EXPLORING THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE DECISION – MAKING PROCESS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE

By

RAMATHABATHE ROSSY MOEKETSI

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SUPERVISOR: MS HD GROBLER

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SUMMARY REPORT

EPLORING THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE

The researcher wanted to explore the experiences of children who removal by a social worker either to an institution or to foster homes. The researcher wanted to find out if the behaviour of absconding could be explained by using systems theory, contructivism, cybernetics and person- centered theory.

The researcher hypothesized that children abscond from alternative care as a means of communicating with the social worker involved as well as any other person significant in their lives.

The study wanted to explore how these children perceived their involvement in the decision making process of their removal. The researcher only interviewed children who had absconded from the alternative care placements.

The study found that all the children interviewed perceived that they were not involved in any way in the process of removal. They all saw their removal as a form of punishment for something they did wrong, but they did not get an opportunity to discuss with their parents or significant others. They also perceived their absconding as an effort to rectify the situation. A lot of anger and suspicion towards social workers was encountered during the study.

In terms of the theories mentioned above, these perceptions are the children's own reality, which might differ from the realities as created or perceived by social workers. It is hypothesized that social workers who use the Child Care Act 74/83 and its regulations in the removal of children, do it to protect the children from risky situations as their job responsibility requires.

This study indicates that the children did not experience removal as protection. Instead of children feeling protected in the alternative care, they felt blamed, judged and unhappy about their removal and excluded from the process.

The researcher made a few suggestions that could be considered when social workers removing children to alternative care.

It is recommended that social workers involve the children and their parents or significant others in the entire process of deciding the future of any children in their (parents') care. However, if removal is deemed necessary, just telling or informing children that they will be removed for their own safety is not enough. Children might not perceive the situation as dangerous. Instead, they might see the social worker as posing a danger to them and their families and thus try to shut the social worker and what s/he says out of their minds. Findings safe ways to involve children and families in the decisions about their future may require of social workers to revive their academically acquired knowledge in this respect.

KEY WORDS

Exploring

The involvement of children

In the decision making process

Children's future

Alternative care/placement

Absconding

Perceptions

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CHAPTER ONE

1. RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on how children who were committed to institutions and foster care, experience the process of removal to such institutions or foster care placements. Children's experiences may vary, depending on their perceptions and needs.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to office records of the Department of Social Development Gauteng province, two out of five children who are committed to children's homes and foster care, abscond. The question that arises from the observable behaviour of absconding is: What motivates children to abscond?

Whose frame of reference was used when making the decision to remove the children? Were the children involved in the decision-making of their removal?

Social workers are always striving to protect children against any abuse or perceived "circumstances likely to cause or conduce to his/her/their seduction or sexual exploitation; live in or exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm the physical, mental or social wellbeing of children" (Child Care Act 74/83: Sec 14(4)(aB)(iii and iv). This raises the question as to whose frame of reference was used to determine the circumstances that led to the children being removed to alternative care.

Constructivism talks about people constructing their own reality and making meaning out of their experiences. Thus, people cannot merely absorb information like a sponge. Systems theory says that systems are closed to information (Bateson 1979: 162). Children who abscond might feel that their stability or reality is threatened. Children's stability may be shaken by the removal, which is a change, and could be perceived by the child as scary. Everyone falls back on their stability when they feel threatened, and by absconding, children may be trying to regain their stability. The change resulting from the removal may be overwhelming for the children.

Keeney (1983: 172) says that individuals exist within structures called families and communities, which form part of the individual stability. By absconding, children may be trying to maintain their stability.

Social workers may be required to make a mind shift, in that children, also, have the ability to create their own reality which may differ from the social workers' own.

If children are involved in the decision-making about their future, social workers may not experience so much failure when working with children. Involving children might also mean including them in therapy sessions before making any kind of decision.

Abscondence of children creates more work for social workers, who already experience high caseloads in their workplace, as they have to deal with one particular case time and again.

Children may be giving feedback to the social worker by means of absconding from legal placement. However, a social worker does not expect the kind of behaviour that the child displays. For instance, as a result of absconding, a child might be labelled as "uncontrollable". If both the social worker and the child are able to create realities, could they not create one together?

1.3 <u>MOTIVATION FOR THIS STUDY</u>

Social workers experience an overload of cases, and they are compelled to work under pressure. Some of the workload may be created by the social workers themselves, by not allowing children and/or their families to participate in the decision-making process.

1.4. <u>OBJECTIVES</u>

> ➢ Explore the experiences of the removal process of some children to children's homes and/or foster care, in terms of systems theory, constructivism and person-centred theory.
> ➢ Could the abscondence be explained differently by using other theories or perspectives?
> ➢ Enable social workers to become aware that there are other ways (theories and approaches) of dealing with children who are in need of care, which includes children and/or their families or their significant others.

1.5 <u>HYPOTHESIS</u>

Usually from the researcher's work experience, social workers resort to removal of children from a situation which the social workers themselves perceive to pose a risk to the children's lives. Social workers might be using their own perceptions to determine whether the situation is good for the children who live in that situation, or not, and therefore disregard how the children themselves perceive the situation. By absconding back to the previous situation, the children may be communicating to the social worker that they are comfortable in that situation.

Proposition Two in Rogers (1951: 101) states that individuals react to a situation as perceived by themselves, which perception becomes their reality. A child may not hear if a social worker tells them that the removal would be good for their life, because systems are closed to information. Children choose what they perceive to be good for them, which may be staying in, or returning to, the situation from which they were removed.

Rogers (1951: 239) mentions that the more the therapist perceives each child as a unique individual, the more the child reacts differently, and this may lead to a cycle of change. The concern of this study is to explore whose frame of reference or reality it is, for the children to be removed from the situations that they are found in, to alternative care. Should the decision for removal of children be co-created by the social worker and the children and/or their families, or just be a unilateral decision by a social worker - as it seems at present? Minuchin (1974: 98) mentions that each person needs to be given the opportunity to state their views or perceptions.

1.6. <u>LITERATURE REVIEW</u>

The study concentrates on systems theory, constructivism, person-centred theory and cybernetics.

Systems theory mentions that people are able to create information and respond to the situation as it is perceived by them. The response cannot be predicted, because it is purely dependent on the person's interpretation of their own perceptions. People do not absorb information from their environment as it is, but make meaning out of the information they perceive.

Constructivism says that people construct their truth, and it becomes their reality, depending on their perception and interpretation of the phenomenon.

Person-centred theory states that each person has the ability to think and create reality.

Cybernetics says that people have a relationship with themselves (first order) and with others around them (second cybernetics).

The literature review will be dealt with in depth in chapter two. Some of the concepts will be introduced briefly below.

1.6.1 Frame of reference

Rogers (1951: 238) describes a frame of reference as the lens through which people perceive others, and that is their own reality. He argues that although therapists have their own perception, the client's perception is paramount in a therapy session. He mentions that therapists should not generalise their perceptions to respondents. He further says that the frame of reference of therapists is merely their lens through which they perceive the situation, but it does not necessarily mean that the lens is the truth. The frame of reference of the therapist is just a perception, and does not necessarily represent the views of the client or a general truth.

Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson (1967: 56) talk about punctuating a sequence of events. They mention that people punctuate a sequence of events, depending on their own frame of reference and perception. They indicate that people construct their own distinction, which becomes meaningful to the person who constructed the distinction.

Punctuating the sequence of events is linked to the frame of reference, in that the frame of reference is the lens and the creator's mind classifies the information and places it on a specified shelf of information.

Respondents, like therapists and other human beings, have the ability to use their frame of reference as their lens of perception. They do not just absorb information as it is received. Any perception is compared to existing ideas. If it is the same as a present perception, it is classified as such. If it is a new perception, a new category of understanding is created as part of the person's knowledge.

1.6.2 Feedback

Watzlawick (1984: 30-31) describes feedback as a cause-and-effect event. For example, when person A speaks to person B, feedback is the response given by person B about the message that person A passed. It tells person A something about how the message was perceived.

Watzlawick argues that feedback is the result of an interaction that has occurred, and the feedback is like a response or an answer to that interaction.

This study focuses on the process that children have to be removed to children's homes or foster care. Children encode the information that they are removed, and feedback may be given in the form of absconding from the placements.

Children's behaviour of absconding from children's homes and/or foster care may be feedback to social workers about their input into the children's world. However, as people create their own meaning, social workers might not perceive children's behaviour in this way.

Removal could then be described as a message by a social worker as feedback to them on how that message was perceived by the child.

The social worker's interpretation of the feedback may differ from that of the child. Interpretations differ because the frame of reference differs.

1.6.3 Perception and reality

Bateson (1979: 102) points out that perception is not a reality; he terms this as "the map is not the territory". What we perceive is not the reality in the environment. It is just the observer's "map" and not the territory itself. People make meaning from what they perceive, whether it be the written or spoken words of another. This implies that people as human systems do not absorb information, but create their own meaning from their perceptions.

Bateson (1979: 102) mentions that people's perceptions become their own reality, and perceptions may differ from person to person, depending on the frame of reference.

Fisher (1991: 25) believes that each person constructs meaning from their perception - which then becomes their reality. He further states that therapists should make it their responsibility to develop an understanding of another person's perceptions.

Taking responsibility for understanding the reality of the child is not the same as taking responsibility for children, their safety or future. It is hypothesised that the role of a social worker, as described in the Child Care Act 74/1983, may be perceived by the social worker as taking sole responsibility for children's safety and their future.

Social workers should take responsibility for understanding and facilitating the process by including children and their families, so that they can create a new, safer and different reality for themselves.

1.6.4 Systems are closed to information

Bateson (1979: 162) mentions that systems are closed to information. He argues that in every learning environment, people have perceptions and make their own interpretations. Meaning and perception are constructed, and are not just absorbed information. Meaning may be created from the spoken word or perceptions. People do not just absorb information, but have reservations according to their perceptions and what meaning they attach to those perceptions. As people create their own reality or ideas from their perceptions, it follows that systems are closed to information.

When children are informed that they will be placed in a children's home or foster care, they make their own interpretations of the spoken words and perceptions of the actions that accompany the spoken words.

This links to what Bateson describes as "the map is not the territory". The territory can be seen as information, and people create their own maps or realities about this territory. We cannot, however, know the territory (information) as it really is, but only our perception of it.

Social workers might perceive their role and responsibility, under the Child Care Act, as having to remove children they perceive to be in danger, to some form of institutional care.

Children might not, however, perceive themselves to be in danger and therefore might not create the same reality around the process of removal.

1.6.5 Self-determination

Rogers (1951: 20) describes self-determination as the client's tendency to strive to actualise, maintain and enhance the self. The client has the ability to create ideas about him and others. Grobler, Schenk & Du Toit (2003: 105) mention that in a therapeutic relationship, what is important is the client's view, rather than that of the therapist. The therapist should always remember that whatever the client is striving for, might not always seem as good or necessary for the therapist.

A social worker may be trying to define the self as a person and the self as a social worker. As human beings, social workers have their own perceptions of the self. As professional social workers, the self is defined by policies and ethics. In the end, the person and the social worker create a dilemma, and the question may be: "Who am I?" The situation may be further complicated by the self of the client.

The dilemma could be caused if the self-determination of the social worker and that of the client are not the same.

For the child, determination of the self is to be part of the family, and a social worker sees the child in a potentially dangerous environment.

1.7.RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this study, an exploratory design will be used. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of children who have absconded from an institution.

The researcher decided to do **qualitative research**. Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel & Schurink (1998: 240) define qualitative research as "a multipurpose approach aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing the social interaction in terms of the meaning that the subject attaches to it".

This study is meant only to explore and describe the perceptions of the participants (subjects) about the process of removal.

Kvale (1994: 147) mentions that the views of the study cannot be generalised like quantitative research results. He further argues that the process in qualitative research is not linear, but, rather, runs backwards and forwards between observation, interpretation,

description and interpretation, conceptualisation and theorising. The reason for this is because the process is focused on the participant's attitude and perceptions. He defines quality as to what kind - the essential character of something.

This study focuses on the removal of children to children's homes and/or foster care. A qualitative study cannot be generalised, because it represents the perceptions of a small number of participants. The main idea of the researcher was not the number of participants, but their experiences, and also because the participants' perceptions were unique to each person.

This study only reflects the experiences of the participants, and does not necessarily represent the views and ideas of all, or the majority of, children who have absconded or are in children's homes and/or foster care placement.

Morse (1994: 43) mentions that qualitative research is aimed at examining what people are doing, thinking and feeling, and how they interpret what is occurring. That is what this study is aiming at: to examine what is happening with a number of children who have absconded from children's homes and/or foster care placement.

Firestone (1986: 16) mentions that qualitative research is more concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. He further mentions that the researcher cannot, therefore, be detached, but is "immersed" in the phenomenon of interest.

1.8 THE POPULATION

According to McKendrick (1987: 268), "population" in research refers to a broad target system from which participants are drawn. For the purpose of this study, the population consists of some children who have absconded from any institution and/or foster care where they were referred by a social worker. Children between the ages of 10 and 18 of both sexes were interviewed. Seven children were interviewed - five from institutions, one who is living on the streets, and one who was placed back with his family.

1.9 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Unstructured interviews were used as the instrument of research. Interviews were open, for children to use ways that fitted them. Children had the options of communicating

through writing, playing or drawing their experiences, and to tell the researcher what their experiences represented. A tape recorder was used, with the permission of the subjects, to record the data for later analysis.

1.10 PRESENTATION OF DATA

The responses are presented in terms of theory. They are analysed in terms of theories discussed in the literature study.

1.11 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The ideas found in this study cannot be generalised, as they only represent the ideas and the views of those who were interviewed, as perceived by the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals in depth with the literature review.

In the previous chapter the researcher introduced the reader to some of the literature that is used in this study. The following concepts are used to explain the theoretical foundation of this study: constructivism, systems theory, cybernetics and the person-centred approach.

Each of the theories is explained individually. Only the ideas relevant to this study are discussed in this chapter, from the mentioned literature.

2.2. CONSTRUCTIVISM

Constructivists advocate that people construct their reality. According to Watzlawick (1984: 28), in interaction with their environment, construction of reality happens when people perceive and make meaning out of their perceptions. The said perception becomes the reality which is constructed by the person. Each person needs to takes responsibility for their own construction.

The following are terms that are used in constructivism, and are explained in terms of how they link to this study:

> ➢ Each **person takes responsibility** **for his own construction**. Each person creates meaning out of their own perception. The meaning therefore becomes the person's reality. The person's reality is the truth to the creator of that reality. Each person should take ownership and responsibility for their own construction. Watzlawick (1984: 28) agrees that each person is an expert of their own creations.

Constructivism includes ideas or constructions about the self of the constructor, their own identity - which becomes their reality.

Children have their own constructions of themselves, their parents and family and that of a social worker, as perceptions by them.

Social workers have perceptions of themselves as professional people, and of the children's environment. As constructions are created in interaction with the environment, the agency policy, as part of a social worker's environment, may play a part in how social workers perceive themselves as professional people.

Social workers also have a personal construction of the self. The self as a loyal employee or a self as a protector will depend on how the social workers perceive themselves.

It is possible that children do not perceive their removal by social workers as protection in the way the social workers do, but may perceive it as coercion or interference in their lives.

On the other hand, it may be possible that social workers are not aware that there might be differences in perceptions when removing children.

The child and the social worker might have different perceptions of the same situation, such as that of the child before the removal. Fisher (1991: 45) also mentions that sometimes the agency mandate and policy conflict with the social work principle of client self-determination. So, it seems as if there may be many conflicting constructions around the removal of children.

> A person may feel threatened when their constructed **reality** is questioned, and they might respond defensively to the perceived threat (Fisher 1991: 21). Response to a potential threat is determined by the intensity of the threat as perceived by an individual. Grobler et al (2003: 49) mention that an individual reacts to the field as experienced and perceived by the self.

> In the constructivist view, **truth is only relative** to one's constructions. The knowledge base that a person creates is a product of their perception of its usefulness and meaning created thereof. The interpretation that a person makes out of their perception is used to make meaning of the process. The meaning is then used in creating one's own reality that fits with the self. This process is ongoing, hence construction is ongoing to create new meanings. Constructivism indicates that what is interpreted today as useful to the client, might not be useful to the same client tomorrow, depending on the new meaning that the client has created.

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> Fisher (1991: 37) coined the term **"fit",** which means that the perceived reality concurs with the identity of the constructor. People strive to maintain a fit in their world; hence, the construction of reality is ongoing.

A social worker may be struggling to create a fit between removing the child because they are duty-bound to fulfill the agency mandate, professional ethics and principles of social work.

It may be that social workers are struggling to find a fit in their environment. Their construction of their reality would be determined by the question whether the resolution is useful, or fits with the social worker's perception. If social workers are torn between the agency mandate, law, professional ethics, children, and themselves as professionals and caring people who ensure the safety of children, then the behaviour of removing a child may be perceived as the only way to meet all the demands they perceive.

> Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson (1967: 29) mentions that the meanings people give to their perceptions are actually their **own creation**. It may not be surprising to find a child comfortable in a situation that the social worker perceives as risky, as children may have created their own reality out of the same situation, but with different perceptions.

2.3. SYSTEMS THEORY

A **system** consists of elements, their characteristics and all their interrelationships. These aspects constitute a structure of the system, while the specific relationship that connects all the elements in a specific identifiable whole, constitutes the organisation of the system.

Boundaries are demarcations made by the person observing and describing the system. Boundaries are distinctions made between certain elements and the environment. Boundaries are imaginary, and the environment within the boundary is referred to as the environment. For example, a family is an environment of children, and there are boundaries between the children, their siblings and their parents.

A child can be regarded as a system that exists within a supra system which is a family. There are different subsystems in a family system. There is a married couple subsystem which consists of two individuals who have committed themselves to married life. They

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have responsibilities towards each other, such as honesty and commitment to married life. Their boundaries are usually negotiated on an ongoing level.

There is a parent subsystem which includes the incorporation of a child, either biological or adopted. The child is allowed in the married couple relationship, but not expected to take over. Parents have a role in socialising the child and to allow him or her to engage with the school system.

The children subsystem includes children within the family. Children negotiate behaviour among themselves, and to a certain extent exclude adults.

The parent-child relationship includes parents and children engaging in an activity. For example, an older girl may want to help her mother with cooking dinner, and the father may teach his children how to swim safely.

In all the subsystems that exist, boundaries are expanded to accommodate a specific subsystem, and sometimes the boundaries may be negotiated. They can be seen as definitions of which individuals form part of a subsystem within a system at any particular point in time.

Elements or people of the same family can be part of different groups or systems. For example, a mother can be part of a group of nurses which forms part of the health system. Again, children can be elements of school - which forms an education system. Also, a family can be an element of the community system.

When we refer to an individual as a subsystem of a family, a family becomes a system and the community would become the supra system.

It can therefore be said that a system is not seen to be concrete, and boundaries can be shifted, depending on the perception of the observer.

Social workers are themselves subsystems, as human beings who operate within the boundaries of the profession and agency which are a system, and also the national mandate as above the supra system.

> Watzlawick et al (1967: 93) mention that people **punctuate** their reality. People make punctuations, depending on their perceptions and the meaning that they attach to their relationships. People make punctuations of their relationships, creating boundaries. Usually, boundaries are not negotiated verbally, but people accept or appoint people in positions that

define specific boundaries. For example: a group that has just formed has not elected a leader, but one person has assumed the spokesperson's role, and members have allowed him to speak for the group, without election. Children make punctuation of relationship boundaries, e.g. how they perceive their family as part of their life. Removal from the family may be perceived as a loss in their lives.

➢ In systems theory, **<u>behaviour is a means of communication.</u>** Every move, even silence, is a means of communicating, which means it has a meaning. It depends on the person who receives the message as to how they interpret the message and how they would respond to the message.

➢ For the purpose of this study, a child may be making an interpretation of the social worker's action of removing them as threatening, depending on the relationship that the child may have with the social worker, and perhaps they are responding to the perceived threat. By absconding, the child may be responding to the threatening relationship with the social worker. The child and the social worker may have different interpretations of other's behaviour. Watzlawick et al (1967: 78) mention that behaviour is a means of communication – it may be that it is relevant - and that abscondence should be investigated and analysed to find its meaning.

➢ It is important to get the full **<u>context</u>** of the communicated behaviour - otherwise it becomes confusing and pathological. This simply means that it is important every time when communicated behaviour is observed, and the context or the environment in which the behaviour is taking place should be taken into account. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the abscondence of children from institutions and foster homes.

➢ Systems theory advocates that it is important for professionals to consider the respondents' **<u>wholeness</u>** when dealing with those respondents (Watzlawick et al 1967: 123). Wholeness refers to the consideration of the totality of a system, and never comparing that with the value of a single element. The combination of the elements within a system constitutes a unique whole which is more than the sum of its parts. It is also necessary

to understand the environment of the systems that one is working with in therapeutic sessions. By fragmenting the system, the dynamics of the totality, its significance and the nature of behaviour and relationship patterns, are fragmented.

Holism also refers to wholeness in systems theory. It means that the relationships that are formed within a system have a reciprocal influence on one another. For example, a mother has a caring responsibility for her child, a father has a maintenance responsibility for the entire family, and the children have a respecting responsibility for their parents and towards siblings. Each element in a system influences the other, and the result is a product which is unique from its individual elements. "Reciprocal" in this instance means that the removal of one part will affect the entire system and its elements. Different behaviours of family members have meaning in the whole of a family; therefore, what happens in a family cannot be explained according to direct cause and effect. For example, one cannot say that children misbehave because their parents are abusing alcohol. Social workers should concern themselves with the questions: What is a person who manifests such behaviour saying? To whom are they saying it? And, what does the communication of other people around them means to them and to others? Negative behaviour therefore has a positive communication value, and it always serves a purpose. Abscondence is perceived as negative, but should have positive communication value and serve a particular purpose.

> ➢ The theory stresses that some people experience previous life experience as if they are experiencing it now (**relativity of time**) (Watzlawick et al 1967: 45). Relativity of time means that a person may behave as if they are experiencing past events now. For example, a child who lost his parent five years ago may cry hysterically, if the parent is mentioned, as if the parent had just died an hour before.

> ➢ The client as a system is the one who determines themselves and their behaviour as a system. **Co-evolution** means that the decision that is taken by the two systems should be agreed upon by the parties themselves. The system should co-evolve new meaning which fits with the parties

involved. For example, a child and a social worker may agree on the definition of a new reality which depends on what fits with both of them.

> **Equifinality** means that the new reality is determined by the parties involved. Watzlawick (1984: 127) states that the client's behaviour cannot be predicted. Can the removal of the child to an institution or foster care be equifinal?

> A social worker operates within an **agency system** which has boundaries. The boundaries in a system such as an agency are defined by the relationships that the agency workers define to each other. Different people perform different functions within an agency, and they are working together towards the same goal. People are performing different functions in an agency, but all the functions are related.

> A social worker and a child form another system - a **therapeutic system.** The child and a social worker are two different systems, brought together by therapeutic goals. This therapeutic system is the envisaged heart of this study. Systems need to co-evolve to be able to create a new reality which fits with all members.

> According to systems theory, relationships may be either **complementary or symmetrical, or both** (Watzlawick et al 1967: 69). A complementary relationship is a relationship where members of the system are different, yet complement each other. For example, in a family system, relationships that exist may be that of a father (provider), a mother (housekeeper) and a child (a developing offspring that needs to be nourished). Symmetrical relationships exist where members are similar and mirror each other - for example, in a family where both parents are working. The mood of competition between parents might emerge if they both perceive themselves as similar. It is always necessary for social workers to be aware of the kinds of relationships that exist in a system. This knowledge will enable a social worker to gain entry into the therapeutic system, without posing any threats to any person.

➢ **Stability and change** complement each other. Change always takes place in every system, but the stability of the system remains. For example: after the death of a mother, the father does not give away his children, but continues to stay with them. The family system still exists - only the structure of the system has changed and it may be that the boundaries have expanded or decreased. Whoever perceives a single parent family as a family, will continue to expect the same activities of a family to continue, even in that family

2.4 CYBERNETICS

The theory links with systems, and some of the terms are used synonymously. Cybernetic theory describes how people relate to each other, types of relationships, and situations where specific relationships exist. It believes that people construct and maintain their perceptions as described, within their relationships (Keeney 1983: 13).

➢ Cybernetics maintains that for therapists to achieve a **visible change**, they should follow the process of providing a mind shift for a person who needs such a change (Keeney 1983: 25). For the client, a social worker might need to help the client to construct new meaning of the environment that is perceived risky to his life. Removal of a child to alternative care might bring about visible change which might be threatening. People continuously experience change; they need to experience the difference which can give rise to **change**.

➢ **Second cybernetics** refers to the situation where the observer becomes part of the observed. For this study, the observer is a social worker and the observed is the child.

➢ Keeney (1983: 33) mentions the **dormative principle**. This principle describes the belief that behaviour is internal to a person, rather than a communication between two people. So, for instance, from a dormative perspective, abscondence or uncontrollable behaviour could be perceived as caused by the characteristics of the child, rather than communication between the child and a social worker or between child and caregiver.

➢ Keeney (1983: 39) uses the term **binocular vision** to explain the relationship between two elements - for instance, between children and their parents and how they relate to one another. The process may also include a social worker and how the relationship is perceived between them, the child and the parents of the child.

➢ Bateson (1979: 87) and Keeney (1983: 153) believe that systems are closed to information. People do not absorb information from the environment. Rather, they create it through the use of difference. People perceive only difference, and create their own meanings from these perceptions. To be perceived, the difference has to fit with the person, and cannot be too small or too big. Too small a difference cannot be perceived, and too big a difference may be threatening. Perception lies in how it is perceived. Someone once said: "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder".

➢ In every relationship there is a **pattern that connects** events and people (Keeney 1983: 163). This describes the relationships between the child, the parents and the social worker. It refers to the relationships that are perceived between all the parties involved.

2.5 THE PERSON-CENTRED APROACH

The theory focuses on an individual person as a system observed in relation to others. Rogers explains his approach according to 19 propositions. Grobler et al make an effort to simplify the propositions for practical application:

➢ **Human experiences** are unique and ever-changing (Grobler et al 2003: 45). They mention that a person in their own experiential world becomes an expert on that world. Another person can only know about the world when informed by the person who is experiencing the world.

For the purposes of this study, a child who is a client is an expert of their own experiential world. It is, therefore, advisable to consult with the client to find out about their experiences in the situation.

➢ Rogers (1951: 482) explains that a person reacts to his environment according to his **perceptions**: this is clearly described by the words:

"Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder". The person's perception is interpreted according to his frame of reference - hence it is unique. It simply means that "one man's poison may be another man's fish". Children's perceptions are interpreted according to their experiences of themselves, their relationships with family members, peers and the community at large.

➢ **Wholeness/Unity.** Rogers (1951: 486) argues that an organism reacts to the experiential world as a whole/in total. Wholeness of a person includes their ideas, feelings, needs, values and physical attributes. Grobler et al (2003: 54) indicate that the self includes all of the abovementioned. The self cannot be separated from feelings, ideas, behaviours, needs, values and physical attributes. It is therefore necessary for the therapist to consider the self as a whole, when dealing with a person - even a child.

➢ **Client self-determination.** Rogers (1951: 487) believes that a person is intent on striving towards self-actualisation and maintaining such an identity. Grobler et al (2003: 17) emphasise that self-determination is up to a client and not the therapist. Every person is determined by himself and not by someone else/an outsider. Self-determination may not be perceived on the same level by an outside person. It is therefore important to understand and accept that respondents also have self-determination - even children.

For the purpose of this study, there is a child who is a client and the social worker who is employed by an agency. A child is striving to determine himself/herself and to maintain such an identity. When removed to an alternative care, the self of the child may be threatened and the child will respond to the perceived threat. Hypothetically, for this study, the child could abscond as a response.

On the other hand, social workers are employed by an agency, and their self is determined by themselves from their perceptions. The same social workers have to abide by professional principles such as "client self-determination".

 Fisher (1991: 45-50) argues extensively about the social work principle of client self-determination. He believes that it is the practical recognition of the right and need of a

client to freedom in making their choices and decisions in the casework process (Fisher 1991: 47).

> ➤ **Behaviour is goal directed** towards the satisfaction of a specific need. Grobler et al (2003: 59) mention that behaviour always has a motive, reason or goal to be attained. Sometimes the goal is conscious - or might be unconscious because it is perceived to pose a threat to the self. A goal is not easy for another person to perceive from face value, but through therapy sessions a client's experiential world could be identified and be made visible to a social worker.

It might be that abscondence of children is directed towards specific needs. For example, children who live on the street may be trying to help their family to bring home something to eat.

> ➤ **Emotions** accompany the goal-directed behaviour. The intensity of the emotions is related to the perceived significance of the need the behaviour tries to attain (Rogers 1987: 492). The intensity of emotions that accompanies the behaviour differs from person to person, depending on the person's value attached to the behaviour and the self that he has to maintain. It is possible that two people, who experience the death of a parent, may differ. The possibility of differences is dependent on the value a person attaches to death or to the deceased person.

For the purpose of this study, this proposition on emotions brings awareness that people's reaction to the same experience may differ. People are not objects that react the same way to the same trigger or event. This is because people are unique and have different perceptions, emotions, needs and values, and will therefore always react differently in one form or another.

> ➤ **Frames of reference.** Rogers (1951: 494) argues that the best way to understand a person's behaviour is to look at the person's frame of reference. To be able to understand the motives for the person's behaviour and the intensity of emotions that accompanies the behaviour, is to try and understand the frame of reference of the person. The perceptions of a person are also influenced by their frame of reference.

For this study, there are three points of possible different frames of reference: the children's frame, and the social workers' personal and professional frames of reference. It is highly possible that these frames might conflict, and one frame of reference needs to take precedence. The researcher wonders whose frame is considered when a child is removed?

> **The development of the self.** Rogers (1951: 497) mentions that the self is built by perceptions that are gradually collected to become the self. Due to the continuously changing perceptual world, the person continually develops the self. The person always checks on "who" the self is.

This study agrees that the self changes with time – hence, others (outsiders) might perceive a person as acting unpredictably. This is possible because outsiders are unable to understand the person's continued change to his experiential world.

> **Perceptions of the self and significant others** (Rogers 1987: 498*)*. The structure of the self can change through our perceptions of our interactions with the environment, especially with people around us. People keep on evaluating their self, to be able to identify the self during their interactions and to be able to create a fit with the perceived changes. It does not mean that the self is changed by all the values of their interaction with other people, but the selected values may be added to the self.

> **Values owned and adopted from other people.** Rogers (1951: 498) believes that values that are attached to the experiences, already incorporated in the self and those that are learned from other people, are analysed to determine whether they fit with the self. Since perceptions differ, even the values that are attached to the perceptions differ, depending on the fit.

> **Conscious and unconscious experiences**. Rogers (1951: 503) believes that some of our life experiences are symbolised and incorporated, because they are perceived as consistent with the self. Some of the experiences are ignored, because they are perceived as irrelevant to the self. Grobler et al (2003: 31) mention that some experiences are not

symbolised, or are given a distorted meaning because the experience is not consistent with the self.

➢ **Self and behaviour.** According to Rogers (1951: 507), most of the behaviours that are adopted by the self are considered to fit with the self. These are behaviours that are symbolised and are usually consistent with the self. Grobler et al (2003: 28) mention that behaviour is not only goal-directed, but also has to fit with who the person perceives himself to be.

Any alteration should fit with the self of the child who is the central client system.

➢ **Behaviour and unconscious experience.** According to Rogers (1951: 509), sometimes behaviour is not symbolised because it is inconsistent with the self structure. The behaviour is therefore not owned and not symbolised. Grobler et al (2003: 34) say that if behaviour is not symbolised, the behaviour is therefore not owned and therefore denied by the person.

For the purpose of this study, children's experience (as perceived by themselves) of removal to alternative care may not be symbolised, and abscondence is therefore not owned because it is inconsistent with their self.

➢ **Psychological tension.** When a person has experiences that are not symbolised and not incorporated in the self, the person is at risk of potential psychological tension (Rogers 1987: 510). The person experiences tension due to the conflict between themselves and their experiences. Grobler et al (2003: 37) explain this psychological tension as an internal conflict within the self. People are usually not aware of the root cause of such conflict because the cause is not symbolised.

For the purpose of this study, the psychological tension might be experienced by the child after being removed to alternative care placement.

➢ **Reconstruction of the self.** Rogers (1951: 513) explains reconstruction as when the self adjusts after assimilating and symbolising previously unsymbolised experiences into the self. The process of reconstruction of the self includes the incorporation of the negative and painful experiences as well as positive experiences, to form the new self (Grobler et al 2003:

76). Children may be trying to assimilate the unsymbolised experiences of being removed to an alternative care placement by agreeing to get involved in this study as participants.

> **Defense of self**. Experiences that are inconsistent with the self are perceived as threats; and the greater the threat, the more rigid the self-structure becomes in self-defense (Grobler et al 2003: 940; Rogers 1987: 515).

The reaction of a child (absconding) could be an indication of defense of the self or of the self structure. The removal might have been threatening and it could have triggered a defensive response in the form of abscondence.

> **Conditions for facilitation.** Under certain circumstances where there is no threat to the self, those experiences that were perceived as inconsistent with the self are then examined and the self structure is reorganised to include those experiences (Grobler et al 2003: 77; Rogers 1951: 517). People assimilate and symbolise experiences better when the conditions that they find themselves in are not threatening or inconsistent with their self.

It would help if the researcher could provide safe conditions to facilitate participants' involvement in the interview process. Safe conditions would allow participants to be freely engaged and provide information for the study.

> **Acceptance of self and others.** Rogers (1951: 520) mentions that the more the person perceives and accepts all their experiences into one consistent and integrated self, the more accepting they become of others who are separate or different individuals from themselves. The person becomes more conscious of themselves, therefore accepting that they are unique from others around them.

> **Developing your own value system.** Rogers (1951: 522) advocates that the more a person accepts their self structure, the more their value system is being replaced by their own. This happens during the continuous re-organisation and value processing of the self structure (Grobler et al 2003:

81). The person is continuously in the process of evaluating, testing and examining their values.

CHAPTER THREE

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the method and processes that the researcher followed when collecting data. The chapter outlines the process that unfolded during data collection in different contexts where participants were found to be in.

Interviews were held with children who absconded from children's homes and foster care placements where they were legally placed. Some of the participants were returned to an institution, one was returned to a foster home but later decided to work and live on the streets, while another was legally placed back with his family whence he was initially removed.

3.2 METHODS OF DATS COLLECTION

A structured interview was used in a briefing session about the purpose of the study. The researcher briefed participants about the purpose of the study, in their different contexts. The researcher did the briefing for ethical reasons, as outlined by Bailey (1982: 481-482). The researcher used unstructured interviews, during which participants were encouraged to make use of different modes of communication. They were invited to use play, voice, tape recorders and writing about their experiences.

All participants were assured about confidentiality of their responses and anonymity. They gave verbal concerned to be involved in the study and the made their choices of modes of communication.

3.3 SCENARIO ONE

The five participants in this scenario had absconded and were placed back in an institution. They are two girls and three boys aged between 15 and 17. They are Dikeledi, Nthabiseng, Jerry Molemo and Mandla (names were changed to protect the respondents). Their interviews started as a group in annexure H, J, K, L, D, G, B, C and E. Annexure H, J, K and L are interviews as a group before individual interviews. The annexure are placed in order of dates of interviews.

They were in a group when the researcher introduced herself. The researcher gave the briefing on the purpose of the study to the group during the first meeting. The group wanted to know if the study would help them in the current situation which they termed a "**problem**" situation. The researcher mentioned to the group that the results of the study might be used in the future. The group mentioned that they had no trust in the researcher, who is also a social worker, as they were afraid that she might use the information against them, thereby undermining their relationships with their present social workers. The researcher observed that the group was reluctant to accept her into their confidence, and then realised that they were just making choices and expressing their experiences (**self-determination**).

The researcher decided to schedule another interview session with the group, with the sole purpose of trying to gain their trust and acceptance. The researcher realised that she needed to build a relationship with the group, to be able to be accepted and, possibly, trusted. The group initially built a solid wall between themselves and the researcher. The group responded unanimously to the researcher.

During the session, the researcher gave the group time to talk to each other for the whole session. In the meantime, the researcher was noting the observable actions of the group members. The researcher overheard participants talking to each other about how they had been removed. The session continued for forty-five minutes.

 At the end of that session, the researcher drew the attention of participants with the hope that they would **co-operate (own construction).** At that point, participants decided to have individual interview sessions with the researcher, for the study. The researcher agreed with the group to have individual interviews at the next session. Participants chose to write and record their experiences on tape.

During the interviews all participants mentioned that they were never consulted by the social worker. They believed that social workers had teamed up with parents or substitute parents to have them removed to institutions (annexures G, E and C). They believed that the social worker gave them misleading information about the reality of their placements in an institution (annexures G, C and B). They absconded because they believed that the whole process was a misunderstanding, and their parents could explain the reasons better (annexures B, C, E and G). None of the participants remembered signing any consent

forms at any stage. Participants mentioned that they were told that their removal was due to their misbehaviour, and were never given the opportunity to discuss their behaviour. By listening to participants, the researcher made them feel accepted, and gained their trust.

3.4 THEMES FOR SCENARIO ONE

- ➢ The group did not just agree to the request of the researcher, but was **self – determined** (Rogers 1987: 487) to be sure of their position in the study. Participants who were in a group wanted to maintain themselves as a group. They were determined to understand the purpose of the study and how the study would benefit them as "victims" of the situation.

- ➢ The group was determined to **remain as a group** for initial interviews. Participants did not want to become engaged in individual interviews. They mentioned that they wanted clarity on the purpose of the study before they would commit themselves. As a result, they remained in the group and supported each other's views on clarity questioning.

- ➢ The researcher initially found it difficult to penetrate the **defenses of self** (Grobler 2003: 940) – a wall that was built by the participants between themselves and the researcher. Participants did not want to commit themselves to the study before they could have assurances about confidentiality and the purpose that the study would be of help to them - whom they considered as "victims" of the situation.

- ➢ The group had their own **frame** (Rogers 1987: 487) of the researcher as much as the researcher had her **frames of reference** of the group. The group had its own perception of the researcher who to them was a social worker like all other social workers who committed them to institutions and/or foster care.

- ➢ Group interviews **fit** (Fisher 1991: 37) well with the group. Participants felt secure and comfortable in engaging with the researcher in a group situation, rather than in individual encounters. Participants could freely communicate with the researcher in a group setting.

- ➢ The group did **not trust** the researcher, and there was no option for the researcher but to **fit with** the group. In order to gain the group's cooperation, the researcher

had to listen to the group's concerns before furthering the process, but kept it focused. The group was asking more clarity-seeking questions, especially about how the study would affect their relationships with their field social workers. They wanted to be assured about the confidentiality of their responses. Again, the group wanted to understand how the researcher differed from their field social workers.

➢ The perception that the group had about a social worker was their only **reality**. The group believed that the researcher, as a social worker, wanted to spy on them by getting their perceptions about their removal. It took the researcher some time to change this perception among the participants.

➢ The researcher had to "**get into the participants' pool**" by allowing them to make a decision on how and when they wanted to be interviewed. Participants had their own frame of reference about the researcher, and the researcher had to go with their frame to gain trust and acceptance, also allowing them to be self-determined. It was a real effort for the researcher to find a fit in the group.

➢ Allowing participants to talk among themselves turned out to yield positive results. It formed **conditions for facilitation** as stated by Grobler et al (2003: 77). The researcher used the skill of facilitation to make it possible for the group to engage in the study. The condition that the researcher created was to allow participants to test among themselves how it feels like to talk about their experience of being removed to an institution and/or foster care.

➢ It was clear that the group could just not agree to be interviewed, and it confirmed the theory of Bateson (1979: 162) that **systems are closed to information**. Participants perceived their removal as their fault, and removal as a way of punishing them which posed a threat to them as good children. They also believed that they were not given the platform by a social worker, to air their views. Asking children to sign a consent form could be linked to telling them that they would be removed to alternative care. Telling is different from fitting with someone's frame of reference. Entering the person's frame of reference means introducing differences and affecting the initial frame of reference. Informing children about signing of a Regulation 15 form might be too little to make a

difference, or it might be too much, creating a threat to them thereby making them close up in defense.

- ➢ **Relationship building** is the key to a successful working relationship. The researcher started off by building the relationship, and was able to continue with the study. The children could not differentiate between the researcher and the social workers who had served them before this study. Building a relationship is essential in all the encounters with people we are working with. Building a relationship form the basis or the foundation of all the processes of engagement.

3.5 SCENARIO TWO

Interviews were held with a participant who absconded from an institution and was later placed back with his family from where he was initially removed. He is a 15 year old male who will be called Mpho for the purpose of this study.

Mpho was removed from the care of her biological parents due to "uncontrollable" behaviour and was placed in a children's home. He absconded from children's home and went back home. He refused to be taken back to the children's home by threatening to abscond again. He was placed in the foster care of his parents with the purpose of observing his behaviour. Annexure of his interviews in order of interview dates are I, P, Q, R and F.

The participant seemed to be "**eager to talk"** (Annexure P). He wanted a chance to state his point of view that he did not do anything wrong, but denying him that opportunity, the child felt guilty for his actions, which led to his punishment by placement in an institution**.**

A briefing session was held with the participant, during which he was informed about the purpose of the study. He was excited that at last his views would be heard. It took the researcher little effort to involve the participant in the study. The researcher decided to have only the introduction and briefing session about the requirements to engage in the study, on that day, to avoid overwhelming him. Both the researcher and the participant decided to have an interview session on a separate day (Annexure F). The participant mentioned to the researcher that he would, in the meantime, write what he could still remember about his experience of removal to an institution.

During the next session, when the researcher met with the participant, he was ready with a written paper. The participant verbalised to the researcher what he had written, and it was clear that the participant wanted to talk about his past experiences. The researcher gave the participant an opportunity to air his views, and the researcher gained the trust of the researcher, so that he felt free to verbalise his story.

The participant could not remember being given any chance to give his side of the story during removal. He only remembers that he was informed that his parents were complaining about his behaviour and that he would be taken to a children's home. He mentioned that he was given a warning once, by his parents, about coming back home late, and he never anticipated that it would result in him being removed (Annexure F). This made the participant feel guilty about his actions.

 He does not remember signing any form as consent to be placed in an institution (Annexure F). The Child Care Act 74/1983 mentions that a child over the age of ten has to sign consent, and the participant denied having seen such a process. He felt he was cheated by the social worker, who conspired with his parents to have him taken to a children's home. It is possible that the participant was given information in a way of telling which did not make any difference to his frame of reference.

His reason for absconding was that he wanted to explain to his parents what had made him arrive home late. It was at this time that his parents mentioned to him that they were afraid for his safety, as he was in the company of boys who were known to be "naughty" (Annexure F). He believed that by removing him from his friends, his parents thought they would be protecting their child. It became clear, after the interview with the participant that his parents' frame of reference and the perception of the situation was – and remained - different from his own perception and frame of reference.

The participant believed that every social worker was blaming him - not directly, but he could sense it from the social worker who removed him, as well as the social worker in the institution.

The participant refused to be taken back to an institution, and he was legally placed with his family - on certain conditions.

3.6 THEMES FOR SCENARION TWO

> ➤ The participant indicated a high sense of **self-determination** to the researcher in the interview. He chose when and how to be interviewed by the researcher. The participant was clear about what message he wanted to convey to the researcher. He was sure about the message he wanted to convey to the field social worker when he absconded from the children's home.

> ➤ The participant developed a different **perception** of the researcher from that of the social worker who did the removal, after the first interview session. The participant was able to relate his experiences to the researcher, who is also a social worker. He was able to create a distinction between the researcher and the field social worker.

> ➤ It was not so difficult for the participant to **trust** the researcher, because the researcher showed him acceptance and he was free to state his point which he had eagerly waited to make for a long time. The participant felt the acceptance by the researcher, and was able to realise that she (the researcher) was different from the field social worker. The participant was able to trust the researcher, and to share his experience of removal.

> ➤ **Systems are closed to information,** and the participant did not remember signing any consent form - which is required by law to be signed if the child is over the age of ten. Each person has a way of registering information after a perception. The participant could not remember being given the opportunity to refuse or accept the decision of him being removed. According to the Child Care Act , he should have signed consent to removal, but he did not remember signing any agreement or document. It is possible that the information was too little or too much for the participant to register in his perception.

> ➤ The participant **felt blamed** for his removal to a children's home**.** He was informed that his behaviour of association with "bad boys", as labelled by his parents, led him to be placed in a children's home. He felt that he was to blame that a social worker removed him, and he wanted to render an apology to his

parents. He absconded from the children's home to come and apologise to his parents, because it was the first time he had wronged his parents.

3.7 SCENARION THREE

This scenario focused on the participant who was working and living on the streets, Di (name changed to protect the identity of the respondent). He was moved from children's home to children's home and he kept on absconding. He is 18 year old male. He was found to be abandoned by his parents and initially the whereabouts of the father were known to the social worker. He was first placed in a children's home and was later placed with prospective adoptive parents. The adoption process was unsuccessful and he was placed back in the previous children's home. He was moved to another children's home due to "uncontrollable" behaviour. He was once recommended to be placed in a mental hospital with suspicions of mental illness but the psychologist defied the recommendation and instead recommended that the child be subjected to intensive counseling because of his continuous movements. Eventually, he was transferred to unrelated foster care placement. The participant absconded from this placement and was moved to another unrelated foster care placement from where he absconded to the streets.

The researcher traced the participant to his regular spot at the entrance of a hotel with the assistance of the previous caseworker. Annexure in the order according to dates of interviews are O, N, M, and A.

The participant wanted to know the reason why his former case worker brought the researcher to his spot without prior arrangement (Annexure O). The former case worker mentioned that the study needed to be done urgently, to give enough time for other social workers to use the results.

An introduction and briefing was made in the following session with the participant. The participant was skeptical about people who might see him in the company of a social worker (Annexure O). The participant wanted to know how the study would "**fix**" (Annexure N) his condition which he said was "not good". The researcher mentioned to him that the study might be used in future while working with other children.

The session was prolonged and the researcher asked for another appointment on the weekend; the participant agreed to the researcher's suggestion. The participant asked that

the researcher should not try to trace him if he could not be found at the usual spot at the entrance of the frequented hotel, and the researcher agreed.

During the following session the participant wanted to know how the study would benefit him after his life had been "**messed up"** (Annexure N) by a social worker. The researcher was very careful in selecting simple words to explain the reason for the study. After about forty-five minutes, the participant agreed to participate in the study, in the form of writing. He agreed with the researcher that he would write on his own and present in the next session - which was also scheduled for a weekend.

During the next session, the participant arrived in a company of a friend. He requested that the session be moved to a park where he said he would be more comfortable. The researcher moved with the participant to a park, which was empty because it was early in the morning.

The participant found it difficult to write because he still had some more questions. The participant felt that he was never listened to by any social worker in an institution or in the field (Annexure A). He believed that he could now be with a family if he was listened to. He absconded everywhere he was transferred, because he said every person who was involved believed what was said by the social worker and not him (Annexure A). He was still angry with any person called a social worker, because they did not listen to children, but gave instructions (Annexure N). He strongly believed that his living on the streets was as a result of social work activities. The participant did not remember a single day when he was asked the reason for his abscondence, but did remember always being told that he was naughty and would be moved to a stricter home (Annexure A).

3.8 THEMES FOR SCENARIO THREE

➢ The participant's **frame of reference** of the case/field social worker was the same as the researcher during the initial interview. The participant started off putting the researcher in the same package as the social worker with whom he worked previously, in the field and in institutions. The participant's perception changed in the following interview sessions, after he experienced acceptance from the researcher.

➢ There were signs of a **lack of trust** by the participant in the former field social worker and the researcher. The participant verbalised his anger to the field social worker who brought the researcher to him (Annexure O). The participant perceived the action of the field social worker as disrespect to him as an individual. He perceived the researcher on the same lens as the field social worker and therefore trusted neither of them. He verbalised the fact that he had experience of social workers, and knew that they were all against him.

➢ The researcher, on the other hand, did **not trust** the participant when he decided to change the venue of their meeting to that of a park. The researcher was able to read the anger in the participant and applied empathy to enter the participant's frame of reference. She showed acceptance to the participant, who later changed his perception of the researcher to a more positive view.

➢ The participant was **self-determined** when he chose to have a session in the park, and not at the usual spot near the entrance of a hotel. The participant's opinion was accepted by the researcher and the client felt valued. The researcher showed acceptance of the participant and he felt valued enough to make some decisions in, and contributions to, the research process.

➢ The participant did not remember any occasion on which he signed consent for his removal - which indicated that **systems are closed to information**. According to the Child Care Act 74/1983, every child over the age of ten must sign consent for removal to alternative care. The participant might also have been told about the form, and either felt overwhelmed and threatened, or it might have been too little information to impact on his frame of reference.

➢ The researcher **built a relationship** with the participant, to be able to continue with the study. It was necessary for the researcher to start off by building a working relationship with participants. The reason was that participants felt threatened by the researcher - who is also a social worker. Building a relationship included showing acceptance to the participant and making him experience that he was valued.

➢ The participant **felt blamed** for his removal to a children's' home. He could remember when a social worker in the children's home mentioned his behaviour

from the previous placement. He felt that every time he was moved from children's home to children's home, it was because he had behaved badly.

3.9 THEMES EMERGING FROM ALL SCENARIOS

- ➢ Participants did **not trust** the researcher at the beginning of the interviews. The researcher had to **build a relationship** with all the participants before she could collect information. This process enabled the researcher to enter the participants' frames of references. After the interviews, the participants experienced acceptance and they were free to communicate with the researcher.

- ➢ **Self-determination** was the leading behaviour exhibited by all participants in all scenarios. All participants were given the opportunity that they had never had to be listened to and to make some decisions about the interview process. Allowing participants to determine themselves created a positive working relationship between the researcher and the participants.

- ➢ Participants believed that they were never consulted in any way about their removal. They did not remember signing papers of consent, which indicates that **systems are closed to information -** if they were told about the removal. It was found that participants did not register in their minds the signing of Regulation 15 by all children above the age of ten. This is possible, under certain conditions such as when a client is overwhelmed by the situation, or the information did not have meaning for the participants.

- ➢ Their frame of reference was the only **reality** for participants. Participants believed that no social workers allowed respondents to contribute in any way in any processes. Participants did not expect to be valued by the researcher and to be allowed to make some decisions. This perception was their only reality.

- ➢ The drawing of pictures and role playing did **not fit** with the participants. The researcher wanted to give participants other means of relating their experiences, but those means seemed not to fit with participants. Participants chose to talk on tape and write about their experiences.

- ➢ They all had a **fear of being rejected** by the researcher as they perceived rejection from other social workers. The researcher was able to observe the fact

that participants did not trust her, and immediately applied immediacy as a skill in intervention. The researcher was able to show acceptance to participants and that their contributions were valued.

➢ It was necessary to brief the participants to allow them to make the decision of engaging in the study or not - which was their right.

➢ All participants **felt blamed** for mistakes that they committed for their removal, which was their frame of reference, and they believed that removal was a way of punishing them, moving them from their beloved family members. Participants believed that they were to blame for misbehaving and they were being punished by being removed to alternative care.

➢ The findings of this study are **solely the perceptions** of participants as perceived by participants. It is not possible to generalise the findings of this study, because they only represent the perceptions of those who were participants.

➢ It was found that the **telling method did not work** for the participants and their frames of reference, perceptions and constructions (people construct reality and do not absorb reality); systems are closed to information are the main themes in this study. Participants could not register that they had signed Regulation 15 forms after they turned ten years of age, to agree to the removal. It is possible, because people do not just absorb information, but they make meaning out of the received information.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The study confirmed the hypothesis of the researcher, namely, that children abscond from institutions where they have been legally placed, because they are not actively involved in the decision making of their removal. Telling them that they are to be removed has not been working, as it might go either way - too much information that brings about threats, or too little difference to be visible.

Anger and hatred has built up inside the participants about social workers. Nevertheless, their frames of references have been penetrated by applying empathetic skills to all of them. Participants felt unrecognised, and by absconding they were seeking attention and recognition for their views which they perceived to be valuable.

The researcher had to build a relationship with the participants, before being able to gain their cooperation for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR
4. REFLECTIONS
4.1 INTRODUCTION

In every study there needs to be a reflection of the process of the research that was conducted. The researcher needs to inform the reader how the process unfolded. In this chapter, the researcher revisits the hypothesis mentioned in chapter one, and indicates whether the study has confirmed the hypothesis, or not. The chapter also indicates how the process links to the literature mentioned in chapter two. The researcher makes a link between the first three chapters, to indicate to the reader how these chapters link to each other and to the research process.

4.2 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researcher wanted to explore experiences in the process of removal of children to children's homes and foster homes, using systems theory, constructivism and person-centered theory. The researcher wanted to find out if the behaviour of abscondence could be explained by these theories. The intention of the researcher was to find a way of explaining the children's behaviour of abscondence. While trying to explore the reasons for children absconding from children's homes and foster placement, it should be kept in mind that social workers' job responsibility is to protect children when they (the social workers) perceive the potential risk to harm the wellbeing of these children. The outcome of the study may be useful to social workers, to consider other means of dealing with children who are perceived to be at risk.

4.3 THE HYPOTHESIS

The researcher hypothesised that children abscond from alternative care as a means of communicating either to the social worker or to any other person significant in the process of their removal. It was found that there are two different points of meaning in the process of children's removal.

Children create different meanings of the same process of removal from that of social workers. Social workers' intention to initiate the process of removing children is to protect these children by removing them from the risky situation, for the wellbeing of the child. The social worker may have good intentions in removing children in the name of protection, since of the social worker's responsibility is to protect the child against any perceived potential risk. Removal to alternative care may be another means used by social workers to protect children.

On the other hand, children create their own interpretation of the process of removal. At this point there is a high risk of potential emergence of different opinions and thoughts about the same process between the social worker and the child.

The study found that the intentions of a social worker are not - or may not be - well communicated to children, and may not fit with the children. Children create their own meaning of the process, and children act, based on their created meaning. Children create a sustained reality (Fisher 1991: 21) and create their own meaning about the process of removal.

Regulation 15 of the Child Care Act 74/1983 requires that children over the age of ten need to give consent for their removal. By signing the consent, children could be believed to have agreed to the removal to alternative care. The difficulty in this situation is that a social worker might have only informed children that they will be removed from the perceived potential risk situation to alternative care, which they might not have heard or attached meaning to. The next concern at this stage is: whose **perception** of a potential risk situation is being used? Is it better to remove children from the current circumstances? How and who is to decide if children and their families are to be removed to alternative care or not?

This study found that social workers may not be aware that **systems are closed to information** (Fischer 1991: 14), and they believe that by signing Regulation 15, the child has understood and agreed to the removal. The pitfall is that social workers just tell children that the situation poses a potential risk to their wellbeing, therefore they (the children) will be moved to alternative care. The study found that social workers may not have considered the theory that people do not **absorb** information, but create

(Watzlawick 1984: 29) meaning from their experiences. The created meaning becomes the person's **reality** (Fisher 1991: 21).

Children in this study did not **absorb** the information that their situation posed a risk to their wellbeing and that they would be moved to alternative care. Children created a different meaning about their removal, and the meaning thereof became their reality. The meaning of removal to children was that they (the children) had done something wrong and they were to be blamed (self-guilt). By removal to alternative care, the meaning they created was that they were being punished (annexure A, N and M). Again, the study shows that **systems are closed to information** (Bateson 1979: 162), because children did not hear what social workers communicated to them i.e. that the situation in which they were living posed a risk to their wellbeing.

The hypothesis made by the researcher that the children's removal was for their own safety, and that absconding behaviour was a means of communication, was confirmed. Children's **perception** of a potential risk situation is different from that of a social worker. There is a communication breakdown between the social worker and the children. The different **frames of reference** (Watzlawick 1967: 56) of children and social workers create a barrier in communication. Frames of reference express a person's perceptions; hence, perceptions of the same process are different between social workers and children. Social workers' frames of reference include, inter alia, their legal responsibility to protect children. Protecting children may include, inter alia, removing children to alternative care. However, instead of feeling safe in alternative care, the children felt blamed, judged and unhappy.

This study found that the children were dissatisfied that social workers did not include them in the removal process, from the determination of the risky situation to where the children were placed. The theory that systems are closed to information may, inter alia, suggest that the telling method is not working when dealing with people. Social workers should involve children and their significant others in the whole process of deciding whether removal to alternative care is necessary, from the determination of the risky situation to whether the alternative placement is necessary, instead of only telling them about the decisions that have been made.

The hypothesis of the study is that children were not included in the removal process in ways meaningful to them; hence, they absconded from the alternative care where they were legally placed, to indicate their dissatisfaction with the process. Because systems are closed to information, the children did not understand the reasons for their removal and they absconded back whence they were removed.

The study shows that the removal of children did not **fit** (Fisher 1991: 37) with the children, and their response was communicated back to social workers by means of absconding. Children felt that they were denied the opportunity for **self- determination** (Fischer 1991: 45). Participants mentioned that they believed that they were being undermined (annexures G, E, C and M). Children developed negative attitudes towards all social workers. Negatives attitudes were even experienced by the researcher when conducting this study. Children were skeptical about speaking of their experiences in dealing with social workers. The researcher needed to use combined therapeutic skills in joining and fitting with the children. After applying therapeutic skills, the children gained the trust of the researcher and they agreed to take part in the study.

The researcher started off by **building relationships** as a **condition of facilitation** (Grobler et al 2003: 77). Building a relationship creates ground for entry into the experiential world of a person. If one does not gain positive entry to the person's experiential world, they may experience threat and need to **defend the self** (Grobler et al 2003: 940). Even in a research situation it is necessary to build relationships as a positive means of entry, to avoid **rejection** as a means of self-defense by children.

This study wishes to encourage social workers to take a new look at the whole process of removal of children to alternative care. Before the process of removing children, the children themselves should be included, and their parents or persons in whose care the children were found, from the initial stage of the process. The initial stage may include, inter alia, the assessment of the situation in which children find themselves, determination whether removal is necessary, and, if necessary, where children should go.

4.4 THE EMPLOYER VERSUS SOCIAL WORKER RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Employers employ qualified social workers who have the basic knowledge and the skills to deal with children's problems. Employers may believe that a qualified social worker has the qualifications, but the different curricula of different institutions might leave gaps in the theoretical knowledge of social workers.

Employers may have induction processes to introduce social workers to different forms and internal procedures, to perform different tasks that are required in their jobs, as prescribed by their job descriptions.

Employers usually provide social workers with in-service training throughout their employment, to be given updates of changes that have taken place within the agency.

At the end of this study, the researcher developed further questions around the removal process of children by social workers, to alternative care. Do social workers, who are doing the removal, have the background theory and values, , to enable them to deal with problems that children and their families encounter? If so, have they forgotten the use of the theories, or do they need to be constantly refreshed about the theories? If they have forgotten, whose responsibility is it to keep on refreshing the social workers, or how can they keep abreast?

The question that needs to be researched further is: who is responsible for introducing social workers, who have a lack of the required theoretical levels, do they need theoretical background after they have graduated from university?

The researcher's belief is that all employers need social workers as much as possible and the researcher believes that in practice, social workers are making an effort to do their level best.

The Child Care Act 74/1983 gives the mandate for protection of children. Can the removal of children to alternative care be part of social workers taking responsibility to protect those children? Is it perceived as the only way to protect children? How much preventative work is being done by field social workers? Does family preservation feature in the work of social workers?

Social workers are already complaining about high caseloads, and children who abscond from legal placement surely take social workers a step backwards, because an abscondence report is expected, as prescribed by the Child Care Act 74/1983. It seems as if the removal of children to alternative care has resulted in another problem – that of abscondence. It is highly possible that social workers might have feelings of failure to execute their duties satisfactorily, and if that is the case, how do social workers feel about the failure?

Can social workers use other theories when dealing with the situation? Again, if **systems are closed to information,** how can social workers be informed about these theories?

4.5 SOCIAL WORK CODE OF ETHICS AND JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

Social workers have ethics of practice. Their behaviour should be governed and regulated by these ethics. These ethics are enforced by the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP).

There are situations where social workers are caught between compliance with ethics and the job responsibilities. The situation exists where social workers are unable to find a balance between the professional code of ethics and job responsibility. At this stage the researcher has this question: is it possible that the ethics can clash with the job responsibilities of social workers, or do social workers have different perceptions of the ethics?

One of the values of social work is **individualisation**. The value demands that social workers to not generalise respondents, but treat each one of them as unique individuals who are different. This is also stressed by Grobler et al (2003:45).

Another value is allowing the **client self-determination.** The value allows the social worker to give space for the client - even children - to get involved in determining what is affecting the client concerned and how to deal with it. Can values like these create conflicting views when dealing with respondents?

4.6 CONCLUSION

In terms of constructivism, children in this study created their own realities about themselves, their parents and their involvement with social workers.

It seems as if these constructions not only differed from those of the social workers they encountered, but also from those of their parents.

It may be the frame of reference or construction of social workers that children have to be removed from their families in order to protect them. However, this is not what the children interviewed in this study experienced. Instead, they perceived the removal from their families as punishment rather than protection, and their behaviour of absconding indicates this.

So, instead of creating a sense of protection and safety in the children, they experienced guilt and anger after the removal.

Also, although social workers may have informed them about the removal, even asking them to sign a form of consent, it did not become part of the children's construction or frame of reference, thus confirming the notion that systems are closed to information.

In terms of the theories discussed in this study, it seems as if the removal did not fit with how the children perceived themselves, their families and the role of the social worker. Instead, it might have threatened them so much that they were unable to symbolise it. This includes the signing of the required consent forms, as behaviour motivated by unsymbolised experiences is not perceived as part of the self and is therefore denied.

This denied behaviour could pose quite a dilemma for social workers, as children could act as if they agreed with the removal, while that may not be the case. One way of avoiding this dilemma is to build a relationship with the children, entering their frame of reference, without posing any threat to them.

Once a trusting relating has been created, the problem which seems to necessitate the removal could be explored with the child and/or their parents.

It also needs to be clarified as to whose responsibility it is to develop social workers to enable them to perform their duties in the best interests of their respondents - including the families they work with.

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ANNEXURE   A

Di (name change to protect the identity of the respondent) is 18 year old male who has passed only Grade 4. Interviewed on 17/11/2007.

I never knew my parents and most of my history I heard when I was in Jabulane Children's home. I was told that I am a trouble maker. Panel meetings were held and I was told by social worker Mike that I have to be transferred. The next week a social worker from Sebokeng came to collect me and I was placed with foster parents.

I was never happy and I now live in Vereeniging. I am happy now that I live in Vereeniging.

ANNEXURE   B

Jerry (name changed to protect the respondent) is a 15 year old male in Grade five. He wrote his story on 17 November 2007

I was staying at Natalspruit at home. One day I was at school during lunch time eating by lunch. I saw my social worker Mr. Solomon coming at the school gate. He called me and told me to bring my books. He did not tell me where we were going and I did not ask too. We went to my home and he told me to take all my clothes. He told me that I am moving to a children's home.

At the home I met Ms Anette who is the director of the home who told me that I will be staying in the home. My social worker told me not to run away. He promises that he will visit me but he never came.

I ran away because nobody came to visit me as they promised. I missed by family and run away to visit them.

ANNEXURE   C

Molemo (name changed to protect the respondent) is a 15 years old male who is in Grade five.

My social worker told me that I am going to a new home when she brought me to the children's home. I asked he the reason for me to move to a new home and she told me that it is because I am not attending school. The social worker told be that because I am not attending school, I will not be able to understand the reason. She told me to ask the social worker at the home some days to come. She told me to ask the social worker at the home if I have a family / relatives or not. She promised that the children's home social worker will trace my relatives before I reach 18 years. I have never heard of a social worker trying to trace my relatives since my arrival in this home.

I run away because I wanted to ask the people I used to stay with about my family.

ANNEXURE   D

Dikeledi (name changed to protect the identity of respondent) is 16 years of age and in Grade six. The interview was on a tape recorder.

I was informed about the reasons for my removal to a children's home. I was in foster care with a relative after the death of my mother and maternal grandmother. My foster parents took in another girl child for foster care but the child was not related. My co-foster child would invite me to accompany her on outings. My co-foster child would leave me in another room to watch television during that outing and would disappear without telling me where she was going. She would later come back and we would go back home. My foster parents warned me to stop going out with the other foster child because they did not like them to arrive late at home. It was difficult for me to refuse when my co-foster child asked me out because she would give me sweets and money as a return for favors.

After some time, my foster parents informed me that they can no longer cope with my behavior and that they have informed my social worker. The social worker informed me that I have to be moved to a children's home because of my behavior and I agreed to the removal.

I am happy about the movement because I can still visit my former foster parents and we now have a positive relationship.

I absconded from the children's home because I wanted money from my former foster parents for farewell function with my friends. They promised to give me the money but the children's home management refused me to go out and collect the money. I sometimes abscond without valid reasons but influence of peer pressure.

The children's home management sometimes takes the side of the house mother only when they deal with abscondance cases.

ANNEXURE   E

Mandla (name changed to protect the respondent) is a 17 year old male who is doing Grade seven.

I broke our family television set. Radio and DSTV. My mother took me to the social worker and tells them what I did. My mother was very angry and they placed me at Van Rhyn place of Safety. I was later moved here without being notified.

I absconded back home because I wanted to know when am I coming back home.

ANNEXURE   F

Mpho (name changed to protect the respondent) is 15 year old male who is in Grade eight.

My parents believed that I am being influenced negatively by my friends. They did not trust me friends; they said my friends are naughty and steal from other people and I should stop seeing him. They reported my behavior to the social worker. The social worker came to me and told me that I have to go and stay in children's home.

I ran away back to my family and my parents informed the social worker. The social worker told me that I have to go back to the children's home. I told the social worker that if they take me back to the children's home, I will run away again.

I was at home for two months and my parents got me registered at the local school. I attended the school and one day after a long time, a social worker came to tell me that she is transferring me back to the family as a test to observe if I am behaving well. I completed the form to come home and not back to children's home.

ANNEXURE   G

Nthabiseng (name changed to protect the respondent) is a 15 years old girl who is in Grade six. She recorded her interview on tape recorder.

I was removed from my parents who raised me up. I was aware that they are not my biological parents. I was told that me biological parents are deceased.

I was removed from foster care placement to Van Rhyn place of safety and was never given any reason for the removal. I told the panel meeting at the place of safety that I want to go back home and they promised me that I will soon. I was indeed released and placed back with my foster parents. For the very first time I was told that in fact my parents cannot be traced.

When I was transferred to this children's home, I was with my parents who raised me. I was never told that I will be moved to a children's home. Upon arrival at this home, I ask the social worker why we travel with my clothes and the social worker told me that I will stay here for only a week.

I am still angry with the social worker because she lied to me that she will come back after a week to pick me up but she never did. I am not sure if the removal was done in conjunction with my former foster parents. I only visit my foster parents during school holidays.

I have two reasons for abscondance. First, I was missing my parents and the children's home management refused me to visit at that time. Secondly I absconded after I heard my parents saying that the children's home management has no right to refuse me to visit my family.

After all the trouble that I went through, I just want to concentrate on getting better education, shelter and daily food. I still have questions to my parents but I do not want those questions to disturb my studies.

I am sometimes not happy about the discipline in this children's home because the discipline is only based on the information received from the house mother.

ANNEXURE   H

On 02/11/2007 the researcher introduced herself to the respondents in a children's home (name hidden for confidentiality sake). It was a group of children males and females who have absconded once or more from the children's home. The purpose of the study was explained to them. Respondents were informed that the results of the study could be used in future when social workers are dealing with other children.

The researcher informed respondents that she needs their concerned to engage in the study. Respondents were given a week to think about what the researcher gave information about.

<u>ANNEXURE I</u>

On 06/11/2007 the researcher went to Mpho's family accompanied by the caseworker. The case worker introduced the researcher to the family. The researcher mentioned the purpose of the study to the family and the respondent.

The family agreed to be involved in the study but they are not sure if Mpho will agree and he was no at home. .

The researcher informed the family that she will come to meet Mpho the next Saturday morning.

ANNEXURE   J

On 10/11/2007 the researcher met with the group of respondents at the children's home. Only respondents and the researcher met at the agreed upon venue within the children's home.

Respondents had more clarity seeking questions for the researcher like:

1. Why the researcher wants individual interviews?
2. Why respondents have to be on tape or write what they want to say and not just tell about their experiences?
3. If record is kept, how can they be sure that their responses will not affect them negatively?

The researcher gave responses to the questions as follows:

1. The researcher informed respondents that it is necessary to obtain individual answers to be able to get pure individual responses because sure they had different experiences during the process of moving to this children's home. Again it is anticipated that each individual respondent will reveal his/her feelings around the experience.
2. Respondents were assured that their responses will be kept confidential including their identity.
3. The researcher informed respondents that their responses will not be kept in their social workers files because the study is not part of the services that they are receiving from the social workers. The responses will only be kept in the researcher's document without their true identification.

ANNEXURE   K

On 13/11/2007 the researcher met with the respondents at the children's home. The researcher decided not to talk about the study but ask the respondents what they want the researcher to know. Respondents talked among themselves and not the researcher. The researcher overheard the respondents telling each other the way they were treated by their respective social workers. The researcher could not concentrate on exactly what the respondents were saying. The purpose of the researcher not to concentrate was to indirectly allow respondents to talk about their experiences without feeling intimidated. After some time of talking to one another, the respondents agreed to be involved in the study. All respondents agreed to be interviewed the next Saturday.

ANNEXURE   L

On 17/11/2007 the researcher met again with respondents in the children's home. The researcher is now impatient with this respondents and wish it could be done an over with today. All respondents want to get done with the process and they demanded paper for those who want to write and the tape recorder for those who want to be on the tape. Those who want to write were given pens and papers to write on. Those who wanted to be on tape recorder were given the tape but they have to use it in turns because it was only one. All respondents agreed to the arrangements.

Those who wanted to write were given the freedom to sit anywhere and write and they will bring back the document later. Those respondents who wanted to write decided that they will bring the report in three hours time.

The respondents who decided to use the tape were provided with a spare room at the children's home to take turns to use it.

Responded were informed that they are allowed to include their feelings whenever they want to include them.

ANNEXURE   M

On 17/11/2007 the researcher waited for Di at the entrance of the agreed upon hotel. After about 30 minutes, Di emerged with two other people presumably his friends. He saw the researcher and came closer. His facial expression was like he is not in the mood for a talk on this day.

Di requested the researcher for the two of them to move to the park. The time was about ten in the morning and there was nobody at the park. At this time the researcher wanted to push Di for an interview. At the park Di informed the researcher that he does not want to be seen with her (researcher). He agreed to write about his experiences of the removal process.

He was writing and on the other hand telling the researcher some of the experiences. He verbalized that what makes him angry is the fact that he was never asked if he agrees to whatever movement that was decided upon but was just told.

ANNEXURE   N

On 10/11/2007 the researcher visited Di without appointment. The reason for that was because Di does not have contact details to arrange appointment. He was smelling and sleepy. He sounds aggressive and wanted to know why he was chosen for the study. He mentioned that his life was "messed up" by social workers. He further mentioned that unless the researcher has come to "fix" what happened. The researcher mentioned to him that he was selected from a list of children who were moved to children's homes by social workers and those children have absconded once or more times. He looks like he has more questions but just tired to ask. He continue to insist that the researcher commit herself to "fix" what other social workers has done which he named "damage" The researcher mentioned to Di that the study is aimed at looking at if there is a need for "fixing" the previous misstates that social workers might have committed to avoid those misstates to happen to other children in future if he can be involved in the study.
The researcher and the respondents agreed to meet the next week and not weekend.

ANNEXURE   O

On 02/11/2007 Di (name changed to protect the respondent) was visited by the researcher who was accompanied by the previous case manager. The reason for the caseworker to accompany the researcher is because Di does not know the researcher.

The caseworker took the researcher to Vereeniging town and stopped at the entrance of the hotel where she (caseworker) use to meet Di. The case worker saw Di coming and he called him to the car. The caseworker introduced Di to the researcher. She informed Di about the study and mentioned that he was pre-selected.

Di was angry with the caseworker and demanded to know why she brought the researcher first before she could inform him. The caseworker tried to apologize but Di seemed not to hear the plea.

The researcher intervened and offered her apology to the client. The situation was tense and the researcher did not want to give up on Di. The researcher requested another appointment with Di to give him clarity about the study and how he could be involved. Di agreed to the next appointment the next Saturday at the same place. Di agreed to the appointment and left.

ANNEXURE   P

On 10/11/2007 the researcher and the caseworker visited the family. This time Mpho was found at home. The caseworker introduced the researcher. The researcher informed Mpho about the study and that he was pre-selected for the study but with his permission. Mpho mentioned that he was informed by his parents about the researcher's visit. He mentioned that he is willing to talk about his experiences.

Before Mpho could make a decision as whether he is going to write, use the tape or do the drawing, he mentioned that his parents and the social worker conspired about his removal to children's home. He said that he is blaming his family because they are the ones who reported to the social worker that he is "uncontrollable". The social worker never bothered to find out from him the reason for his behavior or try to understand the behavior.

The researcher was aware that Mpho is talking about his experiences but there was no entry to stop him talking. On the other hand the researcher could not take notes because Mpho has not decided which method of telling his experience. He further mentioned that he absconded from children's home because he wanted to proof to the social worker and his family that they were wrong to judge him. He is proud that he told the social worker that he is not going back to the children's home and he promised to abscond again.

Mpho spend two months without attending any school and the social worker said nothing. His parents negotiated with the local school to take him and he started to attend school. Few months after Mpho is with the family, the social worker came to inform them that Mpho will be transferred to their care as foster placement. It was this time that Mpho remembers that he signed a consent to be transferred back home but does not remember signing any consent to be placed in children's home.

When Mpho pause it was time for the researcher to tell Mpho that he has to choose how he wants to tell his story rather that just telling the researcher. Mpho decided to write about his experience. The researcher and Mpho agreed that they will meet the next week for Mpho to present his story on paper as he decided.

ANNEXURE   Q

On 15/11/2007 Mpho was visited at home with the hope of getting the written story. Mpho was not at home and was said to be attending extra classes in preparation for the coming examinations. The researcher left a message with the family that Mpho will be visited on Saturday morning.

ANNEXURE   R

Mpho was visited at home as promised and he was found. He started to talk about how angry he is towards social workers when he has to rethink about the experiences. He goes on to talk about his experiences.

At the end of a long talk Mpho remembered that he has to write down all what he has been saying. He started to write and the researcher gave him time to write without interference.