan and Bulmer (1982), that participants' responses might be affected by prior knowledge of the research aims. Two other interviewees seemed to take a contrasting view, implying that they felt the data they supplied might have been enhanced by knowledge on part of the aims and purposes of the research in which they were involved. This seems to be a difficult and contentious area and one that the present study has not explored in a sufficiently detailed way to address the complex questions of methodology, epistemology and human relationships that are contained within.

Finally, however, it might be significant in this respect that four of the five interviewees who said they felt the research had not been explained adequately had previous experience of conducting research themselves and were research experienced participants. This raises the possibility of

another way in which prior research experience might impact on future experiences in that those with some knowledge of the conduct of educational research and of the associated ethical procedures could be more likely to raise these sort of objections to the way research is conducted. There are clear parallels here with the study by Wiles et al. (2006) which explored understanding of ethical procedures in relation to participation, comparing the awareness of a group of experienced researchers with that of those same researchers' less experienced participants. Wiles et al. found that the research experienced group were more aware of the 'tricks of the trade', in relation to the information supplied to them but it was also reflected in concerns over the preservation of their anonymity as was the case for Beverley and Irene, amongst the participants whose case studies are presented here.

Clearly though this study implies that not all the researchers who came into contact with these participants were observing the BERA ethical guidance, there is little from the accounts given by participants here that this state of affairs provoked any concern in the majority of participants, still less that they experienced what authors such as Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) might understand as 'harm'. It is true that two of those who took part in the study, both with previous experience of conducting research themselves, expressed concern over the preservation of their anonymity in connection with their participation (see section 4.6) but the majority of those who regarded the explanation of the research that they had been offered to have been inadequate (section 4.5) were more concerned about a lack of details over what was expected of them rather than with a feeling that their rights as participants had not been adequately explained. Neither did adverse experiences of the research process seem universally to deter future participation as even amongst the group of seven who reported negative experiences of data generation, 3 said they would participate again in educational research if asked, two were not sure and only two of the seven said they felt they would not be participating again.

One explanation for this apparent lack of concern over ethical regulation on the part of participants is highly likely to be ignorance of the existence of ethical guidance. If those researchers with whom the participants in this study had been in contact were, or are, representative of the practices of the educational research community, it is perhaps understandable that participants remain uninformed on such issues as, only a minority of those who took part in this study could recall a discussion of this sort. It is possible therefore to assume that, in general, participants in this study were unaware of their rights in connection with participation in educational research and moreover, the majority remained so following the experiences discussed here.

In the light of these findings, it might be appropriate to question the extent to which ethical guidance such as that provided by BERA (2004) has relevance to the practice of researchers and to the expectations of their participants. The evidence of this study, presented in the findings section and discussed above, is that such guidance is not universally observed either in letter or, it might be argued, in spirit. Equally, however, there are signs here that ethical procedures have little resonance for participants since a minority in this study were aware of such procedures even following their participation. Participants here seem to be similar in this respect to those with whom Vincent and Warren (2001) has contact: ethical regulation appears to have little resonance for them. Furthermore, even when what might be seen as breaches of ethical procedure occur, participants in this study did not report experiencing 'harm' as a result and mostly indicated that they would continue to volunteer as participants in future educational research. There is therefore some support here for describing what was apparent here as the 'empty ethics' of Corrigan (2003).

A tangential issue which arose in the course of this research and which does not appear on the basis of the literature search conducted for this study to have been addressed in the published

literature is that concerning those participants who conduct data generation on behalf of others: an activity I have described here as *vicarious research*. Two of the fifteen participants in this study had experiences of this nature in that both were asked to administer questionnaires to pupils. The experiences of both are developed in the case studies section. There seems to be a variety of interesting points that arise from this sort of participation. First, ethical guidance does not appear obviously directed towards this sort of research participation in which the participant could be seen as acting in the part of a researcher. In such cases, the spirit of ethical guidance would imply that these surrogate researchers might be expected to carry out some procedures directed towards securing informed consent from those who are participating: in these cases, school pupils. In neither of the cases explored for this project does this seem to have happened, as neither participant could recall being offered any form of information in connection to their research involvement that dealt with ethical issues or which constituted any form of ‘training’ to assist them in carrying out their part in the research project. In the absence of such material, there seems to have been no form of ethical procedure taking place between these surrogate researchers and their participants. Secondly, the practice of conducting research in this way through intermediaries who have perhaps received no training in research methodology might raise questions about the validity of data obtained in such a way.

Whilst this is perhaps an interesting discussion in itself and one that may have resonance for the framing of future ethical guidance and for the educational research community as a whole, the aim of this study was not only or even primarily to explore this feature of educational research. The wider aim of this study is to view ethical guidance as just one aspect of the relationship between researchers and their participants and it is apparent in this respect that ethical guidance can offer at best a limited topography of the complex relationship between researchers and their participants. In the next section I look at that relationship in a wider context.

5.4 The challenges of researching participation.

5.4.1 Recruitment to this study

As detailed in the methodology section (section 3.2), recruitment for this study proved to be highly problematic. Extensive and prolonged efforts to recruit participants using a variety of means were successful only in obtaining a sample of fifteen people with substantive prior experience of participation in research and who were willing to take part in this study. Whilst some of the explanation for this lack of success no doubt rest with the recruitment methods themselves and with my own personal limitations as a researcher, there appear to be, as Sieber (2004) suggests, inherent difficulties in recruitment for this sort of ‘stand alone’ research on research participation.

Non-participation is, by its nature, a phenomenon that cannot be directly studied by research hence any understanding of why people chose not to take part in educational research can at best only rest upon indirect evidence. Given that, however, there a number of explanations that could perhaps speculatively be advanced to explain non-participation in this study. First, the filter of prior research involvement which had be applied in this study meant recruiting from a pool of past participants in research. For some members of this group, prior experiences of research participation may have diminished their willingness to participate in further research. One can only speculate that, given the low level of recruitment achieved for this study, the group who did consent to take part in this study in spite of adverse experiences in the past might be untypical of past participants with unsatisfactory prior experience of research participation . It seems perhaps reasonable to assume that many prior participants with previous adverse experiences as participants in educational research would decline invitations to further participation.

Secondly, comments from a number of actual and potential participants suggest that studies of this nature are seen as 'research about research' and hence are not regarded by educational practitioners as a particularly important area of research. Where participants' views on this point have been pursued further in interviews for this inquiry, it is the lack of perceived benefit for fellow teachers or for education as a whole which make participation in research such as this unattractive. One of their reasons given by those interviewed for this study for participating in educational research was the desire to take part in research that they saw as helpful for fellow teachers and Aitken et al (2003) also report this in the context of recruiting participants for clinical trials. If a sense of altruism, connected to an assessment of the value of research to others is a stimulus to participation, then the opposite may well hold: that research without perceived relevance for other teachers may be unattractive to potential participants.

Thirdly, there is the essentially practical question of how researchers might reach those who have previously participated in education research, given that direct access to such former participants in research projects is limited by ethical guidance (BERA 2004) and data protection legislation (Data Protection Act 1998), both of which can have the effect of restricting the communication of participant contact details by researchers on grounds of confidentiality. Given that direct access to participants is thus problematic, those recruiting for studies such as this face the challenge of reaching participants from amongst a huge and disparate group of those who might be presumed to have experience as a prior participant in educational research. Amongst the suggestions given by Sieber (2004) for effective means of recruitment for those researching this area is to link studies on participation like this to much larger studies through, for instance, post-study evaluations. This would seem to be a promising way to mitigate the recruitment difficulties that have limited this study, although such an approach might have attendant methodological complications resulting from the close linkage of the two studies; the original study and the

'meta'- study into participation (see methodology section 3.2 for a more detailed discussion on this point).

5.4.2. Sampling issues

The consequences of the challenges associated with recruitment for this study extend to the nature of the recruited sample. As discussed in the methodology section, there is no indication that the achieved sample in this research is representative of the larger population of prior research participants, even if the composition of such a group were to be established or even to be capable of being established. Once again, as in so many respects in connection with this study, the best available resort is informed speculation but nevertheless, it is possible to offer some conjectures as to the possible relationship between the achieved sample in this study and the wider population of former participants in educational research.

First, the sample for this study contains what appears to be a significant proportion of participants who reported having previously carried out their own educational research. Whilst the rationales given by individuals for participation vary and are discussed elsewhere (findings section 4.2), the point here is there seems to be a connection between prior personal experience and future willingness to volunteer to take part in the research of others. Since no figure exists which indicates the level of research experience amongst the population that was appealed to in recruiting for this study, it is difficult to form a judgement as to how to interpret the fact that 40 per cent of those agreeing to participate in this study had previous research experience. Whether or not such participants were more likely to take part in this project than others without such a background, the level of such people within the sample nevertheless appears significant in itself. As the literature review section shows, the number of research accounts containing comment by authors on the subject of the prior experience of their participants is vanishingly small and there are few, if any, discussions in the literature of educational research (nor, so far as I am aware, in

other fields) that consider the significance of prior experience on how participants contribute to future studies. I draw out some potential implications of this below.

Secondly, prior experience of conducting research might have an effect beyond influencing participants to take part or not; such experience might affect *how* those participants take part in future research. In the findings section, I described how four of the five participants who indicated a ‘cynical’ view of the purposes of educational research had themselves prior experience as researchers. Similarly, four of the five participants who felt the research in which they took part had been poorly explained were previous researchers themselves. In the cases of three participants in this study we have seen how their perception of the interviewer was, to an extent shaped by their previous experience of carrying out their own research and three of the six who reported an overall negative experience of the data generation part of the research had prior experience as researchers. It seems plausible from the limited evidence of this study that prior experiences of working as a researcher could play a part in shaping attitudes to research. A larger scale study would, however, be required to explore this question more fully in relation to the various differing modes of prior research involvement; many teachers conduct some research as part of their ITE, for example and their experience in this respect does not appear at first sight to be necessarily the same as those who have conducted research in other contexts.

Thirdly, as a parallel to the above, the effect of multiple prior research participation seems also worthy of further consideration. It has not been possible in this study to distinguish between those participants who had previously taken part in more than one research project and those who had themselves conducted research since the two groups coincided: all those with previous researcher experience also had multiple research experience as participants. Again, as the implications section below considers, there is an argument for researchers giving thought as to the prior

experiences of participants and how that prior experience might influence their future research participation.

Fourthly, there is a consideration more closely related to this particular type of research: research concerned with participation. It might be suggested that those who are in some way, dissatisfied with the research process of which they have previously been a part could be more likely to wish to have the opportunity to express those views through participating in research such as this. This is another proposition that cannot be directly tested given the general lack of empirical evidence around participating (Sieber 2004), but it might be significant that in this study, six out of fifteen participants related broadly negative accounts of research participation compared with three who reported generally positive experiences. Once again, I am aware of no comparable figures for other studies, as Boothroyd and Best (2003); Kent et al. (2002) and Van den Berg (2001) all suggest, data on participants' experiences as participants is not routinely collected. It seems at least plausible that those who have had either positive or negative experiences of research might potentially bias research such as this in that those who choose to respond to surveys such as this could represent the extremes of experience. Hence it might be significant here that only four out of fifteen participants in this survey reported neutral previous experiences.

Fifthly, as the methodology section indicates, the most effective means of recruitment to this study was through word of mouth. The majority of those who participated were either directly known to me or known through an intermediary person or institution. These personal connections might be a possible source of bias within this study, although since I avoided recruiting from those with who had participated in my own research, I felt that the risk of such bias was minimal given that the basis for the interviews for this study were in relation to third parties towards whose research participants here had contributed. Of perhaps more concern is the potential skewing effect caused by recruiting from personal contacts and hence from what is effectively a

limited potential pool of participants who might share certain attributes in common with the researcher. Examples here are that none of the sample recruited for this study had a Black or Minority Ethnic background or worked in the private education sector. This effective limitation of recruitment from groups which might be seen as broadly allied to the researcher's community therefore might plausibly have affected the nature of this study, effectively filtering out the experiences of whole groups of potential participants because of the way in which participants were recruited. Given, however, that this was a study on participation itself, the findings of this study do suggest that this might be a wider concern for the some research. Although this cannot claim to be anything like a comprehensive survey of recruitment methods¹⁵, this method of recruitment seems to have been by far the most common way to initiate research involvement. The same questions of potential bias in sampling therefore might, unless countered by stratified sampling techniques, for example, be a systemic issue in much educational research. Equally, as I suggest in the findings section, such an understanding argues for the importance of the researcher-participant relationship since that relationship itself might in a way directly or indirectly responsible for supporting future participant recruitment.

Finally, there is perhaps a question to be asked about the openness of the research community to this type of research. As I pointed out above, the lack of success in recruiting participants for this study could, and probably is, due in some part to my own limitations as a researcher, and to the understandable reluctance of those in the educational community to volunteer to take part in research with no obvious benefits for themselves or for education in general. There is however, another possible contributory factor; the reluctance of the educational research community to allow the practices of its researchers to be explored in this way. Clearly any discussion on this issue would go beyond the scope of a study such as this but it is evident to me that the research community could go further in facilitating investigations of this sort on participation and allow

¹⁵ As far as searches for this study were able to establish, no such survey exists for educational research but for such a discussion in relation to clinical trials see Aitken et al. 2003

other researchers in the future to explore this area in ways that have not proved possible here and which yet would appear to lie well within the bounds of what is permissible given existing ethical guidance.

As a footnote here, it seems to me that whilst the fourth and last of these considerations are closely linked with this particular type of research setting, the remaining points could equally perhaps be made of many education research projects. In particular, I will suggest below that the potential influence of prior research experience may be widespread in educational research and the whilst the people recruited to studies may appear representative in many senses, the possible preponderance of ‘re-participants’ within research studies might have a significant and as yet largely unsuspected and unexplored influence on many studies.

5.5 Evaluation of the contribution to knowledge made by this study

In section 3.2, I indicated that I felt the knowledge claims made in this study might be submitted to three tests of plausibility, credibility and evaluation of the data presented. In this section, I shall firstly outline what I believe the two significant claims arising from this study to be to be and then consider those claims by applying those three tests.

The first knowledge claim is that participants’ modes of participating in educational research are conditioned by their prior experience of participating in and/or conducting research. This claim appear to be plausible in that on one level, it aligns with constructivist models of learning which would suggest the importance of prior knowledge in education. At the same time, this claim also seems to speak to common experience in that I would argue, our participation in any social activity, is conditioned by our prior experience in that we look to our knowledge of similar circumstances in order to inform our expectations and subsequent behaviour. The credibility of

this claim, in common with all the knowledge claims presented in this thesis is, in contrast, strongly undermined for two reasons: first my lack of credibility as a researcher and secondly the weaknesses in the research methodology outlined in section 3. I would argue that this claim would be stronger were I a more experienced researcher with a substantial track record in this area of research and had the data generated for this study not consisted solely of interviews with a small and potentially skewed sample of participants, untriangulated with other data. Finally I believe that the data presented in this study provide a good degree of confirmation of this claim in that there would appear to be a demonstrable difference in the accounts given by participants with past experience of educational research and those with no such background. I would therefore judge this knowledge claim to be plausible and to be supported by the data presented but, on the other hand, the credibility of this claim could be contested.

The second knowledge claim I would advance is that some researchers are not observing the BERA (2004) ethical guidance in their contacts with participants. This could be seen to be a plausible claim since researchers are arguably in a position to make decisions about the ethical conduct of their research and it seems at least possible that those decisions might not always be based primarily on the requirements of ethical guidance. The credibility of this claim is potentially open to contention for the same reasons as the first claim and which are outlined above. The credibility of this claim would seem especially questionable since participant accounts offer only an indirect means of observing what takes place in encounters between researchers and participants. Arguably, a study which had included observational data would have been able to make a stronger claim in this respect. Finally, the data presented in section 4 would seem to justify this conclusion as several participants, especially those with previous research experience report procedures that do seem on the face of it to correspond closely with the recommendations of the BERA guidance.

5.6 Evaluation of personal learning

I personally learnt from carrying out this study in three respects. First, the difficulties surrounding recruitment for this study have focused my thinking on this area of methodology. I now have a much better appreciation of the difficulties of recruitment and of possible strategies to alleviate those difficulties. Secondly, I have come to realise that this is a difficult area in which to carry out empirical research, which, as I suggest above, might go some way to explaining the lack of similar published research. This, has not, however, discouraged me from pursuing similar research in future as I believe more strongly than when I started this study that the relationship between participants and researchers shapes educational research fundamentally. Finally I have learnt that this is a complex but interesting area to investigate: engaging with researchers' accounts of their participants has led me to consider areas of methodology, social theory and psychology that perhaps lie beyond the usual territory of educational research.

5.7. Implications

In this section, I set out what I feel are the most significant implications of this research for the ways in which educational researchers work with those who participate in their research. I end with some suggestions for further research to extend our understanding of what participation means and could mean to those involved in educational research.

5.5.1 Ethical relationships with participants

As Wiles et al. (2005) have shown, the intention of those responsible for framing published ethical guidance is that it should reflect a wider responsibility on the part of researchers to act in such a way as to respect those who take part in their research. Respect for participants is seen here as including a commitment on the part of the researcher in as far as it is possible, not only to

foresee and prevent harm to those who take part in their research but also to show a wider concern for the dignity and privacy of participants.

Whilst none of those who took part in this study suggested that they had been harmed during their involvement in research, a significant number of participants reported experiences where either their dignity and/or their privacy appeared to have been compromised by researchers. Perhaps more surprisingly, however, such experiences whilst they were clearly unwelcome features of the research encounter for participants did not seem to deter most of those participants from considering future research participation. Accounts given by those who took part in this study hence indicate some cause for concern over the extent to which the BERA ethical guidelines are 'fit for purpose'. The concerns for participant dignity and privacy which underpin the document seem neither to be enacted by all researchers nor do they seem to reflect what seemed to be important to participants in this study about their experiences. Hence, even when participants are involved in practices that would seem to be opposed to the spirit of ethical guidance, they seemed not to experience them in the way that the authors of the guidance might have expected; in this respect, the agendas of the research community and those of their participants seem somewhat detached. The research community's understanding of harm seems removed from the understanding of harm of those educational practitioners who perhaps experiences stresses of a different order of magnitude in their everyday working life than those they encounter when they volunteer to take part in educational research. Equally, participants, as we have seen, come to encounters in research settings with, in some cases, a sophisticated understanding of the research process and with a greater sense of role reciprocity between themselves and those who carry out research might suspect. Finally, there seems to exist a whole category of what might be described as discourtesies towards their participants that researchers perhaps unwittingly commit in the course of their work which, whilst as we have seen do not obviously occasion harm to participants, powerfully colour the relationship. Through their contacts with participants,

researchers leave behind themselves impressions about researchers and about educational research in general: impressions that transmit and propagate expectations which participants then take into future research participation and/or into their own research activity.

Wiles et al. (2005) point out that the intention of the authors of ethical guidance, such as that of BERA (2004) and often reflected in the wording, is that researchers should apply 'situational relativism' when observing these guidelines, calibrating the ethical procedure for each individual research encounter according to their personal moral stance and their perceptions of the particular characteristics of each research project. Tinker and Coomber (2004) argue, however, that such devolution of responsibility for ethical protocol to researchers is threatened by increasingly prescriptive governance of social research. Similarly, Corrigan (2003) warns that the regulation of social research through inflexible, formalised consent procedures risks coercing researchers to observe what he describes as 'empty ethics' which take insufficient account of the complexities of the social interactions involved in carrying out social and educational research. As these authors suggest, the rationale for a relativist approach to ethical guidance rests on the understanding that research encounters are socially complex and, to an extent, idiosyncratic. If this is accepted, then it follows that situational relativism would seem to be an appropriate approach to ethical governance and that social and educational researchers might be able to claim some justification in exercising discretion when applying ethical guidance to their research activity.

There would seem, therefore, a case as Sieber (2004) suggests for some re-appraisal of the models of ethical guidance that relate to the work of the educational research community. Were such a re-appraisal to be informed by an empirically derived understanding of the experiences of participants within episodes of research involvement, in a longitudinal context that acknowledges the interaction of such episodes and which subsumes some appreciation of participants' own

research activity and relationship with educational research in general, it might be possible to develop forms of ethical regulation based on a more holistic appreciation of the researcher-participant relationship within the wider context of the entire research community, including those who are not employed by HEIs. This might require something of a cultural shift in perception by the ‘professional’ research community to see the co-development of research capacity within the workforce of educational practitioners as a whole as included within the aims of educational research. Such a new regulatory structure might even be based around a notion of co-regulation where ethical regulation is seen as the joint responsibility of researcher and participant.

5.5.2 The significance of participants’ prior experience

This study suggests that participants’ prior experience can be influential in shaping their modes of participation in future research, although the possibility of such a significant connection seems not to have been reflected in the literature on research participation to date. On the evidence of the literature on research participation, researchers do not systematically probe the past participation history of their participants or at least, if they do so, they do not report it. There would appear to be potential benefits for researchers in gaining some understanding of their participants’ histories of and dispositions towards educational research and in disseminating this knowledge to the educational research community. Firstly, as I have argued above, data that is generated in research encounters is influenced by participants’ developing understanding in this respect and it would appear at least plausible that the researcher who probes and responds to this dimension in their participants would be more likely to achieve some congruence between their expectations as a researcher and those of their participants. Such a congruence might at least be expected to favour a more meaningful and potentially more productive research encounter.

Secondly, an understanding of the prior experience of their participants might help researchers develop and/or deploy means of data generation that would be responsive to the level of research literacy of their participants, again potentially making the data generation process more productive for the researcher and more meaningful for participants. Such an appreciation by researchers might also help them to tailor the information and/or consent phase of the research encounter more to the understanding and expectations of their individual volunteers. Although such a 'bespoke' approach to individual participants might have consequences for the validity and reliability of research this would need to be balanced against the potential benefits of a research relationship that could be seen as more functional in the ways I have described here. Finally, the research literacy and experience of participants might be seen by researchers not as a potential threat, either to themselves as individual researchers or to notions of the validity of data generation procedures, but as an opportunity for co-development of research methodology. In this way, the research-experienced participant might currently be something of an underused resource. This study has shown that participants can have considerably more research experience than the researchers with whom they have contact and as this inquiry also suggests, one of the reasons why participants chose to take part in research is to develop their own research capabilities (see section 4.2). It is not therefore difficult to see how some form of collaboration in this respect might be of mutual benefit to participants and to those who carry out educational research.

Finally I discuss the ways in which this research theme might be taken forward in the future.

5.5.3 Future directions for research

As considered in the methodology section, one potential weakness of this study is that it had attempted to draw together empirical evidence on participants' individual experiences of participation with what are mostly generalised accounts of participation drawn from the literature on this area. Arguably, a sounder methodological approach would be to compare participant and

researcher accounts of the *same* research experiences. For reasons of recruitment alluded to above (section 3.2), such an approach has not been possible here, as researchers are understandably reluctant to release contact details for their participants with a view to them taking part in the research of third parties, especially when such research could involve potentially difficult ethical areas. Were it possible, however, to carry out such a study, there would be significant methodological benefits from such an approach, not least perhaps through the potential for triangulation of data.

A future study might explore participants' reaction to publications related to their participation. As discussed in the literature review, there has been some previous exploration of this, particularly within the tradition of narrative research, but a more extensive exploration of participants' views on how they, and the research of which they have been a part, are represented would seem to be a fruitful area of exploration. This would, however, have the effect of applying a filter to participation in such a study as only participants in previous research where a written account was known to be available would be eligible to take part. The consequences of such a narrowing of the participant base would have to be considered. Such a study might be more feasible in terms of participant recruitment were it to involve a number of those who had previously taken part in the same study but there would then be another set of sampling issues to be considered.

An area that has been apparently unresearched is that of vicarious research: where participants are asked to administer research instruments on behalf of others. This study has uncovered two instances of this and it might be instructive to explore the extent to which 'sponsoring' institutions provide guidance and/or training to those who are asked to act as surrogates on their behalf and the characteristics and efficacy of such 'arms length' ethical regulation of participants

through an intermediary. This would seem to be a novel area for future research activity but one in which barriers to recruitment would again pose potential challenges.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Indicative selection of search strings employed in the literature search for this project.

<Participant>
<Participant><Researcher>
<Participant><Empower>
<Participant><Education>
<Participant><Educational Research>
<Participant><Educational Research><Ethics>
<Participant><Interview> OR <questionnaire>

<Participation>
<Participation><Research>
<Participation><Educational Research>
<Participation><Educational Research>NOT<widening>

<Relationship><Participant>
<Relationship><Researcher>
<Relationship><Participant><researcher>
<Relationship><Ethics>
<Relationship><Researcher><Subject>

<Informed consent>
<Informed consent><research>
<Informed consent><educational research>
<Informed consent><participant>
<Informed consent><subject>

<Subject>
<Subject><Educational Research>
<Subject><Research>
<Subject><empower>

<Ethics>
<Ethics><Participant>
<Ethics><research><education>
<Ethics><research>

<Take Part><Research>
<Volunteer><Research>
<Recruit><Research>

Appendix 2 – text used in TES and DCFS noticeboards

Research Participants Needed

I am a researcher from the University of Nottingham carrying out a study to look at teachers' experience as research subjects. I am interested in why people choose to take part, their impressions of the researchers whom they meet and their views on the effectiveness of research. I would be grateful if you could spare 20 minutes to speak on the phone at any time convenient to you. Those teachers who have already taken part have suggested several ways in which educational research might be re-designed in order to make the process more meaningful and productive for teachers.

If you feel you could take part in this project, know of a colleague who might be interested or just have something to say about this research then please reply to me at XXXX

Appendix 3 – speculative e-mail text

I am e-mailing you to ask if any of the staff at your school would wish to be involved with research being carried out at Nottingham University School of Education. The research aims to help re-think educational research by making it more meaningful to those teachers who are involved. At the outset of this project, I wish to explore the experiences of any of your colleagues who have been involved in any form of educational research in the past five years.

The input I have received so far from this project has helped us redesign the way in which we carry out our research and will in future, we hope, lead to more relevant outcomes for the teaching profession.

If you feel know somebody who might have something to say on any of these questions and would be prepared to spare 20 minutes to talk on the then please e-mail me at XXXX Anything you or your colleagues say will of course be treated in total confidence.

Appendix 4 – speculative mailing text

Dear Headteacher

I am sure that you will probably agree that most educational research seldom gets read by the people that matter. Our project aims to address this issue and make research more responsive to the needs of schools. I think this can best be done by making the research process more meaningful and transparent for the people who supply our information in the first place. I am therefore setting out to survey people who have taken part in educational research to find out their experiences and their views on how research might be improved.

I am sending out the enclosed flier to a number of selected schools. Could you please pass it on to anybody who you feel might be interested.

Nick Mitchell
School of Education
University of Nottingham

Could you please pass this e-mail on to anybody who might be interested at your school.

Appendix 5 – Flier/poster included with speculative e-mail and mailing

Participation in Educational Research Project

Have you been involved in any kind of educational research?

If so:

How do you feel you were treated?

Were you told the purpose of the research?

Have the researchers kept in contact with you?

Were you shown the final research publication?

If you feel you have something to say on any of these questions and would be prepared to spare 30 minutes to talk on the phone then please e-mail me at XXXXX. Anything you say will of course be treated in total confidence.

The aim of our project is to make educational research better by making it more meaningful for those involved.

I hope you will be able to help us.

Nick Mitchell
School of Education
University of Nottingham

Appendix 6 TES advert text June 16th 2006



Have you been involved as a participant in any kind of educational research?

If you have and would be prepared to talk about your experience then please e-mail Nick Mitchell at XXXXX or phone XXX. Anything you say will of course be treated in total confidence.

Appendix 7 – Article which appeared in the Times Educational Supplement 5th October 2007

Probing the original probers

Article | Published in The TES on 5 October, 2007 | By: Irena Barker

ACADEMICS PLANNING educational research would do well to involve teachers in the planning stages, to give them an insight into the realities of the modern classroom, a pilot study has shown.

Teachers who have participated in research said they sometimes felt distant from "out of touch" researchers who asked obvious questions only a non-teacher would ask.

Nick Mitchell, a PhD student from Nottingham University, interviewed 16 teachers about their attitudes to researchers and found they are increasingly clued up on research methods and able to "see through" interviewers who fish for particular answers.

"If teachers advised researchers on what questions to ask and how to approach staff, it could help," he said. "Teachers are an overlooked resource."

One teacher illustrated the problem, saying: "People who do educational research often aren't teachers and they ask you questions where you think, 'D'uh yes!' and 'Why are you wasting time with this?' Go and teach a class and find out!"

Mr Mitchell said: "To what extent are researchers taking account of the increase in teachers' research literacy when they design research? Some may be misled by teachers who are simply 'playing the game' when they take part."

One teacher admitted they liked to outwit researchers: "When interviewers interview, often they give off the answer they expect. And, for me, it was sort of, 'been there, done that, I'm not playing that game!'"

The study also revealed that some researchers alienated their subjects by not telling them the purpose or outcome of their studies. Some researchers even ignored official guidelines that say subjects must be told they can withdraw from a study.

Mr Mitchell is seeking teachers who have participated in educational research to widen his study.

Appendix 8 Characteristics of the achieved sample of participants

Participant	Where Employed (Secondary, Primary, HEI)	Research experienced /Single Participant	Research Experience (Research experience in ITE))	Prior Views of research (Sympathetic, Cynical, Irrelevant)	Attitude change following research	Approached/Co-opted	Approached by (internal(senior),external (already had HEI relationship)	How explained (Inadequate, Adequate Doc/e-mail, verbally)	Anonymity/Right to Withdraw (Not Discussed, verbal discussion Written Consent, Right to Withdraw, Anonymised)	Views on researcher/ data generation (No Contact)	Seen written account (Yes, No, Want to, not Published)	Would you participate in educational research again?
<i>Andrew</i>	P	M	RI	S		A	E	I	ND	+	NW	Y
<i>Beverley</i>	H	M	R	C		C	IS	I	V	Neg	Y	Y
<i>Carol</i>	S	M	R	C		A	IS	AV	V	+	Y	Y
<i>Devinder</i>	S	S		I	+	A	IS	AD	ND	+	Y	Y
<i>Erin</i>	H	M	R	C		A	E	I	ND	Neg	N	Y
<i>Florian</i>	P	S		-		A	IS	AD	-	-	N	Y
<i>Grant</i>	P	S		S	Neg	A	EH	AV	V	Neg	NW	=
<i>Hayley</i>	S	S		S		A	I	AD	-	+	NP	Y
<i>Irene</i>	H	M	R	C		A	I	AD	A	Neg	NW	Y
<i>Jatinder</i>	P	S		S		A	EH	-	-	-	-	=
<i>Karen</i>	S	S		C		C	IS	I	-	Neg	N	=
<i>Lesley</i>	S	M	RI	S		A	EH	-	-	-	Y	Y
<i>Mohammed</i>	S	S		I		A	IS	AD	ND	+	N	Y
<i>Neal</i>	P	S		I	Neg	A	IS	AV	ND	Neg	NW	N
<i>Oprah</i>	S	S		S	Neg	C	IS	I	-	Neg	N	N

Appendix 9 Ethics statement for the School of Education, University of Nottingham

A brief statement of my research aims or questions and proposed methods of data generation (maximum 200 words);

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of what it means to participants to take part in educational and social research. Ethical research governance has typically adopted a 'top-down' approach where the ethical agenda has primarily responded to the needs of researchers and their institutions to be protected against claims of malpractice. The resulting ethical procedures associated with educational and social research may mean little to many participants in that research. Starting from the position that ethical research can only be the product of ethical relationships between researcher and researched, this project aims seeks through interviews with participants to further understand these relationships and their actual and potential articulation with ethical procedures.

Data generation will initially be through questionnaires administered to a large group of participants. The size of this group obviously depends on the success of the recruitment strategy (see below) but the target figure for this phase is 60-70 participants completing questionnaires. The analysis of these questionnaire responses will then be used to select a sub set of 30-40 participants to take part in semi-structured interviews which will be carried by telephone and, in some cases, face to face. In addition to the information sheet and consent form, participants will be sent (through e-mail) a suggested agenda for the interview which they will be encouraged to negotiate with me. Following the interview, participants will be sent a copy of the transcript which they will be invited to edit.

A brief statement of how I plan to gain access to prospective research participants;

Since article 23 of the 2004 BERA Ethical Guidelines states that confidentiality should be the norm for research, it would clearly be inappropriate for me to approach researchers to ask them to release contact details of their participants. Recruitment of participants has, therefore to be direct: adverts will be placed in a national newspaper inviting all those with relevant experience to take part in this research.

It is anticipated that despite a predicted low response rate the scale of this coverage will be such as to allow the recruitment of the target number of participants (see above) for this study.

A brief statement of my research aims or questions and proposed methods of data generation (maximum 200 words);

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of what it means to participants to take part in educational and social research. Ethical research governance has typically adopted a 'top-down' approach where the ethical agenda has primarily responded to the needs of researchers and their institutions to be protected against claims of malpractice. The resulting ethical procedures associated with educational and social research may mean little to many participants in that research. Starting from the position that ethical research can only be the product of ethical relationships between researcher and researched, this project aims seeks through interviews with participants to further understand these relationships and their actual and potential articulation with ethical procedures.

Data will be generated through 20-30 minute semi-structured telephone interviews with participants. In addition to the information sheet and consent form, participants

will be sent (through e-mail) a suggested agenda for the interview which they will be encouraged to negotiate with me. Following the interview, participants will be sent a copy of the transcript which they will be invited to edit.

A brief statement of how I plan to gain access to prospective research participants;

Since article 23 of the 2004 BERA Ethical Guidelines states that confidentiality should be the norm for research, it would clearly be inappropriate for me to approach researchers to ask them to release contact details of their participants. Recruitment of participants has, therefore to be direct: adverts will be placed in a national newspaper and targeted e-mail will also be used to invite all those with relevant experience to take part in this research.

It is anticipated that despite a predicted low response rate the scale of this coverage will be such as to allow the recruitment of sufficient (30-40) participants for this study.

Appendix 10 – Participant Information form



The University of
Nottingham

School of Education

The Researcher-Participant Relationship **Participant Information Form**

This is a PhD project to be carried out by myself in conjunction with the University of Nottingham, School of Education.

The aim of this project is to improve understanding of what it is like for participants to take part in research. Amongst the academic community, little seems to be known about;

- What motivates people to agree to take part in research,
- How much is explained to people about the research in which they participate,
- The extent to which people are comfortable about what they are asked to do in the course of their research participation,
- The extent to which participants feel part of a collective enterprise,
- How participation changes participants' views of research in general,
- How much contact participants have with research teams throughout the whole course of a research project.

A large proportion of research, especially in education, is reliant on the goodwill of participants. If the research community knew more about the views of those upon whom it relies, it might be possible to design better ways of carrying out research.

Over the course of this year, I shall be sending out questionnaires and interviewing people who have taken part in educational and social research and exploring their experiences with them. Anybody who takes part in this research will be kept fully informed of the progress of the research up to the final publication.

Contact Details

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If you have any concerns or complaints about this research please contact The Deputy Head of the School of Education XXX. He can be reached at the above address.

Appendix 11 - Participant consent form

The Researcher-Participant Relationship - Participant Consent Form

Project background and aims:

The aim of this project is to help researchers understand what it is like for participants to take part in research. We would like to know why you chose to take part in research and how you felt you were treated throughout the whole research process from start to finish. If we, as researchers knew more about the experiences of those upon whose help we rely, we might be able to design better ways of carrying out research.

As researchers, we have an obligation to those taking part in the project to make sure that nothing negative arises from your involvement. The ethical principles governing this research are set out below. They are based on the code of conduct set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA).

Our code of ethics:

- Participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
- Participants can withdraw from the research at any time.
- Participants are under no pressure to answer any question they may feel uneasy about.
- Data will be stored securely, under the terms of the 1988 Data Protection Act.
- No individual or institution will be identified by name, nor be identifiable.
- Any data which we might use when reporting the findings of our research will be anonymised.
- No-one outside of the research team will have access to any of the data we collect.

Consent:

We would very much value your participation in this project and are happy to answer any further questions you may have about it.

If you would like to take part in the project, please sign below:

Signed Date.....

Print name:

Contact details:

Nick Mitchell

Appendix 12 - Interview schedule

The Participant-Researcher Relationship

Interview Script

- 1. Could you describe your involvement in research**
- 2. How did you come to be involved in research?**
- 3. Could you describe how the research process was explained to you?**
- 4. Did you have any views on educational and social research before you came to be involved in research?**
- 5. How would you describe your relationship with the researcher(s) with whom you had contact?**
- 6. What were your impressions of the researcher(s) with whom you had contact?**
- 7. Could you describe the data generation part of the research**
- 8. Have you seen a written account of the research and if so, what were your impressions?**
- 9. Has your involvement in this research changed your perceptions of the research process and of researchers?**
- 10. Could you identify any costs or benefits to yourself as a result of your participation?**
- 11. Do you think you would participate in educational research in future?**
- 12. Is there anything you would like to add?**