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Tlale, Lloyd Daniel Nkoli; Romm, Norma Ruth Arlene

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Duoethnographic Storying Around Involvements in, and Extension of the Meanings of, Engaged Qualitative Research

Lloyd D.N. Tlale & Norma R.A. Romm

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sense-making;
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engaged research
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relationships

Abstract: In this article we discuss the duoethnographical approach we adopted to extend/deepen our interpretations of ourselves as academic researchers attempting to practise engaged research with participants in the field. We take, as a starting point for our discussion, our engagements in various projects (not always together in the same research settings) in South Africa. We reflect specifically on our ways of co-researching prospects for advancing inclusive education with participants and stakeholders. In terms of South African policy, inclusive education implies that all learners—including those experiencing barriers to learning in various forms—should ideally be catered for in "mainstream" schools, unless barriers are too severe and require referral to "special" schools. Some of the barriers affecting learners' educational experiences are related to socioeconomic disadvantage. In the article we share the extended dialogues we have had with each other around the meaning(s) of research "engagement" in this context. We define our duoethnography as a process of thoughtful dialoguing around, and writing about, the development of co-researching practices between academic researchers and research participants, as we reconsider our ways of seeing such practices. At the same time, we reflect on our developing relationship as duoethnographers.

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1. Introduction: A Brief Joint Account of the Development of our Relationship

In this article we share a duoethnographic dialogue we have been having over an extended period around the practise of research as an engaged activity. We both (from different angles associated with our respective histories) question what SIRY, ALI-KAHN and ZUSS (2011, §9) call "the normalcy of research/researcher distance as sound [research] practice". As authors, we have followed different academic trajectories: Lloyd (Dan)—designated as a black South African in terms of this country's racialised apartheid policies—had a less privileged socioeconomic and educational background than Norma, and he joined academia (the University of South Africa [Unisa]) in 2009. Prior to this, he worked as a district official in the democratic government's Department of Education (DoE). Norma, as a white South African, has had a much longer history working in academia, and has been employed by various universities, including Unisa. [1]

In the article, we share some of the conversations we have had over approximately six years, on myriad occasions (since first meeting in 2012) in relation to the possibilities of practising engaged (as distinct from distanced) research. We share our joint reflections on the extent to which, as an academic located in academia, one can also be a *participant* in the fabric of the social life being explored (and, indeed, being formed) through research activities. We consider what is implied by appreciating (considering) that research is *future forming*, as GERGEN (2015, p.287) puts it, rather than world mirroring. Thus we consider, through our dialogues, what might be involved in practice when we appreciate that research has what DENZIN (2001, 2003, 2016) calls a "performative" function, in shaping that which is supposedly being studied/explored, rather than being "apart" from it. [2]

The first dialogical encounter between us in relation to our involvement with research participants occurred in 2012, in the context of having been jointly involved (along with Norma NEL, the supervisor of Dan's doctoral research at the time) in a research project concerning inclusive education (IE) and teachers' attitudes towards it. This international project, aimed at comparing teachers' attitudes across six countries—China, Finland, Lithuania, Slovenia, South Africa and the United Kingdom—was undertaken via questionnaires and focus group

(FG) sessions (see NEL, ROMM & TLALE, 2015, and ROMM, NEL & TLALE, 2013 for an account of this project.) When introducing ourselves to the teacher participants at the beginning of the FG sessions (in three schools in Atteridgeville, just outside Pretoria¹), Norma NEL explained how the research locally, and in the schools in particular, linked up with the international project. Dan introduced himself as doing doctoral studies in education, and learning how to conduct FGs (ROMM et al., 2013). Norma (ROMM) introduced herself as a sociologist, but also as someone who is involved in interdisciplinary research, and is primarily concerned that FG discussions, when used as a research process, become research explorations where participants can learn from one another and from facilitators who facilitate a process of focused discussion (ROMM, 2015, §43). We make this point here because Dan reminded Norma (in the course of many dialogues over the years) that her way of introducing the purpose of the FG sessions to participants on those occasions helped to turn around a situation of potential distrust (see below). [3]

Before we went into the field (to schools), on the basis of some of her books (ROMM, 2001, 2010), Norma suggested to Norma NEL and Dan that it would be important to ask the participants after the sessions how they felt about the research, in order to gather their feedback on our style of engaging with them. To this end we created a feedback guide (NEL et al., 2015, p.40; for the feedback received, see pp.49-51). What struck us all is that we managed to turn around a situation where, at first, many participants indicated (during feedback sessions) their wariness of us as yet another group of researchers coming to bother them by extracting information from them, with no return (benefit) for them, so that we as researchers could fulfil our aim of "getting data". [4]

In the car trip on that day, returning from the sessions, we shared (and taped) our interpretations of what the FG participants had said during the various feedback sessions. In NEL et al. (2015, p.42) we synthesised the participants' responses (with reference to recordings of their feedback comments), and it transpired that they found the sessions motivating, because of the following:

- It enabled them to learn from one another about their attempts to address perceived challenges (that they had not discussed in as much depth before);
- Hearing our responses/comments as well as our way of posing questions for additional reflection helped them to reinforce discussions they had as school staff members. As one participant stated: "... it's like you were saying, research is just telling the same question, looking at it from another angle. And it also reinforces the questions in our own minds, that we are not going on a tangent."
- It helped the participants articulate more clearly some of the concerns which they felt needed carrying forward—with us as researchers/mediators playing a role in the process. [5]

1 All of these were "ordinary" or mainstream schools in terms of the DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION definition (2001, p.15).

Later, we carried the discussions forward (as requested by many participants) by arranging a meeting through a district official, Shila MPHABLELE, with three Tshwane South district officials (IE Unit), a Gauteng DoE Head Office official (IE) and the teacher participants. The meeting, which was held at Unisa, lasted about three hours. [6]

During the course of the meeting we referred, *inter alia*, to the FG sessions and mentioned that as Unisans we had been encouraged by the feedback sessions, since the participants seemed excited about the FG discussions. These discussions had offered them an opportunity to talk about their concerns and learn from one another, as well as from what we had shared with them. However, Dan added that what had also emerged from the FGs was that the attitude of the district officials sometimes made it difficult for teachers to develop a working relationship with them. He asked: "How often do head office people or district officials go to schools to praise them for the good work they are doing?" He suggested that visits to schools should become more supportive: the visits could help teachers deal with the challenges facing them, without being based on the assumption that they are guilty of "underperforming" (which, the teachers said, irked them). He added that the feedback from the FG sessions indicated that participants were now more motivated (they had been feeling demoralised), because as facilitators we had shown an appreciation for the teachers' situation and what they were doing—and had understood that they work under difficult circumstances to address the challenges of creating more inclusive educational environments in their schools. [7]

His statement helped to set the tone for the rest of the discussion. A district official asserted: "We normally say to teachers that 'you are doing a good job' and we try to encourage them in this way." Whether they "usually" do this is not the issue here, but rather that district officials are now probably more aware that this is how teachers had hitherto experienced their relationship with them, and the quality of that relationship. We were pleased to note that, after the meeting officially ended, many teachers arranged further meetings with the district officials. [8]

In the rest of the article we explain how the international research project, where we tried to set up non-distanced encounters with research participants while also contributing to connectivity between participants and wider stakeholders, became a starting point for us to strengthen our discussions on possible ways of interacting with research participants. Before we elaborate, it should be noted that because Dan was at the time doing research towards his PhD, albeit not young in age, Norma realised that he was relatively new to academia. She also soon realised that he had insights to share about how to encourage relationality (as collaborative sense-making) in contexts of initially more "hierarchical" relationships, as, for example, in the meeting between the district officials, head office and teachers. (For our more detailed interpretation of the dynamics of the meeting, see ROMM et al., 2013, pp.7-8.) After Norma NEL had retired from the university, Dan decided that he would like to have Norma (ROMM) as his mentor: our university's mentoring scheme allows mentees to choose mentors from whom

they feel they can learn. Norma agreed, but we came to recognise that in our official "mentor-mentee" relationship, we were equally learning and contributing. Dan reminded Norma in the course of our duoethnographic reflections (which included reflecting on our relationship) that every time he wrote e-mails to Norma, thanking her for what he was learning (about research), Norma replied "... and thank you for what I am learning too". [9]

Here is one such reflection:

"Dan: I was new in academia and wanted to learn what it means to be an academic and to do research. You know, learning about academic life ... I realised that academic life is a lifestyle. You need to write about what you are doing and you constantly want to know more.

Norma: And do you think you picked that up from me?

Dan: Yes, in reading your work, you know, I was learning writing styles.

Norma: Initially, because Norma Nel introduced you to me as her doctoral student I was not sure how long you had been at [the] university. But what I noticed is that although you did not speak during the FG sessions [in Atteridgeville]—actually nor did I speak much because Norma Nel was facilitating—but in the car afterwards you were making some statements about the interactions of the participants also because you participated in the feedback sessions they gave. You made comments that you picked up from the context that often researchers are distrusted.

Dan: Yes, I picked this up from the feedback. For example, one of the participants said 'I have now realised I cannot just wish something away. I have to give it a chance. Sometimes you must not just treat people [researchers] as if they come from the same cloth. You can chase away a person who can give you a treasure. You cannot just say "these people are here to bother us". We must look first and judge later.'

Norma: I realised you were making interesting points in the car and also in the meeting with Shila [district officers and head office] you were the one who changed the tone of the meeting. You said to them: 'You know these teachers are demoralised and if you have a different tone with them you can have a different relationship.' You were trying to make more relational encounters, instead of the district officers saying: 'It is like this' ... You wanted to shift the power relations.

Dan: If they are there not as authorities but as partners they will learn from the teachers. I advised that 'if you want to be seen as an authority the teachers will hold back and will not share ideas'.

Norma: I noticed you were making some wise insights and that was helping to shift the dynamics in the group. So I began to learn from you. I realised—I don't know if you have read the work of indigenous methodologists—but you were instantiating things that I had read—even as a researcher you must ...

Dan: ... have an attitude of collaborative work.

Norma: And I realised that when you tried to encourage collaboration it does not mean you become afraid to offer your own input. You were raising questions in the meeting to help them [the district officers] reflect. This means that you did not hold back from offering input. Like the indigenous research methodologists say, you can

share some insights. Then you are deepening the scope of the discussion. Anyway, I learned that what you were practising in all your relationships, and also carried into your research relationships, is what the indigenous methodologists call *relationality*. I had read a lot about this concept as what they try to encourage. I gathered that although you had not read this literature, you were adept in finding possibilities to nurture such relationality in various relationships, including between academic researchers and research participants.

Dan: And even between us, although you have a communication style of probing me so that we can think about this together more deeply, I am also bringing you into the conversation to reflect and talk more too. I handle this in my way by asking you to recall and reflect upon some of our experiences with participants that we had during the international project with Norma Nel. I was saying to you: 'Do you remember, um, such and such in that project?'—and that prompted you to talk more! So between us we came to a way of interacting where we were equally contributing.

Norma: You used your relational skills to set up what you call an equal relationship between us in our talking about engaged research." [10]

2. Further Involvements in Research and Reflecting around it—the Case of the (National) 500 Schools Project

Further to our involvement in the international project, we became involved in what was named the (national) *500 Schools Project: Making Schools Better*, set up by Unisa in 2012, with research starting in 2013 (for details, see ROMM & TLALE, 2016; TLALE & ROMM, 2018). Norma was one of the principal researchers on the project, and Dan was involved in certain FG sessions and also in what was called "intervention visits". These visits with selected schools aimed to follow on from questionnaire administration (to principals and teachers from a sample of 500 schools) and from subsequent FG sessions conducted with groups of participants from sub-sampled schools, involving teachers, the school management team, the school governing body (SGB) and learners. Intervention visits were undertaken to the same sub-sampled schools (though not necessarily with the same staff members who had facilitated the FG sessions), and guided, in part, by an "intervention handbook", reflecting previous research phases and made available to the research participants for discussion during such visits. (For an account of the design of the project, see ROMM, 2018a, p.973.) [11]

Dan and Norma were not present together in any FG sessions or intervention visits (in total, 46 Unisa researchers were involved in the *500 Schools Project*). After one intervention visit, a colleague of Norma (Cheryl Ferreira) told Norma about the trip she had been on with Dan (to a rural school in Idutywa, in the Eastern Cape), mentioning to Norma that "Dan was amazing" in his way of interacting with the participants. A few months later, Norma approached Dan to ask how he had—as he saw it—handled those interactions. And so we began talking about this. Unfortunately, most of the tapes (from the feedback sessions) of the two-day intervention visit had been lost in a theft from Dan's car when he returned from the Eastern Cape. But Dan phoned three of the participants to ask them about their experiences and to inquire what had transpired in the school

since his visit. This was recorded (with their permission), so that Norma could also listen to the conversations. (Dan made further phone calls a year later; but these were not recorded.) [12]

Through Norma's listening carefully to the tapes and urging Dan to join her in further reflecting on how he had managed to interact with the participants in such a way that they found the visit inspiring, the start of our joint reflection project (around the meaning of engaged research) emerged. In 2016, an article of ours, entitled "Nurturing Research Relationships" was published (ROMM & TLALE, 2016); and in 2017 an article entitled "Systemic Thinking and Practice: Toward Facilitating Inclusive Education" was produced (TLALE & ROMM, 2018). Meanwhile, when we attended the 13th Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in May 2017, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA), we entitled our paper "Research towards activating inclusive education possibilities: A dialogue around the South African 500 Schools Project". At the conference we attended a session on duoethnography, after which Dan remarked to Norma that what we had been doing together in our dialogues over the (by then) five years could well be called duoethnography, despite our not ever having shared with audiences *our dialogical way of constructing our reflections*. [13]

In the following section, we motivate why we have opted to class our joint reflections/writings in this article as "duoethnographic". We explain this by considering our approach to duoethnography in relation to collaborative autoethnography, as geared to co-generating dialogue. As part of the section, we offer an account of the (duoethnographic) methodology we use to sustain our thinking/writing. We call it a methodology because, following authors such as HESSE-BIBER (2010), KOVACH (2009), KUNTZ (2015), MERTENS (2015) and ROMM (2018b), we believe the concept of *methodology* incorporates the underlying philosophies guiding any deployed methods. In this case, we explain the way we interpret the purpose of our duoethnographic methodology as not trying to capture existing "memories" through our various forms of interaction (e-mails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, etc.), but as co-constructing and re-constructing our memories and interpretations of them. This forms part of an enterprise which expresses what Dan calls "positive thinking" (see below)—that is, future-oriented thinking about *what engaged research can potentially be*. Further, in the rest of the article we develop and share our duoethnographic dialogue around our (co-generated memories of) experiences of our professional involvement as researchers with research participants. In keeping with a duoethnographic genre of writing (NORRIS & GREENLAW, 2012; NORRIS & SAWYER, 2012; SAWYER & LIGGETT, 2012; WINKLER, 2018) we do not attempt to close the meaning of "engaged research", but to show how our dialogues have led us to more considered (dialogically generated) insights (in our view). [14]

Before we continue, in the introduction we mentioned the racialised social categories into which people were forcibly placed in South Africa, following the advent of apartheid (1948) and prior to democracy in 1994. In one of our joint reflection encounters (December 2017) which led to the writing of this article,

Norma asked Dan how we should consider that this history might have affected our relationship, with Norma raising this issue at one point towards the end of a conversation around our style of interacting. The dialogue proceeded as follows:

"Norma: Dan, why do you like hearing my questions? [Dan had previously mentioned that he found them therapeutic].

Dan: At first, like I said, it was just giving you feedback on what happened [in the research in the 500 Schools Project, when engaging with the participants] and later it became kind of the teamwork [between us, as we reflected together] and also it was therapeutic because I learned more about myself and I became interested and when you asked the questions, I learned about myself. I mean many things that are about myself.

Norma: I think you also realised more that you can legitimately bring yourself [as a caring person] into the research situation. You don't need to think that as a researcher your job is just to go in and get information and publish. So you learned that you can bring yourself into the research situations. Would you say that?

Dan: Definitely. I can be a participant. A participant at the same time as a researcher participant and have [them both at] exactly the same time.

Dan: Before this, in terms of research training, I did know the difference, a real difference between qualitative and quantitative. Then, I didn't know the term 'mixed methods'. And I also did not know about interacting with participants.

Norma: We've done pretty well today [in our dialogue]. We've understood better how we ourselves have managed to interact. It's mainly been me also asking you questions as part of our dialogical methodology? And in the dialogue we probe more and more deeply.

Dan: Yeah.

Norma: And I think we learned to trust each other. How would you say we learned that?

Dan: Well, it was like the more we talked, the more we felt safe next to each other. It is not easy to tell your experiences to a stranger. It started a long time ago in 2012, and with time we started ... time made us feel safe with each other. Talking about our experiences and maybe talking about positive experiences. Talking about positive thinking. It was positive thinking. Helping people. Feeling good about helping people.

Norma: Yes. Yes.

Norma: And Dan, do you think, I wonder if we should introduce this into our new article, but what do you think about like you being black and me [being] white. In the context of our conversations, is that a feature or not?

Dan: At first I felt like that, but you know, I don't see colour anymore between us, ... but surprisingly I see that with other people. When we were in America, I felt safe with you.

Norma: Right. And likewise I felt the same. It was wonderful being together at the conference.

Dan: With time, I know, I saw us as GREY!

Norma: So in America, you just felt safe being near me?

Dan: Having been together and, um, you know, sharing positive experiences.

Norma: Yeah, right, sharing positive experiences, feeling at home with each other.
Yes. Yes.

Dan: Even my colleagues know that I can't talk about research without talking about you. They always say: 'You like Norma, neh?' And I say: 'I love her a lot. I have learnt a lot from her. Because she has a lot of experiences, tertiary ones [from being a long time at universities] as a researcher and when you are at [a] tertiary [university] you are part and parcel [of] being a researcher.'

Norma: So you feel you're learning from my research experience?

Dan: Yes. Most of the skills that I use [are] from the way I saw your writings ... It's the truth.

Norma: True, you read some of my work. So, Dan, when you say you say to people: 'I like Norma. I learned a lot from Norma. I'm continuing to learn a lot', are you learning through our *dialogue*?

Dan: You know, you taught me to listen consciously. I listen to what I'm saying. While I am answering, I am listening to what I'm saying to you and I never knew that I could do that. So that experience ... that's what I say it's THERAPEUTIC.

Norma: So, Dan, things that you didn't realise that you could express, you express [them]. It's new to you as you express it. It's becoming clearer to you as you speak?

Dan: Um, this makes me aware about some other things that I was not aware about.

Norma: I see.

Dan: Yeah. You tap into experiences and when you ask questions, I live those experiences, I live them from our DIALOGUE and think again about their MEANINGS.

Norma: Very interesting. You know what's interesting is that our dialogues are always fresh, we talk new things ... because I ask you something and I don't know what the answer will be.

Dan: Even me, when you ask me, it's very true. Um, I don't know what you're going to ask. I don't know what I'm going to say. I just talk talk talk and talk. Answering the questions is only [done] truthfully.

Norma: Exactly.

Dan: I just say it the way I know it.

Norma: Yes, that's right. But in the meantime, you're thinking carefully. You're thinking, you're thinking what you're thinking about when ...

Dan: I'm listening to myself.

Norma: Yes. And therefore the answers are actually quite. ... What's the word?

Dan: Thoughtful ...

Norma: Thoughtful. The answers are thoughtful. It's not just rambling. You want to give a thoughtful answer." [15]

About six months later, in July 2018, prompted by an anonymous reviewer's commentary on our style of interacting (as reflected in the dialogue presented

above), we had another conversation around our relationship. The dialogue proceeded as follows:

"Dan: In order to probe you, I say: 'Do you remember in that feedback in the project with Norma Nel, teachers said that they realised that they should give it a chance of seeing what they can learn from the focus group discussion, rather than already thinking it will be burden on their time?' So I say to you: 'Can you see that the teachers were indicating that, at first, they were wary of us because of their past experience of researchers?'

Norma: Now I realise that through this questioning of yours you stimulate my memory and so cause me to reflect on it further. Yes, my initial introduction to them about the FG session being a learning encounter was very important. It geared them up towards treating it like that. I was displaying that we wanted people to feel that they could benefit from our being there. It was a form of showing that we were hoping to develop reciprocity. This is stated by many indigenous authors. You know, authors such as Bagele Chilisa (2009, 2012), Margaret Kovach (2009), Shawn Wilson (2008), and LaDonna Harris (2000) all stress this.

Dan: I think I must start to read up on these authors now too. I am going to do it.

Norma: In the meantime, you are drawing out through our 'memories' how relationality and reciprocity in research might be practised." [16]

In the same conversation we reflected on how we had created a style of interacting, where we felt relaxed (safe) with each other. And we reiterated that what had been very helpful was the qualitative inquiry conference we both attended in the USA (in May 2017). PURNELL and BREEDE (2017, p.1) suggest that a conference can "function as a safe, relaxed space ... and can actually lead to a deeper investment by attendees via third-place qualities". In the context of the conference, we relaxed together (as attendees) while also preparing our paper. This included: Norma's "probing" Dan on his interpretation of his engagement with participants in the *500 Schools Project*; Dan's responses/reflections; Norma's sense-making around these reflections; and our joint reflections, aided by Dan "reminding" Norma (as his way of stimulating her thoughts) about occasions of our involvement in the international project. The probing and deep reflection were aimed at learning from each another—as we speak and extend our thoughts—and developing our thoughts and feelings in motion during the dialogues, for audiences (as in this article). In the next section we elaborate on how we regard our duoethnographic account, developed in this article, in relation to autoethnography and collaborative ethnography. [17]

3. Autoethnography, Collaborative Autoethnography and Duoethnography (as Methodology)

ROTH (2009, §8) indicates that the origin of the term "ethnography" lies in "ethno" (Greek for "a people") and "graphy" (writing), so that it is "writing about a people": auto/ethnography is thus "the writing of a people, where the writer is him- or herself a member, the people writing the people". In this case, we as "the people" can be called "the people practising research" as professional researchers—so that we are writing about professional research practice from the viewpoint of being involved, *but also trying to develop our understanding of what is involved in being a "professional researcher" who wishes to practise engaged research*. While thinking and writing about this (in the context of exploring and interrogating our experiences), *we extend our conceptions of ourselves as "professional researchers"*, so that our duoethnographic writing is not just a supposed reflection of "the people" (those practising what they consider to be engaged research practice, including ourselves as part of "the people"), but *extends our (and hopefully others') considerations* of what is involved in being an engaged professional researcher. We are thus undertaking an exploration (but also an extension) of views/expectations within the profession, on how to engage with research participants/participant researchers when trying to do "engaged research". [18]

While undertaking this exploration, we are trying to express the point that "cultures" (which seemingly harbour normative expectations for acceptable conduct) *need not be treated as providing clearly defined norms*—in this case, for acceptable conduct on the part of engaged professional researchers. Cultural "expectations" can be considered to be open to interpretation and reinterpretation, thereby leaving openings for us to ask questions about contentious issues that have by no means been resolved regarding acceptable conduct. Our duoethnographic study takes as its starting point this conceptualisation of using auto- or duoethnography to study "cultures" from within. Just as we have already argued, that when we study social worlds we are complicit in their unfolding (see also DENZIN, 2001, 2016; GERGEN, 2015; KUNTZ, 2015; ROMM, 2018b), so we suggest that when we (reflexively) study "the people" (including ourselves) doing engaged research, we recognise that the joint storying we are constructing/writing through our dialogues is *future forming about the potential of the culture* of (in this case) practising "engaged research". As DENZIN (2016, p.422) reminds us, ethnography (whether auto- or duoethnography) "is not an innocent practice". We also concur that "through our writing and our talk we enact the world we study" (ibid.)—in this case, the world of "engaged research". We make an input into people's/readers' considerations of the practice of engaged research, by raising issues for the attention of professional researchers and others to take into account as they, in turn, relate to our ways of dialoguing around the issues/themes/questions we have located (through our dialogue). We hereby admit, with ROTH (2009, §15) that "every act [including the act of duoethnographic storying] by its very nature changes the (social and material) world ... there is no time out, no alibi from our being and responsibility". [19]

Our duoethnographic project includes our awareness that our reflections are not meant to be a representation of what we really did (in the field), as if the memory work of auto/duoethnographers simply refers back to "what really happened" (a stance also criticised by authors such as BOCHNER, 2017; BOCHNER & ELLIS, 2016; ELLINGSON & ELLIS, 2008; ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2011). We admit that we are *constructing* what we take to be "positive thinking" in regard to the (now reconstructed and reconceptualised) experience of engaging with care, as part of the research process in the field. That is, as duoethnographic inquirers we are reconceptualising our perceptions/feelings, while incorporating what SAWYER and LIGGETT (2012, p.629) call "human consciousness and imagination". Furthermore, our joint reconstructions also relate to our interpretations of feedback received from participants, so it is a joint construction that is intersubjectively related to the feedback from those "in the field". [20]

Our duoethnographic project includes taking some responsibility for our way of sharing with readers our emerging thinking/writing in relation to the practise of engaged research. In deciding to embark on this "project", we agree with ROTH (2009, §20) that "a better solution to the one that privileges the monologic voice of one person is collective [collaborative] auto/ethnography or co-generative dialogue". In this case, our co-generative dialogue consists of our generating thoughts on the (potential) meaning of engaged research, by thinking together—co-generating thoughts—largely in the context of interpreting how participants stated that they felt about Dan's involvement with them at the rural school during the *500 Schools Project*. Again, we do not claim to be clearly "representing" their feelings (as on the occasions of Dan speaking telephonically to them, about six months after visiting them at the school, and again a year later). We recognise that how they spoke to him was also a function of, and generated during, the context of him asking them to consider how they regarded his intervention visit—thus soliciting views *in this context*. As NORRIS and SAWYER (2012, p.20) note, citing MUNCEY (2010), "researchers, informants/participants can never really make a truth claim. Recalled stories are always susceptible; they are recollections of past events in the present". NORRIS and SAWYER (2012, p.20) therefore recommend, following Norman DENZIN (1989), that "duoethnographies make explicit that what is reported are ... 'truthful fictions'". In this case, the "reporting" relates to the truthful fictions generated as we looked at participant feedback and used it as a springboard for creating a conversation around engaged research that readers might find meaningful or worth considering. [21]

As will become clear, our way of interpreting the feedback from participants was not static. We ourselves "changed over time" (what NORRIS & SAWYER, 2012, p.20, call a "dialogic methodology") in our understandings of "engaged research" as our dialogues unfolded—with our thinking more deeply around Dan's engagement in the *500 Schools Project*, and relating this to our mutually experienced earlier engagements in the prior international project. As we dialogue, we admit that we are examining, as well as *creating* (versions of) the experience of engaged research. As SAWYER and NORRIS put it, "duoethnographers ... both examine and *create* experience" (p.289, our italics):

these creations are "moving" as we re-story experiences. Following BOCHNER (2017, p.73), our goal is to "produce ... stories that breathe, move, arouse". [22]

NORRIS and SAWYER (2012, p.23) note that "although duoethnographers expect an interrogation of their perspectives, they expect this to be done respectfully and playfully". Earlier, we tried to explicate how Dan experienced as therapeutic the questions Norma asked when "interrogating" him, as it helped him, through interaction, to learn more about himself as (engaged) researcher. And Dan, for his part urged, Norma to "recall" research experiences with a view to reflecting anew on her not-fully-formed perspectives on relational research practice. In discussing Theme 1 (see below), Norma asked Dan why his involvement with the participants can be classed as *co-research*, which was also implicitly an invitation to interrogate/revise Norma's understandings of this. Norma wondered how professional researchers might interact with others in a critical yet supportive way, such that the interaction can be labelled as co-research. In discussing all the themes we located for attention, readers can consider how both of us developed our thoughts in the course of our conversations/interrogations. [23]

4. Our Methods

The methods we used to advance our discussions and reflections were part of a *methodological stance* towards duoethnography (expressed above), which sees it as consciously future forming (performative) to help provoke readers to rethink—and re-imagine—what is or can be involved in "engaged research". The methods we used in our dialogic methodology (NORRIS & SAWYER, 2012, p.20) were aimed at developing our dialogue, rather than achieving closure on the issues we were exploring regarding the practise of engaged research. We now focus on the methods we employed to facilitate our thinking/writing. [24]

4.1 E-mail communication

In our e-mail exchanges we affirmed to each other the importance of continuing this duoethnographic project. For example, in one e-mail exchange (December 2017) Dan wrote to Norma:

"Dear Norma, it [this duoethnographic dialogue] is more than about publishing. After having a dialogue with you I feel soooooooooo fulfilled. You have been the greatest role model and a greatest mentor I have ever had in my life. I am so so so grateful. [As mentioned in our introduction, at Unisa Norma is officially the mentor of Dan, although in practice we both have learned equally from our myriad exchanges.]" [25]

On seeing this e-mail Norma, replied:

"Dear Dan, we have both learned very much from each other. All our meetings are very fulfilling! And I agree it is more than publishing but about dialoguing thoughtfully to be able to share our thoughts with others." [26]

Dan also sent to Norma e-mails outlining ideas on possible themes to explore in our writing (which emerged from his summarising some of our conversations). And, in subsequent telephonic conversations, we "converted" these themes to encapsulate questions we thought would be interesting for readers. The themes are:

- Theme 1: What is engaged co-researching between professional researchers and research participants?
- Theme 2: Can we as professional researchers share with participants our different ways of framing issues that we bring from literature and from life experiences, and in this way challenge their perspectives?
- Theme 3: When something concerns you as professional researcher but also active participant with other participants, what responsibilities do you have to try to catalyse action? [27]

The themes thus arose from e-mail and telephonic exchanges, and we agreed to use extracts from our dialogues in relation to these themes, for the purposes of organising our duoethnographic writing. [28]

4.2 Face-to-face meetings

Much of what is offered as dialogical material below (with our verbatim dialogue) comes from our face-to-face meetings, held approximately every six months after we decided to consciously start our reflective project (around 2015). Some face-to-face material was constructed as we prepared for the conference in the USA in 2017, and we have transcripts of those. But we do not have transcripts of the dialogues we had during the conference, when preparing for our presentation after attending various sessions. Nevertheless, these conversations (recorded in notes by Norma, using shorthand) formed some of the substance of our continued conversations and of Dan's later summarising of the three themes (indicated earlier), on which we focus in this article. [29]

4.3 Telephonic conversations

We often spoke on the phone, sometimes prompted by Norma realising that there was an issue in the literature on research that we could explore further. (Norma has been reading and writing about research since her career began in academia about 35 years ago, and was able to detect where issues were under-explored.) Some of our telephonic conversations were stimulated by comments received from the reviewers of articles we submitted to journals, where Norma took notes of the conversation to assist us in effecting the proposed changes. These telephonic conversations helped us construct the themes we are now using to structure this article. [30]

4.4 Sharing of articles to read

At times we sat together doing internet searches on duoethnography and deciding which articles were important to read, which parts supported our approach and how we could relate to them. We also discussed our individual reading of certain articles in terms of how we could learn from them about the genre of duoethnography, so that we could structure the current article according to this genre of writing (we quickly realised there is no recipe to follow!). [31]

SAWYER and LIGGETT (2012, p.645) note that, in their duoethnographic inquiry concerning their experiences/interpretations of critical educational incidents in relation to the development of postcolonial educational curricula, they found it challenging to "structure and write [their] inquiry". They remark that they had "hours of conversations" which they then presented (in their article) as a "consolidation and 'refinement' of [their] spontaneous, messy, and immediate conversations". They add that, at times, the conversations "churned forward slowly, and at other times with exceptional intuition" (p.646). Likewise, through our storying we have tried to pinpoint—by choosing from the hours of conversation—areas we consider to be of interest to readers who wish for a glimpse of the processes of change/development in our thinking, and of what we consider to be "perceptions and insights" that offer new angles on contentious issues in the literature, in relation to the practise of engaged research. With this in mind, next we discuss the themes/questions on which this article centres, and which we now write largely in dialogical format. [32]

5. Theme 1/Question for Consideration: What is Engaged Co-Researching Between Professional Researchers and Research Participants?

5.1 Brief background to the theme (joint construction)

In June 2014, during Dan's two-day visit to a rural school in Idutywa (in the Eastern Cape) under the auspices of the *500 Schools Project*, he met with the principal, teachers, members of the SGB and a district official from the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The project leader had asked him to explore—with participants—issues relating to IE as part of his "remit". [33]

During the early stages of the intervention visit, Dan asked the participants not to treat him (or the other Unisa researchers) as "experts", but as people sharing ideas about IE that they could take up in some form if they felt it would advance IE within their setting. In this way, Dan suggested that he should not be treated as coming with authoritative ideas (supposedly inherent in his status as researcher or "academic", in relation the rest of the participants), but rather that they were all co-exploring issues together (see ROMM & TLALE, 2016, p.23.) As part of his involvement with the participants, Dan nevertheless proposed ideas on how the participants could approach groups of people in the community (e.g. business people, social workers, the Department of Social Development, etc.) to help deal

with the challenges that they had mutually identified regarding learners' barriers to learning. [34]

It was agreed to set up a school-based support team (SBST) in the school, to further talk together around issues identified as problematic and consider ways forward, including writing letters to various government departments and involving networks in the community to harness options for action. In the telephone calls Dan initiated six months later, he asked for feedback from some participants, namely the principal, a senior teacher and the SGB chairperson (see ROMM & TLALE, 2016, and TLALE & ROMM, 2018, for additional detail). The SGB chairperson expressed to Dan that he and others had considered Dan's "critiques" as constructive, and offering "huge food for thought", thus enabling them to recognise that the process of change "starts with them". He also spoke about teacher–learner relationships having improved since the visit (see Theme 2). For now, we present some of the statements made by the SGB chairperson towards the close of the telephonic conversation, when Dan asked him: "How did you experience this phone call?". He replied:

"It was very conducive and it shows that you care. It shows that you did not plough and then leave the plants unattended. You sprinkled it [what you ploughed] and irrigated it; you nurtured it with your care-giving. It is now growing as you ploughed." [35]

As we remarked in ROMM and TLALE (2016, p.29):

"The SGB chairperson expressed that he and the others found Dan's input (i.e., his sharing of his understandings and advice) as constructive, albeit critical ... The 'food for thought' was experienced as empowering and as helpful to participants to [considering ways of] developing the school by their considering how they could harness support from various sources, rather than concentrating on individualising the learners' (and their own) problems and challenges." [36]

5.2 A co-researching approach?

So how, then, can we conceive that a *co-researching approach* had been enacted between Dan and the research participants/participant researchers? We now turn to one of our duoethnographic dialogues that ensued in relation to this theme:

Norma: So I gather that you were also discussing together the social barriers like that learners were alone as HIV/AIDS orphans, or other things that were arising?

Dan: Yeah. And you know they couldn't, some were as young, you know like [a] Grade 5 child was looking after her younger siblings, and then they had to go home after school or sometimes they wouldn't come to school, and were taking care of young siblings.

Norma: Right, right, yes.

Dan: So it had [an] impact on their studies or the[ir] education.

Norma: Yes, yes, I see. And so, therefore, when you were talking to the teachers and the SGB, were you the one who said we must start involving the social workers?

Dan: Yeah, because they could help, and especially with ... with those children getting, some of them didn't even have birth certificates, because to get a social grant you have to have a birth certificate. I know that social workers are working in the social development department, and they know the procedures of how to make sure that those children ultimately are able to get a social grant [to help alleviate poverty and increase their chances of getting support from an adult or guardian to care for them].

Norma: Okay. So you partly were suggesting to them make use of these social workers.

Dan: Yes, with the establishment of the SBST (School Based Support Team), the school is encouraged to make sure that they involve mainly social workers and a nurse, in case there's a problem of health for a particular child. And remember it's difficult to get a social worker, but remember that these ... even these social workers ... they go around schools on issues about HIV/AIDS or even disability or various aspects.

Norma: I understand. Now Dan, I've got another question. You know you were saying to me that what was happening in this visit, this intervention visit, is you were doing like *co-research*. Remember you said to me on the telephone that day, that it's like democratising the process of knowledge creation, all contribute to looking for how one can proceed further. You want to capacitate the community. In what sense was it co-research? Because you're there, and you're busy encouraging them, you know, you're saying by the way there are these facilities available to you; in what sense are they getting involved?

Dan: You know they were doing research on many things, like where they can get funds for particular, significant things.

Norma: Right.

Dan: Because remember I told you that they lacked infrastructure like toilets. There were no toilets at all. So I said to them: 'Go out, search for where you can be able to get funds, and ask around where can you be able to get funds.'

Norma: Okay, so you almost ... So you said to them: 'This must be something that must be researched by you', kind of thing?

Dan: Yes. I said to them that they should go out and get information, where you can be able to get help.

Norma: Yes, right I see, and even find ways of identifying the right social worker or something?

Dan: Yes, they have to go out themselves to go and get information on where they can get any kind of help to address barriers to learning, for assistance. And then from there we come together again and then discuss what they found out. And then, you know, we'll discuss a way forward about the information that they have gathered.

Norma: Yes. Yes, yes.

Dan: On getting assistance to alleviate the situation.

Norma: Okay, so it's really assistance? Okay, I understand. That's what you meant by co-research.

Dan: Yeah.

Norma: But it's also co-research in the sense that they were the ones that were telling you what the main problem is, like they were identifying?

Dan: Yes, they were identifying ...

Norma: Yes, the problems.

Dan: The problems, yeah.

Norma: That like parents are working far away ... So the teachers are saying these are the factors that are important ... They're identifying the causal factors lying behind the barriers to learning.

Dan: Yes.

Norma: Okay, so it's partly their identification of what the main issues are?

Dan: Yes.

Norma: Right.

Dan: And even in class, the problems that are in class, are identified. The teachers are the ones who gave information.

Norma: Yes.

Dan: On what are the problems ... One aspect was that classes are overcrowded, and the other one was that there's no good relations, one HOD said that, between learners and teachers. Because that ... most of the time, learners complain that they are being shouted at and sometimes corporal punishment is administered, even though government has abolished corporal punishment.

Norma: Yes, I see.

Dan: And also, you know, they were talking about [the] language of teaching and learning, [the] medium of instruction. They were talking about that this is a problem and it's very difficult for learners to ...

Norma: Switch?

Dan: Yeah, to talk, to switch from Xhosa to English.

Norma: Okay I understand, and what did ... What was the solution to this issue of this language of instruction being ...?

Dan: You remember that I told you about ...

Norma: Cheryl.

Dan: Cheryl.

Norma: Right.

Dan: She is the one who tried to address that and then talk to them, and she gave them suggestions, you know it's a long time, I can't remember very well what she exactly said to them.

Norma: Okay, but it was partly in response to them saying that that was an issue for them?

Dan: Yes.

Norma: Okay, it was partly in response to them, and also because in focus groups [held across the project and also in their school] people had mentioned this as problematic.

Dan: Yes, and it was also a way of showing them how [a] school-based support team works, you know they come together, they discuss problems." [37]

5.3 Joint commentary on our deliberations

In further perusing this dialogue, we considered that what had rendered the research process engaged *co-research*, in line with BOWEN's (2015, p.189) discussion on engaged scholarship as "collaborative processes" which are "action oriented", is that the participant researchers—including Dan—were co-identifying barriers to educational inclusion and *co-researching options for collective agency*. Together, they explored the "causes" of barriers to learning, with a view to identifying leverage points for action. As part of the co-research, Dan saw himself as equally a caring participant, contributing ideas that might foster greater inclusivity, and as a professional researcher (with research skills and experience), without trying to separate the two roles. This led to a blurring of the distinction between (professional) researchers and (other) participants, as they all indeed contributed as participants and researchers (see also DICKSON-SWIFT, JAMES, KIPPEN & LIAMPUTTONG, 2006). Dan also tried, as part of the co-research work, to encourage the participants to set up a researching climate in the school setting. He followed through on this advice when he spoke to the principal again about a year later, their conversation centering around developments in the school. Dan advised that the principal should hold brainstorming meetings, so as not to make decisions on his own—research must be done together, as a team; and where appropriate, Dan also offered advice and support. [38]

Of course there may be situations in any setting—not apparent in this example—of seemingly non-negotiable tensions between participants that cannot easily be resolved—that is, where sense-making between parties seems unlikely to become "collaborative". In such situations (as perceived), researchers can try to act as mediators between conflicting understandings and values, as suggested by, for example, LINCOLN and GUBA (2013), and MAYAN and DAUM (2014). LINCOLN and GUBA advise that if researchers feel they cannot contribute to creating a setting where people can co-generate constructions for purposes of constructive action, they should at least try to facilitate better understandings of alternative perspectives and values. The research process can then proceed through attempting to make more explicit these different understandings and values (2013, p.59). This does not mean that participants will be eager to participate in this undertaking. In ROMM and TLALE (2016), we referred to such scenarios (in the *500 Schools Project*) and ventured to offer reasons why we thought that in those school settings, intervention visits were indeed less successful, as the participants were less keen to participate. Our tentative explanation was that they may have wanted the unions to be approached as stakeholders (as we had heard from some other researchers who went on visits). [39]

Under Themes 2 and 3, we now turn our attention to considering how we came to conceptualise co-research as including possibilities for professional researchers, if deemed appropriate, to encourage research participants to review and reframe their initial perspectives in relation to experienced "problems". Under Theme 2, we discuss how Dan tried to encourage people to re-examine some of their original conceptions of what was considered to be problematic. Theme 2 thus represents an extension of our thoughts as we proceeded with our dialogues and started to look at engagement from a new angle. [40]

6. Theme 2/Question for Consideration: Can we as Professional Researchers Share with Participants our Different Ways of Framing Issues that we Bring from Literature and from Life Experiences?

6.1 Brief background to Theme 2 (joint construction)

As indicated, during the FG phase of the *500 Schools Project*, various staff from Unisa had facilitated sessions with teachers, the school management team, the SGB and learners (grades 3 and 6) in sub-sampled schools. During these FG sessions, although our guideline interview questions did not incorporate such questions, many learners viewed the fact that corporal punishment was still being used in the school (despite it being illegal) as problematic. When we (various members of the research team) spoke to teachers about this—in subsequent FG visits to the schools which were meant to be member-checking events, but also became events for further discussion—some teachers admitted to using corporal punishment since they could see no other ways of instilling "discipline". [41]

In our discussion regarding Theme 1, Dan mentioned this to Norma, saying: "... most of the time learners complain that they are being shouted at and sometimes corporal punishment is administered even though government has abolished [it]". Dan (along with many members of the research team who raised this in team meetings) was worried that teachers were continuing to use corporal punishment as a strategy for handling what they considered to be misbehaviour on the part of children. Subsequent to this, Norma, together with McKAY (the person in charge of initially instituting the project with the DBE), and with the project leader coordinating the project (MOHAPI) wrote a chapter in a book meant, inter alia, for teachers in the 21st century. Our chapter was entitled "Rethinking school discipline" (McKAY, MOHAPI & ROMM, 2017). Dan contributed to the same book—a chapter entitled "Whole school improvement"—in which he, too, considered relationships between teachers and learners, and the need for these to be based on mutual respect (TLALE, 2017). In the meantime, however, during his intervention visit Dan tried to encourage teachers to reframe the issue of "misbehaviour". [42]

6.2 Introducing re-framing

In an introductory presentation delivered during the early stages of the intervention visit, Dan cited a quote from GINNOTH's well-known book "Teacher and Child":

"I [as a teacher] ... possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it's my response that influences whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, a child humanised or dehumanised" (GINNOTH 1975, as cited in MAGANO, TLALE & MOTITSWE, 2014, p.5). [43]

Dan pointed out that it is quite possible that children's classroom misbehaviour, as experienced by teachers and classmates who may find this disruptive, can be traced to problems in their lives with which they are trying to cope (e.g. being AIDS orphans or from child-headed households, etc.). He explained that there are various barriers to learning, but it is important to "make sure that you do not undermine the children". The meeting proceeded with people dividing into groups to discuss issues/challenges and report during the "plenary" session, during which further discussions ensued involving all the participants (including Dan, as a participant) (see ROMM & TLALE, 2016, pp.23-27 for details on this process). [44]

In telephonic feedback six months after the intervention visit, a senior teacher referred to the progress he had observed in terms of student-teacher relationships, in response to Dan's inquiry:

"Dan: Firstly, I would like to know, is there anything that you learned from our visit last year?

Teacher: Firstly, I remember that you spoke about the misbehaviour of kids because of their staying alone and being orphans. You also suggested that we could form a School-Based Support Team (SBST).

Dan: [then asked explicitly] Has anything happened in regard to that and also to your handling of discipline issues in the school? How are the kids now?

Teacher: We have tried by all means to encourage the learners to do the work they are given; we tried to encourage them and since you came we have assembled them and reminded them that you were here. We told them that we are one of the schools targeted and we want to make sure we are on par with what is required because we were visited by the university. We explained to them ... the importance of education.

Dan: So did our visit make a different experience for the learners? Was our intervention helpful?

Teacher: Yes, it was very, very much helpful. Because we brought people of your stature, it has helped!" [45]

The SGB chairperson corroborated this, stating: "Your critiques were constructive and your advice has also motivated the teachers that it starts with them.

Everyone has become awakened that it starts from here, and that is what you did." [46]

When Dan and Norma reflected on this kind of feedback, we realised that Dan had been assisting teachers in the school (together with others) to *re-frame the question of discipline*, and that this had (as Dan put it during one of our dialogues, referring to their feedback) "changed the mood in the school". At first Dan stated (to Norma) that during the visit he had asked the teachers as a group to come up with solutions to the challenges they faced, but later we realised that Dan was *inputting into this* by encouraging them to re-frame their "challenges"—something which met with a positive response. In other words, "engaged" researchers can inject new discourses into the social fabric and shift ways of thinking about "problems"—extracts from our dialogue of December 2017 attest to this:

"Dan: And I'm mostly concerned with barriers to learning and teachers had to come with their problems, and as a group they must try and find solutions. So the teachers, um, had to give us [all of us in the meeting during the intervention visit] what concerns or challenges or problems are experienced and the group would then come with possible solutions.

Norma: So do you think that partly as a result of them talking together, the teachers also learn from each other?

Dan: Yes, that's what they said after the session when we were finished. You taught me something, that after the focus group interviews session [with participants], I must ask them how did they feel about the session? What did they gain and what are their concerns? And they said: 'I didn't know that this teacher also has those problems. If I knew I would have talked about it' and that's why the SGB chairperson said [later in telephonic feedback]: 'You taught us how to catch fish ourselves [metaphorically] and [did] not directly provide us with food [solutions].'

Norma: You were helping them to realise how they could talk together and how can they help themselves. And another thing, Dan, you know, you said to me one of the times we were talking [about the visit] that you were helping them to *reframe* the issue of discipline, so that they didn't think of it that the children are unruly, misbehaved. It will help them to reframe that problem. Now you then said to me at one point they discovered their own lives became easier, because the children became more cooperative. Who was it that told you that? Was that when you had the telephone chat with ...

Dan: It was one of the senior teachers who told me. You remember, the one who said that he is going to open his own school. Remember that I told them that the problem is not with the child, but it is with the system, what we do to the child, makes them develop behavioural problems, makes them to be not what they are supposed to be. And I said to him [to] try to get them here and ask them: 'But my child ... why are you doing this?' They were now [acting as] parents to the children [that is, as caring for them]. And the children were more cooperative. They even forgot about the stick.

Norma: Interesting. Interesting. So these are the main things I was keen to ask you [today] regarding your way of engaging with them. So now, Dan, I think we must talk about how we decided to get involved in this research together [reflecting on research

experiences with participants] and how we learn from each other or ... um, developed our relationship because, you know, that's *duoethnography*, people talking together about, um, their experiences and in some ways it's our experiences of doing research.

Dan: Actually, I think, remember we've talked, talked after the college board meeting [at Unisa] and because then we were still involved in [the] 500 Schools Project, and you asked me: "How was your experience?" It was after I went to Umtata [Eastern Cape], we talked a bit about it and then you know, other people wanted to talk to you [on that occasion]. So we couldn't talk more about it. Then you said: 'Let's make an appointment, when would you be free so that we can come and talk about this thing, your experience'. And you mentioned that, um, Cheryl told you that I did a fantastic job in Umtata. You wanted to hear more from the horse's mouth. Then we set up a meeting. And then I remember you came and we started talking about our 500 Schools visit to Umtata. I told you about the whole thing ... that we went there the first day and the mood was unwelcoming (because they said to us that previous researchers had promised benefits and had not followed up on this) and you know, we just insisted that we [would] come again the next day. And then the following day we came and I tried to talk to them and when we were finished they were like, 'please come again'. They were so excited at the outcome of the meeting, that they said that they had gained a lot. Even the district official was very excited. She said that she learnt a lot. She said: 'I thought I knew things, but I gained a lot from this meeting.'

Dan (continued): And then, after I talked to you, you went away and then after some few days you called and you said: 'Is it possible to get more information from the teachers, the principal, the SGB member and the senior teacher?' And that's what I did [over] the phone. Actually, I didn't want to disturb their programme or their plans. So I made an official appointment with the principal and I pleaded with him. I requested him to also ask the SGB chairperson and the senior teacher, when can I be able to talk to them over the phone? Firstly, I talked with the principal of the school and he was very excited, he was thrilled that I came back to them [telephonically]. I told him that I was concerned and uh, I must keep on finding out how were they doing. The principal said that they need my input, in everything they are doing. So many things have changed in the school for the better and they felt that the mood in the school had changed also for the better. And he gave me the telephone numbers of other key figures—the SGB chairperson and the senior teacher, and I thought it would be decent to phone the SGB chairperson and the senior teacher. So we set up a time. He was also very excited. He told me that, uh, things have happened and changed in their school." [47]

6.3 Joint commentary on the dialogue

From this extract of the dialogue between us, we would (now) say that Dan was suggesting to the various participants that initial perceptions of "problems" can be re-framed, especially if one *approaches them with a lens of caring* and tries to develop greater connectivity in human relationships. Later, we surmised that Dan's own caring approach probably became contagious, as participants experienced him as passionate about caring for children. *That is also why we suggest it is important for professional researchers not to display "distance",* but

to be passionate in their involvement. This, in turn, can inspire more caring orientations on the part of participants who may have the power to turn around "the mood" in a given setting. Instead of feeling demoralised about their situation, having to cope with issues that are difficult to deal with (e.g. unruly behaviour of children or children with barriers to learning that seem difficult to address), they become—in Dan's words—"excited" about the many possibilities. [48]

Because the participants had telephonically said to Dan that his input was important to them, he continued telephonic conversations with them—for example, a year later he phoned the principal and SGB member again, to offer advice on how they could brainstorm a revisit of problems and could seek ways forward, while continuing to harness community support. (In our 2016 article we note that it does not take much effort on the part of researchers positioned in academia to devote a small amount of time to continuing relationships developed with participants "in the field"—even telephonic contact may be welcomed by participants as a display of showing—and feeling—care and support.) [49]

In the next theme we refer to ways in which Dan brought to the fore infrastructural issues that he felt the schools had not sufficiently addressed prior to his intervention visit. Our conversation in regard to addressing those issues was prompted, in part, by a reviewer of one of our articles (on systemic intervention) who was shocked at our mentioning the lack of toilets in the school (Dan had noted this during the visit). The reviewer stated that toilets in schools are a basic human right, and that we must include a more comprehensive discussion on this in the article, while referring to the concomitant role of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). We included certain points on this in the published article (quoting the reviewer directly, as she had agreed to be named), but here we consider how our own dialogues unfolded, as we reflected on the role of a "professional researcher" in raising issues of concern (on behalf of marginalised participants with less social power—in this case, the school children). Our dialogues in this regard are categorised under Theme 3. [50]

7. Theme 3: When Something Concerns you as Professional Researcher and Active Participant, what Responsibilities Do You Have to Try to Catalyse Action?

7.1 Brief background (joint construction)

As background to our discussion, we refer to an extract of the feedback received from the principal of the school when Dan spoke to him about six months after the intervention visit, to ask if anything had been done about the ablution facilities:

"Dan: Remember we spoke during my visit about the formation of an SBST and we also spoke about the toilets: Has anything happened since then?"

Principal: With respect to the SBST we have established a committee—with the chairperson of the SGB taking the lead in this ... We are very happy that you came here and we are not relaxed on our side ... we are trying to make things work." [51]

The principal added that they had contacted the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Department of Social Development (DSD)—and they had started work, but would probably not finish that year (as it was already the end of December). He mentioned that the SBST would see what they could do with respect to health matters. Meanwhile, thanks to their having approached the DPW, the school was immediately provided with portable toilets as an interim measure. [52]

In light of this telephonic exchange, and linking this to our discussion categorised under Themes 2 and 3, we would suggest that engaged co-research allows professional researchers as *concerned participants* to raise issues which they believe (on the basis of certain values brought to bear) require further research and action. During the intervention visit the participants did not contest the fact that the lack of toilets at the school was problematic, and agreed to further find out (research) what was possible in terms of their collective agency, to "make things right". [53]

7.2 Joint commentary

In highlighting issues that Dan felt needed addressing, he chose to appeal to those values which he thought would resonate with the participants—the values of caring and acting on behalf of vulnerable learners—while offering the participants a sense that the challenge could be addressed by harnessing collective power in the community. Dan urged the participants to "do research" to explore the possibilities of getting help, rather than waiting for the government (as an abstract entity) to realise that something needed to be done. Through their action (writing to various government departments), the participants discovered *what was possible* in the context in which they were operating, in relation to an issue Dan had brought to the fore. [54]

The co-research aspect of the engagement between Dan and the participants did not amount to Dan just taking his cue from them (teachers, principal and SGB) regarding matters of importance, but included Dan inputting concerns on behalf (especially) of the female learners whom he felt most sympathy with (when he noticed them disappearing into the bushes to do their ablutions), as he realised that the lack of toilets could affect their attendance at school, especially when menstruating. When Norma asked Dan about his stance, he replied that he was reminded of his sisters, and on that basis felt empathy for those schoolgirls. His empathy prompted him to express concern to the teachers, principal and SGB that the issue could not be ignored while they waited for somebody to "do something". [55]

In December 2017, we continued our conversations around this point (and extended them somewhat to address other infrastructural issues that Dan had raised with the participants):

"Dan: They [initially] said they were waiting for [the] DoE or government to bring things to them. And after I talked to them, they are doing things for themselves. Now

things have changed. No pot-holes in the class ... on the floor. You can see that it was not a good quality floor, cheap material was used and then they [the small holes] become bigger and bigger when the children move around the class. So there were many of those. It's a poor-quality floor. So they said, in the [later telephonic conversation] the SGB chairperson said that the floor in the classrooms was fixed. He said that they, um, wrote letters to different people, to business people, and businesses around the area agreed to come in and donate cement and sand, and they asked the parents what will it take to fix the floor. So the parents also got involved.

Dan (continued): The SGB chairperson is a lawyer and is also from the area: he was once a learner at this school. He knows people around. So, writing letters and giving that to, um, to relevant people was easy for him. And he said he never knew it would be so easy, rather than [having] to wait for the government. He went to Public Works and asked for toilets. Public Works was erecting a new building and they had portable toilets there. Then when the contractor finished and left, the toilets were not taken, but the contractor donated them to [the] school. And they also wrote to Public Works and Public Works made a promise that they [would] erect proper toilets.

Norma: So with the potholes in the class that also got the parents even involved in helping to fix the floor. That is interesting.

Dan: Because I told him about what happened in one school, when I was at the district office, in the North-West Province, uh, I told them that I spoke to the principal that he can solve the challenges in his school ... because he said that during lessons they'd see goats just coming into one of the classes ... cows running all over the classroom. So I advised the principal that he must write letters to various businesses to get a fence, and ask the SGB to get parents who will be able to erect the fence.

Norma: Right.

Dan: Ask for paint from businesses and find parents who will paint the school free of charge. And the principal should just organise some meals/refreshments for the parents.

Norma: So, Dan, so that is how we decided to start talking more [between us about your inspirational involvement with participants]. Cheryl said to me, you should've seen how Dan managed to interact with these participants. So then I decided to approach you, or how did you do it? And the reason I was able to approach you, was partly because of our earlier working together, would you say?

Dan: Yes, it was actually me and Norma Nel and you. Yup, we had an international inclusive education project and after that you suggested that, we have, um, a dialogue with the participants. And ask them: 'Were the interviews helpful?' And it started there. Remember also that even when we were driving back from the schools, we even had a dialogue in the car going back, but you know, we were very excited that at first the teachers were not happy to see us, but after the interviews they were very excited about what they [had] nearly lost [if they had not participated in the sessions]. The participants said that 'every time we see strangers, um, we feel like we are going to be burdened'.

Dan (continued): So also here we were talking about how excited they were and they also, they said [just] like people in Umtata, they said: 'You were very helpful.'" [56]

7.3 Further joint commentary

Dan appealed to the participants in Umtata by suggesting that there was scope for action—including in relation to certain infrastructural problems he had detected. He advised that through further research and action they might discover their (and others') capacity to make a difference. When he offered advice on this, they did not feel he exceeded his "professional" capacity (as reflected in the feedback he received). But we can still ask whether we think it is *always appropriate* for professional researchers to introduce what they see as justice-oriented concerns—and hence offer advice for further discussion/research and possible action. Are there situations in which such a stance might be considered harmful, in that it might lead to intransigence on the part of those who feel threatened by the challenge, and can even lead to the victimisation of those more vulnerable? As with all research engagements, these matters cannot be fully decided in advance. But we would suggest that engaged researchers should seek out, and develop, research spaces in which to co-research options for situationally defined justice-oriented action (in which they, too, can input appropriately) and should not feel the need to maintain emotional distance in order to justify their "research" role. Based on our deliberations, we concur with BARTELS and WITTMAYER (2018, p.6) that "researchers [together with research participants] can [legitimately] become active co-shapers of local practices: they carry out [research] work, suggest new views and courses of action, and are personally implicated in projects". But exactly what this means in specific research contexts requires ongoing reflection on the parts of those involved. [57]

8. Conclusion

KIDD and FINLAYSON (2015, §37) are wary of speaking about a "conclusion" to their article (in which they used a duoethnographic approach), stating: "How do we end a conversation that has no end?" In our account of deliberations around our interpretations of our (research) experiences, we recognise that this conversation has no end. This leaves open the space for readers, as COLLINS (2000, p.38) puts it, to "write into our story" from their own perspectives and interpretations of (research) experiences. SIMON (2013), in the abstract to her article entitled "Relational ethnography", comments that she wishes to explore "the emergent relationship between writers and readers as they enter into an anticipatory-responsive dialogue with each other". We would likewise anticipate (hope for and invite) a dialogical reader, who—in the spirit of relational (duo)ethnography—enters into a dialogue with our text. Similarly, KIDD and FINLAYSON (2015, §7) point out that duoethnographic writing does not expect/anticipate that a "resolution" (final conclusion in regard to issues raised) can ever be accomplished. [58]

We have tried, through this article, to share with the readers our dialogues and our way of developing what we regard as deeper insights, arrived at through speaking and listening, each time delving more deeply into our emerging thoughts (as expressed). We have tried to display our dialogical way of looking

into the questions we posed for consideration. We now invite our readers to enter into dialogue with our emergent deliberations in regard to practising "engaged research". [59]

We "conclude" by offering commentary—each from our own perspective, yet still based (in part) on referrals to our earlier deliberations—on what we think led to the success of the collaborative reflective process of duoethnography as we experienced it. (Actually, the duoethnographic project continues, because we are embarking together on new research endeavours and envisage reflecting on them too!)

"Dan: Our duoethnographical project has worked out, because we made opportunities to talk about things that, to others, would be too sensitive. For example, the black and white issue. You wanted to know how I felt about this so you raised the issue with me. And we both gave our thoughts from the heart. We did not learn to trust each other in an instant. It was through many interactions and many conversations that we learned to trust each other and to speak about ourselves, our lives, our work. Then we started to feel safe together. For me, this is important so that we can then engage in genuine dialogue and not hold back our thoughts and feelings as they arise.

Norma: This means that attempts at duoethnography require an investment of time. Duoethnographers need to have a curiosity, to want to learn. And to want to learn through connecting deeply with someone. I also needed to feel that I could safely probe what you were saying to me, so as to draw out—together—some added insights based on our continued probing. You made me feel free to do this. So I agree with you that a feeling of safety, built up over time, marks the success of duoethnography. And if people don't feel 'safe' together, as you say, the attempt at duoethnographic reflection will have less depth." [60]

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Authors

Lloyd Daniel Nkoli TLALE (Doctor of education) is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. He joined the university after being a teacher and a teachers' college lecturer for several years. He was previously an education specialist for the Department of Basic Education, supporting and training teachers in inclusive education. His responsibilities include teacher training (tuition), postgraduate supervision, research and community engagement projects. His research interests include gifted child education, orphans and vulnerable children, children in conflict with the law, social justice and qualitative research. He has published book chapters as well as articles and has presented papers at various local and international conferences. ORCID number: 0000-0002-4658-0421.

Contact:

Lloyd Daniel Nkoli Tlale

Department of Psychology of Education,
University of South Africa
AJH Van Der Walt Building, Muckleneuk
Campus, Pretoria 0003, South Africa

E-mail: tlaleldn@unisa.ac.za

URL:

<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Education/Schools.-departments-&-centres/School-of-Educational-Studies/Department-of-Psychology-of-Education/Staffmembers/Prof.-LDN-Tlale>

Norma Ruth Arlene ROMM (Doctor of literature, philosophy, and sociology) is professor in the Department of Adult Basic Education and Youth Development, University of South Africa. She is author of the following books: "The Methodologies of Positivism and Marxism" (1991), "Accountability in Social Research" (2001), "New Racism" (2010), "Responsible Research Practice" (2018), "People's Education in Theoretical Perspective" (with V. McKAY, 1992), "Diversity Management" (with R. FLOOD, 1996), and "Assessment of the Impact of HIV and AIDS in the Informal Economy of Zambia" (with V. McKAY, 2008). She has coedited three books (on "Social Theory", on "Critical Systems Thinking" and on "Balancing Individualism and Collectivism")— and published over 100 research articles. ORCID number: 0000-0002-1722-9720.

Contact:

Norma Ruth Arlene Romm

Department of Adult Education and Youth
Development, University of South Africa
Building 10, Sunnyside Campus, Pretoria
0002, South Africa

E-mail: norma.romm@gmail.com

URL:

<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Education/Schools.-departments-&-centres/School-of-Educational-Studies/Department-of-Adult-Basic-Education/Staff-members/Prof-NRA-Romm>

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