

Article

Ethical Data Collection and Recognizing the Impact of Semi-Structured Interviews on Research Respondents

Gary Husband 

Faculty of Social Science, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, UK; gary.husband@stir.ac.uk

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Abstract: This article explores the complex relationship between researcher and respondent through shared experience and interaction in the interview processes. Ethical considerations related to the balance of power and potential for change in respondents' professional actions and decisions post-interview are discussed whilst problematizing the concept of truly informed consent. Informed by critical incident analysis, the article draws on the researcher's experience of undertaking a qualitative-based study founded in the principles of phenomenological hermeneutics. Concluded in 2016, the research investigates the impact of pedagogical training programs on respondents' teaching practice and engagement with professional learning. Respondents, experienced lecturers working in the adult education sectors in Scotland and Wales, contacted the researcher to share their post-interview experiences. The research was not designed to elicit change in respondents, nor influence professional choice or practice. However, each communication received attributed participating in the research as the source for renewed interest and engagement in professional learning. Although research interviews becoming an enriching experience for respondents is a recorded phenomenon the ascribed effects were profound, potentially life-changing, and not fully anticipated. Ethical considerations for researchers designing and undertaking interview-based research are considered alongside the potential for engagement in research interviews as a catalyst for professional learning in practice.

Keywords: qualitative research; semi-structured interviews; professional learning; practice-based learning; research ethics

1. Introduction

The study from which this article is taken, completed in 2016, conducted using the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology [1–4] was conducted with the aim of reviewing the initial teacher education programs of lecturers in further education in Scotland and Wales [5–7]. Using the lens of several years of post-graduation teaching practice, respondents were asked to critically evaluate their experiences in 'training' (Training, although a contentious term when used to describe teacher education programmes, is still frequently used within literature referring to further and vocational education. It is used here with full acknowledgement that it is not universally supported or used when describing the professional formation of teachers and lecturers.), the potential impact the training had on their engagement with continued professional learning, and their perceptions on the efficacy of the programs in preparing them for their career as a college lecturer. The interviews lasting on average 40 min were designed to form a shared understanding between the interviewer and respondent on how the initial educational programs offered to respondents, specifically in relation to learning and teaching, had added to their professional and personal capacities and positioned them to progress their careers as lecturers.

Through purposeful questioning and discussion in the carefully designed and piloted semi-structured interviews [5] respondents were asked to re-live their formative professional learning

and go beyond basic recall of events in an attempt to critically evaluate their experiences as a lecturer. In the process of doing this, respondents were able to unpick the formative and initial experiences that had been instrumental in their early development as educators. The questioning further encouraged critical reflection related to ongoing professional learning, constructs of identity, and both continuous and emergent agency. These insights shed light on the perceived efficacy of the initial learning and ‘training’ supplied by employers and its subsequent impact on the respondents’ continued professional learning. This article does not focus on the results of the outlined study, which are published and documented in detail elsewhere [6,7]. Instead, it focuses on supplementary and important observations taken from the practice of conducting the research and seeks to add to the methodological and ethical discussions related to qualitative research practice, and specifically, the undertaking of research interviews.

The communications received were not expected, what they described had not been anticipated, and their content (although expressing positive outcomes) gave rise for significant concern. The initial research had been designed to understand the experiences of the respondents and not shape them. The research had been designed within strict ethical guidelines [8] and in consultation with extensive qualitative research and interview methodology literature (see examples [9–15]). The research design, interview schedules, and analytical frameworks to be employed had been scrutinized by an ethics committee. The group of respondents were all considered to be outside of the accepted definitions of vulnerable groups [8]. The notion of impact on vulnerable individuals was of course considered and is discussed at some length in the literature (see [16,17] as examples). However, where respondents are not perceived as vulnerable, the accepted considerations of ensuring extended protections for vulnerable peers are broadly absent from the wider discourse and research literature. These received communications afforded an opportunity to consider these particular issues and phenomenon in more depth.

Motivation for this Research

Upon completion of the interviews undertaken for the above outlined qualitative research study, I received the unsolicited (but not unwelcome) informal communications from three of the respondents (from the original 20). Respondents were not asked or required to communicate with me after completion of the interviews, this was undertaken voluntarily, independently, and entirely of their own volition. On conclusion of the interviews, three respondents reported that they had felt compelled to critically reflect further on their working lives and experiences. As a consequence, they reported that they had been motivated to identify and seek out learning opportunities that by their own admission, they would likely not otherwise have undertaken. The participation in the research, as evidenced by the account of the respondents’, had engendered a change in the lived reality of the individual, leading to the desire to engage in previously unplanned or anticipated learning. This was not a specified aim of the research, and the actions taken by respondents in undertaking new work and changes to their lives was not fully expected [18]. The experiences of the respondents in these reported incidences were positive and reported upon favorably. However, this article seeks to problematize the circumstances that affected the respondents. It questions the processes and guidelines for the development of ethical considerations and the preparation of research interview participants giving fully informed consent. The subsequent voluntarily supplied testimony from respondents in relation to their post-interview experiences also indicates that the reflective process undertaken as part of the interview, in critically evaluating a past learning experience or event has the potential to lead to a broader and more generalized inspection of an individual’s situation, desires, needs, and interests.

For the purposes of this study and article I am defining fully informed consent using the British Educational Research Association’s guidelines for educational researchers [8]. The guidelines offer that informed consent ensures that respondents are made fully aware of the nature of the research, the methods employed, and the intended outcome, why they as individuals are necessary as part of the study, how the work will be disseminated, and what their involvement will involve. Further to this,

participants are afforded assurances of anonymity (where required), the right to withdraw without giving reason, the right to remain in good standing, and the right to be kept informed of any material changes to the study that may affect their decision to give ongoing permission. O'Neil [19] in his work on the limits of informed consent succinctly adds that informed consent is an assurance that participants are neither deceived nor coerced. I have adopted this definition as it was the one used by the ethics permission committee of the associated university (at the time of the research) that granted me the permission to conduct this work. It is, therefore, the definition and framework used with the participants involved in the study. It is not my intention to present the work of ethics committees as unproblematic. Indeed, the manner in which ethical committees (within universities particularly) operate and the focus they have on regulatory frameworks as management tools [20] is the focus of much critique and discussion (see [21–24] as examples). The broader operation and practices of ethics committees falls outside the scope of this article, which seeks to add only suggestions for further discussion in relation to this much contested area of research practice.

This work is important as it aims to broaden the discussions related to ideas surrounding informed consent and the subsequent deeper impacts of participant engagement with research interviews. The work aims to inform researchers engaged in all areas of research work and specifically those considering participant consent and participant wellbeing, as well as those acting as members of panels giving ethical guidance for researchers. The work is of further interest to those who are considering conducting or managing practitioner enquiry or research projects. Those engaged in the development of research training may also wish to engage with the discussions presented in this article.

The article aims to answer the following questions. Given the potential for influence on personal and situational circumstance arising from research participation (which will be explored more fully in due course), should the ethical considerations related to respondents engaged in research interviews extend beyond the common respect given to anonymity, comfort, wellbeing, and professional standing [8]? Should ethical considerations be extended to consider the consequences of the possibilities for real and tangible personal and professional change brought about through reflection and discussion? If a respondent has the potential to be challenged in their thinking or resolves to reconsider professional actions (such as learning and practice) as a result of participating in research interviews, where then does the ethical responsibility lie for such possible actions?

This then has potential further reaching practical implications for researchers in the design and implementation of research projects. In ethical considerations for research interviews, attention is given to the principles related to ensuring no harm or loss of standing comes to the respondent and a critical part of this is the notion of informed consent. Respondents, fully availed of all pertinent information related to the research and processes, decide about participation based on the known information [25]. If, as postulated above, there are conditions within and created by research interactions that lead to post-interview reactions based on the experiences of respondents, this highlights the need to explore the nature of fully informed consent and what this means in practical applications within the research interview context.

2. Respondent Communication and Critical Incident Analysis

This article focuses on the experiences of individuals who had participated as respondents in a research project that focused on individual's experiences of initial teacher education and subsequent long-term effect on continuous training and learning.

These individuals were willing participants in the research project and had interests and experience in the relevant area of enquiry. Detailed project information documents were supplied to respondents by the researcher and subsequently all participants gave their informed consent to be interviewed. The following reported experiences of three of the original 20 participants were unanticipated and offer an interesting opportunity to explore the impact of research participation on the professional learning of respondents. It should be noted that the focus here on these three communications is only one part of a much larger study that had its focus on the content of the original interviews and responses.

These additional responses presented the researcher to engage in critical reflection in relation to the project as a whole and the interviews specifically.

2.1. Critical Incident Analysis

The original research framework and theoretical perspective did not take into account analysis of post study communication. Although every effort was made to ensure that all eventualities could be managed and incorporated, the reporting of changed actions and behavior of respondents did not form a part of that plan. As discussed, all required safeguards and protections were met and, as such, the study itself complied with regulatory and organizational requirements. These communications could have been dismissed as not important to the study or not relevant to the research question. Instead, it was decided to treat these communications as an additional data set and analyze them using a separate and more appropriate analytical framework.

In discussing this separate analysis, it is important at this juncture to explore in more detail the source of validity of these reflective accounts as research articles. My intention with this article is not to engage in empirical work that claims to have substantive and statistically significant generalizable findings. Equally, there is no intention to engage with what Hammersley (1995) [26] might describe as a challenge to paradigmatic assumptions. This article seeks to simply explore the specific and real experiences as recounted by individual people. Cho and Trent (2006) [27] argue that it is widely accepted that knowledge is a human construct and, as such, testimonial accounts and personal narratives [28] can inform our thinking, and have what Maxwell (1992) [29] would term interpretistic validity through constructing meaning from an emic world view. The accounts themselves are of interest as they afford us an unprompted insight into the experiences of individuals who were not responding to a question but felt strongly enough about their experience to share it. Critical incident analysis offers a useful analytical framework to explore both the experiences of the respondents and the researcher alike. The communications from respondents detailed a response to an incident (original interview), and it elicited a critically reflective response in them but also, from the researcher. Critical incident analysis is a widely recognized methodology [30–33] based on an analysis of everyday practice. Tripp (2012) [33] notes that the vast majority of critical incidents are not at all dramatic or obvious: They are straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice. They are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures (in this example, assumptions related to research methods). Tripp (*ibid*) observes these incidents appear to be ‘typical’ rather than ‘critical’ at first sight but are rendered critical through analysis. These short accounts are narrative [34] in the sense that they afford insight into an experience, a view, as a researcher, I would otherwise not have been privileged to observe in the normal course of the planned research.

Lister and Crisp (2007) [31] offer a summarized but very useful framework for use in supporting critical incident analysis. The stages they propose (based on work by Flanagan, 1954 [35] and Craig and Wilson, 1981 [36]) are as follows; provide an account of the incident(s), review initial response, analyze issues and dilemmas, explore what can be learned, and finally, explore the outcomes. I have adapted this framework for use here by presenting the short narratives of the respondents as the accounts of the events and also the initial responses (their detailed actions). I have then explored the related issues and dilemmas that these seemingly mundane [33] incidents present. The discussion section that follows details the learning from these incidents and finally, the conclusions section suggests possible outcomes in the forms of suggested ongoing points for discussion and areas for further research.

2.2. Account of Incidents

The accounts are presented here verbatim and unchanged. They are extracts from longer communications with irrelevant identifying and salutatory information removed. They are not positioned hierarchically or otherwise and the order here is random (they were quite literally pulled

out of a hat). These accounts represent the first and second step (account and initial response) of the critical incident analysis framework as described above [31].

Response 1:

'... I didn't expect the interview to be thought provoking and didn't think I would think about it again but I did. I realised after the questions about teaching and training that I hadn't really done any courses or learning for a long time (years). I have looked into things I can do and I have signed up for a course on mentoring that runs in the college every year. I will see how it goes.'

Male Engineering lecturer in Scotland with over 10 years' teaching experience.

Response 2:

'... the questions seemed to shock me a bit. When you asked about the sort of professional learning I seek out I couldn't answer! I think I got stuck because I haven't looked for courses and things I just did what was available in the college on training days etc. It got me thinking about what I am interested in, and to be honest my subject hasn't changed much but some of the teaching methods etc have. I have looked into a Masters degree and one of the modules is about online e learning. I am really glad I did the interview as it has made me do something which is really exciting (and scary).'

Female lecturer in Social Sciences in Scotland with 6 years' teaching experience.

Response 3:

'... interview was a bit strained as I didn't have much to talk about in relation to professional learning. I have done bits and bobs but nothing more than I'm required to really. Sorry if the info wasn't much use. Anyway, I don't know if it's too late to include but after the interview I realised I'm pretty bored with work, I obviously can't quit and don't want to! but I realised I needed to do something to get the brain working again. I have decided to do an Open Uni degree [subject supplied but redacted for anonymity]. It's nothing to do with work but I already feel a bit more positive about my job, I'm guessing I will have to see how it goes, you never know maybe a change of subject in the future!'

Female lecturer in Social Sciences in Wales with 12 years' experience.

2.3. Issues and Dilemmas

As Tripp (1993) suggests with many critical incidents, these accounts on first glance seem fairly mundane. Respondents communicating their intention to engage with study and attributing the renewed interest to their engagement with the researcher through the interview. However, asking more analytical questions of these accounts such as why this happened after the interview was conducted, what was it about the interaction that possibly changed the behavior of these individuals, and how did this interaction impact on these respondents, shows these short narratives to be quite revealing. The dilemmas this reveals are perhaps quite subtle but nonetheless important. The engagement of the respondents was not meant to bring about change of any sort. The respondents were happy to engage and pass on their thoughts, but they were not expecting to have their thinking changed and equally, were not informed that it might.

Comparing the research interview process of being asked questions and needing to formulate answers to other situations where this happens, could reveal why these changes in thinking were observed. In situations and planned interventions designed to bring about a change in thinking or behavior, such as counselling [37] and coaching [38], questioning is used in many different ways. The dilemmas that this presents is also subtle but nevertheless remains interesting; while researchers wish to ask questions of their respondents, should they in turn be more aware of the deeper responses that this may elicit and, indeed, should respondents be more fully informed that their interview may possibly yield more than a sharing of information?

In considering what actually changed the behavior of the respondents, it would be a stretch too far to claim that the changes in approach to professional learning seen in the three responses were due entirely to being interviewed. It is clear from the responses that each individual was making a return to previous behaviors and reigniting a desire to learn. From their accounts, we can safely deduce that the interview process may have been the catalyst that prompted deeper thinking and reflection, but I must exercise some caution and diffidence in highlighting any causality. Significant other life experiences are quite likely to also be in play and we must limit analysis of this particular aspect to what is evident in the responses. A useful link between all three participants is the culture and training from which they all hail. Each respondent, by nature of inclusion in the original study, had undergone the same level and type of initial teacher education. Teacher education programs for those working in the further education sector in the UK for the last 20 years have all been built around similar frameworks and national standards (regional variants withstanding but not dissimilar). It is beyond the scope of this article to engage in an analysis of initial teacher education but it is well documented (and problematized) that reflective practice forms a substantial part of the training received [39,40]. All three respondents were well versed in the practice of reflection [41], and this interview process may be responsible for nothing more than helping them re-engage with previous learning and past tacit behaviors and practices. If the engagement in question and response could be considered a catalyst for reflection, and reflective practice is a recognized part of continuous learning, it does then lead to the question, could engagement as a respondent in a research projects be considered as a form of professional learning or development?

In the following two sections, I consider these dilemmas as the final two stages of the critical incident analysis framework are followed. The section titled 'Discussion' details further thinking and the learning gained through pausing to consider these communications. The final section, titled 'Conclusions', details suggested possible outcomes from this work.

3. Discussion

Research Interview Participation, Ethical Considerations, and Informed Consent

Given the proliferation of qualitative based research projects [42] focusing on the practice of teachers, schools and colleges, policy, young people, adult learners, curriculum, pedagogy, and leadership (to name a small selection), it is a reasonable conclusion that many hundreds or indeed thousands of research interviews are conducted globally in education on an annual basis. Given the extent and wide-scale engagement with interviews by researchers, there is now a vast library of good quality instructional literature pertaining to offer methodological guidance in the planning, preparation, and undertaking of research interviews (see DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Drever, 2003; Mason, 2002; Yin, 2011, for just a few examples). As with all genres of literature, there is an enormous variance in quality and, consequently, useful content. The style of interviews, scope, structure, limits, rules, and parameters are all described in a great many formats that range from offering suggested questions to methods of recording, transcription, and analysis. It is tempting to think of these instructional guides as offering a formula to apply to the human sciences, a possible solution to make the unpredictable, predictable and to provide a structured framework by which to justify actions and processes of design. However, as Myers and Newman (2007) [43] point out, qualitative research interviews are problematic and although notwithstanding critique with due consideration to the limitation of potential problems, are rarely predictable. The setting of the interview is an artificial construct of the research, the participants are frequently strangers, and respondents are asked to create responses to specific questions often in a time restricted environment. These circumstances offer up both methodological and ethical problems that require consideration by researchers. The responses analyzed in this article offer us an insight into how these interview situations can lead to a greater level of engagement and reflection than anticipated. Through creating the space in which this interaction can happen, and considering the unequal balance of power in the relationship between interviewer

and respondent [21], acknowledgement should be made that interviews have the potential to produce more than just data.

In many studies, the considerations of ethical conduct and responsibility to the respondents themselves pass through a rigorous process of inspection by ethics committees based within universities housing the research groups or individuals undertaking enquiry [22]. These submissions to committees and subsequent detailed research plans are frequently underpinned with specific points of consideration related to the person (respondent), knowledge, democratic values, quality of research (methods and rigor), and academic freedoms [8]. The considerations towards respondents and participants set out quite clearly that respondents should suffer no loss of professional standing, or suffer personal distress, and be treated equally to each other and without prejudice or discrimination (as per the definition given for informed consent and ethical practice for this article). This information is normally supplied to individuals prior to commencement and coupled with a clear and unambiguous statement empowering respondents to withdraw at any given time without prejudice [13], which forms the basis for informed consent for participation. Signatures are provided and the forms are retained in accordance with ethical guidelines and related agreed procedures for secure data storage [8].

However, this in and of itself is an only adherence to the ritual of procedure and as argued by Holm (1997) [44], ethical behavior in qualitative research interviews requires a reflexive and emotive human response to the individual and the circumstances. Taking this approach, it is possible to view consent differently and not as an act or set of regulations or conditions set out at the start of a project. However, as clearly laid out in the British Sociological Association (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (2004) [45], consent should be regarded as an agreement that is renegotiated over time and during the research itself. As Sin (2005) [46] asserts, consent can only be considered informed if the information upon which it is based is current and responsive to changing circumstances (both emotional and situational). The BSA (2004) statement also asserts that researchers are responsible for the output of the project, its content, and impact. This has further implications for the issue of informed consent as at the onset of the research, it is not possible to predict entirely what the project will find or what the impact on respondents might be. The examples given above offer us an insight into a relatively benign but still unpredictable and unexpected outcome of being interviewed and participating in research.

Equally, in conducting interviews for research purposes the interviewer is engaged in trying to understand the experiences of the respondent through questioning and discussion [4]. Clearly, individuals are unique and will react differently to situations and questions in interviews. A contextual and reflexive approach to consent and human considerations revisited within interactions throughout the life of the project are potentially a critical and integral requirement of ethical qualitative research interviews [46]. These considerations highlighting issues focused on critical factors of reflexive ethical research practice have implications for respondents and the related responsibilities of researchers after the interview. The examples above perhaps demonstrate the explicit need to further explore the links between informed consent as an active and continuing aspect of the relationship between respondent and researcher, in much the same way that a counsellor or coach maintain the professional discourse for the duration of the relationship. In this way then, we can perhaps expect researchers to look beyond the performative nature of standardized ethical permissions and see their role as the arbiters of co-produced knowledge through the discursive process of question and response found in semi-structured interviews. Put simply, this study suggests that researchers could perhaps usefully acknowledge that they cannot simply extract information without acknowledging that they may elicit deeper responses from participants. Researchers utilizing semi-structured interviews then potentially have an ethical responsibility to ensure participants are aware of the potential for such outcomes.

The communications from respondents received would suggest that the interview experience offered space for reflection and professional review of practice leading to decisions that brought about change. This offers the opportunity to further consider the scope of the human interaction within the interview spaces that were the catalyst that perhaps led to the decisions made by respondents. What was it about the questioning of the interviewer and the construction of answers by the respondents

that led to a shift in reflection on current circumstances by some of the research participants? In tackling this question, it would be naïve to consider the interviewer as merely a receiver of pre-existing data [43] transmitted from the respondent. In participating in the research, the researcher and interviewee are engaged in investigation and the sharing of ideas through discussion. The semi-structured interview offers additional depth to that supplied by questionnaire or fully structured interview by inviting dialogic exchange. In so engaging, the researcher is actively constructing knowledge in partnership with the respondent who is constructing answers to questions that may require them to consider issues in a depth not explicitly previously engaged in [12]. As is suggested by the analysis of the communications detailed in the previous section, this dialogic space offers the potential for critical reflection on concepts, ideas, and opinions that may be formed as the answers are constructed or newly articulated as they are recalled, thus bringing them to the fore of consciousness. It is therefore then, as Kvale [18] argues, of little surprise that the research interview situation can be developmental for both the researcher and respondent. As ideas are shared and articulated, the understanding of experience and development of new knowledge offers the opportunity for a formative experience for both researcher and respondent [47]. The experiences of the respondents detailed in this article coupled with the experiences of the researcher as analyzed using the critical incident framework, demonstrate that in this specific set of circumstances, that engagement with the research interview brought about opportunities for reflection and, consequently, learning.

A final learning point for consideration and reflection is that the responses received in relation to this project were positive in both framing and outcome. Each of the three respondents who had felt the need to contact the researcher, had been through their own critically reflective process and concluded as a result of their new thinking that an action was required. It is not known whether the remaining 17 respondents had also undertaken the same processes, it is possible that they indeed did but were not moved to share this with the researcher at the time. Each communication tells its own tale and the respondents were sharing their positive conclusions to the process of engagement with research interviews. However, in problematizing this, the extent to which further consideration is required is revealed. It is easy to accept seemingly positive consequences and additional unplanned effects of the research; however, the communication of positive outcomes does not change the ethical responsibility any more or less than if they had been negative or problematic. Problematizing this serves to highlight the need for further consideration of three key issues, reflexive ethical responsibility throughout research encounters, information and discussion related to methods, and informed consent pre and during research. In considering the potential for negative eventualities, we remove the human predisposition to accept unanticipated positive outcomes unquestioningly and start to respond to a broader scope of potential and less desirable outcomes that ethical considerations and statements such as the British Sociological Association (2004) and BERA (2011) try to limit.

4. Conclusions

How should Researchers Respond to these Considerations?

Firstly, and critically, it should be noted that it is by no means considered that the samples discussed here are conclusive or internationally representative. Cultural, contextual, situational, and historical factors all play a part in how we construct the knowledge of the world around us and as such, where this phenomenon was observed in one national context, it may not be in another. However, the experiences were real for those that lived them, and they have afforded us the opportunity to explore why and how they came about. Any resulting suggestions or ideas are based on expanding the practices and considerations of researchers and are focused on protecting the interest of respondents without limiting the generation of new knowledge.

It is acknowledged that any attempt at generalization would be misguided and further study research in this area can only further and deepen the discussions raised herein.

Utilizing the critical incident analysis framework has provided a structured approach to the analysis and discussion. The final action required in adopting the practices of this methodology requires that the issues and dilemmas discussed, and resultant learning explored, be used to make suggestions for change or offer ideas for further development; these can be thought of as the outcomes of this piece of work. The outcomes here are framed instead of clearly defined and concrete actions, as suggestions for further consideration and critical questions to be asked by research professionals, of both themselves and the structures in which they operate. I have framed them thus for two distinct reasons. Firstly, I cannot make substantive generalizable claims based on the experiences of three people, nor indeed, do I wish to. However, and secondly, it is possible to not dismiss these human experiences as insignificant; after all, they were profoundly impactful to the people whose communications I have analyzed. Instead, I propose that these experiences and the subsequent analysis and discussions detailed here be used to further important discussions relating to the actions of researchers and the resultant impact on respondents.

The responses from research participants highlight several key interesting points. Engagement in research interviews is a potential source of reflection on practice, and subsequent action related to learning in the professions. It offers opportunities that may be difficult to replicate in other professional learning fora, but this as identified, is not the key purpose of research and as such does not often feature in the research project design process. This then ultimately begs the question, that if such potential exists, should an element of professional support for respondents be more broadly and routinely included in the design of research aimed at understanding professional practice? This may be seen as a reciprocity in engagement, where the respondent gives of their time and experience while the researcher provides the forum and structure. In so doing, the co-construction of knowledge meets the project needs of the researcher and, in engagement with the process, the respondent has participated in an exchange whereby the potential for supported professional critical reflection is acknowledged and encouraged. This is clearly subject and focus dependent as not all interviews with professionals will be solely focused on practice alone; systems and procedural reviews may not yield such rich opportunities for critical reflection as practice focused research. However, it is reasonable to assume that if professionals such as teachers and lecturers are being engaged in interviews to establish an understanding about an element of their practice or knowledge base, they will be required to recall information, formulate responses, and articulate their answers based on practice experience. These actions form part of the process of reflection and in so doing the act of answering the questions and entering discussion becomes part of the process of critique and learning in practice which in turn, could lead to change.

Given then that the potential for such outcomes is inherent in the act of engaging in interviews whether positive or negative, there is potentially an acknowledgement to be explicitly made by researchers towards these eventualities. If the result of engaging in the interview is potentially a reflection on practice by the respondent, which leads to them considering a change (in these examples, further learning), then there perhaps is a responsibility on the research professional to foreground this before the research starts.

This article has discussed the acts associated with reflexive informed consent and ethical research practice and now suggests some additional points of consideration for researchers.

In the design and implementation of research that proposes to engage professionals in interviews, as part of the information supplied to respondents, and ethical considerations submitted to overseeing committees prior to commencement, an explanation of the potential for reflections and observations on practice leading to change could reasonably be included for respondents. I propose that further consideration be given to exploring the ways that it could be made clear that in answering questions and engaging in discussion, respondents may consider issues that they had not previously considered that could potentially change their perspective or views on an issue or area of exploration.

I propose that those sitting on committees engaged in granting ethical permissions for research and providing the ethical framework (including that of the informed consent) could usefully engage in

further research and discussion about the nature of engagement between respondent and researcher where semi-structured interviews are proposed as a method for data collection. Ethical guidelines for research proposals including interviews could perhaps contain guidance on meeting the extended respondent needs revealed through the exploration of the experiences analyzed here. In turn, ethics committees considering applications for approval could provide support for and actively look for a deeper understanding of interview methodology and acknowledgement of the potential impact on respondents on engagement with the research process.

In considering the theoretical and methodological positioning of the qualitative interview within the project, consideration could be given to affording respondents the opportunity to respond to the interview beyond its conclusion. I am not suggesting that this should become an onerous distraction but be a natural part of the design process that is actively looked for by ethics committees considering proposed projects.

Further to this, I propose that universities that engage respondents in funded research potentially have an obligation to respondents beyond the conclusion of the project in relation to issues arising from engagement. This extends to both positive and negative outcomes for respondents. I am not advocating that researchers should shoulder the burden of psychological support but that further research could usefully reveal the impact of making available to respondents' institutional facilities from the outset of the study for those wishing to seek support and guidance with issues arising from engagement. Again, ethical considerations to this length could potentially be embedded in design and implementation of research projects and provision made in information sheets for respondents.

This issue also feeds directly into the impact agenda now heavily embedded in research practice. In recent years, focus has often and primarily been given to the impact of planned outputs of research projects (publication, policy, practice). Consideration could be given to exploring the learning and transformative experiences of respondents as potential impact from studies where this is a possibility. There is an opportunity to not only report on (as has been done here), but to explore the potential of actively embedding the effects on learning and development of respondents as part of the impact agenda of the research where appropriate to do so. This further impacts on the considerations of bodies awarding funding to institutions and researchers and ensures that respondents are not treated solely as providers of data but as possible co-constructors of knowledge within the project and humans with agency that may need developmental support. This then facilitates the possible empowerment of professionals in their learning and engagement with research and potentially holds benefits for both researchers and participants alike. If the potential benefits to the respondents in terms of professional learning are made clear from the outset, this then offers the possibility that response rates within qualitative studies may be increased.

Reiman (1979) [28] asserts that outcomes of research participation should enhance the freedoms of the participant more than they enhance the researcher's career. In considering these actions and engaging in further research and discussion, the research community could make further advancements in both engaging professionals in meaningful partnerships and extending the impact of research designed to inform and enhance practice.

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