

NARRATIVE DRAWING AS A WAY OF EXPLORING CHILDREN'S
EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONAL (DIS) CONNECTEDNESS.

by

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DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I declare that “NARRATIVE DRAWING AS A WAY OF EXPLORING CHILDREN’S EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONAL (DIS) CONNECTEDNESS”, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine whether narrative drawing serves as a valuable tool to explore children's experiences of emotional (dis)connectedness. It additionally investigated the impact of combining narratives and drawings. Social constructivism was the epistemological framework used for this study as it created a platform where children could be regarded as the experts of their own experiences. Participants were boys and girls between six and twelve years from diverse cultural backgrounds. The participants created narrative drawings; their stories in relation to their drawings were captured and explored. The researcher interpreted the narratives of eight participants through Thematic Content Analysis. Prominent themes emerged in relation to emotional (dis)connectedness. The findings of this study suggest that the combination of narratives and drawings was beneficial in acquiring richer and more descriptive narratives. Narrative drawing was found to be a valuable tool with which to explore children's experiences of emotional (dis)connectedness. The children's authentic voices that were captured in this study provide an important contribution to the existing body of literature. Recommendations for future research could focus on analysing both artwork and narratives to obtain richer data and to discover how the artwork link to the narratives. This will hopefully assist in designing tailor-made therapeutic programs to address highlighted children's issues.

Key Terms

Attachment bonds, Children, Drawings, Emotional connectedness, Emotional disconnectedness, Expression, Narrative drawing, Narratives, Social Constructivism, Stories.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Research indicates that listening to children's narratives in relation to their drawings is valuable for exploring their views and experiences (Clark, 2005a, 2005b; Dockett & Perry, 2005a; Punch, 2002; Veale, 2005). Wesson and Salmon (2001) noted that drawing and telling are an efficient means of exploring children's verbal expressions regarding emotional occurrences. Participants' emotional experiences in relation to significant others comprise a crucial component of this study. Matthews (1999) focused on emotional concerns reflected in children's drawings; he observed drawings could provide a basis for emotional expression in relation to interpersonal interactions between children and caregivers.

1.2. Problem statement

Weiss (1974) noted that loneliness occurs if children are unable to establish close attachment bonds. Emotional (dis) connectedness relates to attachment bonds, thus children's experience of emotional disconnectedness could cause them to become socially isolated. Gupta (1971) described emotional disconnectedness as a fragmented state that entails experiences of pain, isolation, emptiness and anxiety. Steele (2002, p. 519) noted, in reference to Bowlby, that insecure primary attachment bonds could lead to difficulties in coping with distress and increase children's risk for developing psychopathology.

Previous conversations between the researcher and the social worker at the research setting investigated in this study revealed that some children struggle with emotional and

social challenges. The research setting in question is located in Johannesburg, a city situated in the southern part of Gauteng Province, South Africa. Johannesburg has numerous schools, many of which command limited resources to assist children who might be attempting to deal with emotional difficulties. In some instances, teachers and social workers are often unable to pay individual attention to such children. Latency aged children (six to twelve years), are particularly vulnerable emotionally when faced with stressors (Rudenburg, et al., 1998). Due to their emotional vulnerability it would be beneficial to focus on latency aged children, as such children might struggle to cope and form meaningful connections with others in their context due to stressors and emotional difficulties. Children experience different kinds of victimisation, which due to challenges imposed on them by their developmental age makes them more vulnerable (Finklehor & Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1994). It is of vital importance to become aware of children's age-appropriate development to determine if they are suitable participants in the narrative drawing process and would be able to construct and draw their own stories.

There is an apparent need for children who could be battling with difficult circumstances, who are internalising their problems and who appear lonely to receive assistance. Klein (1994) noted that children who internalise problems are often overlooked. Due to problem internalisation, other people might not be aware that some children are struggling to cope with stressors or disconnectedness. If greater understanding of children's emotional (dis) connectedness in relation to significant attachments is brought to the foreground, it could enable different categories of caregivers to provide meaningful support to distressed children.

1.3 Significance of this study

Lambert (2003, 2007) states children's perspectives have only recently begun to become incorporated into the greater body of literature. According to Clark and Moss (2001) earlier research portrays young children as dynamic thinkers whose perspectives on matters that influence them could contribute significantly. Based on the researcher's hypothesis that emotional (dis) connectedness influences children, their perspectives in relation to this subject may well be significant.

Dockett and Perry (2005b) regard children as the experts on their own lives; they emphasise that adults have a limited understanding of children's lived experiences. This study could thus make a valuable contribution to the greater body of literature with regard to capturing a broader understanding of how children perceive their experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. Lansdown (1994) noted that children are not always listened to and their unique voices are not often acknowledged. Children therefore need to be provided with a context in which their voices are able to be heard and acknowledged. Christensen and James (2000) and Lansdown (2004) mentioned the necessity of finding ways to allow children's viewpoints and participation to be viewed as noteworthy, because researchers need to learn more about children's unique perspectives.

As children might find it difficult to cope with challenging situations independently; it could therefore be valuable for them to have a supportive context for expression. White (2007) stated that telling stories is effective when working with children because it makes children feel as though they are the authors of their lives. Children seem to require a context where they are able to express negative or difficult emotions. According to Case and Dalley (2006, 1992) through art, children are better able to cope

with stress, work through traumatic events and develop their cognitive abilities as well as their creativity. Through narrative drawings, children express negative or difficult emotions non-verbally through art and verbally through narratives.

Walker (2007) noted children's narratives in relation to their drawings could be beneficial to explore meanings of personal experiences. The combination of narratives and drawings has been shown to be an effective intervention to explore children's personal understandings (Kress, 1997; Steele, 1999). Gallas (1994, p. xiv) suggested children use "personal narratives that attempt to order and explain their world." Duncum (1982, 1986, 1985, 1993) noted that the current emphasis falls on children's representations of static objects and not on representing action and consequently suggested the need for research in narrative aspects of children's spontaneous drawings, pointing out that this has been overlooked in recent psychological research.

1.4 Operational definitions

Relevant concepts for this study will be defined; these include: emotions, connectedness, disconnectedness, attachments, narratives, narration, drawings, narrative drawings and child development.

Connectedness, for the purpose of this study, will be defined according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/connectedness>), as a bond or relationship where communication occurs and people experience affinity. Different emotions surface during social interactions with various people; social interactions could encourage emotional connectedness in significant relationships.

Disconnectedness, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/disconnectedness>), as connections that have been broken or are lacking. Children might not have close emotional connections with significant others or previous emotional connections may have been disrupted. According to Gazelle and Ladd (2003) rejection and detachment might cause emotional distance and lead to experiences of emotional disconnectedness.

Emotions, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/emotions>) as an intense feeling in relation to or as a result of people's circumstances; this includes people's mood, relationships and interactions with others. In this study children's perspectives on the emotional experiences and social interactions will be explored.

Attachments, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to Berk (2009, p.425) as, "a strong, affectionate tie with special people in the children's lives that leads them to experience pleasure when they interact with them and they feel comforted by their nearness during stressful times". Emotional (dis) connectedness relates to attachment bonds formed with significant others (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969). Fonagy et al., (2002) reported that attachment relates to children's capacity to connect the meaning of their emotions with another's person's emotions and behaviour.

Narrative, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/narrative>) as a story created to describe a sequence of imaginary or real events. "*Story*" is synonymous with "narrative".

Narration, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/narration>) as the process of narrating a story, as this is the method used to communicate narratives. Research indicates children's personal narratives are supportive and functional in their daily social interactions and communication (Johnston, 2008; McCabe et al., 2008).

Drawing, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to the Oxford Dictionary Online (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/drawing>), as an activity where children produce artwork. The children in this study will create drawings and paintings.

Narrative drawings, for the purpose of this study will be defined according to Luquet (1913, 1927, 1985/1924), whose studies explain that narrative drawings present a moment in a scene that transforms, rather than only representing a simple action. Combining narratives and drawings forms part of the narrative drawing process.

Child development, in this study, will be defined according to Berk (2009, p.4), "as an area of study devoted to understanding constancy and change from conception through adolescence". Lerner (2006) observed that child development forms part of the study of developmental sciences; this includes changes people experience throughout their lives. Berk (2009) suggested child development assists with recognising factors that would influence consistencies and change in children.

1.5 Research question

After reflecting on potential psychological areas of research the researcher decided to focus her research study on the topic of children's emotional disconnectedness, which

seemed significant to explore in regard to how they perceive themselves in significant relationships.

According to Smith and Mackie (2000) connectedness entails the deep-seated need for belonging in social relationships. Emotional disconnectedness relates to psychological pain and experiences of loneliness (Weiss, 1974), drifting apart, social isolation (Anderson, 1981) and separation (Dean, 1961). The researcher reflected on possible areas of research in relation to these findings that could be explored and posed the research questions below.

- Could children's narratives which are based on their drawings be a valuable tool to explore children's unique perspectives in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness?
- Could the combination of narratives and drawings enrich the children's narratives and emotional expressions?

1.6 Aims and objectives

The main aim of this study is to determine if children's narratives based on their drawings is an effective tool to explore children's emotional (dis) connectedness. A further aim is to determine what the impact of combining narratives and drawings on children's expression would be.

Narrative drawings are used as a method to gather data, as the children's perspectives on emotional (dis) connectedness will be captured through their stories. Children's perspectives in this study are explored through investigating their narrated stories in

relation to their created artwork. The children in the research context are affected by various social issues that could influence their emotional (dis) connectedness with significant others.

1.7 Research methodology

The theoretical paradigm on which this study is based is social constructivism. As Berger and Luckman (1966) pointed out, social constructivism entails the notion that reality is socially constructed through shared and agreed upon meanings communicated through narratives; people's beliefs about the world are social inventions. The context set for this study in line with the chosen paradigm allowed the children to share their subjective experiences in relation to their constructed reality. The participant's narratives based on their drawings (not their drawings) were analysed and interpreted through Thematic Content Analysis. Emerging themes in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness are emphasised in the study. Ethical considerations entailed that the placement and parents/caregivers of the children were required to sign written consent forms for the children to participate and for data to be audibly recorded.

1.8 Format of this study

Chapter 2 provides general information about narrative drawings and children's normal development in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness and narrative drawings. The literature review is an overview of different theoretical perspectives necessary to ground this study.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical paradigm on which this study is grounded: namely, social constructivism. The aspects and history of this paradigm relevant to this study will be discussed as well as important theorists of social and individual constructivism.

Chapter 4 discusses research methods used for this study. Data gathering procedures, method of data analysis, sampling methods, size of sampling, the specific research context and ethical considerations will be described in more depth in this chapter.

Chapter 5 describes the presented data in relation to the children's individual narratives.

Chapter 6 contains an interpretation of the prominent themes that emerged from the children's overall narratives. The contribution of the findings to the greater body of literature will be discussed.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, presents a summary of the overall study. Highlights, limitations and future recommendations in relation to the findings of this study will be discussed.

1.9 Conclusion

To determine in which manner this study could contribute to the greater body of literature, it is necessary to explore previous research findings. This chapter provided context and the layout of this study. As noted above, literature that is relevant to this subject is reviewed and discussed in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter literature relevant to this dissertation topic and previous research that is both supportive and contrary will be discussed.

2.2. Overview of children's development

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to understand children's normal age-appropriate development. When engaging children in narratives and/or drawings, it is vital that instructions given should be applicable and age appropriate. It is therefore against this background that an overview of children's physical, artistic, cognitive, psychosocial, self-concept, language and emotional age-appropriate development needs to be undertaken.

2.2.1 Children's physical development

Children's gross and fine motor skill development is important. As Berk (2006) commented, *gross motor development* entails children's ability to control actions that help them get around in their environment, such as crawling, standing and walking. Berk (2006) further noted that *fine motor development* includes smaller movements, such as grasping and reaching for objects. Stages of children's physical development are described based on theories of Cratty (1986), Malina and Bouchard (1991), as well as Haywood and Getchell (2005), as cited in Berk (2009, p.177).

From 2 to 3 years: Children walk and are able to jump, hop and catch objects with a rigid upper body posture.

From 3 to 4 years: Children are capable of jumping and hopping with a flexible upper body. However they still need to catch objects against their chest.

From 4 to 5 years: Children learn to gallop and skip with one foot, are able to rotate their bodies when throwing objects and catch objects with their hands.

From 5 to 6 years: Children gallop more easily and are able to engage in sideways stepping as well. Their throwing speed increases, and they have a more mature manner of throwing and catching objects.

From 7 to 12 years: Children have an increased running speed and their sideways stepping is more effortless. They can jump higher and further and their throwing ability increases in accuracy, speed and distance.

Certain aspects of these fine and gross motor skills are incorporated into the descriptions of their artistic development where relevant.

2.2.2 Children's artistic development

It is necessary to describe children's artistic development in order to indicate their age-appropriate drawing abilities. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) indicated that characteristics of children's art reflect their psychological, cognitive, emotional, social, perceptual and creative development. Stages of children's artistic expression are described according to Berk (2009, p.293) and Lowenfeld's (1957) theories. Lowenfeld's (1957) theories relate to those of Piaget's (1926/1930) cognitive development, described later in this chapter on page 14.

Scribbles: Scribbles are children's first artistic representations that contain their intended representations (Berk, 2009). Wiener (1986) described an eighteen-month-old child's picture, likening her scribbles as representing a hopping rabbit.

Lowenfeld's scribble stage (2-4 years): This stage entails children's self-expression and is subdivided into random, controlled, and naming sub-stages. In the random sub-stage the children hold drawing utensils in their hands while swinging their arms back and forth. Children draw an imperfect circle with controlled scribbling. During naming, children name their drawn marks and learn to hold drawing utensils with their fingers while using their wrists to draw.

First representational forms: First representational forms are the next drawing stage described by Berk (2009); which links with Lowenfeld's naming sub-stage. Children's first representational forms emerge around the age of three (Berk, 2009). According to Berk (2009), children realise they are able to draw identifiable shapes and often label them; between the ages of three and four, children begin to use lines as boundaries for objects and draw their first person. Berk (2009) suggested fine motor and cognitive limitations could cause pre-schoolers to simplify drawn images to tadpole figures. Berk (2009) noted tadpole figures contain a circular form with lines attached to it; four year olds add eyes, noses, mouth, hair, fingers and feet to tadpole images.

Lowenfeld's pre-schematic stage (4-7 years): This stage entails representational attempts. According to Case and Okamoto (1996) objects drawn by older school age children are organised into spatial groupings and not drawn separately. Brain et al., (1993) reported that perceptual distortions occur in older pre-school children's drawings, as they would only recently have started to draw depth.

Lowenfeld's schematic stage (7-9 years): The schematic stage entails achievement of a form concept. Nicholls and Kennedy (1992) points out that depth, overlapping of objects, distance between objects, diagonally placed objects and joined lines continue to develop.

More realistic drawings: Toomela (2004) suggested realism occurs as children's fine motor capacity, perception, language, memory and ability to describe visual details improve. Likewise Berk (2009) observed that five and six year olds have more complex drawings as human and animal figures are more realistic with clearer separations between the head, body, arms and legs.

Lowenfeld's gang stage (9-11 years): Realism at this developmental stage refers to children's experience with particular objects. Three-dimensional effects are achieved with shading and colour blends.

Lowenfeld's stage of reasoning: Pseudo-naturalistic (11-13 years): Linear perspectives, as well as shadows and highlights on objects emerge (Schirrmacher, 1993).

2.2.3 Children's cognitive development

Children's cognitive development provides insight about their perspectives and thinking; cognitive development will be described according to Berk (2009) and Piaget (1967).

Early childhood (2-4 years): According to Berk (2009, p.246) during this age children's dramatic expansions of representational activities are seen through language, drawings, categorisation, make-believe play and the understanding of symbol-real world relations. Berk (2009, p. 240) and DeLoache (2000, 2002b) suggest that symbol-real

world relations involve the understanding of “dual representation – viewing a symbolic object as both an object in its own right and a symbol”. As Berk (2009) reports, children take on other people’s perspectives in familiar situations and begin to use reverse thinking, notice transformations and understand cause-and-effect relationships in familiar contexts. For Berk (2009, p.242) reverse thinking entails the ability to “go through a series of steps in a problem and then mentally reverse direction to return to the starting point”. Based on differences and similarities, children organise familiar objects into hierarchical categories; reality becomes distinguished from appearance.

Early childhood (4-7 years): Make-believe and other thought processes are regarded as representational activities. As Bialystok and Senman (2004) pointed out, children solve verbal appearance-reality problems and their understanding of representational abilities improves. Magical beliefs about fairies, goblins and events disruptive of expectations are replaced with reasonable explanations.

Middle childhood (7-11 years): Children think in a more logical, organised manner about concrete, tangible information. The ability to narrate logical stories, give clear directions and create well-organised cognitive maps develops. Berk (2009, p.248) defines cognitive maps as: “children’s mental representations of familiar large scale spaces, such as their school”. The understanding of spatial concepts improves in relation to their concept of distance.

Adolescence (11-20 years): Abstract reasoning occurs in situations and decision-making skills improve (Berk, 2009). Propositional thought occurs. Piaget (1976 cited in Berk, 2009, p.252) defines propositional thought as, “the ability to evaluate the logic of propositions verbal statements without referencing to real-world circumstances”.

2.2.4 Children's language development

In this study, children's age appropriate language development is described according to Berk's (2009, p.394) theories. Berk (2009) defines comprehension as language understanding and production as language that is used. Language consists of four important components: phonology, semantics, grammar and pragmatics. Berk (2006, p.358) defines phonology as, "rules governing the structure and sequence of speech sounds". Semantics is described by Berk (2006, p.358) as involving vocabulary, "the way underlying concepts are expressed in words and word combinations". Grammar according to Berk (2006, p. 358) consists of syntax: "the rules by which words are arranged into sentences" and morphology: "the use of grammatical markers indicating number, tense, case, person, gender, active or passive voice, and other meanings". Pragmatics is defined by Berk (2006, p.358) as, "the rules for engaging in appropriate and effective communication".

Birth to 1 year: Phonology entails insight into categorical speech. Sounds are organised into phonemic categories where tone and sound patterns of babbling (vowel combinations) resemble children's native language. Berk (2009, p.366) defines phonemes as the: "smallest sound units that signal a change in meaning, such as the differences between consonant sounds".

With regard to semantics, they learn semantics best by listening to their mother's language and voice. Speech for words and syllable stress patterns are analysed; familiar words are recognised as pre-verbal gestures develop. Children's grammar entails an idea of word sequence structures; they distinguish ABA from ABB patterns. Sensitivity is shown to clause and phrase boundaries.

The introduction of pragmatics into their communication skills involves establishing joint attention; children engage in vocal interactions while turn-taking games develop. As Berk (2009, p.369) indicates, joint attention occurs when a child, “attends to the same object or event as the caregiver”. Flom and Pick (2003) and Silven (2001) suggested that if children regularly experience joint attention they develop prolonged attention which enhances language comprehension as they engage in meaningful gestures earlier and develop vocabulary quicker.

From 1 to 2 years: By means of phonology, children recognise correct pronunciations for familiar words and use systematic strategies to simplify word pronunciation. Semantics contains children’s first words and their vocabulary increases to several hundred words. Grammar entails grouping two-word utterances in telegraphic speech. According to Berk (2009, p. 383) telegraphic speech focuses on high content words and leaves out smaller, less important words. Grammatical morphemes are gradually added to change the meaning of three-word sentences. The development of language pragmatics requires conversational turn-taking and topic maintenance.

From 3 to 5 years: At this juncture, pronunciation improves with increased use of phonology and semantics as language contains metaphors based on concrete, sensory comparisons. Developing grammar involves the gradual generalisation of grammatical forms and complex grammatical structures are produced; grammatical morphemes are continually added in a regular order. At this age, pragmatics consists of conversational strategies such as the turnabout, which Berk (2009, p.389) defines as, “where the speaker not only comments on what has been said but also adds a request to get the partner to respond again”. The grasp of illocutionary intent emerges which Berk (2009,

p.389) refers to as, “what a speaker means to say, even if the form of utterance is not consistent with it”.

From 6 to 10 years: At this stage, phonology encompasses children’s awareness that extends to all the phonemes in a word. Children develop the ability to master syllable stress patterns and subtle differences in meaning are signified. School entry-level children’s use of semantics suggests that they acquire a vocabulary of about 10 000 words. Word meanings are grasped based on definitions; appreciation of multiple meanings of words enhances children’s understanding of metaphors and humour. Their grammar usage contains refinement of a few complex grammatical structures such as infinitive phrases and the passive voice. Pragmatics usage at this developmental age consists of advanced conversational strategies and a refined understanding of illocutionary intent. Children communicate clearly in taxing situations. Six-year-old children’s chronological narratives develop into classic narratives that are rich in orienting information and evaluations.

From 11 years to adulthood: The phonology of children in this developmental group reveals their grasp of syllable stress patterns of abstract words while their use of semantics suggests their vocabulary amounts to over 40 000 words. Their subtle, non-literal word meanings such as irony, sarcasm and proverbs improve. Their increasing use of grammar reveals that they are continually refining complex grammatical structures. Their ability to communicate clearly in relation to social expectations in diverse situations indicates the progress they have made in the demands of the pragmatics of language.

2.2.5 Children's psychosocial development

According to Berk (2009) Erikson realised the importance of children's development in relation to their cultural and social context. As children's cultures and early attachments are crucial, Erikson's (1994) stages of psychosocial development as cited in Berk (2009, p.18), are described below.

Basic trust versus mistrust (oral stage) (Birth to 1 year): Infants who experience warm, responsive care gain a sense of trust or confidence that the world is good. Mistrust forms when infants have to wait long for comfort and are handled harshly.

Autonomy versus shame and doubt (anal stage) (1 to 3 years): At this age children begin to use new mental and motor skills; they want to decide independently. Autonomy is promoted when parents allow for reasonable free choice and children are not forced or shamed.

Initiative versus guilt (phallic stage) (3 to 6 years): Children explore different personas through make-believe play. Initiative, responsibility and a sense of ambition develop when parents support a child's new sense of purpose. Excessive guilt occurs when parents demand too much self-control from children.

Industries versus Inferiority (latency stage) (6 to 11 years): Children develop the capacity to work and cooperate with others at school. Inferiority emerges when negative experiences at school, home or with peers lead to feelings of incompetence.

Identity versus role confusion (genital stage) (Adolescence): Occurs when young adults work on establishing intimate ties. Some individuals remain isolated as previous disappointments cause them to struggle with the formation of close relationships.

2.2.6 Children's self-concept development

Children's perspectives of themselves will be important for this study. Berk (2009) suggested that young children's awareness of their inner selves entails their unique inner thoughts and imaginings, indicating (2009, p.454) that the self is established through children's cognitive development and feedback received from significant others. Mead (1934) observed that children's psychological self develops when their view of themselves aligns with the attitude of others towards them.

Berk (2009, p.455) defines *self-esteem* as "the judgements we make about our own worth and feelings associated with those judgements". As Berk (2009, p.453) pointed out, children's self-descriptions are important when *social comparisons* are made which entails "judging their own appearances, abilities and behaviour in relation to those of others". As Butler (1998) and Harter (2006) commented, children's awareness of their strengths and weaknesses increases through social comparison. Children's age-appropriate self and self-concept development will be described below, based on the theories of Berk (2009, p.455).

From 1 to 2 years: Children realise their physical distinctness causes people and objects to react to them in predictable ways. They are able to recognise images of themselves on photos, mirrors and on video; they start to use their own name or personal pronoun to label their images.

From 3 to 5 years: A categorical self develops through classifying the self and others based on age, gender, physical characteristics, goodness, badness and competencies. Children construct a remembered self in the form of a life-story narrative; their formed self-concept consists of observable characteristics, typical emotions and attitudes.

From 6 to 10 years: Children's personality traits and positive and negative attributes are emphasised. Greenspan (1993) suggested children between seven and eight years define themselves based on social comparison, their social ranking and how they fit in with peers. Their self-esteem is determined by opinions of others, especially close friends.

From 11 years and older: Children combine distinct traits to form their self-concept, such as being "smart" and "talented", into abstract descriptions such as being "intelligent".

2.2.7 Children's emotional development

For the purposes of this study, descriptions of children's age-appropriate emotional development will be based on theories of Berk (2009, p.416) as they form an integral part of this study.

From birth to 6 months: Emotional expressiveness entails basic emotions such as social smiles, laughter and happiness during interactions with known people, which develop into organised patterns where children relate meaningfully to environmental occurrences. Berk (2009, p.416) emphasised emotional understanding consists of the child's ability to match their emotions to the "caregivers feeling tone in face-to-face communication".

From 6 to 12 months: Emotional expressiveness consists of intensified anxiety towards a stranger, anger and fear. Children rely on caregivers for security. Emotional self-regulation improves as children could withdraw from stimulation through walking/crawling. Emotional understanding entails social referencing and noticing the meaning of others' emotional signals.

From 1 to 2 years: At this stage, children's emotional expressiveness entails self-conscious emotions that are encouraged through caregiver guidance. Additionally, language assists children with emotional self-regulation. Through emotional understanding children realise that emotions of others differ from their own. Children display empathy and develop a vocabulary of emotional terms.

From 3 to 6 years: Emotional expressiveness at this age involves self-conscious emotions in relation to children's self-evaluation. Children apply more strategies to emotional regulation as representation and language development progress. Awareness of emotional display rules increases, where a positive emotion would be displayed even when the child is feeling differently. Their emotional understanding entails an improvement in the complexity and precision of emotions, as behavioural consequences are understood. Empathy is more thoughtful as verbal expressions continue to develop.

From 7 to 11 years: In children of this age group emotional expressiveness comprises self-conscious emotions that are joined with their inner standards of excellence and appropriate behaviour. Internal strategies link to emotional self-regulation as children shift between problem and emotion-centred coping. Their understanding of emotional display rules improves; empathy is more noticeable through their refined emotional

understanding. Children realise people have varied feelings, and their expressions might not reflect their actual feelings.

Empathy: Roberts (2004a) pointed out that parental warmth encourages children's emotional expressiveness and teaches them empathy in relation to showing concern for another person's distress and feelings. Children are able to model empathy that may lead to positive interactions with significant others. Empathy induces pro-social or selfless behaviour in young children; selfless actions include behaviour that benefits another without any expected reward for oneself (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Roberts & Strayer, 2003). According to Berk (2009) children need to be aware of other people's emotional experiences in order to be able to respond appropriately.

2.3. Narrative drawings

2.3.1 History of narrative drawings

Narrative drawing forms an integral part of this study and was defined in Chapter 1, page 6. According to Costall (2001), interest in children's drawings emerged in the latter part of the 19th century. As Luquet (1927) observed, research focused on children's intent to create realistic drawings, while findings that children's drawings could express their emotions and ideas were initially discarded (Jolley, Fenn & Jones, 2004). Previous research identified narrative qualities as a primary aspect of children's spontaneous drawings (Maitland, 1895; Luquet, 1924/1985). The current void in research on this subject is puzzling because Whitehead (1988) regarded narratives as a key cognitive process.

2.3.2 Types of narrative drawings

Labitsi's (2008) analyses of 10-year-old children's spontaneous narrative drawings indicated children were unable to represent figures visually and were more interested in presenting action. However, Duncum's (1982, 1985, 1986, 1993) types of narrative drawings are described below as this scheme provides a helpful description of children's stories in relation to their narrative drawings.

Action narratives: entail time-bound action drawings that symbolise and represent trajectories. According to Duncum (1993) naming a drawing could indicate that it is an action.

Physical action: narrative drawings, according to Gardner (1980), have an action and a sequence that is physical and not graphic. As Gardner (1980) and Matthews (1984) point out, children often produce drawings that are parallel to physical play activities. Children imagine physical play activities that change the meaning of drawn images; for instance, from one of danger to a solution (Gardner, 1980).

Superimposition narrative: Eng (1957) suggested that in this kind of narrative consecutive events are graphically laid over one another. According to Feinburg (1973) older boys often draw battle sequences that mostly end with explosions. Duncum (1993) commented that understanding such narratives becomes challenging for the observer when there is an overload of visual information.

Repetition narrative: according to Luquet (1924/1985, p.56) this involves a single image where "the essential characteristic is the repetition in the drawing of what changes, and the non-repetition of what does not change". A single main setting is

drawn against which subjects of the narrative appear several times as various parts of the story are acted out.

Juxtaposition narrative: Luquet (1924/1985) observed that juxtaposition narratives involve the main element in a story once, while representative incidents follow, involving the main element. Luquet (1924/1985) suggested elements in the drawings are not repeated, although sequential action occurs. Duncum (1993) described drawings of a four-year-old girl who located many of the main items on her page and then related her story; some items appeared to be disjointed from other integrated stories. According to Luquet (1924/1985) repetition and juxtaposition narratives are the result of early childhood intervention, as children mature culturally, acceptable narratives are included.

Graphic event narratives: Luquet (1924/1985) refers to a picture representing a specific narrative, while a symbolic narrative refers to the presence of an action. Images of objects that appear separate without reference to an action could be children's imagined narratives. Duncum (1993) pointed out that even if an action is not present, narrative drawings could contain events. Events describe visible drawings without assuming that images represent any imaginative narrative dimension. Duncum (1993) suggested that many spontaneous drawings entail events; children might not think about precursors, causes, future outcomes and events that may follow that which is visible in the drawings reproduces all the children intended to present.

Sequence event narratives: describes pictures with events, which appear to involve some degree of un-pictured narratives that are extra-graphic (Duncum, 1993). According to Luquet (1924/1985) symbolic images represent one scene selected from a sequence of un-pictured events.

Simultaneous event narratives: This concept suggests that while sequence event narratives show a single segment from an on-going series of connecting events, simultaneous event narratives contain multiple events within a single picture (Duncum, 1993). The images may show events that are related in space but not by development through time.

Separate object narratives: relates to the interpretation of more difficult narrative images, especially when there are no visual clues that the drawing forms part of a set of imaginary narratives (Duncum, 1993). For Duncum (1982, 1986) these drawings are the most profound extra-graphic narrative images as they display sequential events that are visually illustrated by an additional and separate object.

Comic strip narratives: have some sequences that may be easily followed, while others appear more complex due to the extra-graphic features (Duncum, 1993). These drawings often appear as a collection of randomly positioned separate images across the page but they are connected in the child's mind (Eng, 1957; Wilson & Wilson, 1976). As Duncum (1993) makes clear, children find it time-consuming to depict full sequences if the story's conclusion is already decided.

2.3.3 The influence of culture on children's narrative drawings

A child's cultural context has significant influence over their narrative drawings. Walker (2007) indicated that children's socio-cultural context influences their drawings, while (Berk, 2009) proposes that their cultural experience could enhance their drawing progress. Children's cultural views seem to be ingrained in their thinking. In addition to these researchers' perspectives, Wilson (2000) is of the view that children's cultural exposure encourages them to draw in a certain way. Children, he observed were seen to

narrate their stories in culture specific narratives. Berk (2006) further is of the opinion that narrative forms are culture specific as children learn from parents' narrative styles.

Einarsdottir et al., (2009) proposes that meaning-making aspects of children's drawings revealed an awareness of their contextual influence and importance. Researchers argue that cultural views impact children's drawings, as in research done by Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi's (2000) on Israeli Bedouin-Arab children of polygamous families revealed that these children drew biological mothers larger than other family wives. It may thus be that children's cultural context might enrich their unique experiences as expressed through narrative drawings. Wilson (2000, p.101) commented, "Children's drawings rely on cultural graphic models. Where the models are different, the drawings are also different".

2.4 Emotional (dis)connectedness

Connectedness has been defined as an important construct of this study in Chapter 1, page 4. Bowlby (1969) conducted research on the importance of connectedness and attachment bonds. Children require certain skills to establish emotional connections. For Rouslin (1973) connectedness could be regarded as a person's emotional, perceptual and cognitive capacity to become involved with significant others. Mutual connections relate to emotional connectedness. Miller (1976) noted emotional connectedness entails mutual interchanges with others. Wynne (1984) identified four recurring processes of connectedness in relationships. These processes as identified by Wynne (1984) include: the *presence of attachment*, where people tend to each other with mutual affectionate fondness; the concept of *communication* which relates to sharing attention and exchanging meaning; *joint problem solving* which entails task mutuality, interests and

activities and lastly, *mutuality* which involves patterns of reengagement and a deepened relatedness and refers to people's internal state in relation to their context.

In Chapter 1 page 5, disconnectedness is also referred to as being a significant component of this study in that it causes psychological pain and experiences of loneliness (Weiss, 1974), drifting apart and social isolation (Anderson, 1981) as well as separation (Dean, 1961). Previous research has revealed a link between children's school disconnectedness and delinquency, drug use and mental health problems occurring in the future (Bonny et al., 2000).

According to Ainsworth (1985), insecure attachments during early childhood could cause low self-esteem, a lack of social relatedness and higher emotional vulnerability to stressors. This could lead to further experiences of emotional disconnectedness. Gupta (1971) defined emotional disconnectedness as a fragmented state of pain, isolation, emptiness and anxiety. Such negative experiences are detrimental for children's psychological development as their feelings of insecurity and unworthiness may cause them to internalise their problems (Granot & Mayeseless, 2001). As previously indicated, relationships with parents, siblings and peers, with regard to emotional (dis) connectedness are significant; they are thus described below.

2.4.1 Parent-child relationships and emotional (dis) connectedness

According to Berk (2009, p.427) an internal working model is "a set of expectations about the availability of attachment figures, their likelihood of providing support during stressful times, and the self's interaction with those figures". A child's internal working model influences their perspectives of connectedness. According to Bretherton and Munholland (1999) the internal working model forms part of children's personality

structure that will guide future relationships. Parents play a significant role in shaping children's perspectives of significant relationships. Youngblade and Belsky (1992) and Belsky and Cassidy (1994) suggested that parent-child relationships create internalised relationship expectations that influence peer friendships. In the view of Bowlby (1973, 1982) children with approachable, sensitive parents would view themselves as worthy of receiving care.

If children experience warmth and sensitive care at home they often expect these types of peer interactions. Secure parent-child relations create a support structure for children that enable them to form closer peer connections. Research studies have linked young children's secure attachments with caregivers to positive peer interactions (Clark & Ladd, 2000; Schneider et al., 2001). Youngblade and Belsky (1992) observed that negative parent-child relationships lead to disconnectedness. Research indicates that children who receive less parental affection and more disapproval, or have fewer material resources may become resentful and experience adjustment difficulties (Dunn, 2004b; Tamrouti-Makkink et al., 2004). Contrastingly, research also indicates that parental affection on the other hand may assist children with adjustment.

According to Bretherton (1995) children with insecure attachments may experience anger, distrust, fear and negative recognition biases (Dodge & Newman, 1981). Insecure attachments lead to negative emotional experiences. Cohn (1990) discovered six-year-old boys who experienced insecure attachments were more aggressive than boys with secure attachments. Aggressive behaviour relates to parental discipline, which is important for parent-child connectedness. Dodge et al., (2006) observed that forceful discipline initiates aggressive behaviour that often co-occurs with stressful life

experiences and could be stronger when parents possess unstable personalities or children have a difficult temperament.

Parental separation for brief periods encourages children's independence. Findings indicate that children should be alone at times for their autonomy and development of self-security (Buchholz & Catton, 1999; Rokach, 2004). According to Wynne (1984) attachment bonds grow in intimacy with brief episodes of separation, while extended separation periods cause detachment and rejection. Rejection may lead to loneliness. Gazelle and Ladd (2003) noted withdrawn or rejected children experience more loneliness and social disconnection than popular children or children who are rejected but aggressive. Findings indicate rejection contributes to children's distress, social isolation, and possible peer group exclusion (Dodge, 1983; Dodge, Coie, & Brakke, 1982). According to Bierman (2004) children with regular verbal or physical aggression during middle childhood face a higher likelihood of peer rejection. Emotional distancing causes distress and diminishes the child's sense of support.

Loneliness has clear links to children's experience of emotional disconnectedness in relation to desiring close connections. Weiss (1974) and Perlman and Peplau (1981) reported that loneliness refers to feeling emotionally deprived in relationships, especially if children are unable to form close connections with significant people (Weiss, 1974). Research revealed a link between insecure attachment bonds and feeling lonely (Buss, 1999; DiTommaso et al., 2003; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2001). Mistrust could magnify emotional disconnectedness. According to Rotenberg et al., (2004) negative psychological experiences of loneliness influence children's trust in relationships. Weiss (1974, 1989) distinguishes between emotional and social loneliness, describing social loneliness as a lack of social integration while emotional loneliness refers to the effect of

feeling isolated. Qualter and Munn (2002) however, pointed out that children could be socially isolated and not feel lonely or feel lonely without social isolation. Larose et al., (2002, p. 684) define loneliness as, “a subjective distressing and unpleasant state in which individuals perceive deficiencies in their social world”. Loneliness negatively impacts children’s emotional wellbeing and perceptions.

Berk (2009) noted that if fathers play physically with their children they induce excitement in them. Berk (2009) suggested that if fathers react fittingly to children’s emotional expressions then positive social and emotional models appear in children’s behaviour. Father-child attachment bonds are crucial for children’s future relationships. Fathers encourage confidence in children to explore relationships (Berk, 2009). Ang’s (2006) research on aggressive boys in Asian schools revealed that poor father-child relationships may lead to aggression in boys.

Insecure attachment bonds could encourage problem internalisation and externalisation (Granot & Mayseless, 2001; McCartney et al., 2004). Problem internalisation entails children’s inability to regulate emotions adequately; parental guidance could assist children to cope with negative emotions. Gazelle and Ladd (2003) discovered that internalisation of problems, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness, links to withdrawal and causes emotional distancing. As indicated earlier, Klein (1994) suggested children who internalise problems are often overlooked. Parents might be unaware of children’s inner struggles and this could enhance their emotional disconnectedness. Suppression of negative emotions may be harmful. Weiss et al., (1992) suggested that a child who externalises problems is more noticeable through acting out behaviour. Previous studies further indicate that harsh physical punishment could lead to problem externalisation.

2.4.2 Sibling relationships and emotional (dis) connectedness

Close sibling relations could have a long-term impact on children's emotional connectedness. According to Berk (2009, p.582) "the skills acquired during sibling interaction contribute to the understanding of emotions and other mental states, perspective taking, moral maturity and competence in relating to other children". Children learn valuable social skills from siblings. Modry-Mandell et al., (2007) and Gamble and Taylor (2007) suggested that sibling ties encourage good future adjustment, even amongst hostile children.

Siblings provide emotional support as the intimate knowledge between them creates a supportive context (Garner et al., 1994; Howe & Rinaldi, 2004). Older siblings often support younger ones. Stewart (1983) and Stewart and Marvin's (1984) findings revealed that older siblings provided nurturance for younger siblings who were in distress when their mother was not present. Sibling rivalry is common as siblings spend a great deal of time together in close proximity. According to Dodge et al., (2006) and Tremblay (2004), more opportunities for sibling interaction might cause regular aggressive outbursts.

Sibling rivalry could occur if children need to compete for parental attention and affection. As Berk (2009) observed, worn-out parents are not that observant about treating all their children fairly. Emotional disconnectedness could be experienced due to sibling conflict. Lamb and Sutton-Smith (1982) suggested sibling rivalry relates to emotional struggles between siblings that involve aggravation in relation to dependency needs and competition for parental recognition.

2.4.3 Peer relationships and emotional (dis)connectedness

Children experience a sense of belonging and security that reduces stress in peer friendships (Geisthardt et al., 2002; Overton & Rausch, 2002). Children build resilience through peer interaction as it assists them in coping with daily challenges. Gauze et al., (1996) argued that high-quality friendships could offer a safeguard against the effects of difficulties in family functioning and prevent victimisation (Hodges et al., 1999).

Peer friendships provide a valuable support structure where children engage in emotional expression. In close peer friendships children are more emotionally expressive than with people who are not friends (Hartup, 1996; 2006; Vaughan et al., 2001). Self-disclosure links to emotional expressiveness where children share personal experiences with others and form closer attachments. Newcomb et al., (1999) remarked that as children grow up, intimacy, self-disclosure, openness and affection are emphasised in relationships. Through self-disclosure children receive support. Rose (2002) noted self-disclosure benefits children's friendships as it helps them to receive interpersonal support.

Children develop social skills in peer friendships. Parker and Asher (1993) indicated that rejected children's friendships are poorer in quality. Children who experience insecure-avoidant relationships and rejection by caregivers (Main, 1977; Ainsworth et al., 1978) often engage in hostile, distancing and negative behaviour towards peers which leads to further rejection and emotional disconnectedness (LaFreniere & Sroufe, 1985; Sroufe, 1983). Children with insecure-ambivalent attachment bonds (Ainsworth, et. al., 1978) often portray passive, incompetent behaviour and feel abandoned by peers (LaFreniere & Sroufe, 1985; Sroufe, 1983).

According to Greenspan (1993) playground politics occur between the ages of seven and eight years as children move from a family-focused social context to the world of their peers. Greenspan (1993) noted that children could feel confident due to peer acceptance one day and rejected by the same peer the following day when the peer forms a close bond with someone else. Fluctuations in children's emotions due to peer relations may lead to feelings of emotional disconnectedness. Greenspan (1993) suggested that the emotional upheaval of playground politics might cause children to be rigid in some areas in an attempt to experience a sense of control and order within themselves.

Greenspan (1993) suggested competition could be intense and children might struggle to accept changes in rules made by peers. Greenspan (1993) further noted disapproval, loss of respect, and humiliation tend to constitute children's fears. It is possible that children might withdraw from significant others due to said fears. According to Greenspan (1993) it is necessary for children to learn to cope with fears as they will most likely face judgement by others, group acceptance/rejection and societal rules throughout their lives.

2.4.4 The influence of culture on children's emotional (dis) connectedness

Children's cultural contexts influence their social relationships; (Bettelheim, 1976; Howard, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988) point out that culture conveys a child's knowledge of characteristic patterns of relationships, meanings and moralities expressed in myths, fairy tales, histories and stories. Langellier and Peterson (1993) and McAdams (1993) also discuss the point that children grow up with cultural stories that shape their perspectives of relationships. Frost et al., (2000) point out that the emotional ecology, where care is received, is capable of enhancing connectedness or conversely, may cause

disconnectedness. According to Berk (2006, p.358) children should, “master their culture’s narrative mode of sharing personally meaningful experiences with others”. Social interaction in children’s cultural contexts is significant to attain culture-specific social skills for closer interpersonal relations. As the research participants came from different cultural backgrounds, it was therefore necessary for the researcher to be sensitive to their various cultural perspectives.

2.5 Narrative drawings and emotional (dis)connectedness

Based on previous findings it appears as though combining narratives and drawings could be valuable to explore children’s experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. During his research, Gradle (2007) discovered various stories and paintings reflected family problems as well as social and personal issues. For the purpose of this study painting and drawings would be used as media for artistic expression. Children need to learn to express emotions that relate to their personal experiences. Rasmussen and Smidt (2001, 2003) explored areas of children’s lives: their family and home; schools and day-care facilities; playmates; children’s media; leisure time activities; work and chores; children’s consumer habits and their neighbourhood or environment. Children were given cameras to photograph what they desired to. Afterwards Rasmussen and Smidt (2001, 2003) explored the children’s pictures with them and discovered that children took pictures of events and people of importance to them. In this study visual images and narratives were combined, although the execution differed from that of the above.

In this study children were able to engage in any of the narrative drawings earlier described by Duncum (1993). Duncum’s (1993) findings indicate that due to children’s imaginative thinking it is beneficial to explore their narratives in relation to their drawings; this assisted the researcher in exploring possible actions and events children

could express. In Dockett and Perry's (2005a, 2005b) exploration of children's expectations of school through combining drawings and narratives, they discovered that children receive support through connectedness; anxiety was associated with not knowing many people, not having friends at school or being unaware of how to seek adult help. Emotional experiences emerged when connectedness with others was explored through combining narratives and drawings.

2.6 Significance of various areas of child development for narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

It was necessary to determine if the children's development was appropriate for their participation in this study. Research reveals narratives enable children to engage and form complex themes reflecting their developmental level (Duncum, 1982, 1985, 1986; Gardner, 1980; Wilson, 1974, 1976; Robertson, 1987), and in this way their narratives could indicate their perspectives, needs and experiences in significant relationships. According to Brooks-Gunn et al., (1997a) a child's home context plays a crucial role in their development. The significance of children's emotional (dis) connectedness and narrative drawings in relation to their physical, artistic, cognitive, language, psychosocial, self-concept and emotional development will be described below.

2.6.1 Physical development and narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

Participants in this study required well-developed fine motor skills and grasping reflexes as drawing utensils were used to create artwork. Berk (2009) argued that children need environmental support to acquire new physical skills. Emotional disconnectedness leads to minimal support that negatively impacts children's physical development. According to Black (2005) deficits in children's physical growth due to negligible parental

affection may result in a non-organic failure to thrive and in psychosocial dwarfism. Hagekull et al., (1997) also discussed the point that children could develop a non-organic failure to thrive when parents are cold, distant and unaffectionate towards them during play and feeding activities.

Findings of Doeker et al., (1999) and Tarren-Sweeny (2006) suggested that extreme emotional deprivation interferes with serotonin production and that this was capable of causing social dwarfism where children exhibit immature skeletal development, serious adjustment problems and a short physique. Children with adjustment problems struggle to form close emotional connections. According to Berk (2009) if children are removed from neglectful situations normal growth could continue, although long-term emotional deprivation may cause lasting physical deficits.

2.6.2. Artistic development and narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

Berk (2009) and Lowenfeld (1957) indicate that children between six and twelve years are capable of creating more realistic drawings, including those of people. Those in this age range possess the ability to create narrative drawings and their decision about what they chose to draw was significant for this study. Wolf (1997, p.189) suggested that children's drawing development could be seen "as the development of a repertoire of choices". Berk (2009) drew attention to the concept that children draw more meaningful marks as their mental representations of the world improve and they realise that drawings or pictures include symbols and planning. Children's explanations of their artwork assisted the researcher in understanding their emotional expressions and meaningful experiences. Research data analysed by various researchers suggests that children use drawing as a language to speak about their world to others and themselves

(Dyson, 1993, Gallas, 1994, Kress, 1997, Pahl, 1999, Lindqvist, 2001).

Other research done by numerous researchers indicates that drawings are valuable to explore: children's family life (Fury, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1997; Lev-Wiesel, & A1-Krenawi, 2000); friendships, peer interactions (Bombi & Pinto, 1994; Pinto, Bombi, & Cordioli, 1997; Rubenstein et al., 1987) and different perceptions of their surrounding world (Alerby, 2000; Barraza, 1999; McLernon & Cairns, 2001; Moore & Kramer, 1993; Walker, Myers-Bowman, & Myers-Walls, 2003).

Findings indicate that the social context in which children create artwork, whether in their community of practice (Anning, 2002), the presence of peers (Richards, 2003; Thompson, 1999) or in relation to interactions with significant others (Braswell & Callanan, 2003), influences the drawing process and expressed meanings (Light, 1985).

For the reasons described above, the researcher was required to be aware of the impact that peer relationships, the research context, parent-child relationships as well as interactions with the researcher could have on the children's portrayed meaning.

Participants in this study created drawings in a peer group. Peers are capable of influencing what children decide to draw. Richards (2003) and Thompson (1999) indicated that what others draw or say influence children's drawings. Braswell (2006) suggested peers often discuss artwork and copy from each other. The participants' drawing experience could influence the meaning they express in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness. According to Cox (2005) participants in the drawing experience co-construct meaning; children's meaning making is flexible as they might change artwork as a result of comments from others. According to Braswell and Callanan (2003) children's drawings become more detailed and understandable when adults/parents show

children resemblances between their drawings and other objects. Parental support guides children's artistic development and personal expressions. Boyatzis (2002) established that drawing development is encouraged through adult modelling, remarks and suggestions.

According to Lindqvist (2001, p.8) "children rarely spend a long time completing each creation, but produce something in an instant, focusing all their emotions on what they are doing at that moment in time." Social interactions could enrich children's emotionally expressed meanings. Schaverian (1995) suggested that drawings could be a scapegoat for children's negative emotions, as they could express traumatic emotions artistically. According to Trevarthen (1980, 1995, p.17) drawings form a basis for emotional expression and representations of interpersonal interactions between the child and caregiver.

2.6.3 Cognitive development and narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

As children's cognitive development impacts the meaning ascribed to their narrative drawings, their perspectives and thinking should provide insight about their context and significant relationships. Six to twelve year old children understand symbolic meaning, representational activities and dual representations (Berk, 2009; DeLoache, 2000, 2002b). Children in this age range are able to express unique perspectives through narrative drawings. Piaget (1926, 1928) observed that environmental factors such as peer, siblings and parental connectedness all impact a child's developmental speed. Children's cognitive capabilities improve when support and stimulation is received from significant others.

Berk (2009) noted children between seven and eleven could form logical stories. Children in this study need to be able to engage in imaginative thinking to construct their own stories and create drawings. Make-believe play enhances children's development with regard to their imaginative thinking and ability to reflect on their own thinking which supports their language, imagination, creativity and emotional understanding (Bergen & Mauer, 2000; Berk, 2006; Lindsey & Colwell, 2003). Children often integrate stories when playing. Göncü (1993) observed that four and five year olds build on each other's play ideas and understand story lines as they divide play activities into different roles. Children with invisible friends are more sociable with peers; they recognise viewpoints and emotions of others and engage in complex imaginative pretend play (Bouldin, 2006; Gleason, 2002).

Children's rich and creative imaginary thinking styles may be played out during social interactions. According to Berk (2009) modelling behaviour is significant as children use mental images to imitate behaviour of other people, even long after observing it. According to Piaget (cited in Berk, 2009, p.226) children make sense of experiences through schemes that change with age: "Once children form new schemes, they rearrange them, linking them with other schemes to create a strongly interconnected cognitive system." Cognitive capabilities aid children in structuring distinctive stories.

2.6.4 Language development and narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

Research participants should have attained a certain level of language development to participate in this study, as they need to verbally express their constructed stories. Children between six and twelve years will at times incorporate metaphors into stories, enriching the symbolic meaning (Berk, 2009). Connectedness with others will frequently

enhance children's understanding of the meaning of words and metaphors. Stein (2004) indicated that metaphors communicate meaning and desires through human connection.

For Berk (2006) it is essential that children adjust their speech in significant relationships. According to Berk (2006, p.390) when four-year-olds speak about personally important events, they narrate "brief renditions called leapfrog narratives, jumping from one event to another in a disorganised fashion". Four-year-old children might struggle to tell structured stories and might be too young to participate in this study. Berk (2006, p.390) in his research with children between the ages of four and a half and five years found that they use chronological narratives where they "are placing events in temporal sequence and building to a high point". Berk (2009) discusses the concept that six-year-old children change chronological narratives into classic narratives where a resolution is added. This concept gave the researcher the insight that chronological narratives could assist participants with the thread of their stories in this study.

Based on the researcher's reviews of the existing literature, she deemed that the participants' developmental level seems appropriate for the narrative drawing process, during which as Berk (2009, p.390) suggested, during middle childhood, "orienting information, detailed descriptions, and connectives that lend coherence to the story ("next", "then", "so", "finally") increase". This led the researcher to realise that it was a prerequisite to establish whether the children had the necessary coherence to manage their descriptions and the logical flow of their story. MacIntyre (1984, p. 216) emphasised the importance of narratives by stating: "Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words". Berk (2009)

argued that when parents speak to children about the past, their shared history could strengthen close relationships and children's self-understanding.

Wilson and Wilson (1976, p.4) pointed out that in their view children's narratives are, "the train engine which pulls with it the freight cars of tension and relief, emotions and feelings, repressions and sublimations, symbolizations and expanding aspects of reality". Children's different emotions, experiences, feelings and unique perspectives seem to be richly portrayed through narrative expressions. Telling stories seems to be crucial for children. White and Epston (2007) describe externalisation as that occurrence where people's problems are explored in such a manner that they are viewed as separate from the person. Narrative drawings seem to be very apposite in view of the above as they could assist participants with problem externalisation and negative emotions.

Beals (2001) discovered that children in families who regularly eat meals together exhibited advanced language development; sharing meals provided an opportunity for the children to listen and relate to different personal stories. Beals (2001) drew attention to the finding that social conversations with significant others benefit and impact children's verbal expressions and language development. The reverse of this was described by Hoff (2004, 2006) who observed that children who receive less verbal stimulation develop smaller vocabularies. Nelson and Fivush (2004) suggested that children through conversing with parents learn to structure personally important memories in narratives. Such children are able to describe significant personal events.

According to Bruner (1986) narrative inquiry is a valuable process as it provides information based on people's understanding of themselves and their experiences. Narrative inquiries were deemed a useful means to provide insight into children's

meaningful experiences in relation to their understanding of themselves in this study. Bruner (1983, p.4) noted spoken language entails receptive and expressive language; receptive language relates to language understanding, while expressive language relates to expressions of thoughts, feelings, needs and dreams. It was anticipated that the children would be able to narrate their thoughts and feelings through expressive language in this study.

2.6.5 Psychosocial and self-concept development and narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

Erikson (cited in Berk, 2009) contended that early childhood attachment bonds influence future social interactions and emotional connectedness. Children's relational experiences influence self-concept and development of self in relation to experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. In choosing this approach, the researcher judged that narrative drawings of participants would be able to reflect their perceptions of themselves. Attitudes of significant others influence children's perceptions of themselves in relationships. *Social comparison* among multiple individuals affects children's social interaction and relations, which may form part of their life-story narratives (Berk, 2009). According to Oosterwegel and Oppenheimer (1993) parents' influence children's *self-concept* development. Jacobs et al., (2002) suggested that peers favour children with higher self-esteem.

Children's attachment bonds are crucial for the development of their inner self and self-concept. According to Bird and Reese (2006 cited in Berk, 2009, p.454), the "richness of the mother's emotional communication in narratives about the past – evaluations of positive events and explanations of children's negative feelings and their resolution, predicted greater consistency in five and six year olds' reports of their personal

characteristics". This indicates that parent-child connectedness assists children to label and understand descriptions of their personal characteristics, which may enhance their verbal self-expressions in their narrative drawings.

A significant consideration here was that adjustment difficulties could lead to withdrawal and possible rejection, amplifying emotional disconnectedness. Robins et al., (2001) reported that low self-esteem develops when children experience adjustment difficulties. In studies by Donnellan et al., (2005) they suggest that children with such difficulties, who require constant reassurance and rely on peers to affirm their self-worth, may become aggressive, and display anti-social behaviour and delinquency. Pomerantz and Eaton (2002) noted that a parent who often insults and disapproves of their children encourages low self-esteem.

According to Parker et al., (2006), children develop a sense of high self worth and value if there is a record of accessible care and support for autonomy present from significant others. Berk (2009) observed that controlling parents who frequently make decisions for their children communicate to them that they are too inadequate to make decisions independently; parental control should steadily lessen to encourage children's autonomy based on their emotional maturity. Children who learn to trust their own abilities through supportive parenting become more autonomous. David et al., (1996) suggested that inter-parental conflict could lead to anxiety, fear, ineffective social behaviour, helplessness and low-self esteem in children. It is likely that children will express negative emotions with regard to experiences of conflict, in their narrative drawings.

2.6.6 Emotional development and narrative drawings and emotional (dis) connectedness

Patterson and Hayne (2011) who explored children's feelings in relation to their drawings discovered that older children were more embarrassed by their drawings. Older children might struggle to spontaneously engage in narrative drawing. Farrell (2001) made it clear that caregivers influence children's emotional development. Parental warmth, enthusiasm, labelling and explaining emotions when interacting with pre-schoolers encourage emotion words that enhance emotional understanding (Fivush & Hayden, 2005; Laible & Song, 2006). Emotional expressiveness is more straightforward for participants who have a well-developed vocabulary of emotion words. Knowledge about emotions aids children in getting along with others and in forming closer relationships (Brown & Dunn, 1996; Gardner & Estep, 2001).

Secure attachment bonds relate to warmer and more elaborative parent-child narratives: this includes discussions of feelings highlighting the emotional significance of events (Liabele, 2004; Raikes & Thompson, 2006). Children may also include elaborative parent-child narratives of emotional significance in their narrative drawings. As Berk (2009) established, children recognise that acknowledging the emotions of others enhance the quality of their relationships. Emotional acknowledgement seems crucial for sustaining close attachments.

Greenspan (1993) was of the opinion that children's emotional development influenced their ability to deal with stressors and parents play a significant role in a child's capacity to deal with distress. Valiente et al., (2004) pointed out that an angry disciplinary style of parenting disrupts children's empathy and sympathy, especially if they struggle with emotional regulation, as they tend to respond with heightened personal distress to

parental hostility. Strayer and Roberts (2004b) discuss the point that children with aggressive tendencies display hostility and a weakened capacity to allow different perspectives and that their impulsive acting out of negative feelings could lead to a blunted capacity for empathy and sympathy. Furthermore, their aggression could enhance disconnectedness.

According to Eisenberg et al., (1996), shy children might be unable to display sympathy as they are easily overwhelmed by others' anxiety and distress. Berk (2009) was also of the opinion that shy children focus on their own anxiety instead of other people's feelings.

Based on the literature examined and described, it appears as though it is crucial to consider the children's age range and development in relation to exploring their emotional (dis)connectedness through narrative drawings. From the literature, it further appeared as though children between the age of six and twelve years are the most appropriately developed in a number of different areas, indicating that this group would be best suited to expressing meaning and emotional experiences in / through their narrative drawings.

2.7 Conclusion

From the investigation of available literature, the researcher concluded that narrative drawing is indeed a valuable tool to gain a better understanding of children's emotional (dis) connectedness and struggles within their social context. Although previous literature on this topic has been explored, providing a theoretical grounding on which to base this study was necessary. The theoretical framework informing this study will therefore be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

EPISTEMOLOGY

This chapter explores social constructivism, the theoretical paradigm on which this study is grounded. The valuable contributions made by social constructivist theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky will be described. The chapter will also explore the history and development of social constructivism as well as fundamental concepts such as the epistemology, ontology, philosophy and social constructionism relevant to this study.

3.1 Definitions of epistemology, philosophy and ontology

Epistemology: according to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2009), refers to the theory of knowledge with regards to its methods, validity, range and differentiation between a vindicated belief and an opinion. It also determined how the researcher went about acquiring knowledge in this study. Vorster (2003, p.17) commented, “ the concept epistemology was originally a philosophical idea that referred to a set of analytical and critical techniques which defined the boundaries for the process of knowing”.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.157) noted, “Epistemology asks how I know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Every epistemology.....implies an ethical - moral stance towards the world and the self of the researcher.” The researcher’s perspective on knowledge attainment impacts the research process and findings. Her or his ethical and moral stance in relation to data gathering and interpretation is of great importance. Bateson (1979, p.242) described epistemology in the following manner: “As science, epistemology is the study of how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think and decide. As philosophy,

epistemology is the study of the necessary limits and other characteristics of the process of knowing, thinking and deciding”. His statement indicates that it is necessary to describe philosophy.

Philosophy: forms an integral part of epistemology in relation to knowledge acquisition. The Oxford English Dictionary online (2009) defines philosophy as a study of the nature of knowledge, reality and existence where knowledge is regarded as a system of thought. Philosophy concerns the way a person thinks about knowledge. Oxford (1997, p.36) addresses the issue of constructivism as “the philosophical belief that people construct their own understanding of reality”. Social constructivism incorporates certain philosophical ideas.

Ontology: Oxford (1997) describes ontology as referring to issues concerning the nature of being and what could be viewed as a person’s reality. Acquired knowledge links to what people perceive as being reality. In relation to ontology, social constructivism is concerned with what children in this study would view as their reality.

3.2 Knowledge construction

Schutz (1962, p.5) remarked, “All our knowledge of the world, in common sense as well as in scientific thinking, involves constructs, which is a set of abstractions, generalisations, formalisations and idealisations, specific to the relevant level of thought organisation”. An individual’s thought patterns will influence their knowledge construction and perspectives. According to Schutz (1962), selection and structuring leads to knowledge composition; therefore a person’s experiences are ordered and understood through self constructed concepts and contexts. The specific context in

which knowledge is gained will influence children's conceptual understanding of their experiences.

3.3 History of social constructivism

Mahoney (1991, p.96) suggested constructivism entails "to interpret" or "to analyse" as a person highlights and constructs meaning. Knowledge is often grounded on a specific theoretical framework. According to Mahoney and Lyddon (1988) constructivism views knowledge as a created system. Subjective knowledge systems are based on the experiences and thinking of the people who created them. Constructivism is an approach based on various beliefs; it may be viewed as a meta-theory that is a foundation upon which to build knowledge (Mahoney, 1991).

3.3.1 Pre-modern, modern and post-modern era

Sexton (1997) indicated that history could be divided into the pre-modern, modern and post-modern era; each of these eras highlights a specific ontological perception which influences people's interactions with others and how they deal with situations and problems. The history of these distinguished eras will be described, as this relates to the development of constructivism.

The pre-modern era: According to Sexton (1997), ranged from the 6th century B.C to the middle ages. Sexton (1997, p.5) mentioned that relevant concepts to this era were idealism, dualism, rationalism and religion: as he observed, "effective change efforts were prayer, faith, thinking and/or reasoning". These ontological perceptions influenced people's thinking and reasoning in a manner that was socially acceptable during this specific era.

The modern era: according to Sexton (1997), spanned the period from the Renaissance to the end of the 19th century. Raskin (2002), pointed out that the modern era contained logical positivism, empiricism, identification, scientific methodology and validity of objective truths. Trends of thinking and knowledge acquisition during this period regarded knowledge, which had an objective nature as the only valuable knowledge. Sexton (1997, p.7) says, “One consequence of the modern era was to solidify scientific and professional knowledge as the legitimate source of understanding the world. Through the logical process of science we could discover that which was true. Scientific knowledge was assumed to be a mirror image of objective reality”. This implied that objective and scientific knowledge was considered as being superior to subjective knowledge.

The post-modern era: which, according to Sexton (1997), embodied constructivism where the focus is on knowledge creation with regard to one’s personal and social reality and to a lesser extent on knowledge attainment as such, as was the case in the modern era. Sexton (1997, p.8) avers that in the post-modern era, which ranged from the 1950’s to the 20th century, “The perspective of the observer and the object of observation are inseparable; the nature of meaning is relative; phenomena are context-based and the process of knowledge and understanding is social, inductive, hermeneutical and qualitative”. During this period qualitative research studies became more acceptable because subjective knowledge became increasingly viewed as valuable.

Neimeyer (1995, p.3) argues that “...constructivists see reality as *noumenal*, that is, it lies beyond the reach of our most ambitious theories, whether personal or scientific, forever denying us as human beings the security of justifying our beliefs, faiths and ideologies by simple recourse to ‘objective circumstances’ outside ourselves”.

Constructivism moved away from objective knowledge with the realisation that all the various existing theories would still not be able to encompass all discovered or constructed knowledge.

Subsequently, it became apparent that theoretical paradigms could be built up from different people's ideas captured in history and explored over time. Popper and Eccles (1977) and Proper (1972a) observed certain human belief systems were established as distinguishable periods that changed over time. According to Sexton and Griffin (1997) distinct periods involved thinking that entailed a dominant perspective on reality in relation to ontology and a depiction of how knowledge develops in line with reality or one's epistemology and associated practices. A person's view of reality will lead to the development of a distinct knowledge system. Sexton and Griffin (1997) argued that ontological and epistemological beliefs of a distinct era guide individuals to understand their everyday events based on these opinions and beliefs. People will comprehend knowledge about themselves and their world based on their chosen paradigm within the given epistemological parameters. For the purpose of this study, knowledge will be understood and interpreted within the parameters of social constructivism.

Psychological constructivism: Chiari and Nuzzo (1996b, p.178) suggested psychological constructivism should focus on theories and methods that aim to overcome the dualism between idealism and realism. Chiari and Nuzzo (1996b, p.166) stated that realism suggests, "material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience". Idealism on the other hand infers that "no such material objects or external realities exist apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them, the whole world being dependent on the mind". This latter position implied that (an

object) could be regarded as knowledge only if people are consciously aware of its existence through their worldly perception.

According to Chiari and Nuzzo (1996b, p.178) all the knowledge configurations are connected to the knower; this connection could be in the form “of an ordering and organization of a world constituted by the person’s experience (epistemological constructivism) or in the sense that operations of distinctions in language constitute the generation and validation of all reality (hermeneutic constructivism)”. The human mind and thinking seems to control the construction and maintenance of knowledge systems. Chiari and Nuzzo (1996b) described hermeneutic and epistemological constructivism as two broad categories in relation to constructivism. These are described below.

Epistemological constructivism: Raskin (2002) asserted that epistemological constructivism is not based on idealism alone, as it is accepted that an external reality still exists, which relies on acceptance from the observer. Raskin (2002) suggested an observer would be aware of an external reality only through their personal knowledge construction of it, that is to say, external reality is based on perceptions of the people that constructed its existence. According to Raskin (2002), epistemological constructivism refers to an awareness of knowledge schemes, as people cannot be certain that their constructions reflect an external reality; instead people ought to determine if their constructions are beneficial for their functioning.

Hermeneutic constructivism: Chiari and Nuzzo (1996b) suggest that reality does not exist independently of the observer. According to their perspective, knowledge seems to be based on what a group of observers linguistically construct. Raskin (2002) noted that many different knowledge systems could be established through the dialogue of

different groups. This suggests knowledge could be co-constructed and shared in different communities and groups where various group members engage in the dialogue. According to Raskin (2002) hermeneutic constructivist language plays a significant role in understanding and sustaining knowledge systems. As conversations change, knowledge systems also alter and additional experiences of different group members contribute more knowledge to the existing knowledge system.

Sexton and Griffin (1997) were of the opinion that human ideas evolve over time and theoretical paradigms need to be adjusted in order to remain relevant. Narratives captured in dialogues are an important component of the construction of knowledge systems. Sarbin (1986) stated that narrative is a crucial element in the meaning construction process as it assists with understanding and integrating events that would otherwise be excluded from the body of knowledge. This suggests those narratives communicated would be captured in knowledge systems, and those which are kept silent might not be included in particular knowledge systems.

3.4 Social constructivism and social constructionism

Social constructivism is described in relation to social constructionism based on their similarities and differences; this is beneficial in gaining a clearer understanding of the epistemological parameters of social constructivism. Crotty (1998) suggested that constructivism allows people to derive meaning from objects in their environment and social interactions, while social constructionism denies direct meaning could be attained from environmental objects. In this research study participants were allowed to derive meaning from environmental objects and social interactions.

Both social constructivism and social constructionism view people's subjective experiences and opinions as valuable. As Stanton (2005) remarks, social constructivism and social constructionism recognise the existence of multiple perspectives of reality. Although perceptions of reality are context specific (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996; Doan, 1997), from a constructivist point of view, an individual's perception of reality is seen as equal to any other individual's perception. The researcher should endeavour not to be biased in regarding one participant's perception as having greater value than that of another during the narrative inquiry process. Social constructionism notes the necessity to include the role of the social and cultural context with regards to an individual's perception of reality (Dean & Rhodes, cited in Rapmund, 2000).

Social interactions are regarded as an important contributing factor for knowledge construction by both social constructivism and social constructionism. Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996) suggested that social communities and the context in which people live create particular attitudes and meanings for them to live by. The members involved in co-constructing reality will determine the contextual meaning and this has the potential to become general knowledge for group members (Gergen, 1991, 1994). Knowledge construction appears to occur as a collaborative effort between different people.

According to Durrheim (1997, p.175) who states, "social constructionism highlights the social, historical and collective nature of human consciousness", the social understanding and inter-subjective impact of culture, family and language are significant. Brooks and Brooks (1999) put forward their opinion that, with regard to the constructivist approach, a deep understanding is more significant than imitative

behaviour. An additional view by Hoffman (1990) suggests that social constructionism allows for new meanings to evolve through social interactions.

According to Rapmund (2000) social constructionists suggest that where dominant voices or accounts of reality exist within communities and in the larger society, the dominant voices are often unsuccessful in accommodating differences among people with regards to various opinions that need to be heard. The researcher envisages this study incorporating children's voices in order to allow participant's voices to be heard through capturing their unique perspectives in their stories. Doan (1997) mentions that social constructivist researchers prefer to listen to stories that relate to people's lived experiences, instead of descriptions of experience based on expert knowledge. The researcher is less interested in defining the children's experiences in terms of expert knowledge and is more concerned with/focussed on the children's view of their unique lived experiences.

According to Lowenthal and Muth (2008) the concepts of social and individual constructivism require differentiation in order to gain a clearer understanding of constructivism. To this end, the arguments of leading theorists of social and individual constructivism are discussed below.

3.5 Individual constructivism

Individual constructivism focuses on how the individual would internally construct meaning based on their ecology and social interactions. According to Oxford (1997), individual constructivism suggests children individually make sense of their world and context. Lowenthal and Muth (2008) drew attention to the manner in which cognitive

constructivism, in relation to individual constructivism, developed as a reaction to behaviourist and information-processing theories as interest in these theories waned.

Individual constructivism entails knowledge not directly communicable from person to person as it is individually and distinctively constructed/discovered (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005). This perspective argues that knowledge is individualistically constructed and not socially co-constructed. Cognitive or radical constructivists emphasise learner-centred and discovery oriented learning processes; the social context and interaction is only regarded as an incentive for an individual to experience cognitive conflict (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Radical constructivism: Radical constructivism will be discussed as it relates to individual constructivism. Von Glasersfeld's (1984) point of departure, with regard to this topic, is that radical constructivism links to knowledge construction in relation to people's internalised interpretations of the existence of an external self-governing reality. This indicates that individuals' thought construction of their experiences is significant for knowledge construction. Von Glassersfeld (1984, p.24) suggested radical constructivism represents a world solely based on the structuring and ordering of people's experiences. This links to subjective experiences and knowledge: as Maturana and Varela (1987) and von Foerster (1984) pointed out, radical constructivism denies the possibility of objective knowledge.

Matuarana and Varela (1987, p.34) commented, "all knowledge depends upon the structure of the knower". This indicates knowledge is unique and relates to the manner in which an individual integrates it. Von Glassersfeld (1989, p.1) stated, "To claim that one's theory of knowing is true, in the traditional sense of an experience-independent

world, would be perjury for a radical constructivist.”Gergen and Gergen (1986, p.23) likewise wrote, “Objects or events of the world cannot be identified independently of the concepts of understanding with which one approaches them. The concepts must precede rather than be derived from observation.” This suggests people’s theoretical framework of understanding influences their perceptions. According to Lowenthal and Muth (2008) individual or cognitive constructivism was initially based on Piaget’s theories. For the purpose of gaining a clearer understanding of individual constructivism Piaget’s theories are described below.

3.5.1 Piaget’s theories of cognitive development

Piaget’s theories are significant with regard to children’s cognitive development (Piaget, 1951, 1952, 1965). Children’s developmental levels will significantly impact the way they construct and acquire knowledge. Aspects of Piaget’s cognitive development in relation to children’s emotional (dis) connectedness and narrative drawings have been described in Chapter 2 on page 38. Piaget (1951, 1952, 1965) believed that it is important for children to construct an understanding of their world for themselves. Giles and Heyman (2005, p.107) confirmed this perspective by suggesting children play a role in, "constructing and defining their own social realities".

Piaget (1951, 1952, 1965) argued that individuals understand information which matches their worldview, further stating that if it does not fit in, it is necessary for individuals to adjust their thinking to accommodate new information. Piaget (cited in Berk, 2009) observed that in relation to individual constructivism, children discover or construct knowledge about their world through their own activities. Piaget’s (1951, 1952, 1965) cognitive developmental stages will be described as they explain an individual’s ability to understand, assimilate and process new information.

Sensorimotor stage (Birth to 2 years): Piaget (1976) suggested that infants and toddlers use their senses as a way of thinking, that they acquire knowledge through physical actions. He also noted that symbolic thought emerges at the end of this stage, as children conduct pseudo-experiments that show them new ways of dealing with challenges. Children should acquire knowledge about their context and others to aid them with problem solving during challenges.

Preoperational stage (2 to 7 years): For Piaget (cited in Berk, 2009, p. 236) the most prominent change in this stage is the significant increase in the occurrence of “mental representation”. According to Piaget, (cited in Berk, 2009), language is adjustable in children’s mental representations, as they could deal with the past, present and future simultaneously through their thinking. During this research process it was anticipated that the children’s narratives might reflect their thinking in relation to significant experiences in their past, present and future. *Make-believe* play emerges during this stage; Piaget (cited in Berk, 2009) observed that pretending assists children in acquiring and developing new representational schemes. McCune (1993) suggested *make-believe play* diminishes children’s self-centredness as they realise other people are autonomous during pretend play. Pretend play enhances children’s creativity and ability to allow for different perspectives, which is significant for the purpose of this study.

Piaget (1926/1930 cited in Berk, p. 241) observed, *animistic thinking* “is the belief that inanimate objects have life-like qualities, such as thoughts, wishes, feelings and intentions”. The children in this study might assign life-like qualities to drawn objects. Berk (2009) suggested children’s *inability to conserve* in this stage entails that they centre their attention on a single aspect of a situation while ignoring other noteworthy

qualities. Children's individual knowledge acquisition is subjective as they determine for themselves what is significant to focus on.

Concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years): This stage is characterised by the suitable use of logic, as children engage in more adjustable, organised, logical thought patterns and reasoning (Berk, 2009). *Spatial reasoning*, according to Piaget and Inhelder (1948/1956), refers to the ability to illustrate a map as this requires perspective-taking skills in children because they need to derive the overall layout through linking and integrating different fragments. The participant's ability to integrate and link different fragments would be of importance in this study.

Formal operational stage (11 years and older): The ability to engage in abstract, scientific and methodical thinking emerges; children discover more general and new logical guidelines through their own inner thought patterns (Inhelder & Piaget, 1955/1958).

3.5.2 Follow-up research on Piaget's cognitive development

In contrast to Piaget's findings, children do seem to be sensitive to contexts and other people. Research by Borke (1975), as well as Newcombe and Huttenlocher (1992) indicated that four year olds already have an awareness of others' points of view. Ebeling and Gelman (1994) also described the phenomena of children changing descriptions in relation to their context. Gelman (1972) also discovered that children do not display illogical thought patterns when engaged in simplified tasks relevant to their everyday lives. According to Ruffman (1999), children's illogical reasoning becomes apparent when they are confronted with unfamiliar topics, an overload of information and conflicting facts, which they struggle to resolve.

Although an individualistic construction of knowledge is important, individual constructivism is not appropriate for the purpose of this study where children's constructed knowledge in relation to their emotional (dis) connectedness with others will be highlighted. Social constructivism appears more appropriate as it encompasses the participant's social context, experiences of connectedness and the co-construction of meaning and knowledge.

3.6 Social constructivism

As previously mentioned, the research approach in this study is based on the theory of social constructivism; thus the contribution of social constructivist theorists in relation to it requires description. Vygotsky (1962), a key social constructivist theorist, believed that behaviourist approaches were too restricted to adequately capture complex and rich human dynamics. Early behaviourist and information-processing perspectives have disallowed for a diversity of perspectives; knowledge gathered through these approaches was frequently very rigid, structured and concrete. For Vygotsky (1978) social constructivism refers to an individual's meaning making of knowledge within a social context; interaction through dialogue is essential for learning and knowledge attainment.

Learning is an important component of social constructivism and therefore knowledge construction. Phillips (1995) proposed that a systematic, predictable and controllable view of the universe could not encapsulate the depth of a learner's active and social characteristics. According to Gredler (1997), there are four perspectives relevant to learning based on social constructivism. Mayer (1996) suggested constructivism is an important metaphor for learning. Significant perspectives consist of the cognitive tools perspective, idea-based social constructivism, the pragmatic or emergent approach and

the transactional or situated cognitive perspective. These perspectives are described below:

The cognitive tools perspective: Highlights cognitive skills, strategies and social learning. Meaning is imposed through the social learning process of a group. Gredler (1997) points out that the meaning of the socially, co-constructed outcome in relation to the created context is defined by the group.

Idea-based social constructivism: According to Gredler (1997) such ideas could broaden an individual's vision and become an important foundation for individualistic thinking and social meaning construction.

The transactional/situated cognitive perspective: Focuses on the relation between an individual and their environment. People participate in their constructed environment through actively engaging in social relationships within their environmental context (Gredler, 1997). Gredler (1997) explain that as the context and social relationships among group members alter, the role of each individual may change as the system evolves: role differentiation in a specific context influences meaning and knowledge construction.

Situated cognition: King (2000) addresses this issue that refers to a person's thinking located in a social and physical context, not only in an individual's mind. Situated cognition suggests knowledge is connected to the context in which it develops. Social groups to which children belong were important for this study, as knowledge may be acquired from peers.

Social groups and children's meaning construction: Speed (1991) suggests people's view of reality is constructed through their ideas, as their invented ideas determine what they know. If knowledge is based on constructivism as a theoretical framework, the knowledge and findings will be subjective due to the influence of the researcher's personal ideas. Berger and Luckman (1966) reported that social groups to which people belong influence their reality construction. What one group views as acceptable, another group might disregard. This might affect children's emotional (dis) connectedness in relation to group inclusion and exclusion.

3.6.1 Vygotsky's theories on social constructivism

Vygotsky's theories on social constructivism are important for this study as they form part of the theoretical framework of constructivism. Vygotsky's (1978, 1962) importance as a social constructivist theorist arises *inter alia*, from his acknowledgement of the significance of the contribution of children's social and cultural perspectives to knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) stated that learning occurs through dialogue, as an internal dialogue occurs with regards to acquiring knowledge and understanding one's world. People reflect on their experiences through dialogue. This study aimed, *inter alia*, to provide a context where children could share and reflect on their meaningful internal and social dialogues.

Scaffolding: according to Vygotsky (1978), this concept refers to support provided by parents, peers and teachers to enable growth in children's performance and development. The support or lack of support contributes valuable information to children's experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. In the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) he indicates that scaffolding diminishes when children's competence increases, because less guidance is needed. This idea is further developed

by Pressley et al., (2001), who discovered that in the process of collaborative learning, scaffolding used by teachers and peers is beneficial for children in their endeavours to gain knowledge. It was anticipated that in this study it could be necessary to initially assist and guide participants in the narrative drawing process. It was further anticipated that as they familiarised themselves with this research process less guidance would be necessary. Vygotsky's (1978) three major themes are described below in relation to children's ability to acquire knowledge.

Social interaction: Vygotsky (1978) suggested that social learning precedes development. Accordingly, social interaction is the first theme which plays a crucial role in children's cognitive development. This idea contradicts that of Piaget's (1971) understanding of child development. Vygotsky (1978, p.57) argued that "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and later on the individual level: first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)." Thus, children's narratives may involve expressions of external and internal processes in relation to connectedness.

The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO): is the second theme that refers to people who have a greater understanding or higher ability in comparison to children with regards to a particular task, process or concept (Vygotsky, 1978). He discussed how social comparisons during child development occur between peers, younger children or siblings. The experience of social comparison has been described as a part of child development in Chapter 2 on page 19. It is important to consider the role of the MKO in a child's social context as it could link to their home environment and parental involvement, which is an important contributing factor in this study.

The third theme is known as **the zone of proximal development**: Vygotsky (1987) refers to the distance between children's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and in peer collaboration and their ability to solve a problem without guidance or support. Vygotsky (1978) pointed out that people use culturally developed tools such as narratives and writing to construct their social context; the internalisation of specific tools is valuable for children to express their needs and develop cognitive skills. The researcher regards narrative drawings as a tool that provides participants with a means to express their needs.

3.7 Language as a component of social constructivism

Vico's (1687/1725) concepts of constructivism revolved around connections between the truth, knowledge and the origins of language and the human desire to create knowledge cognitively. Berger and Luckman (1966) also contended that reality is socially constructed through shared and agreed upon meanings communicated through narratives; this means people's beliefs are social inventions. As Hamilton and Stewart (1977) noted, children frequently model parental language during peer interactions. Children's knowledge appears to be constructed through observing parents' emotional connectedness with others. It was anticipated that research participants in this study expected to voice and express their acquired knowledge. In this context especially, sensitivity to the narratives of the children was important, as they viewed their stories as true reflections of their reality.

3.8 Social constructivism and its relevance to this study

Dewey (1938) suggested that ways of knowing could be based on the perception that knowing is not carried out by an outside observer; rather, it is constructed by a participant where society provides a reference point to enable the participant to make

sense of their experiences. Relationships convey meaning in relation to children's emotional (dis) connectedness and the role that significant others fulfil in their lives.

Connectedness: Dewey (1938) concluded that interrelatedness allows the knower to construct knowledge. This concept includes relationships being formed between an individual, community and the world and its creation occurs through socially constructed ideas. As Hoffman (1990) asserted the process of interpersonal communication leads to knowledge construction as meanings are captured through connectedness. Based on social constructivism, the meaning people derive from their context is partially constructed by them. The constructed knowledge of participants in this study would be influenced by their social interactions.

Peer group: Social constructivists recognise that knowledge construction is often rooted in a group or social context (Oxford, 1997; Dewey, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978, 1962). Participants created artwork in a peer group; the researcher expected that their peer interactions would influence their constructed meaning and knowledge in this study. Individuals discover meaning through context-specific socio-cultural interactions with others. Kukla (2000) noted that constructivists believe reality is constructed through human activity and group members will invent the properties of their world together. This suggests reality emerges as social interventions occur. An awareness of social constructions shared among participants in the research group was important as this influenced the overall themes that emerged and impacted this research process.

Speed (1991) noted through sharing ideas or constructions of reality within a group context, other people's ideas enhanced what a person and the group know. In other words, other people's ideas may alter an individual's constructions of reality. Dialogue

between the researcher and children during narrative inquiry sessions in this study most likely had an impact on the children's knowledge construction and meaning. Lerner (1982) mentions the manner in which individuals activate different social reactions depending on their socially conferred roles and status.

Culture specific knowledge: Social constructivism highlights the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in a community with regard to culture-specific knowledge construction (McMahon, 1997).

Learning: Yang and Wilson (2006) similarly established learning is interactive as learners interact with sources of ideas or knowledge in social settings, as well as actively partake in reconstructing ideas/knowledge internally. Mitchell and Myles (1998) drew attention to social constructivism's emphasis that learning occurs in a socio-cultural environment. The children, in this study's, ability to learn impacted what they are able to narrate and share with the researcher.

Meaning: As cited in Oxford (1997), Vygotsky believed constructs have social origins learned through social interactions. According to Manus (1996), Vygotsky promulgated the idea that thought grows from experiences and an individual's maturation process. As children grow older their constructed meanings usually change along with perceptions of their world.

Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996, p.80) suggested the researcher should aim to discover "meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context". Emerging themes needed to be explored in this study

based on the children's perspectives. It is important to regard the meaning children attributed to their world as valuable in this study.

Drawings: The purpose of this study being to understand the interpretations shared by the participants in relation to their created drawings, they were provided an opportunity for verbal and non-verbal expression through narrative drawings. Children's drawings need to be considered as expressions of meaning and understanding (Ring, 2006). Stanczak (2007, p.11) highlighted the value of artistic communication by stating, "the meaning of images resides most significantly in the ways that participants interpret those images, rather than as some inherent property of the images themselves". Einarsdottir et al., (2009) regard drawings as an effective means for children to explore and communicate their understandings and knowledge (Kress, 1997; Steele, 1999). Gallas (1994, p. xv) additionally noted that children's narratives are formed to explain the world in relation to their experiences, suggesting children's personal narratives "...are often part of the silent language that embodies their thinking".

Social constructivism acknowledges people's different opinions of the same situation. Snyder (1982) observed that different social reactions affect children's perceived self-conception and their concept of others in ways that could strengthen or diminish the environmental bias. For the purpose of this study social interaction was important for participants to build their perspectives on knowledge acquired in relation to experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness within their specific context. The research context also needed to be created in such a way that different perspective of the same event and context could be recognised in a sensitive manner.

3.9 Conclusion

Social constructivism appeared to be an adequate paradigm to support the exploration of children's unique perspectives in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness. For Callahan and Elliot (1996) human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to their narrative structure. Social constructivism as a theoretical paradigm allowed research participants to voice their own perspectives, as the personal meaning of their stories holds significance for this study. The methodology used to conduct this research process is described in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

A detailed description of social constructivism as the chosen research paradigm was provided in Chapter 3. In this chapter the research methodology of this study will be described. According to Henning (2004, p.36) methodology refers to a group of methods that “have the goodness of fit” in supporting the research purpose and to accomplish the desired outcome. Different aspects of the methodology should fit together to enhance data quality and coherence of the findings. The practicalities of the research process will be described below.

4.2 Research design

The aim of this study was to determine if narrative drawings are a valuable tool to explore children’s experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. This study also aimed to investigate the impact that the combination of narratives and drawings could have on children’s expression. Qualitative research was chosen as it provided a more detailed description of the participants (Mertens, 2005). Social constructivism is the theoretical paradigm on which this study was based as it allowed participants to express their uniquely constructed experiences. Social constructivism supports the occurrence of different socially constructed meanings shared through narratives (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

4.2.1 Qualitative and quantitative research methods

According to Shank (2002) quantitative methods relate to positivist research, where the purpose is to generalise research findings to larger groups of participants in an a-contextual manner. As Shank (2002) emphasised, qualitative research does not measure data statistically; rather it aims to capture the nature of experiences. A qualitative research approach was chosen for the purpose of this study, the aim being to explore the narrated meaning of a small group of participants and not to generalise findings.

According to Terre Blanche et al., (2006) qualitative research was originally discarded as a method of investigation, as the positivist paradigm believed worldly facts could only be collected through objective quantitative research measures. Terre Blanche et al., (2006) point out that due to the subjective nature of qualitative research it was regarded as being more open to bias. While it is always necessary for the researcher to be aware of any personal biases that could influence this process, this researcher was not aware of any biases that could be a possible limitation to this study.

Stenbacka (2001, p.551) noted that the reliability of good quality quantitative research requires it to have the “purpose of explaining”, while the purpose of qualitative research is “generating understanding”. A qualitative research approach was fitting for the purpose of this study, as the researcher aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the children’s perspectives on emotional (dis) connectedness. According to Davies (2007) qualitative research methods could be regarded as an interpretive approach, as the researcher interprets the meaning of the findings. According to De Vos et al., (2002, p. 397) qualitative research assists the researcher to, “...understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life”. In this study the distinct meaning expressed by a few cases was intensively studied and valued.

4.2.2 The trustworthiness of qualitative research

According to Stiles (1993), reliability in qualitative research relates to trustworthiness of generated data and research procedures; qualitative data needs to be dependable instead of reliable. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) emphasised the importance of being aware that people's behaviour and expressions differ across changing contexts. Valid data should capture the context-bound meaning of the researcher's observations. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), qualitative researchers realise that they investigate changing realities; therefore the same results would not be repeatedly found. If the research participants participated in this study again, the findings would differ, as they could share new and different experiences. For Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.290) who stated that trustworthiness entails that the findings should be "worth paying attention to", they described four important concerns for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These aspects are described below.

Dependability: according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p. 64), refers to: "the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher says they did"; the context would influence interactions and dependability. It is necessary to understand the meaning in relation to the specific research context, as this will assist the researcher to provide a viable account of the research findings. Terre Blanche et al., (2006) contend that data gathering and analysis methods influence the study's dependability and outcome while rich and detailed descriptions increase dependability.

Transferability: Terre Blanche et al., (2006) also stated that transferability refers to rich context specific descriptions; enough descriptive detail should be included about the research process and findings. According to these researchers, transferability links to the

context-specific meaning. A full account of the participant's narratives in relation to their experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness should be provided to the reader.

Credibility: according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p.43), is evident when the "research produces findings that are convincing and believable". A logical flow between the method of data gathering and analysis needs to be established. Bowen (2005) suggested a relationship exists between credibility and the truth of the research findings. Terre Blanche et al., (2006) noted that research credibility is accomplished during the research process: the researcher needs to be aware of discrepancies in relation to the constructed hypothesis. This suggests the necessity of determining if the presented data aligns with the research aims.

Confirmability: measures how strongly the inquiry's findings are supported by the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Denzin (1994, p. 513), "confirmability builds on audit trails and involves the use of written field notes, memos, a field diary, process and personal notes, and a reflexive journal." The personal observations of the researcher with regards to the participants are described in Chapter 5.

4.3. Role of the researcher

The researcher is regarded as the primary instrument of qualitative research with regards to interpreting and deriving meaning from research findings (Alvesono & Skoldberg, 2000; Henning, 1995; Henning, 2002; Holliday, 2001; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). The researcher's previous experiences and history influence the findings and interpretations of this study. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) interpretive research requires of researchers to recognise they are not detached from the research process or outcomes.

The researcher and participants collaboratively co-construct the meaning expressed during the narrative inquiry sessions, and this might influence the latter's narratives. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p.80) emphasised that the researcher needs to be relaxed, as "being relaxed creates an environment for a thoughtful, rich interview". The manner in which the researcher approaches participants affects the findings. Rubin and Rubin (2005) caution against over-identifying with research participants, as this could lead to asking questions that could place participants in a flattering light. The researcher should treat research participants equally in a respectful manner.

4.4 Method

4.4.1 Case studies

A small sample of individual cases was studied in-depth for the purpose of this study. Merriam (1998, p. 21) refers to case studies as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit." The one-on-one narrative inquiry sessions with participants in this study was anticipated to be time-consuming; therefore it was not practical to work with a large group of participants. According to Willig (2001) since a case study is an approach that is focused on individuals, diverse methods of data collection and analysis may be used. Narratives in relation to drawings were the method for data collection that focussed on the narratives of individual children. Berg (2009, p.318) points out that deeper understandings may be acquired as "in essence, case studies open the door to the processes created and used by individuals involved in the phenomenon, event, group, or organisation under study".

Case studies allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' different perspectives on the subject of emotional (dis) connectedness. According to Willig (2001, p.74) case

studies “are selected to provide the researcher with an opportunity to study the phenomenon of interest”. For the purpose of this study, case studies were considered to be beneficial as this approach focuses on individual differences and not on generalising findings for the larger population. Lindegger (1999) discusses the concept that, in case study research, participants are studied as individuals and not as members of the larger population.

4.4.2 Sampling

According to Terre Blanche et al., (2006) the process of selecting participants for the study is referred to as sampling. As stated earlier, for the purpose of this study convenience sampling was used. The above theorists also state that convenient sampling is used when the researcher chooses samples that are available. In this study, the specific research context allowed the researcher to conduct the research in a particular, previously established setting and the necessary sample of children in the specific required age range was available and willing to participate in this process. Gibson and Brown (2009, p.56) refer to the idea that researchers choose participants as they “possess characteristics, roles, opinions, knowledge, ideas or experiences” that is relevant to the research. As mentioned earlier, the children’s developmental level and age was of significance in this study. Merriam (1991) asserts that a research sample, from which the most could be learned, should be chosen. The researcher regarded the chosen placement as an ideal context where a great deal could be learned from participants’ unique perspectives in relation to their experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness.

4.4.3 Research participants

The research participants were boys and girls from culturally diverse backgrounds; they included black, white and mixed race children. As all of them speak either Afrikaans or English, the researcher could communicate with them in a language that the participants and researcher both understand. It was unnecessary to use a translator, which was positive for the study, as valuable data may have been lost during the translation process. None of them had any significant cognitive or physical impairment.

4.4.4 Inclusion criteria

It is important to describe the criteria for participant selection (De Vos et al., 2002). Participants in this study were required to be between six and twelve years old. This age range was chosen, as participants need to be at a certain developmental level to be able to engage in the narrative drawing process. Based on the literature explored in Chapter 2 as related to child development, participants between six and twelve years were chosen for this study. Children in this age range are capable of engaging in the narrative drawing process (Berk, 2009).

4.4.5. Exclusion criteria

Children younger than six years were excluded as they might have struggled to structure their narratives and create logical stories (Berk, 2009) and children older than twelve years, being more self-conscious about their drawings (Patterson & Hayne, 2011) were also excluded.

4.4.6 Research setting

This study was conducted at an after care school centre, namely Gembou in Witpoortjie, Gauteng. The reason why this area and centre were chosen is because the social workers

and teachers require assistance with children who struggle to cope with their current personal circumstances. Limited resources are available at the after-care school centre, and it is difficult for caregivers to pay individual attention to children who face particular challenges. Many of the children at this school are raised in single-parent households with limited support. Logistically, the area is reasonably close to where the researcher resides, lessening travelling costs and thereby making the research more viable.

According to Case and Dalley (2006), for effective research to occur, a room needs to be set up where a relationship between the researcher and children could develop. The room where participants engaged in narrative drawing had tables with chairs and enough space for them to move around freely. Case and Dalley (2006) noted that warmth, light; space and access to materials could increase a room's functionality. There was a washing basin with toilet facilities nearby, ensuring that participants were comfortable. A separate room with a table next to the narrative drawing room were used for the one-on-one narrative inquiry sessions. This was a familiar and practical context for the research participants. The children did not have to travel to a different location. Extra travelling arrangements would have increased the cost of this study.

4.4.7 Method of data collection

The research of Driessnack (2005) suggested that the draw-and-tell method has been highly consistent over time, even for children with emotionally laden experiences. It was anticipated that the participants' narratives could entail emotional experiences, as the purpose of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of their emotional (dis)connectedness. Driessnack (2005) discovered drawing increased the amount of verbal information children shared in interviews. It was expected that the children in this study

would be able to share richer and more in-depth narratives if they had a context in which to express themselves non-verbally through art and verbally through stories. Perry (2004, 2005a, 2005b) and Einarsdottir (2005b) noted that some children preferred to express their experiences both verbally and non-verbally; this study provided such an opportunity for the participants.

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), it is valuable for the researcher to gather data personally and to share valuable experiences with the research participants. In this study the researcher gathered all the data personally over a period of six weeks and the followed process is outlined below:

Art materials used: Basic art materials used in this study to stimulate children's creativity and expressiveness included paints, paintbrushes, crayons, pens, paper, and pencils. Water-based "child friendly" paint that did not contain any toxins was used under supervision. The children worked on plain white paper. Each child received an overall to cover their clothes and the water-based paint could be washed out of clothes when accidentally spilled. According to Case and Dalley (2006) painting aids children's expression of feelings and could enhance the quality and depth of their narrative expressions. Thicker child-friendly crayons were available as it was easier for some younger children to draw with them.

Instructions given during different sessions: The researcher gave instructions to research participants at the beginning of each session, after which art materials were handed out and the children could freely engage in the art making process. Each participant received a piece of paper and different art materials were placed on the tables. The children worked with the art materials as they chose and could draw more

than one picture per session if they wished to. Initially the children used only drawing as an artistic medium to familiarise themselves with this study but for the following sessions paints were added. According to Walker (2007) it is important to consider how the task is presented to children when drawings are collected, as the wording of the given instructions needs to be carefully chosen. Age appropriate instructions that were relevant to the children's developmental level were given.

Session 1: Instructions given: The children were instructed to choose a theme for their story, and were asked to draw the characters of their story.

Art materials used: Pencils and crayons.

Session 2: Instructions given: The children were asked to continue with the drawings of their story, through making drawings of what the characters in their story were busy doing and continuing to colour-in their pictures.

Art materials used: Pencils, crayons and paint.

Session 3: Instructions given: Children were asked to draw or paint the ending of their story.

Art materials used: Pencils, crayons and paint.

Narrative inquiry sessions: According to Riley and Hawe (2005) narrative inquiry sessions could be seen as an attempt to understand how people think about events and what they view as valuable. The purpose of such sessions in this study was to gain a clearer understanding of the children's perspectives. Riley and Hawe (2005) maintain that the narrative approach focuses on sentences constructed by the storyteller in relation to the depicted meaning. In this study each child's meaning was explored by focusing on

their narrative in relation to their artwork. Ezzy (2000) avers that people emphasise certain aspects of their stories during narrative inquiry sessions. In this study the researcher attended to highlighted aspects in the children's narratives as these could carry significant meaning for the various children.

Even though the participants' drawings would not be analysed, they could still, according to Dockett and Perry (2004, 2005a, 2005b) and Einarsdottir (2005b), provide a context for children where they can exercise some control over their participation in data generation activities. Through their drawings children were accorded the option to choose what they wanted to depict and share during this research process. Perry (2004, 2005a, 2005b) and Einarsdottir (2005b) recommended that a drawing context should be non-confrontational. Children engaged in this study created their artwork in a group, as this was less time consuming and the most practical option.

Perry (2004, 2005a, 2005b) and Einarsdottir (2005b) also recommended children should be encouraged to take their time when responding to questions, as the co-construction of meaning during narrative inquiry sessions could be time-consuming. The researcher allowed enough time for participants to respond to the questions that related to their created artwork. Patton (2002, p. 343) noted the researcher should, "explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject ... to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined."

According to Gillham (2000) it is important to give participants some basic information about what narrative inquiry sessions entails. The researcher explained to participants

that their stories, in relation to their drawings, would be explored during the one-on-one narrative inquiry sessions. Gillham (2000) insists that the purpose of recording should be explained to participants. The researcher consequently explained to participants that the audio recordings assisted the researcher in remembering their stories. Gillham (2000) considered it necessary for participants to know the length of inquiry sessions. The researcher informed the children that they had enough time to share the details they wanted to (of their story) during the narrative inquiry sessions.

As each child was different, each narrative inquiry session was unique. The researcher in this study needed to use her discretion about the types of questions she asked about the children's drawings. Reissman (2008a, p.105) questioned, "...how is a story co-produced in a complex choreography – in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, and history and culture?" This drew attention to the fact that various aspects influence children's narrated stories during the narrative inquiry sessions and research process.

Reissman (1993) highlighted the importance of attentive listening in sessions, as this method assists the researcher with understanding children's possible meanings. Attentive listening is a means of encouraging participants to share their stories with the researcher. During the narrative inquiry sessions the researcher based her questions on the details of the stories shared by participants and aspects in relation to children's experiences of emotional (dis)connectedness were highlighted. The researcher reminded children of their previous stories through showing them their previous drawings and provided them with a short summary of their stories told during previous narrative inquiry sessions.

Recording of the data: The stories that the children shared with the researcher during the narrative inquiry sessions were recorded. Audio recordings are quicker and more efficient for data gathering than other methods. It was easier to analyse and interpret recorded data. Participants were observed in a familiar setting during the art making process and their artwork was collected.

4.4.8 Data analysis

Data transcription: Data transcription is an important phase of data analysis and interpretation. According to Emerson and Frosh (2004), data transcription is an interpretive process that involves more than merely changing words into written form. Interpretation goes hand in hand with data transcription and is a vital component of data analysis. Reissman (2008a, p.28) stated, "...in constructing a transcript, we do not stand outside in a neutral objective position, merely presenting 'what was said'. Rather, investigators are implicated at every step along the way in constructing the narratives we then analyze". As the entire research process influences the data transcription, the researcher's involvement could help with data analysis and interpretation.

The narrative inquiries with the children were conducted in either English or Afrikaans. The gathered data was translated into English and then translated back into Afrikaans by an independent translator to ensure that the translation did not detract from the essence and richness of the children's meaning. Parker (2005) emphasises that data transcription enables the researcher to view data from a different perspective; new aspects could be noted and picked up during the transcription process. The researcher conducted the narrative inquiry sessions and data transcription herself; this led to a more in-depth understanding and sensitivity to the participants and research context. According to

Parker (2005) it is important that researchers make the data transcriptions themselves, as decisions made about these would shape texts in a particular way. The transcribed texts would influence the interpretation of significant themes.

For the purpose of this study Parker's (2005) views assisted the researcher with data transcription. As Parker (2005) pointed out, it is important to indicate who is speaking, and what is emphasised in the participant's speech; an explanation of occurrences in the context could be provided in the transcript. The researcher included brief explanations in some of the children's narratives. Parker (2005) noted that when a participant raises their voices or shouts, words could be typed in capital letters and hesitation could be marked with round brackets around the space including the number of seconds. This procedure enriched the children's narratives.

In this study the wording of some of the children was unclear; Parker (2005) suggested that when children's speech is 'unclear' brackets could be used around the word 'unclear' to indicate the researcher's inability to transcribe it. According to Parker (2005) square brackets could indicate when there have been other occurrences such as laughter; the material in brackets explained what happened in the context and formed an integral part of data interpretation. Parker (2005) also explains that the transcription process could contain highlighted and extracted themes necessary for the data analysis. The themes highlighted during the data transcription assisted the researcher with the data analysis and interpretation.

Even though the children's artwork was not analysed for the purpose of this study, it could still play a supportive role with regards to the narrative inquiry sessions. Walker (2007) considers drawings as a natural method of inquiry for school-age children, as

they are familiar with drawing in a school context and other settings. For the purpose of this study only the children's narratives would be analysed and not their artwork. Brewer (2000, p.105) suggested that analysis links to the researcher becoming aware of existing relationships between the "patterns, categories and descriptive units". The data needs to be categorised before the researcher is able to interpret it, to extract recurrent themes expressed in the children's narratives. Rossman and Rallis (2003) emphasised that the researcher needs to be engrossed in the data gathered.

The researcher needs to allow participants to voice their own perspectives in their narrative drawings. According to Henning and his associates (2004, p.5) qualitative research refers to "the type of inquiry in which the qualities, the characteristics or the properties of a phenomenon are analysed in order to gain a suitable understanding and explanation". There is room for unique findings in qualitative research; therefore it is important to be aware of individual differences between the participants during data interpretation and analysis.

Thematic Content Analysis: According to Terre Blanche et al., (2006) Thematic Content Analysis is an interpretive analysis method. Thematic Content Analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation in this study. Henning et al., (2004) noted that the researcher's personal knowledge and understanding would greatly contribute to the research process and outcome. In other words the meaning the researcher derives from the data influences its interpretation.

As Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) indicate, Thematic Content Analysis requires that the researcher be immersed in the data through continuously reflecting on the findings during the research process. Thematic Content Analysis would be valuable to

highlight constructed meanings grouped into themes and categorise them in relation to the children's experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. According to Geertz (cited in Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006, p. 321), interpretive analysis aims to provide dense descriptions related to the "characteristic process, transaction and context that constitutes the phenomenon". Data interpretation should be relevant and descriptive of the specific research context. Guidelines for Thematic Content Analysis would be described according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) as follows:

- **Familiarisation and immersion:** During this analysis phase the researcher should already have some understanding of the data's meaning (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). It is important to reread the text enough times to know what the content contains and what possible types of interpretations are supported by the data (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The researcher needs to be aware of discrepancies in the data and the underlying meanings of children's stories. Terre Blanche et al., (2006) noted that it is beneficial to remain close to the data and interpret it from an empathetic understanding as part of interpretive data analysis.
- **Inducing themes:** According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p.141) this phase links to "induction" which entails to "infer general rules or classes from specific instances". Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p.141) laid emphasis on the necessity to "determine what the organising principles are that 'naturally' underlie" the data. Categories used in this phase would contain important themes, thereby making labels in relation to each participant's narratives more relevant to the research participants and context (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

In this phase of analysis the researcher should not simply re-write the content, but be aware of the process and emerging contradictions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Contradictions should not be overlooked as these could entail profound meanings relative to the research findings. Terre Blanche et al., (2006) insisted that the researcher should focus on the research aims during data analysis. The categorisation of themes could only be done once the researcher had familiarised herself with the data. According to Fischer (2006) the main themes with underlying sub-themes used for data categorisation are interrelated and form part of visible data patterns.

- **The coding phase:** It is crucial for the researcher to mark different sections of the data as being relevant to some of the chosen or highlighted themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher could “code a phrase, a line, a sentence or paragraph, through identifying these textual bits through virtue of their containing material that pertains to the themes under consideration” (Terre Blanche et al., 2008, p.324). The themes under consideration form an overall umbrella under which the remaining content could be organised.

Terre Blanche et al., (2006, p.362) refer to coding as “breaking down a body of data (text domain) into labelled, meaningful pieces, with a view to later clustering the ‘bits’ of coded material together under the code heading and further analysing them both as a cluster and in relation to other clusters.” Different fragments of the data cannot be viewed in isolation; it is necessary for the researcher to understand how different themes are intertwined. Additionally, Terre Blanche and his associates (2006) explain how themes that are constructed in relation to coding would change in the coding process as the researcher gains a

more in-depth understanding of the relation between various themes. It would be necessary for the researcher to integrate different themes in a meaningful and easily comprehensible way.

- **The elaboration phase:** Terre Blanche et al., (2006) emphasise that during the elaboration phase it is vital for the researcher to attentively explore themes grouped together under main and sub themes; a more-in-depth exploration of these themes could elaborate. They also (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p.362) point out that the aim of this process is to, “capture the finer nuances of meaning not captured by your original coding”. In the same reference they encourage the researcher to continue with the “coding, elaborating and recording until no further new significant insights appear to emerge”.
- **Interpretation and checking:** Terre Blanche and his associates (2006) noted the importance of paying special attention to discrepancies, contradictions and weak areas that might still be present in the data during this final phase. They also emphasise that it is important for the researcher to evaluate her role during the data collection phase, and to reflect on how she influenced the data gathering and analysis process. Parker (2005) noted even though Thematic Content Analysis includes categorisation, it is still necessary to be sensitive to the meaning of terminology found in the narratives. This relates to the epistemological approach of social constructivism as it focuses on meanings individuals attribute to certain narratives by means of constructing their world.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The aim of this study was explained to the children and their parents/caregivers before they signed written consent forms. It is important for them to know what this study entailed before giving consent. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) the researcher needs to prepare participants as much as possible for the narrative inquiry sessions that would be conducted. The research participants should voluntarily agree to participate in the study and not view it as compulsory.

The researcher ensured that the caregivers or parents of research participants sign a consent form to provide consent for the children's participation and audio recordings of their stories. The placement where this research was conducted was requested to give permission for the research to be conducted within this specific setting. None of the collected information would ever be made known except in the case of severely destructive behaviour, where it would be imparted only to caregivers/parents in an ethical way. All information gathered would be kept confidential as privacy and confidentiality relates to the safeguarding and protection of the participants' identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Pseudonyms would be used instead of children's real names to protect their identities. Information obtained during this study would be kept between the researcher, the participants and her research-supervisor, as outlined in the written consent form.

With regard to the above: properly allocated rooms were used for the narrative drawing and inquiry sessions, to ensure that research participants felt comfortable. If any of the research participants decided not to further participate in this study they were able to withdraw from this research process at any time. In such an instance no benefits from the school would be withheld from them. A parent/caregiver who desired to receive

feedback based on the research findings could communicate with the researcher. The after care centre would receive a report from the researcher with a summary of the emerging themes.

The method of sampling was fair and this research was conducted to benefit participants and not to cause them harm, and indeed in on-going respect for the participants. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) stated that it is important to be aware that participants might feel vulnerable or exposed when sharing intense personal experiences. The researcher provided therapeutic support to any of the children requiring it throughout the research process as well as afterwards.

4.6 Conclusion

A detailed plan of how the research was conducted has been described. The data gathering and analysis procedures have been stipulated. The practicalities of conducting the research were explored to ensure that this research would be viable to achieve the aims as set out in Chapter 1 on page 7. The presentation and analysis of the findings are furnished in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The research methodology has been explained in Chapter 4. In this chapter the narratives of eight research participants will be presented and analysed. The overall themes, interpretation of the findings and contribution of this study to the body of literature will be discussed in Chapter 6 that entails the interpretation of results. To capture the richness and diversity of the stories the researcher provides an individual description of the narratives of eight participants.

5.2 Biographical information

The narratives of eight children between the age of six and twelve years old were analysed. With regards to race, five of the children were black, two were mixed race, and one was white. Four were girls and four were boys; two of them told their stories in English and the other six narrated theirs in Afrikaans.

5.3 Descriptions of the narratives of eight individual participants

5.3.1 Participant 1: Mia's narratives

Mia is a very talkative girl who told her story with ease during the narrative inquiry sessions. A need for one-on-one interaction and individual attention seemed to be present. It appeared to be significant for Mia that a context was provided for her where she could speak freely. She appreciated it that her story was listened to. She was helpful and cooperative. Mia was always excited about creating her artwork and enjoyed painting immensely. She was lively, spoke at a rapid pace, and told very elaborative, descriptive and detailed stories. Mia narrated her story in Afrikaans.

Loneliness. The main character in her stories often remained behind alone at home. It appears as though relationship expectations with regard to significant others are not met and that this could contribute to the experience of loneliness. Children's internal working models entail relationship expectations (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). The family members in Mia's stories do not appear to be available when the main character requires support: this leads to loneliness, disappointment and exclusion that influences relationship expectations. Buss (1999) and Matsushima and Shiomi (2001) made it clear that expectations about oneself and others influence the quality of relationships and could contribute to loneliness. Mia said the following:

“Mam she sits in the, her father and mother agghh (sigh) kids and them, and the mother walked away mam (sigh). Now she is alone mam and she cannot reach the stove mam, because she is too little.”

Emotional deprivation. The main character in Mia's story is aware that she is unable to care for her crucial needs independently; important emotional and physical needs appear to be neglected. Neglect could result in emotional deprivation, which seems to be more pronounced when the mother figure is absent and the main character needs to rely on the care of an older sibling. Neglect of physical needs was present as she emphasised hunger in her story. She said the following:

“Because I did not eat, how many times have I not eaten? Then I said, I forgot, two more days I have not eaten. Her mother screams at her sister! Her sister got a hiding! You are rude, you don't have manners! You must make for the child, mother. How Rinkie's, Rinkie's sister did not, she gave her 50 cent to only buy a banana. That she can only buy a banana. I was so hungry, I ate all my chocolates! And she for

herself, for herself she packed food and she did not pack food for me. I was hungry the whole day. She did not know I was hungry and when she came she did not worry.”

Emotional distance. The main character in her narratives has a close bond with some siblings, while sibling rivalry and emotional distance is present in relation to other siblings. As Dunn (2004b) emphasised, sibling interactions entail strong emotions, which could be negative, positive or ambivalent. Emotional distance in relation to sibling rivalry seems to be a painful experience as Mia said:

“Rinkie’s sister was VERY angry at Rinkie and then Rinkie cried.”

“Very sad, she screamed at her sister. Her sister does not even worry!”

Rejection. According to Howe and Recchia, (2006) age variations between siblings could entail that siblings strive for power and control, which causes sibling rivalry. In Mia’s story a coalition is formed between younger siblings in an attempt to exclude and reject the older sibling and gain more power within the relationship. Howe and Recchia (2006) observed that power struggles between siblings could make it tough for parents to control children; sibling rivalry entails the concern of differential parental treatment. Mia said the following:

“Her sister jumps in the air and says hooray brother, sister. Where is big sister?”

She says, she will not live with us! “

Verbal aggression. According to Dodge et al., (2006) and Tremblay (2004), more opportunities for interaction with siblings could lead to more aggressive outbursts. Verbal aggression is present in name-calling directed towards the older sister. The following comments in Mia’s story were directed towards the older sister:

“There comes spit out of her, she’s a bit crazy. And she does not understand her, she talks rubbish.”

The need for emotional closeness. An overburdened mother might not treat all her children in an equally fair manner. Jenkins et al., (2003) made the point that when parents are stressed they might not treat all their children in an equal manner and this is often due to financial concerns, marital conflict, the pressure of caring for several children, or single parenthood. Berk (2009) made a similar observation. The mother figure in Mia’s stories seems overburdened. The main character experiences a strong need for affirmation and attention from the mother figure. Bowlby (1969) indicated that attachments with primary caregivers are crucial during childhood. Mia said the following:

“Although she can see mam, mam and mam they make her old, and she has a baby mam.”

“She can with the baby, she cannot wash him mam, because she struggles, she struggles to walk, then she sends Rinkie’s sister to do so.”

Emotional closeness. The younger sibling in Mia’s stories provided emotional support for the main character. The younger sibling who showed an awareness of the main character’s needs displayed empathy. According to Howe and Rinaldi (2004) intimate knowledge between siblings could provide a context where siblings emotionally support each another. Mia said the following with regards to the younger sister:

“Her mother, ah no her little sister. She says Rinkie you don’t have to worry!”

Social isolation. Differences in appearance led to peer rejection in Mia's stories. The opinions of peers are significant as previous findings indicated that rejection contributes to distress, peer exclusion and social isolation (Dodge, 1983; Dodge, Coie, & Brakke, 1982). Children could be socially isolated due to peer rejection. As mentioned earlier, according to Greenspan (1993) social comparison and self-esteem is influenced by opinions of others as well as how children fit in with peers and friends. Mia described the following:

“OUTSIDE, she and her friends played nicely, what her friends wanted she did. What her friends wanted she did and then she did it and then her friends was nice with her. They were very ugly with her.”

“They were just ugly because Rinkie dressed nicely, she was never dirty. That's why they were ugly.”

Peer acceptance. The main character responds empathetically towards other peers who are rejected or excluded. Her narratives entail a strong awareness of the emotional experiences of other children. Berk (2009) suggested that children should be aware of other people's emotions and experiences to respond empathetically. Gest et al., (2001) noted that to be able to form and sustain friendships empathy, perspective taking and intimacy is required and this relates to social competence. Emotional connectedness could assist children with social competence. Mia said:

“When she sees a friend, another friend does not have a friend she will call him to come and play along with them. Then she asks him, do you steal? Then she says no. If she says yes she says to her sorry I am not going to play with you, then she says I will play with you but you must not steal.”

5.3.2 Participant 2: Lea’s narratives

Lea was a very talkative young girl. During the narrative inquiry sessions she told lengthy and detailed stories. She was exceptionally energetic and sociable, and enjoyed group interaction. She spoke at a rapid pace, and was very cooperative and enthusiastic during all the narrative inquiry sessions. Lea narrated her story in English.

Lea initially described the interaction of three cats and noted that she was the main character in her story. Conflict and tensions arose between the cats in Lea’s narratives. Children who are cooperative with a pleasing temperament have a higher capacity to handle conflict (Berk, 2009). Lea described the following:

“Mam it is about, the triangles, they fight over, over the triangles mam.”

Emotional closeness. Connection through communication is important for emotional closeness in significant relationships. Lea described telephonic communication, which could assist children in relationships where others do not reside in close proximity. Telephonic communication forms an integral part of children’s language development (Berk, 2009).

Lea described close spiritual connections with the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Berk (2006) noted that children in middle childhood could come up with very intricate religious and

spiritual ideas that could be viewed as well-built moral forces in their lives. Lea said the following:

“Mam, what I mam, things I like mam. It is mmm, what do you call it mam the Holy Spirit.”

“When I pray I can. When I, when I pray then I speak to Jesus.”

Loss. Lea described a connection with a face in her story. The purpose of the face is to warn family members of possible danger, such as a thief who intends to steal their valuable belongings. This could indicate childhood fears in relation to possible harm and loss (Greenspan, 1993). Lea said the following in relation to the face:

“Sometimes my grandmother will ask him.”

“It tells you who steals, and who does this, this, this.”

“Yes mam. Mam and then they closed the window, and then that thief came again and he wanted to break the window, and then he did not want to anymore. He was afraid we will catch him”.

Lea described that the home circumstances of the family improved due to having more money and material possessions. As mentioned earlier, previous research suggests fewer material resources could cause resentment in children and adjustment difficulties (Dunn, 2004b; Tamrouti-Makkink et al., 2004). Lea’s stories contained a strong emotional component in relation to possessing money and material resources; in her words:

“They, they want to make angry, they have money.”

“They have a house now mam, a nice house and they stay in the house. They, they do not take rotten bread. They have food now mam.”

“Mam they watch TV and they “like” to watch TV mam, very much mam.

5.3.3 Participant 3: Jay’s narratives

Jay was very cooperative during the narrative inquiry and drawing sessions. He was not especially talkative and appeared somewhat withdrawn at times. He followed the given instructions, and remained calm and relaxed. He expressed strong opinions during the narrative inquiry sessions with regards to different people and situations. He narrated his story in Afrikaans.

Belonging. The main character in Jay’s story was his uncle, who is his mother’s brother. Jay described a very close bond with his uncle, niece and nephew. Jay’s story revolved around activities he engaged in along with his uncle, niece and nephew. He seems to experience a sense of belonging in relation to these family members. Dockett and Perry (2005a, 2005b) considered that connectedness with others provide support for children. Security and comfort seems to be present in the close attachment bond with the uncle, who is concerned about the children’s care and protection. Jay said the following:

“He is just looking, just that we are playing safely”

The uncle seems to be idealised and regarded as a role model. According to Berk (2009) boys strongly identify with the masculine role during middle childhood. Jay’s narratives indicate identification with this role and associated activities as he described playing rugby, going fishing and riding motorbikes. Children could learn valuable social skills through modelling behaviour. Berk (2009) remarked that children imitate the behaviour

of significant others through modelling. According to Berk (2006) gender connectedness could lead to higher levels of delight and fulfilment with oneself. The experience of enjoyment and satisfaction appears to be present during group activities in Jay's stories.

Jay said the following:

"We're just going to go for a ride on the motorbikes."

"Mam here I've done this; they always play rugby and there he's got the ball in his hands."

Emotional closeness. Jay mentioned that he knows his uncle; this could link to self-disclosure in relation to emotional closeness. Newcomb et al., (1999) established that intimacy; self-disclosure, affection and openness would increase in children's relationships and friendships, as they get older. Jay said the following, in relation to his uncle:

"It is only my uncle, I know him."

Loss. There seems to be an emotional awareness in relation to the experience of loss in Jay's stories. Jay described that his nephew and cousin shared similar emotional experiences in relation to losing something of great value. He said the following:

"We played with it, we threw, we threw it to one another and I dropped it and then it was missing."

"I didn't feel so good mam".

"He also didn't feel so well".

"She also did not feel so good".

Emotional distance and social isolation. Emotional withdrawal and social isolation seem to occur after the experience of loss. Jay described how he withdrew from others and watched television alone; only later did a desire emerge to change his situation. Campos et al., (2004) and Saarni et al., (2006) argued that emotions could lead to the desire to either maintain or change the situation in relation to what is regarded as important. Internalisation of a problem could enhance social isolation when distress or negative emotions are experienced (Klein, 1994). As mentioned previously, negative experiences could be disadvantageous for children's development as feelings of insecurity and unworthiness may lead to problem internalisation, loneliness and social isolation (Granot & Mayeseless, 2001, Kerns, Klepac & Cole, 1996). Jay said:

“Mam I just went and sat in the house and watched TV the whole time.”

Connectedness through play. Joint activities seem to be a strong point of connection where attachment bonds are established. According to Russ (2004) the activity of play could initiate or facilitate children's problem solving skills, and this may lead to greater insight and encourage different thinking abilities. In Jay's stories he used problem-solving skills and strategically planned how he could replace the lost item. There still seems to be a fear present, of losing the valuable item again, as he said:

“Yes mam a little bit better. I then decided to save my money to buy myself another one.”

“And (sigh) we ALMOST lost that one too but then we JUST got it again”.

There was a contradiction in his story as he described that it was difficult to replace certain lost valuables, although Jay mentioned that they had replaced the lost item with

something similar. This indicated difficulties with replacement of a valuable item in its entirety, especially when the object carried great significance. Life-like qualities was attributed to the object, as indicated previously this is referred to as animistic thinking (Piaget cited in Berk, p. 241). There seems to be hope and wishful thinking with regards to finding what was lost again in Jay's words:

"I somehow hoped that it will come back".

"No mam they just wished that they could get another one like that. He was the best thing that ever looked after us".

5.3.4 Participant 4: Nico's narratives

Nico was a very friendly, talkative and active child. He was curious about the other children's narrative inquiry sessions. He enjoyed the narrative drawings and having his own space during the one-on-one narrative inquiry sessions. He would mostly finish his drawings first. Nico told his story in Afrikaans.

Loss. Nico's story was about his brother who had died in a violent manner. He mentioned that he was very fond of this brother. Loss occurred in the relationship that ended with his father as well, due to his death. Nico said the following about his father and brother:

"With the house, and my father is DEAD."

"He just made a plant. Then they came, uhmm those people they held a knife. Then they cut him like so."

Emotional closeness. There seems to be the presence of strong sibling connections and positive interactions. According to Berk (2006, p.582), "because of the frequency and

emotional intensity, sibling interactions become unique contexts in which social competence expands.” In Nico’s story it appears as though his older brother in the story provided support and care for him. According to Tucker and his associates (2001), both members of sibling pairs would often offer each other help with family issues.

Loneliness. There seems to be some concern about experiencing loneliness as a consequence of death and loss of significant relationships. The fear of abandonment or of being left alone if other family members die emerged in his story. Weiss (1974, 1989) regarded loneliness as not having close attachment bonds with significant others. In Nico’s words:

“Yes, then my brother took a knife and they are going to cut Jessie, and Tjokker and my mother”.

Emotional deprivation and social isolation. The experience of emotional disconnectedness seems to lead to emotional deprivation in his story; important relationships with significant others in the main character’s life came to an end in his story. According to Feeny and Noller (1996) attachment figures and care giving are crucial to form loving relationships. The father figure in his story seems to have experienced social isolation due to his anger. Nico said:

“My father he, he was ANGRY, he lived alone at the house.”

Physical aggression. Violent acts that consisted of cutting and mostly ended in death are described in Nico’s story. Nico mentioned how the father figure instructed him to engage in aggressive acts, and he had to obey these instructions. There seems to be forceful discipline present in relation to the father figure’s anger. Children could model

aggressive behaviour of parents (Berk, 2009). As described earlier, aggressive behaviour of children could occur due to forceful discipline (Dodge et. al., 2006). According to Berk (2009, p. 517), “boys are more likely than girls to be targets of harsh, inconsistent discipline because they are more active and impulsive and therefore harder to control”. Nico said:

“And then my dad said, that I, that I have to listen to him.”

“My father did, my father hey, and then my brother came, and then came my brother hey. Then my brother helped my dad”.

“I did, I cut a head.”

Emotional distance. There seems to be the experience of emotional distance in relation to significant family members who had died. Nico wrote down the names of family members in the concluding part of his story. The remembrance of names is significant as it relates to identity, and often carries strong associations or connotations. The death of a sibling is linked to the remembrance of the person: as Balk (1981, p.288) mentions, “You can never forget somebody you are that close to all your life”.

5.3.5 Participant 5: Andy’s narratives

Andy was a calm boy who spoke with a soft tone of voice. He enjoyed the one-on-one interaction in the narrative inquiry sessions, particularly showing his drawings to the researcher. Andy was obedient and cooperative during the sessions. He enjoyed focusing on his own activities. He was quiet in relation to most of the other very talkative children. He would be thorough in completing his drawings and took a great deal of time. He was a friendly child with a very respectful manner. He told his story in English.

Emotional closeness. Andy said he was the main character in his story. The desire to receive attention, nurturance and care from significant people when feeling unwell was present in his narratives. It seems important to receive involvement and support from the mother figure with regards to situations that are uncomfortable such as being ill and experiencing pain. According to Dockett and Perry (2005a, 2005b) connectedness with others provides support for children. Berk (2009) indicated that parenting would influence children's empathy and sympathy. Andy said his pain diminished as he received care, empathy and support from the mother figure. In his words:

"I am very sick and my head hurts."

"I slept on the bed the whole time, and I ate energy food. "

Connectedness through play. Fantasy and pretend play with a friend at school were described in Andy's story. He described the magical abilities of one of his friends. Sawyer (1997) noted that social pretend play provides a context for young children to work through fears and emotional issues. Make-believe play could assist children in overcoming childhood fears. Similarly Eckerman (1996) emphasised that pretend play is important to establish and built closer peer relationships. In Andy's story pretend play assisted him in forming closer friendship bonds. He said the following:

"Yes, she is my friend. She plays with me at school".

"She takes her magic stick and she does a lot of things with it".

"Like, she can a, a, a rock, she takes it up what she sat on the ground, she makes that she turned into a rabbit."

Make-believe and pretend play is beneficial for children's development and friendships. Make-believe play contributes to children's emotional understanding (Youngblade & Dunn, 1995), and assists them with integrating different emotional experiences (Piaget, 1951). Pro-social behaviour emerged in Andy's narratives when he said:

“Then I tell them to play in the sandpit. When they are finished then they dig and dig, then they find toys, presents and sweets and pretty stuff, Mam.”

Peer acceptance. Andy's narratives indicate an awareness and acceptance of his friend's perspectives and abilities that differ from his own. According to Berk (2009) children's interaction with many different peers could assist them in their awareness of viewpoints of other children that diverge from their own.

Emotional closeness. According to Bagwell et al., (2001) and Buwkosi (2001), close friendships may help children to enhance their concern and support for one another; this could increase empathy, sympathy and positive pro-social behaviour in relationships. Strong sibling bonds with his sister and brother were described. The connection with the older brother seems to be significant, even though the brother works far away from home. In Andy's words:

“I play with him, and he shows me his phone. He always plays with me”.

Connectedness through play. This indicates the presence of play as an activity for emotional connections with siblings. The establishment of closer family bonds could encourage family cohesiveness. According to Olson (1993) cited in Walsh (1998, p.84) cohesiveness can be defined as “the emotional bonding of family members with one another”.

5.3.6. Participant 6: Lienkie's narratives

Lienkie was a very neat looking and helpful girl. She assisted in handing out art materials for the research sessions. She was friendly and cooperative and enjoyed drawing. She was supportive of other children and had strong leadership skills. Lienkie followed the given instructions and supported the other children. During the narrative inquiry sessions Lienkie mostly gave short answers and did not elaborate extensively when narrating her story. She laughed often and seemed to enjoy school. During the drawing sessions it was vital for her to sit next to her two close friends. Lienkie told her story in Afrikaans.

In Lienkie's stories, establishing a sense of identity seems to be important. The positive attributes of the main character were emphasised such as being smart. As noted earlier, children's self-concept development entails that they emphasise their positive and negative attributes (Berk, 2009). Lienkie said the following when describing her story:

“Mam, it's about a smart cat mam.”

Self Acceptance. Positive attributes link to having a positive attitude towards the self and assist with developing a positive self-esteem. This could enhance confidence in one's own abilities. Parker et al., (2006) indicated that children's internal perspective encourages inquisitiveness, enthusiasm and a positive affect. Berk (2009) added that self-esteem links to judgements people make about a person and this evokes certain feelings. Positive self-esteem could form a foundation to encourage development of children's autonomy, because they need to learn to trust in their own judgements and abilities. Parker et al., (2006) noted that children develop greater self-worth and value

when consistent accessible care and support for autonomy is present in significant relationships.

In Lienkie's story the cats often roamed around freely in the streets whenever they chose to. This could indicate the desire to make more decisions independently. Berk (2009) suggested that children should be allowed to be more autonomous and parents need to lessen control of children to encourage autonomy. Having the ability to make decisions and express the acquired knowledge seems to be important as Lienkie said the following:

“Mam he knows everything mam.”

Connectedness through play. The smart cat seems to connect with others through joint enjoyable activities such as play. As Bagwell et al., (2001) and Bukowski (2001) noted, secure friendships present opportunities for children to discover themselves and develop a meaningful understanding of another individual; friendships also support children's development of self-concept, point of view and identity. As she put it:

“Mam it's the cat's friend mam, and he stands next to the dustbin mam.”

“Mam they play together.”

Peer acceptance. In all her stories there seems to be a strong theme of connection with other cats seen as friends. Children may experience acceptance when they are supported and cared for in friendships. According to Buysse et al., (2002) friendships are important for children during middle and early childhood. Bagwell et al., (2001) and Bukowski (2001) established that satisfactory friendships contribute to children's psychological wellbeing and competency level. The strong emotional connections in Lienkie's

narratives could contribute to establishing a positive self-concept. A friendship is a very important cornerstone in children's support structure; it appears as though she has a strong reliance on friends.

Belonging. An environment of safety and comfort seems to be provided in which affectionate needs are fulfilled through belonging. According to Berk (2009) friendships in middle childhood could be viewed as jointly agreed-upon connections; in friendships children are fond of each other's personal qualities and respond to each other's needs. There is the experience of being invited to play with others in a group; as she said:

"They say can you, can you play with us?"

Emotional closeness. A close bond with a specific friend that has been sustained over a period of time was described. By repeating the word "many" Lienkie emphasised the duration of the friendship as long standing. Burgess et al., (2006) reported that children with intimate and close bonds in relation to others could process social information constructively and respond with an approach that will sustain friendships. The smart cat is described as being with a friend and never walks the streets alone. Lienkie mentioned that the cats receive care and affection from another lady who often feeds them, and said the following about the cat's friend and lady:

"Mam they WALK together, mam".

"Mam they will climb onto her mam".

Lienkie commented in relation to the length of the friendship:

"Mam for MANY, for MANY days mam".

5.3.7. Participant 7: Luke's narratives

Luke spoke with a soft tone of voice, and appeared to be somewhat shy and withdrawn. He quietly undertook his own drawing activity. During the narrative inquiry sessions he took quite some time to answer questions in relation to his drawings. Luke told his story in Afrikaans.

Loss. There seems to be fear present in relation to losing valuable belongings. The moral dilemma with regards to stealing is present in Luke's narratives. According to Berk (2009, p.484) moral development could be "viewed as a matter of internalization: adopting social standards for right action as one's own." Luke seems to have an awareness of socially appropriate behaviour and loss. Attachment theory indicates caregivers should provide a safety-regulating system to reduce the risk of someone close to that person coming to harm (Bowlby 1969). Strong attachment bonds between parents and children could help the latter to feel less afraid or insecure in relation to possible harm. As Bowlby (1969) pointed out, children need an attachment structure to provide support and protection during distress. Luke said:

"For the people that will come and steal their things."

Physical aggression. Luke's narratives indicate physical aggression directed from the monkey towards the woman in his story. Conflict and tension emerged in these narratives. There seems to be frustration at not being able to voice underlying anger. The monkey in his story bit the woman because he could not speak. Underlying feelings of anger seem to be expressed non-verbally. If significant caregivers in children's lives label and explain emotions it could assist them with their emotional understanding and expression (Fivush & Haden, 2005; Laible & Song, 2006). Luke's narratives indicate

that if someone causes harm to another person punishment will occur. The monkey was obliged to attend court due to his behaviour. Luke described this as follows:

“The woman slapped the monkey.”

“The monkey had, had almost bit her, and then came that woman and then the monkey bit him here (Shows me on his cheek)”

“Because he was at the monkey court.”

Social isolation. The response of the monkey being hit was to withdraw by going into a tree. This could indicate that fear causes withdrawal and social isolation. As noted earlier, the outcome of exposure to violent trauma during this age could lead to withdrawal, isolation, aggression, fears and impairment in initiative (Rudenberg et al., 1998). It seems as though the monkey was severely punished by the father figure for misbehaviour, as Luke said that:

“He hit the monkey, and then the monkey went into a tree.”

“Mam, this one mam. This was the DAD, and the dad hit the monkey until it fell.”

“And then came the lion and he ate the monkey.”

Rejection. Rejection was present in Luke’s narratives as the monkey was severely rejected and eventually eaten by a stronger animal, namely the lion. The lion is regarded as the strongest and most powerful character in the story; it also killed the father figure in the story. According to Hubbard (2001) rejected children expressed more anger and non-verbal sadness. Anger directed towards the father figure is presented in Luke’s words:

“And then they became angry. They were angry at the dad.”

“And the lion, the lion bit the dad.”

“And then, and then he was dead.”

Fear due to the aggression was displayed as well as danger leading to death. According to Berk (2009) school-age children find it difficult to regulate uncomfortable emotions provoked by developing their self-worth and through gaining more knowledge about their world/context. There seems to be fear of loss of significant relationships through aggression and death. The need to defend one against aggressive acts is present as Luke said the following:

“And she kicked, and slapped and then the woman ran away.”

Emotional distance. The woman figure who ran away could indicate the presence of withdrawal, which leads to emotional distance, especially when difficult or challenging circumstances arise. Withdrawal could be a coping mechanism in threatening situations, to find safety and get away from fear. Berk (2009) noted that children employ certain strategies to regulate the intensity of their emotional reactions, through emotional self-regulation, to a level that is comfortable for them in an attempt to reach their goals. Berk (2009) suggested children’s interactions with parents, peers, and teachers assist them to express negative emotions in a way that could bring forth the required response in others.

5.3.8 Participant 8: Kaylin’s narratives

Kaylin was calm and relaxed during the narrative inquiry and drawing sessions. She waited patiently and worked cooperatively with the other children. She had a small voice and was not overly talkative. She had a close friendship with another talkative girl at the

school. She displayed a positive attitude with regards to the narrative drawings, appeared to enjoy the one-on-one interaction a great deal and was a joyful child who smiled often. Kaylin told her story in Afrikaans.

Kaylin's story revolves around a happy heart. When the researcher inquired about what the heart does she replied:

"She laughs".

"She loves me."

Emotional closeness. It seems as though a strong emotional connection is shared with the heart in her story. According to Berk (2009) a strong and affectionate attachment bond with significant people often leads to enjoyment during interaction. Michalik et al., (2007) and Strayer and Roberts (2004a) reported that parents who show warmth encourage children's emotional expressiveness and teach them to behave emphatically in relation to the distress of other children. Warmth and love seem to be present in the relationship described by Kaylin, especially when she refers to the mother figure:

"She is the MOTHER."

"She just says she loves me VERY, VERY, VERY much."

"She says she wants to kiss me".

Acceptance. The heart seems to be a significant figure that provides support and acceptance. Love and physical affection appear in social interactions with the heart, and the heart affirms the positive attributes of the main character. Positive affirmations could assist children in building up a positive self-concept. Berk (2009) pointed out that children's self-concepts entail their abilities and beliefs about themselves. The mother

figure provides a context of safety, security and love. Weiss (1982) suggested attachment bonds would emerge in relationships of emotional significance; these relationships are crucial for a person's sense of security and emotional stability. According to Ainsworth et al., (1978) some of the close associations between a mother's responsiveness and children's security entailed sensitivity, accessibility, acceptance and cooperation from the mother in relation to the child. Acceptance, sensitivity and accessibility seem to be present in interactions described in Kaylin's words:

"She is good to me."

"She says, she says to me you are the best child that one gets."

Peer Acceptance. It seems as though acceptance is experienced from peers. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995) children desire to experience acceptance in peer relationships and want to avoid rejection; there is a strong desire to belong. Kaylin mentioned the names of specific games, and it appears as though these games are mostly linked to group activities. As Parker et al., (2006) noted, the period of late childhood (ages six to nine years) is unique in that there is an increase in children's need for peer acceptance. This could indicate why children often engage in play that involves bigger groups.

Belonging. The friends in Kaylin's stories had girls' names; this could indicate friendships and belonging to a group of same-sex peers. According to Maccoby (1998), children seem to have a more positive approach to same-sex peers; this could be observed during play as their behaviour will often be in line with preferences for their own sex. Kaylin's stories indicated a theme of fantasy and pretend play related to girls as she said:

“She sees a star and....”“And a princess.”

Connectedness through play. The princess and the star could be linked to fantasy or symbolic play. Singer (1981) argued that play could be an externalisation of children’s imagined fantasies; it enables children to explore their internal imaginations. The princess who plays with the butterfly could be an internal fantasy. Joy and satisfaction in relation to friendships seem to be experienced, especially from playing games. Russ (2004, p.4) suggested there is “comfort and enjoyment in play”; children seem to experience fulfilment during play.

5.4 Conclusion

The children’s unique narratives were presented in this chapter and analysed. Individual themes in the individual children’s narratives were highlighted in relation to their experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. The next chapter entails the interpretation of the data and contribution of the findings.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND INTEGRATION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

The data was presented and analysed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the data will be interpreted based on the social constructivist paradigm. The contribution of the findings to the greater body of literature will be described.

6.2 Discussion of overall themes

The research findings are grounded and interpreted based on social constructivism; therefore research participants were given an opportunity to voice their perspectives in relation to their uniquely constructed reality. According to Schutz (1962), the configuration of knowledge entails that people order and understand their experiences through a self constructed concept and context. From a social constructivist viewpoint the knowledge systems that the participants constructed socially are influenced by their specific context and history. Constructivism regards an individual's perception of reality as being equal to any other individual's perception, although these perceptions of reality are context specific (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996; Doan, 1997).

The children's narratives contained very rich descriptions of their experiences in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness. Although prominent themes that emerged in the overall findings of the research group will be discussed, it is still important to note that each participant had a very unique story. According to Stanton (2005) social constructivism recognises the existence of multiple perspectives on reality. It is important to allow for difference and diversity in the children's experiences as all their stories are regarded as being equally important and significant. The aim of this study is

not to solve participants' problems, but instead to give them an opportunity to make their voices heard through their narrative drawings. This indicated the necessity of providing a research context where children could freely express themselves. The social research context in which children created artwork and interacted with fellow peers influenced their drawing process and narrated meaning (Anning, 2002; Braswell & Callanan, 2003; Light, 1985; Richards, 2003; Thompson, 1999).

It was important for the researcher to be sensitive to the influence of the children's respective cultural contexts on their constructed narratives. In this research study, participants came from diverse cultural backgrounds. Gherardi (2000, p.213) stated that, "Knowledge like plants is alive, and then it can be talked about more like garden architecture as it becomes culturalized in different discourses." The participants' cultural experiences influenced the interpretation of their experiences and their knowledge construction.

The findings of this study revealed that even though all the research participants attended the same school context their experiences were distinctive. Schwandt (2000) demonstrated that people have subjective interpretations of the world; this is aligned with qualitative research approaches such as social constructivism. Neither the researcher nor the research participants had objective perspectives in relation to this research process; as their perspectives were influenced by the knowledge of themselves and their context. The overall themes that the researcher identified and interpreted are influenced by her subjective experiences and perspective. Special attention was paid to the children's perspectives and meaning that they portrayed in their unique stories.

The researcher extracted themes from the gathered data that will be described below. Prominent themes in relation to the children's experiences of emotional (dis)connectedness were loss, acceptance, rejection, belonging, social isolation, emotional distance, emotional deprivation, connectedness through play, emotional closeness, and loneliness.

6.2.1 Loss

Different aspects of loss emerged as a theme in the children's narratives. Various children described fear in relation to the loss of significant relationships and/or valuable belongings. Children during this developmental age are particularly vulnerable to stressors such as loss (Jensen & Shaw, 1993). The participants' narratives indicated a heightened sensitivity to the emotional experiences of loss.

Loss of significant relationships through death occurred in the research participants' stories. In some instances relationships ended through violent acts of death. According to Carey (1999 cited in Berk 2009, p.262) for children to understand death they need to "break down their global category of not alive into dead, inanimate, unreal and non-existent". Loss through death appears to be extremely difficult for children to deal with, especially if there had been a strong emotional bond with the (deceased) significant person or caregiver. Previous findings suggest loss could predispose children to future problems (Masten & Gewirtz, 2006; Sameroff, 2006).

Fear of abandonment due to parental loss emerged in the children's narratives. According to Pardeck and Pardeck (1998) many children experienced fear of loss with regard to who would care for them if their parents/caregivers were not present. An emotional expression of sadness and unresolved anger accompanied children's

experiences of loss. According to Bowlby (1969, 1973), if children are separated from parental figures despair and detachment might be experienced. Fear and anxiety was expressed in relation to losing something/someone valuable, and this emotion was enhanced with the expressed need for protection of significant others against harm. Bowlby (1989) suggested parental loss could cause depression and anxiety in children; caregivers should therefore provide protection and safety for children.

6.2.2 Acceptance

The desire for acceptance especially from peers and parents emerged as a theme in the children's narratives. In this study children described acceptance when warmth was present in significant relationships. Bowlby (1951, p.13) commented, "the young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment". Acceptance related to experiences of joy in the interaction described by children, particularly in relation to mother figures and peers. Warmth stemming from father figures was not described in the children's stories.

These stories implied that peer acceptance, particularly in friendships, led to closer emotional connectedness and stronger friendships. According to Asher and Parker (1989) children's friendships provide opportunities for playing, camaraderie and disclosure; and being able to form friendships that enhance children's self-worth. In the children's narratives acceptance in close friendship was described in association with positive emotional connotations while sharing experiences with friends appeared to be significant.

Previous researchers discovered the link between young children's security stemming from attachments with caregivers and positive peer interactions (Clark & Ladd, 2000; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif, 2001). In the children's narratives, descriptions of secure parental attachments related to peer acceptance. Children's narratives that entailed descriptions of insecure attachments also expressed the need and striving for acceptance in peer groups. Peer pressure in relation to acceptance emerged, especially with regards to the requirements for belonging to a specific friendship or peer group.

As Adler and Adler (1995) observed, children regarded as group leaders by their peers/teacher, would often exclude some children and include others; this could increase children's insecurity as regards peer acceptance and their social standing. Peer group acceptance and group social interactions were described in different participants' stories. Greenspan's (1993) study suggested that children's social standing, how they fit in with peers and social comparisons, influenced their definition of themselves. Opinions of close friends can be detrimental for children's self-esteem (Greenspan, 1993). Some of the children's stories entailed descriptions of the opinions of friends. Acceptance in relation to the inclusion of rejected or excluded children into peer groups through inviting such children to join play activities was present. High-quality friendships act as a safeguard for children against victimisation (Hodges et al. 1999).

Affirmation or the need for affirmation during acceptance from significant others emerged. According to Phillipsen (1999) cooperation, reciprocal affirmation and self-disclosure could assist children to sustain friendships and improve their sensitivity to the desires of friends. The children's stories contained descriptions of positive attributes of close friends; it appeared as though identifying positive attributes in themselves and others related to their identity discovery. Newman and Newman (2001) commented that

this kind of development often occurs on a one-on-one friendship level. Participants described the fact that significant others recognised their positive attributes and this enhanced the experience of acceptance.

According to Downey et al., (1998) during middle childhood, vulnerable children might replace their concern about acceptance with an extreme sensitivity to rejection. Different children expressed aggression in relation to rejection; the combination of rejection and aggressive tendencies in children could lead to problem externalisation. Bierman and Wargo (1995) suggested that peer acceptance could be advantageous to assist aggressive children in dealing with distress and with regulating negative emotions. Peer group acceptance could assist children with difficult home circumstances. Criss et al., (2002) explored the role of children's peer relationships in relation to family difficulties and problem externalisation; they discovered that despite family hardship, externalising behaviour did not apply to children who had large groups of friends.

Acceptance of another individual's autonomy and perspectives is important for children's emotional connectedness. The need for greater autonomy in relation to developing one's own perspectives and opinions emerged in the children's narratives. According to Berk (2009, p.573) autonomy contains two important components for children; "an emotional component where one relies more on their selves and less on their parents for support and guidance" and the "behavioural component where the child is allowed to make their own decisions independently by carefully weighing one's own judgement and the suggestions of others to arrive at a well-reasoned course of action" (Collins & Laurson, 2004; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Autonomy links to greater emotional maturity in relationships, and this includes the acceptance of different

opinions of others. Some of the children's narratives entailed the ability to accept different opinions from friends and this enhanced their acceptance.

6.2.3. Rejection

The theme of rejection in relation to peers, siblings, and parental figures or caregivers emerged in the children's narratives. Some children displayed an extreme sensitivity to peer rejection; this could be heightened due to their current developmental age. According to Parker et al., (2006) children who are very sensitive to peer rejection could react excessively when trivial disappointments occur and this in turn could compromise social relationships.

Children could often cope with experiences of rejection through problem internalisation or externalisation. As Parker et al., (2006) noted, if vulnerable children experience rejection this has the potential to amplify their problem internalisation and externalisation. Insecure attachment bonds encourage problem internalisation and externalisation (Granot & Mayseless, 2001; McCartney, Owen, Booth, Clarke-Stewart, & Vandell, 2004). The children's narratives in this study entailed externalisation with regards to aggressive acting out behaviour. Internalisation in the children's narratives often related to social isolation.

Passive, physical and verbal aggression in relation to rejection emerged in different children's stories. According to Berk (2009, p.617) rejected-aggressive children could be seen as children who "show severe conduct problems – high rates of conflict, physical and relational aggression". Berk (2009) added that such children often displayed deliberate aggressive acting-out behaviour; which leads to their disregard and avoidance by peers. This type of externalised behaviour could increase peer rejection.

Physical, verbal and relational aggression was present in the children's stories; aggression often led to experiences of rejection, emotional distance and peer avoidance. Berk (2009, p.514) referred to physical, verbal and relational aggression, reporting that *physical aggression* links to "harm others through physical injury – pushing, hitting, kicking or punching others". Physical aggression described in the children's narratives included acts of hitting, biting and cutting with knives. Berk (2009, p.514) indicated that *verbal aggression* refers to "harm others through threats of physical aggression, name-calling or hostile teasing". Verbal aggression in the children's narratives consisted of name-calling, teasing, rejection and the exclusion of peers or siblings.

Berk (2009, p.514) noted *relational aggression* could be seen as damaging "another's peer relationships through social exclusion, malicious gossip or friendship manipulation." Deliberate acts of social exclusion were present in the children's narratives. Relational aggression as a result of jealousy emerged in their narratives and this seemed to lead to peer exclusion and rejection. Friendships of aggressive girls often entail jealousy, quarrels, and disloyalty as situations with peers are manipulated; while friendships of aggressive boys entail anger, physical attacks, defiance and aggression in relationships (Bagwell & Coie, 2004; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Dishion, Andrews & Crosby, 1995). In this study jealousy occurred in relationships described by girls, while physical aggression and defiance was present in peer relations of boys.

Children's social interactions with parents could contribute to their aggressive behaviour. Previous research indicated that parental interactions which contain, "withdrawal, power-assertion, negative comments and emotions, physical punishment and inconsistent discipline are linked to aggression in early childhood" (cited in Berk, 2009, p.516, Bradford et. al, 2003, Crick & Nelson, 2002, Yang et al., 2004). Some

children described the aggressive behaviour of mother and/or father figures. Wilson and Gottman's (2002) studies on marital conflict revealed this could lead to the harsh treatment of children; when children modelled behaviours learned from aggressive parental figures they often encountered peer rejection. If some qualities are regarded as being unwanted by the peer group, children could be rejected. According to Parker et al., (2006) losing friendships could be stressful for children. Donnellan et al., (2005) remarked that children with adjustment difficulties rely strongly on peer affirmation and they could become aggressive.

The emotions that accompanied children's experiences of rejection in this study included sadness and anger. Anger could lead to aggression. In the view of Bierman (2004) children who engaged in regular verbal or physical aggressive behaviour during middle childhood could face more occurrences of peer rejection. Rejection described in the children's narratives often related to social withdrawal, social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Social and emotional withdrawal relates to emotional disconnectedness in important relationships. Problem internalisation could lead to further isolation and less support (Klein, 1994).

Parker et al., (2006) found that members of a specific peer group would decide that a specific child is undesirable, unsuitable or uninteresting. Social comparison in relation to children's acceptance or rejection in peer groups emerged in the children's narratives. Butler (1998) and Harter (2006) suggested children's awareness of their strengths and their weaknesses increase through social comparison. Jealousy caused competitiveness due to social comparison in the children's narratives, leading to experiences of rejection.

6.2.4. Belonging

A strong theme emerged in the children's narratives with regards to the importance of and need to belong in a family and peer group. The children expressed a strong need to establish deeper connections through belonging. Social constructivists recognise that knowledge is often constructed in a social context or group (Oxford, 1997; Dewey, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978, 1962). In the children's narratives it appeared as though belonging related to identity development and having a space, role or place. According to Newman and Newman (2001) children seek connection, and group inclusion provides them with an opportunity for identity development and self-expression. The experience of belonging could provide a secure environment for children. The findings of Geisthardt et al., (2002) and Overton and Rausch (2002) indicated that children's stress levels are less in peer friendships as this provides a sense of security for them.

As Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2002) reported, children often chose their peer group based on similar characteristics as shared characteristics provide a context for children to validate their social identity development. The members involved in the process of co-constructing reality will determine the meaning within the context and this meaning has the potential to become general knowledge for group members (Gergen 1991, 1994).

Regular contact with other children could assist children in forming stronger group cohesion and increase emotional connectedness. According to George and Hartmann (1996) children are more likely to identify children in their direct social context as friends than those with whom they have less contact. Many of the children's narratives entailed descriptions of friendships within their school context. According to Dockett and Perry (2005, p. 272) a "sense of belonging" is crucial for children's school adjustment.

6.2.5 Loneliness

There seems to be a strong theme of loneliness and the desire to form closer attachment bonds with significant figures in the children's narratives. According to Weiss (1974) loneliness relates to emotional deprivation in relationships. Many of the children described experiences of feeling lonely in relation to not receiving enough attention from significant figures, especially maternal and paternal figures. The need for physical affection was present in the children's narratives. Research findings regarding various ethnic groups revealed that warmth from mothers and physical affect from fathers such as hugging, cuddling, playing, soothing and verbal encouragement in a loving manner led to better cognitive, emotional, and social skills development in children (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2003).

The children's narratives entailed negative emotions, such as sadness, in relation to experiencing loneliness. Larose et al., (2002, p. 684) emphasised loneliness is a distressing and unpleasant experience for individuals. The children's narratives entailed descriptions of the need to experience more time with significant others, especially parental figures or caregivers, and when this was not possible loneliness was experienced. Research findings indicated a relationship between insecure attachment bonds and experiences of feeling lonely (Buss, 1999; DiTommaso et al., 2003; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2001).

For Weiss (1974, 1989) there is a differentiation between emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Social loneliness refers to a lack of social integration, consequently a sense of disconnectedness from others (Weiss, 1974, 1989). The children's narratives entailed descriptions of their struggles with social integration; this was often due to rejection and insecure attachment bonds with significant others. He indicates that there

seems to be a relationship between experiences of loneliness and children's ability to trust. Rotenberg et al., (2004) discovered that ten to eleven year old girls with low trust in peers were regarded as being lonelier than those who highly trusted peers; loneliness entails negative interpersonal experiences and mistrust.

Loneliness in the children's narratives was linked to emotional withdrawal, which intensified their experience of loneliness. In one of the children's stories loneliness was accompanied by neglect of physical and emotional needs. Anger was directed towards family members as a consequence of loneliness and exclusion. According to Gazelle and Ladd (2003) withdrawn or rejected children seem to experience more loneliness and social disconnection than popular children or children who are rejected but aggressive.

6.2.6 Emotional deprivation

An overall theme of emotional deprivation emerged in the children's narratives; as their emotional needs were not met by their relationships with caregivers or peers. This relates to children's internal relationship expectations, which form part of their internal working model (Bowlby, 1973). These relationship expectations could link to their manner of thinking and established schemes as described by Piaget (cited in Berk, 2009). According to Berk (2009) such a model influences their social interaction and it will have an impact on the children's fulfilment of their emotional needs. Children could determine their emotional needs through internal dialogues, which assist them in understanding their world (Vygotsky, 1987).

Children's experiences of emotional deprivation may lead to acting out behaviour and problem externalisation. Bowlby (1952, p.34) wrote, "there is a specific connection between prolonged deprivation in the early years and the development of an

affectionless psychopathic character given to persistent delinquent conduct and extremely difficult to treat". This indicates that emotional deprivation could influence children's temperament, character development and affection towards others in future relationships. According to Rothbart and Bates, (2006) (cited in Berk, 2009, p. 418) temperament links to "effortful control, the self-regulatory dimensions of temperament involves voluntary suppressing of a dominant response in order to plan and execute a more adaptive response".

Children who experience emotional deprivation due to the wrong kind of parental interaction could experience adjustment difficulties. According to Berk (2009), children of mothers who struggle with depression could experience emotional deprivation. Such children might have adjustment problems and withdraw into a depressed mood (Hay et al., 2003). Children who experience emotional deprivation could react in a manner that increases rejection and avoidance from others. Children with depressive fathers may well experience more father-child conflict, as they get older (Kane & Garber, 2004). Conflict in relation to father figures was present in various stories by the children in this study.

Previous studies by Bolger and Patterson (2001) consisted of ranking the most unpopular peers in the children's class; their findings revealed mistreated children experienced more peer rejection. Peer rejection and mistreatment of children could increase emotional deprivation. Shields et al., (2001) suggested mistreated children (between eight and twelve years old) could exhibit negative interpretations and associations in relation to such parents. There were instances in the children's stories where parental figures were associated with negative connotations and this led to children's decisions to withdraw emotionally and internalise problems. Gazelle and

Ladd (2003) discovered problem internalisation could cause emotional withdrawal. Previous findings indicate parents who are unable to control their stress levels often mistreat children, and such parents respond with high emotional aggravations; issues such as marital tension, domestic violence, use of alcohol and drugs, health difficulties and overcrowding are often found in such abusive contexts (Wekerle & Wolfe, 2003; Wekerle et al., 2007). This indicates the significant influence of children's context. This is confirmed by Vygotsky's (1978) theories, which indicated that children's social context influences their meaning making.

Emotional deprivation influences various areas of children's development and their ability to deal with stress and tension. Previous findings indicate mistreated children experience problems with empathy, their self-concept, emotional regulation and social skills; such children could experience adjustment problems in relation to depression, aggression, substance abuse, criminal behaviour and problematic peer relations (Cicchetti & Toth, 2006; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001, Wolf et al., 2001). Acting-out behaviours could cause avoidance and increase emotional deprivation and children's emotional disconnectedness.

6.2.7 Emotional distance

Emotional distance emerged as a theme in relation to peers, parental figures and siblings in the children's narratives. The children described aggression, conflict or rejection that led to experiences of emotional distance in relationships with peers, siblings and parents. Dodge et al., (2006) and Tremblay (2004) found that more opportunities for interaction with siblings and peers could lead to more aggressive outbursts from children. Emotional distance entailed feelings of loneliness, as children's needs for closer emotional attachments were unfulfilled. The needs for closer emotional attachment

bonds to provide care and comfort were recurrent in the children's narratives. According to Izard and Ackerman (2000) children's experiences of sadness or anxiety show their vulnerability and need to be comforted.

Emotional distancing could relate to children's ability to regulate their emotions. As mentioned earlier, Valiente et al., (2004) found that angry disciplinary parenting disrupts empathy and sympathy early on and children exposed to this behaviour struggle with emotional regulation. Sociable and assertive children are good at emotional regulation and are more likely to display sympathy and pro-social behaviour such as helping, sharing, and comforting others in distress situations, than poor emotional regulators (Bengtson, 2005, Valiente et al., 2004). They also do not withdraw through emotionally distancing themselves. If children struggle with emotional expression they may suppress negative emotions. Such suppression may be harmful and lead to internalisation disorders (Keenan & Hipwell, 2005).

Difference in opinions between children could lead to discrepancies or conflict, which may cause emotional distancing. For Piaget (1932) peers promote cognitive development of friends through attempts to resolve disagreements that occur based on different perspectives with regards to problems experienced. He was also of the opinion that this assists children in raising their awareness of difference in opinions between them and peers. However, differences between hostile children could increase emotional distance as they are often less affectionate towards peers. Hostile or aggressive children's inability to allow for another's child's different perspective and the impulsive acting out of negative feelings might lead to a restricted capacity for empathy and sympathy (Hastings et al., 2000; Strayer & Roberts, 2004b).

6.2.8 Emotional closeness

The experience of emotional closeness emerged as a theme in the children's narratives. The children appeared to be more emotionally expressive when they described emotional closeness in friendships. Fabes et al., (2003) observed that the more often pre-schoolers refer to feelings when interacting with playmates, the better liked they are by peers. One of the aspects of emotional closeness is self-disclosure; self-disclosure was described in some of the children's stories. Self-disclosure benefits children's friendships and increases interpersonal support (Rose; 2002).

Emotional closeness with siblings was described in many of the children's stories. Berk (2009, p. 582) noted, "the skills acquired during sibling interaction contribute to the understanding of emotions and other mental states, perspective taking, moral maturity, and competence in relating to other children". If children are able to emotionally connect to significant others this could enhance their emotional closeness with peers. Modry-Mandell et al., (2007) and Gamble and Taylor (2007) suggested that sibling ties encourage good adjustment in the children's future. Children learn about emotional closeness through sibling relationships.

It is necessary for children to understand emotions to sustain emotional closeness in relationships. According to Gardner and Estep (2001) knowledge about emotions aids children to form and maintain close relationships. Berk (2009) noted children recognise that the acknowledgment of others' emotions enhances the quality of relationships. Empathy refers to recognising other people's emotions and this is essential in forming emotional closeness. Berk (2009) added that empathy entails understanding and emotional expression. Empathy is an important encourager for young children's pro-social behaviour in significant relationships (Eisenberg, Fabes & Spinrad, 2006; Roberts

& Strayer, 2003). Pro-social behaviour was described in the children's narratives and was related to emotional closeness.

Support is crucial as the children described an enhanced need for emotional closeness during distress, especially from mother figures. If children experience anxiety, stress or illness, the need for emotional closeness with significant others intensifies (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1975). Emotional closeness provided children with safety and security. According to Kochanska (2001) emotional closeness entails emotional safety, as well as steadiness in care giving experiences, and assists children with integrating the basic features of their affective functioning.

Many of the children described emotional connections with friends at the school. School seems to be a fundamental point of connection for the children, as this provided them with an opportunity to form close attachment bonds with others. The children's narratives indicate that children who do not have strong attachment bonds with significant figures at home rely strongly on peer support at school. Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that children desire acceptance in peer relationships and avoid rejection; there is a strong desire to belong.

6.2.9 Social isolation

A strong theme of social isolation emerged in the children's narratives. Weiss (1974) observed that when children are not integrated into peer groups they could experience social isolation; when emotional closeness is not experienced in relationships loneliness could occur. The experience of rejection in the children's significant relationships led to social isolation. Socially isolated children might experience negative self-attributions due to rejection. The experience of uninvolved parents was present in some of the

children's stories, and this led to social isolation. Uninvolved parents could cause more psychological difficulties with regards to children's well-being, in comparison to children with involved parents (Simons et al., 1994).

According to Ainsworth (1985) insecure attachment bonds could lead to low self-esteem, a lack of social relatedness and higher emotional vulnerability to stressors. Piaget (1932) and Vygotsky (1978) pointed out structural aspects of interpersonal relationships influence the development of knowledge, language, social problem solving skills and moral behaviour. Social isolation could develop as a result of peer relationship difficulties. Rubin et al., (1998, p.681) suggested the long-term effects of children who are "experiencing difficulties with peers is a consistent risk factor for later adjustment".

Children's inability to adjust to a context could contribute to their social isolation. The children's narratives implied that withdrawal from relationships would occur due to fear or hostility from parents or siblings. The former's decision to withdraw from social relationships could relate to insecure attachment bonds. Previous findings indicate parental attachment bonds are an important antecedent to shyness and children's passive-withdrawn behaviour (Fox & Calkins, 1993; Hartup, 1992). Children with low self-esteem may withdraw from social interactions and experience social isolation. Snyder (1982) observed that different social reactions would affect children's perceived self-conceptions and concepts of others.

6.2.10 Connectedness through play

Connectedness through play emerged as a significant theme in the children's stories. Play was regarded as one of the most important and natural ways for children to establish emotional connectedness. Children learned a great deal about emotional

regulation and emotional understanding through play. According to Russ (2004, p.5), “Play is a major arena in which children learn to express emotion, process emotion, modulate and regulate emotion and use emotion in adaptive ways”. Children’s emotional regulation during play influences their ability to form emotional connections.

Misailidi (2006) and Saarni (1999) established that school-age children begin to understand mixed emotions when people’s emotional expressions are not always representative of their true feelings. The children’s narratives indicated that play seems to be a significant priority for most children, while pretend play in peer friendships was also described. Fein (1987, p.282) emphasised that pretend play is symbolic behaviour, in which “one thing is playfully treated as if it were something else”, and emotions are incorporated in play.

Russ (2004, p.4) described important affective processes that emerge in play; these will be described below in relation to the children’s narrated stories:

Expression of emotion: relates to children’s affective states that could be expressed during pretend play, this includes positive and negative emotions (Russ, 2004). The children in this study expressed positive emotions during acceptance in play and negative emotions during exclusion/rejection from playing activities.

Expression of affect themes: children portray different emotions and different affect content themes emerge during play. These images and play activities are likely to contain a common emotional thread (Russ, 2004). The children’s narratives displayed emotional threads in relation to their experience of play and with regard to different relationships.

Comfort and enjoyment in play: children find peer interactions through play enjoyable (Russ, 2004). This emerged strongly in the children's narratives as play was often associated with happiness and joy and was regarded as a prominent point of peer connection.

Emotional regulation and modulation of affect: this indicates children's ability to experience positive and negative emotions where cognitive and affective processes are important (Russ, 2004). The children's narratives encompassed positive and negative emotions that were expressed in their narratives; this was often influenced by the described context.

Cognitive integration of affect: links to children's ability to integrate emotions with their cognitive thinking. Play is a crucial component of child development and is essential for children's emotional wellbeing and expression (Russ, 2004). Some of the children were able to describe their emotions verbally. The children's cognitive thinking influenced their experiences of play (Piaget cited in Berk, 2009).

6.3. Contribution of the findings in relation to previous research

Children's unique perspectives: Based on the findings of this study, narrative drawing seems to be a valuable tool to explore children's experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. The children's unique perspectives were captured through their narratives; significant themes were extracted during the interpretation process. During this study the participants shared their individually constructed stories; the children's subjective experiences made a valuable contribution to existing literature on the subject of emotional (dis) connectedness. As Lambert (2003, 2007) pointed out, children's perspectives have only recently become more important in research literature.

Children as experts: Researchers often regard themselves as being the expert on a research participant's lived experiences. However, the researcher regarded the children as the experts on their lives and experiences throughout this study. Dockett and Perry (2005b) recognised the children in their study as being the experts on their own lives, since their findings revealed adults often have a limited understanding of children's experiences. For the purpose of this study the children's stories were not validated against their background information, to present their authentic experiences and perspectives. Morrow and Richards (2002) made it clear that to give children a voice in literature their own narratives should be seen as the main knowledge source; this is contrary to the current outlook in relation to research on children. This study made a valuable contribution to current literature as the participants' narratives were recognised and acknowledged as the main knowledge source.

Listening to stories: The aim of this study was to provide a context for the children where their voices could be heard. The researcher observed that the one-on-one interaction during the narrative inquiry sessions provided a valuable context for participants to share stories. Lansdown (1994, p.38) mentioned we "do not have a culture of listening to children". It was therefore significant for the children that the researcher listened to their stories. As Morrow and Richards (2002) noted, it could be detrimental if researchers do not listen to children's views as few attempts are made to understand the latter's lives based on their terms.

Benefits of combining narratives and drawings: This study confirmed that the combination of narratives and drawings is beneficial in enriching children's narrated stories. According to Edwards (2010) both language and art are an expressive means of communication, separately and jointly. The researcher observed that children created

more emotionally expressive artwork when they used paint instead of only drawing utensils. Case and Dalley (2006) found that paint has great possibilities for children's emotional expression. The children in this study were enthusiastic about sharing their drawings and stories with the researcher. Drawings allowed the children to engage in non-verbal expression that enriched their verbal expressions. In this respect Gross and Hayne (1998) suggested children's narratives are more descriptive if they draw as well. Drawings were consequently a sound starting point to enable children to share their stories with the researcher in this study.

Narrative and spontaneous drawing: Duncum (1986, 1985, 1982, 1993) mentioned the need for more research in the narrative dimension of children's spontaneous drawings. According to Duncum (1993) children's representations of static objects, rather than of action, are emphasised in the literature. The children in this study engaged in various types of narrative drawings as described by Duncum (1986, 1985, 1982, 1993). The types of narrative drawings that appeared in this study are described again briefly here. The children engaged in *action narrative drawings* when they named their drawings, which often entailed the occurrence of a significant event. Various children *presented physical action narrative drawings*, where the drawings were parallel to physical play activities and specific games. The children provided *sequence event narrative drawings* where they described un-pictured events in their narratives. *Simultaneous event narrative drawings* were presented where multiple events were drawn within the same picture.

Drawings as a cue to remember: In this study the researcher used the children's drawings from previous sessions to remind them of what they had shared previously. Research has indicated that drawings in relation to narratives helped children to structure

their narratives about events as these reminded them of what they have shared or not shared previously (Butler et al., 1995; Wesson & Salmon, 2001). Drawings assisted the children in this study with the thread of their stories.

Understanding meaning: According to Walker (2007) children's verbal descriptions are essential in understanding the meaning of their drawings, particularly when the researcher cannot recognise what has been drawn. This study indicated that it is valuable to listen to the meanings children share about their drawings as this enriched their artwork and narrated story. Foreman (1994, p.10) commented, "the power of words keeps the objects contextualised and connected to other meaningful experiences". Walker (2007) found that drawings could be effective in understanding the meanings of children's personal experiences, particularly when children not only draw but also talk/write about their drawings. Some children in this study wrote verbal messages, of significance for them, on their drawings; this was explored during narrative inquiry sessions. The research findings of Patterson and Hayne (2011) suggested children shared more information about past emotional events when they could draw and tell than when they were only asked to tell.

Less resistance to questions: During this study children were less resistant to questions posed during the narrative inquiry sessions, as the questions related to their drawings. Similar findings emerged in research conducted by Lev-Wiesel and Liraz (2007) on children from drug treatment units between the ages of nine and fourteen years. Lev-Wiesel and Liraz (2007) established that children who drew first before being interviewed expressed more negative emotions, life appreciation and enthusiasm and shared more descriptive narratives, while children who did not draw showed more

resistance to questions. In this study even shy or withdrawn children did not seem to be intimidated by the questions posed.

Expressing uncomfortable emotions and experiences: This study indicated that drawings assisted children in expressing uncomfortable and negative emotions such as anger and sadness. Previous findings suggested drawings aid children in talking about distressing events (Sourkes, 1991). In this study children expressed difficult emotional experiences and shared rich narratives with a great deal of descriptive emotional content. Gross and Hayne (1998) conducted research on a group of three to six year old children where they asked the children to draw about when they felt sad, happy, or scared, and reported that children who could draw and give verbal descriptions narrated more emotional content than the group who were only allowed to tell. Participants in this study shared distressful experiences; their descriptive emotional expressions enriched their narrative drawings. Narrative drawings provided a safe context for them to share and express repressed emotions.

Children's fears and connectedness: Thematic Content Analysis was a valuable method of interpretation in this study. Driessnack (2006) conducted research on how children (between seven and eight years) narrated fears in relation to drawings. Driessnack (2006) extracted themes through Thematic Content Analysis, which indicated children experienced fear when they felt unprotected, vulnerable, isolated or not connected to a community. The children's stories in this study made it clear that they felt vulnerable if insecure attachment bonds with significant others were present and a need for protection against harm arose. Fear in the narratives of the children in this study related to having lost valuables or significant relationships due to feeling insecure and

unprotected. The theme of social isolation and loneliness in relation to emotional disconnectedness emerged in this study, and this was often associated with withdrawal.

6.4 Conclusion

An important aspect of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of the children's perspectives in relation to their emotional (dis) connectedness. The aim of this study was not to generalise the findings, but instead to capture the children's unique contextual experiences through their shared stories. As Orlikowski (2002) noted that people improvise their practices, as new ways of interpreting their world are learned and new experiences are acquired in relation to it. The children will develop and learn new ways to experience their world that will influence their perspectives. If the researcher conducted this study again, the children's stories could be very different due to additional experiences. Chapter 7 will provide an overall summary of this study.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

“Every life is worthy of a novel”

Jim Potts

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the researcher integrated and discussed the research findings and the most prominent themes. In this chapter the study is evaluated and the main highlights, limitations, future recommendations and possible areas for further research will be discussed.

7.2 Evaluation of this study

One of the goals of this study was to provide a context for the children where they could share their uniquely constructed stories through narrative drawing. The aim of this study was to explore what the outcome of combining narratives and drawings would be on the children. A further aim of this study was to determine if narrative drawings are a valuable tool to explore children’s experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. Social constructivism is the theoretical framework that formed the foundation for this study as this paradigm supported the participants’ differentiated individual experiences. In this study the children’s unique stories were captured through providing an opportunity for them to voice their distinct experiences. As Hua Liu and Matthews (2005) point out, knowledge is not directly transmittable from one person to the next; instead it is distinctively constructed or discovered by an individual.

The researcher was aware of the ethical considerations of this study; particularly as the research participants were children. Therefore she obtained written consent forms from the parents/caregivers that allowed the children to participate in this study. The researcher explored the children's emotional (dis) connectedness in relationships. As the narratives involved emotionally laden content the researcher was available to provide therapy to any of the children who required it in relation to this research process.

The meanings that different experiences had for the children came to the foreground in their rich narratives. The purpose of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of the children's perspectives and meaning that their stories and artwork had for them in relation to experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness. The children's perspectives were explored further through data interpretation and analysis. Based on the researcher's subjective experiences certain prominent themes that reoccurred in the children's narratives were identified. These themes could be seen as a common thread within the research participant group. The rich narratives of the children provided exclusive descriptive details of the highlighted themes.

The themes that the researcher discussed and identified based on the children's narratives were *loss, acceptance, rejection, belonging, social isolation, loneliness, emotional deprivation, emotional distance, emotional closeness and connectedness through play.*

Descriptions of each child's individual narratives were presented in Chapter 5. The research findings in relation to the different themes that emerged were discussed in Chapter 6. Many of the children's stories entailed experiences in relation to emotional disconnectedness. Connectedness through play in children's friendships emerged as a

strong theme, where playing and establishing close friendship bonds seem to be crucial for the participants.

7.3 Highlights of this study

The rich narratives the children shared with the researcher during the narrative inquiry sessions constitute a highlight of this study. The children presented their narratives in a very creative and descriptive way. The findings of this study indicate that artwork could assist children in conveying stories with enriched narratives. The researcher observed that the children were not threatened or intimidated when narrating stories that included violent acts, aggression or uncomfortable emotions. The children could externalise uncomfortable emotional content in relation to emotional disconnectedness. White (2004) elucidated that with the process of externalisation the person is not seen as the problem: the latter is perceived as being separate and this is less intimidating.

The children greatly enjoyed the activity of painting. It is a very expressive art medium and it appeared as though it enriched the children's emotional expressions. The narrative inquiry process provided each child with an individual space where they could share their story during the one-on-one interaction with the researcher. A safe context was created for participants where their unique stories and meaning could be heard and expressed. This seemed to be very valuable for the children; particularly for withdrawn and shy ones.

One of the gaps in the research was that there is not enough research based on children's perspectives. The researcher was able to contribute the unique experiences and voices of the children to the greater body of literature in relation to the subject of emotional (dis)connectedness. Drawings supported the children's narrative expressions. Based on the

findings, combining art and narratives could be regarded as a rich therapeutic tool for children. The narrative drawings provided the children with a context in which they could freely express themselves and their experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness.

7.4 Limitations of this study

One of the limitations is that the children's background information was not incorporated in the interpretations of their narratives. As this study was based on social constructivism the researcher wanted to present the voices of the children from their perspectives and not modify the findings in relation to such information. The latter might not have validated their stories. Due to the boundaries of the study it was not feasible for the researcher to engage the children further in an exploration of their background information. The aim of the researcher was to present the authentic voices of the children in relation to their experiences of emotional (dis) connectedness.

Another limitation was that not all the participants could attend all the inquiry sessions; therefore only data of eight participants could be used for further analysis and interpretation. The researcher was aware of this possible limitation and of the likelihood of dropping out beforehand; therefore she included more participants in this study. Due to the time limitations of this study it was not possible to analyse and interpret the children's artwork, which could have held valuable information in relation to their non-verbal expression of emotional (dis) connectedness. This is a research area that could be explored further in future studies.

7.5 Future recommendations

Further research could be conducted on this subject where the background information is incorporated and explored in relation to children's narratives. The themes identified

within the school context where the research was conducted could be explored further. This process of inquiry could determine if the children's narratives validate their contextual conditions, especially with regards to the emotional (dis) connectedness experienced with significant people in their lives.

Certain themes that emerged from the children's narratives could negatively affect their psychological wellbeing. Themes that could potentially be of concern include emotional deprivation, loneliness, social isolation, rejection and emotional distance. As the research participants are within an age group that is particularly vulnerable to stressors, they might require closer attachment bonds and a great deal of care and support. Therapy could provide more support for struggling children. If there are social concerns in their home environment it would be necessary to connect with other resources such as social workers in the area to assist children. The available resources within the community could be utilised, as other community members might be able to play a supportive role in assisting not only the children but also teachers and caregivers at the placement.

Children who come from difficult socio-economic circumstances could require more one-on-one interaction and additional therapeutic support. Uncomfortable emotions such as anger and sadness were expressed in the children's narratives. It might be beneficial for the children if a safe context could be provided for them where they could express repressed and negative emotions with the necessary support to comfort them on a regular basis.

The children at the school enjoyed the creative activities such as painting. If the children are encouraged to partake in such activities more often this could assist them in their

overall development and emotional expression. Further research could be conducted on how different artistic media influence children's narratives. The children's narratives and artwork could both be analysed and interpreted and then compared. This could enrich the findings of this study.

7.6 Conclusion

While the narrative inquiries of the children provided the researcher with very rich data, many other options are still available in exploring the meaning of the children's narratives further. The overall findings greatly contribute to the greater body of psychological knowledge due to the uniqueness of the children's narrative expressions in relation to emotional (dis) connectedness.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of informed consent English

Dear Parent or Guardian

I am a master's student in the Clinical Psychology Department at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I am conducting a research project on "*Narrative Drawing as a way of exploring children's expression of emotional (dis) connectedness*". The purpose of the study is to find out if what children say (narratives) about their drawings will reflect their emotional connectedness and relationships with others in their environment. The children will be asked to draw a story of any kind; only their narratives will be analysed as part of the study. Therefore I would like to request permission for your child to participate in this study.

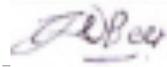
During the research no harm will be done to the children throughout the study. If the child requires individual therapy and support as a result of the research I will be available to the child for individual therapy sessions without any costs. It will not cost the children anything to participate in the study as the researcher will provide all the necessary art materials for them. The children will participate in the study at Gembou. I do believe that the narrative drawings will be beneficial for the child, as it is an enjoyable activity which enhances their emotional and fine motor skills development. The children will be asked questions about what they drew. The project will be explained to the children in terms that your child can understand, and your child will participate only if he or she is willing to do so. The duration of the study will be six weeks, and the children will participate in the study on a weekly basis for two hours after school. Only I along with my research supervisor will have access to the information of your child. At the conclusion of the study, children's responses will be reported, but none of their names will be made known in the research results or findings. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the results will be made available to all interested parents as well as to the staff at Gembou. The interested parents need to ask Venessa for a report and I will then give it to her to give to the parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect the services normally provided to your child by Gembou where the research is being conducted. Your child's participation in this study will not lead to the loss of any benefits to which he or she is otherwise entitled. Even if you give your permission for your child to participate, your child is free to refuse to participate. If your child agrees to participate, he or she is free to end participation at any time. Although it is advisable to be available for the entire data collection process in order to maximise the validity of the findings. You and your

child are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your child's participation in this research study.

Should you have any questions or desire further information you are welcome to phone me, Chanelle de Beer.

Yours sincerely
Chanelle de Beer



Clinical Psychology Masters Student
University of South Africa

Please indicate if you wish to allow your child to participate in this project by checking the statement below, signing your name and return the letter to Venessa at Gembou as soon as possible. Sign both copies and keep one for your records.

_____ I grant permission for my child to participate in the study of narrative drawings as a way to explore children's emotional (dis) connectedness study in an attempt to see their emotional connectedness to other individuals in their environment.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Printed Name of Child

Date

APPENDIX B: Letter of informed consent Afrikaans

Geagte Ouer of Voog

Ek is 'n meesters student in die Kliniese Sielkunde Departement by die Universiteit van Suid Afrika (UNISA). Ek doen tans my navorsing oor, “*Die eksplorاسie van kinders se emosionele verbindende aan ander deur gebruik te maak van narratiewe tekeninge*”. Die doel van die studie is om te bepaal of dit wat kinders sê (narratiewe) oor hulle tekeninge dui op hulle emosionele verbindende en verhoudings met ander mense in hulle omgewing. Gedurende die navorsing sal die kinders gevra word om enige tipe storie te teken, maar slegs die narratiewe sal geanaliseer word as deel van die studie. Om die rede wil ek graag U, as ouer/voog, se toestemming vra dat u kind mag deelneem aan die studie.

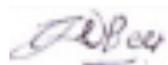
Tydens die navorsing sal geen skade aan U kind verrig word nie. Indien die kind egter wel individuele terapie en ondersteuning benodig na aanleiding van die studie, sal die navorser beskikbaar wees om individuele terapie sessies met U kind te doen sonder enige koste. Dit sal ook U kind niks kos om deel van die studie te wees nie, die navorser sal die nodige kuns toerusting verskaf. Die kinders sal by Gembou aan die studie deelneem. Ek dink egter dit sal baie goed vir U kind wees om deel te neem aan die studie aangesien dit 'n lekker aktiwiteit is, en dit help ook hulle om te ontwikkel op 'n emosionele en motoriese vlak. Die kinders sal vra gevra word oor dit wat hulle geteken het. Tydens die studie sal die projek aan die kinders verduidelik word in terme wat hulle kan verstaan, en U kind sal slegs deelneem as hy/sy wil.

Die navorsing sal ses weke neem, en die kinders sal deelneem aan die studie op 'n weeklikse basis vir twee ure na skool. Slegs die navorser en haar studieleier sal toegang tot die data verkry. Wanneer die studie voltooi is sal die data gepubliseer word, alhoewel die name van die kinders wat deelgeneem het beskerm sal word en glad nie bekend gemaak sal word as deel van die bevindinge nie. Wanneer die studie voltooi is sal 'n opsomming van die resultate vir die ouers wat sou belangstel beskikbaar wees, asook vir die personeel by Gembou. Die ouers wat hierin belangstel sal vir Venessa moet vra vir die opsomming wat ek dan vir haar sal gee om aan die ouers te verskaf.

Deelname aan die studie is vrywillig. U keuse van of die kind mag deelneem of nie sal nie die dienste wat die kind tans by Gembou ontvang beïnvloed nie. Die kind se deelname in die studie sal nie lei tot die feit dat U kind enige voordele verloor wat hy/sy andersins sou verkry het nie. Selfs al gee U toestemming dat U kind mag deelneem aan die studie het U kind steeds die opsie om nie deel te neem nie. Indien U wel toestemming gee dat U kind aan die studie kan deelneem, het U kind steeds die opsie om enige tyd van die studie te onttrek. Dit word egter voorgestel dat U kind beskikbaar sal wees vir die hele studie om die validiteit van die bevindinge te verhoog, en om die meeste voordeel uit die studie te put.

Indien U meer sou wou uitvind oor die studie of enige verdere vrae het is U welkom om my Chanelle de Beer te skakel.

Groete
Chanelle de Beer



Kliniese Sielkunde Meesters Student
Universiteit van Suid Afrika

Asseblief dui aan as U graag wil hê dat U kind moet deelneem aan die studie deur die onderstaande blokkie te merk, en U handtekening te maak onderaan. Die brief moet asseblief aan Vanessa terugbesorg word by Gembou so gou as moontlik. U kan een van die kopieë van die brief behou.

_____ Ek gee hiermee toestemming dat my kind aan die studie; Die eksplorasië van die ekologie van kinders se emotionele verbindinge aan ander deur narratiewe tekeninge, met die doel om emosionele verbindinge aan ander in hulle omgewing te evalueer mag deel neem.

Handtekening van Ouer/Voog

Naam van Ouer/Voog

Naam van kind

Datum

APPENDIXC: Follow-up letter of informed consent English

Dear Parent/Caregiver

This is just a follow-up consent form for you to give your permission that your child's narratives may be audibly recorded during all the research sessions. The data recorded will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor and will be kept confidential. After the research has been completed the audible data will be destroyed. The recording will assist the researcher with her data analysis process and will optimise the study.

Thank you very much that you have allowed your child to participate in this research project. It is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely
Chanelle de Beer



Clinical Psychology Masters Student
University of South Africa

Please indicate if you wish to allow your child to be audibly recorded in this project by checking the statement below, signing your name and return the letter to Venessa at Gembou as soon as possible. Sign both copies and keep one for your records.

_____ I grant permission for my child to be audibly recorded in the study: *Narrative drawing as a way to explore children's expression of emotional (dis)connectedness* study in an attempt to see their emotional connectedness to other individuals in their environment.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Printed Parent/Guardian Name

Printed Name of Child

Date

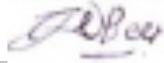
APPENDIXD: Follow-up letter of informed consent Afrikaans

Geagte Ouer/Voog

Die is net 'n brief om op te volg dat U toestemming gee dat U kind se narratiewe tydens die sessies op band mag opgeneem word. Die data wat opgeneem word sal slegs na geluister word deur die navorser en haar studieleier. Nadat die studie voltooi is sal die data vernietig word. Die rede vir opname is dat die data die navorser sal ondersteun met die data analise en die studie dus verbeter.

Baie dankie dat U toestemming gegee het dat U kind mag deelneem aan die navorsing studie. Dit word opreg waardeer.

Groete
Chanelle de Beer



Kliniese Sielkunde Meesters Student
Universiteit van Suid Afrika

Asseblief dui aan as U toestemming gee dat U kind se narratiewe mag opgeneem word tydens die studie deur die onderstaande blokkie te merk, en U handtekening te maak onderaan. Die brief moet asseblief aan Vanessa terugbesorg word by Gembou so gou as moontlik. U kan een van die kopieë van die brief hou.

_____ Ek gee hiermee toestemming dat my kind se narratiewe op band opgeneem kan word tydens die studie; *Die eksplorاسie van kinders se emosionele verbindende aan ander deur gebruik te maak van narratiewe tekeninge.*

Handtekening van Ouer/Voog

Naam van Ouer/Voog

Naam van kind

Datum

APPENDIX E: Letter of permission

Geagte Gembou Personeel

Ek is 'n meester's student in die Kliniese Sielkunde Departement by die Universiteit van Suid Afrika (UNISA). Ek doen tans my navorsing oor, "*Die eksplorاسie van kinders se emosionele verbindende aan ander deur gebruik te maak van narratiewe tekeninge*". Die doel van die studie is om te bepaal of dit wat kinders sê (narratiewe) oor hulle tekeninge dui op hulle emosionele verbindende en verhoudings met ander mense in hulle omgewing. Gedurende die navorsing sal die kinders gevra word om enige tipe storie te teken, maar slegs die narratiewe sal geanaliseer word as deel van die studie. Om die rede wil ek graag U, as instansie se toestemming vra dat ek die navorsing by hierdie instansie mag doen.

Tydens die navorsing sal geen skade aan die kinders verrig word nie. Indien enige van die kinders egter wel individuele terapie en ondersteuning benodig na aanleiding van die studie, sal die navorser beskikbaar wees om individuele terapie sessies met die kinders te doen sonder enige koste. Dit sal ook die instansie en kinders niks kos om deel van die studie te wees nie, die navorser sal die nodige kuns toerusting verskaf. Ek wil ook hiermee toestemming vra dat die kinders by Gembou aan die studie kan deelneem. Ek dink dit sal baie goed vir die kinders wees om deel te neem aan die studie aangesien dit 'n lekker aktiwiteit is, en ook hulle help om te ontwikkel op 'n emosionele en motoriese vlak. Die kinders sal vra gevra word oor dit wat hulle geteken het. Tydens die studie sal die projek aan die kinders verduidelik word in terme wat hulle kan verstaan, en U kind sal slegs deelneem as hy/sy wil. Die studies al ook aan die instansie se personeel verduidelik word. Die narratiewe van die kinders wat toestemming gee sal op band op geneem word tydens die sessies en die data opnames sal na die studie vernietig word.

Die navorsing sal ses weke neem, en die kinders sal deelneem aan die studie op 'n weeklikse basis vir twee ure na skool. Slegs die navorser en haar studieleier sal toegang tot die data verkry. Wanneer die studie voltooi is sal die data gepubliseer word, alhoewel die name van die kinders wat deelgeneem het beskerm sal word en glad nie bekend gemaak sal word as deel van die bevindinge nie. Wanneer die studie voltooi is sal 'n opsomming van die resultate vir die ouers wat sou belangstel beskikbaar wees asook vir die personeel by Gembou. Die ouers wat hierin belangstel sal vir Venessa by die instansie moet vra vir die opsomming wat ek dan vir haar sal gee om aan die ouers te verskaf.

Deelname aan die studie van die kinders is vrywillig. U keuse van of die kind mag deelneem of nie sal nie die dienste wat die kind tans by Gembou ontvang beïnvloed nie. Die kinders se deelname in die studie sal nie lei tot die feit dat die kinders enige voordele verloor wat hulle andersins by die instansie sou verkry het nie. Die kinders het steeds die opsie om nie deel te neem nie, alhoewel hulle ouers toestemming gegee het. Indien die ouers wel toestemming gee dat die kinders aan die studie kan deelneem, het die kinders steeds die opsie om enige tyd van die studie te onttrek. Dit word egter voorgestel dat die betrokke kinders beskikbaar sal wees vir die hele studie om die validiteit van die bevindinge te verhoog, en om die meeste voordeel uit die studie te put.

Groete
Chanelle de Beer



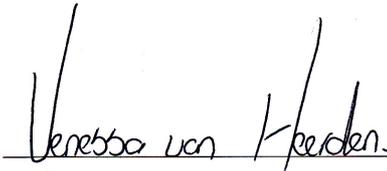
Kliniese Sielkunde Meesters Student
Universiteit van Suid Afrika

Asseblief dui aan dat U as instansie toestemming verleen dat die studie kan geskied by Gembou deur U handtekening te maak onderaan. U kan een van die kopieë van die brief behou.

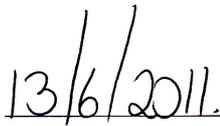
_____ Die instansie gee hiermee toestemming dat die kinders by Gembou aan die studie; Die eksplorasië van die ekologie van kinders se emotionele verbinding aan ander deur narratiewe tekeninge, met die doel om emosionele verbinding aan ander in hulle omgewing te evalueer mag deel neem.



Handtekening van Gembou



Naam van betrokke party



Datum

APPENDIX F: Declaration of language editing

CERTIFICATE

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that I have edited the following document for English style, language usage and consistency; it is the responsibility of the author to accept or reject the suggested changes.

Author: Ms Chanelle De Beer

Item: MA (Clinical Psychology) Dissertation on NARRATIVE DRAWING AS A WAY OF EXPLORING CHILDREN'S EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONAL (DIS) CONNECTEDNESS

Length: 46 000 words approximately.

Sincerely



DAVID LEVEY
2013-02-04