

**FACILITATORS AND LEARNERS: CO-CREATING A BETTER
UNDERSTANDING OF ONE ANOTHER**

by

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ABSTRACT

In South African schools various factors influence relationships between facilitators and learners, compounding their frustrations: class sizes, cultural and language barriers, and hierarchical power/knowledge relations. These problems have led to a polarisation between facilitators and learners which could cause facilitators to experience a lack of appreciation and agency. Learners participated in this qualitative study experienced themselves as without voices, and wanted to be acknowledged as people with worthwhile knowledges of their own. This report shows how the therapist and participants engaged in a participatory process of narrative co-search during individual and group conversations where social construction of knowledges and practices of acknowledgement and care, enhanced by letters and externalising conversations, led to the co-creation of a better understanding of one another. This resulted in a more caring, supportive and acknowledging school community, where facilitators re-connected with their preferred stories, and learners found acknowledgement for their own knowledge and preferred ways of living.

Key terms:

Participation; Commitment; Transformation; Understanding; Acknowledgement; Care; Respectful listening; Social construction discourse; Deconstruction; Narrative pastoral therapy; Co-search; Co-create; Preferred ways of being.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

As a pastoral counsellor at two primary schools, I have witnessed many frustrations experienced by both facilitators¹ and learners. At first I thought that if I could only get facilitators to listen to learners and to acknowledge the learners' 'local experience' (Andersen 1993: 321) or local knowledge, and to get learners to show more understanding for the facilitators' situation, that could solve a lot of these frustrations. But the more I listened the more I realised how complex the issues are.

I noticed several factors which influenced relationships between facilitators and learners, compounding their frustration: class sizes, cultural and language barriers, hierarchical barriers between facilitators and learners, and the top-down hierarchical structure used by the Gauteng Educational Department. The existing power/knowledge relations (Foucault 1977:138) and the way these influenced the relationships between facilitators and learners, as well as between facilitators and the Education Department, contributed to great tension in the school.

During this study I came to realise that there was not only a problem between the facilitators and learners, but that broader discourses such as economic, political and social discourses caused and maintained these problems. I was able to identify some of these discourses and have highlighted the effects of these discourses on the facilitators' and learners' lives in this study. However, the main aim of this study was to focus on assisting facilitators and learners to reach a better understanding of one another. I wanted to help

¹ The word 'facilitators' is used by the Gauteng Education Department for 'teachers'. My experience while I did this study was that the teachers are moving towards being facilitators, but that they are not there yet. They still teach as 'educators' and the learners still address and talk about them as teachers.

them to overcome their practical struggle and to work against any further polarisation. The scope and time frame of the study limited my involvement however, and, I was not able to allow for a detailed deconstruction, as suggested by Sampson (1989) of these broader discourses. Nor was I able to take up 'the complex challenge of finding how to engage in the powerful act of bringing about social change' (Davies 1996:28).

1.1.1 Class sizes

The ratio of learners to facilitators is sometimes as high as 40 or even 45 to 1. Class size has implications for the amount of time facilitators can spend with learners. Lessons are thirty minutes each. With forty children in a class facilitators find it difficult even to listen to every child's unique story. One facilitator told me that she had so many pupils in her class (45 learners) that she does not have time for each of them. She tries to give them some 'expert' advice on some problems, and, if that does not work, she refers them to a counsellor.

Davies (1996:5) uses the term 'new managerialism' to explain classes of such sizes: 'It is an economically driven approach, organised around the metaphor of survival of the corporate body in a competitive market'. According to Lloyd Dobyns (quoted by Davies 1996:13), one of the main proponents of the new managerialism asserts that the system's aims should always be to get more for less. In the South African school system, with limited financial resources available to schools, individual facilitators may be committed to good education and teaching practices, but large class sizes, a result of this economic discourse of getting more for less, limit facilitators, and restrict their ability to implement their preferred educational practice, not unlike the situation described by White (1995b:64);

There are teachers who, because of certain frustrations, many of these relating to the structures of the workplace, wind up responding to children in ways that go against their own better judgement, in ways that compromise how they really want things to be in their relations with children.

This kind of situation results in inappropriate and unhelpful ways of teaching and educating, leaving facilitators with feelings of inadequacy and guilt. For example, one of the facilitators in this study had a Xhosa boy, Siphon^{*2} in her class. Siphon could not understand a single word the facilitator spoke. The result was that Siphon became irritated and began to disrupt the lessons. When this behaviour took over such a big part of his life in class that it disrupted the entire class, the facilitator chose the only workable option available to her – sending him out of the class for a large part of the day. This style of discipline did not in any way accord with the facilitator’s good intentions, or preferred practice, but both the language barrier between her and this learner and the class size contributed to an action she felt forced to take.

The effect of such language barriers and big classes is that teaching and discipline are governed by ‘normalization judgement’ (Fillingham 1993:122). A facilitator then disciplines the entire class in the same way, without taking into account that what works for one child may not work for another: ‘The new methods of power are not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control’ (Fillingham 1993:123). The way that normalization and control are used in class came to the fore when I spoke to Antoinette*, a teacher who said that the only way she could speak to the children and hold their attention is when they sit still without saying a word to one another. She pointed out that she believed that this kind of sitting still was totally against some learners’ culture, but, as it was the only form of discipline that worked in classes of this size, she used it.

Normalization and control work in several ways: ‘Disciplinary power...not only punishes, it rewards. It gives gold stars for good behaviour. And the tendency is for that which transgresses its dictates to be defined not only as bad but also as abnormal’ (Fillingham 1993:125). In the light of statements such as these, I asked myself when, where and how one decides what ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal behaviour’ is. Is it facilitators with their ‘superior

² All names marked with an asterisk are pseudonyms. Where names are not marked with an asterisks, the learners or facilitators gave permission for their names to be used.

knowledge' who decide. Or do the discourses of society determine this 'superior knowledge' of the facilitators? Some of these questions came up in the conversations with facilitators in the study, but these questions must remain open, because the issues are too complex to allow for a simple answer.

Large class sizes force facilitators to rush through timetables, trying to 'manage' the curriculum and the learners, with no time to attend to individual needs or to encourage discussions to promote critical thinking. I asked myself what led to these large class sizes and the discourse of normalization (Fillingham 1993) as a way of dealing with too many learners. What other discourses help to maintain these practices?

Davies (1996:241) argues:

A sense of agency on the part of the teachers is absolutely fundamental to the kind of changes needing to be brought about if we are to think through and establish any kind of social justice in our schools. The new managerialism not only does not grant agency to teachers, it takes it away from them.

The economically driven 'new managerialism' takes agency away from the facilitators. The lack of agency is contrary to facilitators' good intentions of really listening to children, creating a learning environment and maintaining energy and enthusiasm for teaching (Davies 1996:241). Facilitators need confirmation that they still put their good intentions into practice.

1.1.2 Cultural and language barriers

The wide range of different languages spoken at schools in South Africa increases the problems that facilitators and learners experience. Because the school in the study is multi-racial and multi-cultural, learners speak various languages. However, teaching is only done in English and Afrikaans. Hence, for example, the meaning a Xhosa learner attaches to something the facilitator says could differ entirely from the meaning the facilitator intended the word or sentence to have. Even worse, it could happen, as the case of Sipho (above), that a Xhosa (or Zulu or Sotho etc.) boy/girl sits in the facilitator's

class but cannot understand what the facilitator says.

The cultural differences in the school in this study go much further than only language and/or misunderstandings resulting from language barriers. People from different cultures, Xhosa, Zulu, Portuguese, Afrikaans and English (and various others – it changes often due to new enrolments in the school) work together in one school. In South Africa's recent history, cross-cultural contact has been extremely limited, if not impossible, and such contact has not been promoted sufficiently, even though political changes have taken place. Under apartheid almost all South Africans missed out on playing and living together – as strangers we 'developed separately'. As South Africans we still know almost nothing about each other's different cultural ways of living or giving meaning to life.

The political discourse of separate development and various other political and socio-economic policies have shaped our lives and knowledge in many different ways. One implication of this was brought to my attention by one learner who told me that he could not ask the facilitator to explain something again, because in his culture (Xhosa) that might convey the message that the facilitator had not explained the point sufficiently in the first place. He did not want to offend the facilitator. An English-speaking learner might ask the facilitator to explain the work again, sending a message to the facilitator that the learner had difficulty in understanding the work. At this particular school, teaching is primarily done by white Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking facilitators.

In some of the situations that came to my attention, I addressed the issues of attaching different meanings to words/phrases and the importance of respecting one another's preferred ways of doing. But, although I would have liked to address the issue of culturally appropriate or sensitive ways of teaching, due to the lack of time and the limited scope of the study, I could not do so in this study. I could only make the facilitators aware of the importance of cultural differences and the need for culturally sensitive ways of teaching.

A post-structuralist approach challenges researchers, therapists facilitators and other people in positions of 'power' to recognise the need

to celebrate difference wherever there are groups who are routinely down-graded by the discourses and practices of the dominant cultural group. So while it recognises the need to disallow patterns of exclusion based on a claim about the irrelevance of difference, it also sees the need to focus on those differences, and even to heighten them as part of a process of reworking the cultural conceptions of superiority and inferiority.

(Davies 1996:12)

The aim of this study was to address the immediate problem of polarisation and to help facilitators and learners to listen to one another and to be sensitive to each other's experiential³ knowledges.

1.1.3 Hierarchy and power/knowledge

Both facilitators and learners in this study find themselves in a relatively fixed position within detailed hierarchies. A hierarchy can be described as a 'complex chain of authority and training. Each level of the hierarchy keeps watch over the lower ranks' (Fillingham 1993:124). Facilitators experience a gap between the ideals of Outcomes Based Education and the realities of teaching. According to the facilitators, part of this gap arises because the people in top positions (in the Education Department) do not visit the schools to experience how the schools really function. This results in syllabuses that are not on the learners' 'wave length'. Facilitators feel that both their own and the learners' creativity is limited by this lack of insight by the Education Department. Therefore the facilitators find themselves in a situation where they 'must be reconstituted as a team of huskies. Train them well, point them in the direction you want, and off they run' (Davies 1996:13).

³ The plural 'knowledges' is preferred in this study, because the plural foregrounds the notion of multiplicity and undermines the modernist stance the therapist has a form of knowledge which is privileged above the experiences and knowledges of the client.

How do some people get others to accept their ideas of who they are? Foucault (quoted by Fillingham 1993:11) believes 'that [it] involves some power to create belief. And these same people who decide what is knowledge in the first place can easily claim to be the most knowledgeable – to know more about us than we do ourselves'.

In school structures power and power relations can be seen in everyday interactions, techniques and practices, such as the hierarchizing of facilitators and children as well as the hierarchizing of facilitators and the Education Department. In the school situation, facilitators and the Education Department, as well as facilitators and learners, are constantly in relationships of power. Foucault (quoted by Townley 1994:11) prefers the term 'relationships of power' to the term 'power', because he says: 'Power, in other words, is normally seen as emanating from and being in the service of institutions...one must analyse institutions from the standpoint of power relations – not vice versa'. On the other hand, power also influences how knowledge is created and the subjugation (Foucault 1980:81) or marginalization of 'alternative' knowledge (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:42).

The social discourse stating that children should be seen but not heard has led to the marginalizing and silencing of children's voices. The effect was that a socially constructed view of adults and facilitators as the experts of children's lives made adult knowledges come to be regarded as more worthwhile than the local knowledges of children.

Davies (1993:40) argues that adults claim 'authoritative knowledge' about children and adds: 'Prior to going to school children learn to walk, talk, observe and build up their own local knowledge through this (experience). Each step they take in life enriches this local knowledge of them and they come to certain conclusions about the way the world is. The shame is that the moment they come to school they learn to see in ways deemed legitimate by people with access to that authoritative knowledge.'

Adults and facilitators use their 'expert' knowledge in ways that indicate to children that

their local knowledges are subordinate to the knowledge of adults and facilitators. The social discourse that states that children should be seen but not heard is then strengthened by the fact that children are not even allowed to ask questions about why certain things are the way they are. Davies (1993:40-41) comments on one such experience:

I vividly remember walking home from school one hot summer afternoon and suddenly seeing all the silvery leaves on the tree shimmer together. A moment later I felt a breeze on my face. I was filled with wonder at my discovery that wind was created by the waving of leaves. For a long time I was puzzled over how all the leaves knew to move together at exactly the same moment in time, but I presumed that it was something similar to a flock of birds wheeling simultaneously in the sky. I also remembered the look of puzzlement on my teacher's face when I asked her how all the leaves knew to move at the same moment. Her incomprehension clued me in to the fact that I had asked an apparently non-askable question and I dropped my questioning immediately. But why was I so ready to abandon my observation, at so minute a signal from the teacher?

The effect of the belief that children's knowledges are subordinate to the 'expert' knowledge of adults and facilitators is to increase the polarisation between learners and facilitators. Through my work as a counsellor, I realized that learners want to use their own knowledges and take control of their own lives. They do not always want 'expert' advice that is given to them. They have a desire to show adults that, when learners are given an opportunity to use their own knowledges, they can make a success of their lives. This supports a statement by White (1995b:90), who says: 'Mostly in my experience when young people have been given more opportunities to take control over their own lives, and when they have support around making those decisions, they are so excited about having that opportunity that they actually make really good decisions.'

After speaking to some of the learners whom I see in practice, I came to the conclusion that finding ways to co-construct practices of care and ways to handle problems in such a manner that it is acceptable to both learners and facilitators is still a big problem in South African schools.

The following ideas from an Australian learner, Annie (quoted, in White 1995:47),

strengthen the notion that learners can play a role in their own education:

When the curriculum was more involving of us, it was much more interesting. I think that schools focus far too much on product and much too little on understanding. I actually learnt the most when I wasn't producing the most....You'd also have a lot more respect for teachers, I think, if you saw they were on your wave-length. If they were talking to you about, you know...drugs or whatever, and teaching about something that was important to you....I think that some teachers are doing that now. They are making their work relevant to students...and also it depends on how much support they get from the school. I mean, it must be very difficult for teachers to be lateral and creative when they've got so many pressures on them.

As Annie suggests, ideally, facilitators should make what is in the syllabus or curriculum 'relevant'. In South Africa, a more inclusive, democratic syllabus would be ideal, but facilitators in the school in the study find themselves in a position where the Gauteng Education Department decides what is included in the syllabus as well as by what time the learning set out in the syllabus should be achieved. This comes from a discourse where the tradition of emancipation 'is one in which change is usually brought about for the other rather than working with people who themselves decide what changes they might want to bring about' (Davies 1996:7).

The problems faced by facilitators who try to get on the children's 'wave-length', as Annie puts it, are compounded by the multi-cultural and multi-lingual situation. No facilitator can share all the cultures and backgrounds of all the learners in such a complex situation. The problem is made worse by new managerialism where an economic systems-driven way of education leads to 'lean and mean' efficient organisations (Davies 1996:7). Because of this 'lean and mean' way of working, the facilitators find themselves in a position where 'the control of students and of student bodies is central to what goes on in schools. In Western schooling there is a strong tension between overt practices of control (which are seen as both necessary, distasteful and disrespectful) and the belief that students should be treated with respect as people capable of controlling themselves' (Davies 1996:31).

Annie's final words ('it must be very difficult for teachers to be lateral and creative when they've got so many pressures on them') suggest that learners are able to recognize facilitators' problems, and such understanding can be fostered by a more collaborative and appreciative way of working, as was attempted with the letter of acknowledgement set out in Chapter Three.

The conversations I had with the facilitators opened up opportunities for self-reflection, through which they could come to identify some discourses that led them to impose control on learners. They could now see that this control was not enforced intentionally, but as a result of the pressure of these discourses.

1.1.4 The way language defines people and power relations

The more I listened to the learners and their facilitators, the more aware I became that society defines people through the manner people speak to and about one another. According to White (1995b:59), 'I believe that it is because modern "problem-speak" is informed by the dominant discourses of our culture...the success of the structuralist discourses of the last hundred years or so have provided a whole new range of options for locating the problem at particular sites within the person's identity'. Because society is economically driven, time is scarce and competition between people is very prominent. This economic discourse affects both facilitators and learners. Unintentionally, the facilitators can give descriptions to the learners which imply that learners' identities are limited or fixed by the problems with which they struggle (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997). When facilitators do this, learners could be stuck with unwanted labels, which may accompany them throughout their school years.

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

I identified discourses such as economic discourses (getting more for less), political discourses (separate development) and social discourses (children should be seen but not heard). These discourses result in big classes, cultural and language barriers, hierarchical

barriers between facilitators and learners, and the top-down hierarchical structure used by the Gauteng Education Department. These discourses became clear when I heard some of the stories of facilitators and learners struggling with the challenges of learning and teaching.

To address difficulties in meeting teaching and learning challenges, I chose the option of research as co-search as described by Dixon (1999:45) to guide my therapy-as-research. The research aims that guided the co-search journey were to co-construct their multi-storied lives with a group of learners; to assist a group of facilitators to validate learners' experiential knowledges and to work with those knowledges; to co-create better collaboration between facilitators and learners; to identify how the effects of economic, social and political discourses (class sizes, hierarchical power/knowledge relations, and cultural and language barriers) constitute facilitators and learners; and to be an audience for facilitators' stories.

1.3 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH APPROACH

I chose to conduct qualitative research because the aim of the study was to co-create better understanding(s) in a collaborative process with both facilitators and learners. The research developed as a result of a need identified by the different participants. The meaning which the participants gave to certain aspects of the learning and teaching environment guided the development of the study. 'Lived experience is central to qualitative inquiry and the criteria of evaluation in qualitative research are based on ethics of caring, personal responsibility, and open dialogue' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:102). During informal conversations, facilitators expressed a need for care (someone that will listen to their needs, as done during the individual conversations in Chapter Four) and the learners indicated that they wanted to take responsibility for their lives and that they wanted open dialogue (as with the conversations and the play in Chapter Three).

Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) implies,

an emphasis on processes and meaning that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

I used qualitative research because I wanted to learn more about a social practice where facilitators and learners were participants in co-creating a better understanding of one another. The research had an exploratory and descriptive focus.

Originally my dissertation was registered as 'Facilitator, look through my eyes'. The reason for this was that I wanted to focus entirely on the learners and the problems they experienced with facilitators. During my conversations with the children and the feedback which I gave to the facilitators (with the learners' permission), I got important comments which made me realize that I could not do this study without looking at the problems that the facilitators experience as well. These problems the facilitators experience revolve mainly around their emotional needs. In this study, the facilitators' needs included a need for a sense of appreciation, for a sense of still meaning something in the lives of learners, for confirmation that these facilitators actively pursue the dreams and goals they had when they originally became teachers, for a sense of getting agency back and for a sense of feeling good about themselves as caring and understanding facilitators. The focus of the research thus shifted to the inclusion of the needs of the facilitators as well as the co-creation of better understanding between facilitators and learners. Hence a new title evolved: 'FACILITATORS AND LEARNERS: CO-CREATING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ONE ANOTHER'.

During my sessions with the learners who participated, I realized that as a therapist I could not conduct this study unilaterally in a way I had decided beforehand. It was actually not my right to decide which issues I wanted to address and then ask questions which the learners had to answer and respond to. Instead, this study developed step by step during the conversations between the learners, the facilitators and me. If it had not

developed in this co-operative manner, I could easily have exploited the learners in pursuing my own plans as described by McTaggart (1997: 6):

Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualised, practiced, and brought to bear on the life world. It means ownership: responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice. Mere involvement implies none of this, and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others.

As a result of the fact that it was the learners themselves who wrote their play (see Chapter Three), the learners obtained ownership of their own preferred ways of living, or agency.

In the beginning, a number of learners were sent to me for counselling because of aggressive behaviour. The learners and I were expected to address the effects of this aggressive behaviour on themselves, on other learners as well as on facilitators. During the conversations that followed, the learners decided on steps that would help them to take responsibility for aggression. They implemented their own preferred ways of dealing with the problems and asked whether they could communicate these ways of dealing with their problems to the facilitators in a play.

Because I view therapy as research or co-research in line with the idea of David Epston (quoted by Dixon 1999:45), I read this as a sign that participants were taking control of their lives as well as of the therapeutic process. Nevertheless, although I worked in a participatory way during the therapy as co-search, by using the learners' own knowledges and preferred ways of dealing with their problems, total power sharing of the research process as suggested by Bishop (1996:168) was limited.

1.3.1 Participatory research

As mentioned above, this study was done in a multi-racial, multi-lingual school, where various social, economic and political discourses had an effect on the polarisation of the

facilitators and the learners. This increased the challenge to use participatory research in this study, which was not only aimed at theoretical and practical improvement and the facilitators' and learners' better understanding, but also at 'changing the system itself or those conditions which impede desired improvement in the system/organization' (Zuber-Skerritt 1996:5).

Because of the limited scope of this study, the steps towards transformation were restricted to creating an awareness of the various discourses which led to the current problem of polarisation in the school and addressing these discourses on a small scale. My research was informed by Feminist discourses, liberation theology discourses and social construction discourse. This study was co-constructed with participants and informed by an ethical commitment similar to that discussed by Bosch (1991:424-484), when he says that 'commitment is the first act of theology...commitment to the poor and the marginalized...subject-empowering [and] life-giving love'. Bosch (1991:424) states that 'one can only theologize credibly if it is done with those who suffer'. This study was also informed by the ideas of Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991:27), who write about the role of one's prior commitment in one's way of being in the world. They argue that one has to become 'self-aware...to allow for being self-critical, and open up to questioning by others'.

This 'self-awareness' was very important because self-reflection played an important role throughout the study. By speaking to learners and watching their play, facilitators practiced self-reflection and realized that they have to let go of their 'expert' knowledge and have to open up to the experiential knowledges of the learners. Only then can they try to understand the knowledges of the learners and try to work with those knowledges. The self-reflection which occurred during the individual conversations I had with the facilitators as well as the self-reflection as a result of the letters I wrote to them confirmed the facilitators emotional needs (as mentioned in 4.1).

1.3.2 A dual role as ex-facilitator and therapist

I had been a facilitator and taught in a primary school for ten years. The fact that I was an insider 'starting with my own experience' (Reinharz 1992:259) helped me to identify with the facilitators. 'Being an insider enables you to understand what people say in a way that no outsider could' (Reinharz 1992:260).

On the other hand, my experience as a pastoral, narrative therapist guided my listening to the learners in a different way. I needed to shift my 'expert' knowledge out of the way and really listen to what the learners wanted to say. Increasingly, I listened to their local knowledges and experience and a mutual and dynamic relationship developed into a more equal dialogue. As I was in constant conversations with both facilitators and students, it was important to reach a point where all participants agreed upon the meaning of the practice at hand. This could only be achieved because there was no 'expert' during this study. Knowledge could be co-constructed by all the participants.

1.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

The qualitative research interview is no longer a mere adjunct to the basic scientific methods of observation and experimentation, but provides through conversation between persons, privileged access to the cultural world of intersubjective meaning. In several respects, the knowledge produced in an interview comes close to post modernistic conceptions of knowledge as conversational, narrative, linguistic, contextual and inter-relational.

(Kvale 1992:51)

This conversational knowledge was the goal I had in mind with my research, to assist facilitators and learners to engage in true conversations where facilitators listen to learners' experiential knowledges and work with that knowledges in a way that constitutes and promotes agency. However, according to Davies (1991:51), agency is

never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is the freedom to

recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning in it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity.

1.4.1 Participants

To co-construct their multi-storied lives with a group of learners, individual conversations took place and the learners and I used group conversations, a play and letters of appreciation. In order to assist the facilitators to re-connect with their original dreams and ideals regarding teaching, both individual and group conversations were arranged.

1.4.1.1 *Learners as participants*

Both individual conversations and group conversations were held with learners. I spoke with one learner. He then invited the other seven learners involved in the problem story to join the conversation. They then named the problem 'skoorsoekery' [quarrelsomeness⁴] and decided to stand together against it as the 'Anti-Bad Boys team'. That was the start of group conversations with the learners. Of the group of eight boys, seven boys were white and one boy was black. Six boys spoke Afrikaans at home, one boy spoke English and one boy spoke Xhosa. I had twelve group sessions with the 'Anti-Bad Boys', two individual sessions each with Stefan, Christo and Rocktion, one individual session each with Barend, Kobus and Wikus, five individual sessions with Gerhard and ten individual sessions with Michael.

1.4.1.2 *Facilitators as participants*

I had individual conversations with three facilitators. Each conversation took up one session. All three facilitators were white females. One facilitator had a special class with fifteen learners. The second facilitator had a Grade 2 class consisting of 45 learners. These Xhosa-, Tswana- and Zulu-speaking learners are educated in English by an Afrikaans-

⁴ The learners spoke mainly Afrikaans and important words are given in the original the first time. Thereafter, the English translation in square brackets is used. Transcripts of Afrikaans interviews have also been translated, as has the play performed by the learners.

speaking facilitator. The third facilitator had a Grade 3 class with twelve white Afrikaans-speaking children and seventeen black Xhosa-, Tswana- and Zulu-speaking children who are being educated in English. The facilitator is also Afrikaans-speaking.

I wanted to assist the facilitators in addressing their emotional needs, through these conversations. Consequently, I chose the dual tasks of support and of resurrecting facilitators' forgotten knowledge (Foucault 1980). Because of the influence which various discourses had had on the way facilitators taught, the facilitators expressed a sense that they were not appreciated any longer and said that they no longer had faith in their mission and dreams. Through the conversations I wanted to assist the facilitators to restore their beliefs in themselves, their dreams and goals, and to let them feel appreciated again by helping them reclaim agency .

1.5 THE PROCESS OF THE STUDY

The study developed as a result of my work as therapist at a multi-racial, multi-lingual primary school. After I had had a conversation with a boy who was referred to me by a facilitator in connection with aggressive behaviour, the boy realized that he was not the problem within this situation. Multiple factors contributed to the problem. He asked me whether I could talk to the other boys in the school who stood on the side of the problem.

We invited them to join in the conversations. They were really pleased as they said that actually they 'all needed to talk to me'. This developed into a group conversation and the emerging of the 'Anti-Bad Boys'.

As the conversations developed and the boys discovered what their local knowledges meant to them, they expressed a wish to communicate this discovery to the facilitators through a play they wanted to perform in the hall during school assembly. That was how the play developed (see Chapter Three).

Both the play presented by the learners and the learners' different behaviour in class, as

well as on the playground, led the facilitators to write a letter of appreciation to the learners. Fellow group members also acknowledged one another's contributions. The learners also wrote a letter of appreciation to one of the facilitators.

The study took on a different direction when I talked to some facilitators. I then realized that the facilitators had their own problems which limited their teaching and involvement with the learners. These problems led to polarisation between facilitators and learners. I invited facilitators to come to talk to me. This opened the way for individual conversations with facilitators as well as spontaneous group discussions during break.

As the study was done for the purposes of partially fulfilling the requirements of a Masters' degree, time was limited and the participants included were the 'Anti-Bad Boys', (a group of eight Grade Six learners), four facilitators and myself as co-creating therapist.

1.6 HOW MY COMMITMENTS AS PASTORAL THERAPIST GUIDED THIS STUDY

As a therapist at the school in this study, I witnessed and was confronted by the needs of both facilitators and learners. I encountered emotional needs, feelings of inadequacy, learners without voices and the pain of being stuck with unwanted reputations. Being confronted with these needs challenged me as a pastoral therapist to work within this school context with a commitment to transformation (Cochrane et al 1991:18).

For me, ethically, this commitment to transformation meant positioning myself on the side of those who suffer. This can only come about when 'there is the power of empathy and compassion, of delight in otherness, and strength in the solidarity of listening to others, bearing together stories of pain and resistance' (Welch 1990:135). In such listening to others, I chose to be informed and formed by contextual theology, by the notion that theology can only be done with those who suffer. The emphasis is on doing

theology, since doing is more important than knowing or speaking (Bosch 1991:424). Contextual theology is seen as a theology from below Bosch (1991:439) and grows from self-other participation and not from a privileged position of knowing. This guided me to shift my 'expert' knowledge out of the way and really listen to what the learners wanted to say. The challenge in contextual theology is to maintain dialogue among all participants (Bosch 1991: 426-427). This challenge guided me to listen to the participants' local knowledges. As a result, a mutual and dynamic relationship could developed from more equal dialogue.

My commitment to a just society was informed by feminist pastoral practices, which are liberating, as they seek 'justice, peace, healing and wholeness for all in partnership' (Ackermann 1991:96), and use strategies such as giving voices to the voiceless and introducing new values. These strategies informed me to help me give the learners their voices back by letting them create and perform their play in front of the facilitators and other learners. Together, the learners and I created new values of collectiveness that stand against individualism and self-achievement (see Chapter Three).

A commitment to 'do pastoral care as participatory ethical care immediately challenges us not to care for but to care with people who are in need of care' (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). This commitment inspired me to practise care as a social practice, 'where care is socially constructed by care-givers as well as care receivers' (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7), when some facilitators expressed a need for emotional care. I then invited them to come to talk to me and acted as a witness for their needs, through which they could experience care, respect and love. The above was an outcome of my work as a pastoral narrative therapist and it resonated with Walker's (1998:7) notion of an 'expressive-collaborative model for ethics', where 'ethics and for that matter, care, is interpersonal and...negotiated by all participants' (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). That was why, in this study, it was important to reach a point where all participants agreed upon the meaning of the practice at hand. Knowledge was then co-constructed by all participants.

A chapter outline is given below to briefly indicate how this collaborative process evolved

in the following chapters.

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter Two discusses the epistemological, theological and philosophical views that underlie my views in doing this study.

Chapter Three was 'written' by the learners, expressing their preferred ways of dealing with their problems and using their own experiential knowledges in appreciating one another.

Chapter Four gave back the agency to some of the facilitators. It shows how lenses through which the facilitators could re-discover their original dreams, hopes and good intentions were constructed.

Chapter Five offers a reflection on the research process, self-reflection and recommendations for pastoral, narrative therapy as well as practical, pastoral theology.

CHAPTER TWO

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY, PASTORAL CARE AND THE NARRATIVE METAPHOR

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains briefly how postmodern discourses create a context for social construction discourse, which in turn informs a contextual approach to practical theology. I used a contextual, narrative approach to pastoral therapy to guide me in my listening to the stories of the participants in this study. The reader is invited to witness the way in which the journey towards the co-creation of a better understanding between facilitators and learners was co-constructed by means of ethics of care (Heitink 1998) and justice (Ackermann 1991), as well as respect for one another's knowledges. In the transforming process towards a better understanding of one another, an element of prophetic pastoral practice (Gerkin 1991) was included.

2.1.1 Postmodern discourse

According to Herholdt (1998:217), a postmodern discourse brings 'the values, perspectives, hopes, visions, aspirations and personal faith of the person back into play, since it seeks wholeness and meaning' by gaining perspective on the continuity between all levels of a multi-levelled reality. Postmodernism also questions the concept of objective knowledge (Dill & Kotzé 1997:15). Gergen and Kaye (1992:57) write: 'The postmodern argument is not against the various schools of therapy, only against their posture of authoritative truth.' Modernist thinkers tend to be concerned with facts and rules. By contrast, postmodernists are concerned with meaning (Freedman & Combs 1996:22), not the 'expert' meaning of the therapist, but the meaning of the client, which is co-discovered by 'permitting the patient (client) to use his own thinking, his own

understanding, his own emotions in the way [that] best fits him in his scheme of life' (Erickson, quoted, in Freedman & Combs 1996:9). This approach does not mean that the therapist's experience and knowledge are useless, it just means that they are to be considered no more valid than those of the client (Freedman & Combs 1996:44). According to Andersen (1993:321), the client has 'local experiences, while the therapist has general experiences'.

The central concern of postmodern research is explaining the process by which people come to describe, explain and otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live (Gergen 1985:266). This concern informed the step by step evolution of this co-researched study between myself, the facilitators and learners who participated. In a postmodern approach, the explanatory locus of human action shifts from an interior region to the processes of human interaction (Gergen 1985:271). In this study I (as therapist), facilitators and learners were involved in inclusive dialogue and in respectfully listening to one another. This type of interaction resonates with Hoffman's (1990:2) statement that human beliefs about the world are social inventions. Therefore I chose to be formed and informed by the postmodern discourse of social construction (which emphasises human interaction and the constitutive effect of participatory dialogue and stories) throughout the study.

2.1.2 Social construction discourse

Using the metaphor of social construction leads me to consider 'the ways in which every person's social interpersonal reality has been constructed through interaction with other human beings and human institutions' (Freedman & Combs 1996:1) and to focus on the influence of social realities on the meaning of people's lives. Weingarten (1991:289) writes: 'In the social constructionist view, the experience of self exists in the ongoing interchange with others and the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into these narratives.' In interaction between the learners and the facilitators in this study threads of hope, respect and acknowledgement were woven. These threads which the facilitators and learners wove

were the first steps towards the co-creation of a better understanding of one another. The community of care (White 1995b) which developed between the facilitators, the learners and myself constructed the 'lenses' through which we could interpret the world (Freedman & Combs 1996:16).

Because I have adopted the social constructionist metaphor I see myself as a curious and interested therapist who is skilled at asking questions to bring to the foreground the knowledges and experiences that are carried in the stories of the people consulting me. I think of myself as a member of a subculture in collaborative social interaction with other people, where we can construct new realities that enrich our life narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996:18).

2.2 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: COMMITMENT, CARE AND TRANSFORMATION

In listening to the stories of the learners and the facilitators I chose to be informed and formed by the voices of contextual theologies such as liberation and feminist theologies. This guided my commitment to the transformation process which takes steps in co-creating a better understanding between facilitators and learners in a South African school.

2.2.1 Contextual theology

Contextual theology is not an individual theology, but uses people's experiential knowledge to attempt to make sense of experiences by putting them into a broader picture where the faith of a Christian community is related to the community's life, mission and social praxis (Cochrane et al 1991).

In this study at a multi-racial, multilingual school, it made sense to work within a contextual theology framework that believes that both black and white Christians interpret and seek to live by the gospel, but that each individual and group understands spirituality

differently. These differences 'can only be explained by reference to social context and location, to the material conditions determining the existence of each' (Cochrane et al 1991:27).

Contextual theology acknowledges that a pastor, preacher or therapist can only understand part of the reality. Contextual theology has played an important role in the liberation of the oppressed people of South Africa. However, when I use ideas, principles and practices from contextual theology, I do so more with the view of transformation towards a more ethical or just society (Graham 1996). This position means a commitment to transformation (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:3)

This commitment to transformation means a positioning of oneself on the side of those suffering and against all oppressive or exploitative discourses and practices (Bosch 1991:424-484). In this study, the particular stories of the learners and the facilitators called me as pastoral therapist to accountability, to really listen and to attend to their needs, and to join in their resistance and transformation (Welch 1990:139). During this study, the transformation developed step by step, as a result of the various stories told by learners and facilitators. In this transformation process, my role as pastoral therapist was to be on the side of both the learners and the facilitators. My 'being on their side' was made visible through the active and responsive way in which I practised respectful listening as well as the externalising conversations, reflective letters and the group discussions we shared. Throughout the therapy I tried to listen in a way that showed the participants that they were saying something worth hearing (Anderson 1995:35). A commitment to being open to the facilitators' and learners' stories helped me to assist the learners and facilitators in the transforming journey that we took towards co-creating a better understanding of one another.

Bosch (1991:439) sees contextual theology as a theology from below (not from a privileged position of knowing) co-constructing a variety of 'local theologies' (Bosch 1991:426). By adopting this stance of a theology from below, I could value the learners' knowledges and involve them as the co-authors of Chapter Three, where their voices are

heard in the play they wrote and performed in the school hall.

By moving my 'expert' knowledge out of the way and facilitating the learners' play, I tried to let my practice resonate with the ideas of Bosch (1991:424) and Cochrane et al (1991:15), who identify the first act of theology as a commitment to the poor and marginalized as well as to doing as more important than knowing. This respect for the learners' knowledges and the co-search which developed was guided by Graham's (1995: 230) statement that 'relational justice seeks to correct power imbalances, "replacing" domination and subordination with cooperation. Relational justice is made central in pastoral care'.

In order to understand more of the spirituality, it is important to enter into conversation with other fellow believers (Rossouw 1993:901). It was only through dialogue with the learners that I came to understand more of what spirituality means to them. I could learn from Gerhard's words (see Chapter Three) that being a Christian is shown when one invites another person to be one's friend. When I entered into a dialogue with Gerhard, he got back his 'marginalized' voice (see 1.1.3), and he could state the meaning he attaches to spirituality. Listening to Gerhard made me realize that the only way to partly understand the meaning that spirituality has for the oppressed and the marginalized is to enter into a dialogue with all of them and really listen to their voices and experiences. That is what contextual approaches like liberation theology and feminist theology do.

2.2.2 Feminist theology

Feminist theology takes context, culture, and religious traditions seriously. It is a plural theology in content and attitude (Keane 1998:121), and, because women come from different cultures and have been exposed to different religious traditions, not one but many streams of feminist theology have gradually emerged (Keane 1998:123). Feminist theology looks wider to include the Bible, the church and its development, the society and God's influence in people's circumstances. It is an ethical theology because it is biased in favour of community and is consequently less concerned with self-interest (Keane

1998:133).

Feminist theology believes that oppressed and marginalized people are the ones that know best what the effect of marginalization and oppression are. The only way to try to know about this effect is to value people's experience and to be in true dialogue with those who suffers from it. (Cochrane et al 1991:107). In this study it was the learners and the facilitators themselves who could understand best the effects the various power/knowledge relations were having on them and on the relationship between them (facilitators and learners).

According to Isherwood and McEwan (1993:35), feminist theology takes as its starting point the experience of women and men and their interaction with each other and with society. This is a source from which to do theology. Isherwood and McEwan's (1993:44) statement that 'feminist ecclesiologies rely on the importance of human experience for theology' warned me to take note of the various interactions between facilitators and learners and to extend that interaction by making use of the play and letters of acknowledgement (as set out in Chapters Three and Four).

From liberation theology, and feminist theology I learned that people cannot do theology as though they lived in some abstract realm or dead corner of history – people have to be involved in their world: '[I]njustice is not simply an act of fate; it is caused by people's actions and therefore requires people's actions to address the balance' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:76). To step into the journey of co-creating a better understanding of one another, facilitators and learners had to get involved in one another's worlds and take actions, like the play the learners wrote and the open letter the facilitators wrote, to redress the balance. The challenge to me as pastoral therapist was to develop my capacity for love and loving (Isherwood and McEwan 1993:70), and to offer a caring ear to the facilitators (as in the conversations in Chapter Four). This offering of a caring ear could occur because of my concern for the becoming of others. I agree with Isherwood and McEwan (1993:70) who say 'love manifest[s] as a commitment to justice in the world'. Postmodern theology also invites a 'rediscovery of the value of human participation'

(Herholdt 1998:218), seeking wholeness and meaning by gaining perspective on continuity between all levels of a multi-levelled reality.

2.3 POSTMODERN THEOLOGY AND ITS CHALLENGES

It is of great importance to me that the assumption in postmodern theology is that there is no absolute truth. Truth is relative to a specific social context and relevant to the questions people ask and the needs they want to meet. Truth is also never final and eternal. It grows with experience, because a person's thoughts are an integral part of the reality he/she wants to learn. Herholdt (1998:223-224) states:

Postmodern theology seeks not to focus on dogma that requires exact understanding, but favours a more poetic literary approach where the sacred can be imagined through the dimension of language, communicating relative and applied meanings to believers respective to their needs and powers to comprehend. The aim of postmodern theology is not to provide a rational or exact explanation of God, but to point to coherence between our experience of God and the way we experience the world physically and morally.

It is through one's personal experience that one gains knowledge. The knowledges that one gains are models to a reality with which one can identify and which then becomes one's own reality (Herholdt 1998: 216-217).

Within a postmodern theology I see my task as a pastoral therapist as a prophetic one, where according to Brueggemann (1978:12), I have to 'nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us'. In this study, where there are people with many different cultures, I asked myself how we could do more of this postmodern theology in which there is more of a cultural sensitivity and a sensitivity for different ways of seeing and giving meaning. Saunders ([s a]:3) wrote: 'There is no truth; there are but ways of seeing. Much knowledge is reflective. It is opinion, it is experiential, it is subjective, it is personal, but, nevertheless, it is still knowledge.'

I experience postmodern theology as a 'softer theology', where I never tell someone 'I know what is good for you', and I stop making decisions 'on behalf of God'. This was very important in this study where the aim was not to use 'expert' knowledge, but where facilitators and learners entered into genuine conversations, where they listened to each other and respected one another's knowledge and situations (Botha 2000: personal communication). This broader view of postmodernism challenges churches (and pastoral therapists) to a different style of communication. It calls churches to a style of communication which involves the experience and expectations of their members, and which appeals to all faculties and not solely to their intellect (Rossouw 1993:901). According to Rossouw (1993:901), theology should move towards a participating theology where pastors, therapists and the congregation could come to a point where they can co-create a contextual theology which serves them all. In this co-creation there has to be equal facilitation and negotiation from fellow Christians. It is only then that a point can be reached where leaders and fellow Christians can become fellow players in the search for a meaningful Christian life in contemporary culture.

Closely related to this more collaborative and transparent way of communication about religion is the challenge to shift the emphasis in spiritual formation from 'What do we believe?' to 'Who are we?' (Williams, quoted, in Rossouw 1993:901). The answers to the question 'Who are we?' develop in interaction with fellow believers. Christians develop a new character and identity through faith in God. Rossouw (1993:902) argues: 'This process of identity and character formation is not a merely intellectual process, but is a comprehensive process of socialization within a community of believers. Life within the church should be structured in such a way that it offers ample opportunities for this process of socialization and character formation.'

In this study, both the learners and the facilitators took steps towards a community of respect by not labelling a person. They began to avoid using labels chosen by other people, as a result of other people's expert knowledge about someone else's life as explained by Maimela (1998:113). Instead they started to adopt an approach of 'Someone became the person he/she is' because of co-creation of values and ways of living, through

the communication and contact that persons have had with facilitators, parents, friends and other relevant people during their lifetime.

The challenge I experienced in this study was to find ways in which the facilitators, learners and myself (as therapist) could live out a prophetic theology. It was in my search for answers to this question that the ideas, principles and practices from contextual theology and post modern theology informed me in my view of transformation towards a more ethical or just society, to be achieved by practicing a just pastoral therapy. According to Charles Waldegrave (1990:5):

[j]ust therapy takes into account the gender, cultural, social and economic context of the persons seeking help. It is our view that therapists have a responsibility to find appropriate ways of addressing these issues, and developing approaches that are centrally concerned with the often forgotten issues of fairness and equity.

Such 'just therapies' reflect themes of liberation that lead to self-determining outcomes of resolution and hope. In moving towards transformations of this nature in the current school circumstances, it is not enough 'to repeat generalized Christian principles. We need a bold and incisive response that does not give the impression of sitting on the fence but is clearly and unambiguously taking a stand' (Cochrane et al 1991:56). That was why I asked myself the following questions: Where are the churches, where there is no food in children's homes, and violence and abuse at home has such a big effect on the learners', lives? If Christians could attend to the needs of these learners in the school, then the learners could experience the church as a church for everyone, a body of people, bands of disciples, who live in faith, act in love, reach for justice and work for the future in hope and trust, as explained by Cochrane et al (1991:65). Due to the scope of this study I could not approach different churches with these issues: however, my pastoral care at schools not only includes counselling but is also extended to other practices of care, from supplying lunch to networking with social workers, safety homes and the child protection unit of the police service. The importance of practising care in a practical manner came to the fore when Jesus, according to Matthew (23:23) attacked the Pharisees with the words: 'Woe to you, facilitators of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of

your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness.’

2.4 PASTORAL CARE

By extending counselling to such pastoral care (above), I, as a pastoral therapist or facilitator, can become engrossed in a true dialogue where the stories of Jesus are lived. As Rossouw (1993:903) said: ‘A Christian understanding of the world can never be anti-human.’ Their actions should communicate love and care. Christians should always consider the effects their preaching, paradigm or words have on someone else. According to Rossouw (1993: 903), ‘Christians should always be able to claim that it is the best available approach to ensure the fullest development of human potential in all situations of life.’ Christians should start to live the way Jesus did, when he lived and preached through deeds and not through words. Christians cannot only say they are Christians and not implement a Christian approach to life. To move from being right to doing right, (Rossouw 1993:903), one should have a prophetic theology where one really does what one believes.

I asked myself the question of why it is so difficult to ‘do’ Jesus in the schools. Could it be because of cultural shifts that are occurring and the challenges these shifts pose to developing a new understanding of oneself and the world? A theology that pretends to be a timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts, runs the risk of becoming obsolete, and is itself a reaction to preceding cultural developments (Rossouw 1993:895).

The way I chose to ‘do’ Jesus, by offering love and care, was informed by Heitink (1998:18-19), who describes mutual care as ‘having the characteristics of both fellowship (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*) – that through fellowship there is a realisation of a need and a reaching out or service that follows’. As the relationship between the learners and myself as well as between the facilitators and myself developed, it moved from a solely counselling relationship to one of mutual care, as other needs became prominent.

Gerkin (1997:112) states: ‘The most elementary form of care that the Christian community [and I as pastoral therapist] has to offer is to locate pastoral care in the centre of the dialogue between the Christian story and life stories; to foster and to facilitate the process of connecting life stories to the Christian story and vice versa.’ This view guided me to commitment to a similar form of respectful listening as that captured in Anne Rice’s novel *Interview with the Vampire* (quoted by Anderson 1995:35):

I was at a loss suddenly, but conscious all the while of how Armand listened; that he listened in the way that we dream of others listening, his face seeming to reflect on everything I said. He did not start forward to seize on my slightest pause, to assert an understanding of something before the thought was finished, or to argue with a swift, irresistible impulse – he did not do the things which often make dialogue impossible.

Through this kind of respectful listening, dialogue on pastoral therapy can function as a participant in a conversation (Pieterse 1996:901) which means that the ‘story of God becomes a conversational partner’ (Botha 1998:160) and not a bulldozer. The above was very important in this study, where facilitators were inclined to value their own knowledges, but they did not use it as a ‘bulldozer’ but rather ‘lived’ their views as a ‘partner’ in a dialogue, in which the learners and facilitators engaged in the play and letters, respected one another’s knowledges and situations and worked towards co-creating a better understanding of one another.

SteinhoffSmith’s (1995:147) statement that marginalised (or oppressed) people can and must be included as ‘valuable participants in a caring community’ became true when a group of learners (the Anti-Bad Boys, see Chapter Three) who used to be marginalized in that they did not get an opportunity to voice their knowledges, wrote a letter to a facilitator acknowledging what she meant to them. By doing this they became valuable partners in the caring community of the school. This transformation towards a caring community helped the facilitators and the learners in their steps towards co-creating a better understanding of one another.

In the steps they took, they really listened to one another, trying to understand one another's stories of their lives and working with one another's 'complementary stories'.

2.5 THEOLOGY AND A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO PASTORAL THERAPY

It is important to see that 'believers need not only understand the story of the Bible, but they also have to relate the stories of their lives, to the bigger story presented by the Bible' (Rossouw 1993:899). By really listening to a person's story (like Jesus did) one tends to use a person's own knowledge instead of acting as an 'expert' who uses his/her own knowledge in a normative way. 'Stories have the capacity not only to inform but also to involve the hearers, draw them into the story, call forth commitment, and evoke ownership of the world and responsibilities embodied in the narratives' (McCoy, quoted, in Rossouw 1993:900).

It is important to realize that within a broader anthropology, the role that socialization, culture, ideology, beliefs, power, emotions, dispositions and other factors play in the behaviour of people, is acknowledged and accounted for in all practices. Within the multi-racial, multi-lingual school where this study was done I tried to use an approach that resonates with Lorschach, Tobin and Bruffee's view (quoted, in Rossouw 1993:900), when they say: 'In the process of learning or understanding, for example, the focus will no longer be solely on the content of what is to be learned, but due consideration will also be given to those subjective experiences that might have an impact on the learner's ability and willingness to acquire that information'.

My commitment to practice pastoral care where I really listen to other people, trying to understand the stories of their lives and working with their complementary stories resonates with what Morgan (2000:2) says about narrative therapy: 'Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments

and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives.’

2.5.1 Lives are lived through stories

‘Using the narrative metaphor leads us to think about people’s lives as stories and to work with them to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling’ (Freedman & Combs 1996:1). A person’s story develops through time as they arrange their experiences in order to arrive at a coherent account of their experiences during this time (White & Epston 1990). A person’s story is influenced by the social, cultural, political and economic environments in which she/he lives, works or receives school education (McLean 1997). Bruner (quoted, in Winslade and Monk 1999:22) says that ‘the stories we tell about ourselves, and that others tell about us, actually shape reality. In an important way, stories become the reference points for living’.

In schools, discourses about what constitutes a successful member of the school community (and, just as powerful, what constitutes failure) not only describe learners’ and facilitators’ lives, they actually shape experiences of them and of school.

I came to realize that children’s life stories and the way they live according to these stories could only be understood and enjoyed with them by talking to them and discovering what constituted these stories.

Facilitators live their lives by the stories they tell of themselves (McLean 1997:17), stories that have been influenced by the cultures and environments in which they grew up and received educational training, as well as the various different schools in which they taught previously.

Life stories are influenced and formed by social, cultural, political, economic, racial and class environments, as well as age and positions in a school hierarchy. I am constantly reminded that learners and facilitators are multi-storied. There is no single story that is sufficient to include even one person’s entire life. However, some stories do become

centralised and then become dominant, while others are marginalized.

In the lives of children that are referred for counselling, the dominant story is problem-saturated. As the stories that do not fit with the dominant story are filtered out, so too are the positive attributes (McLean 1997:17). It is only by putting oneself in the shoes of the people one consults and by trying to understand from their perspective, in their language, what has led them to seek assistance, that one can recognize the alternative stories (Freedman & Combs 1996). Only then can a therapist consult with clients to 'thicken stories that do not support or sustain problems. As people begin to inhabit and live out the alternative stories, the results are beyond solving problems. Within the new stories, people live out new self images, new possibilities for relationships and new futures' (Freedman & Combs 1996:16).

2.5.2 Deconstruction through externalising conversations

By deconstructing problem stories through externalising conversations, a narrative therapist provides opportunities for the development of new and different stories by which the client wants to live (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). Therapists are no longer interested in solving problems. As a therapist I am interested in 'thickening' stories that do not support or sustain problems. Working with people's own knowledges, and not trying to be the expert in their lives, a therapist can reach the point where, as Freedman and Combs (1996:16) remark, people begin to 'inhabit and live out these alternative stories' and people can 'live out new self-images, new possibilities for relationships and new futures'.

In this study this point was reached by asking questions and having group discussions where self-reflection could take place. Through questions and self-reflection, learners and facilitators could explore various dimensions of the situation. In these discussions I used externalising language which encourages people to separate themselves from the effect that the problem has on their lives and relationships (White 1991). That encouragement is one of the most important aspects of narrative therapy: the problem is the problem, the person is not the problem. When one separates the problem from the person, it becomes

something outside the person and he/she can start fighting against it. So, for example, in this study, the moment a facilitator realizes that it is Fighting that has stolen a big part of the learner's life, fighting is separated from the learner. Now the facilitator and the learner are united to work together as a team against Fighting (see 3.6.3).

Deconstruction of the facilitators' problems happened during externalizing conversations, where self-reflection brought the facilitators to a point where they realized it was not they that intentionally acted against their original dreams and good intentions. It was social, political and economic discourses that had stolen these dreams and their inherent ability to solve problems from them. Through deconstruction they could now recognize the effects these discourses were having on their lives and on the relationships between them and the learners. They could come to a point where they could choose a preferred alternative story (White 1991).

When externalising becomes an attitude (rather than a technique) for therapists, then therapist reach the point where they start asking questions such as: What is influencing the person so that he/she thinks/feels/acts this way? What is keeping the person from having experiences he/she would prefer? (Freedman & Combs 1996:47). Who benefits from it? This is where language and the way people use it is very important.

2.5.3 Discourses, language and power

'Discourses are social practices; they are organized ways of behaving' (Monk et al 1996:35). Through my conversations as therapist, in the school in the study as well as in my practice, I found that children often talked in ways in which the dominant discourses about them become evident: The lives of facilitators, counsellors and learners are shaped by various discourses, such as competition and self-achievement, that circulate in school communities (Winslade & Monk 1999: 23-24). These discourses shape what we learners and facilitators expect of themselves and of others around them as well as their actions and reactions to the events of their lives.

Dominant discourses go hand in hand with power and knowledge. As Foucault (quoted, in Freedman & Combs 1996:38) said:

The discourses of a society determine what knowledge is held to be true, right or proper in that society, so those who control the discourse control knowledge. At the same time, the dominant knowledge of a given milieu determines who will be able to occupy its powerful positions.

So for example, in this study, where I worked within a school context, one of the discourses which constituted the facilitators was the social discourse of 'children should be seen but not heard'. In this study I asked myself whether it was this social discourse of 'children should be seen but not heard' that proclaims that facilitators have an 'expert' knowledge which they could provide to the children without respecting and working with the learners own local knowledges.

Postmodernists focus on 'how the language that we use constitutes our world and beliefs. It is in language that societies construct their views of reality' (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). While counselling at school I realized that the way in which facilitators and friends spoke about learners co-construct the way in which these learners see themselves. If they were labelled 'those fighters', they saw themselves as 'fighters': 'Discourses are social phenomena that live in the talk that we hear and repeat' (Winslade & Monk 1999: 24). Therefore, language also acts as a discourse. Anderson and Goolishian (1988) also argue that people exist in language. Language is a dynamic, social operation and not a simple linguistic activity. 'Language thus constitutes meaning. Life is experienced within language and how we experience is given meaning within the parameters of language. The language we grow up and live in within a specific culture, specifies or constitutes the experience we have' (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:32).

As this study was done in a multi-racial, multilingual school where both the facilitators and learners come from different cultures and speak different languages, the different meaning each person gave to language played an important role. Although it is a

multilingual school, there are Xhosa- and Zulu- speaking learners and learners from other languages and backgrounds who hardly even understand English. That is where real dialogue is very important. Freedman and Combs (1996:28) state: 'In agreeing on the meaning of a word or gesture, we agree on a description, and that description shapes subsequent descriptions, which direct our perceptions toward making still other descriptions and away from making others.' Therefore a facilitator has to continue to ask the learners if they really understand what the facilitator has said and whether the facilitator has really understood what the learners have said. Because of the different cultures involved, the words (language) could have a totally different meaning to the learners than to the facilitator. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of life. As Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) put it: 'Language does not mirror nature, language creates the nature we know.'

The problems the facilitators and learners at the school in the study experience are the products of discursive practices, or ways of speaking, which have placed the person in problematic positions in the story he/she is telling about his/her life. When a therapist asks questions about the effect the problems are having on clients' lives, clients gain back their own voices and start to use their own knowledges and expertise about their lives to choose the stories they want to live by. 'Counselling therefore becomes an opportunity for deconstructing dominant discourses and in doing so, enable individuals to make choices with respect to the discourses and practices by which they prefer to live' (McLean 1997:114).

2.5.4 A 'not knowing' approach

Narrative therapy is actually a liberation therapy which is meant to help people to live out their preferred reality and to move from being 'victims of the problem' to being the hero in their own lives. However, it is also an ethical therapy which always keeps in mind what the effect of a person's preferred reality is on him/herself, as well as on other people. The effect can only be experienced and rated by 'those to whom it was done' and responsibility should always be taken for the behaviour chosen (Jenkins 1990). Therefore,

a preferred reality should only be lived if it does not have a negative effect on the person him/herself or on someone else.

In order to achieve this preferred reality or alternative story, the counsellor uses the client's own knowledges, because the client is the expert in his/her own life. The counsellor does this by following a 'not knowing' approach. However, a 'not knowing' position is not an "I don't know anything" position. Our knowledge is of the process of therapy, not the content and meaning of people's lives' (Freedman & Combs 1996:44).

To follow a genuine 'not knowing' approach, a counsellor has to be genuinely curious, really listen and keep asking questions about what was just said. Monk et al (1996:26) claim: 'Genuine curiosity opens space for the client and the counsellor to observe what is taking place in greater breadth and depth. It is a specific kind of curiosity giving rise to questions that highlight new possibilities or directions for the client to consider.'

This curiosity allows the therapist (and client) to listen for the 'not yet said' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). By doing this the counsellor can see a small and sometimes very subtle event or part of the person's life story which contradicts the problem story. These contradicting events, those events that the person would like to be part of his/her life, are called 'unique outcomes' or 'sparkling moments'. These unique outcomes which contradict the problem and which the participants (in this study, the learners and the facilitators) choose to be part of their lives are then expanded and focused on.

These 'unique outcomes' or 'sparkling moments' are the twigs and sticks of the 'fire' of the alternative story chosen by the person. Monk et al (1996:17) have a beautiful description of how to build all the unique outcomes into a preferred story:

I like to describe this stage of the narrative interview as similar to the task of building a fire. To keep the first flickering flame alive, you place tiny twigs very carefully and strategically over the flame. If the twig is too large, the flame could be suffocated. If there is only one twig, it will quickly be spent and the flame will be extinguished. The fire needs to be gently nurtured by the placing of twigs in such a way that oxygen can feed the flames. Larger

sticks are then placed on the fire, and soon the fire has a life of its own.

To bring these ‘sparkling moments’ to the client’s awareness, the counsellor uses ‘landscape of action’ questions which encourage a person to situate unique outcomes in a sequence of events that unfold according to particular a plot, and ‘landscape of identity’ questions which encourage a person to reflect on and to determine the meaning of the developments that occur in the ‘landscape of action’. To thicken the descriptions of the alternative story it is important not to move too quickly from ‘landscape of action’ questions to the ‘landscape of identity’ questions (White 1989).

A practical example of how these ‘landscape of action’ and ‘landscape of identity’ questions were used can be seen in 3.5.1 and 4.2.

2.5.5 The beginning of self-redefinition

When ‘landscape of action’ and ‘landscape of identity’ questions are asked there can be a reconstruction of the client’s earlier life to demonstrate that capabilities accumulated from the past have helped him/her and can continue to help him/her in putting together his/her preferred reality (alternative story). For example, by delving deeper into the ‘best incidents’ the facilitator experienced in his/her life, the facilitator could experience the fact that he/she is still a good facilitator who means a lot to these learners. Monk et al (1996:42) say: ‘The narrative therapist looks for alternative stories that are enabling – that allow the client to speak in his own voice and to work on the problem himself.’ This process can be described as repositioning, or reclaiming the voice of the client, and is the beginning of self-redefinition. The questions asked in this study supported the construction of the story of helping, listening and supporting facilitators (see 4.2). This was also done when helping the learners to speak in their own voices, during conversations with the Anti-Bad Boys (see 3.5.1).

Other ways that we used to enrich the alternative stories of standing up against ‘fighting’ and gaining appreciation and agency were by letters of appreciation and

acknowledgement (see 3.6.2 and 3.5.2) In contrast to conversation which by its very nature is ephemeral, words in a letter do not fade and disappear. Epston (1994:32) says: 'A client can read and reread a letter days, months and years after the therapy and then be reminded by how far their lives had been advanced, and the extent to which they have considered themselves to have changed.' Both the facilitators and the learners became the heroes in their stories, instead of the victims of their problems.

The Anti-Bad Boys team (see Chapter Three) also served as an audience to witness the growth of the alternative story. Through the play written and performed by the Anti-Bad-Boys team, they could now serve as 'counsellors' in the lives of friends who experience similar problems. The positive effect the play had on the learners and the facilitators' lives showed the worth of 'playful approaches'. The play provided a common language through which learners could communicate their thoughts, emotions and experiences to the facilitators as suggested by Freeman et al (1997:4).

2.6 THE UNIQUENESS OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

Throughout narrative therapy, a counsellor tries to listen with respect and appreciation. The counsellor is not the 'expert' on other people's lives. Erickson (quoted by Freedman & Combs 1996:9) believes that a therapist's job is to understand the beliefs and experiences of the people who come to consult him/her. The therapist has to stay curious and work with the client's own knowledges and skills. Narrative therapy is a collaborative process where the client experiences a 'senior partnership. Counselling must never be just something that the client is the recipient of, he/she must be a significant agent in the production of the counselling process from which he/she benefits, (Monk et al 1996:24).

The person is never the problem. The problem is the problem, and the effect the problem has on the life of the client is deconstructed. The various social, economic, political and cultural discourses constituting the problem-story are also deconstructed. The counsellor, together with the client, works towards the client's preferred reality. It is important to keep in mind that the therapist has to look at the effect a client's preferred reality has on

others. Where the effect of the client's preferred reality is negative or harmful, the client has to be accountable for those effects (Jenkins 1990:188-189.) It is actually a liberating therapy where the client becomes the hero in his/her own alternative story/preferred reality, instead of the victim of a problem story: 'You are not what other people say you are, you are your own preferred self' (Maimela 1998:113). It stays an ethical therapy because it asks about the effects this preferred reality may have on the client's own and other people's lives.

2.7 REFLECTION

My connection with the facilitators and learners during the time I did this study reminded me how important it is that the paths taken by pastoral therapy are open and flexible to new developments. As pastoral therapist, I listened to the voices of contextual, feminist, liberation and postmodern theology. These voices guided me in my commitment towards care, transformation and just therapy.

I believe that every person is unique in his/her own experiential knowledges and preferred realities. Only by engaging in true dialogue with other people and the stories of God in the Bible can a person construct his/her own story, which is a continuously developing story. That is why I want to agree with Dueck (1991:183), who says: 'Each person is an actor, and the world is a stage. Since a pre-existing order is rejected, there is no preordained script. Instead of chains, we have opportunity.'

The way contextual theology relates the faith of a community to the community's life, mission and social praxis (Cochrane et al 1991) informed my view of transformation towards a more ethical or just society (Graham 1996). Feminist theology with its emphasis on the importance of human experience (Isherwood & McEwan (1993:44) guided me towards therapy as a co-search, where the learners and facilitators could co-construct new realities through their interaction with one another.

Narrative pastoral therapy guided me to follow a respectful, non-blaming approach, where

I valued the skills, competencies, beliefs, values and abilities of everyone included (Morgan 2000:2), which assisted them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives and enabled them to live their preferred life stories.

Chapter Three expands the journey to the point where, as a result of respectful listening, care and acknowledgement of people's knowledges, the learners acted as authors of their preferred realities and co-authors of the chapter. Chapter Three and Four show how this counselling in a pastoral narrative manner guided the rest of this research.

CHAPTER THREE

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECTING LEARNERS' KNOWLEDGES – USING QUESTIONS, CONVERSATIONS AND PLAYS

In this chapter, the focus is on learners' knowledges as well as on how different cultures and separate development influenced each person differently.

Because this study was done in a multi-lingual school, some of the keywords and phrases are first given in Afrikaans [with the English equivalent in square brackets], to ensure that the meaning of the words the learners used were not lost in translation.

3.1 RESPECTING LEARNERS' KNOWLEDGES

Children's local knowledges (Andersen 1993:321), and their preferred ways of dealing with 'Problems' are captured by Black (1995:93), who says:

If young people had an opportunity to have a say about what they learn and how they learn it and when they learn it, they might have much more of a sense of ownership over it and it might be much more successful...When you start sharing the power and allowing young people to make decisions about themselves, the myths and the stereotypes about young people are constantly challenged.

3.2 QUESTIONS ASKED TO THE LEARNERS INDIVIDUALLY

Michael was referred to me because fighting was taking over his life and a reputation as a 'Troublemaker' was taking hold of him in school. I wanted to hear Michael's account of what the problem story was. I wanted him to have a say in how he preferred to deal with the problem.

I began by asking Michael what he would like to be called and he said: 'Michael'. I also explained to him that I am not someone to whom 'naughty' children are sent. I explained that I saw my role as someone who listens to children as they explain what makes their lives miserable, sad, unhappy or anything else they do not like to be part of their lives. In response to my question whether he knew why he had come to talk to me, he said: 'Seker maar omdat ek altyd in die moeilikheid is' [I think maybe because I am always in trouble]. I asked him what the 'moeilikheid' [trouble] was that he was referring to and he said: 'Bakleiry' [Fighting⁵]. I wanted to explore the way he saw Fighting and the effects it had on his life. I then asked him: 'When was the first time Fighting tried to enter your life?' He said: it had happened ever since he came to this school. I asked whether Fighting was only present at school or whether it went home with him as well. He replied 'Dit is die heel, heel meeste in die skool' [It is by far the worst in school]. I asked him: 'In your experience, what percentage of your days in school belongs to Fighting?' The answer came: 'About 80%.'

Exploring the effects of Fighting, I asked him whether 'fighting was stealing stuff from him'. He immediately answered: 'Yes, I don't have any friends and the teachers don't like me.' I continued: 'Has it been getting worse or better?' He answered: 'Worse.' A sparkling moment emerged when I asked him: 'When is Fighting at its worst?'. He answered: 'When Barend, Stefan, Gerhard, Rocktion and Kobus tease me.' I followed this up. 'What does this teasing get you to do?' He said: 'It makes me hit them.' I was interested in expanding on the idea of the cunningness of fighting and asked: 'Is there other stuff that makes it easier for Fighting to enter your life?' He responded: 'Yes, when the other boys swear at me and push me around. If the other boys hit me, I hit them back.' When I ask them for my ball they throw it away. They walk past me on purpose and then they push me.' He continued: 'Can't we call all the boys who are making Fighting happen and then you talk to all of us together?' He saw fighting as a way to defend himself in the group. He 'had to fight' to maintain himself as a person in the group. This is a prominent

⁵ The learners identified their problem as 'Bakleiry' but throughout this study it will be referred to as 'Fighting'.

discourse in Western culture, where men have to 'stand on their own two feet; being able to look the world straight in the eye' and to 'stand tall' (Smith 1996:14). I valued his local knowledges about the problem as well as his preferred way of dealing with it and invited the other five boys mentioned above and two more to join the conversation.

3.3 QUESTIONS PUT TO THE GROUP

For me the purpose of the group discussions was not to seek the 'truth'. It was Michael's wish 'to deal with Fighting' in a group discussion. I wanted to respect and work with this wish. By listening to Michael, chose the direction the therapy was going in the way he thought he could benefit the most from.

There was no 'absolute truth' about the problem called Fighting. I held on to the idea that the boys' lives were multi-storied. They had different viewpoints and different versions of the problem. The purpose of the group conversations was that the group could get together and talk to each other. They could then listen to each other's viewpoints and co-construct a local meaning of Fighting, identify when Fighting appeared, the course of the Fighting as well as the effect Fighting was having on both the boys and the facilitators. I hoped that increased understanding would be achieved and that space would open up for change to take place.

The members of the group were Michael, Stefan, Christo, Gerhard, Kobus, Rocktion, Barend and Wikus. I explained to them that I had been talking to Michael about Fighting and how it was influencing his life. I also told them about Michael's wish that they join the conversation and I asked their opinion about this. They all agreed to participate in the group discussions.

I asked them whether they also experienced problems with Fighting and they said yes. I wanted them to decide what they preferred to talk about regarding Fighting and asked: 'What do you think is the most important thing to discuss about Fighting?'

Kobus replied: 'I don't like it when someone is looking for trouble, and troubles me. When someone is a "Show off" and doesn't want to be helped. When someone swears at me and I don't deserve it, or hits me without any reason at all. I don't like it when they point a laser into my eyes or kick my desk.'

Gerhard responded: 'People tell stories that are untrue and they make faces⁶ at me. They call me names and I don't like it.'

Rocktion added: 'They call me names and push me around. They tap my space case and disturb me when I want to work.'

Christo replied: 'Yes and they spit at you and trip you when you walk in the rows.'

Michael stated: 'Everyone must not try to be the boss. That only makes it worse.'

Wikus said 'I can't take it when they keep pushing me and tease me all the time. Name-calling is also a big problem.'

Barend said that the (other children in the class) do not want to share 'stuff like sweets and sport balls. This then usually ends up in a fight. In class they shoot at you with peashooters while you are working.'

Stefan commented: 'If you can't say something good about a person rather keep quiet, because this name-calling is really getting to me.'

⁶ One way of ensuring a richer description of this research was to include the learners' voices. In order to preserve the spirit of the meanings of their words, the learners' local style of speaking was retained (see Morgan 1999:vii).

3.4 THE ANTI-BAD BOYS EMERGE

Listening to them I realized that 'each one of them was unique with a different life story, as a result of different cultures, different dreams and preferred ways of living. The only way that I could try to understand each of these boys' stories was to talk to them with the idea of being in language', according to Anderson and Goolishian (1988:377). My own inquisitiveness and the not knowing stance I had adopted prompted me to ask questions: 'What do you mean? Did I understand you correctly?' By doing this, I could work with their knowledges and listen to their preferred ways of dealing with trouble.

We continued the group discussion: 'Now that you have heard one another's point of view, what name would you give the problem?' After a little discussion amongst them they named the problem 'Bakleiry' [Fighting]. I said: 'Michael told me that Fighting takes up 80% of his school day. I am interested to hear what percentage of your day Fighting tries to take from you.' The percentage ranged from 60 to 80%. My next question was what percentage they would want Fighting to have. They said not more than 10 to 20%. I then asked: 'What have you already done so that Fighting doesn't take up 100% of your school days?'

Rocktion said that it helps him if he plays on his own; Christo suggested that it helps when they all play rugby.

I replied: 'If this has helped you in preventing Fighting from taking up 100% of your school day, what do you think could help you lessen Fighting? To move even more towards the 10 to 20% you want it to be?'

Stefan responded: 'It has to start with us. Like Christo says it helps when he plays rugby.'

Michael chipped in with: 'But then everyone has to bring his side.' 'We could become the Anti-Bad Boys instead of the Bad Boys.' Barend added. The other boys all nodded their heads excitedly said: 'Yes, yes, yes!' This suggestion from them was what White (1992)

calls a 'unique outcome'.

As a result of this conversation, they decided that the only way that they could outsmart this Fighting was 'to stand together against it'. They decided to form a team and was ready to name it 'Anti-Bad Boys'. Through this they could support each other and motivate the other children in the school. As Winslade and Monk (1999:100) said:

Clients can be invited to share their own knowledge with each other. This has to be done within the bounds of confidentiality and with proper regard to informed consent. It can, however, lead to the establishment of little communities of concern in which people support each other to overcome the problem.

By following this practice, I could use their own knowledges and skills. Their own ideas on how to outsmart Fighting would probably work better for them than solutions provided by facilitators or a therapist.

3.5 THE ANTI-BAD BOYS FORM AN APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE

The Anti-Bad Boys team also served as an appreciative audience for each other. They express this role in the group conversations, where they individually and spontaneously reported positive incidents they had witnessed about one another. By reporting these examples of positive behaviour towards one another, they established a ritual of acknowledgement (White 1995b).

3.5.1 Using group conversations

The group conversations that followed astonished me. We met once a week and at our next meeting they burst into my office. Before I could say anything, all the group members simultaneously said: 'Not one of us was in the office this week. Not even once.' (Previously they had often been sent to the headmaster's office for bad behaviour.) We

settled down and I then asked them what was different about the group that could lead to such a change – not being sent to the office.

Michael said: 'Speaking took the place of Fighting.' I asked him what speaking had done to chase Fighting away and he replied: 'I realised that it does not make anything better when you hit immediately. First ask the other child what his story is. If you just fight you do not have any friends, but if you talk about it you still stay friends.' 'Yes,' Kobus continued. 'When we played [top] and I pushed you, you did not hit me. Instead you asked me what I think I was doing and I said I was sorry, it was an accident.'

Barend mentioned that when Wikus wanted to hit Stefan, Christo had stopped him and said: 'Remember about our team. He [Wikus] did not hit Stefan but walked away.' Michael added: 'When the other children said I took Gerhard's suitcase, Barend, Stefan and Kobus stood up for me and said it could not be me, because they had been playing with me during the time the suitcase got lost.'

I then asked: 'So what do you notice about the way the group is working?' Barend replied: 'Fighting got less and we started to talk more' and Rocktion added: 'We did not want the worst for each other anymore. At the scholar patrol Kobus and Michael were playing. Then a scholar patrol got hit in the face. The scholar patrol went and told Mister Lang Botha* that it was Michael [who had done it]. Kobus then stood up and admitted that he, Kobus, had hit the boy, and not Michael.' I then asked Michael what this incident (his friend's behaviour) had done to him and he said: 'It showed me that we could be true friends, standing together against Fighting.' I asked Kobus: 'What was it that enabled you to admit that you did it?' He replied: 'I did not want to feel guilty any more.' I wanted to know what guilt did to him and he said: 'Saying and doing bad things to children.'

Wikus stated that 'Rocktion had not been in a fight the whole week.' I wanted to know what had enabled Rocktion to chase Fighting away and he said: 'When someone is teasing me or looking for trouble I walk away. I ignore fighting.' Christo said: 'Laughing helps us, Michael manages to let laughing work. Instead of getting angry someone starts

to laugh and then we do not think about fighting any more.’

Kobus said: ‘I told Michael to stop eating in class, because this really makes the teachers cross and he listened to me.’ I asked Michael what it was that had made him listen to Kobus and he replied: ‘I realised it is much better to work together and have friends than to fight and be alone.’ Gerhard added: ‘The group also helped me to stop backchatting the teachers. They showed me that backchat always brings me into trouble.’ Michael said that two other incidents also showed him that the group had helped one another. ‘After I had been absent they let me copy their work, and once I battled with homework, and when I phoned Christo he helped me with it. Christo also phoned me once telling me what food I should give to my hedgehog.’

After this discussion that centred around which steps they had taken I moved from a ‘landscape of action’ towards a ‘landscape of identity’ and asked: ‘What has this chasing away of Fighting told you about yourselves?’ This is what they said:

Michael: ‘I can chase Fighting away and replace it with talking. Fighting does not make anything better it just makes it worse when you loose your friends.’

Rocktion: ‘I felt like a looser but since I chased Fighting away I feel cool, I am proud of myself.’

Kobus: ‘I can chase stuff away that make me feel guilty and rather do stuff that make my friends and teachers proud of me.’

Christo: ‘I can chase Quarrelsomeness and Fighting away and first ask what a person meant by doing something without just hitting him. Dit voel kwaai [That feels cool].’

Stefan: ‘Making a success of this Anti-Bad Boys group showed me I can make a success of my life.’

Barend: 'The teachers like me and they say they can see a difference. That showed me I am actually not that bad and that feels like a miracle.'

Wikus: 'Like it worked. That "live by the sword, die by the sword", does not have to be part of my life. I can change and be nice to my friends as well as my wife and kids one day.'

Gerhard: 'Back-chat made that no one liked me. Now that the group helped me to chase it away, I have more friends and the teachers like me. I think that in the future I will be able to chase other things I do not like away as well.'

With a lot of laughter and pride we ended the group conversation.

In order to strengthen their 'newly discovered or rediscovered' abilities and the knowledges they now had of themselves, they decided that they each wanted to write down something that they admire about one another. I thought of this as documenting some of the changes they had witnessed in each member's life. I hoped that this would bring similar meaning to them as it did to participants in an exercise written about by Lewis and Cheshire (1998:25), where the participants said: 'So, at the end of the day you get this big piece of paper with all these nice things about yourself. It brings tears and boosts you up a bit. All you have to do if you're feeling down about yourself is to open it up and think "Hey, they thought I was all right". It was really good.'

3.5.2 Using letters of acknowledgement

The boys went back to their classes and the next week each one brought a piece of paper with the rest of the group's names on and everything he appreciated and witnessed in each member. We gathered everything from each member, and this was then put into a letter of acknowledgement to each member from the others. These letters are set out below:

This is to Michael from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

- Kobus:** You stopped eating in the class and pay more attention.
- Christo:** I asked you something and you said yes. We then became friends.
- Gerhard:** I told you I wanted to be your friend. You then said: Yes.
- Wikus:** You used to backchat the teachers a lot, but you have chased backchat away and now we are friends. You are not in trouble with the teachers any more.
- Rocktion:** You do not eat in class any more and stopped seeking attention.
- Stefan:** You started to play with the other children.

This is to Gerhard from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

- Kobus:** You stopped trying to be funny and looking for attention.
- Wikus:** You used to be nasty to me, always fighting. But since you chased it away we went on a boat together and really became friends.
- Rocktion:** You stopped Fighting and then you started sharing things. I then also shared my vetkoek with you.
- Barend:** Fighting is much less in your life. You now do your work in class and talk less in class. All this helped that you now have many more friends.
- Christo:** Because Fighting has become less I went to play with you when you were in my street.

This is to Rocktion from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

- Kobus:** You do not take other people's stuff any more.
- Gerhard:** You share your vetkoek with me and buy me stuff when you have money.
- Barend:** You chased Fighting away and started to share more.
- Stefan:** We started to fight less because we came to know each other.
- Christo:** When I ask you whether I can join you playing, you always say yes.
- Michael:** You are more decent and try to keep your anger to yourself.

This is to Stefan from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

- Kobus:** You started to pay attention in class.
- Wikus:** You and Barend thought you could hit everyone, but the talks with Tannie [Auntie] made it better.
- Rocktion:** You stopped fighting and swearing. Then we became friends.
- Barend:** You used to pick on other children. But since we became a group the picking stopped.
- Christo:** You started to talk to me in class and then we became friends.

This is to Christo from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

- Kobus:** You and me used to be in the office every day. Then we stopped the chatting in the class and the trouble disappeared.
- Gerhard:** You help me with my work and buy me sweets at the tuckshop.
- Wikus:** You used to think you are the boss, and fight a lot. But the group helped you not to think you are the boss any more.
- Rocktion:** You chased Fighting away.
- Barend:** We started to talk to each other and we dated our girls together.
- Stefan:** Backchat is less in your life.
- Michael:** You said fewer bad things and stopped calling other children names.

This is to Wikus from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

- Kobus:** You used to hit first, but now you ask what the trouble is before you hit.
- Gerhard:** We are now like brothers. We share everything.
- Rocktion:** You chased backchat away and started sharing your stuff.
- Barend:** You used to cry a lot because you had no friends. Since we formed this group and you started to share and fight less we are his friends. You do not cry any more.
- Stefan:** You started to do your homework.

Michael: You are much friendlier.

This is to Barend from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

Kobus: You used to hit first but now you first ask what the trouble is.

Gerhard: You share your bread with me and you are my friend.

Wikus: You used to hit and swear at every one, but the Tannie [Auntie] helped us and now that we are a group things are much better. You stopped fighting and swearing.

Rocktion: You chased Fighting away and started to help other children.

Stefan: You do not hit anymore.

Christo: We started to talk more. The more we talked the better friends we became. You now listen to me.

Michael: You are more decent and not so short-tempered any more.

This is to Kobus from your Anti-Bad Boys team members

Stefan: Swearing is not part of your life any more.

Barend: Since you joined the Anti-Bad Boys you have more friends. We went to the movies together.

Rocktion: You stopped backchatting and started to share more.

Wikus: You used to hit little ones but since we talked to Tannie [Auntie] and formed the group you help them.

Gerhard: You are a good child. You share your pizzas with me and help me with everything.

These initial letters of acknowledgement were later turned into certificates that were given to each member.

3.5.3 The learners' God talk

To me some of the member's behaviour spoke of moving from 'being right to doing right' (Rossouw 1993:903). Their God-talk developed very spontaneously and sometimes indirectly. Being influenced by postmodern theology, I strive to bring life and faith together in a spirituality of wholeness (Rossouw 1993:899).

In one conversation, Gerhard said spontaneously: 'Our church is praying for Michael's parents. To come to church. It is nice going to church. You learn about God and that you have to share. I am sharing. I shared my lollipop with Christo. The church also taught me that you have to love your neighbour like yourself. I think Barend is a Christian because he always invites lonely children to come and play with us. I also started to play with friends that do not have friends of their own.'

The above spoke to me of a kind of hospitality, a generosity 'that creates the safe ground in which others can grow and develop' (Nouwen 1997:58).

The group knew that Gerhard might return to a children's home. During an individual conversation, Stefan said: 'I am praying for Gerhard.' I asked him whether he had experienced that it helps to pray and he answered: 'Yes, for sure. I once lost my shoes and I prayed that my mother must not hit me. She did not. It worked. You do not always just have to pray for big stuff.'

I had witnessed an example of a love and care 'where the stranger can enter and become a friend' (Nouwen 1975:71). I had witnessed God's love made real on the school ground and mutual care being practised (Heitink 1999).

For me, the confirmation of the commitment that I had started this study with, the kind of commitment discussed by Bosch (1991:484) and Cochrane et al (1991:27), came when Michael said to me: 'You are very different from other people. You are the first person who listened to me without just saying I am bad. You are the one who helped me'.

3.6 AN APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE OF FACILITATORS

This development came about during a group conversation I had with the Anti-Bad Boys. During the conversation the Anti-Bad Boys said that Mrs Olivier (one of their facilitators) had come up to the group and had said that she had noticed such a great difference in their behaviour. She said: 'It is much better. The "problem" children have stopped causing trouble. Something has changed.' She wanted to know from them how they had managed to do it. Rocktion confirmed that another facilitator, Mrs Cornelissen, had also said: 'It is much better in class.'

Mrs Olivier and Mrs Cornelissen had spontaneously become witnesses (Weingarten 1997) in a way that made them contribute to the development and evolution of the boys' new story. Once we had started to develop this alternative story, we wanted to widen the focus. We wanted the story to become known. A story is not a story unless it finds an appreciative audience. The function of the audience is to hear the story (in this instance, see the story) as it is produced and to respond to it. Responses might include expressing appreciation or applauding, they might involve reviewing or publicizing the new story, or they might involve contributing to the development and evolution of the new story (Winslade & Monk 1999:96).

3.6.1 A facilitator becomes a witness

I used the feedback we had received from Mrs Olivier and asked the group 'landscape of identity' questions to enrich and strengthen their 'new identities' as Anti-Bad Boys. Questions included: 'What gave you the idea that she (Mrs. Olivier) saw you chasing the problem away?' and 'How do you know she is on your team?' They said: 'She said to us that something was different. She saw less of the problems. She wanted to know what had happened'. This signalled to me the beginning of a different relationship between learner and facilitator – the development of new identities.

Next I asked: 'What do you think she saw in you that she appreciated most?' They

replied: 'The fact that when a fight started some of the members of the Anti-Bad Boys team would intervene and stop the fight. Normally we would all have joined in.' I heard the emerging of new 'group goals' – supporting one another towards more respectful ways of treating other learners.

'What made her say that she could see such a big difference, that she saw more of you and less of the problem?' I asked. 'Maybe because we started to talk to each other. Becoming friends.' they replied. I wondered: Were talk, friendship and negotiations beginning to overshadow jealousy, Fighting and bossiness?

I asked: 'What was it that Mrs Olivier did that helped you most in overcoming the problem?' 'That she said something. She did not say nothing. She told us something was different. The fact that she saw it inspired us to go on. If she could see a difference, then we really are able to make a difference.', was the reply. The Anti-Bad Boys had started to experience new identities. They were shrugging off the tight grip of an unwanted reputation, that of bad boys.

3.6.2 The letter to Mrs Olivier

The Anti-Bad Boys team wanted to thank Mrs Olivier for the role she had played in developing this new identity of the team. They did this in the form of a letter they wrote to her. This letter was co-constructed by the members of the Anti-Bad Boys team during a group conversation. One of the members started to thank Mrs Olivier for giving them a chance and then the other members spontaneously joined the conversation and as they spoke, I wrote down their comments. Afterwards I read their words back to them and together we co-constructed the formal letter. They did not disagree about the content and I experienced this as a way of working together as a group. The letter to Mrs Olivier read as follows:

Dear Mrs. Olivier

Thank you so much for giving us a chance. You were able to look through the 'Bad

Boys' and started to see a difference. Thank you that you did not keep quiet, but that you told us you saw a difference.

The fact that you said you saw less of the problem (fighting), and wanted to know what had happened really inspired us to carry on helping each other. You said that you could see we helped each other stopping a fight rather than joining the fight. This really helped us to do the same in the other classes as well.

You said you could see us talking to each other and becoming friends. The fact that you could see a difference, and told us that you could see it, really helped us to take the step from the 'Bad Boys' to the 'Anti-Bad Boys'. It certainly made it easier to stay on the road of the 'Anti-Bad Boys'.

Thanks

The Anti-Bad Boys

3.6.3 Letter from a facilitator

Mrs Olivier then sent an answer to our group. I opened the letter during our conversation to an anticipating, excited but also anxious group, I read the following:

Dear Anti-Bad Boys

I can really see that talking together in your group has had a positive influence on all of you. The other day when trouble broke out in class some of you intervened, stopping the fight. You reminded one another that 'this was not the way to behave'.

You actually told me that there are alternative ways to solve differences. A camaraderie has developed between you that is very positive and this is visible to the entire school, facilitators as well as learners. If you continue to influence each other in these ways, the Anti-Bad Boys will definitely be of benefit to the entire

school.

Mrs Olivier.

After hearing this, they jumped up and clapped their hands together saying: 'Yes, Boys, yes!'

Mrs Olivier's reaction extended the conversation and supported the group in their plans against Fighting. This reaction of the learners supported the value of letters as described by Epston (1994:32): 'Clients have described feelings of sorrow, delight, elation (even a compelling urge to dance!) upon reading these accounts of our conversations together.'

3.7 THE PLAY PERFORMED BY THE ANTI-BAD BOYS

The learners expressed a need to communicate their chosen way of dealing with their problems to their facilitators and they asked me if they could do it in the form of a play during school assembly. I thought that it was a good idea and emphasised that the play could only consist of events that really occurred and the ways in which they had then dealt with the events. I went to the headmaster and told him about the learners' wish to do the play in order to communicate their preferred ways of dealing with Fighting to the facilitators. The learners wanted to use the play to get the facilitators to respect their knowledges. He said that they could perform the play during a school assembly which would be attended by all the learners as well as all the facilitators.

The play was co-constructed during four sessions by all the members of the Anti-Bad Boys team. During the first session, we went to the rugby field where we spoke informally and the learners discussed the format of the play. We spoke about what had come out in the previous conversations about how they had chased Fighting away, and decided to put those incidents where they really helped, appreciated and acknowledged one another in the play. Michael said that he wanted to show the other children how fighting got less in class and he wanted to use the peashooter incident. 'Yes.' said

Gerhard. 'I want to do that part with you.' Kobus replied that the slammers they played at school used to cause a lot of fighting and he would like to show the other learners as well as the facilitators how the members of the Anti-Bad Boys team can now play slammers together without Fighting breaking up the game. Wikus said: 'Then we can show them how talking helped.' 'And that I do not hit that quickly any more,' added Rocktion.

The actual dialogue then developed step by step, with all members making contributions - without Fighting interfering. Rocktion asked if he could play a drum roll between the opening and closing of the curtains and Stefan said: 'Yes, if I can operate the curtains.' Barend contributed by saying he thought Christo and Stefan should do most of the talking, as they are not too shy to speak in front of people. I asked whether this was all right with all of them and they agreed.

The next step was to decide what they wanted to wear. They all agreed that it must not be school uniforms. Some of them wanted to wear jeans and some 'baggy shorts'. After a discussion on this they decided that most of them had 'baggy shorts' and therefore they were going to wear the 'baggy shorts' and white T-shirts. Christo and Kobus said that they will lend Rocktion and Stefan, who did not have any, a pair of 'baggy shorts' and Michael said that he would lend Barend a white T-shirt.

During these conversations I witnessed how mutual care was expressed and lived in a practical way (Nouwen 1975:71). The individual striving for achievement where each member had to fight to gain a place in the group had now been replaced with collectiveness and a collaborative way of working as a team (Smith 1996:14).

3.7.1 The play itself

Play: Anti-Bad Boys

Mr. Coetzee* announced that he had a surprise for the learners and called me onto the stage. I spoke to the learners as well as the facilitators, telling them that as a result of

Fighting, this group of boys used to be in trouble quite often, but that they had found ways to outsmart this Fighting, and that they wished to show the other learners, as well as the facilitators, what had helped them to chase Fighting away, and what had come in the place of Fighting.

[Stefan opens the curtain slowly while Rocktion plays a drum roll.

Rocktion, Michael, Wikus, Barend, Kobus and Gerhard are standing in a queue, facing the audience, heads down, perplexed.

Christo and Stefan enter through the side doors. Marching in with big steps, they play the role of two facilitators at a school.]

Christo [annoyed and loudly]: In trouble again!

Stefan [crestfallen]: Always the same kids.

Christo [pointing to them]: You are always the naughtiest!

Stefan [walking towards them]: What is this trouble?

Rocktion [after a long silence and mumbling]: Fighting on the playground.

[Going down the queue, each one mumbles something, not really wanting to speak, but this is exactly what each one experiences as giving them the most trouble in school.]

Gerhard: Backchat in the class.

Barend [shy]: Swearing.

Kobus: Fighting in the class.

Michael: Peashooter shooting and looking for a fight.

Wikus: Name-calling.

Christo: What is the reason that you always end up in the office?

All [together]. Fighting.

Stefan [curious]: Where does this Fighting always appear?

Michael [loudly]: In class.

Kobus [looking at the others]: And on the playground.

Christo [to the audience, as if in thought]: Let's have a closer look at this Fighting.

[Stefan closes the curtain while Rocktion plays a drum roll.]

Set change

Drum roll while the six set the stage to look like a classroom with two desks and two chairs.

Stefan opens the curtains, Michael and Gerhard are both sitting at their desks.]

Gerhard [sitting back with a smile on his face]: Gee, but this work is easy.

Michael [looking mischievously back at the rest of the class and whispering]: Hey, I have an idea. Let's shoot Gerhard with a peashooter. [He then gets out his peashooter and shoots Gerhard at the back of his ear. Gerhard rubs his ear, jumps up and runs up to

Michael. Immediately a fight starts].

[This situation draws a lot of laughter from the audience.] [Christo (acting as facilitator) bursts into the classroom, grabs them by the arms and whisks them off to the office, while they are making faces at the rest of the class. While they are walking offstage, Stefan closes the curtains.]

Christo [enters through the side door and addresses the audience]: Fighting is not only in the class. [Exit]

Stefan [who also enters through the side door]: But also on the playground. [Exit]

[Stefan opens the curtains halfway. Wikus, Barend en Rocktion come walking in and crouch at the centre of the stage, starting to play slammers. Kobus walks in, in a very show-off way right up to them and kicks all the slammers away. They all start fighting and hitting one another.] Christo enters [very cross] , [very loudly] Go to the office immediately.

[Stefan closes the curtains while Rocktion plays a drum roll.]

Christo en Stefan enter through the side doors with a look of excitement.

Christo [facing the audience]: One month later.

Stefan [proudly]: I hear the people talking. They now see less of the Bad Boys and more of the Anti-Bad Boys.

Christo [facing Stefan, very curious]: What made the difference?

Stefan [with a grin]: Let's have a look!

[Stefan opens the curtains.

The same scene as previously where Michael and Gerhard are sitting at their desks.]
Gerhard [with a smile]: Gee, but this work is easy. Michael, facing the blackboard, gets out his peashooter and shoots Gerhard. Gerhard jumps up, walks towards Michael and looks him straight in the eye.]

Gerhard [cross] What do you think you are doing?

Michael [gives a step backwards]: I am sorry, it was an accident. I wanted to shoot the blackboard.

Gerhard [with a wry smile on his face]: If it happens again, there is going to be trouble.

The audience, especially the facilitators, cheer. [Stefan closes the curtains half way.]

Christo [enters through the side door and asks Stefan, as two facilitators speaking to one another]: Do you think the difference was only in the class?

Stefan [as a proud witness]: No, it was on the playground as well. Let's have a look.

[The same scene as previously starts where Rocktion, Wikus en Barend stroll in, crouch down and start to play slammers. Kobus walks in and kicks all the slammers away. They all jump up.]

Wikus to Kobus: What do you think you are doing?

Kobus [putting his hands in the air]: I am very sorry, I only wanted to walk past and did not see the slammers.

Rocktion [walks up to Kobus, putting his arm around his shoulders]: Won't you rather

join us in the game?

Kobus [with a broad smile] Yes, please!

Again the audience whistles and cheers.

Barend: Let's go and play in the shade.

[Together they pick up the slammers and while they are chatting, they walk off. The curtain closes and the eight members enter through the two side doors. Christo, Gerhard and Kobus are standing. Rocktion, Barend and Wikus are crouching and Michael and Stefan are sitting with their legs swinging from the stage.]

Stefan [facing the audience, proudly] We really want to share with all of you what helped us in choosing against the Bad Boys, and rather for the Anti-Bad Boys. I have learned that I must speak more and not hit so quickly.

Total silence in the school hall.

Wikus [looking straight ahead]: I have learned that 'to live by the sword and die by the sword' does not work. Because if you fight now, you are also going to fight when you are an adult, and then you are going to hurt your wife and children. But if you behave yourselves, you will also behave like that when you are an adult.

Barend [looking the audience straight in the eye]: I have come to the conclusion that life is like a balloon. The air that you put in is the air with which the balloon is filled. If you fill the balloon with 'bad air' like fighting and swearing, then the balloon will be bigger from all this 'bad air'. But if you fill the balloon with 'good air' like sharing and caring, then the balloon will get bigger from all the 'good air'. I chose for the 'good air' to be part of my life.

Rocktion [proud]: There was a time when I felt like a loser. But since I walked away from

Fighting and started to ignore Fighting, I now feel 'cool'.

Michael [raising his head and looking straight at me]: I saw that Fighting does not make anything better, in fact it only makes it worse. Rather talk first. For example, when you play soccer and your friend kicks the ball against your leg, do not fight first. Ask first what his problem is. Believe me, it works. The result of this is that you have a lot more friends.

Gerhard [looking at Michael and smiling]: When backchat was part of my life no one liked me and I was always in trouble. But since I chased backchat away, everyone likes me and I have a lot more friends.

Kobus [grinning]: It is really nice, since teachers start to say they are proud of our school's children.

Christo [giving a step forward]: I have learned that Fighting causes trouble. Don't immediately start fighting. Rather talk about the problem first.

[All eight members then stand up and hold a poster in the air, which they all decided on, but Kobus made it. On the poster, the following words are written]:

Anti-Bad Boys

All together [very loud]: We are not the Bad Boys any more, but the Anti-Bad Boys.

Both facilitators and learners cheered and whistled.

3.8 THE RESULT OF THE PLAY

The positive effect the play had on the eight members of the Anti-Bad Boys team, the facilitators as well as other learners confirmed what Freeman et al (1997:4) say: 'Playful

approaches should not be underestimated as a worthy challenge to serious problems. Like the twin masks of tragedy and comedy, play reflects both the mirth and pathos of the human experience. When children and adults meet, play provides a common language to express the depth of thoughts, emotions and experience – in this way we share a lingua franca.’

3.8.1 Facilitators come to respect the learners’ local knowledges

During a group conversation after the play, the boys reported that a few facilitators had come to them to talk. They had said that they were glad that they now knew what worked for the boys. Mrs Charmaine said that she now know that it helped when they walked away from each other, trying to ignore Fighting. Mr Claasen* remarked that he could see that the facilitators could learn from the play that they may ask the children how they would like to deal with a problem. The facilitators said that the play had taught them to talk more to the learners instead of making their own interpretations.

3.8.2 The play gives hope to other learners experiencing similar problems

The mother of Dean* another learner in the school, phoned the school and told the Head of Department, Mr Smit*, that Leon had seen this show at school and that he wanted to talk to the therapist. When I talked to him, he wanted to know whether I thought it was possible for him to chase away the problems which were troubling him at school, just like the Anti-Bad Boys had done. This developed into a few therapy sessions with Dean, as well as his mother. Watching the show which the Anti-Bad Boys performed in the hall gave Dean some hope that it was also possible for him also to chase his problems away. I told the Anti-Bad Boys that they had given someone else courage to face problems. This gave them more courage and they became ever more determined to keep to their undertaking, as Anti-Bad Boys.

3.9 EXPANDING THE PREFERRED REALITY INTO THEIR OWN LIVES

The appreciation the boys had received from each other as well as from their facilitators, a facilitator's letter and the play supported the construction of their stories that they are Anti-Bad Boys who succeed in what they prefer to become. The more people were brought into this appreciative audience, the more the boys believed their new self-description (Monk et al 1996).

An expansion of this new-found self-description happened when Gerhard started to sell juice at the school and Wikus and Kobus started polishing shoes to earn extra money. All three of them then said that they believe in themselves and they know that they can succeed in anything they want to do.

Michael also told me that he now helps his father to repair cars. He said: 'Fighting and Trouble are not just less at school but also at home.' When I asked him whether it was his father that had changed, he said: 'No, it was me that chased Trouble away. Not only at school but at home also.'

3.10 REFLECTION

Consulting with the learners at schools, and especially these eight learners, strengthened my belief that neither facilitators nor therapists can ever be experts on children's lives. I was prepared to really listen to the children and respect their own local knowledges in dealing with the problems they experience.

I guess it's all about where you're coming from and what your aims are in working with young people. It's about whether you're coming from a position of being the expert, having something useful to offer and dictating that to young people; or whether you're coming from a position of having something to share and they might best know how they can receive it... When you start sharing the power and allowing young people to make decisions about themselves, the myths and the stereotypes about young

people are constantly challenged, so that's a really exciting thing to do.
(Black 1995: 93)

3.11 SEVEN MONTHS LATER

I scheduled a follow-up to acknowledge the fact that not one of the eight learners is in therapy any longer. Neither the facilitators nor the eight learners feel any need for further therapy. Christo has been chosen as a leader (prefect) and six months after the play was performed, Michael received the following letter from Mrs Cornelissen.

Dear Michael

I feel very proud of you while writing this letter. I can really see a change in your behaviour in class. I can see that you try very hard, in your schoolwork as well as in your relations with your friends. It seems to me that Fighting has disappeared from your life. You are a real inspiration to me as well as to your classmates.

Mrs Cornelissen

This letter from Mrs Cornelissen expanded and strengthened Michael's re-discovered identity. It showed how the facilitators now acknowledged the learners' knowledges and assisted the transformation process, of moving towards a more caring and supportive school community. In Chapter Four the facilitators are included in this transformation process of care and support and the value of their self-reflection as a result of conversations and letters are discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

BEING AN AUDIENCE TO FACILITATORS

4.1 PRACTISING CARE WITH FACILITATORS

While I was counselling learners at schools, I realized that it is not only learners who want care but that facilitators may also want and request counselling. I became aware of this need when I spoke to facilitators about the progress of learners whom I had counselled (in every case, such consultations were done with the permission of the learners concerned). During these informal conversations, many facilitators told me that they had experienced a loss of their original faith, dreams, goals and commitment regarding teaching. Many of them said that they now teach because it is their job, but that they do not really enjoy teaching any more. Many felt that their teaching does not make any difference in the learners' lives. As an insider (someone who had also taught for ten years), I could identify with this need of the facilitators and I asked them whether they wanted to talk about it. They said yes, they really had a need to talk to someone.

These facilitators approached me, in most cases, not as persons in a 'crisis', but rather as persons in need of nurture and support. This indicated to me how the subject of care 'is shifting from that of a self-actualised individual for whom care functions primarily at times of crisis towards one of a person in need of nurture and support' (Graham 1996:51). By listening to the facilitators' stories, I was able to offer them some of the care they needed, and I practised one of the most basic caring functions that a pastoral therapist can offer, namely: 'a storied context of ultimate meaning within which life can be lived. Expressed another way, one of the fundamental structures of care that life in a community of faith can offer is a story or a grammar – a way of speaking about people's circumstances – that connects people's life experience with the ultimate context of meaning contained in the gospel' (Gerkin 1997:103). The way in which care and commitment guided the conversations I had with facilitators is reflected on in more detail

in Chapter Five.

It was when I discovered this need amongst facilitators that I decided to expand this study to include something of their experiences. It was in respect for their wishes that they became participators in the research, or rather, co-search. This resonates with what Ballard (1996:31) says about participatory research: 'We construct our understanding through dialogue with one another and with many poets and other storytellers that we choose to illuminate our lives.'

Once the facilitators became aware that I was trying to participate in their experience in a caring way, more spontaneous conversations followed. We also had a few spontaneous group discussions during breaks, where these facilitators spoke to each other about a lack of appreciation and their loss of motivation. It was then that I asked them whether there was something that stole their dreams and goals away from them. What stood on the side of these problems which they experienced? Which daily battles with problems undermined their capabilities to persist with their best anti-problem practices? In these informal conversations emerged some factors which contributed to the facilitators' feelings of failure, helplessness and frustration: cultural and language barriers, class sizes as well as stress due to pressure to perform under difficult circumstances.

Some of the facilitators felt that they were experiencing 'burn out' as a result of these factors, and really needed to talk about their problems. I invited them to come to talk to me. Three facilitators immediately approached me and asked whether they could have individual consultations with me. They said they had experienced my invitation as 'reaching out a caring hand towards them'. I smiled and said: 'Actually, it is a caring ear I invite you to.' They responded: 'We just need someone to act as an audience for our needs.' From this point onwards, the conversations with the facilitators developed step by step.

During the ensuing conversations, I listened respectfully to the facilitators' stories, asking 'landscape of action' and 'landscape of identity' questions (White 1995a:24). These

questions enabled facilitators to re-connect with their original dreams and goals, how they still practise their good intentions of 'being there for the learners'. However, the limiting practicalities of big classes, language and cultural barriers, and various problematic power relations had blinded them to these good things they still do.

4.2 CONVERSATIONS WITH FACILITATORS

In the individual conversations and through therapeutic letters we sought ways in which the three facilitators who participated in the study acted instinctively and purposefully in accordance with their original dreams and goals for teaching and education. It was through this practice that the facilitators re-discovered 'lenses of hope' through which they could now 're-vision' a sense that they still put their good intentions into practice. The scope of this study unfortunately prevents me from discussing every conversation. However, the three facilitators who consulted me gave permission for excerpts from our journey to be included.

4.2.1 Tertia Botes

Tertia is a Grade 3 facilitator with a class of 17 English speaking-children (consisting of Xhosa, Tswana and Zulu children) and 12 Afrikaans-speaking children. Hers is one of the few small classes (29) in the school.

4.2.1.1 *A conversation*

We had our first conversation one morning, during her free period, in an office overlooking the blocks of classes.

Esmé: What was your cause/mission in deciding to become a facilitator?

Tertia: I always loved children, and I am a very patient person. I do not want to stop teaching. I love the sport, especially netball.

Esmé: Do you coach netball at school?

Tertia: Yes, but it is very difficult to let them (the learners) attend the practices because most of them do not have transport back home after the practices. They have to walk very far back home.

Esmé: How do you then manage to get them still to come to the practices?

Tertia: I guess it is because they see that, although they may not experience themselves as very clever they can play a great game of netball – if they are prepared to give their best during practice. Three of our girls received [provincial] colours for their netball. They then had to practise in Pretoria North [which is 70 kilometres from the school]. Two of us [facilitators] took them to these practices and brought them back again at six in the evening.

Esmé: What made you do this for them?

Tertia: The look on their faces. They enjoyed it so much and they were so proud of themselves.

Esmé: Did these incidents help you experience that you were serving your cause as facilitator to your satisfaction?

Tertia: Yes, you know I never thought about it like that, but I guess when one of the girls came back to me and said, 'Ma'am, I never thought I could do anything like this. If it were not for you I could never have done it.' I realize now, that was what I always wanted to do. To really mean something to kids. To enrich their lives. I guess, although it does not feel like that every day, I still do it.

Esmé: Can you recall any other times when you felt like this?

Tertia: Yes, at the end of the year, when one looks at the children's books and sees how they progressed, you realize all the effort you have put in, all the times you have contacted their parents and talked to them, have really shown some results.

Esmé: I notice you said you contacted the parents of the learners and talked to them. Is this an 'anti-problem practice' that works for you?

Tertia: Yes, for sure. By making contact with the parents one understands much more. Then you know what's going on at home. If I do not know what's going on at home it is easy to think he/she is only a naughty child.

Esmé: What advice do you think you could give your colleagues, if they ask how you deal with problems in your class?

Tertia: That there is always a story behind every child.

Esmé: What do you think this reaching out to the parents has meant to them?

Tertia: I think the fact that I told them I know their kids can do better showed them that I, as a white facilitator, really wanted to help. That it does not matter to me whether they are black or white. You know, having such a high percentage of black children in the school makes it very difficult sometimes. Their culture is different. Sometimes I miss the hugs I used to receive so freely, and because of the language barrier they do not express themselves freely. It can become very frustrating, but luckily our staff is helping one another a lot.

Esmé: In what way do you as staff help each other?

Tertia: The headmaster helps a lot. When he finds us on the verandas talking to one another he will never send us back to our classes if we tell him we need to talk a

while. When we go through a really bad spot, he will make break five minutes longer and give us some time to unwind a bit. I think we all suffer. If we had to struggle with one another as well it would be very bad.

Esmé: How do you help one another to unwind?

Tertia: Every one gives his/her fair share. When someone's child is sick, the others will give up their free periods and attend to your classes while you can go home. I guess just talking to one another, like we did at break when you asked us what the greatest problems were we all experienced, also helps.

Esmé: Like, talking to the parents of the learners in your class helped all of you?

Tertia: Yes, then we might also consider that there is a story behind every problem.

Esmé: And not just a naughty child?

Tertia: Yes...([aughing]).

4.2.1.2 *A letter to Tertia Botes*

The value of reflective letters has been identified by informal research done by Epston and White (as quoted by Freedman et al 1997:113-114), which supports that clients felt that a letter had the equivalent value of 4.5 sessions: 'For beginners, letter writing can seem daunting and time-consuming.... and yet such therapeutic documents (letters) are highly effective.' In order to acknowledge the 'forgotten' qualities that Tertia still had and still exercised as facilitator, I responded to the conversations we had had by asking questions in a letter that I wrote to her.

Dear Tertia

This letter is a response to the conversation we had on 03/11/2000. A few questions

went through my mind and I have put them on paper, if you would like to read through them. If other ideas cross your mind, would you be willing to share them with me?

At the beginning of the conversation you said that the girls who played netball had problems with transport and that you took them to the practices and brought them back at six in the evenings.

I wonder what this says about your caring for the children? I am curious about what the netball girls would say about what you did for them? What did that show (tell) them about the kind of facilitator you are?

You did not only reach out towards the netball girls, you told me how you contacted the learner's parents. Your words were: 'By making contact with the parents one understands much more.'

How did you manage to still do this with such a busy schedule and a big class? I wonder what other 'reaching out' you do to parents that we did not even discuss? Are you perhaps aware of other forms of reaching out?

You said that the staff help one another a lot, that if someone's child is ill, the others will give up free periods and attend to the person's classes, and that talking to one another helped.

Does this say anything about your problem-solving technique? What does it say about the importance of working and talking together; of a collaborative way of working? What does it do to your way of teaching, to know that you have a principal who knows (in your own words) 'when we go through a really bad spot' and then gives you an extra five minutes during break just to unwind?

At the end of the conversation you said that 'we might discover that there is a story behind every problem'.

I am curious to know what you think the story behind your problems with teaching is and whether the questions I asked are assisting you with these problems.

Warm greetings

Esmé

4.2.1.3 *A response from Tertia Botes*

The following responses from Tertia indicated how the conversations and letters had helped to enrich her identity, re-connecting her with qualities she had thought were long forgotten and showing her how she still exercised her original dreams about and

commitments to becoming a facilitator.

Tertia read the letter and responded by sharing a few of her ideas with me during a next conversation, parts of which I transcribed and include with her permission.

'I now realize that the reaction one receives from learners and parents determines a great deal of one's future behaviour. The fact that my deeds are appreciated makes it easier to act in the same way again. Through my contact with the parents I discovered that collaboration with the parents as well as individual attention to learners leads to better performance by the learners Our staff certainly contributes a lot to my teaching abilities. The fact that they are really my friends, and that I can share my problems and difficulties with some of the teaching, like the big classes and the language and cultural barriers with them, really helps me to carry on. Our headmaster, with his understanding of our difficulties also gives us that extra bit of "petrol" to carry on. I think the story behind our teaching problem lies in the fact that the Education Department changes too many things without really knowing what is going on in the schools. For example, the implementing of Outcomes Based Education or Curriculum 2005. To make it work, each facilitator has to adapt it to the specific requirements of his/her class, as well as those of the individual learners. It works very well with a fast learner. However, the learner who is slower to understand has to get additional help. This is what the people in top positions do not understand, and this makes it very difficult for both facilitators and learners.

Inner reflections: As an ex-teacher I know how much time goes into teaching. Therefore I admired the way in which Tertia had made the time to contact the learners' parents and to give individual attention to those learners who need it.

4.2.2 Antoinette

She is a Grade 2 facilitator with 49 learners in her class. All 49 are taught in English and

their home languages are Xhosa, Tswana and Zulu.

4.2.2.1 *A conversation*

Antoinette and I had our first conversation one afternoon just after school before her sports coaching started. The conversation took place in an office overlooking the blocks of classes.

Esmé: What was your cause/mission in deciding to become a facilitator?

Antoinette: My Grade One teacher, Mrs Burger.

Esmé: What respectful practices did she have which inspired you to become a facilitator?

Antoinette: One could go to her with all one's problems. I want to mean something to the kids. The way that she meant something to me. If stuff is not great at home I want to be here for them, but it does not work like that anymore.

Esmé: Who/what stole these dreams of yours?

Antoinette: I think the learners do not have the openness to share their lives with me, because all that they hear is shouting. There used to be a time when all the children sat on the carpet and told their news of the day. This just cannot happen any more. I do not even have a carpet because there is no space to put it. All 49 would not fit on a carpet if I had one. If you try something like this it is chaos, because there are just too many kids. The result of this is that I stopped trying to do it. The kids get no assistance from me. Out of frustration it feels like I only shout at them.

Esmé: What would you like to see happen?

Antoinette: I would like a support team, a team that can help each other in coming up with ideas for discipline. The situation is influencing my entire life. I can't even read my Bible any more because I feel guilty about what I do [at school to the learners].

Esmé: What other stuff makes this shouting and guilt more?

Antoinette: The frustration between what I want and what I can.

Esmé: What is it you want?

Antoinette: Fewer children in my class, a bridging class where they can learn English. Then I would be able to communicate better. To really listen and talk to them. To come to know their needs. You know there are so many children in my class and only ten may get merits at the prestige evening. The system is so rigid they would not let me nominate thirteen names. Of the thirteen learners I fought for only the ten learners with the best performance get nominated.

Esmé: What made you 'fight' for those other three names?

Antoinette: I know who stood out in my class as hard and successful workers. The whole year all thirteen of them got stars and remarks [as rewards] like 'I am proud of you. I can see you did your best. Thank you for good work'. How would three of them now understand that the others could get rewarded at the prestige evening but not them? I cried for days and in the end I convinced the headmaster to reward the three other learners at a school assembly.

Esmé: What does this 'fighting' for three kids reveal about your beliefs and values?

Antoinette [after a long pause.]: Maybe that I still really care and want to be there for

them.

Esmé: And the stars that you reward them with, as well as the remarks like 'I am proud of you' and 'Thank you'?

Antoinette: That I do not only shout the entire day, but still reward them and give them acknowledgement for what they do. I still believe that if you reward someone properly they are going to work harder.

Esmé: After what you've told me now, if the learners in your class could talk to each other, discussing ways in which you help them, what would they appreciate most?

Antoinette: [silence] That they must not accept what other people think of them. That they are worthwhile fighting for. That they can even stand up for themselves as well.

Esmé: You said you believe that rewarding someone is important. How do you experience that in your own life as a facilitator?

Antoinette: Hmm...I think that because of the frustrations I experience as a result of the big class I do not feel rewarded very often. But I must say you made me see I am not entirely bad.

Esmé: Would you like to see more of this 'not entirely bad' person?

Antoinette: Yes, I certainly would.

Esmé: What do you think would help to do that?

Antoinette: Maybe more talking.

Esmé: Like with other people as well?

Antoinette: Yes, because talking with my husband does not work any more.

Esmé: If we could use your idea of a support group that you mentioned earlier, who would you like to include in that group?

Antoinette: I think some other colleagues and friends of mine at school.

Esmé: Maybe that is something we can start in the new year, a support group for facilitators?

Antoinette: Yes please!

4.2.2.2 *A Letter to Antoinette*

As an acknowledgement to the helpful practices Antoinette still implements as a facilitator, I wrote her a letter. The letter also summarised and extended the conversation, in line with (Epston 1994:32).

Dear Antoinette

This letter is a response to the conversation we had on 10/11/2000. A few questions went through my mind and I have put them on paper, if you would like to read through them. If other ideas cross your mind, would you be willing to share them with me?

At the beginning of the conversation you said: 'I want to be there for them, but it does not work like that any more.' But later on you told me about all the stars and remarks you gave them that said: 'I am proud of you. I can see you did your best. Thank you for good work.'

You said that you were not there for them any more. However, what does it tell you about yourself that with a class of 49 learners you still find the time to give individual remarks, like these, to them? Would the remarks say something about

your intentions?

You said that with your personal knowledge of the learners you knew exactly which were the thirteen hard workers.

How did you manage to make time to know the children individually in such a big class?

You talked about how the incident where you ‘fought’ for the three kids who did not get awarded at the prestige evening, showed them that they should not accept just anything. They were worthwhile fighting for and you hoped that they can even stand up for themselves.

I wonder, were there other times when you also demonstrated to the learners that they could stand up for themselves, times when your behaviour showed them that you believed in them?

I am looking fore ward to hearing your response to these questions.

*Warm regards
Esmé*

4.2.2.3 *A response from Antoinette*

During a subsequent conversation, Antoinette shared a few of her thoughts as a response to the letter I had written to her. Antoinette’s responses indicated that she had started to re-connect with her preferred ways of living out her dreams and goals for teaching. I transcribed parts of the conversation and, with her permission, include it in the study.

By reading this letter I realized that actually I do mean something to the learners, and that it is that which they give back to me that helps me to carry on. It is more from their work and their books that I come to know them than through what they tell me. Thinking about it now, they do not often, or easily, speak about their families and the circumstances at home. A white child will come and tell you that he is hungry but a black child will not do it. I would really appreciate it if someone can come and speak to us about cultural differences. Someone like Justus Tshungu. Who could for example tell us what it means when I scold a learner and he/she grins at me? Sometimes I think we forget about their [the black learners] circumstances

and the differences in the way we as white Afrikaners and they as Black people grew up and developed. For example, the way they [the black learners] are sitting and talking now. I do not think it is in their culture to sit still and not say a single word. And that is exactly what we expect of them in the class situation?.... Sometimes when three or four children stay after school and help with work in class while waiting for their transport, I get a glimpse in their lives. Because it is only in such a small group that they will tell me something of themselves or their family circumstances.... I really wish I had more time, a smaller class and more knowledge about the difference in the cultures. I think that then I would be able to do even more of the good stuff (which I now realize I still do) for the learners in my class'

These steps Antoinette has taken towards cultural consciousness, resonates with Graham's (1996:105) ideas that patterns of social relations are produced in culture.

4.2.3 Sonja*

Sonja runs a special class, with 15 learners. All 15 are taught in English. Their home language is either Afrikaans, English, Xhosa, Tswana or Zulu.

4.2.3.1 A conversation

We had our first conversation one morning after break (over a cup of tea, at Sonja's request) in the office overlooking blocks of classes. As the conversation developed I realized that this 'sharing a cup of tea' was part of the way that Sonja 'gives' to other people, always reaching out to someone else with something to eat or drink.

Esmé: Can you share with me what motivated you to become a facilitator?

Sonja: I wanted to be like my teacher and my dad made me a blackboard when I was young. He encouraged this dream of mine to become a teacher.

Esmé: Were there other people who also encouraged you?

Sonja: Yes, my brother. He always boosted me and told me I 'could do it'.

Esmé: Do you think you are a person that can [do it]?

Sonja: I think so, I used to do nursing during holidays. Although it was difficult, I did not quit.

Esmé: What made you carry on?

Sonja: I think it came from the way I was brought up. Our family used to stand together. Seeing the positive side of life. I think our faith helped us.

Esmé: Do you practise your faith at school?

Sonja: Yes, I believe that God has put me here with a purpose. You know, I have the special class. Most of the children's intelligence is less than 60. Although they have learning problems it makes everything worthwhile when they run to me in my car in the mornings. Every one wants to say 'hallo' first.

Esmé: You mentioned earlier that you see the positive in life. Can you remember times that this 'positiveness' helped you in the school?

Sonja: Yes, I think it means a lot to other people. I like cheering them up.

Esmé: I can testify to that. I recall once when I was in the staff room and everyone was down. You walked in with freshly baked bread and jam and everyone cheered up.

Sonja: You know there was a time that I wanted to quit teaching, but thinking about it

now I think they will miss me.

Esmé: What do you think the school and the children would miss most if you should leave?

Sonja: I think a lot of them saw dedication in me. To do your best every day. The soup that I make for the children in class each day, the hugs I give, that really means something to them. Believing in their humanness.

Esmé: Can you recall any particular children/learners, whose lives you have influenced because you believed in them?

Sonja: Yes, Hennie. He was spastic and could only use one arm. He could not speak a word of English and could only count up to 5, although he was 11 years old. Except the fact that he could count up to ten after a year, I think the most important thing was that I helped him to become more positive. He started to feel good about himself. I started armwrestling against him. Later he started throwing back the discus to the other athletes.

Esmé: What part do you think you have played in Hennie's success in overcoming his problems?

Sonja: We cracked jokes together. He came to know himself as not 'so bad' as everyone always believed. I think he realized that he could also achieve something in life and that he must not lie down, ever.

Esmé: This motivating of and believing in children, in what ways do you still do it today?

Sonja: When I see a child can, he is trying, I will give him stars or a sticker as a reward. Not only for academic work but also when helping a friend.

Esmé: What do you think those stars tell a child?

Sonja: It shows him he can. He is good enough. Because God put him here, and when he is good enough for God he is good enough for everyone.

Esmé: Do you enter this faith of yours into your class conversations?

Sonja: Yes, I would start talking about values at any time of the day. I take a situation and connect it to the Bible. For example, when a child spontaneously shares his bread with a friend I would say 'that is now how Jesus would have done it'.

Esmé: Which other practices of your own have been the most helpful in your classroom while dealing with problems?

Sonja: Quite often I use other children in the class to help handle a problem.

Esmé: Can you give me an example?

Sonja: Yes, when I am discouraged with a child who keeps hitting and hurting the other learners, we have our own 'court session', where the children decide together what they think the appropriate punishment should be.

Esmé: And does this work?

Sonja: It works for me, because if all the friends feel the same way about the punishment, it works better than when I would hand it down.

Esmé: If the children in your class could talk to one another, discussing what it is that you do that helps them most, that which they appreciated the most, what do you think they would say?

Sonja: I do stuff that is 'nice'. Different stuff.

Esmé: Did the things we talked about so far help you too....?

Sonja: Yes, for the first time in my life I experience freedom. I think it has something to do with the fact that I now realise that the 'everyday stuff' that I do really makes a difference in people's lives. And that I do it without trying to do it. It just happens. You know there is a saying: 'The oil that leaks is going to reach every one around you.' I would rather like to spread a perfume of bubbles.

Esmé: If you think back about the things you have told me, like what you did for Hennie, do you think you leak oil or do you spread a perfume of bubbles?

Sonja: I see now it is not difficult to spread bubbles. It comes automatically.

Esmé: What do you think these bubbles consist of?

Sonja: Maybe my 'positiveness' and interest in each child's humanness.

4.2.3.2 *A letter to Sonja*

In order to acknowledge the way in which Sonja still believes in the learners' humanness and exercises her 'positiveness' in school, I wrote a letter to her.

Dear Sonja

The conversation we had on 29/10/2000 made me curious about some of the things you said. A few questions went through my mind and I have put them on paper if you would like to read through them. If other ideas cross your mind, would you be willing to share them with me?

You said that your brother always told you that you 'could' (do it).

I wonder what he would say about the way you teach in class now? The fact that the children cannot wait to say 'hallo' in the morning, running to your car to be first?

You mentioned that your positiveness helps you a lot in the school.

I am curious to know if you can recall other incidents in the past where your positiveness also helped you to have such a positive effect on children/learners? Do you have other people or factors on the side of positiveness?

You spoke about how you believe in people's humanness.

I wonder. What you see in people (learners and facilitators) that makes you believe in their humanness. What motivates you to let people feel good about themselves?

You mentioned the important part your faith plays in your teaching and how you would spontaneously bring the way Jesus would have done something into the lesson.

I wonder what for you is so precious about the way 'Jesus did' it that you spontaneously teach it, not from a book but as a result of someone's behaviour. Can you think of other times in your teaching career where you acted the way 'Jesus did' and where it meant a lot to someone else?

Another interesting thing you said was the way you made use of the children in your class to 'handle a problem'.

I wonder what it was that let you decide to involve them in such a way? Did you perhaps see that this collaborative way of handling a problem has worked in your class? If so, would you be willing to share it with me?

You said that you now see it was not too difficult to spread your 'perfume of bubbles', this perfume that consists of positiveness and interest in every learner's humanity.

This makes me think about the role that positiveness and interest in every learner's humanity can play in teaching in general.

I am looking forward to hearing your reflections on this letter.

*Warm regards
Esmé*

4.2.3.3 *A response from Sonja*

Sonja's response showed how she had re-connected with her ability to speak to people

and the way her faith supports her in her teaching as well as how she supports others. What she now realizes is that 'ordinary friendly relationships are mutually helpful and therefore therapeutic in certain ways, although they are seldom spoken of in such terms by the laity' (Gerkin 1997:103).

During a subsequent conversation, Sonja shared with me her journey towards being a more fulfilled and appreciated facilitator. This was done verbally, and I transcribed some of her comments and, with her permission, included them in the study.

Thinking about your letter made me realize that my brother would have said he is not surprised at the way I am teaching now, because 'that is the way Sonja is.' I know it is my faith, my children, my husband and incidents that I see happening which are on the side of my positiveness. Like the incident where I was in a 'low' in my teaching and a friend started praying for the children in my class. Each friend prayed for specific children. You would not believe the peace that entered that class. At the end of the year, both the learners in my class and I were at a 'high' we have never before been at.... I know that there is good in every person and I now realize that the way I discover that 'good' stuff is to really make time to speak to people. Like after school when the children help me with chores in the class. Or when I see someone loves cleaning the class then that will be the task I let him/her do for me. I also learn a lot from the learners' pictures. Not by interpreting it, but by speaking to them about it and asking what they meant with the different drawings.... I have decided to involve the learners in deciding how to handle the problems in class because experience showed me that what they decide on works best. Because they know themselves and their fellow learners better than I know them. They know their likes, dislikes and the way they do stuff in their culture (both the black and the white children).... When I experience a 'low' spot in my teaching, my faith, my friends and my fellow facilitators carry me through. Our staff are really there for each other.

In my conversations with Sonja I felt that through her reaching out with food, she lived

out a 'table fellowship' like Jesus did: '...even today, to invite a man [woman] to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness: in short, sharing a table meant sharing a life' (Jeremias 1971:115).

4.3 EXPANDING THE APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE

The facilitators not only re-connected with their original faith and good intentions through the conversations they had with me, but also through positive feedback which they received from the learners. The Anti-Bad Boys served as members of the 'community of acknowledgement' to Mrs Olivier when they wrote her a letter of appreciation. In the letter they mentioned how Mrs Olivier had helped them to strengthen their standing up against 'Fighting' (see letter in 3.6.2) She could now see her helpful practices through the children's eyes, and this contributed to the growing of her alternative story, where she could feel appreciated and worthwhile (Morgan 1999:98). This letter of appreciation and acknowledgement also helped to document Mrs Olivier's anti-problem practices (White & Epston 1990).

The facilitators also wanted to act as an appreciative audience to the way in which the learners stood up against fighting. They wanted to acknowledge what they had learned from the learners, and decided to do it in the form of a letter addressed to the learners.

4.4 AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE FACILITATORS TO THE LEARNERS

After the conversations and letters of reflection and responses between the facilitators and myself, the facilitators experienced a wish to communicate to the learners how 'this speaking' the Anti-Bad Boys talked about helped them as facilitators. We (Tertia, Antoinette, Sonja and myself) met one morning (in the same office where the conversations had taken place), while the learners had a programme in the hall. I asked them why they wanted to share this knowledge and the motivation they had received with the learners. They decided that the purpose of the letter was to acknowledge what the

facilitators had learnt through the play which the learners performed; to acknowledge how the facilitators' experienced caring 'for themselves'; to communicate the facilitators' commitment to the learners; and to demonstrate to the learners that the facilitators saw themselves on the same side as the learners.

Together, the facilitators then co-constructed the following letter, which they read to the learners during the next school assembly in the hall.

Dear learners

In your play (on 18-09-2000) you spoke about how you replaced 'Fighting' with 'Speaking'. It was through your play that you reminded us of the importance of 'Speaking' [talking], and we would like to share with you something about the way in which 'Speaking' helped us.

Before we felt as though we as teachers [facilitators] did not make a difference in you as learners' lives any more. We did not feel appreciated or worthwhile as teachers any more.

But 'Speaking' gave us back our hope, both in ourselves as teachers [facilitators] and in ways we as teachers [facilitators] and you as learners could speak and work together, against problems.

'Speaking' came to us in two different ways. Firstly, your 'Speaking' through the play and also our 'Speaking' with the therapist during individual conversations and reflective letters.

Through your 'Speaking' through the play you taught us the importance of including you in the handling of problems. We learned to respect your knowledge about yourself and to work with that knowledge. For example: Rocktion said it worked when he played on his own. Maybe it can work in class as well if he sits alone at a desk. We would never have known this if Rocktion had not told us in the play. In future we would like to talk more to you as learners. By doing that we hope to learn more about your knowledge and work with that knowledge in handling problems.

It was by watching your play that we realized we also had a need to speak to someone about the problems we experienced. We then had individual conversations with Esmé where we experienced a caring for ourselves and we discovered that we actually still teach our good intentions. We discovered that we are still committed to you and reward you by giving you stars and positive remarks and that we learn more about you during conversations when you are in smaller groups. Like when we practise sport or you stay in class while waiting for your transport. We realized

that we still try to give individual attention when you need it and contact your parents when it is in your interests.

Although big classes and the language differences sometimes blind us to these positive features of our teaching, both the conversations [with the therapist] and your play gave us new hope and inspiration to really commit to these positive aspects we want to practise.

The way the members of the 'Anti-Bad Boys' team helped one another opened our eyes to the ways in which we as colleagues encourage and support one another.

We are curious about ways in which we can combine your 'Speaking' with our 'Speaking'. By doing that we can learn from one another and come to respect one another's knowledge.

*Thank you for sharing a part of your life with us
Your re-inspired teachers [facilitators].*

Through the individual conversations, reflective letters and the open letter from the facilitators, I again realized the fundamental role facilitators, learners and therapists can play in creating communities of care, concern and acknowledgement. Through the care the facilitators received during the interviews and the acknowledgement the learners received through the open letter, 'doing hope' started to surface at the school. Weingarten (2000:402) says about 'doing hope' that it is 'something too important – its effects to body and soul too significant – to be left to individuals alone. Hope must be the responsibility of the community'. In this study, the community consisted of facilitators, learners and myself as therapist.

4.5 REFLECTION

Through my various conversations with the facilitators and letters to the facilitators, they came to realize that they still had those original skills they had had when they started to teach. They still meant something to the children, although various discourses had concealed and suppressed these good intentions. They were freed from feelings such as a sense of a lack of appreciation, a sense that they did not mean anything in the lives of the learners, a sense that they do not teach according to their original dreams and goals for

teaching and a sense of lacking agency. This is when, according to Anderson (1995:31), therapy can 'help people create and gain access to self-identities that are freeing -that allow them to develop understanding of their lives and its events, that permit self-agency or a sense of self-agency'.

These conversations also helped the facilitators to reposition themselves, moving from unreflected ways of speaking to more self-reflecting ways of speaking. They realised that their good intentions did not guarantee them the outcomes they wanted, because unreflected ways of speaking had maintained the patterns of belief they had intended to move beyond (Tannen, quoted, in Davies 1996).

By using the facilitators' and the learners' knowledges, a more collaborative way of teaching was achieved. The conventional one-way communication between facilitators and learners where 'I am the expert and you are the child' became, 'We are both experts on our own knowledges and if we respect each other's knowledges, those knowledges can enrich both our lives'.

Mrs Olivier's letter to the Anti-Bad-Boys, the letter that the Anti-Bad Boys wrote to Mrs Olivier and the open letter of acknowledgement to the learners broke the pattern of expert versus children. The possibilities for two-way (or multi-way) communication were extended. The facilitators and learners were now taking steps in co-creating a better understanding of one another.

Through these conversations and letters, both respect for the facilitators' situations and care for their needs were shown, and 'forgotten' qualities they still had and still exercised as facilitators were strengthened.

In Chapter Five the co-search and pastoral therapy are reflected upon, extending the journey of commitment, care and transformation.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

And how many times has he told his tale to strangers
 Laying out his life while driving round and round the town
 How many times has he had no word of answer
 From passengers preoccupied with stories of their own.

And how many times do they tell their tales to strangers
 Who turn away in silence and pretend they didn't hear
 How many times do we throw away such chances
 Never knowing what we might have learned with open ears
 Never knowing what we might have learned with open ears.

(Judy Small)

The above song, 'How many times' by Judy Small (1998), tells a story of people with problems, but no one interested to listen. All they want is someone to act as an audience for them. Judy Small reflects on how many times potential listeners throw away the chance to become an audience and what they could have learned if they had listened with open ears.

5.1 WHAT LISTENING WITH 'OPEN EARS' TAUGHT ME

Throughout this study I saw my role as a pastoral therapist who listened curiously to the stories of learners and facilitators. Listening in a deconstructive way to the learners (and, later in the study, also to facilitators) as they explained their life stories to me constantly reminded me that learners and facilitators are multi-storied (McLean 1997:14).

On our journey towards co-creating a better understanding of one another I listened to those sparkling moments (Monk et al 1996) that are alternatives to problem stories, working towards the stories the learners and facilitators wanted to be part of their lives (Monk et al 1996:42). The more I listened to the facilitators and learners, the more I learned from them and the more I came to respect them as people with a need for an 'open ear'. This listening was extended towards respectful listening, between learners and learners, between learners and facilitators as well as between the facilitators, the learners and myself.

This deconstructive listening led to two very important aspects of the study. The study moved from research to co-search; the aim moved from first consulting with the learners to a broader study where both learners and facilitators were included and collaboration became the focus. Therefore, I eventually chose to change the title of the dissertation from 'Facilitator, look through my eyes' to 'Facilitators and learners: co-creating a better understanding of one another'.

5.2 EXPANDING THE RESEARCH TOPIC

My conversations with the learners who participated and the feedback which I gave to the facilitators (with the learners' permission), as well as the response from the facilitators, made me realize that I could not do this study without including reflection on the needs and the problems that the facilitators experienced. The facilitators experienced this inclusion as a 'caring hand' stretched out to them. The fact that I too had been a facilitator and had taught at a primary school for ten years gave me the inside knowledge and sensitivity required to attend to the needs of these facilitators. My role as 'insider' as described by Reinharz (1992:260), also contributed to the fact that I could identify with the problems the facilitators experienced. By including the needs of the facilitators, a first step was taken toward introducing the new concept of co-creating a better understanding of one another.

It was only after I had spoken to several learners and facilitators that I realized how

complex the issue of their frustrations was. These frustrations were the outcome of several factors such as class sizes, cultural and language barriers and various hierarchical power relations. These factors were caused and maintained by broader discourses which led to a polarisation between facilitators and learners. I then realized that the only way to assist both facilitators and learners was to work against any further polarisation. I needed to avoid polarisation by listening to the learners on the one hand and facilitators on the other. I need to listen to both, separately and together. Co-construction can only be achieved when both facilitators and learners attain an understanding of one another's lives and problems. Because it was not possible within the scope of this study to arrange group sessions to address both learners' and facilitators' needs simultaneously, I encouraged communication between these two groups by means of the play, letters of acknowledgement and the open letter from the facilitators to the learners.

In assisting learners and facilitators to gain a better understanding of one another, I was informed by what Freedman and Combs (1996:16) say about social construction discourse: 'The beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labour, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day.'

5.3 HOW PASTORAL PRACTICES GUIDED THE JOURNEY TO ADDRESS THE AIMS OF THIS STUDY

After I had become aware of the teaching and learning problems and the emotional needs both facilitators and learners were struggling with, my commitment to a transformation to a more ethical and just (school) society guided me in choosing the following aims of the study: to co-construct their multi-storied lives with a group of learners; to assist a group of facilitators to validate learners' experiential knowledges and to work with those knowledges; to co-create better collaboration between facilitators and learners; to identify how the effects of economic, social and political discourses (class sizes, hierarchical power/knowledge relations, and cultural and language barriers) constitute facilitators and learners; and to be an audience for facilitators' stories.

On the journey towards these aims, I aspired to a practice that resonates with what Bosch (1991:484) identifies as the challenge of pastoral practices: ‘a commitment to the poor and the marginalized...subject-empowering and life-giving love.’ Liberation and changes in South Africa have brought us to the point where black and white learners can receive education in the same school, but a commitment towards transformation challenges pastoral therapists to take therapy a step further – to participate in their interaction with other people in such caring ways that faith can be experienced as something practical and lived in communicative acts. The confirmation that I have participated in such a way during my therapy *with* the learners and co-constructed their multi-storied lives *with* them, came when Michael (who used to be labelled a ‘troublemaker’) said to me: ‘Tannie, [Auntie] you are very different from other people. You are the first person who listened to me without just saying I am bad. You are the one who helped me.’

Michael’s words stressed the importance of what White (1995b:64) says concerning the structuring of schools as communities of acknowledgement and communities of concern. In my study, theology was practised as a theology from below, where learners, facilitators as well as myself as therapist participated in a journey of respect, acknowledgement and care (Bosch 1991:439). Through the play the learners performed, the various letters of acknowledgement and the open letter from the facilitators to the learners (through which the facilitators acknowledged the learners’ knowledges and worked with those knowledges), greater collaboration between facilitators and learners developed. This collaboration was one of the first steps towards the transformation of the school towards a community of acknowledgement and support (White 1995b:64). In this community of acknowledgement and care, the learners could feel empowered by getting their voices back and being able to ‘speak’ to the facilitators and their fellow learners through the play (see the importance of playful approaches, as discussed in 3.8). The play the Anti-Bad Boys performed included their different stories, the stories they preferred to live by. This experience resonates with what Graham (1996:117) describes when she says that ‘the building up of a faithful (and moral) community is believed to take place in the telling and retelling of the definite Christian story’. In the play, the learners communicated to the

facilitators how they experience spirituality; for example, Gerhard said the way the other boys shared stuff with him. showed him how they 'do' Jesus by sharing, helping and understanding one another.

I experienced the value of practising care as described by Heitink (1998) through my conversations with the facilitators. They needed me to act as an audience for them. I responded to this need by inviting them to have conversations. The care they received from externalizing conversations helped them to re-connect with their original goals for teaching and showed them that they still practise those goals in their daily teaching.

5.4 THERAPY AS RESEARCH

I chose to conduct a qualitative research study, because the aim of this study was to co-construct, with a group of learners, their multi-storied lives and to co-create better collaboration between facilitators and learners (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:1). Qualitative research starts from the perspective and actions of the co-researchers studied (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000:4). For the purposes of this study, this was very important, because in order to move towards a more just, caring and supportive school community, it is necessary to implement a multi-perspective approach to social interaction which aims at describing, making sense of, interpreting and reconstructing this interaction in terms of the meaning that participants attach to it (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2).

5.4.1 A reflection on how moving from research to co-search benefited the participants

During my conversations with both learners and facilitators, we created meaning *with* one another and engaged in a process in which we have talked *with* one another instead of *to* one another (Anderson 1995:34).

The result of such talking with Michael in our first conversation was that the knowledges he had concerning the problem guided us to invite seven other learners to join us in the

conversations, and the conversation with Michael developed into group conversations. Through the interaction with one another, meanings could be co-created in conversation with one another (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:26). By using Michael's knowledges and following a notknowing approach where I as therapist stayed 'humble' about what I knew, as suggested by Anderson (1995:34), mutual understanding could develop, and I as therapist could be continually informed by the learners. During these conversations the boys co-created knowledges about ways to deal with 'Fighting', and they asked me whether they could communicate their ways of dealing with problems to the facilitators in a play. I read this request as their taking control of their lives as well as of the process. This was where the research became a 'co-search', as described by Dixon (1999:45). Due to the wish of the facilitators to speak to someone, and my invitation to them, they joined us in this co-search. Throughout this co-search, I was committed to qualitative research, where participation guided the research to be primarily to the benefit of the participants. I agree with Dixon (1999) when she adds to the notion of 'communities of care', Epston's idea of 'communities of concern' and suggests that we 'unpack' the research metaphor and approach issues in such a way that all participants benefit from the conversations and become able to make significant contributions towards the process.

5.4.1.1 Benefit for the learners

As a result of the inclusion of the facilitators in the study, they became more sensitive to the polarisation between them and the learners, as well as to how the effects (such as class sizes, cultural and language barriers and hierarchical power relations) of the economic (getting more for less), political (separate development) and social (children should be seen but not heard) discourses have increased this polarisation. This benefited the learners in the sense that the facilitators are now more aware of the learners' wish to be acknowledged as people with worthwhile knowledges of their own. The facilitators became curious about the ways in which the learners handled issues that caused trouble in their lives and now tried to work with the learners' own knowledges. Mrs Olivier's letter acknowledged the learners' alternative ways of handling problems in their lives. Her letter testified how she had witnessed how the Anti-Bad boys had started to take responsibility

and worked together in camaraderie. She acknowledged their knowledges of alternative ways to solve problems. She had witnessed more ethical behaviour where the Boys talked together in a group, helped one another and intervened when a fight broke out. The open letter from the facilitators to the learners further valued and acknowledged the learners' knowledges and preferred ways of living their lives. Through this collaboration, the conventional one-way communication patterns where the facilitators are the 'experts' and learners are there 'to be seen but not heard', were broken down and this enriched the lives of both facilitators and learners. This collaborative way of working together and co-constructing a better understanding of one another contributed towards establishing a more caring (Bosch 1991; Heitink 1998), acknowledging and supportive school community (White 1995b). This could only happen through counselling in pastoral, narrative therapy where contextual, feminist, liberation and postmodern theology and the uniqueness of narrative therapy (see 2.7) guided the co-search.

5.4.1.2 Benefit for the facilitators

Through the various conversations I had with the facilitators as well as the letters I sent them, they re-connected with their original dreams and ideals regarding teaching. Before these conversations, the facilitators had expressed a sense of not being appreciated any more and said that it felt as if they do not make any difference in learners' lives.

In the responses I received from the facilitators who participated, they said that they could now see that the conversations had strengthened the 'forgotten' qualities that they still had and still exercised as facilitators. So for example, they mentioned that they realised that they still give individual attention to the learners and work collaboratively with parents, and that they do mean something to learners, and still do 'good stuff', despite being overwhelmed by language problems, cultural differences, power/knowledge relations and class sizes.

Through the conversations the facilitators came to practise useful self-reflection, which made them more aware of cultural differences in the school. As a response to the letter

which I wrote to Antoinette, she expressed a wish to learn more about cultural differences and the stories behind some of the learners' behaviour. Through these conversations, she gained sensitivity to the different development, languages and ways of upbringing among the different cultural groups in the school. The facilitators started to reclaim agency (Davies 1991).

5.4.2 Using a narrative approach

This study developed step by step while I as therapist listened in a deconstructive way, with 'open ears', to the stories of facilitators and learners struggling with the challenge of learning and teaching. The landmarks of narrative therapy, which is a 'just therapy', contributed to this study's developing into a co-search, a collaborative study. My practice resonates with what Waldegrave (1990:10) emphasises when he says:

Just Therapy attempts to extract the essence of therapy, which relates to the manner in which people give meaning to experience and create their 'reality'. Both therapists and clients weave webs of meaning (Maturana & Varela 1987) around the problems presented in therapy. This therapy, in essence, concerns the movement from problem centred stories of pain, to stories of resolution and hope; new meaning is given to experience by the skilful weaving of new patterns.

In this study I used externalising conversations where the focus was on expanding choices and possibilities between persons and problems, moving away from problem-centred stories (Freeman et al 1997). By means of externalising conversations, the learners were separated from the problem, they could now stand together against 'Fighting'. Because the way we use language constitutes our world and our beliefs, the learners and I co-constructed a different way of talking about handling the problem. Instead of saying they were going to 'fight' against the problem, they chose to say that they are going to 'stand together against Fighting'. This 'new language' also helped to get them out of the 'fight' metaphors. The way the Anti-Bad Boys used externalising language during the play; and

the facilitators' response and open letter (as a result of the play) contributed to a more collaborative way of working, where learners and facilitators formed a team against the problem. This approach provided opportunities for the development of new and different stories.

At the beginning of the study, both the learners and the facilitators had very thin descriptions of themselves. The eight boys saw themselves as 'always in trouble'. They had to fight to maintain themselves. This fighting to maintain oneself is one of the discourses about men, especially in South African culture where individualism and self-achievement are propagated more than collaboration. However, Outcomes Based Education is now trying to work towards collaboration. Using 'landscape of action' and 'landscape of identity' questions allowed an articulation in fine detail of the story line of their lives to develop (Morgan 2000:15). This enabled the boys to discover that they could chase 'Fighting' away by standing together, and replace it with 'talking' and 'helping one another'. The letters of acknowledgement they wrote to one another also contributed to thickening and enriching their descriptions of themselves. Rereading a confirmation of the preferred stories which contradict the problem story of 'Fighting' helped the boys to separate the problem (Fighting) from their lives. By reading and re-reading these confirmations regularly, they could remind themselves of how far they had advanced in their lives and internalised their own preferred stories (Epston 1994:31-32). The open letter and letter of acknowledgement the facilitators wrote to the learners as well as the letter of acknowledgement the learners wrote to a facilitator served as 'spreading the news'. This is a practice Freedman and Combs (1996:237) use to strengthen the alternative story of a preferred identity. Through this act of 'spreading the news', the facilitators and learners got involved as witnesses to the emergence of the alternative stories in one another's lives.

Working together as a team and acknowledging one another's achievements opened up a new value system of collaboration in the place of competition.

In my conversations with the learners and the facilitators, I saw my task in accordance

with Gergen's (1994:250) ideas of 'transformative language in which new understandings are negotiated together with a new set of premises about meaning'. The group conversations where the Anti-Bad Boys reconstructed a new value system of collaboration, sharing and helping one another, instead of competition, resonated with Gerkin's (1997:84) comment: 'To care pastorally for the people, was to consistently inquire about and help the people to consider the morality of their actions.' The narrative approach I followed did more than bring about consideration of the morality of their actions. It participated in bringing about moral actions.

Through the process of deconstruction, I searched for 'sparkling moments' – preferred ways of being that are neglected and un-storied (White & Epston 1990). The dominant stories of 'Fighting' (by the learners) and a lack of appreciation and agency (by the facilitators) could be deconstructed and steps towards a preferred reality of a better understanding of one another could be taken. As a result of this better understanding of themselves and one another, the facilitators felt more appreciated. They felt that their teaching was worthwhile. The learners experienced acknowledgement in a more caring and supportive school community.

5.5 ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST

As a pastoral therapist and as a person, it is my commitment to strive towards 'doing right' instead of 'being right' (Rossouw 1993:903). I value accountability and transparency as part of my ethical practice, in agreement with (Elliot 1998:37-61).

One of the ways to be accountable is to be completely transparent with the participants in therapy (Niehaus & Jane 2001:73). One of the ways I could be transparent was to allow the learners and the facilitators to have access to my conversation notes. They were free to ask me to change or add anything to those notes. I used the notes to write the letters of reflection to the facilitators, and the learners paged through the notes to use some of them while writing their play. After each conversation I had with the learners we negotiated

what I could discuss with the facilitators. Conversations with the facilitators were handled in the same way, where we negotiated what was to be discussed with the principal, if anything at all. Nothing that was not negotiated beforehand was ever reported back to the facilitators (from conversations with the learners) or the principal (from conversations with the facilitators). This confidentiality created a partnership of trust which supported us in our journey towards a more ethical and just school community.

5.6 THE INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS ON MY COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS AND PASTORAL THERAPY

I agree with Reinhartz's (1992) notion that a researcher has to be changed by the participatory process. The information I gathered from the learners and the facilitators during the research process has been very valuable. It has enriched my life in many ways. It showed me what a privilege it is to work with children and the enormous amount one can learn from children, if they are given a chance to share ideas and knowledges with adults. It opened my eyes and ears to the personal knowledges of my own two daughters, the learners I consult with at schools, as well as the children who consult me in my practice. It reminded me that their knowledges about their lives are not subordinate to my 'expert' knowledge and that I have to respect their preferred ways of dealing with difficulties as well as their spiritual and religious values and ethics, and, where necessary, deconstruct these. Sharing the learners' lives reminded me of the importance of language, and the way in which language constitutes people. In future I will be more cautious not to give descriptions which can limit or fix a person's identity or agency. This study has left me as therapist with a determination to be more aware of how what I say may silence a child sitting in front of me in therapy.

The value of friendship, love and care emerged strongly during the conversations I had with the facilitators when they spoke about the ways in which they as colleagues support one another, how they are there for one another and offer care in listening to one another. They reminded me how to really care for people, and to be there for people. The way in which Sonja showed me how positiveness can enrich one's life will always be a part of

my preferred life story.

The care and support the facilitators showed one another (see 4.2.1 and 4.2.3) and the learners' God talk (see 3.5.3) brought me to practical theology, which focuses on people's religious actions (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:6) Through the Anti-Bad Boys' movement towards collaboration where they started to invite fellow learners to become their friends and started to share, I witnessed a living, a 'doing', of practical theology. The actions of mutual care (Heitink 1999) among learners and facilitators made God's love real in the classes, on the playground and among facilitators. The collaboration which developed during the research process was a practising of the fusion of horizons that Gerkin (1984:47) speaks about. According to Gerkin (1984:47), there is a fusion of horizons in a therapy process. This fusion includes an understanding process between people, where new stories (narratives) with new meanings are created. In the conversations with the Anti-Bad Boys, as well as the communication between facilitators and learners (through the play, letters of acknowledgement and the open letter from the facilitators to the learners) we were in a process of fusing horizons. We tried to understand one another's stories (narratives), but also to create new stories (narratives) with meanings where we respected one another's personal knowledges. In this process there was a fusion of the horizons of people's stories (narratives) about their lived experience, their relationship with God and their understanding of the stories (narratives) of others. The way learners and facilitators practised love and mutual care during this co-search, and moved towards a school community of support and acknowledgement, contributed to theology in general, and to practical theology in particular. My research showed how this can be done in practice, where practical theology moved beyond the confines of the church and into the school. Through mutual care, love and respect as practiced by these facilitators, learners and myself as therapist, practical theology moved into the lives of people and made a difference to create a more just and ethical school community.

5.7 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although I worked in a participatory way during the therapy as co-search, by using the learners' own knowledges and preferred ways of dealing with their problems, total power sharing in the research process as propounded by Bishop (1996:168) was limited. I asked myself why this was the case. Was it because facilitators and learners found themselves in different positions in detailed hierarchies created by the hierarchizing of facilitators and learners as well as the hierarchizing of facilitators and the Education Department? Can this be the reason why my experience during this study showed that, although teachers are called facilitators, they still function as educators?

Although I could not change the system itself, through this study I took small steps towards addressing language and cultural barriers. I discussed language difficulties which both learners and facilitators experienced during this research with the headmaster and we thought that a bridging class where learners could learn English as a second language would help a lot. He said that he would like to address the issue, but did not have the funds for such a bridging class. I then went to the Education Department and spoke to the school psychologist who deals with these problems. After hearing this, she said that she would come and visit the school and then make a recommendation for sufficient funds to be made available in order to start such a bridging class.

However, on the transforming journey towards a more caring, supportive and just school society, the following questions remain: How can we make the Education Department more aware of the effects (class sizes, cultural and language barriers, and power/knowledge relations) caused by the economic, political and social discourses which increase the polarisation between the learners and the facilitators? My collaboration with the school psychologist to whom I have spoken can make the Department aware of the need for funds for such a bridging class. I asked myself whether this collaboration and transforming process could be extended, by inviting the Education Department and the Ministry of Education to host a seminar, together with learners and facilitators in which

the effects (such as class sizes, cultural and language barriers, and hierarchical power relations) social, economic and political discourses have on the relationships between facilitators and learners could be explored.

Although it was not possible within the scope of the study to arrange group sessions to address both learners' and facilitators' needs simultaneously, this is something I would like to arrange in future, as it will extend collaboration between facilitators and learners. The way the Anti-Bad Boys team became counsellors to fellow learners, acting as an anti-fight and anti-bullying group, in accordance with Lewis and Cheshire (1998:4-32) is also something I would like to extend further. The establishing of a support group for the facilitators is also something I would like to do in future.

Antoinette (one of the facilitators at the school) expressed the wish to learn more about cultural differences, and asked whether someone like Justus Tshungu could come and speak at the school, sharing something of the different ways of living and giving meaning to life, in different cultures. This development of cultural consciousness and respect is something that needs to be addressed. The future implementation of a cultural and religious sensitivity programme, where speakers of different cultures and religions can be invited to come to share their experiences with learners and facilitators, will be of a great help in the transformation process towards a caring and supporting school community. The knowledge that learners and facilitators could gain from such a cultural and religious sensitivity programme could also help facilitators and learners to follow a more pluralistic and inclusive theology approach, where all religions are respected equally. I am committed to address these issues in collaboration with future co-searchers at the school.

5.8 AN OPEN ENDING

Looking back at the journey on which this study took me, I agree with Morgan (1999:14), who says:

These stories are special because they remind me that I don't have to know the answers to people's problems to be helpful. They remind me of the

resources, skills and talents that become more available to people when they are invited into re-authoring conversations. Remembering these stories and the knowledge that people are the experts in their own lives, adds to a sense of excitement when I meet people – I'm excited by what I might learn from them and excited by their strengths and abilities. I look forward to them.

I do not see this study as the end of a journey but rather as the beginning of an ongoing, exciting way of living, whereby more lives can be enriched and 'thickened'. It is my sincere wish that the knowledge you as reader have gained from the life stories of these learners and facilitators has filled you with excitement about what else you might learn, and mean to someone else, when travelling through life with open ears and a commitment towards a just and caring society.

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APPENDIX 1

C
**SERTIFICATES OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT WERE HANDED OUT
TO THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS OF THE ANTI-BAD BOYS
TEAM:**

Michael;

Gerhard;

Rocktion;

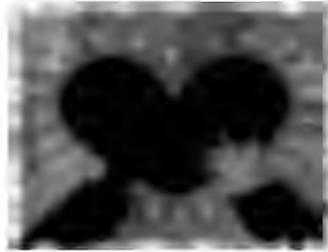
Stefan;

Christo;

Wikus;

Barend; and

Kobus.



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

MICHAEL

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to chase fighting and backchat away,
started to play with other learners and
accommodated them as his friends

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

GERHARD

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to chase fighting and
attention-seeking away, and replaced it with friendship and sharing

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

ROCKTION

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to keep his anger to himself and
form caring friendships with fellow learners.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

STEFAN

has participated in

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to stop swearing and picking on children. He started to speak to fellow learners and became their friends

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

CHRISTO

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

Through the way he used his knowledge to chase trouble away and started to help his fellow learners without wanting to be the boss.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

WIKUS

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

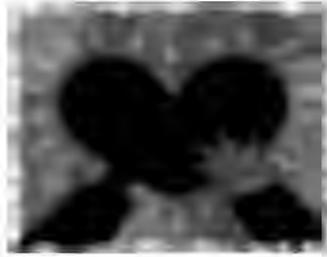
and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

Through the way he used his knowledge to speak before he acted, chased fighting
away and replaced it with sharing.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

BAREND

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to stop swearing and started to help fellow learners. He replaced fighting with sharing and speaking.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

KOBUS

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to establish friendships,
sharing and working together in the team.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

MICHAEL

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to chase fighting and backchat away,
started to play with other learners and
accommodated them as his friends

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

GERHARD

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

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and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to chase fighting and
attention-seeking away, and replaced it with friendship and sharing

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

ROCKTION

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to keep his anger to himself and
form caring friendships with fellow learners.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

STEFAN

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THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to stop swearing and picking on children. He started to speak to fellow learners and became their friends

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

CHRISTO

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

Through the way he used his knowledge to chase trouble away and started to help his fellow learners without wanting to be the boss.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

WIKUS

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

THE ANTI-BAD BOYS TEAM

and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

Through the way he used his knowledge to speak before he acted, chased fighting away and replaced it with sharing.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THAT

BAREND

HAS PARTICIPATED IN

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and

Motivated

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by the way he used his knowledge to stop swearing and started to help fellow learners. He replaced fighting with sharing and speaking.

From the team: _____ Date: _____



AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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and

Motivated

fellow learners and facilitators

by the way he used his knowledge to establish friendships,
sharing and working together in the team.

From the team: _____ Date: _____