

**FACILITATING INNOVATIVE YOUTH ENCOUNTERS FOR WELL-BEING AND HEALING**

by

WILLIAM SAMUEL SOLOMONS

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SUPERVISOR: MR. D. J. KRUGER

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## Declaration

Student number: **4465-139-2**

I declare that **Facilitating Innovative Youth Encounters for Well-Being and Healing** is my own work and all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

WILLIAM SAMUEL SOLOMONS

7 June 2013

## **DEDICATION**

*TO AGAPE COPELAND TRAIN, OUR RAY OF HOPE AND LOVE...*

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## **Abstract**

This research is based on a youth intervention organisation founded by the researcher in 1997. The organisation (Agape Copeland Train) is located in the Northern Cape. Youths' contexts in the Northern Cape are fraught with psychological, social and relational problems, including violence, alcoholism, teenage pregnancies, depression, crime, poverty, and curtailed future prospects. An exploratory enquiry, informed by ecological and positive psychology, is undertaken. In particular, this research focuses on the (often neglected) perspectives of facilitators who work with youth. Exploration of how facilitators' well-being is impacted on whilst serving youth in this challenging context is undertaken. Interviews with facilitators yielded themes of positive transformation, including shifts in mindsets and positive affect. In addition, aspects of the organisation's development, as relevant to the context of the research, are described and a model of youth facilitation process, as developed by facilitators within the organisation, is presented. The researcher's own experiences in the organisation (as director and as a facilitator) are reflected upon. Observations, incidents, and experiences are used as additional data sources. Facilitating vulnerable youth from an ecological systems perspective is an intricate, reflexive, complex and challenging process.

Key words: Ecological paradigm; facilitation; group process; positive psychology; reflection; well-being; youth development.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*A disciple once complained to his Master:  
‘You tell us stories, but you never reveal their meaning to us.’  
The Master replied: ‘How would you like it if someone offered you fruit  
and masticated it before giving it to you?’*

*No one can find your meaning for you. Not even the master.  
Eat your own fruit.*

There certainly are no absolutes when facilitating youth processes; facilitators need to find their own rhythm, make sense of their own encounters, and metaphorically ‘eat their own fruit’! This introductory chapter provides the context of this study in terms of the broader landscape of youth development in South Africa. In addition, Agape Copeland Train (ACT), a youth development Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) is introduced.

Ten years ago if anyone had asked me how I dealt with transference when working with youth, I probably would have replied: ‘What transference?’ At that stage working with youth was solely about them; talking with them, designing programmes for them and advocating projects for them. Yes, I was served in return, but the problem is, I was never aware of it, and never took the time to talk about what happened to us, the facilitators, whilst working passionately on youth projects. Back then I was ignorant, took a lot of things and people for granted and never realised that youth facilitators needed support too: Just as we engaged youth in learning processes and hosted reflection sessions for them, so too did facilitators need the space to debrief and reflect.

I have been fortunate to work on a youth programme called Agape Copeland Train (ACT). This organisation was formed with the purpose to equip matriculants (grade 12 learners) with important skills needed for their last year of schooling as well as for life after school. Founded in 1997 in Upington in the Northern Cape Province, ACT was

established for a number of reasons, such as to pre-empt the flow of senior learners into prison, reduce unemployment amongst school leavers and ultimately to lobby for study and job opportunities for matriculants. Often the challenge that youth initiatives such as ACT face is to collaborate with schools, to ensure that processes related to youth development, required at school level, will happen. Pendlebury, Lake and Smith (2009) state that schools are important institutions where youth are trained and prepared for greater challenges after school. They write:

“Schools are safe places where children develop emotionally and socially as well as intellectually and where they learn (through example and experience, as much as through instruction) of their own and other’s rights and responsibilities. At their worst, schools are places where children are vulnerable to abuse, rape, bullying, humiliation, and inadequate support for learning – all of which may impede meaningful access. Unrecognised learning disabilities or poor concentration due to hunger, disease or trauma can also result in children’s silent exclusion and eventual drop-out.” (Pendlebury *et al.*, 2009, p. 27)

Working at Agape Copeland Train for fourteen years, I have noticed that schools are not always safe places. Rudolph (in Pendlebury *et al.*, 2009) reports that children act out and are at times brutal. Regardless of safety requirements at schools, youth sometimes bring weapons, drugs and delinquent behaviours (often modeled from their homes or communities), to school. In 2006, for example, two learners (who were part of the ACT programme) from different schools died on their school premises. One was stabbed to death for a cigarette he wouldn’t share, whilst the other was fatally stabbed because of his teasing nature. As a consequence, the department of education in the Northern Cape Province consulted with stakeholders, including ACT, to collaborate regarding a strategy to address the prevalence of violence at schools. In these consultations it was shocking to observe how many parents appeared unmoved, distant and apathetic about school brutality. This is of concern since parents are typically the primary disciplinarians of their children.

Beard and Wilson (2006) state that each individual's genetic make-up, disposition and experiences play a significant role in making every life experience unique to that person. It is therefore important to take into consideration young people's ecologies and their respective epistemologies. Taking this into account can provide a better understanding of whether issues such as youth violence, and others, are linked to deficiencies in parental or other social support. Given this awareness of the interrelatedness of many aspects in a system, a guiding paradigm for this study is the ecological model, described further in chapter three.

Another issue to consider is that misconduct amongst youth is often drug or alcohol related. Weilbach (2008) reports that children and youth are affected by drug and alcohol abuse, and an alarming number of youth are dependent on drugs such as dagga, alcohol, cocaine and crystal meth (tik). Weilbach's (2008) findings are corroborated by the Department of Safety and Liaison in the Northern Cape area where ACT is based, who have records of young people in conflict with the law. Government and NGOs are thus also faced with the challenge of how to deal with youth at risk. We have noticed that both teachers' and learners' performance and morale can be compromised due to the impact of the disruptive influence of drugs and associated disturbed behaviour in schools. As one ACT facilitator noted, what should be a learner's happiest time in life (adolescence), when one should live life to the fullest, have lots of friends and be happy, is often taken away by troublemakers at schools. In ACT's work we have observed that youth who are involved with drugs, exposed to violence and who do not feel safe at home, are mostly unhappy and struggle to enjoy activities or to just have fun and be young.





**Figure 1:** Agape Copeland Train Website Splash Screen, Upington, 2010, designed by in-house Multimedia Designer Jacques Keet Copyright © 2010

Cloud (2011) states that happiness is at the core of life. When one is happy, one lives life to the full, is more willing to take risks and to participate in events. Cloud (2011) cites crèches as an example and indicates that if one goes to a crèche, the different levels of happiness are evident: Some babies are happy with the world, whilst others have to work at it a little bit more. Thus as children grow one can see their natural dispositions coming to the fore. So each person brings genetic components and factors into life, which can contribute to one's moods and sense of well-being. Besides this, however, the rest of what goes into one's happiness comes from things that are directly under one's control: One's own behaviour, thoughts and intentional practices in life (Cloud, 2011). ACT's programme aims to tap into these factors by creating encounters for youth where they can deal with issues creatively, learn how their behaviour influences their performance in life and ultimately empower them to determine to be successful and happy adults.

Given an increasing understanding of the above, the work of ACT has, since its beginning, evolved and adapted. Thus we ventured into areas such as HIV/AIDS peer education, environmental education, Creative Study Techniques (CST), art exchange, Youth Parliaments, child savings and children's rights. We also began to take youth on weekend camps, away from their familiar, and for many deprived, surroundings.

Facilitating these youth camps, we noticed how learners transformed into social change makers and started to take charge of social issues within their respective communities. Perhaps most of them became interested in joining ACT because the programme connects with their earnest and serious side, a factor youth programs can tend to overlook or avoid, possibly due to not knowing how to deal with or handle the effects of getting serious and addressing deeper issues. A burning question that then arose was whether the learners flocked in because of the quality and impact of our programme, or whether they simply came to get away from home and see new places?

This undertaking by Agape Copeland Train to facilitate youth encounters at getaway camping sites is costly, considering the logistical, financial and administrative support required to optimally run such initiatives. However, the approach has been experienced as being more impact-full for youth as they are away from the classroom and the stresses linked to their familiar contexts. This relates to Beard and Wilson's (2006) observation that the learning environment and surroundings can strongly influence a group's experience. In view of this, this study will take into consideration the effect of a different learning context on youth. Furthermore in this research we consider the impact of the environment on facilitators' psychological well-being. Interestingly, from working with adolescents on training camps, one notices that when young people are grouped in a context other than the traditional classroom, they become freer and more vulnerable. The vulnerability arises through the space provided for them to share their past experiences, something they may never have done before and which may evoke the discomfort of sharing. Freedom is created by the environment, where learning takes place, whilst still having fun and experiencing the opportunities and activities of outdoor youth training sites. On arrival at outdoor camps, one notices the youths' different emotions: Some are scared, some look shy, some display anger, whilst others appear excited, confident, happy and enthusiastic. The difference in individuals' emotions on arrival stimulated us as facilitators to ask what processes were at work, leading us to venture into an exploratory, qualitative approach to data gathering.

For youth to gain from youth programmes, they need not only to be provided with activities, but also to become psychologically engaged in those activities. Blumenfeld, Kempler and Krajcik (2006) define psychological engagement as an individual being motivated to the extent that their interest is fully captured by what they are doing, for example being absorbed in learning a new skill or focused on delivering a community service. ACT seeks to enable this through innovating a variety of challenging activities, and providing emotionally available and sensitive youth facilitators. Thus ACT has become a hub for learners who want to go beyond just attending school. It has become a place where they can meet others and share, explore and learn new ways of learning and living.

Prior to studying at UNISA, I was part of the group of facilitators at ACT who created spaces for young people in the Northern Cape where they could escape to a place away from home: A place where they could share, discover and learn more; a place where they could be free without being judged or assessed. This place gave birth to innovative encounters to make all the aforementioned possible. For example, it was on the outdoor camps where we found a space at night, an encounter we started to call 'The circle of trust'. During the process of this dissertation we changed the name to 'Firing encounters'. 'Firing encounters' is a place where youth can share whatever they feel comfortable with. We light a fire and when someone has something painful or motivational to share, that person picks up a piece of wood and throws it in the fire. It was during these firing encounters that I came to know the youth better, and gained access to their pain and victories. With their permission, I started writing their narratives and put it together into book format. Some of their stories will be shared in this research document, whilst others remain in our hearts and memories.

Whilst doing the Masters in Clinical Psychology programme at UNISA, I realised that these encounters may have activated healing in many young people in one way or

another. Thus I have sought this opportunity to check in with young people attending the Agape Copeland Train camps, to gauge whether encounters on camps bring healing in some way or another. In addition to the healing encounters of young people, however, I was challenged about the processes happening with those who work with the young people, the facilitators. This was a perspective I had never thought of as working at ACT, as our main focus has always been primarily on our target group, the youth.

So, significantly, whilst creating learning encounters for youth and facilitating increasingly innovative sessions, I had forgotten about the people working with the young people, the people who work endlessly, with much passion and drive: The facilitators. In fact, the central role of facilitators is a much neglected aspect that could be seen as the X-factor or missing ingredient in creating personal encounters for groups that touch them on a deeply human, spiritual and soulful level. My focus for this dissertation, therefore, is not so much on the effects youth activism has on the larger community. Rather, this study highlights and explores the internal effects such work has on the facilitators who work with the young people. This is an often neglected aspect, as many studies have been done regarding youth, but few on the processes that take place in those working with the youth, namely the facilitators.

To elaborate: In creating spaces of learning and healing for young people, how do the facilitators learn and heal in the process as well? How does the landscape shift for them? How do they deal with and walk away from their own shadows of sorrow and pain? And how can the caretakers be taken care of? This dissertation is an attempt to go into the wild (Estés, 1996), to negotiate entry, to experience, to find resonance, to identify dissonance, to negotiate understanding in the ever evolving landscape of 'no man's land' (Pollard, 2000). It is an attempt to find truth hidden in the dissonance, to be able to listen more and more deeply, to allow for the difficulties and pain, and to share. Ultimately, too, it is about finding my own meaning on this journey.

Indeed, for many years I have been facilitating groups of young people, attempting to motivate the masses and address social ills. However, this research brought about a changed perspective, moving from such broad factors to attend to reflective accounts of those playing the role of facilitator, and our quest to improve, to grow in capacity to give more, and also to provide the opportunity for our own voices to be heard. Looking back, I am wondering what happened in the conversations, in those still moments when neither facilitator, nor learner, had something to say, but were served in those quiet moments of the silence. This dissertation aims to research whether the very activities and spaces which facilitators created for learners were of service to themselves as well.

Facilitating youth processes and working within the NGO sector is challenging, as is evidenced in part by an alarming number of smaller youth oriented Non-Government Organisations in South Africa leaving the field. One reason for this failure could be the lack of guidance and tested models to provide a structured, evidence-based approach for facilitators working with youth. A model that emerged from ACT's work and that was part of this research process is presented as a central component of this study. This model addresses the process of youth facilitation. The model emerged from ACT's facilitators making a conscious effort to document the process we apply when facilitating youth encounters. Developed by ACT, this model is proposed to meet the aforementioned deficit experienced by youth development NGOs. It is a clear, methodical process that can be used by facilitators to guide the facilitation process in order to optimise the possibility for systemic change in both youth and facilitators.

The underlying theoretical approach to this dissertation is what we have termed 'Realistic psychology'. This is an application of positive psychology, informed by an ecosystem paradigm. This approach also takes into consideration how motivation, creativity, and shifting from a problematising to wellness approach, inform youth development work. This culminates as a meta-perspective on youth development and

facilitation. Contrary to many models and approaches that seek a cure for social and psychological challenges faced by youth, this dissertation seeks a deeper understanding of creating the conditions and possibilities for positive social change.

Following on from this introduction, the literature review in Chapter Two covers youth development and facilitation, describing current challenges in South Africa and providing an account of contemporary youth development approaches. This provides a context for this study and ACT's youth facilitation activities. The following chapter (Chapter Three) is an exploration of realistic psychology, covering aspects of positive psychology and the ecosystem paradigm that provide the theoretical frame informing this study. Chapter Four provides an outline and justification of the research methodology employed in the research project with subsequent data analysis and a discussion of the findings in Chapter Five. Chapter Six concludes the dissertation. This research explores the processes of facilitators, their narratives and how creating innovative encounters for young people influences their well-being and possibly heals them as well.

## **CHAPTER 2: YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITATION**

In this chapter the context of youth in South Africa is discussed. The challenges youth in the South African context face are discussed. Also, cognitive, psychological and social aspects of youth development are explored, including the concepts of resilience and agency. Community psychology and approaches to youth development and facilitation are introduced to further the discussion on youth interventions and group facilitation. This is further unpacked in terms of interpersonal groups, skills needed to facilitate youth development initiatives and approaches to optimise learning and facilitation.

Globally, how countries define youth varies on different levels such as by political, socio-economic and cultural custom. Both the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Acs, Arenius, Hay & Minniti, 2004) and western countries define youth as people in the age category of 18-34 years, whilst the United Nations and the World Bank include those between 15 and 24 years as within the youth sector. The National Youth Commission Act (1996) defines all South Africans between the ages of 14 and 35 years as youth. Everatt (2003) questions the rationale behind such a broad definition of youth in South Africa, particularly as there is a vast difference in terms of the capabilities and developmental stages of a 14 year old teenager and a 35 year old adult. The National Youth Commission took this reasoning into cognisance and has further clustered youth into groupings of 14-24 years, and 25-35 years.

### ***2.1 Challenges youth face in the South African context***

With a wide range of social and economic challenges facing South Africa, youth development programmes and youth enterprises seek to address a specific and significant sector of the population: The youth. A governmental youth development framework became visible in the nineties, its objective being an integrated and positive approach to youth development. However, the impact of this framework remains questionable. Critics have commented on its fragmented approach and questioned

whether it will actually enhance young people's lives. Many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were also established during the nineties as global donors generously sponsored developmental initiatives. After approximately 10 years of democracy in South Africa, though, this kind of sponsorship decreased and many NGOs have closed doors, whilst others have needed to explore more sustainable ways of making ends meet.

Moreover, unemployment amongst youth remains problematic. The Umsobomvu Youth Fund (Morrow, Panday & Richter, 2005) reports that two thirds of the South African population in the age group of 18-35 years old are unemployed. Altman (2005) states that in South Africa employment has increased for all races since 1995, but the available job opportunities lag far behind the increase in the number of people who are potentially economically active. Youth unemployment may, in part, be attributed to the on-going difficulties regarding poor quality of education in South Africa. This poor quality of, and performance in, education reflects the legacy of apartheid. Educational infrastructure, in terms of well-equipped school buildings, well-qualified and motivated teachers, and a culture of teaching and learning, has been severely damaged. On a less visible level, apartheid education with its limited resources and budget, took away people's dignity and was damaging to people's confidence and self-esteem. In addition, education in general during the apartheid regime was highly rigid and authoritarian. Thus learners failed to engage in critical thinking and opposition of the system was not tolerated.

Seventeen years after the end of apartheid, its impact is still visible in South Africa. For example, a large number of adults between 45-60 years old belong to the non-professional labour sector. Most of their children (today's youth) do not undertake tertiary education nor pursue a better life, this often due to limited finances or limited perceptions and awareness of opportunities. This results in increasing numbers of people being dependent on government support. Admittedly, government has made



efforts to address this through initiating study funds for students, and providing bursaries and loans to disadvantaged students.

For many youth whose parents left school early and do not have professional careers or decent jobs, there is a lack of parental support to guide them in their adolescent years towards adulthood. This leads to some young people making ill informed choices whilst others may even come to deal with the hand of the law. HIV/AIDS has dramatically altered the traditional roles and responsibilities of youth and it is of concern to see so many child headed homes, where children are deprived of their childhood, and are compelled to find ways to survive against all odds. Such factors have a significant impact on the educational and socio-economic levels in many communities in South Africa.

Holden, Geffener and Jouriles (1998) state that children and youth are often exposed to domestic violence. They describe how some children witness actual events of domestic violence and can themselves be injured during these violent events. This exposure is in part attributed to large numbers of youth living in overcrowded households, with no space for privacy (Holden *et al.*, 1998). However, accuracy and reporting of such cases in communities and wider society may be hindered. As Mohr, Noone, Fantuzzo and Perry (2000) comment, the field of violence and abuse monitoring is complicated through varying definitions of exposure to violence, challenges in ensuring accuracy and substantiation of children's reports of abuse experiences, and other confounding factors and methodological complexities.

International observers, such as McKinsey Consultants (2011), reason that Africans should be able to come up with innovative and unique solutions to their own challenges. For example, the African concept of 'ubuntu' reflects the value and esteem held in African culture of mutual care and consideration of one other. Ramose (2005) states that ubuntu is the root of African philosophy and that the African tree of knowledge stems from, and is indivisibly connected to, ubuntu. Thus ubuntu is the wellspring from

whence African ontology and epistemology flow (Ramose, 2005). Given this, Africans function more within the 'we' domain instead of the 'I' and draw their 'beingness', their reason and meaning for existence, from others and by being connected to others. Ramose's description, however, motivates curiosity as to why we still witness newspaper headlines of brutal murders and violence, acts that certainly do not reflect the spirit of ubuntu and Africanism. Reflecting on my experiences of working with youth, I have observed that those who have been exposed to brutal and violent behaviour at times struggle to deal with conflict situations effectively.

In summary, below are noted the challenges that young people specifically in the ACT programme (Upington) are facing:

- Persistently high levels of poverty in many parts of the Upington region.
- Widening gaps between rich and poorer communities.
- High and rising levels of unemployment amongst school leavers.
- Growing signs of drug and alcohol abuse.
- Teenage pregnancies and abortions.
- The increasing HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- Child headed households with absent parents.
- Academic underperformance.
- Increase in crime and violence.

## ***2.2 The cognitive, psychological and social development of youth***

Johnson, Blum and Giedd (2009) describe the prefrontal cortex functions of decision making, planning and impulse control as still undergoing development during adolescence, and that this, in part, explains adolescent risk-taking behaviour. Steinberg (2010) argues that this developmental phase during adolescence can have different outcomes, depending on environmental support. The emotional availability of parents to guide their children through this phase, as well as other support systems such as school, youth organisations and the community in general, can contribute towards

youth's positive development. For example, Irby, Ferber, Pittman, Tolman and Yohalem (2001) state that youth who actively take part in organisations and their communities have fewer problems, are better skilled, and contribute more towards their families and society at large in adulthood.

The youth who struggle most are those situated in areas where resources and opportunities are limited. Such young people, especially those located in deep rural areas, are deprived of quality education as well as the prospect of a decent job. Poverty and a lack of environmental stimulation have been argued to adversely impact on intelligence. Eells, Davis, Havighurst, Herrick and Tyler (1969) state that since the inception of intelligence testing, educators and psychologists have debated and researched the relationship of IQ to environmental factors. Binet (in Wolfe, 1973), a pioneer of research within the domain of intelligence, claimed that there was a definite and measurable relationship between the scores pupils obtained on intelligence tests and the social status, or cultural background of their parents. He further stated that many studies are virtually unanimous in finding that children from 'favourable' socio-economic backgrounds tend to obtain higher scores on intelligence tests than those children from lower or less favourable socio-economic backgrounds. Eells *et al.* (1969) state that such conclusions are, however, questionable and open to different interpretations.

Binet's (in Wolfe, 1973) findings suggest that higher, as opposed to lower, social status levels optimise the conditions and stimulation for mental growth. The mechanism of this is that parents of higher social status have the means to create a better learning environment for their children. Eells *et al.* (1969) state that the ecology (social environment) of the individual supports and gives direction to his cognitive development. However, the relationship of social status and intelligence is not simple, as some youth from low socio-economic families perform well academically. Binet's conclusion that differences in social status and school experiences produce definite and

substantial differences in intelligence-test results is nevertheless noteworthy. One can therefore conclude that environmental factors impact on differences in IQ.

James *et al.* (2008) cite a vital aspect of the cognitive revolution as being the understanding that human cognition mediates the effects of environmental stimuli on human responses. Thus every individual encounters his or her environment in a unique way. Consequently, people living in the same area will not have the same experiences of their environment, and so too with children raised in the same household. According to Alcalay and Bell (2000) the relationship between people and their environment is reciprocal. Hence people's actions are affected by the environment, but people concomitantly also influence and affect their environment. As people have different capacities to react in terms of altering or maintaining the environment, so too do environments differ in the resources they offer to individuals. Learners growing up in challenging environments where they are faced with violence, poverty and a lack of leadership and guidance, have to work harder to overcome such adversity and achieve their goals.

Due to social and intellectual challenges, youth may become trapped in a developmental stage and struggle to progress to the next stage of development. Erikson (1950) describes how much of youth development theory is premised on developmental psychology, where individual personality unfolds through stages of maturation. Each individual must master the different developmental stages individually and uniquely according to that stage. Erikson (1950) emphasises that adolescence is a crucial stage in personality development as young people are starting to explore identity and experiment with behaviour, roles, attitudes and sexuality. He highlights the importance of successful negotiation of the physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes in order to resolve the 'crisis' of identity occurring at this stage. Should a person lag behind during this crucial developmental phase, problems might be compounded during later stages of development. Chapman and Werner-Wilson (2008) also cite the importance of

developing and maintaining a balanced approach to sexuality during adolescence, reinforcing that this stage requires accepting that sexual behaviour emergence in adolescence is a normal part of the process of young people transitioning, physically and psychosocially, into adults; and understanding the role adolescent sexuality plays in the formation of sexually healthy and competent adults.

Mascolo and Margolis (2002) propose three overlapping, yet partially distinct, pathways in the development of social skills from childhood through adolescence. These are the responsive, the dominant-aggressive and the avoidant-submissive pathways. Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992) state that responsive interaction skills reflect an individual's capacity to sustain personal and social goals in a social situation while preserving the relationship between self and others. This is adaptive as otherwise adolescents can tend to self-centeredness, thinking that life revolves around them without considering others. Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992) state that dominant-aggressive interactive skills are demonstrated when there is the use of power or force to bring about personal and social goals with little regard for one's social partner's goals, beliefs and desires. Finally, avoidant-submissive interaction styles involve the active avoidance of social interaction, especially under novel conditions, and/or include the deferring of one's personal goals to those of others. Extra mural activities, by granting the opportunity to engage with others purposefully and negotiate aspects of interaction, can contribute towards the psychological development of adolescents.

The psychological development of adolescents is a complex process and it is important for youth workers and facilitators to be familiar with these processes in order to have a better, deeper understanding of what adolescents experience and how to approach them. Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that the psychological maturing of adolescents is a far more complex process than their physical maturing. Biological changes are often taken as the evidence of maturity and development, whilst little emphasis is put on where a youngster finds him- or her- self psychologically with regard

to his or her developmental stage. Parents from low socio-economic backgrounds are particularly at risk of not being aware when a child is behind his peer group in terms of psychological development.

Although predispositions and genetic factors are acknowledged, the role of the environment in directing developmental and psychological growth is key, and such development can proceed in a variety of directions depending on individuals' experiences within particular homes, schools, communities and cultures (Park *et al.*, 2004). The document 'Enhancing Healthy Adolescent Development' (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, 2010) mentions how factors in the social environment (both real and perceived) have the greatest impact on adolescent health. They reason that family involvement and support are crucial and having resources for support is a key contributor towards youth's overall development. Health Canada (2007) states that these qualities of involvement and support are primarily reflected in parenting styles and family cohesiveness. They report that the majority of children in families with adequate financial resources appear to develop normally, regardless of family configuration, and that of all the family factors, socioeconomic status (reflected in family income and parental education) has perhaps the most significant impact on child/adolescent development. Health Canada (2007) further argues that the national culture also influences adolescent health through its values, beliefs and policies. Related to this, Yugo and Davidson (2007) claim that robust policies, such as human rights and social welfare, can have an impact and influence on both adolescent values and their health.

### **2.2.1 Resilience in youth**

Resilience is defined as both a process and an outcome characterised by positive adaptation to adversity (Patton, 2011). Heiman (2002) defines resilience as "the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and distress" (p. 1). Walsh (1996) states that a resiliency based approach helps to identify factors and interactions that enable families to withstand challenges. Such an approach focuses on organisational patterns,

communication, problem-solving processes, community resources, and affirming belief systems. According to Walsh (1996), through being aware of these factors, clinicians can foster change by facilitating processes in families such that they can discover and rekindle skills and resources already available within the family system. He further stresses the need and importance of further studies and research around 'well-functioning families', particularly how they deal with and overcome adversities. Thus there is an increasing need for a more positive focus on how families succeed rather than simply why they struggle (Walsh, 1996). Boyden (2003), Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski (2007) and Clauss-Ehlers, Yang and Chen (2006) state that developments in resilience research have urged deeper understandings of how specific cultures and contexts nuance the processes of resilience. Pursuing this aim to understand resilience amongst adolescents necessitates asking questions such as whether the protective aspects and processes associated with resilience are culture- and context- specific in youth. Such questions foreground the recent calls to culturally and contextually sensitive resilience research.

Resiliency processes, that is, thriving in the face of significant adversity, have long been investigated. Anthony and Cohler (1987) state that early studies, shifting the focus from risk factors and vulnerability began by emphasising individual, and subsequently the triad of individual, familial, and community strengths. Cameron (2009), Theron and Theron (2010), and Ungar (2008) have voiced concerns that many resiliency investigations narrowly focus on minority youth, often failing to acknowledge broader cultural complexities and dynamics. Informed by the above, and from our experience, the protective factors ACT focuses on and has found important to build resilience in young people are:

- Being loved and taken care of.
- Having dreams and a reason to live.
- Having friends and belonging to a group.

- Being connected to school and its activities.
- Being supported by their parents.
- Good, supportive friends with positive ethical values.

Agape Copeland Train, as a case in study, instils these and other protective factors in young people. With this grounding, further opportunities are created for youth to master creative skills and artistic expression, to engage in teamwork, for involvement in health enhancing social activities, and for making a difference in their communities as social change makers. Through ACT's interventions we have noticed that when young people work together on community projects, their self-confidence and resilience increase.

Resilience is a complex concept. Patton (2011) makes the distinction between ecosystemic resilience and engineering resilience. Engineering resilience is useful in conditions of low uncertainty and high constancy. This approach is applicable in systems that are stable or at a near equilibrium state. In these settings, command and control approaches that are stable and consistent are likely to be efficient and effective. In contrast, however, the ecosystemic resilience view is more appropriate in contexts of high variability and unpredictability. In communities or neighbourhoods where there is a high prevalence of social and psychological dysfunction (the context of this research study), the ecosystemic approach to resilience, that focuses on adaptability and absorbing or adjusting to disturbances, is more appropriate.

According to Arrington and Wilson (2000), Bottrell (2007), and Brooks and Goldstein (2003), resilience is the capacity to deal successfully with the obstacles that confront us on life's roads whilst still maintaining a straight and true path towards one's goals. Thereby one displays developmental competencies in achieving positive life outcomes in spite of risk and the existence of inhibiting environments. Scholars such as Kitano and Lewis (2005), Moffit (1993), Small and Memmo (2004), Wachs (2000), Werner (2000),



and Werner and Johnson (2004) describe resilient people as even from a young age having shown signs of early coping strategies and planning how to manage what befalls them. Whilst younger children may protect themselves by withdrawing from a dysfunctional family situation and finding outside support, older resilient children actively plan how to cope with events, thereby continuing to develop a sense of greater mastery, impulse control, and independence. The aforementioned authors conclude that peers and adults are often fond of resilient children as they tend to be sociable and assertive, and exhibit good communication and problem-solving skills.

Johnson *et al.* (2009) state that resilient adolescents and adults possess an internal locus of control, a more positive self-concept, and greater social maturity, nurturance, empathy, sense of responsibility, and independence. Furthermore they have the ability to analyze specific factors in a stressful situation and make effective choices. Johnson *et al.* (2009) propose that these characteristics can be associated with an individual's innate abilities and unique temperament, or the result of an individual's developmental history. Hippe (2004) states that resilience does not mean invulnerability, but rather that resilient persons are aware of their strengths and limitations and have empathy for others. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) advise that resilience not only involves inner strength in the young person, but also support from those in the environment. This is supported by Godsall, Jurkovic, Emshoff, Anderson and Stanwyck (2004), and Richmond and Beardslee (in Arrington & Wilson, 2000), who state that youth's relationship with others, such as the family, is an important part of resilience.

Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) relate how resilient youth are not just susceptible pawns of negative, delinquent, or drug-using peers, but actively prefer to associate with those who will affect them positively. Brendtro and Du Toit (2005) explain that resilient youth develop personal autonomy and the belief that they can make things better, even if life is difficult. As an example, Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) refer to children of alcoholic parents who demonstrate resilience: Such youth do not manifest negative tendencies

like other children of alcoholic parents, but rather show an ability to adapt well to their circumstances and progress through adolescence appropriately. These children are characterised by the ability to accept their parents' problems, while at the same time choosing to distance themselves from addiction and substance abusing family members. Working with youth from farming communities, I have noticed that whilst some maintain the status quo of alcohol dependence, others rise above their circumstances. This demonstrates what Arrington and Wilson (2000) mean when they define resilience as the evidence of adaptation and the lack of developmental impairment, despite exposure to risk, the maintenance of adjustment despite the occurrence of negative life events, and achievement beyond what would be expected given the amount of stress experienced. In summary, resilience can be understood as adaptation despite risk.

Kumpfer and Bluth (2004) stress that youth are enabled and assisted to become resilient survivors in times of severe adversity when they can create meaning for their lives through goals, dreams and a desire and outlet to use their talents to make the world a better place. On the other hand, overwhelming stressors such as homelessness and abuse wear down even the most resilient children over time (Kumpfer & Bluth, 2004; Small & Memmo, 2004). Whilst children and youth are generally able to withstand the stress of one or two family problems in their lives, when family problems continually assail them, their probability of becoming substance users increases (Kumpfer & Bluth, 2004). Thus children cannot make themselves enduringly resilient, remaining robust despite relentless onslaughts from the environment (Luthar, 2003). Small and Memmo (2004) add that although the likelihood of problem behaviour steadily decreases as the number of assets an individual possesses increase, the presence of even one risk factor can double or triple the occurrence of problem behaviour, even among youth who report many material assets.

Small and Memmo (2004) conclude that although efforts can be made to develop resilient characteristics in children and youth, our capacity to intervene is sometimes

curtailed. It is noticeable that resilient youth want more out of life and are usually the ones who attend youth camps for further development. Moreover, facilitating resilient youth requires resilient facilitators, who can hold spaces and give guidance where necessary. Where government and communities fail to have a strong and visible culture of values and decent education in place, important skills needed in adolescence, such as resilience, can be instilled in youth through youth developmental initiatives.

Many young people confuse resilience with anger. They reason that when acting out violently, they behave resiliently. Many families, having struggled for survival for generations, introduce their children to the only tool known to them: To act out and behave violently. These youth are then exposed to this type of environment and behaviour as normal and acceptable. The challenge therefore for facilitators working with such youth, is to turn their negative resilience into positive resilience. This is approached through creative learning processes. When designing workshops, it is therefore imperative for facilitators to be aware that youth attending the training camps will probably attend with anger issues. The art of facilitating in this instance is to acknowledge the anger instead of denying it.

### **2.2.2 Agency**

Du Toit (2005) and Bottrell (2007) maintain that resilient youth in marginalised circumstances who have not received the benefit of close adult guidance, nevertheless demonstrate skills and persistence in maintaining a sense of agency. This is manifested by their countering of the negative labels and limiting prospects assigned to them. Furthermore, since they have had to learn to depend on themselves, they exhibit high levels of self reliance. Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Small and Memmo (2004) describe agency as the ability to exert control over and give direction to one's life by making decisions and enacting those decisions on the world. Agency also concerns the ways in which individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance. Thus agency is the capacity for autonomous social action, and individuals' abilities to operate

independently of the constraints of social structure and to make their own free choices while engaging with the social structure (Ecclestone, 2007).

Facilitating youth processes, I have noticed that one of the greatest challenges for young people is to see things from a larger perspective, and to make sense of their role and purpose in life. Most young people see themselves as being disconnected from their families and communities at large. They tend to form their own sub-groups and many experience a lack of agency. From a life course perspective, Ecclestone (2007) and Emirbayer and Mische (1998) view agency as requiring self-direction, self-efficacy and opportunities to exercise autonomy. Associated with this is a desire to shape a specific field or context, by drawing from various cultural resources. Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 963) explain:

“Agency should be understood as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and ‘acted out’ in the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment).”

According to Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency is not an individual capacity that people have, but something a person achieves in and through engagement with particular temporal relational contexts; it is thus something that people do. Thus, agency is rooted in achievements, understandings and patterns of action; not something that people possess as an attribute but something they do in different contexts. Warren and Webb (2007) stress that agency is not simply a voluntary act, but the deliberate making and taking of an identity. Biesta and Tedder (2007) further explain that, by viewing agency as an accomplishment, it is possible to understand why an individual can achieve agency in one situation but not in another (e.g., to survive on the streets but not cope in conventional society). Biesta and Tedder (2007) reiterate that agency builds upon achievements, understandings and patterns of action. They argue that although agency

is involved with the past, it has a projective element with the intention to bring about a future that is different from the present and the past, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations. Among adolescents, at a key stage of identity formation, agency is "...the ways in which the self is represented and understood in dynamic, multidimensional and evolving ways" (Ecclestone, 2007, p. 5).

In addition, this is expressed through the ways youth negotiate through their learning careers, often in circumstances not of their own making. Tyler, Tyler, Tommasello and Connolly (1992) state that adolescents who develop early autonomy and choose to live outside the realm of adult authority are capable of making rational choices in their lives. Agency, as positive self determination is evidenced in youth who, by their own doing, escape rejecting, violent, or chaotic homes and find more positive surroundings (Kumpfer & Bluth, 2004).

### ***2.3 Community psychology in South Africa***

Opening deep processes, such as why people are angry, its origins, and who and what maintains it, requires support from a bigger system, the community. The need for community psychologists to support NGOs regarding the psychosocial challenges faced is clear. Yen (2007) cites how NGOs have, and continue to, play an important role in the development of community psychology in South Africa. Usually these organisations (NGOs) are formed by 'social entrepreneurs' who feel passionate about a specific issue. Social entrepreneurs are people who are driven by a higher force, who rely on intrinsic reward and value bringing systemic change to the communities they serve. NGOs can be structures in which community psychologists work and utilise as channels to reach people.

Yen (2007) further states that differences in needs, goals and access to power between psychologists and community members draw attention to the need for psychologists to

reflect on their contradictory social positioning as privileged professionals and their social distance from those they hope to assist. He comments on how community psychology emerged actively in South Africa in the decade of the 1980s and the years leading up to 1994 and the collapse of apartheid. In the new democratic South Africa, many community psychologists, instead of working against the current government, now work in collaboration with them. This approach requires more input and more coordinated interventions from community psychologists. The challenge is, however, to what degree community psychologists can apply their authentic approaches to social challenges, instead of being swallowed in by governmental initiatives and government's prescribed approaches towards social calamities.

According to Seedat, Duncan and Lazarus (2001), community psychology's programmatic thrust is to render mental health services to all, especially the oppressed. Its focus is on transforming the way psychosocial problems and solutions are conceptualised, whilst providing a contextual analysis that takes into consideration local knowledge and social issues.

#### ***2.4 Approaches to youth development and facilitation***

Health Canada (2005) outlines the following as guiding principles and practical considerations to be considered in fostering youth engagement and enhancing the overall health of adolescents:

1. Adolescents are competent individuals with strengths, capabilities and potential, and should be regarded as such.
2. Adolescents differ in their developmental stages and their abilities to comprehend and respond to specific tasks and expectations.
3. The way in which youth behave is meaningful to them and makes sense.
4. Adolescents want to belong, have the need to share, to be heard, and want to be involved in issues concerning them.

5. In working with adolescents they appreciate a non-judgmental approach and appreciation for them.
6. An adolescent's ecology, the family, school, culture and context from whence he or she comes, should always be taken into account.
7. Youth interventions should ensure that they contribute towards youth's healthy development and add to their future success.

Interestingly, these guidelines do not favour or focus on either nature or nurture aspects of development. Rather, they appear to acknowledge that these two aspects are not mutually exclusive. In addition to these guiding principles, Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias and McLoughlin (2006) identify the following practical aspects as important in youth development:

- A youth-friendly and safe environment.
- Meaningful participation, with youth engaging in experiential activities.
- A facilitating culture instead of a teaching, top down approach.
- Community involvement and social change making events.

When working with youth who are facing (often multiple) challenges, the ability to identify both risk and protective factors, in order to address these, is crucial. The National Institute on Substance Abuse's (NIDA) (2005) framework regarding this is illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Framework for characterising risk factors and protective factors in the six subsystems (NIDA, 2005).

<b>Risk Factors</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Protective factors</b>
Early aggressive behaviour	Individual	Impulse control
Lack of parental supervision	Family	Parental monitoring
Substance abuse	Peers	Healthy peer group
Drug availability	School	Anti-drug use policy Academic competence Good teacher-child relationships
Poverty	Community	Strong neighbourhood attachment
Ineffective policies and programs advertising cigarettes and alcohol	Society/Media	Researched or well informed policies and programs Policing advertising aimed at adolescents

For any institution or organisation, it is vital to maximise the abovementioned protective factors through initiatives and programs in order to optimally support young people through the challenges of adolescence.

An example of how ACT attends to protective factors is by addressing academic competence and healthy peer groups through creative approaches. Taylor (1972) warns that the school system can have a damping effect on spontaneity and originality and early confinement to a narrow desk and a narrow view of what constitutes ‘good order’ can act to stifle creativity. Often, young people with means take the opportunity to pursue extra lessons in the practice of music, theatre, or other arts, where they can learn in a freer and open context. But, in poorer communities where most learners hardly survive to pay school fees and have one balanced meal a day, creative activities



are not a priority. In ACT's youth development programme, we strive to address this deficit by involving young people in role plays, storytelling and song. Young people involved in the ACT programme are encouraged to host ACT bashes on Friday nights with their peers, rotating from one community to another. During these bashes learners share and educate others through drama, song and storytelling. We have noticed that, using the artistic medium to convey their message is a powerful medium, as their peers also become involved and want to attend their bashes.

Since young people are still in the process of finding their identities, they are vulnerable to external threats and influence. Their primary focus is typically on fashion, peer approval and fun, and often they want to look, sound and live like the superstars they see in the media and movies. Most of them are thus influenced and will do whatever it takes to uphold that standard, preferring to be part of the in-group. Since the media have so much influence on young people this begs the question as to why government and youth policy makers do not harness this area more as a means of educating young people and presenting alternate in-groups and norms of behaviour to them.

The importance of building academic competence as a protective factor for youth is acknowledged and addressed in youth development programmes. ACT has designed a programme that introduces learners to alternative ways of learning. While most learners are talented, and enjoy art, singing, dancing or music, when it comes to academic work, they tend to struggle and doubt their abilities. This results in poor performance and some learners leaving school or engaging in criminal activities. Given that some learners live in overcrowded households, studying in the traditional way with a chair at a desk is not always possible. ACT therefore introduces learners to creative study techniques, where they can apply their talents and senses in learning, such as, dancing whilst learning and stimulating senses such as smell and touch to assist the recall process during exam times.

The psychological factors of resilience and agency can be effectively employed in youth initiatives. Agape Copeland Train takes these into consideration when working with young people on camps. We do this by hosting group therapeutic sessions where young people can realise that others are facing adversities as well and learn new ways of dealing with their challenges. By engaging in dialogue around the challenges experienced, I have noticed that youth become stronger and find deeper meaning and purpose for a better way of living. Recognising resilience in marginal youth requires appreciation of relative context, cultural options and understanding from alternative centres. Such shifts may help to identify youth potential rather than transgression, and point to the kinds of interventions that may strengthen rather than correct. Thus a challenge is to develop today's youth into resilient and positive citizens, with high ethical standards, converting negative actions and patterns into positives. However, in order for young people to grow and thrive, they need positive relationships and a caring environment.

Through my experience at ACT and engaging with youth, it has become apparent that young people want to be part of exciting groups and be involved in change-making activities. Youth development initiatives should therefore design programmes and models that speak to this need and create the right atmosphere, space and identity before even attempting to start reaching out to youth. Instead of simply disseminating information amongst youth, government should involve and consult young people to get a clearer understanding of what they really need. A classic example of government's ill-informed approach is when, five years ago, they started distributing condoms to schools in an attempt to reduce the HIV/AIDS pandemic. From my dealings with youth on camps I found most of them shocked and confused about why government was supplying condoms to them. Had government involved youth in this decision, they would have discovered that the youth did not want condoms, but rather more recreational facilities and study opportunities.

Ultimately in addressing young people's needs, the youth themselves need to be included in order to ensure relevant and applicable programmes are rolled out on a national scale. For youth to take ownership of youth development initiatives, it is vital that they be involved from the inception phase right through to the evaluation phase. Effective consultation and collaboration with youth requires taking their different ecologies and epistemologies into account. Grills (2004) defines epistemology as a branch of philosophy concerned with ways of knowing, including the relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge. Designing youth models for South African youth should therefore include addressing questions such as: i) what do we know? , ii) how did we come to this level of knowing? , iii) how did we come to this knowledge?, and iv) how do we apply it?

### ***2.5 Youth interventions as reconnection, healing and developmental restoration***

Ramose (2005) proposes that the principles of wholeness apply with regards to the relation between human beings and physical nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for physical nature as well. The concept of harmony in African thought is comprehensive in the sense that it conceives of balance in terms of the totality of the relations that can be maintained between human beings, as well as between human beings and physical nature. Facilitating youth training sessions, and on a deeper level, hosting encounters for healing of young people, requires reaching this harmonious level of oneness with nature. This is a challenge that facilitators face when planning and facilitating sessions. Agape Copeland Train ventured towards this realm of getting closer to nature, and even contributing towards the preservation of the environment and simultaneously promoting community cohesion, through one of our projects. We allied to the tree planting campaign in South Africa and visibly adopted the 1=16 Trees project as one of our programmatic thrusts. In this project our grade 10 and 11 learners are invited to identify 16 people in their respective communities to whom they would like to donate trees. They are then encouraged to write about the 16 people and the reasons

they would like to donate trees to them. Finally they donate the tree and motivate their chosen 16 people to take care of the trees.

Through this project, we noticed a number of changes on three different levels – that of the community, the learner and the facilitator. On the community level those community members who received trees became ambassadors of trees and motivated their neighbours to start planting trees. This even spread out to beautifying their community and mobilising children, youth and adults in the area. Youth and their parents also grew closer through this project as they started talking about trees and the importance of trees. Both learners and parents educated each other and shared in the excitement of beautifying the area and doing something for others. At the learner level, some learners chose to start planting trees at school and demonstrated a heightened awareness of their school environment. Facilitators also took to planting trees at their own homes and in so doing mobilised their respective communities to join them in planting trees.

Related to this is Corrigan's (2010) analysis of Wheatley's twelve principles for supporting healthy community. Key points of this analysis are:

1. When people are part of creating something, they are more likely to support it.
2. People act most responsibly when they care. Any group needs passion and responsibility to get work done.
3. Having conversation is the means that people have always used to think as a collective. In conversation, shared meanings are discovered. Conversations are not 'soft' processes, but the very foundation by which wars are started and ended, money is made, lives begun and freedoms realised.
4. To change the conversation, change who is *in* the conversation. This aids in making our blind spots visible and addressable. An example pertinent to this

study is that if you are talking ABOUT youth without youth in the process, you are in the wrong conversation.

5. Leadership can come from anywhere.
6. Focus on what's working: Ask what's possible, not what's wrong. Energy for change in communities comes from working with what is working. When we accelerate and amplify what is working, we can apply those proven things to the issues in community that appear intractable and drain life and energy.
7. Wisdom resides within us. Experts can't do it for us, but they can be helpful. Ultimately the wisdom for implementation and action is within the community.
8. Good lessons come from failure. Change occurs in cycles, with failure part of the process. Pioneers of change realise that most of their initial ideas don't make it to the final product, but without those humble beginnings they cannot reach the final product!
9. Learning from our mistakes is the only way to get better results. Paradoxically, though, society does not embrace failure yet ever expects better results.
10. Meaningful work is a powerful human motivator. Corrigan (2010) asks poignantly: How often do we remember the deepest purpose that calls us to our work?
11. Without relationships, communities die, individuals give up, and possibility evaporates. We need each other, and we need to be with each other as well. When we have tended to relationships, we can make it through what comes next.
12. Generosity, forgiveness and love are critical elements in a community. Ideally we need the focus of our energy to be devoted to our work. If we use our energy to blame, resent or hate, then we deplete our capacity and give away our power and effectiveness.

This is NOT soft and cuddly work. Kahane (2010) has recently written about the complementarity of love and power. Love and power are connected, with the one not possible without the other. Yet to pay attention to this quality of being together is hard, and for many, frightening. Many people won't even engage in this conversation because the work of the heart makes us vulnerable! But what do we really achieve by being guarded with one another, by hoarding, blaming and despising? Corrigan's (2010) list is comprehensive, and covers many lessons learnt in a community of social change and innovation practitioners. Their emphasis on attitudinal, relational and group processes, often dismissed as 'softer issues', has been instructive for ACT's approach to youth facilitation.

A dialectic expressed by Heidegger (in Howe, 1993), the twentieth-century German philosopher, clarifies the paradox of 'how things are' and 'that things are'. He proposed two modes of existence: The everyday mode and the ontological mode. According to Heidegger (in Howe, 1993), in the everyday mode one is entirely absorbed in one's surroundings, and one can marvel at how things are in the world. Conversely, in the ontological mode, the focus is on an appreciation of the miracle of 'being' in itself and one marvels simply that things are, that you are. Heidegger thus presents the crucial difference between 'how things are' and 'that things are'. When absorbed in the everyday mode, one turns towards distractions such as physical appearance, style, possessions, or prestige. By contrast, in the ontological mode, one is not only more aware of existence, morality and life's other immutable characteristics, but also more primed and alert to making significant changes. In this mode one is then prompted to grapple with one's fundamental human responsibility to construct an authentic life of engagement, connectivity, meaning and self-fulfilment. This research displays curiosity as to whether facilitators at ACT operate in the everyday mode or whether they find more meaning, and perhaps well-being, by working in the ontological mode. The 1=16 Trees project attempts to meet communities on both the everyday mode (they can enjoy and experience the social and environmental aspect of planting trees) and the ontological mode (where they are reminded through our dialogues about the

importance of their existence and can simultaneously reflect on their own lives and meaning whilst engaging in the tree planting project).

Many of the youth with whom we worked were faced with death during the course of this research. Some lost parents, whilst others had to say a final goodbye to friends and siblings. As facilitators we were ill equipped to deal with death and were unsure of how to create a platform or space where those in mourning could find solace. When a young girl I came to know through our school programme lost her mother, I was personally challenged to be there for her and to create a space of comfort and solace for not only her, but others as well. In doing this we found that youth could grasp and realise the power of agency and the value of connectedness.

Yalom (2010) states the following concerning Tolstoy's (1981) 'The Death of Ivan Ilych' where the protagonist (a middle aged, self-absorbed, arrogant bureaucrat) develops a fatal abdominal illness and is dying in unrelenting pain. As death approaches, Ilych realises that all his life he has shielded himself from the notion of death through his preoccupation with prestige, appearance, and money. He becomes enraged with everyone around him who perpetuates denial and falsity by offering unfounded hopes for recovery. Then, following an astounding conversation with the deepest part of himself, he awakens in a moment of great clarity to the fact that he is dying so badly because he has lived so badly. His whole life has been wrong. In shielding himself from death, he has shielded himself from life as well. He compares his life to the experience he had often had in railway carriages when he thought he was going forward, but was in reality rolling backwards.

In short, he became 'mindful of being' (Yalom, 2010, p.34). As fast as death approaches for Ilych, he finds there is still time. He becomes aware that not only he, but all living things, must die. He discovers compassion, a new feeling in himself. He feels tenderness for others: For his young son, kissing his hands; for the servant boy, who nurses him in a

natural, loving manner; and even for the first time for his loving young wife. He feels pity for them, for the suffering he has inflicted on them, and ultimately dies not in pain, but in the joy of intense compassion.

Thus grief and loss may serve to awaken one and make one mindful of one's being. Most people find it harder to relate to others in their sorrow than in their joy; this is particularly so as they may not know how to relate to, and even acknowledge, another's process of mourning. It is at times like these that nature can provide an outlet and play a role in the healing process.

### **2.5.1 Group facilitation**

Any youth development initiative that aims to have impact should enhance young people's skills and competencies and have positive, tangible outcomes in mind. To make this kind of development possible, strategic collaborations with institutions and organisations that have the necessary resources to support the initiative is necessary. But also, at grassroots level, committed, available and caring adults are required. At ACT, facilitators are crucial to the programmes we offer youth, and much of what we present to the youth is done in a group context, facilitated and overseen by the facilitators. Thus it is relevant to explore some aspects regarding groups and facilitating group processes.

Hulse-Killacky, Killacy and Donigan (2001) identify the characteristics of effective task groups as including the following:

- The group's purpose is clear.
- There is a balance of process and content issues.
- Differences within the group are appreciated and embraced.
- There is a climate of cooperation, collaboration, and mutual respect.
- If conflict is present, it is acknowledged and addressed.
- Feedback is understandable and given immediately.
- 'Here and now' issues in the group are addressed.



- Members are actively involved in all processes.
- Members are given time to reflect on their work.

Hulse-Killacky *et al.* (2001) warn that a leader's failure to attend to here and now factors is likely to result in a group that gets riveted on content concerns, and this failure demonstrates poor appreciation of the role played by process issues in the success of a group. Should interpersonal issues within the group be ignored, cooperation and collaboration will not develop, and it is likely that group goals will not be met. The broad purposes of a therapeutic group are to increase members' knowledge of themselves and others, to help members clarify the changes they most want to make in their lives, and to provide them with the tools they need to make these changes. By interacting with others in a trusting and accepting environment, participants are given the opportunity to experiment with novel behaviour and to receive honest feedback from others concerning the effects of their behaviour. As a result, individuals learn how they appear to others.

#### **2.5.1.1 Phases of group facilitation**

Having surveyed numerous textbooks and guidelines (AGPA Guidelines, 2007; Corey & Corey, 1997; Donigian & Malnati, 1997; Kaplan & Sadock, 1993; Klein, Bernard & Singer, 1992; Rutan, Stone & Shay, 2007; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) most discuss a stage model of group development and use a version of Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) stages: Forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Burn (2004) refers to this model as "the most famous sequential-stage theory" (p. 28).

1. **Forming:** This stage refers to the initial phase of gathering together, and the beginning stages of group members getting to know each other better. Rogers (1970) states that during these tentative interactions concerns over ambiguity, power, self-disclosure and the search for meaning in the group usually remain hidden. At this time the focus is on dependency and inclusion (Bion, 1961).

2. **Storming:** During this stage dissatisfaction begins to develop as each member experiences their individual autonomy conflict with the group (Bradshaw, 1990). Bion (1961) refers to this as the differentiation or fight-flight stage. Power and control concerns become manifest in the group and displays of rebellion or aggression are common (Fall & Wejnert, 2005). The storming phase is inevitable and results in growth for the group, taking the group to the next level.

3. **Norming:** This phase is about how the group sees itself. Donigian and Hulse-Killacky (1999) observe that the norming phase of group development is characterised by the growth of cohesion. During this stage, individual differences and conflict make room for a collective perspective. Members still maintain their individuality, but focus on what is important for the group, the group ethics and their responsibility in making the group effective.

4. **Performing:** Cloud and Townsend (2003) describe how in this phase members develop the capacity to be both supportive and confrontational, creating an environment in which interpersonal patterns can be identified and challenged. By this stage members assume responsibility for their therapeutic work, are present to the work of other group members and sensitive to the group-as-a-whole climate (Egan, 1973).

5. **Adjourning:** Termination of any group comes with intense emotions. As the group prepares to end, feelings as disparate as joy and dread can often be experienced simultaneously (Rutan *et al.*, 2007). A closing event or ritual may help in the resolution of such emotions. At this stage defensive attempts at denial, minimisation, or flight behaviour alternate with periods of productive engagement (Kaplan & Sadock, 1993). Termination also brings up the existential themes of death, isolation, responsibility and meaning, themes that members and leaders often unconsciously collude to avoid (Kaplan & Sadock, 1993).

### **2.5.2 Corey and Corey's thinking, feeling and behaving model**

Corey and Corey (2006) advise of the difference between group processes and techniques. Group processes are elements basic to the unfolding of a group from the

time it begins to its termination. This includes dynamics such as the norms that govern a group, the level of cohesion in the group, how trust is generated, how resistance is manifested, how conflict emerges and is dealt with, and the forces that bring about healing, group members' reactions, and the various stages in a group's development (Corey & Corey, 2006). Techniques, on the other hand, are guiding principles and interventions which the facilitator applies within the group. Corey and Corey (2006) use the term 'technique' to refer to a leader's explicit and directive request of a member to focus on material, to explore emotions, practice behaviour, or solidify insight.

When leading a group, facilitators ideally pay attention to what group members are thinking, feeling and doing, thereby attending to the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains (Corey & Corey, 2006). Attending to these three dimensions in facilitation provides the basis for deep therapeutic processes to emerge. Corey and Corey (2006) warn that if any of these three dimensions are excluded, the therapeutic approach is incomplete. By attending to cognitive aspects, the thinking or thought processes of group members are explored. Typically group members are challenged to think about early decisions they have made about themselves. Attention is paid to members' self-talk and how members' problems are caused by the assumptions they make about themselves, others, and life. Thus many group techniques are designed to tap members' thinking processes, to help them think about events in their lives and how they have interpreted these events, and to work on a cognitive level to change certain belief systems (Corey & Corey, 2006). Engaging the cognitive dimension is vital to maximise growth.

The affective domain considers the feelings of group members, and through group work, members are assisted to become aware of, and express, their feelings. Corey and Corey's (2006) rationale for engaging this dimension is that if members are able to experience the range of their feelings and talk about how certain events have affected them, their healing process can be facilitated. In addition, if members feel listened to and understood, they are more likely to express feelings they have previously kept to

themselves. Thus, as per Corey and Corey's (2006) approach, groups can undergo and benefit from an emotional catharsis (the release of pent-up feelings).

For Corey and Corey (2006) the cognitive and affective domains are essential parts of the therapeutic process, but the behavioural domain (acting and doing) is also central to the change process. According to Corey and Corey (2006), countless hours can be spent gaining insights and ventilating pent-up feelings, but at some point members need to get involved in an action-oriented programme of change. To trigger this dimension, group leaders can ask members provocative questions such as: 'What are you doing?' 'Does your present behaviour have a reasonable chance of getting you what you want now?' 'Will your behaviour move you in the direction you want to go?' If the group work is focused around the behaviours people are doing, the chances are increased that members will also be challenged and enabled to change their thinking and feeling. Bringing feelings and thoughts together by applying them to real life situations focused on current behaviour is the emphasis of behaviour therapy and reality therapy.

This kind of approach puts responsibility on the group members to internalise the newly learned skills and ultimately to apply them in their daily lives. Corey and Corey (2006) explain that underlying their integrative emphasis on thinking, feeling, and behaviour is their philosophical leaning toward the existential approach, which places primary emphasis on the role of choice and responsibility in the therapeutic process. People are challenged to look at the choices they do have, however limited these may be, and to accept the responsibility of choosing for themselves. Corey and Corey's (2006) approach is based on the assumption that people can exercise their freedom to change situations. Thus, members are encouraged to identify and clarify what *they* are thinking, feeling, and doing, as opposed to a focusing on changing others.

### **2.5.3 Yalom's model**

Yalom (1975), a pioneer of group therapy, based his theory of interpersonal learning on Sullivan's (1955) interpersonal theory of psychiatry. Sullivan (1955) maintained that psychiatric symptoms and problems originate in, and express themselves as, disturbed interpersonal relationships. According to Yalom (1975) the group creates a collective platform or space in which members of the group learn trust and improve social skills. Two concepts are emphasised: The group as a social microcosm, and the corrective emotional experience (Yalom, 1975). 'Social microcosm' refers to the group process that resembles customary everyday functioning, and where patients tend to behave in their usual (maladaptive) way. When group members observe and experience different interactional styles and patterns, they can have a 'corrective emotional experience', whereby group members help each other to shift from maladaptive behaviour to more adaptive ways of interacting.

Yalom's interactive model proposes that:

- A person's symptoms derive from disturbed interpersonal relationships, which remain unresolved if not dealt with. Hence the anxieties of those relationships play out when the person interacts with others in other contexts.
- The therapist promotes a climate in which the person can learn about and understand those patterns of behaviour that cause distress.
- Through becoming aware of blind spots in interactions with the group, a change within the person is more likely to happen.
- Members in the group will start taking risks and sharing information once trust has been built. Feedback from the group is optimally done so the person can see and understand the need for change.
- It is important for the group to have a platform through which members can give feedback at later stages regarding the changed behaviour and whether and how significant others perceive it.

In addition, when the facilitator takes Maturana's (in Kenny, 1985) theory of group work into account, for example by taking a 'not knowing' stance in facilitation and motivating the group to share their stories and their views, the facilitator creates space. This space to which Yalom (1975) refers potentiates the stripping of maladaptive behaviour and the learning of new ways of coping. If the facilitator does not co-join the process (as per Maturana's theory) the group may not attain mutual trust, thus possibly maintaining old destructive ways of relating, as described by Yalom (1975).

Foulkes and Anthony (1957) define psychotherapeutic groups in terms of three factors: 1) that the group relies on verbal communication; 2) that the individual member is the object of the treatment, starting with the one who is 'bleeding' the most; and 3) that the group itself is the main therapeutic agency. "The group is treated for the sake of its individual members and for no other reason" (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957, p. 36).

The most widely accepted (AGPA Guidelines, 2007) set of group therapy effects were formulated by Yalom in 1975. These are presented here from Yalom's latest work (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

1. Instillation of hope: Group members come to realise the efficacy of the therapeutic group, maybe as a last resort of hope.
2. Universality: Members of the group realise that others have similar experiences and that they are not alone.
3. Imparting information: Sharing crucial information and knowledge that might be helpful to members in the group.
4. Altruism: Creating a caring and helping environment where members can reach out to those in need.
5. The corrective recapitulation of the primary family group: Members have the opportunity to experience reparative relationships and corrective emotional experiences.
6. Development of socialising techniques.

7. Imitative behaviour.
8. Interpersonal learning: Group members receive feedback and gain insight about the typical interpersonal impact they have on others.
9. Group cohesiveness: Feelings of acceptance, belonging, warmth, trust, and group identity are experienced by members.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) suggest that perhaps the most unique and arguably the most important feature of therapeutic groups is their focus on the here and now. The 'here and now' is defined as the nature of the relationship between interacting individuals (Yalom, 2001). From an interpersonal and integrative therapy perspective, working in the here and now is the primary role of the facilitator (Rutan *et al.*, 2007; Yalom, 2001). The first stage in the here and now process is an experiential one: Group members live in the here and now, developing strong feelings and opinions toward the other group members, the leader, and the group itself (Rutan *et al.*, 2007).

#### **2.5.4 Findings from group psychotherapy relevant to facilitators' roles**

During the process of this research, facilitators expressed the desire for, beyond debriefing sessions, an encounter reflection group. They experienced the need to address deeper psychological processes, and to have a space to explore and face aspects and issues that had arisen for them. This demonstrated an exploration and awareness of their role and how their issues, conduct and standpoint as a person, can impact on facilitating youth. From psychotherapy, Maturana (in Kenny, 1985) discusses the following important elements of the role of the therapist (here taken as the facilitator) in participating in the group process:

1. How are therapists to describe themselves and what they do? Causality is essentially ruled out due to the inappropriateness of instructive interactions. Thus therapists cannot construct themselves as 'change agents' who operate on others to directly change them. Rather, the therapist provides an experimental context within which the person can productively ask questions through actions and thereby reconstitute or

reconstruct himself (Kenny, 1985). Furthermore, people do not begin to change just because they have arrived in therapy; in reality people are in the flux of change continuously. The therapist collaborates in a co-existing structural drift with the client, but they cannot control this drift. The therapist should therefore come from a position of not knowing, one where the client is the expert, telling his story, and the therapist simply creates and holds the space for the client. Where the therapist trusts the process and co-joins the group process, the structural changes which arise in all those undergoing a co-existing drift will impact uniquely on the therapist, who is not exempted from these unpredictable transformations.

2. All parties involved in the process of group therapy can perturb the group process in one way or another. Therefore all members in the group are equally significant in their participation. Maturana (in Kenny, 1985) argues that the teaching profession is a good example to illustrate the expert versus learner syndrome. The teacher, who sees himself as the expert, with knowledge to instil in the learner, gets frustrated when the learner does not engage in questions around that which seems important to the teacher. In facilitation, the facilitator can create the context, but needs to be aware and sensitive to the process of getting there, to the ideal outcome. Unlike the teacher, the facilitator does not have a rigid answer or solution to the problem, but guides the group towards a better perspective.

3. There is no 'right outcome' for psychotherapy, since there is no 'natural nature' for us to reach or achieve. In effect the focus moves away from 'setting the client right' to rather triggering a change or movement within the client. Facilitation is therefore an active collaboration to get the group or members in the group unstuck, to reach a better place of equilibrium.

#### **2.5.4.1 Interpersonal groups**

Shaffer and Galinsky (1974) and Wright (2004) state that for interpersonalists, the critical therapeutic elements are found in the group's ability to offer corrective emotional experiences for members as well as a safe environment where life's universal



problems can be validated, new understandings integrated, and new behaviours practiced. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) describe how, from this perspective, the leader plays the roles of 'technical expert' and 'model setting participant', working to generate a cohesive group culture where self-disclosure and authentic member interactions predominate. Kivlighan and Tarrant (2001) argue, however, that Yalom's (1975) hypothesis that group climate mediates the group's relationship with the leader has not been tested.

"The more important the members consider the group, the more effective it becomes. I believe that the ideal therapeutic condition is present when clients consider their therapy group meeting to be the most important event of the week. The therapist is well advised to reinforce this belief in any available manner." (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 136)

Although emphasising the importance that the group should hold for its members, Yalom and Leszcz (2005) ultimately describe the therapeutic group as a 'way station' and a 'dress rehearsal' for the work that can only be done with family and friends. Thus, while therapeutic groups are no replacement for outside family and friends, they nevertheless provide a powerful environment for this sort of 'dress rehearsal' to take place.

#### **2.5.4.2 Skills needed to facilitate youth development initiatives**

Kaba, Mathew and Haines (2010) outline the goals of facilitation as:

- To create a forum for group discussion.
- To educate and inform.
- To articulate and respond to the questions and concerns of group members.
- To clarify and address issues.

To achieve these goals facilitators require personal qualities, skills, experience and expertise. Hunter, Bailey and Taylor (1995) state that the practice of group facilitation relies on four main areas of expertise:

1. Concepts: Theories and models about personality, group dynamics, developments, systems and interventions.
2. Skills: Listening, observing, identifying problems, diagnosing, responding, questioning, intervening and the ability to be collaborative.
3. Personal self-awareness: Self-knowledge about values and ethical frameworks, attitudes, belief, motivation and personal needs.
4. Personal qualities: Empathy, acceptance, congruence, flexibility and caring.

The goals of facilitation as identified by Kaba *et al.* (2010) above, resonate more with the traditional way of teaching, where the teacher is expected to know-it-all and instil knowledge in the learner. The learner asks questions and the teacher answers.

Maturana's (in Kenny, 1985) theory of a non-expert approach stands in contrast to this and rather enables the facilitator to adopt an enquiring approach, to seek more information and gain deeper insight with regards to where the group 'is at'. In Kaba *et al.*'s (2010) model it appears as if the teacher is responsible for suggesting solutions and addressing the issues. Yalom's (1975) model, however, stresses the collectiveness of group processes that brings about the stripping of maladaptive behaviour and the realisation of new truths or new knowledge. The facilitator is therefore part of the group, not in front nor behind the group, but attuned to, and part of the pace and flow of the group.

**Table 2: Important Facilitating Behaviour:** Hossfeld and Taormina (2007) and A World of Difference Institute (1999)

Clarifying	Interpreting, clarifying, misunderstanding, defining terms. 'Tell us what you meant when you said that it was oppressive. We may not all have the same definition'.
Encouraging	Being receptive, warm, friendly and responsive. Encourage the group that you are not the expert, but that this is a group effort.
Evaluation	Motivate group members to raise their opinions and different views. 'How does that comment relate to the way others in the room might feel in a similar situation?'
Gate keeping	Managing time and group participation. 'Let's hear from some of the people who haven't said much today'.
Giving	Offering facts or personal experiences to clarify a point. 'That is a relevant observation, in fact, that very thing happened at...'
Initiating	Suggesting a new perspective, new ideas, definitions, and approaches. 'Perhaps if we looked at the issue this way...'
Orientation	Bringing the group back to task. 'That's an interesting point. Perhaps we can discuss it further later, or during a break, because now we really need to get back to what we started'.
Resolving Conflict	Conciliating differences, cooperative problem solving. 'Even though you feel that way Jason, can you understand what Tina is saying?'
Seeking	Asking for clarification, suggestions, more information. 'What has your experience been?'
Summarising	Pulling it all together, restating points. 'What I think I hear you saying is...' 'Let's review what we just discussed.'

Hossfeld and Taormina (2007) state that handling and using questions is an extremely useful tool in a facilitative environment (see Table 2). Through the skilful use of questions the facilitator can awaken the group by:

- Harnessing the 'power' and 'voice' of the group.
- Perturbing thought processes and arousing interest.

- Expanding their repertoire, by bringing in new discourses.
- Bringing a variety of stimulation for group members.
- Creating a space where members appreciate each other and listen to each other's viewpoint (Hossfeld & Taormina, 2007).

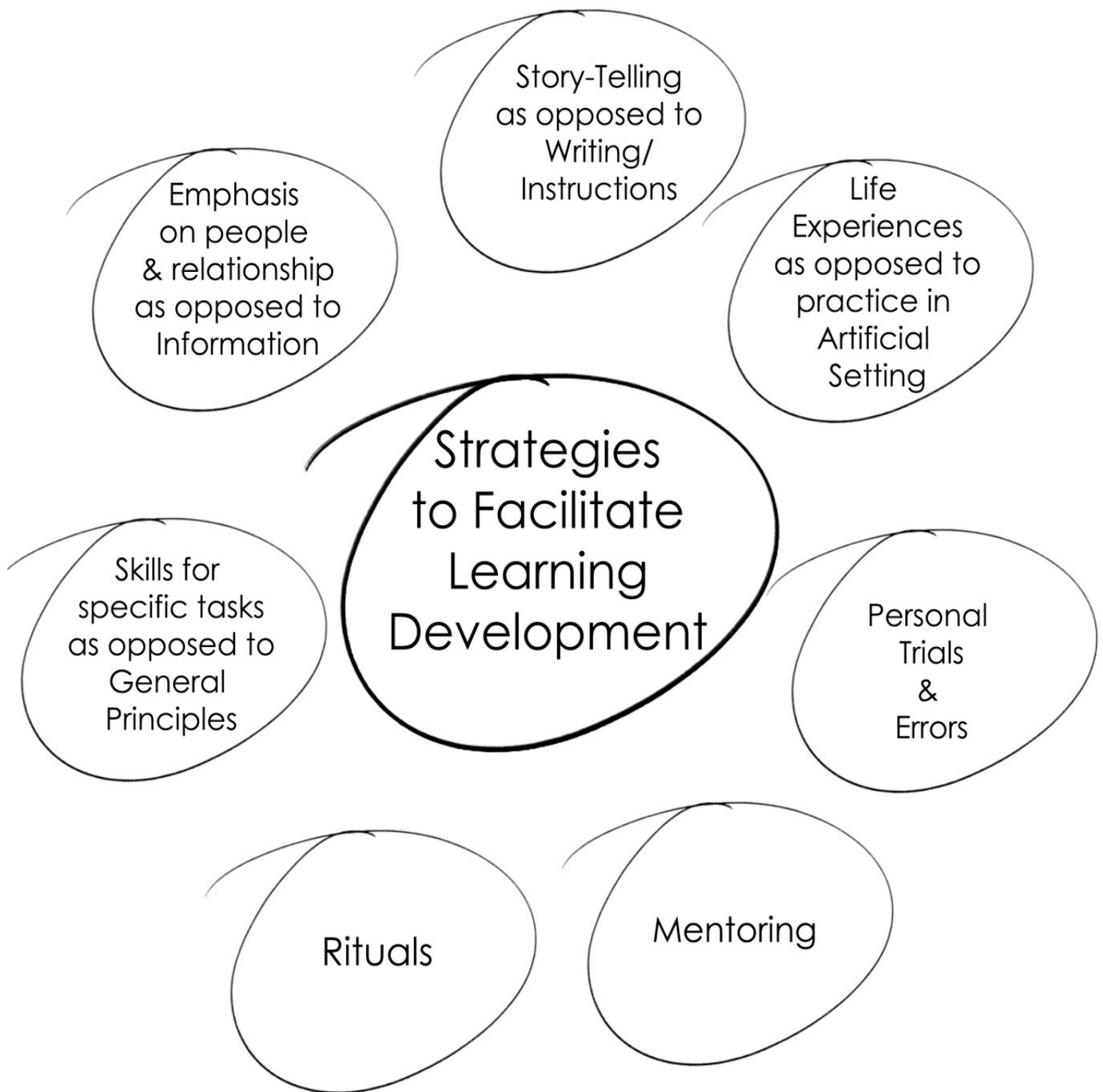
Only a trained, well-adjusted facilitator who is intellectually and emotionally mature is likely to integrate the above aspects effectively such that they can create and host spaces for groups. Furthermore, effective facilitation is optimised when facilitators are confident and skilled in their role. Kruger (personal communication, 2011) proposes that when the facilitator possesses the necessary skills, they become more receptive to enabling effective facilitation. Factors to address in terms of training facilitators include:

1. For facilitators to function optimally in training contexts, they should be engaged in a pro-learning environment where they make sense of, and reflect on how they perceive the world, their scripts, assumptions, past experiences and sense-making processes.
2. Kruger (personal communication, 2011) reasons that the most effective and engaging form of learning is via experience. Such learning incorporates the personal, emotional, cognitive, volitional, cultural and embodied aspects of the self in context, unlike learning that takes place in an abstract or context-free environment. This experiential learning approach is sometimes mistakenly called 'soft skills learning', however, applied experiential and reflective forms of learning more effectively allow for deeper self-awareness and insight ('intangible development'), wider application, and appropriate transfer to other areas of working and living.
3. By creating a training space and climate that allows people to optimally develop, they own their learning and they provide the content for the process. This is facilitated by enabling them to initiate, participate and contribute to their personal and collective (group) sense-making and development by: Engaging with the learning of the past; allowing a space for unlearning of 'dysfunctional', incomplete or

contradictory scripts and assumptions; and exploring new ways of living and working together, thereby assuming greater personal and collective responsibility.

4. The environment should be of such a nature that this growth proceeds of their own volition and at their own pace, yet within the structure of a process that can hold the group development process at the same time.
5. This learning can be painful and requires expert trainer-facilitators. The processes involved often evoke many unsaid, hidden and sometimes painful experiences and beliefs that are presented and acted out in the training context in ways that may be hidden to the participants themselves.
6. The facilitators of these processes of personal and group development require extraordinary skills, sensitivities and meta-awareness (i.e. a capacity for meta-facilitation, rather than education) to initiate and host dynamic group processes of this complexity and scope. Meta-facilitative skills regarding group dynamics take many years to develop and cannot simply be imparted to novice trainers.
7. Organisational learning via experiential modes of self-discovery has great value. When the new ways of living and working together provide positive feedback to participants by way of personal, interpersonal and other rewards, it is integrated as new learning, into legitimate and established ways of understanding and relating. This has a knock-on effect and is formative of renewal of the working culture.
8. When groups agree on their purpose, and share significant values, norms and experiences (or shared history), including their ability to have difficult conversations (about situations involving conflict, race, gender, ways of working, or any other differences) the groups' levels of trust, well-being and functioning are dramatically increased.
9. From this perspective leadership is an inside-out job, that occurs both at the level of the individual and the group, and *cannot* be located *only* in certain individuals in an organisation. A group's intelligence is located in the group, and not in individuals.
10. Proactive leadership is an adaptive and service-enhancing value that can be nurtured and developed as part of organisational culture.

Facilitating group processes can be conceived in two very different ways (Auerswald, 1969). A mechanical approach assumes that reality is fixed, absolute and certain and uses a machine-like metaphor for people and for living. In this modernistic worldview, knowledge is hierarchically designed and it is guided by the belief that something is only scientific and valuable if it can be observed and measured. By contrast, an ecological epistemology hosts an openness toward a multiverse of realities and narratives. In addition, it acknowledges the interrelatedness of everything and the importance of a particular context in which encounters, social negotiation and various perspectives are shared. In this view connecting patterns rather than absolute facts are shared and the position of the facilitator as the expert or instructor is challenged. In the light of these two views, group process is constituted by a combination of certainty and theory and “of openness and the vagueness of encountering ‘not knowing’ at grass-root level” (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001, p. 119).



**Figure 2:** Strategies for using Indigenous Knowledge (Duncan *et al.*, 2008, p. 316).

## **2.6 Pioneer approaches to optimise learning and facilitation**

To promote learning development, Duncan, Bowman, Naidoo, Pillay and Roos (2008) propose a number of strategies that venture beyond typical didactic approaches. Gaining and maintaining young people's interest can be challenging. Through using storytelling as opposed to written instructions and exercises, youth facilitators can capture participants' attention and keep their interest. Furthermore, storytelling creates a relaxed and receptive mood. This increases the likelihood of retaining in memory the story and its message, thereby enabling learning to occur. Instead of contrived practice in artificial settings, Duncan *et al.* (2008) advocate experiential learning as having a greater impact with regard to learning. In actuality, this approach enables the group to have fun, experience an activity in reality (in the 'here and now') and often results in participants being able to make more valid and valuable contributions when reflecting on the performance of the activity in retrospect.

Providing the freedom for youngsters to make mistakes and fail is an additional component of Duncan *et al.*'s (2008) model. The freedom to fail can provide a valuable lesson; the facilitator does not judge, but rather holds a space where failures become life lessons. This openness and absence of belittlement allows young people to feel safe to share their failures and disappointments. Through mentoring the facilitator is available as a role model and has the prerogative to offer direction and guidance where necessary. Additionally, the use of rituals on camps or during group encounters can symbolise deeper meanings in life for both youth and facilitators. These rituals also can provide a sense of familiarity and belonging to something which holds shared group understanding and symbolism. This is exemplified by the ritual 'Firing encounters' ACT camp facilitators host, where young people can throw a piece of wood in the fire to indicate they wish to share something. Instead of having undifferentiated, general rules and principles for all tasks, the specifics of each task are acknowledged. Thus, as each task a youngster needs to accomplish requires a different skill, tasks are allocated



accordingly, to maximise variety of exposure, applied learning and increasing responsibility within a variety of realms.

Building on the above, at ACT we have found the following to be important when facilitating and creating youth encounters for healing:

- Art plays an important role in group facilitation as some members cannot express themselves overtly. Art is a means of connecting the person with his environment and anxieties, and an opportunity to find healing or to move closer to equilibrium.
- The right space/site will have the ideal effect. Therefore planning the right venue for the activities to take place is key as people are interconnected to their environment and look to the environment for answers.
- Experiential learning is crucial for any group. People can share and listen, but ultimately they want to experience. This kind of learning has an optimal impact and effect.
- To focus on current issues at hand, the 'here and now', helps ensure relevance and maintain mutual respect in the group.

Cloud (2011) states that when people have strong support systems where they can process their needs, feelings, fears, and so forth, they are:

- Physically healthier, with stronger immune systems and less illness.
- Medically more likely to deal with their illnesses and treatment well.
- Emotionally healthier, with less stress, depression, and anxiety.
- More likely to follow through on their attempts to change their lives.
- More able to reach their goals.

Thus the benefits of a facilitation approach which takes into account the ecology of youth (psychological, social, environmental factors) in turn can have positive reciprocal effects on those very same aspects.

In order to hold spaces for positive youth encounters, the facilitator needs to know how to create the space, how to maintain the ambience and how to track the process. This research aims to see how facilitators, in creating these spaces for youth to develop and grow to their maximum potential, are also impacted upon themselves. In Chapter Five we will examine how facilitators have, beyond facilitating others, journeyed through their own processes. Also covered, as it is relevant to the facilitators' development, is how the ACT programme has evolved over time. The ACT programme originated and is embedded in the local community, their practices, ways of thinking and languages. The struggles and victories of the ecology are known to the researcher and the facilitators. Having the benefit of understanding these elements makes resonance with the youth possible. However, I am acutely aware that abstract descriptions and literature discussions cannot do justice to the actual lived experiences of our youth. Thus, in Chapter Five, this dissertation gives precedence to the voices of facilitators and youth. In the following chapter an brief integrated view of psychology in the context of youth development and group facilitation is suggested.

## **CHAPTER 3: REALISTIC PSYCHOLOGY**

In this chapter realistic psychology is suggested as a theoretical frame that integrates positive psychology and the ecosystem paradigm. This view also takes into consideration motivation, creativity, and wellness as core aspects of youth development work and facilitation. Contrary to many models and approaches that seek a cure for social and psychological challenges faced by youth, this dissertation seeks a deeper understanding of creating the conditions and possibilities for positive social change.

### ***3.1 Ecosystem paradigm***

From a biological perspective, an ecosystem describes how parts of nature integrate with each other at various levels (Adler, 1932). In essence, an ecosystem is formed by the interaction of a community of organisms within their physical environment. Related to this, ecosystemic psychology can be described as the psychology of context. A key characteristic of the ecosystem approach is the shift from parts to the whole (Capra, 1996). Thus living systems are perceived as integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller parts.

Hoffman (1985) emphasises that context is integral to psychology. Biological, physical and unconscious connections are all components of context, and ecological psychology takes heed of this. A person located in any environment, is subject to physical, biological and unconscious influences, all of which interrelate regarding the ecology of the person. Hoffman (1985) therefore reasons that systems theory is a unifying theory that represents a paradigm shift in terms of how a client's behaviour is understood. Becvar and Becvar (1996) advocate examining the client and his relationship to the family, as each affects and is in turn affected by the other person. Boundaries are fundamental characteristics of a family system, and the rigidity of these boundaries determines the amount of information allowed to flow into and out of the family system (Becvar &

Becvar, 1996). Clearly the openness or not of these boundaries affects the degree to which the family system is open or closed to other influences in the wider ecosystem. Interestingly, the old African proverb: 'It takes a village to raise a child', summarises this post modern and ecological thinking.

### ***3.2 From disease to wellness model***

Von Bertalanffy (1967) cites how the study of psychology has traditionally been concerned with pathology; words such as 'victim', 'patient', 'disease', 'complex' and 'remedial' illustrate this negative focus. He further argues that mental disease is essentially a disturbance of system functions of the psychophysical organism. Seligman (2002) remarks that after World War II psychology became a science largely focused on healing, and concentrated on repairing damage using a disease model of human functioning. Seen as the father of positive psychology, Seligman (2002) argues that this focus on pathology of the human psyche neglected the possibility that building strength is the most potent weapon in the arsenal of therapy. He reasons that psychologists, by exclusively focusing on what was wrong with people, disregarded the option that one of the best ways to address someone's weakness is to encourage his or her strengths.

Seligman (2002) suggests that the popularity of psychoanalytic theory led many psychologists to regard anything positive about people as suspect. Positive qualities were viewed as being, in actuality, the results of unconscious defences that disguised the real motives and needs of sex and aggression. Positive constructs such as character strengths and virtues were therefore off the radar screen of psychology. Seligman (2002) further describes how hope and optimism were dismissed as wishful thinking if not outright delusions, altruistic behaviour was viewed as just another personal strategy for personal gain, and courage was reinterpreted as a deficiency in those parts of the nervous system responsible for fear. Yet, buried in the traditional, pessimistic approach, Seligman (2002) argues the seeds of hope for a more positive psychology are to be found. Els and De la Rey (2006) acknowledge that there seems to be a growing trend among organisations to realise the importance of the so-called human factor as various

disciplines highlight the importance of a holistic approach and attend to the total wellness of people.

Rowan and Dryden (1998) state that the simple dichotomy of 'sick' and 'healthy' people is untenable, given that all people have issues to deal with in their lives, and all have room for further growth towards health. According to Rowan and Dryden (1998) a sense of self, or identity, is crucial. This entails identifying oneself as in charge of one's own life and able to make one's own life decisions, rather than being at the mercy of, or in the control of, others, past or present. Youth from disturbed environments, however, may experience problems in psychological development and identity that prevent them from optimal living. Psychological disturbances, and issues of identity, are perpetuated by continuing to think, feel, and behave in the same familiar ways (Rowan & Dryden, 1998). By experiencing and expressing ourselves in the same way and eliciting familiar responses from our environment, we create a closed, self-maintaining system.

ACT's youth programme, and this associated research, aims to facilitate processes where both young people and facilitators can grow towards discovering themselves, knowing themselves better and understanding their strengths and weaknesses. This is enabled through innovative encounters incorporating outdoor and creative activities, where those involved are placed in new circumstances and required to relate to one another beyond familiar groupings and established patterns.

### ***3.3 Learning context and responsibility***

Winnicott (in Davis & Wallbridge, 1981) fully acknowledged that for every human being, from the beginning, life can be challenging and inherently difficult. Nevertheless, he maintained the conviction that, for each individual, life can be creative and valuable. Bound up with this was the belief that every human being, given a facilitating environment, intrinsically contains the momentum for growth towards emotional as well physical maturity, and towards a positive contribution to society (Davis & Wallbridge, 1981). He did not subscribe to the belief that human beings are born with

the seeds of their own destruction within themselves, and disagreed with Freud's explanation of aggressiveness in terms of a death instinct. Rather, Winnicott (in Davis & Wallbridge, 1981) viewed instincts, and the impulses to which they give rise, as the natural source of spontaneity and creativity through which life alone is made worth living for the individual and productive for society.

Winnicott's (in Davis & Wallbridge, 1981) reasoning that, given the right or ideal circumstances, positive development for any individual is possible, is developed by Lickona's (1991) focus on character education. Related to moral education and emanating from the discipline of psychology, the character education approach is typically favoured by religious communities. According to Lickona (1991) what is termed character education is in reality a broad and eclectic set of approaches. Formulated by Lickona (1991), the "head-hand-heart" model (p. 47) of character education integrates affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of moral formation. Thus it follows that good character consists of knowing what is good, desiring the good, and ultimately doing the good. Karl Marx (Marx & Bender, 1988) on the other hand has warned that all morality is merely the conventions of the ruling party. This raises the question of morality as a societal construct, not merely an issue of individual behaviour.

Sayer (2005) argues that the poor are discriminated against on multiple levels, and such discrimination is a moral issue, again highlighting broader sociological considerations pertaining to morals. Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (2002) describe how young people who are despondent and demotivated display destructive behaviour. This is significant as, according to Moffitt (1993), parents and children resemble each other in terms of temperament and personality. One can therefore reason that parents of troubled youth often lack the necessary skills and support to cope constructively. This is of concern as youth are primarily dependent on their parents to model good character and high moral values.

Meeting children from child headed households with both parents absent, causes one to wonder who instils moral character in them and how they manage to keep themselves together, morally and socially. One of our part-time facilitators grew up in a poverty stricken home where both parents were alcoholics. Frequently there was no food in the home and some of her older siblings had to work after school to put food on the table for them. Nevertheless, she and her siblings decided to work hard in order to escape poverty. Through the support of study loans and bursaries the three entered university and made it against all odds. Today they are in professional careers and their parents are rehabilitated and proud of them. Significantly, these young people still remember their roots, and they strive to help others realise their dreams. Their involvement in the ACT programme, in accessing an alternate approach to life, probably contributed towards their ultimate success.

### **3.3.1 Impact of outdoor interventions on youth**

As described above, the youth ACT works with mostly come from places where pain, trauma and poverty are the order of the day. Facilitators working with youth from deprived areas where poverty and violence are rife would thus question how a holistic approach could be possible in their communities. Typically in these communities youth do not have access to transport and are therefore entrapped in their contexts. At ACT we propose that by changing the context one changes the field of possibilities.

Gass (1995) argues that because of the profound difference between the outdoor and domestic environments, transference is an important aspect of outdoor intervention. Gass (1995) and Kimball and Bacon (1993) explore how different transference mechanisms can be enhanced through outdoor endeavours. Spontaneous metaphoric transference takes place where participants independently recognise key connections between outdoor experiences and daily life. In addition, structured metaphoric transference happens where facilitators deliberately frame experiences in order to increase spontaneous metaphoric discovery. It is further proposed that cognitive insight developed through experiential learning should facilitate the recognition of parallels

between outdoor experiences and pro-active behaviour (Gass, 1995; Kimball & Bacon, 1993). Sprouse and Klitsing (2005) suggest that this can be strengthened by providing a variety of practice applications and examples to provide cues for tapping into past learning, as well as ensuring that participants connect what they are learning with potential future application.

Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997) state that in line with the 'what works' movement, the claimed benefits of outdoor intervention have been a matter for scientific inquiry since the 1970s. Despite numerous investigations, mixed results characterise the evidence landscape of outdoor intervention with at-risk groups, including child offenders. In fact, authors generally agree that the outdoor intervention strategy lacks a well-organised, indisputable and widespread knowledge base about effectiveness (Bruyere, 2002; Garst, Scheider & Baker, 2001; Neill, 2003; Sprouse & Klitsing, 2005).

Nevertheless, ACT supports the idea of outdoor psychological benefit, as we have witnessed how mindsets and behaviour transform gradually, after outdoor adventure activities. Parents and teachers who believed some youth to be problematic, were surprised when ACT specifically recruited those 'troublemakers' for its camps; and schools subsequently started to request special camps for such learners. Instead of working on the reasons for the troubled behaviour, we focus on what the youngsters are good at and enjoy doing. Soon such 'troublemakers' discover and realise that they are more than the sum of their past mistakes and become transformed into change makers.

### ***3.4 The psychology of motivation***

Behaviour is influenced by various internal and external environmental cues and by disequilibrium situations of various kinds (Johnson & Crowe, 2008). In addition to environmental cues, a number of factors play a role, such as the person's age, his heredity and how he feels and experiences the event in that moment. Tolman's theory



(in Johnson & Crowe, 2008) posits three intervening variables as the major components of motivation. Over and above various individual and environmental factors, causality for the direction and persistence of behaviour is attributed to these three factors. The key intervening variables are:

1. Demand for a specific goal.
2. The degree to which the person positions himself to be in the same space as where the goal is directed or available.
3. What the person expects in that space/environment where he finds himself.

These three variables in turn regulate the person's persistence and context, until his goal is achieved. In attempts to gain a deeper understanding of behaviour, it is necessary to see the person in relation to nature and not in isolation (Johnson & Crowe, 2008). Thus the ecology of the person plays a vital role in how he reacts to, and interacts with, his environment. Tolman's (in Johnson & Crowe, 2008) stance regarding the importance of the 'here and now' in obtaining one's goal resonates with Yalom's (2001) theory of the power of the 'here and now'. Yalom (2001) argues that for a member in a group or even for the group itself, to reach equilibrium, a place of healing, it is important that they focus on the 'here and now'. The dynamics which are present in the 'here and now', and their positioning of themselves within that moment, facilitates the process towards goal achievement, as described by Tolman (in Johnson & Crowe, 2008).

### ***3.5 The health of creativity***

With some youth being averse to outdoor activities, ACT introduced artistic activities to the programme. We realised that when only sessions which require speech and writing are provided, those who can better express themselves artistically may be overlooked. Artists express the vitality and meaning of their lives through creative work and creative processes. On another level, artists may also seek emotional healing through their creative work. Perhaps that is one reason why creativity and the process that gives birth to it has often been idealised. Creative processes have typically been seen as positive for psychological growth and well-being. Kavalier-Adler (1996) states that mystique, love

and creativity come from the same place. Kavalier-Adler proposes that when one is engaged with one's internal world through the creative process, one gains space to reflect on the interpersonal world of love relations and intimacy. This researcher therefore foresees that should one create innovative encounters for youth, encounters that they enjoy and that include artistic activities, this will most probably enable them to move towards inner equilibrium and to reach a level of psychological wellness.

In this regard, Wheatley (1992) elaborates on the role of creative learning and innovation in the improvement of society:

“Learning (innovation) is fostered by information gathered from new connections; from insights gained by journeys into other disciplines or places; from active, collegial networks and fluid, open boundaries. Learning (innovation) arises from ongoing circles of exchange where information is not just accumulated or stored, but created. Knowledge is generated anew from connections that weren't there before. When this information self-organises, learning (innovation) occurs, the progeny of information-rich, ambiguous environments.” (p. 113)

Kavalier-Adler (1996) further states that the subjectivity of the self can only be experienced in one arena at a time. In terms of the state of consciousness he calls the 'love creativity' dialectic, moving to one's internal object connections represents moving towards the creative process. Through these internal world relations a person enters into the state of imagination that is the essence of creativity, a state of vision within the mind, which is removed from touching and doing in external reality (White, 1990). Furthermore, Kavalier-Adler (1996) claims that when one engages with one's internal world in such a way that a creative process fully unfolds, there is a natural ebb and flow that opens one to re-engagement, once it has run its course, with the interpersonal world of external object relations. Accordingly, such ebb and flow can be related to a free psychic state of love creativity dialectic, in which the internal and external worlds speak to each other. Kavalier-Adler (1996) advises that this process is impeded when, due to pre-oedipal trauma, there is a sealed-off self-state within the internal world. Pre-

oedipal trauma is defined as developmental arrest, in that the core differentiated, separated, and integrated self has failed to form (Kavaler-Adler, 1996).

Van Deurzen (2008) writes that artists do not and never have proposed final solutions to the challenging questions of life. They do not seek to eradicate human suffering, save the world nor necessarily take great interest in such topics. Rather, artists describe and document the world in their various ways, exposing the pain and joy of human existence, highlighting its contradictions, plumbing its depths, and trying to fathom its endless mysteries. Van Deurzen (2008) further describes art as the arena of human emotions and how the artist's expression has often thrived on adversity, suffering and unhappiness, suggesting that such is the fertile ground wherein human ingenuity is rooted, grows and blossoms. It is in the depths and troughs of human experience that inspiration is to be found and artists know that the richness of life is in its contrasts (Van Deurzen, 2008). For an artist the objective of living is not attaining 'normality' with its tedium of homogeneity, control and predictability; likewise, it is not the eradication of adversity that they work towards, but rather the intensity and depth of passionate and radical human experience. Van Deurzen (2006) reasons that through art one works from the inspiration and direct experience of personal confrontation with reality, which often means using one's emotional suffering and despair as a starting point.

What ACT facilitators have noticed on camps is that through doing art activities with youth, youth become increasingly able and free to document their own battles with life, their work being an attempt to transform their anguish and agony into something of value. By engaging learners in a series of innovative encounters at ACT, the programme leader's objective is for every youth to find his or her own rhythm and discover what works for him or her. This too applies for the facilitators, who have to find their own rhythm of facilitating and a means of connecting to their own unique styles.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHOD

### *4.1 Aim and rationale*

The primary research question underpinning this study is: How is the psychological well-being of facilitators impacted on by facilitating youth encounters? Supplementary questions are: What are the dynamics present before, during and after facilitation? And: How has the ACT programme shifted during the course of this research, and what were the effects and impact at organisational, facilitator and learner levels?

This research adopts an exploratory, qualitative approach in order to avoid the external imposition of assumptions (Silverman, 2010) and to give a voice to the facilitators. During the process of this research, the researcher refrained from 'the expert paradigm'. Rather, as Anderson and Gooloshian (1992) suggest, the responsibility lies with the therapist/researcher to create an atmosphere of curiosity, openness and respect. It is therefore crucial to be aware of what is important for the participant (to respect that which they want to share, as well as that which they choose not to share) thereby taking into consideration that they are the experts of their own journey. In facilitation and research, curiosity is manifested as creating an environment that seeks understanding (Anderson & Gooloshian, 1992). Curiosity is lost, in both research and therapy, by the professional who poses as a 'know it all'.

Baron (2011) refers to the concept of 'making the expert disappear'. In this regard he mentions Hoffman (1985) who states that the second-order approach calls into question the expert status of the professional. They reason that for the researcher to gain accurate information and insights, and to do justice to the people and the context in which he works, he needs to get rid of his own predispositions and 'issues'. Questions or comments that begin with phrases like: 'Could it be that?' or 'What if?' immolate or reduce the professional persona and enhance participation and invention. This then

means that the researcher takes a humbler stance, listens more, and thereby obtains a clearer view of the participant's experience. Thus in the process of engaging participants and gathering information, the researcher and facilitator are not seen as the idea generators nor meaning givers. Rather ideas and meanings emerge from the dialogue between the researcher and participant in co-owned, co-created partnership.

Given that this research is located within an NGO, perspectives on programme evaluation are briefly explored. Patton (2011) notes that programme evaluation traditionally is very detailed, formal and static. This kind of evaluation engenders fear of failure in the organisational culture. The high emphasis on obtaining credible evaluation results by way of rigorous methods that emphasise certainty and predictability can have a counterproductive impact on a programme and its implementation. Patton (2011) suggests that developmental evaluation that is sensitive to complex evolving and unpredictable processes is more valuable in building reflective capacities. This kind of evaluation aims to nurture a hunger for learning. This is reflected by this research being a process of enquiry and exploration, including the use of a newly developed model of the process of facilitation. This model was created from a deliberate resolve to document the process and structure of facilitation that ACT implements at camps. The model also included the recent incorporation of facilitator debriefing as part of the process.

The approach adopted in this study is in line with Argyris and Schon's (1974) model designed to overcome defensive routines of enquiry that arise from using insight alone. A Model I programme-theory evaluation focuses mainly on instrumental programme-theory, without addressing sub theories and higher order theories that govern implementation, resulting in a potential blind spot in the evaluator's field of vision (Friedman, 2001). Argyris and Schon's (1974) method, however, distinguishes between what Auerswald (1969) calls mechological versus ecological approaches. The method proposed by Argyris and Schon (1974) enables people to critically reflect on their

reasoning processes under conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, conflict, and psychological threat. This is a Model II approach and is underpinned by the valuing of free and informed choice, internal commitment, and the generating of valid information (Friedman, 2001).

The Milan approach to group facilitation adopts the perspective that the therapy environment is a research operation, undertaken by both researcher and participants. Bateson's (1999) premise that all parts of a given system must, if the system is seen systematically, be given equal weight, relates to the multi-positional stance of the therapist/researcher. The researcher, like the group, is therefore an active contributor during the process of facilitation or information gathering. Given this, aspects of the researcher's own reflections and experiences are incorporated as data.

#### ***4.2 Ethical considerations***

Resnik (2001) states that ethics can be simplistically thought of as rules for distinguishing between right and wrong, although the most common way of defining ethics is the norms of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. While most societies have legal rules that govern behaviour, ethical norms tend to be broader, and also more informal than laws. Thus an action may be legal, but unethical, or illegal but ethical (Resnik, 2001). Key ethical principles important in research are: Honestly, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, respect for intellectual property, confidentiality, responsible publication, responsible mentoring, respect for colleagues, social responsibility, non-discrimination, competence, and legality (Resnik, 2001).

It is noted that my position as programme founder, and ongoing involvement at ACT including as a facilitator, afforded unrestricted access to the organisation, its people and processes. Whilst my connection to ACT brought about this unique and privileged position of access, it also required an awareness of my enmeshment with the

organisation and research process. Thus the approach this research adopted included a reflective component. As explored above, a reflective approach acknowledges the researcher's involvement, experiences and impressions as inseparable, valuable and vital components of the research process and findings. Reflection involves applying insights obtained through a purposeful consideration of one's experience in terms of practice, in order to enhance that practice (Wigg, 2009).

Particularly given my position at ACT, ethical safeguards to ensure participants' involvement in the research was voluntary, without obligation, and that participants were fully informed of the research goals, were crucial (Wassenaar, 2006). Therefore this research implemented the following ethical standards. Participation was strictly voluntarily: Both facilitators and learners involved in the ACT programme had a choice to participate in the research and could withdraw from the interviews at any time (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Learners' and facilitators' contributions were respected and they shared only what they felt comfortable to share. Participants were provided with the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding their involvement (Wassenaar, 2006). This was ensured by, prior to each interview, the purpose and methods of the study, including the use of cameras, being explained to participants. Participants signed consent forms indicating their informed and voluntary participation (refer Addendum E). Participants were assured of anonymity (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This was upheld by names and identifying factors being excluded from the text, thus responses cannot be linked to individual participants. All respondents received a letter guaranteeing their anonymity.

Participants were not exposed to any harm during the gathering of data (Wassenaar, 2006), thereby respecting their psychological integrity. As a matter of procedure on camps, in order to protect young people during group encounters, they are informed prior to group processes that they should only share what they feel comfortable with sharing. Facilitators guard the group process from escalating to too deep a level or for

youth to divulge overly sensitive experiences. Furthermore, youth are informed that should the need arise for more individual support, facilitators are available for individual sessions. An 'Intervention monitoring box', where youth can 'post' such a request, makes requesting additional support non-threatening. During the facilitators' debriefing sessions deeper processes and personal disclosures are permitted to take place. A verbal contract of confidentiality is established between group members. Whilst the researcher is bound by the ethical and professional requirements of confidentiality, group members contract to this as non-professional individuals. Thus the maintenance of confidentiality by others involved in the group processes cannot be guaranteed by the researcher (Wassenaar, 2006). Notwithstanding this, the process of data collection for this study was one on one, private interviews.

All participants (youth and facilitators) were informed of the researcher's availability for additional support or follow up should sensitive matters have been triggered by the research interviews. With regards to publication of research results, it was established that the organisations included in the study would be given the opportunity to scrutinise articles for approval before submission for publication. In addition, the contributions of organisations involved will be duly acknowledged.

#### ***4.3 Research tools, sample and procedure***

The following research tools were used for data collection:

- One-on-one interviews with facilitators of the ACT programme.
- One-on-one interviews with grade 11 learners participating in the ACT programme.
- Case studies (real events or activities which happened during the course of the research, e.g. psychodrama and metaphor exercises).
- Observations made on training camps with grade 11 learners, including on outdoor activities, such as river rafting and hiking with grade 11 learners.



- Personal reflections as a facilitator and executive director of the ACT programme.

Facilitators who had been working on the ACT programme for more than five years and learners who attended the most recent youth encounter camps (April and July, 2011) were approached to participate in an interview for the study. A convenience sample of voluntary participants was obtained. Five facilitator interviews were held. Interviews were held during camps in a quiet and private area. Interviews were open ended with the main questions being: 'Describe how your journey at ACT has impacted on you? How were you served in return whilst serving youth on camps?'

The texts of interviews were analyzed by thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is applicable to the exploratory approach of harvesting recurring themes and issues emergent from the data (Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Transcripts were read through repeatedly. Once familiarity with content was obtained, repetitive content was identified. Similar extracts were grouped together, and emergent patterns coded and mapped (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Frequent reference to the research questions assisted focus and relevance of themes.

Observations of behaviours and events on the training camps were recorded as field notes. Other data, such as the interviews with learners, the psychodrama and the metaphor exercise, are included in terms of my reflections on their content and value in terms of the research question. This data was also augmented with reflective personal diary entries and incidents concerning more recent years of my work at ACT (2008-2011).

#### **4.4 Limitations**

Interviews were conducted using a broad, open ended approach. Whilst this aimed to allow interviewees freedom to express their experiences of working as facilitators at ACT, on analysis of the text, it yielded general impressions given by participants. Thus, it is possible that more probing questions, and further follow-up interviews, may have

yielded richer data on the actual mechanisms of psychological well-being and the emergent themes.

Interviews are social interactions, with the attendant norms of socially acceptable behaviour and socially desirable responding influencing the interaction and subsequent data collected (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). This means that interviewees are sensitive to the context of the interview. In this case, interviewees may have shaped their responses (for example as overly positive) since, although I was the researcher, I am also in a position of authority within the organisation. This is evident in the data from interviews with facilitators comprising minimal negative content.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The aim of this chapter is, in presenting the data, to provide snapshots, sketches and stories of the lived experiences of the facilitators, youth, and the writer. These descriptions are from an insider perspective where I, as founder of ACT, reflect on past journeys now seen through new lenses as a result of my training as a clinical psychologist. These descriptions are by no means exhaustive, nor the only account that can be given of the history of ACT. Thus this chapter presents the data collected, explores the research findings and seeks to answer the following questions raised in previous chapters:

- How is the psychological well-being of facilitators impacted on whilst facilitating youth processes?
- What are the dynamics present before, during and after facilitation?
- How has the ACT programme shifted during the course of this research and what were the effects and impact on organisational, facilitator and learner levels?

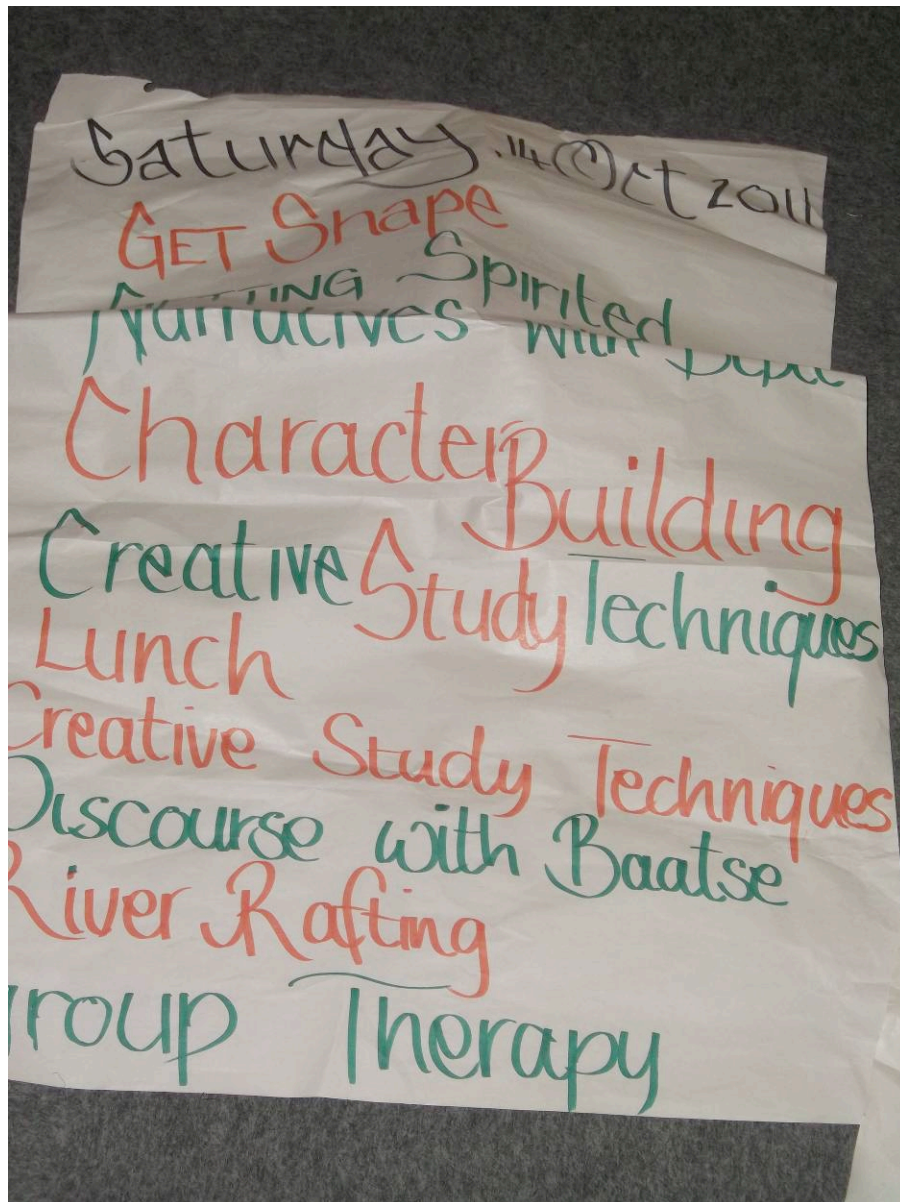
This last question will be addressed first as a means of providing context to the data that follows.

### ***5.1 Shifts during the research phase***

Previously in the planning phase, as programme leader, I would choose the theme of the weekend and present it to the team as a given. I did not seek the team's suggestions and the team typically trusted and agreed unanimously with my ideas. We would sit as a team to 'discuss' the weekend training camp, but since I was the one imposing my theme on them, I would do most of the talking, instruct them on what should happen and eventually present the whole weekend programme to them, except the Saturday night programme, which was their specialty. Interestingly, though, the Saturday night programme was the one I enjoyed the most as it was always fresh, creative and resonated with the youth.

Facilitators were allocated to facilitate different sessions. I gave them freedom to decide which activities they wanted to facilitate, but did not trust them enough to allow them to design the actual session. Learners would arrive on Friday at the camping site, with us having been there two hours in advance, decorating the place and getting it ready for their arrival. On arrival, registration would occur, after which rooms would be allocated to learners. Immediately thereafter we would all gather in the hall where 'Welcoming and Code of Conduct' would take place. Although presented in a funky and hip way, we have always had a very strict Code of Conduct. For example, 'No RDP' on camps, which means that boys are not allowed to date girls on camps, as it is primarily a learning environment. We have found, however, that this item tends to motivate the youth to meet at night and see each other as potential boyfriends and girlfriends.

The camp programme is structured (see Figure 3), and includes exercise periods, Bible study, group facilitation sessions and experiential activities such as obstacle courses and river rafting. Since the programme is structured, it limits the opportunity for informal socialising whilst ensuring that the learners participate and do not get bored easily. On Saturday night a variety show, presented by learners and facilitators takes place. This is entertaining and enjoyed by all as an opportunity to showcase their talents. After further activities on Sunday, the camp ends with an evaluation activity done by the learners on an ACT evaluation template just before lunch.



**Figure 3:** Newsprint with typical Saturday programme, Upington, 2011

Now however, having changed my approach, facilitators are involved in the planning phase and are encouraged to make suggestions, which are accepted and implemented. I give them the freedom to design sessions and trust them to come up with innovative activities. My appreciation for their work and creativity has grown, and I have learned new ways of designing a programme! Power is shared amongst us and the facilitators who design the session lead the meeting and explain to us what the objectives are and who will be facilitating which activity. This approach makes me feel part of the group

and it is noticeable that, with increased ownership of the programme, facilitators approach their work with greater effort and increased enthusiasm.

Working from a position of 'not knowing' was introduced to the facilitators. It was explained that, whilst there is an idea of what we want to achieve with the camp, we should be more sensitive to the processes unfolding on the camp and not present ourselves as experts, imposing time and fixed sessions on learners. At first facilitators were worried and uncertain whether this would work, but when they observed how I had shifted from a rigid to an inclusive approach, and the positive changes and resultant impact, they became receptive and cooperative.

In addition, with a new focus on us as the facilitating team, I introduced debriefing sessions, where the facilitators would meet, reflect and share experiences. We would sit together and share, and what was developed in the invisible sphere became tangible in our new way of relating and caring for one another. In these group debriefings we sensed the healing aura to which Yalom (2001) refers, and we went the extra mile to hold that aura for each other. As a result of these debriefing groups, we experienced that in the sessions we facilitated we no longer felt tired and we also felt less worried about families or challenges at home. Mirrored in what Yalom (2001) says about the present (the 'here and now') being important for a group to grow, these debriefing sessions were an opportunity for us to be present for each other, and we ultimately were able to make better inputs in sessions.



**Figure 4:** Different Process Levels at ACT, Pretoria, 2011

## 5.2 ACT's process levels

In my quest to understand the dynamics present when facilitators create encounters for healing on training camps, I will discuss Agape Copeland Train on three levels:

- A. Programme Level as an Organisation (NGO)
- B. Learner Level
- C. Facilitator Level

### **5.2.1 A: Programme Level**

Agape Copeland Train started in 1997 with the objective of preventing senior learners (Grades 10-12) being sent to prison. Working in Correctional Services, I had noticed a trend of senior learners who had the academic ability to perform and pass at school level, nevertheless ending up in prison. After a number of discussions with the head of the prison in Uppington, I quit my job at Correctional Services and presented a new idea of working with these learners to local guidance teachers. We devised an intervention programme for matriculants and commenced the project working with 140 matriculants, selected from 7 local high schools, on Saturdays. The following learning areas were focused on:

- Study techniques
- Life skills sessions (Self-discovery, communication skills, decision making, conflict resolution and leadership)

Information on the above mentioned topics was mainly delivered in lecture format, although some fun activities and ice-breakers were incorporated. Learners were provided with sandwiches and juices after sessions, funded on the whole by facilitators themselves. Facilitators were initially volunteers, but as ACT grew, received stipends. Apart from my honours degree in psychology, all the other facilitators had teaching qualifications and backgrounds. With much enthusiasm, energy and drive, we started to research and design our own programmes, registered as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), and started writing proposals for potential donors. The first proposal consisted of two pages and was without any specifications, written in generic format for all donors. Our first sponsorship came from DOCKDA, a Cape Town based donor who donated R40 000 towards ACT. This funding financed photocopying, lunch for those attending the Saturday programmes, and a stipend for facilitators. Initial training on how to run a proper NGO was obtained from a consultancy firm in Cape Town. From attending courses we learned skills such as: Determining objectives, compiling mission statements, writing funding proposals and financial management.



Being naïve to the NGO environment, this training was much needed and came at the right time.

As more funders became interested in ACT, we faced increasing challenges. An example of this was facilitators who wanted better stipends. I then made my first mistake as team leader when I offered two facilitators who really worked hard and put in extra time on the programme more pay than the others. When other facilitators became aware of this and were dissatisfied, we experienced our first conflict as a team. Soon, however, the work of ACT evolved as we ventured into areas such as HIV/AIDS, job shadowing, art exchange and environmental education. The impact of our work became visible and more people and institutions such as the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, the Education Department, Transnet Foundation and De Beers started to notice us. We recruited more team members for our programme and won various awards such as Youth Leader SA, Community Builder (Youth Category) and Best Organisation //Khara Hais Municipality.

Despite the awards and recognition, as an organisation we were still in development, faced challenges, and made mistakes such as:

- Lecturing, instead of facilitating.
- Making decisions only as facilitators without any inputs from external people.
- Lack of a managing board for the first three years.
- Exclusion of learners on decision making.
- Linear approach to organisational planning and implementation.
- Lack of innovation in our approach.
- Poor writing skills.
- Lack of documentation of our interventions.

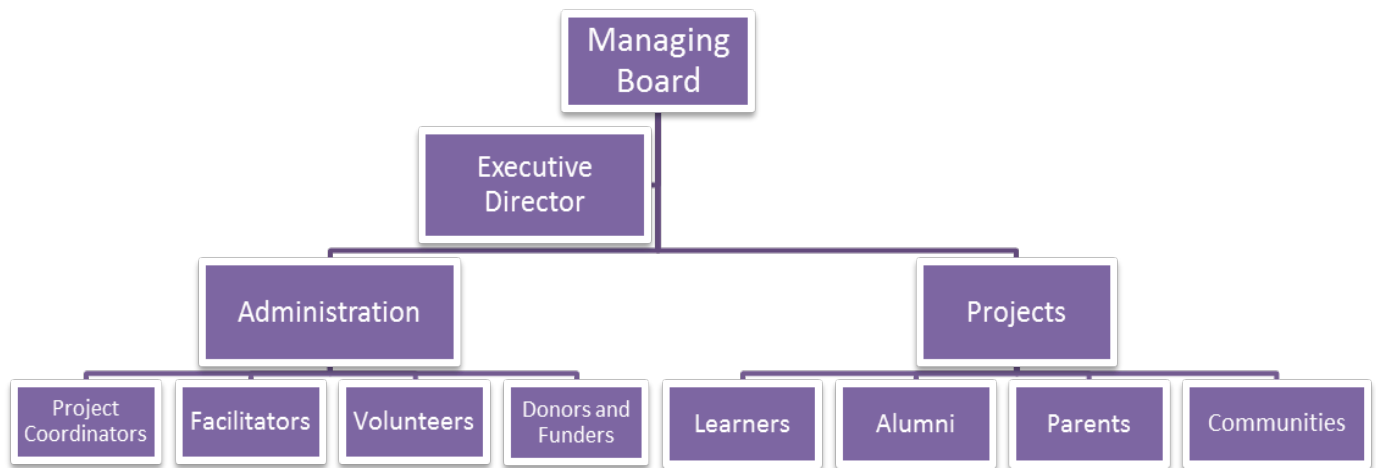
These are just some of the mistakes identified; however, in hindsight, such mistakes have contributed towards our improved approach today. Thus our programmatic thrusts

have diversified beyond life skills and study techniques and currently consist of the following projects:

- Creative Study Techniques
- Character building sessions
- 1=16Trees
- School-To-Work Future Link
- Edge encounters
- Art exchange

Our approaches have also broadened through:

- Weekend training camps
- Youth bashes
- Alumni dialogues (agape@agape)
- Job shadowing
- Youth Parliaments
- Art exchange with Namibia, Uganda, Albania and New York
- Environmental tours
- Storytelling, plays, creative writing, and theatre
- Social networks (Facebook and Twitter)



**Figure 5:** Organisational Hierarchical Structure of ACT, Pretoria, 2011

### **Accountability**

Although we initially did not have an established structure, ACT now has a management board in order to ensure direction and accountability. The management board comprises seven people who meet once a quarter. Collectively they bring a diverse range of skills to the organisation such as: Project management, financial management, teaching, clinical psychology, and youth development. This is the highest level within the organisation where decisions are approved. Reports are submitted to donors and other stakeholders twice a year. The organisation advertises its services and events on the local radio station and newspaper, through posters, Facebook, Twitter, and our Website.

Thus ACT as an organisation is under development, learning from past mistakes and currently building capacity to engage with our target population of youth.

### **5.2.2 B: Learner Level**

Learners who enrol into our programme come from different ecologies. With an alarming number entering the ACT programme with serious family break downs, developmental delays and emotional damage, ACT is challenged to reach them on a level that will speak to them, resonate with them, and be relevant to them. Learners

often are found to be stuck in unwanted scripts from their past whilst viewing the future as unbearable. Some share that the reason they engage in unwanted behaviour, such as alcohol, drug abuse and criminal activities, is to cope with their challenging socio-economic family settings. They justify doing these undesirable activities as a means to escape from adversity and an attempt to experience a degree of happiness in their youth. Needless to say, this instant happiness is often only short lasting yet leaves them with increasing problems afterwards, particularly when they may have engaged in reckless activities they would not have done if sober.

Through engaging youth in social change making activities, ACT proposes to turn their negative behaviour into positive and more meaningful behaviour. We create encounters for their healing by empowering and trusting them with responsibility. For example, in the 1=16Trees project, learners identify the people to whom they choose to donate trees. Also, they are responsible for choosing the themes for ACT bashes, as well as planning and running the whole event. Furthermore, by being involved at school and community levels, learners experience an increased sense of belonging, ultimately finding a reason to live and to dream.

### **5.2.3 C: Facilitator Level**

Facilitators are the ones who work with the youth and who hold the space for them on outdoor camps and other ACT activities. They therefore need to be aware of the rationale for hosting the space, and be sensitive to process in order to have a deeper understanding of the group dynamics unfolding during the session. Previously facilitators had a set programme of what was expected of them when facilitating a session. There was a structured programme, with objectives, session activities and outcomes. During the course of doing this research we realised that this way of thinking and working is linear, where facilitators follow a predetermined, structured programme and even impose a rigid way of doing things on learners.

The shift to facilitating from a position of 'not knowing' and the 'here and now' was resisted by facilitators. The previous way of planning and facilitating was 'tried and tested', stable and secure, and this had contributed towards their sense of confidence. Programme implementers are at risk of defending their uncertainties and fears by attributing their implementation problems on issues in the client, the system, the environment, the country or its history. However, this defensive stance can easily distract them from internal inquiry into their own contributions to difficult group processes and seemingly meagre outcomes (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001). In view of this, facilitators, through training and debriefing sessions, were assisted to face their own anxieties and challenges in adopting a new approach to their work.

This required a shift, to make healing and restoration possible. Many of the young people facilitators engage with at ACT come from family systems where pathological symptoms are maintained by destructive behavioural patterns. Facilitators typically want to take responsibility on behalf of the group, but instead were being asked to be content with not knowing, allowing the group process to unfold. This meant they had to let go of control and knowing, and sit in the discomfort. This may have initially been experienced as a type of failure. However, it provided the opportunity for facilitators to show their own humanness and limitations and gave space for the group system to act on their own knowing, thereby not allowing them to abdicate their responsibility to the facilitator.

Some facilitators became stuck at this point where they felt ill equipped and uncertain of their new role. This was addressed when I invited two of my colleagues from the clinical psychology programme to attend a grade 11 camp. We demonstrated an application of the 'not knowing' method whilst facilitating different sessions. Given the opportunity to observe this method, the facilitators then felt more comfortable to explore and apply this approach. This shift in facilitating to a point of 'not knowing' caused shifts in the facilitators as well. They have had to move away from their comfort

zones, know their topic better, be more present and aware of process, and think on their feet.

### 5.3 The ACT model



**Figure 6:** Agape Copeland Train Group Process Diagram, Pretoria, 2011.

Based on reflection about our programme, and in an attempt to incorporate both Yalom's (1975) and Corey and Corey's (2006) models, Agape Copeland Train developed its own model for facilitators working with youth. This model is applied throughout our

programme, but for the purpose of this research study, attention is paid specifically to its application in youth facilitation. A further explanation of the stages of the model follows.

### **1. Brainstorming the idea:**

The team of facilitators get together before the actual camp takes place and are introduced to the theme and objectives of the camp. During this session they share, learn and exchange ideas in line with the theme and objectives. Here the approach is that there is no 'right or wrong' and all thoughts are written on newsprint. An atmosphere of mutual collaboration is formed and members are encouraged and expected to respect each other's ideas and viewpoints. It is this difference (of mutual collaboration and respect) formed at this stage in the facilitator's group that enables the difference on the camp as well in the youth group facilitations.

### **2. Creating the virtual space through cognitive processes:**

After the brainstorming session members are requested to come up with the rationale behind the selected activities, as well as considering how previous sessions have worked, lessons learned and where improvements can be made. At this stage we begin to visualise and imagine the activity. During this stage we started to take into cognisance Yalom's (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) theory of group processes and how this might impact on the planned activity. Given his strong emphasis on the importance of the 'here and now' we became aware of the need to have the capacity to deal with issues as they might arise from the activity. This openness to a less structured approach brought a certain degree of discomfort amongst some team members.

### **3. Linking a facilitator with an activity (finding resonance):**

Each facilitator then chooses an activity that he/she wants to facilitate. The process of choosing an activity entails the following:

- Whether the facilitator feels capable to facilitate the session.

- If the facilitator is knowledgeable about the topic.
- If the topic resonates with the facilitator.

#### **4. Designing and imagining the activity:**

After the facilitators have chosen their activity they then enter the design phase.

Planning and designing the activity is the most exciting part of the production phase.

During this phase, the facilitator considers and explores a variety of facilitating aids that could be applied during the actual sessions. Examples of such aids are role plays, ice-breakers, movies, magazines, image theatre, and break-up groups. The facilitator plans how the session will be rolled out and gets a sense of what he/she envisages should happen during facilitation.

#### **5. Facilitating the activity:**

This phase happens during the actual camp. At this stage the facilitator puts into action what has been planned and designed prior to the session. In so doing, the facilitator remains alert to how the group perceives the activities, being sensitive to the process and allowing for changes or the session to go whatever direction the group wants it to go. The main focus during facilitation is keeping the topic alive and the group interested. Facilitators at ACT are expected to be knowledgeable, and this is often tested at training camps as young people see them as experts in the field of youth development and have expectations regarding their level of knowledge on relevant topics. This can lead to heightened levels of anxiety amongst facilitators during training camps.

#### **6. Observing and reflecting the learners' experiences:**

The facilitator is required to observe and be aware of processes emerging from the session, the learners' experiences, how they react and behave, and how they think and engage throughout the session. By reflecting, the facilitator affirms, honours and validates the young person's experiences and inputs in the sessions.



## **7. Facilitators becoming aware of their own experiences during the session and sharing them (Debriefing):**

Facilitating requires a great degree of resilience, confidence and calmness. It is important that the facilitator is aware of emotions triggered and that these are dealt with, whilst still facilitating effectively. Creating a space for the facilitator to reflect on the process after a session and to attain closure of the session is important for the facilitator's own process as well as for future facilitations.

### ***5.4 Facilitators' experiences of psychological well-being***

Central aspects regarding facilitators' well-being, as impacted on by their work with youth, were identified through thematic analysis. An overarching theme of positive transformation emerged. This overall theme of transformation is comprised of two sub-themes: Shifts in cognition and behaviour (skills), and positive emotions.

#### **5.4.1 Shifts in cognition and behaviour**

Participants recounted a shift in mindset from a rigid frame of reference to a broader worldview (seeing things differently). This was reflected in statements such as:

*'When I was in ACT, before the ACT camps, I thought there were only colored youth and had a culture shock, realising there are more outside than inside. ACT taught me to mobilise myself and introduced me to new ways of thinking and that other people are different, but I must respect the differences and can learn from them too.'*

Facilitator A, male, 28 years old.

There was also evidence of a shift from a self-centered, individualistic view to a collective focus:

*'... taught me to mentor, it is needed in society. I find solace in being a mentor to other learners now, sharing my experiences with them and now they can see if I made it this far, they too can. Just like ACT helped me, I know there are many more who need our help.'*

Facilitator A, male, 28 years old.

*'They are my people, my family. We look out for each other, serve each other and are genuine. I was introduced to the term 'servant leadership' at ACT and have been striving to serve others'*

Facilitator E, male, 23 years old.

This collective focus also became a resource for the facilitators, who draw social support from ACT:

*'(On leaving ACT to study I) missed the daily routine at the office big time and had to remind myself that whether or not I am there daily, we still connect on camps and it feels like I never left.'*

Facilitator E, male, 23 years old.

Changed mindsets were reflected in a shift from past narratives of failure and limitation, to a 'here and now' focus:

*'I became more alert of others, but also myself. At times I realised that I was my biggest enemy as I struggled to forgive myself for the mistakes I have made. As a facilitator I learned that others accept you for who you see yourself for. It begins with me, loving and accepting myself. I came to love and respect myself more. I never would have thought that others would see me as a role model, but that is what actually is happening now.'*

Facilitator D, male, 22 years old.

Transformation was also reflected in the reports of new opportunities for growth, learning and the acquiring of new skills:

*'I was exposed to new things, I've learned study techniques that taught me new ways of learning, even though we were many at home with no desk to study, I learned to study creatively without needing a desk.'*

Facilitator A, male, 28 years old.

*'(ACT has been an) exciting opportunity to enhance my human skills.'*

Facilitator D, male, 22 years old.

*'ACT opened doors for me; I attended national meetings and even had the opportunity to go to university. They supported me throughout and whilst I was studying I continued facilitating.'*

Facilitator E, male, 23 years old.

*'I facilitated a session once without preparing, but learned that it's important to know or at least have a plan from which you can work at hand. Using music and at times working outside helps to calm me down and amazingly I function better outside than inside. I know more, function better and the kids love me more outside!'*

Facilitator H, female, 28 years.

*'ACT is a refreshing revolution where young people can develop without limitations. I was introduced to new terminologies when started working with ACT, such as tracking my process and some real deep stuff.'*

Facilitator F, male, 25 years.

#### **5.4.2 Positive emotions**

Facilitators reported positive emotions experienced as a result of their involvement at ACT. Heightened experiences of confidence, self-awareness, agency, and the ownership and management of emotions were evident.

*'ACT is a revolution for young people in a positive sense, one where they can be relentlessly happy and discover new ways of living and being successful. As a facilitator I also became part of this revolution, where my sadness turned into happiness.'*

Facilitator E, male, 23 years old.

*'When we do the facilitators' reflections and the firing encounters, some burning issues come to the fore. At first I was afraid, did not know how to deal with them, but when I looked at those kids, entering the circle with confidence, I changed as well. I got to find myself again on camps, made peace with past calamities and got to know and understand my own hardships better.'*

Facilitator D, male, 22 years old.

*'First I was uncomfortable, but now when we do the firing encounters, previously the circle, I feel safe and at home. Because of the learners' stories and their spontaneity in sharing their pain, they motivate me to share mine as well. ACT made me to take care of myself and to be gentle with myself.'*

Facilitator I, male, 25 years.

*'Before I have to facilitate a session I'm so nervous that I at times feel like asking to sit out or to change swap timeslots with another facilitator. But mostly I will just do it. I think they can see sometimes see I'm nervous, but just won't tell!'*

Facilitator H, female, 28 years.

*'Recently we talked about how we got served, whilst serving young people on our camps. I never thought of it that way, now that we are having the conversations I realise we did get served! This was visible in the changes others saw in me. People around me were saying things were different about me, in a positive sense.'*

Facilitator E, male, 23 years old.

*'I was shy before ACT, but learned more about myself and how to deal with my issues.'*

Facilitator A, male, 28 years old.

*'I found a home with Agape Copeland Train. When I joined ACT, I felt kind of pedantic, but now, look at me, I can talk in front of the kids, I can motivate them and I love it!'*

Facilitator E, male, 23 years old.

*'In those moments I facilitate, I feel like a rock star, rocking that stage and rocking my world.'*

Facilitator D, male, 22 years.

There was also a search for deeper meaning and the acknowledgement of intangible, inexpressible aspects that are experienced by the facilitators.

*'Some things are happening in those moments. I cannot give words to those moments, as they are indescribable...'*

Facilitator D, male, 22 years old.

*'(I'm) all about connecting with creativity and constructing new images, but ACT brought me closer to my own constructions. I mean these were areas I otherwise would not have even bothered to go.'*

Facilitator F, male, 25 years.

*'Mens het so waardeloos gevoel, want dit was altyd oor hulle, maar nou vandat daar op jou as fasiliteerder gefokus word, besef ek hoe baie daar is wat ek nooit wou oor gepraat het nie. Ek kry nou 'n kans om dieper te kyk vir my eie genesing' (One felt so worthless because it was always about others, but now since there is a focus on you as the facilitator, I've realised how much there is that I've never spoken about. I'm getting a chance now to more deeply explore my own healing).*

Facilitator B, female, 42 years old.

Participants expressed a tension between cognitive and affective well-being. A repetitive issue was the conflict of following one's passion in youth work and the more reality-based concerns of making a living. This exemplified the negotiation of choices facilitators encountered.

*'By ACT gaan dit oor passie en vuur, om jou alles te gee of liewer niks. Dis lekker om by ACT te werk, maar wanneer die geltjies opdroog en mens maar moet vasbyt, volunteer, dan begin wonder mens oor ander jobs.'* (At ACT it's about passion and fire, to give of your all or nothing at all. It's great to work at ACT but when the money dries up and a person must just hang in there, then you begin to think about other jobs.)

Facilitator B, female, 42 years old.

### **5.4.3 Implications**

The transformation of mindsets reported by facilitators is significant as Frederickson (2001) describes how this serves to build personal resources, which prove to be useful when one faces novel threats. In addition, the report of positive emotions by facilitators is valuable as positive affect is shown to make one more receptive to considering a

wider range of behavioural options (Kahn & Isen, in Frederickson, 2001). Additionally, positive emotions are described by Frederickson as resources which enable individuals to gain perspective on life events and manage, even on a physiological level, aspects of stress and adversity. This suggests the elements of well-being identified in this study, can further serve facilitators in managing and adapting to life challenges beyond their facilitator role, in effect building resilience.

From an ecological perspective, positive emotions, in enabling personal growth and social connection (Frederickson, 2001), can have a broader impact on interconnected groups and ultimately communities. Seligman (2002) notes three core aspects of positive psychology: Positive subjective experiences, personal strengths and virtues, and positive institutions and communities. Gable and Haidt (2005) comment that the lattermost aspect of this has been neglected, and that more daring interventions and theories are required in addressing the positive functioning of societal institutions. ACT's community psychology focus and appreciation of the ecology of those it is linked to (both facilitators and youth), deliberately seeks to bring about such an impact beyond the individual. Furthermore, ACT seeks to apply such optimal functioning within the organisation, and is driven by empathic and passionate values of caring, rather than by formalistic and distant work relations.

Shifts in mindsets and positive emotions were consistent themes of facilitators, reflecting two central aspects of well-being that resulted from facilitation. However, in this study the interviews did not explore these aspects further. Determining the finer details of outcomes emergent from interventions is typically challenging (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Future research, to explore the mechanisms of how mindset shifts actually occur and how positive affect is built through the process of facilitation, may be warranted.

#### **5.4.4 The process of accessing facilitators' experiences**

Previously, facilitators at Agape Copeland Train were simply there as conduits of change, to perturb a bigger system. They functioned mechanically as the main focus was on the youth. Meetings were conducted mainly from a top down approach and work was allocated accordingly. During the course of this research I was interested to see how facilitators experienced the shift in our facilitation approach. The new approach has brought them from the periphery to the heart of youth development and encourages them to be aware of and sensitive to processes happening on different levels, beginning with the self. Lifschitz and Oosthuizen (2001) note how the facilitator's own sense of disconnectedness and lost-ness can be echoed and reflected in the struggle of those we seek to help. The experience of facilitation can serve as a powerful indicator of a collective group process that is based in the here and now, rather than a theoretical construction of where the group is supposed to be. At times I had a sense that we were maintaining a comfort zone, having become too comfortable and safe in our approach; even so, often the youth would challenge or provoke us, shifting us out of the comfort zone and the sense of having arrived.

This shift in our approach led to interesting, though not always comfortable, discussions with the facilitators. This discomfort was due to the following reasons:

##### **5.4.4.1 For facilitators**

- Since it was the first time they had a platform to share their experiences and the effects of facilitation on them, they felt at times uncomfortable, overwhelmed and some even surprised. Uncomfortable, as they were used to discussing only the processes happening with learners and were not sure now whether the space was safe to talk about themselves, especially their blind spots and challenges. They were overwhelmed because they believed that the main focus area was the learners, and facilitators were just a means to an end. They therefore did not know where to start when sharing their own narratives. However, this new approach also caused them to feel valued and important in

the organisation, as they were given time to engage in discourses other than programmes and learner's challenges. Surprise arose from the fact that facilitators' personal journeys and struggles were previously not discussed at ACT and most time was usually spent around making life a better place for learners.

- They had to be honest in their feedback, some of which included negative feedback about me and my leadership style.
- Some had to face a lack of awareness and insight regarding their own adversities and life challenges.
- Some were not sure whether they could trust the team and myself with their deepest secrets, nor whether they were ready to go there.
- They were used to having to uphold a standard of being an expert and felt uncomfortable to let go of that role.

#### **5.4.4.2 For myself (as researcher and team leader)**

- I did not know whether the group would be ready and receptive for the new approach.
- I was not sure if the team would trust the process enough to join in. Furthermore, I was uncertain as to whether they would trust me to hold the space for them and whether they would feel safe enough to be vulnerable in the moment.
- I was not sure how facilitators would react when they saw that I also don't know at times what to do and which way to go.
- How would we manage to hold spaces for each other, and could we start to pick up the pieces of brokenness and pain, even our own, to find healing?



## ***5.5 Personal reflections***

Drawn from the interviews with facilitators, and vignettes recorded in my personal diaries, a number of observations follow.

### **5.5.1 Sustainability**

All ACT's facilitators grew up in the community where the ACT programme is based. They reflect the local culture of people in this area who learn to embrace challenges and make it against all odds. Furthermore the issue of sustainable development, for example through involving alumni to contribute time and expertise on camps, was evident as crucial for the ongoing viability of the programme. With regards to this, ACT has an alumni database of young professionals who are involved in ploughing back into the programme. A number of them have hosted grade 12 learners at their respective companies during our job shadowing programme. Learners shadowed alumni in their respective careers and the alumni joined us during our evening sessions, facilitating some sessions with the learners.

Sustainability is also challenged by external factors, such as facilitators being headhunted by other organisations. As a result of her involvement in ACT, one of our project coordinators was approached by provincial government to implement a youth development programme in Kimberley. She received an appointment to senior management level and decided to embrace this opportunity that offered high level remuneration and job security. It was a sad loss for ACT, but a great gain for government. This demonstrates the contrasts between large-scale establishments and community based organisations: In general, provincial government has the resources and infrastructure, but organisations like ACT have innovative drive, passion and ambition. To create productive connections between these two stakeholders remains an ongoing challenge.

### **5.5.2 Situated context**

Moreover, covert political processes can sabotage small community based initiatives and NGOs. This was experienced when ACT lost funding for a potential graduate fellowship that appeared to be well underway and recommended by provincial structures, but then was vetoed by the very same government department. This may in part have been due to an incompatibility of vision and organisational climate, since ACT is organic and passion driven, whereas government operates by a more bureaucratic and political approach. However it may also have been due to a complex and enmeshed political climate. As a result of this experience I decided to get out of full time involvement in this environment and to embark on a new professional journey learning new competencies and skills.

### **5.5.3 Operational requirements**

Issues of funding and staffing, and other organisational challenges that underlie NGOs, impact on facilitators. This is reflected in the interview data where facilitators expressed a tension between following their call to be involved in youth development and the realities of earning a livelihood. The financial issues are indicative of the shift from a lay community based organisation to a more formalised organisation. This slow change throughout the years was marked by significant pockets of donor funding, and caused some challenging moments for ACT as an organisation. Part of my indecisiveness as programme director has been rooted in the fluctuations and shifts in the amounts of donor money received, and also donor instructions regarding to which specific projects or budgetary items funds are dedicated. When donors dictate how finances should be spent and allocated this takes away the freedom of ACT to operate primarily within the domain of youth development. Often those who allocate funds have limited knowledge of the real issues on ground level. Fortunately over the years, donors such as the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, ASHOKA Innovators for the Public and the Anglo American Chairman's Fund have been consistent supporters of our initiative.

#### **5.5.4 Functioning in the 'here and now'**

To illustrate the importance of functioning in the 'here and now' mode, I would like to share a letter written by a learner to me after I paid a visit to her school:

*'Dear sir, last night I baked a cake, a chocolate cake, cause you promised you would come to our school. I could not sleep last night as I was too much excited seeing you again and singing the ACT songs again, but sir, I wanted to surprise you with my chocolate cake. Finally you arrived, you were here, at our school. I had to protect the chocolate cake from hungry peers and greedy teachers and carried it proudly with me into the room where you were supposed to meet with us. Then, everybody walked up to me, wanted a piece of it. You just stood there, did not even notice me as you were too much into your conversation with others. You asked about everybody else, but me. You did not even see the chocolate cake, did not even take a piece when CJ told you the cake was for you. Sir, it was not about the chocolate cake, but do you know how hard I have worked to find those ingredients? Do you know how anxious I was that it should taste like the one I have tasted at my cousin's wedding? Yes sir, maybe it is about the chocolate cake. Do you know I baked the chocolate cake?'*

When I received this letter, I was moved to notice how much planning, effort and anticipation someone had actually put into that moment of me visiting their school. Writing this research dissertation makes me realise that at that time, I was not fully present in the moment and not appreciative of all the moment held. Should I have functioned in the ontological mode as described by Heidegger, I probably would have noticed the girl with chocolate cake, paid attention to her and, yes, had a slice of the cake. I learned through this heartfelt letter to be more aware of my surroundings and appreciative of what is happening in the moment, in the here and now.

#### **5.5.5 Bereavement**

A number of facilitators at ACT experienced death in the past years. With literally no knowledge of how to deal with death, I did not know how to relate to them and at times preferred to ignore the painful event of death. That changed, however, when I experienced death in my own family, as my father passed away and I was confronted with my own pain and loss. When I lost my dad to Alzheimer's disease I struggled to

come to terms with it and felt lost and hopeless at times. This encounter with death, however, gave me a new perspective and new lenses through which to see my colleagues' losses. Often I still wonder how they manage to deal with their pain and losses. Experiencing death has made me more aware of others, more compassionate and more caring. I now call my mom more, can say that I love her and even express my gratitude, things I was not able to do before my dad's death. Having experienced death, I can relate to those youth and team members who have lost loved ones, something I was previously not capable of doing.

### **5.5.6 Leadership style**

During the recent Future Link outreach to Cape Town there was an interesting dialogue between myself and one of the facilitators:

Me: *'Since this is our debriefing and reflection session, I would like people to be honest and cooperative in commenting.'*

Facilitator: *'William, if we as an organisation want to grow, we need to be more strategic, knowing how we will reach our goals.'*

Me: *'Well you are a strategist, so we need your help in this regard.'*

Facilitator: *'Yes, and you are the dreamer, or as you put it, visionary. It is nice to dream, but I'm more curious about the nuts and bolts, how we will be getting there!'*

Me: *'So what do you suggest?'*

Facilitator: *'I suggest you share your dream and leave the strategy of how we will get there to us. I want dates and objectives, the rest I will attend to.'*

This was a challenging conversation, and the facilitator emailed me three weeks thereafter to request the dreams and objectives as he was ready to get started. I was uncomfortable with his email as he defined objectives and mission statements to me. I did not respond immediately and counter manoeuvred later by kindly thanking him for his proactive behaviour and instructed him to find the information in our brochures and other ACT material. Whilst writing this dissertation I have been challenged with the following:

- Why did I feel uncomfortable with the facilitator's email?
- Am I receptive enough for critique?
- Do I take feedback too personally?
- Do I suffer from the 'founder syndrome'?
- Am I able to sense change in the youth development sphere?
- Do I still have a role to play in youth development?
- How does my personal style hinder the growth of ACT?
- Do I model a pattern of procrastination and underperformance to facilitators at ACT?
- How can I give both facilitators and alumni more power?

These questions have arisen from this research study, particularly given the feedback from team members. Although they demand future exploration, as yet they remain unresolved. This is particularly due to my period of professional training having somewhat removed me from the day to day dynamics of the organisational climate.

### ***5.6 What dynamics are present during facilitation?***

In our debriefing sessions facilitators reported that a number of concerns were present whilst facilitating, such as: 'Am I still on track with the topic? Have I possibly interpreted this learner's comment or question wrongly? Do they like me? Am I facilitating as the expert or do I take a humble stance and just hold the space of learners? Am I congruent and genuine in the moment? Is my session creative and fun enough for them?'

During the process of writing this dissertation we started encounter groups for facilitators and other social change makers, to reach the following goals:

- To create a space where likeminded people can meet.
- To talk about young people who struggle at school and need support.
- To tap into our own resource bank, seeing how we can respond to different calls.

- To connect with others.
- To find a space where we can learn new coping skills, through giving and loving.

Overall, reflecting on what facilitators have to say about their encounters facilitating on the ACT camps, I conclude the following:

- Camps do create encounters of healing for facilitators as well.
- Facilitators revisit their own sorrows and past traumas on camps during our debriefing sessions.
- They support each other and find solace within a safe space of facilitators.
- Their own motivation levels increase whilst they motivate the learners.
- They apply the very techniques and advice they give to learners.
- During the planning phase they include considering their own space, where they can reflect and keep track of here and now issues.
- They are faced with their own giants and find new ways of dealing with them.
- They are challenged to uphold high ethical standards.
- Their own sorrows keep them humble and they serve each other.

### ***5.7 Using Psychodrama to find resonance and trust***

To assist youth and facilitators to build a level of resonance and trust we wrote a play together (Figure 7) and used psychodrama to assist us in accessing and getting closer to our own stories. Psychodrama aims to facilitate the deeper understanding of the many dimensions of emotional conflicts by enacting them rather than just talking about them. With the development of additional roles the sense of self can be strengthened. Through enactment the person is able to learn more of the relative effectiveness of body language, and to differentiate between thoughts, feelings and actions. Facilitators

reported that they experienced some relief of their own anxieties whilst they were doing psychodramas.

Facilitators and learners shared their experiences of the play. Some comments were:

- *'The script reminded me of the time when my mom died and we did not know how to reunite as a family, everybody was kinda turned into himself.'*
- *'I played a part in the play and cried whilst we were practicing as I felt for the children in this play, although I never experienced something like this.'*
- *'Stepmothers are always like that, ask me, I know.'*
- *'Life is tough, I mean even us here, and some of us live on our own whilst our parents are trying to make it in the cities. Life oh life...'*

These comments reflect how psychodrama can be a powerful medium of healing through:

1. Creating a platform where both youth and facilitators could address social issues and illnesses through the medium of art.
2. Engaging facilitators and learners in conceptualising narratives and writing a script, thereby utilising untapped creative potential.
3. Providing a safe environment for an insightful experience through drama in such a way that it activates and leads to further healing processes.
4. Enabling them to discover how they form, maintain and can change their social situations.
5. Freeing facilitators from rigid behaviours and helping them to develop new and more appropriate (spontaneous and creative) approaches to current experiences and life situations.

Figure 7: The play we produced and performed

Scene with Therapist (session one)

Therapist: On our telephone chart I see that Mr Sauer's secretary called indicating that you Mr Sauer and your wife encounter some serious challenges with Augusta?

Mr Sauer: Yeah, she's troublesome, she doesn't listen and all we want is you to speak sense into her life

Mrs Sauer: Yes, she's always outside with friends, refuses to listen and is simply rude

Augusta: (turn her face away from the parents)

Therapist: Augusta, how old are you?

Augusta: 16

Therapist: You have an interesting artistic look...

Augusta: I got it from my mom's side, she was an artist you know.

Therapist: tell me more..

Augusta: She painted the most beautiful landscapes, (thinking...) a soulperson with so much passion&so much love

Mr Sauer: Please can we focus on Augusta's problem and leave the past in the past..

Therapist: Its important information to help us getting to her problem

Mr Sauer leaves, Mrs Sauer follows (CURTAIN/LIGHTS)

Song "want die hele wereld raak stil.."

Session two with therapist:

Therapist: I'm glad you're back

Mr Sauer: Can we now focus on the reason of being here, of helping my daughter to get her life together and to be an obedient daughter

Mrs Sauer: Yes it is time she needs to listen to us, her parents who simply want a good life for her

Augusta: You're not my mother!!!

Mrs Sauer: never wanted to, thanks God for that. You certainly one helluva spoilt lady!

Therapist: As I was about to ask, please tell me more about the family from your mom's side

Mr Sauer: PLEASE PLEASE. Cant you see (pointing at Augusta) the state she's in? Lets Please focus at this challenge at hand and not dwell in the past..(furious)

Therapist: Mr Sauer, to deal with the problem at hand, we ought to understand the system and its challenges as hard as it may be

Augusta: My mom is from Costarica. (showing happy emotions) my grandmom bakes the nicest of apple pies

Therapist: She taught you how to bake apple pie too?

Augusta: yeah..

Therapist: you wanna talk about your mom's funeral??

Augusta: I was in Costarica when she died. My dad called and said that they'll bury her, so I can stay for my holiday and don't have to rush

Therapist: So you were not at the funeral?

Augusta: yes, my dad said it was too much money changing the flight

Mr Sauer: I did it for her. Wanted to spare her the pain and yes if I had to change the flight it would have been an extra R8500 you know. Those flights are expensive!



Therapist: Augusta, would you have loved to attend your mom's funeral?

Augusta: Indeed, I soo wanted to, I loved her so much, she was my life, she was my mother! (crying)

Mr Sauer: Augusta , I didn't know you feel that way about her

Augusta: she was my mother!! (crying)

Mrs Sauer: Now that is what I'm talking about, she simply cannot listen, like her father says, she should have asked

Augusta: He was the one saying that I should stay as changing the ticket is expensive. He was the one taking that last moment with my dear mother away!! (crying) . My brother was not allowed to attend either as he was studying in another city and dad refused to bring him up for the funeral.

Mr Sauer: (angry) It was two week away from university recess, so what was the need to bring him up earlier as the out of season tickets were not available on line.

Therapist: Mr Sauer, what values more , your children or your expenses?

Mr Sauer: Mam, I'm a lawyer and simply needs the facts, what do we need to heal my daughter and make her to listen? Lets not get distracted please (adamant)

Therapist: Mr Sauer , can we please see your son in the next session as well

Mr Sauer: Is it really necessary?

Therapist: Mrs Sauer, if you don't mind, I would like to see the children and Mr Sauer alone in the next session

Mrs Sauer: You don't want me in here? You'll deal with my husband and you know he's a lawyer?! (facing her husband) Baby, sort this woman out, who does she thinks she is, not wanting me here!

Mr Sauer: (looking at his wife) Please, just do as she asked, we want this thing to work.

Mrs Sauer: So you also align with her now?! Am I no longer good enough? This child of, wants to separate us, its me or her, you choose today! (Walks out crying)

Song: " want die hele wereld raak stil..."

CURTAINS

Session with whole family

Session with the nuclear family:

Jason: You were for as long as I live like this. You never had time for us, never engaged in any meaningful conversation with us. Did we ever matter to you. Yet you were so successful in your profession, others perceived you as a hero, a great man who initiate miracles. But tell me dad, why you were never there for us. Do you even know that during the week of mom's funeral I took off, in fact ran away from school to be by myself. Tell me dad why , why you never cared?

Mr Sauer: (crying) I cared, I ve loved you all my life. How can you say I don't love you, how can you say I don't care. (crying)

Jason: But dad, I'm no longer angry, in was introduced to Christ, through a friend of mine. I've learned about God's unconditional love, I've elearned about His compassion and care, but ultimately I've learned to forgive , as Chirst has forgiven us. I love you dad, because of Christ I have forgiven you dad.

Mr Sauer: I'm so sorry, I did not know how to show love, I did not know how to deal with emotions, hence it was more my need for you not to be present at your mom's funeral. God knows, I was scared, so scared to deal with your loss and to face your pain. Your mother was a phenomenal woman. A compassionate woman, Godfearing and loving woman. Please forgive me my children, please forgive me. Jason, I'm lost, please share your God, please share your newly found faith with me.

THE END

## **5.8 Metaphors as a tool to enable psychological insight and well-being**

Another activity that has proven to be useful in working with learners involves asking them to invent a metaphor describing themselves. These are some of the metaphors:

- *'Like an egg.'*
- *'Like an eagle, can go thru storms which come my way!'*
- *'Like a book, you judge me from the outside but when taking time to read me, you'll realise I'm more interesting than you thought.'*
- *'I'm like the human heart, it doesn't take skill to understand me, it comes natural and quick.'*
- *'I'm like a star, that shines.'*
- *'Ek is soos 'n kameelboom peul, dit lyk asof ek nie interessant is nie, maar ek hou mense warm en kan 'n goeie voorbeeld wees.'*
- *'I'm like a camel, I can carry heavy stuff, people worry about me. I can be in the sun for long hours but still surviving.'*
- *'I'm like a palm tree, when storms come, I'll just bend, when everything's happened I'll move back up.'*
- *'I'm like a fish, a fish stays focused, I still hold my goals and objectives.'*
- *'I'm like a computer, when you press the wrong button, you'll get the wrong answer.'*
- *'Ek is soos 'n lug ek kan weer eens lig in mense se lewens bring.'*
- *'I'm like a predator, I prey on success and opportunities.'*
- *'I'm like a cheetah, ek jag vir my prooi!!'*
- *'I'm like the Bible, I'm black, red and black, can make people smile when they're upset.'*
- *'I'm like a mountain, big and strong and can face anything coming my way.'*
- *'Like Cape Town's weather, three seasons in one day.'*
- *'I'm like a lion, strong, powerful and don't take any nonsense!'*
- *'I'm like a flowing river that fulfils other rivers, I like to know what goes with other people and to see us all successful. I'm like a river, like the river moves, I move. Whatever you told me, I'll do.'*
- *'Eks soos 'n skilpad, wanneer moeilike dinge gebeur skuil ek in my dop...'*
- *'Eks soos 'n blom dit beskryf my naam en my van, dit beteken ek groei nog.'*

- *'Eks soos 'n blom, ek groei in my persoonlike lewe en ook in my geestelike lewe.'*
- *'I'm a telephone pole, that is very tall. It connects different kinds of wires and I connect with everyone.'*
- *'I'm like the rain - when it comes you may not want me, but when I leave I always leave something behind.'*

When we reflected on the metaphor activity, some shared that this had enabled them to gather more information about others: Who they are and why they behave in a certain way. For example, one learner who described herself like Cape Town's weather, frequently shifts moods. All in one day she could be sad and isolated, yet at another time appear engaging and cheerful. We also came to understand through this activity why another learner would, on the whole, not share during group activities. This insight enabled us to know how to create a space where she felt safe to open up and enjoy herself. Another learner's response alerted us to heighten our security at night, to pre-empt any sexual misconduct on the camp.

During our facilitators meeting, after the metaphor exercise, we realised that it takes time to get to know learners, and yet this is important as we need to know them in order to appreciate what it would take to create a better space for them to share, grow and enjoy themselves. We also were cautious not to fall into the trap of making our own assumptions, and the learners' self metaphors gave us a new means of accessing the youth's perspectives on their ways of seeing and living. Between the facilitators we also shared our own metaphors and gathered some meaningful insight into each other's personas and why we present ourselves as we do. We found this to be a non-threatening way of exploring these aspects of ourselves.

### **5.9 Interviews with youth**

The following issues emerged from my interviews with the matriculants during our Job shadowing week (School-To-Work Future Link)(see Addendum F):

- A majority of learners face trying to make it against all odds.
- Sexual promiscuity is high amongst youth.
- Psychosocial education, such as provided on ACT camps, contributes towards their resilience and hope for a better future.
- Some live in child headed homes.
- There is a big generational gap between parents and youth and communication between them is limited.
- Socio-economic challenges such as poverty affect academic performance.
- Some youth are exposed to alcohol and drug abuse.
- Many live in overcrowded households with limited space to themselves.
- Some struggle with their sexual identity and bear the brunt of rejection and mockery.
- Culture and belief systems are valued.
- Peers contribute towards hope and motivation.
- Teachers are seen as role models.

#### ***5.10 A synthesis of innovations for youth facilitation, healing and development***

Emergent from the above data, and evident from experience at ACT, the following factors are identified as being important elements for psychological well-being of facilitators:

- **Confidence**—learning to trust and value one's own abilities

As a facilitator one needs to be confident in order to create a secure and safe environment for the learners. Young people are expressive and will even comment on your style or ability if they notice you are struggling or do not know what to do. When I started facilitating in 1997, a matric girl commented: 'I see you are very nervous today, take a smoke break, it always helps!' I was still young and reactive, but was so ashamed of my inability to facilitate without showing my anxiety. This event taught me to be humble and to trust my ability to facilitate. Furthermore, strategies to manage anxiety,

such as adequate planning, can build confidence. Overall, as facilitators we have learned that enjoying the group process, and having fun whilst facilitating, helps us to relax and ultimately perform better.

- **Connection**—forming positive relationship bonds with friends, family and community which are mutually beneficial

Frequently mentioned in interviews with facilitators was the support they drew from fellow team members. Also prominent was the importance of loyalty towards and investment in their community. After a weekend training camp, it is important for facilitators to have a life and people who care for us waiting at home. Previously we would never reflect after camps and would leave the training camp soon after the learners. Having been part of deep interactional processes, however, some of the narratives and pain could remain very much alive in the facilitator. Without having a platform to deal with such pain, those who waited at home were often the recipients of the unresolved issues and pain – both one's own and that of the shared stories from learners. We also learned that, as some of the facilitators did not have family waiting at home, we ourselves needed to form a family, having our own debriefing session. Thus, just as we hold safe spaces for learners, we now hold those spaces for ourselves afterwards, reflecting and sharing our own processes and narratives.

- **Character**—having respect for societal norms and mores and developing a moral compass

With character development an aspect of ACT's programme, facilitators are aware of the need to model what they represent. As facilitators they can be under the close scrutiny of learners. Thus there is a need for their behaviour to be congruent with their role, whilst also being able to be real with the young people they work with about challenges they have faced in their lives. Facilitators on the ACT programme

demonstrate valuable character traits such as commitment, acknowledging their own limitations, keeping promises, and being able to set boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

- **Caring/Compassion**—having a sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

Facilitators have often come from similar backgrounds to those with whom they work. This provides them with insight and empathy regarding the situations the youth face. Furthermore, the extent of caring is often demonstrated by facilitators being willing to serve without great material reward.

Through my experience at ACT I believe that by creating encounters for healing processes to take place for both youth and facilitators, programmes will be relevant and have impact. Research such as this exploratory study, determining what changes occurred in facilitators' psychological well-being, will assist in clarifying the characteristics required of such programmes. This can then be used to inform stakeholders as to the elements of which effective programmes should comprise.

### **5.11 Recommendations**

Through ongoing challenges and the implementation of the new model of facilitation, it has become evident that there are certain key factors in optimising youth development encounters. Facilitators are central to these factors.

1. *Setting the space* and creating a milieu for healing to take place. This happens first of all within the facilitators. Scharmer (2007) calls it the interior condition for change and describes how the hour before any encounter is the most important space in the encounter. This means that facilitators need to work on their own baggage, history and scripts continuously and proactively. Without this stance no process will be ethical, significant or authentic. This is perhaps the most challenging realisation that a facilitator needs to come to: That healing is also necessary for the facilitator (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001).
2. Being present, to come into, and *attend to the moment* (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

3. *Forgiveness* is central to youth encounters.
4. *Embracing new dimensions* that surface, and encountering yourself in a new way.
5. Exploring and prototyping *new ways* of doing, relating and acting (Scharmer, 2007).
6. *Planned reflection* on and harvesting of new processes and ways of being enables a more conscious and articulated explanation and construction of changes that are occurring. For the facilitator to have a deeper awareness and insight of allowing the next moment to unfold. Giving consideration to what we have possibly missed and need to revisit or allow to emerge (Westley, Zimmerman & Patton, 2006).

The practice of community psychology demands that: “The practitioner be dedicated and become an integral member of the community with whom he/she works...” (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001, p. 107). They note that theories and meta-considerations are impotent without a pragmatic of action in communities. In other words, a pre-formulated theory cannot predict whether an intervention will be healing or hurtful and can never be a substitute for the experiences of those involved (Lifschitz & Oosthuizen, 2001).

Nevertheless, our experiences as the NGO of Agape Copeland Train since 1997, enable us to make the following recommendations that government can utilise for future planning and possibly a more relevant and effective approach towards youth development in the Northern-and Western Cape provinces:

- Inclusiveness of young people in developing youth policies and youth programmes is necessary.
- Pro-active planning of youth initiatives prior to key youth dates on the annual calendar.

- Involvement of a diverse group of young people in training sessions or events has a greater impact and effect.
- Creating a space for innovative thinking, and maximum impact and effect, requires sensitivity to the environment, facilitation style and group work.
- Making the memories that were captured on camera available on a social media site or sending quotes and memories to youth three months after the event is a useful way to remind them about the importance of the event and their responsibility towards acting as social change makers.

In essence innovative encounters should be structured in such a way that the context itself creates the space for deeper reflections and well-being to be optimised. This kind of innovation, in changing the individual, opens possibilities for broader social development.

In this chapter I provided an insider perspective on some of the history, journeys and participants of Agape Copeland Train. Over the years the organisation has faced many challenges, experienced many sweet encounters and bitter-sweet losses. My understanding of models and approaches to facilitating and hosting innovative youth encounters for healing and well-being has grown. It is therefore impossible, as both director and facilitator, to now not see that the things that cause pain and hamper development, apply to both facilitator and youth. Training at the UNISA clinical psychology programme provided the necessary distance for me to disengage from the immediate pulls and crises of youth development. This enabled me to become aware of and conscientised to deeper ecological system perspectives of profound change in therapeutic settings. This deepening meant that I as a person was presented with a lot of uncomfortable feedback and challenges and had to learn how to swim in the deep end of my own and other peoples' suffering, limiting behavioural repertoires and inherited intergenerational baggage. No simplistic model or theory will suffice to



provide a one-size fits all method that can assist adolescents (and their facilitators) in the context of their lives, challenges and growth.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING THIS JOURNEY...**

Writing this dissertation was a sense of tracing and not an attempt to find an origin. On the outdoor training camps of Agape Copeland Train, when listening to young people's narratives, I see young people who are trapped in scenarios of unslaked desire, relentless punishment, and at times even horrifying dangers. Their suffering moves me. Their plight is that they are trapped in such scenarios: Their symptoms the signs of being caught in scenarios they appear compelled to repeat endlessly without escape. This trap is more or less unconscious. During the camp's firing encounters, where youth can freely share their narratives, whether painful or victorious, I can actually hear their stuck-ness. However, this need not be the experience of all youth.

"The way to maintain one's connection to the wild is to ask yourself what it is that you want. This is the sorting of the seed from the dirt. One of the most important discriminations we can make in this matter is the difference between things that beckon to us and things that call from our souls. Intuition is the direct messenger of the soul." (Estés, 1996, p. 34)

Working with some of the facilitators for more than 10 years, it has been an awakening to realise how much I have failed them in not always having held them and having created spaces for their individual processes of healing. The implication of this realisation is that facilitators, as individuals, come with their own pain and anxieties. Given this, they need to be given a space to learn how to embrace and deal with their own challenges. This also makes us cognisant of the fact that, as facilitators experiencing this need, how much more do youngsters require such support. The 'Intervention monitoring', one on one approach used on camps is one way to avail such support. Additionally, through holding debriefings and encounter groups for facilitators, facilitators are able to become emotionally vulnerable and experience mutual support.

This grants them a confidence that extends to their facilitation of youth, where they trust emergent processes and no longer remain stuck on a content level.

During (and even through) the process of writing this dissertation, I have learned to listen beyond listening, to understand beyond the semantics of words and to suspend my own needs, own comforts, own anxieties and own agenda and to simply trust the flow, which leads to more powerful and impact-full results. This is aligned to what some have called journey work methodology or what Romanyshyn (2007) calls the wounded researcher.

What I have learned from facilitators and the youth encounters is:

- It is individuals who make the difference.
- A recipe and method are not as important as a supportive ecology that promotes health and well-being.
- Resilience is not a thing and cannot be seen as a bank account to be filled or debited.
- Communities have the capacities to create unique solutions and answers to the questions of their time.
- Facilitators need to get out of the way to enable people to create their own innovative solutions.
- The modernistic industrial mind-set is part of the problem that needs to be addressed in any innovative youth encounter.
- A second order change perspective from a profoundly human stance enables the creation and establishment of the unique conditions for change and healing that are owned by the participants, and initiated by the group, not the facilitator.
- Change is not just a repetition of old scripts with new covers.

- Change is the reclamation of our profound human condition, is normal and is ongoing; therefore change in a group is facilitated by the awareness, love, passion and non-interference of facilitators and donors (Kruger, personal communication, 2011). Kruger further states that our models and theories will always be provisional, recursive and adaptive to uniquely local circumstances, histories and personal experiences.

Kruger (personal communication, 2011) comments that 'reality' is strange, complex, nonlinear, mysterious and emergent. This relates to the ecosystemic paradigm that acknowledges the flux and interconnectedness of all parts of a system. Doing this research reflected this 'reality', as both facilitators and learners were challenged with complex processes and encountered new events which, at times, were strange and mysterious. So too, my approach and sharing of the findings of this research might appear strange and complex for those who prefer the linear way of conceptualising and facilitating youth ventures, and are not willing to leave their comfort zones.

Yet ultimately as a consequence of witnessing the pains and joys of facilitators and youth, my responsibility to represent this reality has enlarged. I am now more aware of the following:

- The need to strive to understand the core of facilitation, which entails a different kind of responsibility.
- To realise during the planning and rollout phases of youth development initiatives that we are dealing with people's pain and suffering.
- To enter into any process unintentionally, is betrayal (of both youth and facilitators), to not consider the personal meanings forged from their suffering and experience is negligence. The call from past experiences and hurts requires us to respond to their need as primary, beyond any programme or research agenda.
- To accompany facilitators and youth in walking away from the shadows of the sorrow and pain of the yesteryears.

- To acknowledge that my story also has a role to play, by also exploring my pain and struggles as the researcher, and setting an example of vulnerability.
- What matters is not a core of knowledge or truth, but rather a core of responding and offering. It is not about the 'truth', but about how we respond.
- How do you follow that which is calling you?

During the course of my training and research, I have noticed the distinct ways in which authors and researchers write about youth development, health, illness and resilience. As discussed previously, the distinction between the mechological and the ecological practicing viewpoints (Auerswald, 1969) is reflected in the literature. My experience of ACT and of UNISA's clinical psychology programme, has shown me the deep epistemological level on which change can be made more possible, or be made almost impossible. This epistemological split seems to run deeply through the theoretical landscape of health interventions. Attaining an ecological mindset that is sensitive and attuned to uncertain, unpredictable and open-ended group processes, has possibly been one of the hardest shifts in my life. I moved from an expert top-down leadership position to a more humble and enabling position as a co-facilitator where the learners also participate. In this learning process our intuitive and experienced knowledge as facilitators became more highly valued, and my opinion of objectified, rigid and linear (mechological) knowledge declined. My practice of facilitating empowerment has shifted enormously. I take less responsibility on other people's behalf and I take more responsibility for my own experiences and for creating more optimal conditions that can enable and facilitate healing.

It follows that when one is a witness (and by virtue of the fact that you realise you have witnessed something), you have to respond. Your response has to do something. Offer a sense of promise, a sense of hope. I have spoken, I have done. The how, I honestly don't know. In therapy when patients appear, I have to invent something. Whilst facilitating, we are at times 'stuck' and don't know how to deal with or respond to certain issues in

the here and now. We feel ill equipped at times and scared of the powerful spaces that are held by something or someone bigger than ourselves. The knowing that exceeds knowing is that fact that we as facilitators cannot know. Thus things transform, not in accordance to our agendas; yet we watch and wait with a sense of purpose. Kruger (personal communication, 2011) states that as the facilitator you become the master of a ritual. As the master conducting the ritual you serve to help people understand its meaning and are sensitive to the deeper call of hosting young people's processes.

*No one can find your meaning for you. Not even the master.  
There is more fruit than you can imagine.  
The teacher's only job is to show you where it is hidden and how to uncover it..  
Eat your own fruit.  
Help others to find, and share...*

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## ADDENDA

Individual interview during Camp, The Future, Own It! With Grade 11 learners at Duin in die Weg,  
Grootdrink, Northern Cape Province

1. Why have you come to the camp?

To learn, and to get encouragement to others

2. How do you experience it so far?

Excellent, I've learned a lot.

3. What have you learned so far?

How to make contact with my emotions. More study skills  
Not to be judgemental.

4. Are you happy?

Very much

5. What makes you happy?

Talking

6. What are your challenges in life?

School

7. How do you deal with these challenges or cope with them?

Studying a lot.

8. What are your future plans after matric?

Studying in Cape Town in the field of UCT.

9. What can you add to the ACT program?

I think it's completed

10. What do you think of the ACT program?

It's a great way to motivated young people, to reach success and  
also have the power to help others with the knowledge that  
they gain

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

### ADDENDUM A: One-on-One Interview Form

Individual Form

“Spitskop” Environmental Trip

26 February 2011

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Gr. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Hoe was vandag se uitstappie vir jou?

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2. Why is it important for you to do creative activities?

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3. Wat verstaan jy onder kreatiwiteit?

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4. How do you feel when you do creative activities?

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5. Which activity did you like the most today and why?

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6. Which of the following are you interested in?

- ❖ Poetry
- ❖ Dance
- ❖ Singing
- ❖ Theatre production

- ❖ Painting
- ❖ Story telling
- ❖ Card making
- ❖ Reading
- ❖ Writing
- ❖ Rap

7. What are the main social problems in your community?

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8. How do you plan to address these issues?

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9. Have we met your expectations for the day? Why do you say so?

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## **ADDENDUM B: Assessment Form**





ADDENDUM D: Learner with a poster designed during an Art Exchange session

## Research Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby give  
permission to William Solomons to use my stories/pictures/reflections in his  
research document: Innovative Encounters for Well-being and Healing,  
which will be done on Agape Copeland Train.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### ADDENDUM E: Research Consent Form

### **One-on-one Interviews with matriculants**

This is what some matriculants had to say during the Job shadowing project, School To Work Future Link (STWFL) in Cape Town:

**Matriculant 1:** *I'm more into music, inspired by music and working with youngsters my age. Music makes me happy. People my age who can talk to me about positive things motivate me. I'm living with my parents, two brothers and five sisters. Lastborn. Things happening in my community like crime, alcohol abuse...*

**Matriculant 2:** *It feels good and I learn a lot from ACT. I didn't know how to study, but ACT taught me how to study. I accepted God in my life and things are just happening for me ever since..*

**Matriculant 3:** *I'm a good person, although a lot of people don't like me,. My actual name means people love me. People think I think I'm better. My friends think I'm growing up in a better house. My family care. Parents are loving people, I don't want to lose them, and they mean a lot to me. My parents support me. My biggest challenge is to worship God in truth and spirit.*

**Matriculant 4:** *Today the first day of STWFL was tough, the people at the place where I'm placed break my spirit. I feel nothing, I feel worthless and simultaneously, I feel like I'm meant for better and greater things. We're a very close family, live happy with my parents, we motivate each other. We understand each other. We talk about our problems and look for resolutions. ACT gave me self-confidence, becoming a beauty therapist is now a possibility. Money will not block me. I must just be sure of my dream.*

**Matriculant 5:** *Today I've worked at a mechanic workshop. I feel good, because I did what I want to do one day, working on cars. The people at the workshop were impressed with me being a girl and wanting to work in a men-dominated field. The one man asked me to motivate his daughter who is also in matric.*

**Matriculant 6:** *Being at STWFL is refreshing. It's a break, away from the stress. If only teachers were able to teach us the same way we probably would have all passed with A symbols. My mother died in March and I live with my grandma. We are 5 children, with the youngest only 9 months. They didn't tell me the cause of my mom's death. They*



*actually wanted to tell me, but I don't want to hear it. Grand mom gets pension. My dream is to become a journalist or something in media.*

**Matriculant 7:** *My family is very interesting, supporting and friendly. What my family hate is to be interrupted like people talking behind their backs. I live with my grandfather. I'm Ok not living with my mom, because my granddad can't stay alone. My challenge is to be successful and creative in life. It means a lot being part of ACT. At first I thought it was just fun, but later I realised what it mean being part of ACT. STWFL is about taking a stand in life and moving forward in future. My personality is to stretch my wings, which Mr S taught me. I want to see me through your eyes. I've been inspired by Robert's speech. (Robert is an ACT alumnus, who currently works in the creative department of a newspaper.)*

**Matriculant 8:** *I've lost both parents in 2009 when I was 18 years old. What drives me in life are good friends, heal songs, worship songs, the church and the Joy books of Christ. My dreams are to live a better life, not be rich, but to have everything I need in life. Be a person motivating others, not with a lot of money, but to be there for others.*

**Matriculant 9:** *My parents are divorced, I live with my mom. I have a baby, my baby lives with my mother. I wanted to quit school, but I swallowed my pride and went back to school. After the baby I got closer to my parents. My mom struggles financially. We're very happy and there are no problems. I have a dream to become a clinical psychologist.*

**Matriculant 10:** *I'm living with my dad and stepmother. My mom died. My brothers and sisters are unemployed. My dad is also not working, he is too old and is looking for a job. My sister is disabled. There is no income at home. My stepmom bakes cake, but it doesn't bring in any money. I would like to become a soldier, but also want to start my own business in electricity, preparing stuff. Yesterday I felt like studying occupational therapy, where I was placed during STWFL. I also would like to be a pastor one day. My biggest challenge is my school work and the situation at home.*

**Matriculant 11:** *My family is nice. I'm gay and I am happy. I feel people must call me Crezentia. I was despised when I told them I'm actually a girl in a guy's body. People say bad things. I would like to do BCOMM accounting: I decided I'm Crezentia in 2004. It's*

*nice to be on the camp one learns, ACT helps me to dream and then there is hope. ACT taught me to be human. Group is awesome, different cultures. This group accept me for who I am. My parents find it hard accepting the way I am.*

**Matriculant 12:** *I'm quiet by people who don't know me, with my friends I'm wild, jokey, love music. Energetic. Grow up in spiritual home. Parents are saved. Dreams are to become a lawyer. Will join NAVY & study through them. I don't believe there is something too big for me, when saying I'll do it, I believe I can do it.*

**Matriculant 13 (writing in Afrikaans):** *Ek is 19 jaar oud. My lewe ek is gebore 2de Februarie 1992 in Pretoria. 1994 het ek my ma in 'n motorongeluk verloor. Ek weet tot vandag nie wat gebeur het nie watter tipe person sy was nie. Ek is onbekend aan my pa, weet nie hoe hy lyk nie het net 'n naam en van van hom. Ek was slim op skool aan alles moontlik deelgeneem, almal was mal oor my en ek was beroemd onder ouens, kinders ens. 2006 het iets gebeur wat ek niemand van vertel het nie, dit was erg, baie seer en op 'n manier het ek gevoel ek verdien dit want ek was verwagtend. Ek het selfmoord probeer pleeg, meer as 60 hartpille gedrink, maar dit ongelukkig oorleef. Voel ongewenst en dat ek 'n skande vir my familie is. Ek word nie support nie en hoë standarde word vir my gestel. 2008 het ek skool gelos en IT gaan swat op Upington College, het swanger geword en my mense het my gedreig, gevors om te aborteer. Daar is nie 'n dag wat verbygaan wat ek nie wonder wat as ek nie, watter tipe ma ek sou gewees het nie, hoe hy/sy sou gelyk het nie. Dit vreet aan my tot vandag. My familie vra nie hoe ek voel nie, wat ek deur gemaak het nie. Dit vreet aan my fisies en sielkundig. Ek het nie 'n sielkundige voor of daarna gaan sien nie. Dit het en veroorsaak dat ek nie meer akademies meer so goed presteer nie. Ek het met verkeerde mense mans spesifiek deurmekaar geraak en met hul sex gehad asof dit normaal is. Ek het gevoel at least word ek gebruik en al lieg hulle dat hul iets voel, maar die alleenheid en minderwaardigheid kon ek nie verdra nie, die woorde wat ek gegee word nie. Ja my lewe wat ek haat en gebruik my houding, maniere en ombeskoftheid as 'n defants maginism om nie seer te kry nie.*

**Matriculant 14:** *There is a history about my surname. My granddad's surname was Cloete, but when they wanted to come to South Africa he made up a surname Kalota. I live in a family of 11 people in a shack. My mom is like they say a shebeen queen. Living with such a big family you don't have space, it's a shebeen so there are always people drinking. For me being exposed to shebeen is like a family sick. My mom and I don't talk about this, neither about school. My dream is to be an internal auditor, as it is high in demand. People are corrupted and cannot be trusted. I want to be honest, a person people can trust. My biggest challenge is the way of teaching at school, our accounting teacher is the school's account. Closer to exam time, he pushes us to catch up. This week at STWFL, I got images, I will never be able to erase and my memory is big, always something to learn. Campus tour was powerful. If you allow people to control you, they will control you. Met new friends, realised I cannot be quiet. I like challenges, but at times the obstacle is so big you cannot surmount it!! I also learn from documentaries. I've also learned about inside varsity. I allow learning, positive learning through media. When I was primary school we have learned to read through singing. I think that is why we never took reading serious.*

**Matriculant 15:** *I'm more of a quiet person, very introverted, I do everything to my best. I'm one of two boys and four sisters. I live with my parents. Two sisters are married. Living with my parents is fine, but I don't want to be dependent on them. I want to study multimedia or music next year. I saw a lot of things that really don't want me to go there. I think I'll take music as a part time job. My environment is my biggest challenge. The crime, alcohol and rape are affecting me. This week I have learned a lot. I've gained some spiritual motivation and learned just to be myself. I'm gonna work hard, I mean since the first camp I have worked hard.*

**Matriculant 16:** *I've been moving a lot since my mother died. After her death, they realised she was an alcoholic, so they took me away. I'm living with my friend Gladwin. Before my mother died my mom and Gladwin's mom were very close. My dad died in 2000, since he died we struggled and she got a job as domestic worker.*

*I would like to be a man of God and get as many people as possible in His Kingdom. I want to be able to solve people's problems. Also a doctor, finding new cures for illnesses. Also want to do Zoology.*

**Matriculant 17:** *I have my parents they are married. Have two sisters. We have a middle class lifestyle. We cope well. My dream is to study computer technician. My biggest challenge is passing matric. ACT teaches me self-confidence and believing in myself, achieving and getting better marks, although you were a poor achiever.*

**Matriculant 18:** *I'm actually a very shy person, very creative, responsible with a lot of respect. I love working with people. I have this problem, I think I have a lack of confidence, I sometimes doubt myself and I tend to give up too quickly. I have not learned yet how to fight in life. I believe in God. I'm staying at my gradmom's house, my parents are not together, dad in Kimberley. My biggest challenge is facing my fears. I want to do multimedia at UJ next year.*

**Matriculant 19:** *I have a single mom and I live with her. Three children, me the eldest. My mom take care of me. My biggest challenge is peer pressure. Next year I would like to go into the business world, like going into accounting at Tshwane University. Will see where I fit in. ACT has changed my life, it has a big effect on my life, as me as an individual I have confidence, have time for my books, time to enjoy. ACT also taught me to choose friends carefully, and also to focus on my church life. It gives me the power to love God. The programme gives me hope that I can achieve what I want to achieve in life.*

## **ADDENDUM F: One-On-One Interviews with Matriculants**



**ADDENDUM G: 1=16 Trees Poster, Upington, 2011.** Designed by in-house Multimedia

Designer Jacques Keet Copyright © 2010 *Inculcating a spirit of nature conservation in facilitators and youth as well as an awareness of the importance of trees amongst communities through the 1=16Trees project.*



**ADDENDUM H: Edge Encounter Poster, Upington, 2011.** Designed by in-house Multimedia

Designer Jacques Keet Copyright © 2011 A poster of a group encounter planned by ACT facilitators





**ADDENDUM I: Facilitators of ACT marketing a play to be performed at the Kalahari Kuierfees, Upington, 2007.** (Photograph by the Author.)



**ADDENDUM J: Grade 11 learners during an experiential session at the Orange River, Duin in Die Weg, Northern Cape Province, 2011.** (Photograph by in-house Multimedia Designer Jacques Keet.)





**ADDENDUM K: Grade 11 learners at Duin in Die Weg, Northern Cape Province, 2011.** (Photograph by in-house Multimedia Designer Jacques Keet.)



**ADDENDUM L: Artwork done by learners**





**ADDENDUM M: Planning corner for one of the outreaches, Edge Encounters**