Power, Participants and Pandemics – steering a reciprocal path through research methods

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Abstract

This paper explores the need to consider reciprocity and power dynamics when working with human participants.

It classifies the potential costs to participants in research and how researchers can engage in acts of reciprocity to mitigate these and leave participants with a net benefit from participating in research. Using my own PhD research involving interviews with school professionals and national policy influencers, it offers an example of how these considerations may be employed, particularly during the time of extreme pressure placed on these participants from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this paper, I highlight questions about how researchers might consider the power dynamic within interview research and offer suggestions of how this might be considered when planning to conduct interviews honestly, ethically and in a mutually beneficial way.

Introduction

Conducting research involving participants can offer a glimpse into the perceptions of the lived experiences of groups of individuals that offer differing perspectives of a social event or topic. Participants offer insight into their lived experiences, personal perspectives and struggles in their everyday lives. The delicate nature of disclosures from participants should be respected and protected, following ethical guidelines required of all research. Still, beyond this, the nature of participants giving their worldview generously to the researcher who may benefit should be considered. This window into the world of participants should be valued by researchers not just for the data that it may offer but also for the privileged position it places the researcher, benefiting from the time and openness of their participants. This benefit to the research should be considered, along with the potential for it to place a cost on participants that may need to be considered more subtly than other considerations, such as physical and psychological harm.

This work evaluates these considerations and uses the position of my own PhD research as a context. My research aimed to interview teachers and national policy influencers from both Scotland and England and explore their perceptions of the purposes for which assessment should be used in these two countries. Working with teachers and school leaders, it was necessary to navigate ethical procedures both for my institution and local authorities. These processes ensured that I considered the potential harm to participants. It did not ask me to consider the time cost to participants, however, which was particularly pertinent to school participants at a time when educational institutions were recovering their ways of working following the COVID-19 pandemic. Although different to direct harm, the difficulties that participation may cause should also be considered.

Research involving participants may invite them to become involved with or recall difficult situations, such as recalling areas of tension and conflict in their lives. Ethical procedures for education research should be consulted, such as the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (BERA, 2018), which stipulate that researchers must minimise harm and consider ways in which researchers might 'protect all who are involved in or affected by a piece of research' (BERA, 2018, p.2). This need to protect from harm is, of course, a vital requirement for education research (BERA, 2018), as is the need to balance any potential harm with potential benefits (Cohen et al., 2018, p.111). Beyond the small discussion of the use of incentives for research and the need to maximise benefits to participants within this literature however, the obligation for researchers to contribute to the lives of their participants is limited and perhaps an oversight. This should be considered as particularly important where pressures on academics to produce publications are exerted (McGrail et al., 2006).

The need for a researcher to positively contribute to the lives of their participants can be termed reciprocity (Cohen et al., 2018) and involves the researcher considering their obligation to improve the lives of their participants. Reciprocity is necessary when there is an imbalance of power between those involved in research, which can be achieved by reconsidering the research methods and any power imbalances or by offering rewards and incentives to compensate for this power imbalance (von Vacano, 2019). Without this consideration, the researcher is taking research data through interaction with their participants, possibly with the reward of publication or research qualification for the researcher, and not offering a contribution to their participants. Research conducted in this way may be said to be exploitative of participants, and the term 'rape research' has been used to describe this form of exploitation (Sikes, 2006, p.112). Working with participants in this way may make any aim of improving the research context problematic, as the first benefit of the research to participants has not been considered. As Paulo Freire outlined, admittedly describing the role of teachers rather than researchers, 'The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves' (Freire & Macedo, 2018, p.44). When there is the potential for researchers to exploit their participants, even when the ethics of mitigating harm have been considered, it becomes of high importance that consideration is paid to what the researcher might do for their participants.

Opportunities for reciprocity may be realised in a number of ways, both informally and through formal incentives. Discussing tensions and strains with participants working and living in difficult circumstances may provide a rare opportunity for them to be heard and perhaps encourage them to continue these conversations about their context. This is especially true in contexts where individuals may be time-poor, or where policy enactment is enforced, such as schools, opportunities to discuss and reflect on such challenges may be discouraged. Where these participants are professionals such as teachers working in environments where accountability may restrict their agency (Buchanan, 2015), these research conversations may be an opportunity to offer trust and agency and a genuine opportunity for professional dialogue.

More formal reciprocity may take the shape of incentives that are offered to participants in exchange for their participation. These can be advertised as part of the initial contact from researchers and on consent documentation. However, the use of such incentives should be considered, as they may encourage participation, on a surface level, from participants just looking to receive the reward. Dockett et al. (2009) relates the use of reciprocity to building trust between participants and researchers due to the mutual benefit of participating in research, which is built on by Brooks et al. (2014) to mean financial incentives to demonstrate the value of the participant's input by the researcher. It may not be the case, however, that these financial relationships always build trust, as some participants may feel obliged to participate and continue within the research when they can ill-afford the negative implications of withdrawing from the research and financial opportunity. The sources of these finances should also be questioned as part of research ethics considerations by researchers and ethics panels, especially where private organisation funding may present a conflict of interest or assert the power to promote positive views around products or services.

The influence of power should be considered at all levels, with the interactions of different groups within the research. It has been argued that ethical considerations should be considered throughout the research process, not just during the initial gplanning or permission stages (Hammett et al., 2022) and so should the power balances between participants and researchers. As critical researchers attempting to reduce unethical imbalances of power, Foucault's work reminds us to work reflexively and consider how there might be undue influence on participants through reciprocity and incentivisation (Schirato et al., 2020). Readers and research users should also be critical of the role financial incentivisation has played within the research in a similar way to other areas of research, such as climate science communications framed by oil companies (Schlichting, 2013) and research on the effects of smoking from tobacco companies (Bero, 2003). Without this criticality for the research process and its outcomes, any findings cannot be assured to be removed from potential bias. Furthermore, the publication of findings that are less favourable to financial sponsors may be less likely to be published.

When conducting research within schools, it is most often the institution itself that acts as the gatekeeper for participants. However, my PhD research also involved permission to be sought from a local authority's education department and access to teachers was provided through school leaders. This presented ethical dilemmas, whereby recruiting teachers via school leaders was much easier than approaching individuals, but the informal conversations and persuasion of participants by the school leaders was unknown to me as the researcher. It would be commonplace for school leaders and parents to be contacted to arrange research with students within a school, due to difficulty with informed consent from young children; however, this would not be the same with adult professionals in school. A key concern with this is that teachers may, however, feel obliged to participate in the research or feel as though participation was required according to their employment contract. For this reason, it was important, within my research, for further communication beyond the introductions to be made with the teachers themselves

and to ensure they are approached directly once their interview transcripts are produced to ensure they still wish to participate in the research.

When working with teachers, it was common for them to describe our conversation as on a level of professional dialogue that they did not normally engage in. Assessment policies in many schools in England and Scotland are often related to external exams or government policy and enacted in schools on teachers. There is little conversation about how these might look or contributions from teachers to shape them. Each school was offered the contribution of a written report from me, whereby I would write anonymous responses to questions about my findings. This was offered to be useful with school self-assessment and enable schools to use it as evidence of third-party review of policy enactment, which is useful to schools as part of a review and preparation for normal external inspection processes such as Ofsted in England.

Through these themes of power, pandemic and participants, these issues were negotiated throughout the design of my main study. The negotiations were necessary to work for formal ethical processes as a normal part of PhD research and recruit participants as reflexive researchers. Each theme will now be considered in more depth and within the context of my PhD research participants.

Pressures on participants

Working with participants can place demands on them, which can vary greatly depending on the time commitments and the effects on participants' of engaging in the research themes. This work has highlighted reciprocity's significance for these demands, yet a deeper understanding of our research's impact on participants can aid in managing or valuing them. It should be a fundamental aspect of ethical research. However, this may not be explored beyond the level of reducing pressures that may be considered harmful or negative.

Obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and addressing physical and psychological risks are key ethical concerns in the initial stages of research. I aim to delve into these aspects and advocate for equal consideration of participant costs beyond notions of harm. Notions of harm are currently served within many university ethics processes, although it has been argued that even these are addressed rather superficially (Hammett et al., 2022). Other consequences to participants from taking part in research should be equally considered by the research team before working with participants.

When considering informed consent, participants should be informed of what is required of them and the researchers should have considered this. Any participant information forms should inform the participant exactly what might be required in terms of time and logistics such as the location of the research. Gowen et al. (2019) provide recommendations for researching with individuals from the autism community. One of their suggestions is to talk to members of the community to understand what information would benefit them about the study and how to format this in a manner that can be understood. This recommendation however would help

researchers working with any group of participants to ensure all parties understand what is required.

The requirements of participation might be considered as costs to participants and should be considered as part of the research. Working with participants can help researchers to identify these costs and plan to mediate or compensate for them. This should be a necessary part of informed consent and designing research that aims to at least leave participants in a state that is no worse than prior to the research. Iltis (2004) compares this to people not agreeing to financial costs in other life transactions without a quotation for the costs before work is completed. To enable others to consider the costs of participation to their participants, some categories of participation costs have been classified below in Table 1. This list has been generated through a consideration of potential school participants, informed by my own work with schools during the PhD study. This list is by no means exhaustive but meant to illustrate and broaden more commonplace notions of what researchers might be asking of their participants.

Category of Cost	Description
Loss of privacy and confidentiality	Participants might feel uneasy about sharing personal information, fearing their privacy could be compromised. Even with assurances of confidentiality, the risk of unintentional disclosure or data breaches might cause anxiety.
Time commitments	Participating in research often requires a significant time commitment. This can be particularly burdensome for participants who are already busy with work, family, or other responsibilities.
Financial costs	Some research studies might involve travel expenses, accommodation costs, or time away from work. These financial burdens could deter potential participants, especially those with limited resources.
Stigma and social consequences	Engaging in certain research, especially if it is about stigmatised topics (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, sensitive personal experiences), could lead to social stigma, discrimination, or negative consequences in personal and professional relationships.
Cognitive burden	Studies involving complex tasks, cognitive challenges, or a high cognitive load might be mentally taxing for participants. This can lead to fatigue, stress, and reduced decision-making capacity.
Withdrawal of consent	Participants who experience discomfort or dissatisfaction might want to withdraw from the study, potentially leading to feelings of guilt, regret, or pressure to continue participating.

Loss of control	Some research activities might involve relinquishing control over decisions, such as when participants are exposed to experimental conditions they might not fully understand.
Misunderstanding	Participants might not fully comprehend the study's purpose, procedures, or potential risks, which could lead to unrealistic expectations and later disappointment or distress.
Unintended Consequences	Participants might not foresee all the potential consequences of their involvement, and some aspects might affect them negatively in unexpected ways.

Table 1 Categories of potential cost to participants to be considered in research design

My PhD study also included work with national policy influencers as interview participants. For my policy influencer participants, I provided them all with the agency over when the interviews would take place by providing access to a booking form connected to my calendar. I was mindful to include evenings and weekends to provide flexibility around their other responsibilities. It would also allow them to be mindful of when they participated, as they may not wish to participate at a busy time when the cognitive burden of participation may be detrimental to their other priorities.

As I recruited and worked with participants, I consulted with them before and after the interviews about how the work would be used and how they might like it to be used. Although my teacher participants were concerned with protecting their anonymity as an individual, all expressed hope that my work would be shared with policymakers in their school and nationally to help those making decisions understand the lived experiences of teachers and students. I asked them about whom they would like anonymised statements to be shared with to ensure they had control over this and could inform how the impact of my research might look in communication with policymakers. This also helped them to discuss with me how best to protect their anonymity, especially as this might pertain to the disclosure of certain details that may not be necessary to the research point, they were making but might allow them to be identifiable. Ensuring this happened was particularly important given that I only worked with fifteen participants across two schools.

Although my work was not participatory, as the work was completed by the researcher rather than groups of interested people who may also be participants (Cohen et al., 2018, pp.55–56), it was nonetheless important to consult with the teachers I was engaging with. Often for schools, this involved co-planning with school leaders as well to ensure teachers could be provided with the time needed to participate. However, there is always the potential for unintended negative pressures from the research, and it was important for me to feel that I was able to give something back to the teachers and evidence to them that their participation had made an impact. This led to a consideration of how reciprocity might be used to address any negative effects of

participation beyond the harms which I had considered to remove during the university ethics process.

Working with Participants ethically to ensure reciprocity

Once researchers have considered the costs for their participants of contributing to the research, they should consider how the research might benefit the participants. Reciprocity has been introduced in this paper as an approach to bring tangible and intangible benefits to individuals who contribute to the research process. This paper argues it should not just be the researcher who personally benefits from the research process but the communities who have contributed to it.

Returning briefly to the need to consider the impact of the research on the participants, it is useful to consider their contribution and how this might inform the idea of reciprocity. Baumrind (1964), considering the ethically infamous behavioural study by Milgram, suggests that in some work, the researcher may be detached from the subject, which can prevent them from considering their contribution to the research as an individual. In Milgram's obedience study (1963), participants were asked to deliver electric shocks to fellow participants with increasing levels when they responded with an incorrect answer to a question. The electrical shocks were pretend, and the second participant was actually a confederate who pretended through a microphone to be shocked, causing distress to some participants, although 84% were pleased to have taken part when interviewed as part of a debrief. Baumrind continues to say that 'a debt does exist, even when the subject's reason for volunteering includes course credit or monetary gain' (Baumrind, 1964, p.421). Cohen et al. (2018) suggest this can be resolved if participants are thanked for their contribution in a post-research meeting with the researcher. This suggestion fails to fully consider the true cost of participation and perhaps overvalues the role of the researcher's time as a potential reward (Brooks et al., 2014).

Previous writing on reciprocity, such as Brooks et al. (2014), has provided too few suggestions for how researchers might embed methods to compensate participants for costs involved with research participation. A comprehensive list of suggestions as to how researchers might engage in acts of reciprocity is needed to allow for full consideration when planning research methods and ethics. Whilst the argument of this paper is that the choice of how to mitigate the pressures of research participation is best done with participants, it is beneficial for researchers to have a framework of possible modes for reciprocity to help with this planning.

In this section, I introduce categories of reciprocity that might be considered in the research design phase. The aim is to collate suggestions of how researchers can work with participants to ensure the research process is rewarding for all parties. It is also worth noting here that the activities designated as reciprocity can be considered as a part of the research methodology and have been reported as illuminating to the analysis of other aspects of the study (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). The suggestions collated in Table 2 below aim to contribute a systematic list but are not, nor can they be, exhaustive. All research and its demands on participants are unique, and

so this list should be used to stimulate a broad consideration of how research works to be mutually beneficial.

Category of reciprocity	Description
Participatory design of research	Inviting participants to identify what should be researched and how a research project might attempt to do this is a fundamental aspect of some epistemologies, including the feminist perspective. For feminist research, it is considered a fundamental principle that 'research participants should be fully included in the research process; they should help to set the research agenda … and have an opportunity to influence its design, analysis and dissemination' (Oakley, 2000, p.18). This aspect of reciprocity can work to ensure that research considers what is most valuable to and for the groups of society they are committed to understanding.
Financial	Financial contributions may be provided to participants in the form of payment vouchers, competitions, or direct payment. This can be a useful way to compensate for the time, and any costs participants face when taking part in research activities. Beyond this, however, it can also offer an incentive for participation that may be more difficult to turn down by potential participants if, for example, they are facing financial hardship. It may be found that participants are engaging in the research for financial gain, which may impact their willingness to participate authentically (Dockett et al., 2009). Brooks et al. (2014, p.97) suggest the use of financial incentives to 'reduce the power differentials between the researchers and those being researched'. However, there is an inconsistency with this argument in that if some participants feel financially dependent on the research and the incentive offered, the researcher holds power over this resource. Participants may lose the ability to opt out or perhaps say honest ideas that may lead to them being de-selected to participate.
Informative	Through participating in the research process, participants may gain knowledge and understanding in the area of study, or may receive a follow-up conversation with the researcher, who may be an expert in their field. This conceptualisation, however, identifies the researcher as the expert and the participant as lacking knowledge or understanding. This may of course, not be the case, and suggesting this may create inequalities of power (Dockett et al., 2009).

Opportunity for direct impact	Participants may choose to engage with research if there is a prospect of it potentially leading to a direct impact on their lives or situations. The impact may contribute towards better policies and procedures that help to improve their lived experiences or for those they care about. This depends, however, on all parties being aware of what potential impact might arise from the study.
Opportunities to contribute to wider society	Participants may contribute to research to make a difference in the lives of others; this requires the researcher to inform participants of how their participation can make this contribution. It can also be achieved through co-designing with participants how answers to the research questions might help with their own agency or work towards the desired improvements.
Fulfil Professional or Personal curiosity	Some research participants may welcome the opportunity to discuss and co-research aspects of their professional or personal lives. This can bring immediate benefits, such as providing research participants the agency, expertise, or encouragement to look deeper into their personal lives or situations. Some participants, such as employees and students, may lack an opportunity to explore their situation in their normal professional lives or situations. It is worth noting that this time spent considering the problems participants might face can also be detrimental to their experience. This is particularly true where participants may lack the agency to change their difficult circumstances and become further aware of their helplessness within a given situation. Trainor & Bouchard (2013) identify that these conversations might also be challenging for researchers when participants disclose difficult situations where the researcher may act as an advocate or support for the participant, but this help is declined.
Opportunity to voice thoughts and feelings	Offering participants a voice is a core strength of many social research methods and provides an opportunity that may not otherwise be available to some individuals. For example, in some institutions, such as schools and hospitals, where professionals are responsible for the people they are caring for, it is important to take account of the individual's needs and choices. Hearing the voices of those who do not always make the decisions can help them to feel heard and provides further benefit to them if these views are communicated to those that do.

Table 2 A classification of categories for reciprocity in research design

The opportunities detailed above for researchers to reciprocate the contributions participants can make to their research have the potential to impact all who engage with it. In summary, the framework offers an opportunity to provide ideas for all who participate in research design to

receive positive benefits in response to the pressures described earlier in this paper. By no means, however, should they be considered transactional in their use, and opportunities to provide as many types and amounts of reciprocity should be utilised and provided to participants, where feasible.

In contrast to the above recommendations for applying reciprocal approaches, Brooks et al. (2014) provide a general caution against using a degree of incentives that may distort the purpose of the research. It may also disincentivise participation where the reciprocation portrays participation as needing whatever the incentive may be. An example of this might be teachers receiving CPD for participation in research on teaching and learning, whereby their participation may appear directed by school management.

When considering how to reciprocate within my own research, this was considered before engaging in the ethical review process and before recruiting participants. Although the methods did not follow a true participatory design, teachers were consulted about the methods for the interviews and how they might be conducted. It was important that teachers feel as comfortable as possible to talk about their practice without the feeling of any judgment about competency. The school leadership was asked whether they would value any feedback about the assessment processes within the school and anonymised feedback about where this was working and where there might be tensions between policy and practice. This was taken up, and I was careful to minimise any expectation of assessment expertise on my own part, rather that I would simply provide a narrative of what was working within the school and what could be improved from the perspectives of teachers.

During COVID-19, it felt particularly important to try and offer something to the schools and other participants for this study. Many public sector organisations were feeling particularly pressured as the pandemic created many operational difficulties without any lowering of expectations as to service quality. Kim & Asbury (2020) identified pressures teachers faced from COVID-19, including concerns over pupil welfare, increased workload and even their professional identity. The schools I worked with were coping with the need to recuperate lost learning time, cover teacher absence due to illness, and work with their communities to continue supporting them with other difficulties that were exacerbated by the pandemic. The schools' agreement to facilitate twenty-five hours of interviews with their teachers was a significant gift to my PhD project and, therefore required consideration of how this time could be used for the benefit of the schools and members of their community.

Throughout these considerations, there should be a consideration of power. In the case of working with schools, empowering the participants who can inform and improve the nature of the research and how they are treated as co-designers with benefit to them.

Who has the power in research?

Power in research can be considered in position with the work of Michel Foucault, whose work is useful for us to understand how positions of power are entwined with knowledge (Foucault,

2020). Researchers may possess and shape certain types of knowledge, but so do certain participants, and this can impact how research relationships are initiated. Social science researchers will take the contributions from participants and select, contrast, disagree and reinterpret what is said, and this power should be moderated with the voices of those we are researching (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). By contrast, participants may be chosen because of their position, expertise, and prior experience, which can empower them in some research situations. These relative positions can provide difficulty for the organiser and opportunities to explore the lived experience of actors in their field of study.

Firstly, concerning research with participants with less power in the research process, there are numerous considerations, including the option for participatory methods described earlier. Methods may need to be changed and adjusted depending on the participant's age, abilities, or position (Aldridge, 2014), which is especially useful for working in schools where participants may be of different ages and need adjustments to language. Trying to pre-empt and mitigate all aspects of these can be challenging, especially when potential vulnerabilities are unknown prior to the research planning, making the empowerment of participants a challenging prospect.

The meaning of the term empowerment with participants is rather nebulous despite much discussion over the need to consider participants as more than research subjects. Ross (2017, p.2) uses the term empowerment to identify methods that have the ability to 'dismantle inequalities in researcher-participant relations'. Whilst the various methods of empowerment are beyond the scope of this work, using the previously discussed frameworks of pressures faced by participants and methods to reciprocate their participation would be a good start to ensuring all participants are not only welcome to engage but also reduces the barriers that potential participants might face.

As indicated previously, some participants may be considered to have the reverse position in the research relationship with the researcher. These participants may put the researcher in a dependent position (Elliott, 2023), and this can make it difficult to ensure participation (Goldstein, 2002) and operate on the agenda of the research priorities rather than the priorities of the participant (Morris, 2009). Of course, this final point considers that the participant may not have been part of the research design process; however, when such participants are involved, there needs to be careful consideration that their 'elite' status does not allow them to dominate the research planning in a similar way.

This section has reviewed two possible positionalities that may create inequalities between participants and researchers where they are not the same individuals. For my own research, these inequalities were considered in the design. As a former teacher in England and now a researcher from a known local university, it was difficult to predict how participants may interpret my position. This was true for the teachers in school that I worked with as much as for the participants I referred to as policy influencers who had worked as high-profile academics, civil servants, and heads of organisations.

For the teachers I worked with, it was important to be transparent with these positions, and some teachers seemed to appreciate being able to relate to this in their explanations with phrases such as 'you know how it is when you are trying to make decisions about a class as you are teaching dynamically' or 'you'll know we all have pressures for certain grades to be produced'. At the same time, I was also aware that some referred to me as 'the assessment expert' and other such phrases where I was positioned as the researcher who might be making judgments about practice. I ensured all participant information made it clear that the purpose of the work was to improve the understanding of how assessment policy worked and how this might be improved, not judge any individual teacher or organisation for their practice. In addition, I reassured my participants that I did not consider myself to have any particular expertise in their own context and found myself more perplexed by the difficulties of making assessment work the more I researched it.

Despite my explanation of not wishing to judge participants, many seemed nervous of what would be asked at the start of our interview. Only once I had explained my aim to reciprocate their contributions by anonymously reporting what was working for my participants regarding assessment policy did they seem to relax and enrich their discussion. They were happy to tell me of their frustrations in their role and the barriers and pressures they faced, knowing that my research aimed to understand these mechanisms and report what wasn't working to policy influencers. Many changes had taken place at a fast pace in these schools, especially since COVID-19 and the restrictions and pressures this applied meant that many felt their views and experiences hadn't been consulted. Knowing the research aimed to understand and use their suggested priorities seemed to empower the school participants to discuss their most pressing thoughts on the interview topics openly.

In contrast to school participants, the policy influencer group may have understood their role in the research, as they were individually sought to contribute their expertise. Working with these participants as a researcher meant ensuring I could reveal their true thoughts and feelings on the research topic and gain their perspectives on how the policy environments were created. Similar solutions were deployed, however, by framing the interviews as conversations to co-create a shared understanding of how certain policy environments can be created and what the effects of these might be for different contexts, such as schools serving different communities. Inviting the elite policy influencers to create a shared understanding helped to mediate any role of control or expectations they might bring to the interview due to their position and enabled the relationship to be reflexive and based on shared investigation.

Ensuring that both groups of participants could participate in the research with me was a deliberate aim. As a PhD project, it might have been more difficult for the project to be designed in a completely participatory way, especially as the groups of participants were diverse, which may have placed a further burden on them that would have precluded their participation. Whilst it was possible for me to meet with school leaders before commencing the research, as they rightly wanted to gate-keep their teacher's time and workload, it wasn't possible to co-plan this

with teachers without asking them to commit to further time and workload. This may have also been difficult due to my participants both working in schools and national policy institutions, as the availability of the groups may not have been possible to work synchronously. This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of how power dynamics in my research were considered, however, and offer an example of how these dynamics can be diverse within the same study depending on the makeup of the participant groups.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a variety of opportunities for researchers to contemplate how their methods may need to be adapted to continue working with research participants. This paper has considered the power dynamics of research and how participants might be burdened or rewarded through their participation in research. These issues of pressure and reciprocity were particularly acute during the pandemic as the social institutions we work with such as schools, were already facing unprecedented challenges to continue functioning normally. Although the pandemic brought these issues to the fore, it shouldn't be considered that they should not be prioritised as we emerge into a more normal way of working.

Just as some methodologies, such as online tools, have continued in their use since the pandemic, considerations, and ethical processes to reduce the burden of research should also continue. This paper aims to contribute to this endeavour by providing a framework for planning the potential pressures that may be placed upon those participating in research and potential methods by which they may be incentivised and rewarded for their participation. Whilst ethical processes and guidelines support researchers to consider examples of physical and psychological harms that may arise from research, the consideration of other costs and the corresponding need for reciprocity has not been classified. Whilst these examples may apply differentially depending on the participant and their context, they offer a framework to initiate conversations between the researcher and their participants to ensure that research rewards all those who participate.

This paper also used my own doctoral research to illustrate how some of these themes and considerations may be applied. I recognise the potential, however, for my own methods to have been improved to ensure a more democratic process to the considerations of pressures and reciprocity for my participants. If this is true, it serves as evidence for the further need for the frameworks within this paper to be incorporated into the processes of ethical planning. These frameworks should be further developed and incorporated into ethical guidelines to ensure that research methods' pressures and power dynamics are considered beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Biography

Michael is a year 6 part-time PhD student at the University of Glasgow. His work has meandered through various topics before finally settling on an exploration of how national policy attempts to create change in Secondary schools in England and Scotland through assessment processes. He originally planned to conduct the majority of his methods within schools but had to diversify his participants and conduct all of his interviews on Zoom. He works as a professional tutor in Initial Teacher Education at Liverpool Hope University.

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