

TRANSFORMING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY: FACILITATORS LIVING VALUES

by

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ABSTRACT

From a feminist theology of praxis the appreciative inquiry used in this research reflected on the constituting role the living of values by facilitators play in transforming the lives of children who suffer the effects of poverty, neglect and abuse. The concretisation or the living of values within the school community linked with the theme of solidarity with the marginalised.

The facilitators' solidarity with children as "concrete others" became ways of doing participatory ethics. As part of a postmodern paradigm, a social constructionist discourse made it possible for therapist-researcher and participants to view the facilitators' work and the research itself as part of a relational process. Appreciative inquiry invited a reflective stance towards action, relating and personal knowledge. The research also reflected on poststructuralist theory and practice, and the power of imagination and language to re-describe of the work of facilitators.

Key terms

Values; Praxis; Transformation; Solidarity with the marginalised; The "concrete other"; Community; Participatory ethics; Teaching as doing theology; Narrative; Relational; Appreciative inquiry; Re-membering; Imagination; Writing; Metaphor; Teaching; Poverty; Hoping; "Selving"; Researcher involvement; Reflexivity.

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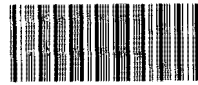
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*We live, but why do we live? I think: to become more human:
more capable of reading the world, more capable of playing it
in all ways. This does not mean nicer or more humanistic. I
would say: more faithful to what we are made from and to
what we can create.*

Hélène Cixous

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1.1	POVERTY AND SCHOOLING IN KRAAIFONTEIN	1
1.1.2	Bringing care into the public dialogue	5
1.2	AIMS OF THE RESEARCH	6
1.3	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	7
1.4	RESEARCH APPROACH	7
1.4.1	Position of the researcher	8
1.4.1.2	Reflexivity	10
1.4.1.3	Keeping a research journal	11
1.4.2	Participatory Action Research	12
1.4.2.1	Appreciative Inquiry	12
1.4.3	Theology “from below”	13
1.5	STEPS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS	15
1.5.1	Getting the research started	15
1.5.1.1	Inviting the facilitators: apprehension and enthusiasm	15
1.5.1.2	Introducing the research participants	16
1.5.1.3	Structuring the research	17
1.5.1.4	Establishing rules	19
1.5.2	Letters	19

1.5.2.1	Documenting the process	19
1.5.2.2	Creating space for reflection	20
1.5.3	Addendums	20
1.5.4	Creating relationships through letters and addendums	22
1.6	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	22
1.7	CONCLUSION	23

CHAPTER 2

MAKING VISIBLE THE RELATIONS BY WHICH WE ARE SHAPED

2.1	RELATIONALITY WITHIN A POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW	25
2.2	THE RELATIONAL AS PROCESS WITHIN THE RESEARCH	26
2.2.1	Introducing ourselves	26
2.2.2	Narrative	26
2.2.2.1	Structuring life through narrative	27
2.2.2.2	Narrative structure	27
2.2.2.3	“Thinking with” stories	29
2.2.2.4	Personal and cultural narratives in meaning-making	30
2.2.3	Appreciative Inquiry	33
2.2.3.1	An appreciative stance towards knowing	34
2.2.3.2	An appreciative stance towards action	36
2.2.3.3	An appreciative stance towards relating	38
2.2.3.3 a)	Facilitators relating to children	39
2.2.3.3 b)	Relating to one another	41

2.2.3.3.c)	Participation in relationships in the school community	42
2.2.3.3.d)	Re-membering	46
2.2.3.3 d) i.	Letters from the group to others – taking it back practices	49
2.2.4	Expressing and extending values	50
2.2.4.1	A problem-mailbox	50
2.2.4.2	Investigating relationships with nature	50
2.2.4.3	Connecting with colleagues about the research	51
2.3	CONCLUSION	53

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF PRAXIS IN KRAAIFONTEIN

3.1	WHY A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF PRAXIS?	54
3.2	SOLIDARITY WITH THE MARGINALISED	56
3.2.1	What does “marginalised” mean?	56
3.2.2	What is meant by “solidarity”?	58
3.2.2.1	The “concrete other”	59
3.2.2.2	Participatory ethics	62
3.2.3.3	The transformative power of solidarity	65
3.3	COMMUNITY	67
3.3.1	Mutuality	69
3.4	PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE	71
3.5	HUMANIZATION	74

3.6	DOING THEOLOGY	76
3.7	GOD AND THE WORLD: RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUALITY AND INCOMMENSURABILITY	78
3.8	CONCLUSION	81

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH AS IMAGINING AND RE-IMAGINING

4.1	IMAGINING “COUNTERSTORIES”	82
4.2	RE-IMAGINING OURSELVES	83
	4.2.1 My Camel-thorn tree	84
	4.2.2 The Oak	87
4.3	HOPING	91
	4.3.1 Being a “safeguard of other’s hope”	93
	4.3.2 Research as hope-inspiring practice	95
4.4	“SELVING”	96
4.5	METAPHYSICS OF THE IMAGINATION	98
4.6	BIBLICAL METAPHORS IN THE RESEARCH	99
4.7	“FREEING THE MORAL IMAGINATION”	101
4.8	IMAGINING FROM THE POSITION OF THE OTHER	102
	4.8.1 Folds in the landscape	103
4.9	CONCLUSION	104

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH

5.1	INTRODUCTION	105
5.2	DISCOVERING THE EMBERS: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN ACTION	105
5.3	PARTICIPATING IN THE CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE: THE ROLE OF NARRATIVE	106
5.3.1	Reflection and re-storying	109
5.3.2	Participation as reflection	109
5.3.3	Reflecting on participation as process	110
5.3.3.1	Reflecting on the value of conversation	110
5.3.3.2	Reflecting on the value of letters	111
5.3.3.2	a) Letters after the sessions	111
5.3.3.2	b) Letters from the group	112
5.4	REVISITING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESEARCH	114
5.4.1	Evaluating their participation in the process	115
5.4.2	Reflecting on meaning	116
5.4.2.1	Discovering and appreciating their values and relationships	116
5.4.2.2	Did the research live up to its ethical purpose?	119
5.5	REFLEXIVITY	120
5.5.1	Excerpts from my research journal	121
5.6	RESEARCHER INVOLVEMENT: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE	123
5.6.1	My commitment to the forming of relationships	124
5.6.1.1	Rapport	125
5.6.2	Researcher limitations	127

5.6.2.1	“What would you have done differently?”	127
5.7	REFLECTING ON POETRY AND POETS	128
5.8	THE READER AS CREATOR	129
5.9	REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	130
5.10	THE RESEARCH AS AN APPEAL TO DOING THEOLOGY: RECOMMENDATIONS	131
	Coda	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY		134

APPENDICES AND ADDENDUMS

CHAPTER 1

APPENDIX A: Information sheet for participating facilitators.

APPENDIX B: Consent form for participating facilitators.

CHAPTER 2

ADDENDUM A: “Footprints in the sand.”

ADDENDUM B: Reflecting on conversations with individual facilitators.

ADDENDUM C: Letter to Gawie’s mother.

ADDENDUM D: Letter to Jeanette’s mother.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 POVERTY AND SCHOOLING IN KRAAIFONTEIN

I am currently consulting as a pastoral counselor with children at a primary school in Kraaifontein in Cape Town's northern suburbs. The school is a predominantly white school with more than one thousand learners.

I have witnessed the influence of poverty, alcohol, sexual abuse, domestic violence and general neglect on the lives of the children in this community. Many breadwinners in this community have been retrenched and have difficulty finding work. To make ends meet, some households take in extended family members and friends, which often make for cramped and stressful living conditions.

In a chapter on the growing poverty amongst whites, Pieterse (2001:41) quotes a labour economist on the continued effects the Equity Employment Bill will have on whites, especially those in jobs in government institutions and parastatals:

Currently there are some 1,4 million whites in the labour market, filling about 23% of the total number of posts, whereas whites make up only 12% of the population. Hence there is a surplus of 11% of whites in the labour market. The declared aim of the Act is that worker numbers per post level should eventually reflect the population structure. Hence the surplus whites will have to be forced out of the labour market over the next five years or so.

Job losses, and the consequent spiral of poverty that is set in motion, will therefore be a reality for the community of Kraaifontein for the foreseeable future. Not only are children exposed to the effects of this spiralling poverty, but the home is also in many cases no longer a secure place where love and hope are practiced. Consequently, many of

Kraaifontein's children are turning to the school and its facilitators¹ as the source for physical, emotional and spiritual sustenance.

In her reflections on the effects of poverty on the lives of children, practical theologian, Pamela Couture (2000:37) stresses the importance of the school as "the most influential institution in the life of the child." She also refers to Garbarino and his colleagues who describe the potential role of the "school as refuge" in a violent community. The Kraaifontein community could be considered as a violent one where children are not valued and protected but exposed to considerable levels of violence and abuse. This invites the school in Kraaifontein especially, to be a "place of refuge."

Couture (2000:94) defines the effects of poverty in the lives of children in terms of material poverty as well as what she refers to as "the poverty of tenuous connections." It is especially regarding these "tenuous connections" that I see facilitators at the school as the practitioners of mercy. Couture (2000:69) quotes theologian Jon Sobrino who says: "...the works of mercy 'consists in making someone else's pain our very own and allowing that pain to move us to respond.'" These "[a]cts of mercy provide trust and hope through interpersonal presence"(69).

If a school becomes a place of refuge, facilitators' "interpersonal presence"- their living of values such as respectful relationships - provide children with "alternative ways of being" that can stand against violence, abuse and a sense of powerlessness.

In a conversation I had with FX, an experienced facilitator at the school, he told me: "In this school I have come to realise that one has to be more than a teacher. You sometimes have to be a mother and a father as well." These words rouse my curiosity as to the values that enabled him to make such a comment about his relationship with the children.

During a therapeutic session I had with 13-year old Susan, FX's name featured with four other facilitators' on her invitation list to support her with decisions that she had made.

¹ "Facilitators" : substitute word for "teachers" used in South African Education.

We were planning a celebration to mark the steps she had taken over many months to become the “good girl” she wanted to be. Susan was adamant that, apart from her great grandmother, no family member was to attend her celebration. However, her face lit up with delight as she named the facilitators whom she was inviting, and speculated upon what they would be able to tell about her transformation. Her sense was that while her achievements were not recognised by the members of her family, her achievements were valued and celebrated by some facilitators at the school.

I was struck by what I perceived: the values of caring as a mother and a father did not exist within the abstract confines of ideas or words. FX had made it into something so tangible in his relationship with Susan, that she was able to respond to it. A social constructionist epistemology focuses on relationship as the vehicle for meaning: “knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together” (Gergen 1985:270). Likewise, values do not exist “in people’s heads.” Values find expression in relationships. In Chapter 2 I will name and reflect on some of the relational processes through which values were expressed, in both the school and in our research. Through the research the research participants redefined their purpose as facilitators and what it means to be “humane”, and if and how their relationships with God played a part in the redefinition of both. Pamela Couture (2000: 50) comments :

Pastoral Theology has always asserted that we learn about God in the midst of humanness. As we encounter the human in the church’s godchildren, in their surroundings, and in ourselves, our primary learning, if we are open to it, is about the presence of God where God is not expected to be found.

In her work on the concept of Shalom in the South African context, Annaletta van Schalkwyk (1999:23) echoes Couture: “[m]y understanding of SHALOM is that it is an all-encompassing concept which includes salvation/liberation in all aspects of life. It thus implies that the whole of life is religious – and not only those matters that pertain to the “vertical” relation between an individual and God.” She links this idea to our interrelatedness as human beings: “SHALOM therefore happens in relation between

people” (van Schalkwyk 1999:31). Thus Shalom stands against the brokenness and tenuousness of human relations that are all too often a consequence of poverty. By working for justice and wholeness, facilitators become the agents of Shalom in the Kraaifontein community.

The term “spirituality” within feminist theology represents, what Isherwood and McEwan (1993: 149) refer to as, “imagining wholeness”. I have witnessed how FX’s practices of mothering and fathering speak of attempts at attaining Shalom and wholeness within relationships between children and adults. I have also witnessed the healing that takes place when these humane acts of facilitators stand against the alienation that Susan and many other children in Kraaifontein experience.

Educationalist Maxine Greene (1988:8), reflects on a caring relationship as that which stands against individualism. She states: “It is difficult not to be reminded of Paolo Freire writing of ‘humanization’ as our primary vocation – the struggle for ‘the overcoming of alienation’, for the affirmation of men and women as persons.” However, contemporary schooling, in employing interpretive thinking, often emphasizes quite the opposite from the holistic principles of humanization. Interpretive thinking views what exists around us as objective “reality” impervious to individual interpretation. This, in turn, contributes to dualistic thinking: us / them, private / public, which “...signifies a self-dependence rather than relationship; self-regarding and self-regulated behavior rather than involvement with others” (Greene 1988:7). Dualistic thinking greatly contributes to tenuousness of relationships, which may be even more disastrous for a school community such as Kraaifontein.

The difference between the holism of Shalom and the dualistic approach of interpretive thinking is made visible in the position the facilitator takes within his/her relationship with children: “Rather than posing dilemmas to students or presenting models of expertise, the caring teacher tries to look through students’ eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own way of making sense of the world” (Greene 1988 :120). Greene refers to this position as one of “connected teaching”, in

which “care” is practiced not from an expert, hierarchical position, but from a position of being alongside a child. Our research has described this position of “being alongside” as one of solidarity with the learners of Kraaifontein. Within a feminist theology of praxis, the theme of solidarity with the marginalised and its effects are discussed in Chapter 3. (See 3.2)

1.1.2 Bringing care into the public dialogue

However, this conscious positioning of solidarity with the marginalised has important ethical dimensions as well, because “[c]are without solidarity may strengthen the privatization or moralization of care, whereas solidarity acknowledges that people are differently situated. It brings care into the public dialogue and collective support” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7-8). In Kraaifontein, care is not done only by some but becomes a communal activity in which everybody plays a part.

During a first meeting with the principal of the school in January 2001, he spoke to me about the “moral decline” in the lives of Kraaifontein’s adults. He expressed his wish for a “spiritual transformation” of lives in the community. In a conversation I had with him in September 2001, he expressed the wish for the kind of teaching in his school that has “values” as its main focus. He said: “History and geography are of passing relevance. Children take values with them for life.”

He also referred to the parent community’s appreciation for the facilitators at the school. When I asked him what it was that they appreciated, he replied that parents often mention “the caring” of facilitators and their “walking of the extra mile with a child.” The latter may then include the facilitators’ attending to the material aspects of poverty that Couture (2000) referred to. Kraaifontein’s school also looks after the physical needs of their children. The school’s soup kitchen provides daily meals for more than fifty children. The remedial teacher at the school also told me of the “rainbow cereal” she used to hand out by the cupful to children in her class who came to school, hungry.

It seemed to me then, that many of this schools' facilitators were already practitioners of the "connected teaching" and "caring solidarity", that speak of Shalom. The research indeed uncovered and made visible the narratives and metaphors that speak of "connected teaching" and thereby contributed to bringing the care of Kraaifontein's facilitators into the public dialogue.

1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Paolo Freire (1999:77) remarks that there is not "educational practice in zero space - time - neutral in the sense of being committed only to preponderantly abstract, intangible ideas." Therefore Freire emphasizes the seeking of that which supports the values of facilitators as an essential part of educational inquiry: "What kind of educator would I be if I did not feel moved by the powerful impulse to seek, without lying, convincing arguments in defense of the dreams for which I struggle, in defense of the ' why ' of the hope with which I act as an educator?" (Freire 1999: 83). The research provided an opportunity for six of Kraaifontein's educators to seek and rediscover the arguments that support their dreams and hopes for teaching.

During the research, the word "humane" was often used by one of the facilitators to describe the "why" of the hope with which she acts. The research therefore became a search for a richer description of the word "humane", its theological roots and ethical implications. If indeed "humanization is our primary vocation" (Greene on Freire 1988:8), then the purpose of this research was for the individual facilitators to reflect on the values within their own lives that make humane acts possible.

In an article on facilitators themselves as a source in action research, Schubert and Schubert-Lopez (1997:206) refer to the need for educational research to be done from the perspective of the individual facilitator: "It was evident to us that our lives as teachers were interwoven with our lives as human beings, and that reflective teaching went hand-in-hand with reflectiveness about our personal living." In their comments on the meaning of the research, (see 5.4) the facilitators remarked that their reflections on personal

stories and the humane values these contained, had indeed made a meaningful difference to how they viewed their lives as humane professionals. These stories spoke of the engagement of facilitators with both the moral and natural worlds. Through their stories, facilitators were therefore invited to speak of themselves, their natural world and their school community in personal and connected terms. Some of the facilitators even described the reflective stance of the research as a process of rediscovering their hope and purpose for teaching in this specific school community.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I was guided to focus my research journey with facilitators on their commitment to values, using the following questions to guide our conversations:

- What kinds of values sustain the facilitators and how are these values supported?
- What kinds of values assist the facilitators in transforming a school community to caring solidarity?

1.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research was conducted as a postmodern, qualitative inquiry that did not focus on universal or “generalized laws of educational behavior” (Schubert & Schubert-Lopez 1997:209), but rather on the experiences and personal knowledge of its “gendered, historically situated, interacting” (Lincoln & Denzin 2000:1047) research participants. Our research therefore chose to focus on narratives of the personal relationships of Kraaifontein’s facilitators, in coming to an understanding of the role of values in their lives, rather than on universal principles of the role of values in teaching.

In our research, narrative therefore provided a vehicle for what educationalist Schubert (1991:207) describes as “teacher lore”: “the study of the knowledge, ideas, perspectives and understandings of teachers. In part it is inquiry into the beliefs, values and images

that guide teachers' work." He describes the narratives of teachers and dialogues with them as a neglected form of educational inquiry and proposes that in this form of research "teachers are not merely studied in an effort to learn about them; indeed, they are invited to share in the creation of knowledge" (:207).

Research that is done within a postmodern epistemology has personal involvement and connectedness as its focus: "the *values* [italics mine] of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers and civic *transformation* [italics mine]" (Lincoln & Denzin 2000:1052). With personal values such as care as its point of departure, our research as postmodern inquiry consequently focussed on the effects these values have in transforming a school community. It also focussed on the ethical implications when facilitators become "morally involved" in teaching.

Research within a postmodern paradigm did not only sanction the subject of personal values as a research topic in our research, but also validated the connectedness between the researcher and the research participants as an important aspect of our research process.

1. 4.1. Position of the Researcher

The epistemological base of qualitative research alters the relationship between researcher and respondent because it enquires about the world in "a radically different way than has been conventional" (Lincoln 1990:290). The research reality was not seen as being "out there", waiting to be "uncovered" by me as a neutral researcher. Instead, I preferred to be guided by social constructionist thinking that we were constituting reality through the concretising of our values in relationships and through our use of language.

The qualitative approach had important implications regarding my position as a researcher: I introduced myself in the same way as the facilitators did, by way of the personal metaphor of a frangipani tree with its roots in the red soil of the Northern Province, but presently flowering in the Cape sun (see 4.2 for the metaphors by which the

facilitators introduced themselves). I thereby refused “objectivity” or “neutrality” as my research perspective. My research perspective was also informed more especially by my training in drama and literature, my poetry and by my being a married mother of two teenage sons living in an affluent suburb. It was also informed by my connectedness to the school community in Kraaifontein.

Yet, as a researcher, I wanted to use the personal in what Heshusius (1994:15) refers to as “a participatory mode of consciousness.” Heshusius refers thus to the “merging” that takes place between researcher and researched when she says: “I had to completely and non-evaluatively observe my personal reactions and in that attentiveness, dissolve... them, which opened up a mode of access that was not there before” (Heshusius 1994:19). In the resulting kinship there is no longer any “privileged status”. Therefore, “[m]utuality and ethicality are at once embedded in a participatory mode of consciousness” (Heshusius 1994:19). By refusing the “role” of neutral observer, I preferred to “position” myself, as researcher, and my work in participatory and ethical terms. To participate therefore meant that I formed relationships with the research participants. See Chapter 5 (5.6) for a reflection on how the feminist egalitarian and a social constructionist approaches encouraged me as researcher to create relationships with the research participants: “To the extent that part of the ideology of feminism is to transform the competitive and exploitative relations amongst women into bonds of solidarity and mutuality, we expect assistance and reciprocated understanding to be part of the research/subject relation” (Reinharz 1992:264-265).

The dimension of mutuality in the research asked of me as researcher to make myself vulnerable by sharing my emotions in the same way that the facilitators did. Within a climate of shared risk, exploitation became impossible and rapport was created.

My position as researcher - part of the research process and not outside of it - also dictated that I would not merely participate in the research, but would make myself ethically accountable for the research and its effect on the lives of the six facilitators taking part. See also Chapter 5 (5.6), for how a feminist approach to participatory

research influenced me in taking specific actions that created a spirit of egalitarianism in the research.

1.4.1.2 Reflexivity

As a consequence of the fact that the personal can never be neutral or value-free (Christians 2002), an integral aspect of the involvement of the researcher in the action research process was one of reflexivity:

The process of non-reflexive research is amenable to 'lying' because...we manipulate the evidence to fit with our preferred way of viewing the world and usually fail to acknowledge that this has happened. Reflexivity can provide an internal audit to this process in that it requires us to 'own up' to what we know of our constitutiveness in the knowledge construction process.

(Hall 1996:36)

For instance, because I am not working as a facilitator in the school, total power sharing in the research process as proposed by Bishop (1996:168), was not possible. I brought to the research my experiences of the facilitators of the school through the counselling that I have been doing for a year, but another part of me looked through outsider's eyes. This impacted on the way in which I co-conducted the research with the facilitators.

In an article entitled "On tending broken dreams", Lous Heshusius (1996:128-135) speaks of the split between other and self that resulted from positive dogmas. She quotes Baldwin on the powerful efforts to regain self-other unity, as those that will "illuminate the world":

The question which one asks oneself begins, at last, to illuminate the world, and becomes one's key to the experience of others. One can only face in others what one can face in oneself. On this confrontation depends the measure of our wisdom and compassion.

(quoted by Heshusius 1996:133)

The self-other unity that Heshusius refers to, creates a participatory consciousness (Heshusius 1994) in which traditional boundaries, such as those between the researcher and the research participants, may be dissolved. See also Chapter 3 (3.2.2.2) and Chapter 5 (5.7.1.1) for the ethical dimensions of this unity and the ways in which it featured in the research.

1.4.1.3 Keeping a research journal

Our research invited self-reflexivity in all of us during and in between sessions. However, to make transparent the process of facing myself that Baldwin refers to, I made use of a research journal in which I as author could “engage in a dialogue with those studied” (Lincoln & Denzin 2000:1051). The research journal therefore became a document of my evolving relationship with the both the facilitators and the authors of the various books and articles I consulted. Through a research journal I also documented my journey with ideas that emerged during the research and how these altered my thinking and practices. Some of these ideas then led me to question myself with regards to the ways in which I open up instead of close down opportunities for discussion in the group. By reflecting on what was discussed in the group, I therefore used the research journal as a way of facing my own dilemmas. Such a “facing oneself” provided me with new perspectives on the ethical responsibility of my work as a researcher and as pastoral counselor (see 5.6.2.1 for excerpts from my research journal, documenting this process of reflexivity).

The qualitative approach to research and the value it places on self-reflexivity has therefore created space for me as researcher to fit pieces of my own life together in new ways and into “counter-stories” (see also 5.7). Like some of the facilitators taking part in the research, I too, was changed by the new truths these counter-stories told.

The research journal therefore became an integral part of research as a relational, reflexive and transformative process.

1.4.2 Participatory Action Research

Research that is done from the practical imperative of the Kantian ethical position - whereby every man is treated as an end in himself and never as a means only - (Lincoln 1990: 292) is, by definition, participatory in nature. Research within such a paradigm is not done on people, but rather by them and with them (McTaggart 1997a:29). Therefore, Participatory Action Research fits with the ways in which I believed research to be useful as a tool for participants to reflect upon, inform, re-story and transform their own lives.

In this primary school the group of facilitators became the researchers of their own lives. This had an impact on all facets of the research: “Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership: responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice” (McTaggart 1997c:6). In practical terms this meant that the facilitators at the school determined the direction of the research, which was guided by their appraisal of what they consider to be useful: “...the most meaningful image of action research derived from our teaching is a continuous, conscious attempt to seek increased meaning and direction in our lives with students, and in our own personal lives” (Schubert & Schubert-Lopez 1997:206).

1.4.2.1 Appreciative Inquiry

One of the most meaningful participatory approaches in our research has been that of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987) is a holistic form of inquiry that refers to a specific collective research perspective, namely one “that is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes” (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987:25). Our research focussed on discovering and understanding the values and forces involved in sustaining the facilitators.

Working for World Vision within poor rural communities in Tanzania, Dirk Booy and Sarone Ole Sena (1999:40) describe their experiences of the appreciative inquiry

approach as follows: “Appreciative Inquiry processes build the capacity of communities on the foundation of what works; what empowers, what gives energy, joy, happiness, motivation, hope and inspiration.” This stems from what they refer to as the heliotropic effect: “In biology this refers to plants’ natural tendency to turn toward the light. In social systems the heliotropic effect refers to the natural affinity communities have toward those things that give them energy and joy” (Booy & Sena 1999: 41).

We also discussed ways in which these values and forces can be fostered within their relationships with the school community. The appreciative stance that was taken in the research therefore had not only values as object, but also the actions and relations of the facilitators. Appreciative Inquiry takes place within relationship, that of the one who appreciates and the one who is appreciated. In Chapter 2 - that deals with the relations by which we are shaped - I will describe the practical ways in which we took an appreciative stance. However, for the purpose of this chapter, it is significant to note that as a researcher, I was not the sole appreciative inquirer, but that all six facilitators participated with me in taking an appreciative stance towards themselves and others.

Participatory action research is concerned with people changing themselves and their circumstances (McTaggart 1997c:7). This concern for action is also grounded in contextual theology where the emphasis is on doing theology (Bosch 1991:424).

1.4.3 Theology “from below”

To recognise the local knowledges and values of people as point of departure in the search for increased meaning, also finds its equivalent in theological terms in Feminist Theology: “How we experience our reality must dictate our theology” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993: 71).

Bosch (1991:424) refers to the “doing of theology” as acts that are not confined to the practices of the church, but are done “from below” (Bosch 1991:423). I believe Bosch’s “below” refers to the contexts in which people make meaning of their lives, like the corridors and classrooms of this primary school in Kraaifontein: “Where people are

experiencing and working for justice, freedom, community, reconciliation, unity and truth in a spirit of love and selflessness, we may dare to see God at work” (Bosch 1991:430-1).

Theology therefore moves into the realm of praxis in the sense that we as individuals and as community are empowered to continually participate in working towards Shalom instead of seeing theology as a set of fixed rules to be passively adhered to: “Religion is not about standing still, repeating established ‘truths’, being limited by accepted interpretations; religion is about the communion of community in the present, the interrelatedness of everybody, connecting and networking, carrying and caring” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993: 61).

If action becomes the focus for research and for theology alike, it demands imagination of us as its practitioners, especially in transforming a community. The theologian, Walter Brueggemann (1993) puts forward the question: “How do people change?” He then goes on to provide an answer that lies in a postmodern worldview in which reality is continually being shaped:

People do not change, or change much, because of doctrinal argument or sheer cognitive appeal....People do not change, or change much, because of moral appeal....[P]eople in fact change by the offer of new models, images and pictures of how the pieces of life fit together - models, images and pictures that characteristically have the particularity of narrative to carry them. Transformation is the slow, steady process of inviting each other into a counterstory about God, world, neighbor, and self.

(Brueggemann 1993:24-25)

How did we construct these counterstories during the research? I believe counterstories developed during this research project out of experiences not previously told, from stories in which “pieces of life fit together” in new and transformative ways for the facilitators and the school community of Kraaifontein. Chapters two to four will deal with the form and content of the counterstories that emerged in the research.

In this Chapter I will focus on the research process itself to illustrate how the facilitators participated in creating the structure and direction of the research.

1.5 STEPS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Steps refer to all the practices that focus on co-construction in the meaning-making process of research.

1.5.1 Getting the research started

1.5.1.1 Inviting the facilitators: apprehension and enthusiasm.

The principal of the school had no objections to me conducting the research at the school. He saw the opportunity for some members of staff to reflect on their work and values as a potentially enriching experience for them and for the school community. Upon his invitation, I addressed all the facilitators of the school one morning and explained what the research would require in terms of their time and involvement. I also explained the title of the research: it was the comment, made many months before by FX, a facilitator in this school, that: “in this school I have come to realise that one has to be a mother and a father as well” that had stuck with me and had made me curious as to the values that made those words possible.

After my talk, two facilitators volunteered to take part and took the information sheet. (for information sheet, see Appendix A at the end of the dissertation). The first one who was to join the research was FX. Toekie approached me and said that she was enthusiastic about joining the research, but was afraid that the fact that she was “only a temporary facilitator at this school” might be an excluding factor. A modernist approach might have favoured a homogenous group. A postmodernist approach, on the other hand, relishes difference. I told her that it would be wonderful if she could join the research. Toekie’s position as a “temporary” facilitator in fact added certain “outsider” perspectives to some of our conversations (see 5.3). Had I gone with certain criteria or “profiles” in my

approach to the research participants, the process would also have greatly missed out on Toekie's wisdom and warmth.

Some facilitators expressed interest, but said that they did not have the time. Lizél said that she was willing to join if the research took part during school hours. A week passed. Gawie, the deputy headmaster, then told me that he and two of his colleagues, Jeanette and Aubrey, who form part of the same lift club, would join the research.

In a meeting, the principal together with Gawie, allocated time for the research during school hours on Fridays when singing took place in the school hall, so that classes would not be disrupted. This meant that Lizél would be able to join the group. The principal told me that some facilitators expressed interest in the research but thought that it would be "too personal" and therefore decided against it (see also excerpts from research journal in 5.6.2.1). He advised me to reconsider taking a group, but rather to have one on one conversations with interested facilitators. I then told him that our group already comprised six facilitators and that I preferred to continue with the research in a group, because of the learning that takes place when stories are shared. He understood and said that although his commitments prevented him from joining the research, he would like to do so at some stage. I kept this in mind and the group invited the principal to our seventh session.

I always had the sense that the principal was supportive of the research. His verbal and practical support certainly helped in fostering a relaxed and informal relationship between the facilitators and myself.

1.5.1.2 Introducing the research participants.

The research group thus consisted of three women and three men. The women were Lizél, Toekie and Jeanette. The men were Aubrey, Gawie and FX. Jeanette is a grade two facilitator, Lizél is a grade four facilitator, Toekie teaches grade fives, Aubrey and Gawie are grade six facilitators and FX teaches grade sevens. Gawie is also the deputy principal of the school. All of the research participants were Afrikaans speaking. I translated the conversations, excerpts from letters and poems.

The facilitators all signed a consent form (see Appendix B) in which they stated that they understood the purpose and conditions of the research and that they were willing to join. They handed these consent forms to me before the start of our first session.

The facilitators chose not to make use of pseudonyms. I suggested that they had the right to revise their position regarding pseudonyms upon reading the final drafts of the research chapters. They all stayed with their original decision to use their own names.

The facilitators represented a wealth of different experiences in teaching: Lizél has been teaching at the school for the full twenty eight years of her teaching career, Jeanette has worked at this school for all of the three years since graduating from college; FX has been a facilitator for thirty four years, six being at this primary school; Toekie has twenty years of teaching experience and has been working at this school as a replacement facilitator for the past eighteen months; Gawie has worked at this school for eight of his fourteen years in teaching; and Aubrey has been in teaching for fifteen years, two being at this school in Kraaifontein.

1.5.1.3 Structuring the research

During our first meeting together, the six facilitators handed me their signed consent forms. They agreed that we would meet fortnightly and that the sessions would be more or less sixty minutes in duration. At the time, I thought that six sessions would be sufficient to complete the research. However, the third session turned out to be shorter than sixty minutes due to the fact that it our session coincided with the National Women's day of Prayer which involved some of the facilitators. We felt that we needed more time to explore some of the themes raised. After the fourth session, the facilitators proposed that we schedule the session for the following Monday – after school hours. Their decision spoke to me of their commitment to the research in that they were prepared to give of their “free time” for it.

By the seventh session, I had read Bronwyn Davies' book on body/landscape relations (Davies [sa]b). Because we had introduced ourselves in the first session by way of a landscape metaphor, I was inspired by her work to not only speak about a personal metaphor, but also to write about it. I therefore asked the group if they would be interested in revisiting their original metaphor and, if they chose to do so, to write about their connection with their specific metaphors (see 4.2). The research thereby evolved into an eighth session, during which the facilitators shared their revisiting of their original metaphors with the group.

As part of the participatory ethics in which I tried to conduct the research, I invited the facilitators to reflect on the research process itself, by way of an evaluation sheet (see 5.3.2 – 5.4.2).

During the last sessions of the research, the issue was raised regarding whether, and if so, how to take the research to the other colleagues in the school. Bushe (1995:5) refers to “amplification” as the process whereby the understandings arrived at during appreciative inquiry are taken further within an organisation.

How the amplification of our research should be done was negotiated with the research participants. The facilitators were apprehensive in sharing with outsiders to the process some of the narratives which developed within the context of confidentiality within the sessions. They decided against compiling a book of stories and ideas about being facilitators in a poor community. However, the facilitators felt that some of their colleagues were curious about the research and that some feedback to them was needed.

After discussions with my supervisor, I formulated a draft document to discuss with colleagues, in which I explained the research process and touched upon some of the themes in it, and invited comments. The draft document was approved by the research participants. I shared this development with the principal, who proposed that I use the next “teacher-development session” at the school to talk about the research to all the facilitators at the school, together with distributing the document. I told the principal that

I would discuss it with the group, which I did during our “closing ceremony”. They thought it would be a good idea to share the research in written form, but supported by some oral explanation (see 2.6.3).

For the six research participants and myself the research concluded in a ceremony in which we had tea and cake. Combs and Freedman (1990:40) refers to the function of a ceremony to metaphorically highlight what Bateson refers to as connectedness.

According to Combs and Freedman (:208) ceremonies generally “serve two purposes – to validate an occurrence and to promote change.” Our ceremony spontaneously took the form of an extended reflection on the research. It also provided an opportunity for us to talk about the impact that the stories or metaphors of others had on us personally.

1.5.1.4 Establishing rules

Following Silvester’s (1997:235) procedure in starting group discussions, I asked the facilitators if there were any rules that they would like the group to observe that would help them to be able to share stories. Gawie said that we should keep the purpose of the sessions in mind. Aubrey named confidentiality as an important principle. Toekie and Lizél said that it was important to listen and feel comfortable in not making a contribution, when you don’t feel like doing so. Toekie and Lizél also said that it was important for us not to talk at the same time, but to afford each member the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas.

1.5.2 Letters

1.5.2.1 Documenting the process

With the permission of the facilitators, I recorded the conversations during our sessions on mini-disc, which enabled me to give verbatim accounts of the sessions. After each session, the individual members received their copy of a letter, containing a narrative summary of the session. These letters were sent first to my supervisor, Dr. Elmarie Kotzé, for supervision and comments. As our sessions took place on a Friday, the letters were referred to as the Friday Letters.

In these letters, I also posed questions to individual facilitators as well as to the group about what was discussed in our session. Some questions led to discussions during the following sessions, and these questions determined the course the research took. We took time during each session to reflect upon the letter of the previous session. FX especially, often made notes on the letters regarding some of the questions I had asked. He carried the letters with him to the next session and often referred back to comments made in previous sessions.

On one level, the letters therefore contributed to “ ‘rescuing the said from the saying of it’ the ‘ told from the telling of it’ ”(White 2000:6), by documenting what was said. The conversations, being ephemeral in nature, were therefore supported by the concreteness of the letters. Through letter writing the options we had in developing our conversation in one direction or another, also became documented.

Participatory action research implied that as a researcher, I would be accountable to the facilitators. Therefore the letters also served as a reflexive practice (Hall 1996:41) in which I made transparent my own ideas and feelings around certain conversations and themes.

1.5.2.2 Creating space for reflection

The letters created space for me to reflect on the effect the stories, metaphors and ideas of previous sessions had on me personally, and as a researcher. Thus, letter writing became instrumental in my continuously evolving relationship with the facilitators, but it also became a practice to be accountable as well as being transparent about the process (see also 5.3.3.2 for the facilitators’ own reflections on the value of letters in the research).

1.5.3 Addendums

Conversations continued with some facilitators in between sessions on days that I consulted with children and their families at the school. With the permission of the

facilitators, our conversations were then recorded in an addendum. Like the letters, the addendums were sent via e-mail to my supervisor for supervision before being distributed to the research participants.

I believed the addendum would document not only what was said but would also reflect the urgency I felt in continuing some conversations. The creation of an addendum included an ethical dimension – namely, that I wanted to include the rest of the research participants into the conversations that I had had outside of the prescribed time for research conversations. Through this practice, I believe the ethic of participation was honoured.

To describe some of the participation in meaning making that took place on yet another level between the content of letters, the facilitators, my supervisor and her input and my ideas, I would like to describe the reflections on our third session:

Relating to disciplining practices that were discussed during our third session and that were reflected in my subsequent letter, Dr. Kotze faxed me a chapter on the theme of power and subjection from Bronwyn Davies and Cath Laws on Poststructuralist theory in practice: Working with “behaviorally disturbed” children. They (Davies & Laws 1999:155) quote Burman who says: “[A] developmental/categorizing psychology fulfilled the middle-class desire to classify that which it did not understand and to bring it under surveillance in an attempt to control it.”

I made photocopies of this chapter and distributed it, as part of an addendum to our third session, amongst the six facilitators for their comments. In the following session, they did not comment on Davies’ work directly. In my addendum I also wrote: “The fax reminded me of the role the perception of facilitators play in the enforcement of rules. I also thought what you told about the effect of poverty and neglect on the lives of children in Kraaifontein and that made me wonder about your ideas about what is regarded as “correct” within a school community.” Then I told the facilitators about the principal’s involvement with a boy who had developed severe problems with aggression that were

having a disruptive effect on his class and how the principal's perception and approach opened the doors for healing in this boy's life (see 3.2.3.3). Before sharing his story with the group, I obtained permission from the principal to do so.

I closed the addendum by asking if the ideas of Bronwyn Davies and the principal's story made a difference to the way in which the facilitators viewed the power that their judgement has.

In our seventh session, however, the principal's story resurfaced. This time Lizél spoke of the terrible effects of the power of judgement when used as a form of control over children. She contrasted the handling of the sexually abused boy by Kraaifontein's principal to the route of control that another principal chose, with tragic results (see 2.3.3.3). In this way, themes did not remain isolated in separate letters or addendums but were woven into the research as a meaning-making process.

1.5.4 Creating relationships through letters and addendums

Letters and addendums therefore became more than documents "in black and white" reflecting what was said. The above-mentioned example illustrates how they also became tools for creating a multiplicity of relations between the facilitators of the school, myself as researcher, my supervisor, the ideas of Bronwyn Davies and the stories of two school principals. When I first posed the research question regarding what values assist the facilitators in transforming a school community towards caring solidarity, I could never have envisaged how the multiplicity of relations brought forth by the letters and addendums could make those values visible - but they did.

1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The personal and participatory involvement of research participants within the qualitative paradigm consequently required the application of a new research ethics.

In a chapter on the ethics of qualitative research, Yvonna Lincoln (1990) proposes a relationship between self and other based on the Kantian ethical principle that “is judged by whether one would wish the principle guiding his or her own actions to become law that would guide the actions of others toward him or her” (Lincoln 1990:291). This principle is found in the social ethics that determine that one should do unto others as one would wish them to do unto yourself. As a consequence, the individual has to take an ethical and political stand in the living of his or her values, and therefore the “personal...becomes the standard for the professional and the public alike” (Lincoln 1990:292). The theme of personal involvement is taken further in a discussion on the generalised versus the concrete other in 3.2.2.1.

This ethical principle also underlies the process thought of feminist theology: namely, that truth can only be discovered through the experience of its meaning and effect in the lives of people, and not through official declarations of people in powerful positions (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:60-61). I believe that this ethical principle had profound implications for research with facilitators who work within a school and its power structures, in that it asked of the facilitators to reflect on their values as having real ethical and political effects.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This research process has challenged me to become part of the transformation of a school community. In the following chapters I wish to attend to the complementary facets of the research process.

In Chapter 2, entitled “Making visible the relations by which we are shaped”, I have focussed on values as part of a relational, social constructionist epistemology. Also discussed are the ways in which the relational featured in the different processes of the research.

Chapter 3 is entitled “A Feminist theology of praxis in Kraaifontein.” This chapter deals with the concretisation of values in the school community and is linked with the themes of a feminist theology of praxis and its ethics.

Chapter 4 entitled “Research as imaging and re-imagining” reflected on poststructuralist theory and practice in the research – more specifically on how the power of imagination and language offered the facilitators possibilities for new descriptions of themselves and their work in Kraaifontein.

In Chapter 5, I invited the facilitators to join me in reflecting on our research together, regarding the research’s meaning for their lives and mine and for the lives of others in the school community.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING VISIBLE THE RELATIONS BY WHICH WE ARE SHAPED

2.1 RELATIONALITY WITHIN A POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In this chapter I would like to weave the meaningful threads of the social constructionist discourse and its effect on both the research process and the content of the research. As part of a postmodern paradigm, a social constructionist discourse makes it possible for us to view the “self” not as a way of understanding through observation or analysis, but rather, as Kenneth Gergen (1990:165) proposes:

that we press toward a metaphor of ‘self as relationship’. By this I mean that we reconsider all that was previously attributed to single individuals as possessions of persons in relationships. We take matters of rationality, experience, self-esteem, desire for appreciation....out of the heads of individuals, and we view them as properties of relational process.

The title of the research speaks of the relationship between the values of facilitators and the transformation which these values bring about in a school community. We could have studied both as separate entities. However, we chose to focus on “the rituals of interchange” (Gergen 1990:166) between them and the ways in which the community is shaped. This also leads to redefining the idea of “self” of the individual facilitators. Upon ending the research, I was curious as to whether the research was indeed experienced by the research participants as a social constructionist process. I therefore invited the facilitators to reflect on if and how their ideas of self have been redefined through the research (See Chapter five 5.3.3 – 5.4.2 for the facilitators’ reflections).

Within a social constructionist paradigm, language is seen as a tool by which reality is shaped, rather than merely a linguistic system that refers to and describes a “real” world. In conjunction with the view of language as being dynamic, the local knowledge of

people being carried in narrative is also valued within a social constructionist epistemology. Relationality, therefore, also implies the speaking of and listening to language and narrative. If I wanted to conduct the research within a social constructionist epistemology, it meant that I needed facilitators working in Kraaifontein who were willing to share their language and narratives with me and one another. In this chapter, I will discuss the centrality of language and narrative to make relationships visible. In this chapter I also document the appreciative stance we took in our research towards those relationships and the values they embody.

By choosing the relational as a shaping force of the research, I will indicate how it became visible through different processes of the research.

2.2 THE RELATIONAL AS PROCESS WITHIN THE RESEARCH

2.2.1 Introducing ourselves

I will discuss the metaphors by which the research participants chose to introduce themselves as facilitators in chapter 4. However, some of these personal metaphors became linked to narratives about the kind of values that sustain the facilitators. These will be discussed in this chapter.

2.2.2 Narrative

The research focus was the description of the values that sustain and assist the facilitators in transforming a school community. Although the facilitators named some of the values that sustain them, the personal way in which each facilitator lives the values and their significance to the school community, became visible through the telling and re-telling of narratives. We discovered how ordinary narratives often contained extraordinary descriptions of the transformative power of values. Michael White (2000) quotes David Malouf on these moments as containing the “little sacraments of daily existence.” White (2000:145) explains that:

[t]he word *sacrament* invokes mystery. And it evokes a sense of the sacred significance of the little events of people's lives; ...those little events that are so often neglected, but that might come to be regarded with reverence, and at times with awe. These little sacraments are those events that have everything to do with the maintenance of a life, with the continuity of a life, often in the face of circumstances that would otherwise deny this.

The narratives that are retold in the following chapters, speak of many such sacraments that maintain life for Kraaifontein's children in the face of despair.

2.2.2.1 Structuring life through narrative

Because we select certain stories to tell and select certain values and events which support these to construct our stories, we can say that stories become the way in which we construct the meaning of our lives. To Michael White (1991:28) "the narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories - that these stories are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined, effects and that these stories provide the structure of life." See Chapter 5 for the facilitators' own reflections on the "real effects" that the sharing of stories in the research had on their lives.

2.2.2.2 Narrative structure

Within narrative therapy, a story is seen as consisting of events, linked in sequence, across time and according to a plot (Morgan 2000:5). White (1991:28) quotes Bruner on the duality of "landscapes" present in our narratives; namely "landscape of action" and "landscape of identity". "Landscape of action" refers to the "what happened" part of stories. These include the characters, events, sequence and time elements of the narration. "Landscape of identity" refers to the plot or meaning of the story. It also refers to the reflection by which meaning is made in narrative. Working with the practices of narrative therapy in the research, I asked "landscape of action" and/or "landscape of identity" type questions to get richer descriptions of a story.

Because our research had the values of the facilitators as its main focus, some stories developed a plot around a specific value. I was also interested in the actions taken by someone and how those support the plot. Some actions or story details may have been overlooked for inclusion into the story, yet these sometimes added new meanings to it. Sometimes a value was identified and then a “landscape of action” question would initiate a story.

Early on in the research, the facilitators introduced the theme of learning from one another as facilitators. The word “cross-pollination” was used to describe the interaction between colleagues in the school. Lizél told a story about an incident that she regards as a ‘big compliment’. A colleague who had to conduct the Scripture reading in the school hall, told Lizél how she questioned herself regarding the appropriate dressing for the occasion when she asked the following: ‘How would Lizél have dressed?’ whereupon she went and changed her clothes. I then put a “landscape of identity” question to Lizél: “Does dressing have to do with respect, or with something else?” Lizél replied that she thought dressing spoke of respect and that it meant a lot to her to know that she could teach the colleague something about respect. Through the question, the compliment became more richly described for the value it carried. In my research question I wanted to know how the values of the facilitators are supported. If respect as a value is acted upon by a colleague in such a way as Lizél has described, it supports that value. The questioning therefore brought forth how the story is both a compliment and supportive of the value of respect.

In my letter after the session, I elaborated on Lizél’s story with more landscape of identity questioning: *“Something that has stayed with me since you told your story Lizél, is the fact that your colleague told you what difference your example had made to her. I wonder what it would have been like if she had kept quiet? What effect do you think our giving back to others has on ourselves and on them?”* (excerpt letter 2) The “giving back” or “making appreciation visible” theme was thereby introduced to the research.

Educational researchers, Clandinin and Connelly, (1991:275) propose that "...[o]ne of the main functions of research from a narrativist point of view is to foster reflection and restorying on the part of participants." Lizél's story illustrates how a narrative approach fostered the reflection and restorying of the values of respect, "cross pollination" and the making visible of appreciation.

2.2.2.3 "Thinking with" stories

Frank (1995:17-18) explains how telling one's story reflects the core of the postmodern, in that it refuses the essential truths of modernity, but rather shapes the self through the telling and affects the listener in the witnessing of the story:

Storytelling is for an other just as much as it is for oneself ... the teller offers herself as guide to the other's self-formation. The other's receipt of that guidance not only recognizes but values the teller. The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story for the other.

Within a postmodern paradigm, grand narratives of objective truth make way for personal narratives as a vehicle for transmitting relational values and knowledge. However, personal narratives remain limited in their purpose if we only tell them to ourselves. Within a postmodern world, narratives influence both the ones who shape it and those who receive it in the interaction and interpretation that takes place between them. Consequently: "there is no longer a dichotomy between explanation and understanding, but the two aspects belong together in interaction (dialectic). The text does not refer the reader to a meaning "behind" the text that needs to be understood...but rather to an explanation of the author's way of being in this world" (Herholdt 1998a:456).

In order to be influenced by the narratives of others, Frank (1995) uses the advice of an anthropologist to think with stories and not about them so that the stories can affect the listener. So storytelling is simultaneously an act of self-formation and the creation of space for others to enter. Within participatory action research, the researcher does not

stand apart from the research, but becomes part of it – also in the way that our thinking with stories affects us.

During our sixth session, Aubrey told a story he read of someone who went to a funeral. Being unable to express his sympathy in words for those attending, he came to the service and went up to the bereaved family members. He did not speak, but started cleaning their shoes. The family members afterwards said that his simple act meant a lot to them.

After Aubrey told his story to the group there was silence. I thought about the landscape of action in Aubrey's story and what it signified and said to the group that it made me think about how responding to others means opening ourselves to think in new ways about the other and his/her needs. The shoe-polisher, who knew the family well, realised that his actions would convey more about his sense of solidarity with them, than words of sympathy could. Gawie added: "We must have an agenda (when we respond to the needs of the other) but it should be an open one...." Thus the way both Gawie and I received Aubrey's story simultaneously fostered an awareness of the symbolic values of actions and a sense of needing to have an "open agenda" in our relations with others. Aubrey's story, and our response to it, resonates with Frank's (1995:22) statement: "The truth of stories is not only what was experienced, but equally what becomes experience in the telling and its reception."

Reinharz (1992) notes that one of the consequences of feminist research is that the researcher herself is also changed by the research. The sharing of stories has thus influenced both myself as the researcher as well as the research participants (See Chapter 5, 5.3 & 5.3.3.1 for reflections on how the research participants and I have been influenced by our "thinking with" stories told during the research).

2.2.2.4 Personal and cultural narratives in meaning-making

Within a social constructionist paradigm, meaning does not exist objectively, outside of people's experience, but is made through the narration of people's personal experience

and how they choose to link with other narratives: “People make sense of their lives through stories, both the cultural narratives they are born into and the personal narratives they construct in relation to the cultural narratives” (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). The overlay between personal and cultural narratives in our quest for meaning spoke through Jeanette’s revisiting of the metaphor of the sea by which she introduced herself in the first session. For Jeanette, the metaphor opened up cultural and mythical narratives by which she chose to then re-describe the value of love as a relational force in her life:

“The sea is a source of enchantment to me. I love sitting on a rock or dune, simply watching the sea. I can watch the coming and going of the waves for hours. It makes me think of God’s love that washes over us every day, without stopping.

My metaphor of the sea has been intensified in the course of the research. I realise my dependence on God. I would like to be something of what Jesus was, to Kraaifontein’s children. I would like to extend the image of the ocean by including the footsteps in the sand. I enjoy walking on the beach and often look at the footprints left behind....As a child we/I often went for our December holidays to the Natal south coast. After an enjoyable morning on the beach, the sand was often terribly hot when we had to walk back home. Then our family used to make a queue; my father walked first, then mother, then my sister and then me. We all walked in my father’s footsteps – then the sand would not be so hot by the time I had to step on it. My father was a wonderful father figure to me, in helping me to understand the concept of God our father. Later, when I became older, the poem, “Footprints in the sand”, meant a lot to me (for poem, see Addendum A at the end of the dissertation). Jeanette added: “Therefore, I will sometimes pray: ‘God, at this time I am unable to walk. Please carry me.’ As I started thinking about the footprints in the sand and what it means to me being a facilitator in Kraaifontein, I came upon this story:

On his mothers footsteps

It was a busy day in our house in Costa Mesa, California. Actually it was busy like this

every day with ten children, and one on its way. But on this specific day I found it hard to complete even the most basic routine jobs – all because of one little boy.

Len, who was three at the time, was right on my heels, no matter where I went. Every time I had to stop and do something and turn around, I fell over him. Several times I proposed with great patience, enjoyable things to do that would keep him occupied: Why don't you go and play on the swing? I would ask him.

But then he only smiled innocently and said: No thank you mommy, I'd rather be with you. And then he would continue following me.

After stepping on his toes for the fifth time, I started getting impatient and insisted that he go outside and play with the other children. When I asked him why he hung around me, he looked up at me with his lovely green eyes and said: See mommy, at school the lady said that we must walk on Jesus' footsteps. But I cannot see him, so I am walking on yours...(Davida Dalton, as told to JoEllen Johnson in Canfield et al.1999:78).

After reading these stories, Jeanette linked it with living the value of love in Kraaifontein: “*May I be to the children in my class, a footprint on which they can step, a footprint they they can follow, a footprint that will lead them to the love of Jesus, a footprint that mother and father do not always leave for them...May I be a footprint for Jesus in Kraaifontein.*” (excerpt letter 8)

Jeanette's interweaving narratives link with feminist theologian, Elaine Graham's (1996:113) description of narrative as resource for pastoral theology: “The pastoral function of telling stories, whether understood as a generic human story or the particular revelation of the Christian Story, defines the shape of the community and helps locate individual meaning and identity; but it also implies certain kinds of value-commitments concerning the nature of truth and knowledge.”

Jeanette's choice of narratives included not only a description of her childhood memory of her relationship with her own father, the mythical story of a fatherly God carrying the weary, but also of a mother who became, for a three year old, the embodiment of Jesus. By selecting these narratives, Jeanette richly describes God as a relational force in her life in the image of the strong male but also as a mother doing housework.

Through Jeanette's writing and incorporation of cultural narratives, the value of love has therefore been described not only in heroic patriarchal terms, but also in nurturing female terms. Jeanette's words, "may I be a footprint...", is simultaneously, a reference to the multiple meanings contained in these narratives, and the expression of a personally forged truth to live the value of love in Kraaifontein. Therefore, as narratives are linked, an important ethical dimension emerges: "Stories can carry the ethical wisdom of people across generations and different cultures in a way quite different from logical and rational organised normative systems. I experience that stories embodying struggles of doing what is right, enable people to participate in finding or making choices about ethical ways of being" (Kotzé 2002:20).

2.2.3 Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is "a new form of action research" (Bushe 1995:1) and organizational study, that takes its epistemological cues from the social constructionist view that "...treats social and psychological reality as a product of the moment, open to continuous reconstruction....Socio-rationalists argue that the theories we hold, our beliefs about social systems, have a powerful effect on the nature of social 'reality'. Not only do we see what we believe, but the very act of believing it creates it" (Bushe 1995:1). For instance: my questions regarding "cross pollination" amongst facilitators in the school, elicited Lizél's story in which a colleague took an appreciative stance towards her. Taking an appreciative stance towards Lizél, her colleague and their interactions then created new beliefs about the importance of acknowledging the contributions others make to our lives.

Lizél's story was an "ordinary" one about dressing appropriately for school. Yet it is exactly in that it inquires about the "ordinary magic" of people's lives, that appreciative inquiry as action research is different from other forms of action research that has problem-solving as its objective: "... the central conviction of life as a mystery creates for us a distinctly different relationship to the world than the conviction of life as a problem to be solved..." (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987:28).

Within organisational life, Srivastva, Cooperrider and Fry (1990:30-33) direct their appreciative inquiry to three areas, namely: knowing, action and relating. I will show how these areas also became our attention of focus in the research into the organisational life of this school.

2.2.3.1 An appreciative stance towards knowing

During our fourth session Gawie made a drawing of a brain that zips open with cognitive knowledge that emerges from it. Then he said: "This is *not* what teaching in a primary school is all about. Maybe this is more what university is about. We cannot but look at our values, because it is an inextricable part of our profession." (see also Addendum B at the end of the dissertation). Knowing within a postmodern paradigm does not refer to objectifiable truths that have fundamental meaning, but rather to a process "that recognizes the power of mind and the importance of compassionate consciousness in allowing for the cooperative evolution of shared meanings and values that guide our lives" (Srivastva et al 1990:12). As part of a social constructionist discourse, appreciative inquiry therefore makes visible those values which give meaning in our relationships with others but which also redefine our ideas about ourselves. The research question: "what kinds of values sustain the facilitators and assist them in transforming a school community", therefore became the focus of our appreciative stance towards knowing. A key point here is that appreciation is not merely a synonym for admiration: it represents the creation of new values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of valuing. As Nietzsche once put it, "Valuing is creating: hear it ye creating ones! Valuation is itself the treasure and jewel of valued things" (Srivastva, et al 1990:14).

During our second session I put the question to the group whether learning only takes place “from the top down” within a school organization, or is it possible for a younger facilitator to teach something to a more experienced colleague? FX replied by saying that, after thirty years in teaching, he had some “fixed ideas” about teaching which changed when he sees the student teachers in action in his class. He told the group that they exposed him to the latest teaching methods and so he also benefited from their knowledge. Earlier in our conversation, I noted that FX had said: “I am not all-knowing.”

I followed an appreciative line of questioning regarding FX’s values in my follow-up letter: *“FX, does curiosity about life and humility to constantly open yourself to the knowledge of others, enable you to be more of the facilitator that you prefer to be, namely that as a student for life? Am I right when I say that you have developed your contact with junior colleagues into a source of energy for yourself in teaching? Would you describe this as a creative approach? I wonder what it says about ... creativity as a value for you in what you have described as a ‘calling’ (teaching)?”* (excerpt letter 2)

FX responded to these questions by saying that he regards “creativity as essential in not stagnating in the teaching profession.” He expanded on the value of creativity by saying: “The artist disappears, but his work lives on.” He spoke about how the impact of the facilitator as artist in the life of a child is often not immediately visible, but may become visible some years later when he reads that one of his pupils has graduated from university, cum laude. I then asked FX if he regards teaching as creative, to which he replied: “If teaching was not creative, we would have had to close our doors.” FX gave yet another description of what it means to be a facilitator in Kraaifontein. He used the word “a builder of people”: “You have to be everything that builds in a child’s life...a mother, father, minister, sick-comforter, coach.” I expanded on the metaphor by asking FX if his compassion for the children who struggle and his belief in teaching as his calling were like “mortar and bricks in his building of people.” He replied that this was how he perceived teaching.

The appreciative stance in the research towards FX's knowing, not only highlighted his curiosity and humility as values, but that our valuing of his creativity over several sessions opened new ways of looking at teaching as a creative endeavour. It also spoke of FX's desire to add meaning to children's lives by being more than a facilitator who relied on imparting cognitive knowledge. In Chapter 3 (3.4) I will discuss the honouring of personal knowledge with its somatic and affective modes of knowing in the research, as part of a feminist theology of praxis.

Heshusius and Ballard (1996b:14) quote physicist, David Bohm's description of knowledge in his discussion on insights, values and education: "[it] is an active process, which is present not only in abstract thought, but which enters pervasively into desire, will, action, and indeed into the whole of life." FX's re-description of the role of knowledge in a school in Kraaifontein indeed brings life to these words.

2.2.3.2 An appreciative stance towards action

In their model for an appreciative stance towards action, Srivastva et al (1990:24) propose that appreciation of actions takes into account the degree to which people act on their values and embrace practices that produce change for the betterment of self and others. In our research we have heard how facilitators often managed, through their actions, to integrate the "traditional polarities" (such as male/female and senior/junior and even adult/child) that tend to cause division rather than connection between persons in a school community.

Often during the research we heard that conversation became an action by which facilitators positively influenced the lives of children. Gawie spoke about how conversation itself can challenge the traditional polarities of right/wrong in teaching, and the effects which these polarities have on disciplining. Gawie elaborated by saying that some facilitators preferred to summarily discipline "naughty children". As deputy principal, Gawie shared his belief in conversation rather than punishment with his more hardline colleagues. He did this because he believes that because knowledge of the home

context of a child's life may emerge in conversation, this often changes one's perception of the child's "naughtiness" and leads to greater flexibility. Gawie shared with the group a story of a boy who "had been naughty for the umpteenth time. However he was assaulted at home by his stepfather. I saw the bloodmarks on his back." If he had not engaged in conversation with the boy, Gawie would not have been able to hear how suffering affects the child. Gawie's appeal to colleagues - to open themselves to the stories these children had to tell - represents a change in the dynamics between the polarities of "wrongdoing" and "punishment" (see also 3. 2.2.1 regarding Gawie's relationships with children as concrete others). Gawie's example also speaks to me of how empowering the act of listening can be: by not judging, but rather listening, Gawie honoured the boy as both the teller of his own story and "thought with" the child in the telling of his painful story of abuse.

Our research group listened to Gawie's narrative of another boy in the sixth grade who was often in trouble with the law and who even spent a few nights in jail without his parents wanting to fetch him. We heard about the conversation Gawie had with the tearful boy in which he told of his father who had left the family. The boy regarded the fact that his father never made any contact as proof of the fact that "he doesn't care about me." He also said that his mother worked night shifts, which meant that she slept when he got home and when he woke, she was at work.

In my letter after the session, I reflected on how Gawie's actions of listening and continuing conversations spoke of caring contact, a value that had been missing in this boy's life: *"You (Gawie) told us how the child 'changed completely' after your conversation with him and how you complimented him on the improvement in his maths....I often tell the children ' God made no junk. You have it, you just have to explore it."* (excerpt letter 2)

Gawie told of yet another boy who commented to someone else that he regards Gawie as the only person in the world who has ever cared about him. I asked: "What action did you take that enabled the boy to make this comment?" Gawie then told us that in his

interaction with the children who are often in trouble he prefers to look for “connection”. For Gawie, this connection lies in whatever interests the child: “If a child is fond of pigeons, I would inquire, when I meet this child in the corridor, how his pigeons are doing, and whether the chicks have hatched yet. In this way you reach a child.” In this way the value of empathy that Gawie lives at this school became embodied in narrative.

2.2.3.3 An appreciative stance towards relating

A fundamental difference between the positivist and postmodern paradigms centres around the perception of the self-other relationship. The positivist approach favoured a regulated distance between self and other, with the individual knower being the source of and validator of all knowledge (Anderson 1997:30). What the postmodern approach proposes, and which our research uncovered in the lives of these facilitators in Kraaifontein, is that of selfother unity (Heshusius 1996:133) and of relationship itself as the source of knowledge. Heshusius states that selfother unity is attained within a participatory consciousness between people that “results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention” (Heshusius 1994:17).

Chapter three deals with some of the theological dimensions of this abandoning of the preoccupation with self. For the purposes of this chapter, I wish to focus on the effect that the relationship with the other has on the formation of the selves of the facilitators. In a conversation with Calle-Gruber, feminist writer, philosopher and professor of English, Hélène Cixous (Cixous & Calle-Gruber 1997:13) states:

The other in all his or her forms gives me I. It is on the occasion of the other that I catch sight of me; or that I catch me at: reacting, choosing, refusing, accepting. It is the other who makes my portrait. Always. And luckily. The other of all sorts, is also of all diverse richness. The more the other is rich, the more I am rich. The other, rich, will make all his or her richness resonate in me and will enrich me.

2.2.3.3 a) Facilitators relating to children

Through appreciative inquiry, we discovered what it is about our relations that bring care, energy and hope to the school community of Kraaifontein. Srivastva et al (1990:31) describes the kind of care we witnessed through the discussions: "Care is a state in which something does matter; it is the opposite of benevolence, tolerance or apathy....The effect of appreciation and care is ontological to organizational action: People initiate because they care, they organize because someone or something matters."

Toekie told of a meeting she had at the parents' evening with the uncle of one of the boys in her class who struggles with discipline. The man told Toekie of the violence this boy of eleven years old had been exposed to. His father is a "raver" who has, on occasion, chased the boy with a hammer, threatening that "he will knock his brains out" with it. The father also goes on raving stints during which he dances to electronic music for hours and becomes disconnected from the world outside the rave. At these times he has left the boy without food for long periods of time. The pornographic videos that his father spends up to R500 a month on are also left for the boy to watch. The mother lives elsewhere and verbally abuses the boy when he visits her.

Toekie said that she realised then why this boy reacts with violence to problems in class. She told us that he has said that when he is grown-up, he will buy a gun and kill his parents. The uncle subsequently took over the parental responsibilities for the child and Toekie told him that: "this is the last year we will be able to catch him in the safety net." When I asked her what she referred to as a "safety net", Toekie explained that she regards the value of discipline as a safety net for this boy who has suffered the effects of violence in his life. Toekie said that discipline for this boy went together with a sense of safety, as he was never disciplined by his parents and was left to his own devices. She therefore encouraged the uncle to give the boy tasks to do at home and to praise him for completing them. I asked Toekie what effect her disciplining in class has had on the boy. She said: "I was surprised because the other day he came up to me and put his arms around me and he said: 'I like you because you remind me of my granny. She is also very

strict.” Toekie’s relationship of standing with the boy against violence, meant disciplining him in a non-violent and caring way. Toekie’s words that this may be “the last year” also reflected her urgency in reconnecting this boy with hope. Next year, she realised, he may no longer be in her class. It may then be too late for her to make a difference.

For Levinas the relation between the self and the other is not a theoretical or cognitive reality, but primarily a face to face encounter that summons one to respond. Within the response, Levinas (1963:181) proposes, lies both the discovery of the I and of morality:

To be an I then signifies not to be able to slip away from responsibility...The putting into question of the I by the other makes me solidary with the other in an incomparable and unique way – not solidary as matter is solidary with the block which it is part of, or as an organ is solidary with the organism in which it has its function. Solidarity here is responsibility – as though the whole edifice of creation rested on my shoulders. The unicity of the I is the fact that no one can answer in my place.

By acting with discipline and by speaking to the uncle, Toekie has shown that solidarity means responsibility. “The word ‘responsibility’ itself is from the Latin, ‘I answer’ (*respondeo*)” (Deetz & White 1999:113). Toekie’s story illustrates her commitment to this child as she knows “that no one can answer in (her) place.”

However, Toekie’s story supports an important supplementation to Levinas’s notion of responsibility: “located in the recognition of the other’s face, we can say that this is not just the bare face of human physiognomy but a face superimposed with social identity taken from the way the person to whom it belongs is situated in social relations” (Burkitt 1999:79). Seeing how social violence and abuse in Kraaifontein superimposes itself on the life of an eleven-year-old, has had a profound impact on Toekie’s relationship of responsibility towards him.

In her telling us of the boy’s circumstances and her conversation with the uncle, Toekie’s voice carried many different emotions: empathy, sadness and anger. How often do we

hear people react to others by saying: “it’s none of my business.” Toekie’s actions and her account to us speak of her making the boy’s suffering her business. In an article entitled, *The alchemy of risk, struggle and hope*, practical theologian Denise Ackermann (1996:145) says that in our search for justice and peace, the struggle is first against apathy: “*Apatheia* in Greek literally means non-suffering...The state of apathy is embraced unconsciously. All potential for hope vanishes” [Ackermann’s italics]. It then struck me that Toekie was the one facilitator in the group who spoke most often about the value of bringing hope to the suffering children of Kraaifontein.

Following the analogy of Cixous of the other as the one who makes our portrait, we may discover in Toekie’s story a portrait of herself: painted in the warm colours of security and hope by an eleven-year-old boy.

2.2.3.3 b) Relating to one another

The research question posed in Chapter 1 inquires how the values of the facilitators are supported. One way of providing an answer lies in the knowledge that facilitators have about the values that they bring to teaching. However, within a social constructionist epistemology, knowledge is something we create during interaction with others. This prompted me to take an appreciative stance towards the way in which the facilitators relate to one another.

After Gawie had told us about his conversation with the abused boy, I became curious as to the participants’ perception of Gawie. I therefore asked what caused facilitators at the school to send children who experience problems to Gawie’s office. Gawie replied that that was simply the task of the deputy-principal. But Toekie volunteered another kind of explanation: “You are reassuring, Gawie. You have a way of calming one...When I leave (your office) I feel ‘well, he now carries half of the burden.’ That is your gift.”

One of our conversations centered on whether it was possible for us to discover something of God’s love and care in the acts of love and care of humans. The facilitators

thought that it was possible. I then asked the facilitators if some of Toekie's actions reminded them of God. Different pictures of Toekie emerged during this session. Lizél commented about Toekie's attentiveness to others and the fact that she is always the one to hand out small gifts - like stressballs - to her colleagues: "She has the wonderful ability to realise what we (as colleagues) need."

Gawie preferred not to speak of God, but highlighted other dynamic facets of Toekie's influence in the school community in his word-picture of her. Gawie likened the positive effect Toekie's sense of humour has on her teaching colleagues, the yeast without which bread cannot rise. He also referred to Toekie's moral strength and called her "a rock".

2.2.3.3 c) Participation in relationships in the school community

Toekie mentioned that as a substitute teacher she has had experience of teaching in a variety of schools. She said that she has witnessed a change in the school since the arrival of the current principal. She described him as someone who always listens to others and who is not only a presence in his office, but also a person who moves amongst the staff and children. Toekie said that this approach makes a huge impact on a school. I was curious as to what this reflected in terms of moving away from patriarchy (for a discussion on patriarchy and its effect in schools see Chapter 3, 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.). I asked the facilitators what the effects are of strong patriarchal structures in teaching. My question opened a wealth of anecdotes, contributed mainly by Toekie and Lizél who spoke of the inhibiting effect patriarchal leadership has on staff and how it lays down rules that do not allow for individual initiative. For instance, like choosing to teach under a tree instead of a classroom on a beautiful day. Toekie told of the practices that accompany patriarchy which are still present in schools in the area, such as the rules that children may only carry their bags in their right hands and may only step on the painted dots in the corridor. Toekie then spoke of the problems which rules like these create for disabled children who are unable to step on the dots. Jeanette said that patriarchy makes people nervous as one is always on the lookout for doing something wrong. Toekie added

to this by saying that she has experienced that it could lead to whispering conversations in the staff room.

It was noticeable that in our research group it was the three women who were the ones who had clearly known and suffered the effects of patriarchy in teaching, and who were able to describe its disempowering effects in great detail.

FX however, cautioned that one needs a leader in the school “to take the unpopular decisions.” The group agreed that their school offers just the right mix of authority from a compassionate principal combined with participation from the staff. In my letter following our session I followed an appreciative line of questioning regarding these facilitators’ relationship with their principal: *“What would it mean to him if he could know how you value his contribution towards the creation of a school community in which people care for one another....Would it be important to us as a group to find out with what ideas and dreams he associates himself with as principal of this school?”* (excerpt letter 3).

I then proposed that we invite the principal to one of our sessions. The proposal was accepted and the principal attended our seventh session. A week before the session, I asked the principal if he would be willing to take an appreciative stance towards each of the six facilitators in the group and highlight the values in each individual that contributes towards the school community.

During the seventh session a lot of valuing took place in the appreciative stance the facilitators took towards the principal and the principal towards each one of them. Due to lack of space, I will not be able to reproduce this conversation in its entirety, but will only refer to some comments that were made.

FX spoke with appreciation about the principal’s firm stand regarding the position of religion in the school. When I asked whether that stand speaks to FX of integrity, he agreed that it did. FX also spoke of the warm “vibe” of the school that does not happen

when “a ‘make-or-break despot’ sits in his office, but rather when the warmth radiates from the principal of the school.” Then FX referred to the question: “who benefits?” that started our research and which we discussed during our fourth session as the ethical question that centres our research and work (see also Participatory ethics: 3.2.2.2). FX, however, used the phrase, “who benefits”, in drawing a distinction between a “boss” and a “leader”. A boss, said FX, is someone who disciplines, commands others to work, and sits and waits for the work to be done. In the process people do not benefit, but are stepped on. On the other hand, a leader says: “let’s do it together.” He said that only a leader who knows about working *with* people can truly refer to its staff members as “*the dream team*”, as Kraaifontein’s principal does. Because of the mutual care in Kraaifontein’s dream team, everyone benefits.

FX’s distinction between a boss and a leader, speaks of the difference between prescriptive ethics (Kotzé 2002:13) and social or participatory ethics and the moral consequences it has. Kotzé (2002:13) describes prescriptive ethics as ethics that form part of systems of truth that are “grounded in scientific and/or religious discourse. This form of ethics allegedly has objective or transcendent truth status and is not bound by time or context, thus assuming prescriptive status.” Prescriptive ethics are thus “timeless and without context ” (Kotzé 2002:13).

When adhering to objective truths, a principal can therefore become, in FX’s words “a make-or-break despot.” Prescriptive effects do have real and harmful effects in the lives of those who are at the receiving end of the prescriptions: “people are stepped on.”

By contrast, a participatory mode of ethics is contextual and involves a “doing of ethics” (Kotzé 2002:21) through which another kind of morality is established: “When the self and the other are seen as belonging to the same consciousness, all living is moral....” FX’s reference to the “let’s do it together” style of leadership in this school speaks of participatory ethics, that ultimately becomes almost tangible in the “vibe” it creates. FX’s reflections brought to the fore the fact that ethics has real effects in a school community.

Expanding the appreciative inquiry, I asked what words they would use to describe a good leader. Lizél said: “humanity” (see also 3.5). Toekie proposed: “tolerance” and added that she has a feeling that the principal accepts her “warts and all”. She also mentioned the fact that she did not experience him as being “above” the others in the school. She said: “I feel that you are always one of us.”

Gawie remarked that he has never experienced the principal as being moody. He thought that for him the word “flexibility” describes his idea of a good leader.

I spoke about my knowledge of the value of flexibility in the principal’s life, through the story of his handling of a sexually abused boy (see 3.2.3.3).

Lizél expanded on the actions that have to accompany the value of flexibility. She referred to a boy in a neighbouring town who committed suicide after the school sent him home after he had confessed to using cannabis and the school had informed his parents, despite his wishes. Lizél was wondering whether that principal followed the compassionate route and whether flexibility was absent. In that reference, Lizél brought home the responsibility that they as facilitators have in the living of values, such as flexibility, in a school community.

The principal then spoke appreciatively about the facilitators. He commented that their taking part in the research is indicative to him of their willingness to give of their time and of themselves, which he regards as an exceptional attribute.

Then he took an appreciative stance towards the individual facilitators and the unique qualities that play such a vital role in the school community. In Toekie, he valued her sense of humour and the therapeutic value of laughter that she brings to the staff. (Upon which Toekie quipped: “I will send medical bills to all of you. It is said that antibiotic is released in the brain every time you laugh!”) He also spoke about Toekie’s standing with colleagues who experienced problems, despite the fact that she was not a permanent member of staff. The principal then made special mention of the fact that she is able to

keep discipline in her class and “that children feel secure in your presence.” Some weeks later I asked Toekie if these words would sustain her in providing discipline and a sense of security to the eleven year old boy who said that she reminded him of his grandmother. She replied that she knows that what she does is right and that she does not need the principal’s words to sustain her; however, it was a comfort to her to hear that the children did indeed benefit.

To FX, the principal said that if his child had been a pupil at this school, he would have wanted him to be in FX’s class: “He is an exceptional teacher who can transform any academic subject into worldly wisdom.” He said that he observed this whilst visiting FX’s class. “This is extremely important in teaching, but especially so in Kraaifontein; not only to teach children, but to be the one who makes the difference by saying: ‘You are also a somebody. You can become something in life.’” He also appreciated FX’s capacity for work, despite his age and health problems.

An appreciative stance to relating brought to the fore new descriptions of the “self” of each of the facilitators. Within the social constructionist paradigm in which the research was conducted, the “self” proved to be no longer a fixed, essentialist concept, but rather one forever being shaped as relationships are verbalised and values being appreciated. In our research conversations, re-membering was another way of appreciative inquiry.

2.2.3.3 d) Re-membering

Michael White (1995,1997) developed the narrative practice of re-membering from Barbara Meyerhoff’s notion of “membered lives” (White 1997:22). In our research re-membering became a practice through which facilitators were encouraged to identify people who have played a part in the development of values and beliefs, or who have witnessed in them the values and beliefs that have sustained them. Re-membering therefore has relationship and people’s own lived experience as its focus. White (1995:33-34) uses the metaphors of “solidarity”, “alliance” and “affiliation” to describe the appreciative stance within such a relationship. The premise behind re-membering

practices is that we shape the ideas of who we are, by seeing ourselves through the eyes of others. Re-membering thus became a way for both an appreciation of and a richer description of the facilitator's lives and values.

Keeping in mind the research question, I introduced re-membering in our second session by asking the facilitators if they thought that this process could be a useful one to support or strengthen them in living their values. They thought it was worth a try. Re-membering was done through appreciative questions such as: "If I were to ask your mother, what would she tell me she most appreciates about you?" (Freedman & Combs 1996: 247).

Toekie re-membered her mother who was a strong person to whom she could go to and on whose shoulder she could cry. Whenever Toekie was unsure about being able to continue caring for her quadriplegic son, her mother sustained her with the words: 'Then you pray for mercy. You keep on your knees until God grants you mercy.' The words of Toekie's mother sustained her whenever hopelessness and despair felt like overpowering her. The link between mercy and hope that was re-membered in this way was subsequently woven into the poem that Toekie chose to write at the end of the research, about what it means to be a facilitator – often in the midst of hopelessness.

Lizél said that her mother encouraged her to study. She remembers that her mother said that "a woman does not have to be only a typist. She can be whatever she wants to be." Lizél's mother always had an "open door" for others and she combined strictness with love. The desire to combine these two values, said Lizél, is what her mother supports in her. Then I asked Lizél what her mother would say, if we could ask her, about Lizél's teaching practices at this school. She answered that her mother would have been proud.

Jeanette said that both her parents were facilitators and that both stand with her as a facilitator in Kraaifontein. Jeanette explained that her mother stands with her, especially in practical and problem-solving ways: "Many afternoons I would phone her to ask her advice in dealing with a child and when I stand in the classroom I sometimes wonder how my mother would have dealt with a situation." Jeanette told the group that her mother

taught at a small farm school and that she often gave the children something to eat first, before they would work. I then asked Jeanette what she would discover if she looked through her mother's eyes at herself. "I have a lot of love", Jeanette replied.

Jeanette continued re-membering how she went with her mother to distribute food parcels to the poor children of the school, and how she had to look after some of these children when her mother invited them to their house to stay for a weekend. I then asked Jeanette if the image of a relay-runner and the handing over of the baton of "making-caring-visible" fits the relationship Jeanette has with her facilitator-mother. Jeanette replied positively and said that she had subsequently told her mother: "*A door has been opened for me....that I have not seen in this way before....Now I realise why I landed here (in Kraaifontein)*" (excerpt letter 4). Jeanette then told us that she had applied for two teaching posts at affluent schools in a neighbouring town and was very disappointed when she did not get appointed. Jeanette re-membered that her mother came with her on the day that she was interviewed by the principal of this school and commented that it looked exactly like the school where she used to teach – "with gates at both ends".

Re-membering for Jeanette became a powerful process of reconnection with the value of love and the ways it can be made visible. It also provided the opportunity to see her value of love in the context of poverty, in connected and spiritual terms.

For Jeanette, re-membering as a relational process took place over many sessions and even moved beyond the sessions into a conversation with her mother and extended itself into writing. Through this multi-layered process, some aspects of the research question became answerable for Jeanette: particularly about the kind of values that sustain her, how these values are supported and how these values assist her in transforming the Kraaifontein school community (see Jeanette's weaving of personal and cultural narratives in 2.2.4).

Gawie also told the group about his application for a position at another school that "he was certain to get." When he did not, an ex-colleague who knew him well, came to him

and said: “Gawie, your task at this school is not finished yet. Not teaching-related tasks, but other tasks....” Gawie told us that the task that this woman referred to related to the values of flexibility, love and patience we had been discussing. When I asked Gawie if this woman was part of the “team” of people who supported the values of love, steadfastness and patience in him, he replied that she was. Gawie also mentioned his mother. I then asked him what his mother sees and supports in him as a facilitator. He mentioned his patience with and love for children and that he always preferred to look for the potential in children. Gawie thought that his mother “passed on” patience as a value to him. I asked Gawie what it would mean to her to realise how she had helped the value of patience to develop in his life. Gawie said that it would mean a lot to her. We used letters to convey our appreciation for the way in which Gawie and Jeanette’s mothers sustain them in their values.

2.2.3.3 d) i. Letters from the group to others – taking it back practices

After reading about our re-remembering, my supervisor suggested that the group write a letter to someone identified in our session, in order to take the re-remembering back to the person who played such a meaningful role in the facilitator’s life. As a group, we drafted letters to both Gawie and Jeanette’s mothers. The letters were signed by all during our final ceremony, before being handed to Gawie and Jeanette to send to or give to their mothers (for letters, see Addendums C and D at the end of the dissertation).

Through these letters we shared the discoveries we had made during the research about some of the values that are vital to Gawie and Jeanette as facilitators in Kraaifontein and about the difference others make to their lives in how they support these values. Letter writing thus became an important extension of the relational process – outside the walls of the room within which the research sessions took place.

2.2.4 Expressing and extending values

My second research question has as its focus how the facilitators' values assisted them in transforming a school community to caring solidarity. We therefore also investigated new and relevant ways in which the values could find concrete expression in the school.

2.2.4.1 A problem - mailbox

During the third session, Toekie made the comment: "There are many children in the school living without hope and they look to us for support. However, we are not always aware of these children." Toekie's words made me wonder about using a mailbox as a way of connecting those children who experience problems, with those facilitators who could offer support. I raised the idea in the group. Toekie and Lizél were especially enthusiastic about the idea. Lizél told the group of a mailbox she had once placed in her classroom that had led to three children disclosing that they were victims of sexual abuse. The group felt that the mailbox needed to be secured and placed at a central position in the school to enable all children to have access to it.

With the permission of the group, I discussed the mailbox idea with the school principal, who immediately thought that it was useful and could be practically implemented. He said that he would take the idea further.

2.2.4.2 Investigating relationships with nature

During the seventh session I shared with the group some of the stories I had heard as counsellor at this school, regarding the nurturing role plants and animals have in the lives of some children. The group then discussed the value of nature in the lives of neglected children.

In this regard, I referred to Nevi Basson's thesis (2001) in which she explains how pastoral care can include eco-spirituality as a way of caring for children. Basson

(2001:34) quotes Clinebell on the principles of ecological spirituality that guide the practices of eco-education by becoming “(1) more fully, intentionally, and regularly nurtured by nature; (2) more aware of the larger meaning of (our) place in nature and in the universe; and (3) more involved in nurturing nature by active earth-caring.” Gawie asked me if he could have a copy of the article, which I subsequently made and gave to him. He said that some of the suggestions we made during our sessions were taken up for discussion at the various grade meetings. Amongst these ideas were the development of an area at the school where children could plant flowers and/or vegetables. The idea to have plants or animals (especially birds) in class and that children were encouraged to care for these, would also be discussed.

Two facilitators raised objections. FX pointed out that, from his experience, he believes these ideas to be good in theory but not workable in practice. Toekie said that she regarded older children (grade 5 and higher) to be too “self absorbed” to be interested in caring for plants. However, the idea was expressed that it could be of special benefit to children in the lower grades, but that the project needed committed facilitators to make it work. If facilitators decided to initiate such a planting-project, I offered to sponsor the first bags of compost.

The proposals that our research put forward - to use nature as a connector between children living without hope and the wonder, growth and hope inherent in nature - remain open for discussion amongst the facilitators of this school. I subsequently discussed these proposals with the principal, who told me of his recent visit to a neighbouring school in a poor community and its flourishing vegetable garden. He said that he would give the matter some thought and discuss it with colleagues as to its practical implications.

2.2.4.3 Connecting with colleagues about the research

The facilitators remarked that some of their colleagues were curious as to what we were doing during our research sessions. In Chapter one I referred to the procedure of opening

the research process to colleagues in the school, not only as a way of satisfying their curiosity, but also as a way to “amplify” the work that was done during the research. In this chapter I will briefly focus on the content of what was shared with the facilitators outside of the research process.

The research participants agreed that they wanted me to speak on their behalf about the research. Before I addressed the staff during one of their “teacher training” meetings, I remembered FX’s words that I have to be plain speaking and to the point to be effective. I therefore decided against distributing a document, but chose rather to share ideas about the research verbally. However, during my address, I invited the facilitators who were interested in obtaining a written document on the research, to collect it from me. I also invited facilitators who were interested in doing a similar project, in whatever format, to speak to me about it.

In my address to the staff, I spoke about how I became interested in doing research at the school in the first place. I also shared the themes of appreciative inquiry and remembering and the development of a metaphor from nature with them and the fact that it offered richer descriptions of themselves as facilitators in Kraaifontein.

I spoke of the ethical framework created by the question: “Who benefits?” that was answered during the research. I shared with them my observation of the special sense of community that exists in this school and how I realised that this does not happen by itself. In connection with this theme, I referred to our discussions around the issue of patriarchy and how that creates rules and distance. I told the staff how we often spoke about our discovery of the importance of flexibility as value in standing with an abused or neglected child. I spoke about the Christian faith that was a source of strength for all the participants in the research. We asked what Christ’s relationship was with people who, at the time, also stood on the margins of society: prostitutes, women and children. How do we, likewise, stand with Kraaifontein’s children - who also find themselves at the margins of this society? I quoted Gawie, who referred to the way in which Christ looked beyond the rules of his time to the people in need and how angry the Pharisees were that

He had healed people on a Sunday. The facilitators said that Christ's example strengthened them in standing with the poor and neglected of Kraaifontein.

By choosing these aspects of the research to focus on, I hoped to highlight the relational both as processes of the research and as themes within the research, and the fact that the relational had shaped our ideas about who we are.

2.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focussed on the narratives of human relationships in the lives of the facilitators and the ways these provided richer descriptions of themselves and of the values they bring to teaching. Chapter three will focus on the theological dimensions of the relational principle of the postmodern, and, more specifically, of a feminist theology of praxis.

Whether in the form of dialogue or deed, a feminist theology of praxis is grounded in what Ackermann (1991:108) describes as a relational anthropology: "As such it is the opposite of alienation, of apathy, of discrimination and finds its source in our understanding of God as 'God in relation'." The six facilitators all spoke of their Christian faith as a sustaining force in their lives. As theological themes of solidarity with the marginalised and of "God in relation" were explored in the research, it opened for some facilitators, new possibilities for living values in the context of poverty and deprivation.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF PRAXIS IN KRAAIFONTEIN

3.1 WHY A FEMINIST THEOLOGY OF PRAXIS?

The theme of *solidarity with marginalised* people and a focus on the importance of *community* are strong themes within a feminist theology of *praxis*. When I started my research project during 2002 at the Kraaifontein school, these themes were already running through the school's life like golden threads. I realised that these themes do not create themselves within a school community. They require people with certain beliefs and values to embody them. I therefore asked the participants to reflect on the values within their own lives that enable them to stand in solidarity with others. My research question also inquired about the way that these values are supported. The research then storied these values and rendered them visible to the facilitators taking part in the research. In this chapter, I have reflected theologically on those values and its praxis as pastoral care, by linking it with these themes of feminist theology. Reflecting on the research, I will use Denise Ackermann's (1998:84-90, 1991:106-111) description of the nature of a feminist theology of praxis as reference.

Values underlie humane actions. Denise Ackermann (1991:108) therefore proposes that questions regarding our humanity are central to practical theology:

As all theologizing is a human activity, and as practical theology is more specifically concerned with the communicative actions of people of faith, understanding what is meant by our 'humanity' appears to precede any debates, speculations or faith statements about God, Jesus Christ, the church, ministry, etc. From a feminist perspective an appropriate approach to theological anthropology is found when emphasis is placed on the relational. A relational anthropology is founded on the praxis embodied in the injunction "to love your neighbour as yourself."

Following Denise Ackermann's description, it seems apt therefore that a research question about values such as love - not as faith statement but as praxis - should be regarded as a theological question. However, theology cannot be contained within one

chapter only. Relationality as a theme was already introduced in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4 the imaginative aspect of a feminist theology of praxis also comes to life.

For Ackermann (1998:85), “a feminist theology of praxis emerges from the stories of our different contexts.” What Ackermann refers to here are the stories of suffering that are normally not told. However, through the telling of these unfamiliar stories, the voices of the marginalized are honoured.

Within a strong patriarchal educational system in South Africa, the feminist approach also affords women and marginalised men the chance to tell their stories as they live their lives as “ordinary facilitators”. It also values the specificity of the contexts that shape the personal knowledges and the specific values that facilitators of Kraaifontein bring with them to teaching. I hope to illustrate how these personal knowledges and values then provide the energy for and shape the individual and collective actions of facilitators as well as become the guidelines for a transforming practice of care.

Another theme within a feminist theology of praxis that will be discussed in this chapter is that of collaboration towards *community*. For the purpose of this research, I will use community as an inclusive term to focus on a school community and not exclusively on a faith community.

According to Ackermann (1998:84) “(a) feminist theology of praxis begins by acknowledging the unending, relentless suffering together with the resilient longing of the human person for wholeness.” This acknowledgement of the suffering embedded in marginalised people’s experience, as well as witnessing their resilience, can only take place in a spirit of *solidarity with the marginalised*. I therefore take this as my starting point in discussing a feminist theology of praxis in Kraaifontein.

3.2 SOLIDARITY WITH THE MARGINALISED

3.2.1 What does “marginalised” mean?

The word “marginalised” refers to people who find themselves on the periphery of society. Consequently, marginalisation is tied to the functioning and effects of power relations, which determine the position of certain groups and individuals and their power within society as being central and others as being on the periphery. French philosopher Michel Foucault (McHoul & Grace 1993:59) proposed that power relations in a society are unable to function without the presence and circulation of discourses. Within society, various discourses determine what is regarded as truth. Within contemporary South African society, we are familiar with the many discourses that marginalise children: such as the discourse that children should be seen and not heard and the discourse that parenthood implies entitlement over children. The latter is a powerful discourse that is present in the various forms of abuse that children are subjected to in Kraaifontein. The presence of such a discourse presupposes the superiority of adult power over that of children. It therefore becomes a discourse that disempowers and thus marginalises children.

Apart from the “material effects” of poverty (Couture 2000), such as living with the insecurity of not having a roof over your head when you get back from school, the facilitators who participated in the research described the emotional effects of poverty and deprivation on children as feelings of being without hope (“hoop-loos”), loneliness, sadness, fear and being unloved. Children in the Kraaifontein school are also often left to their own physical and emotional devices. They often feel and act as if they are on their own and “a law only unto themselves.” Therefore, the marginalisation of children through neglect, abuse and poverty also creates, what Couture (2000) refers to as the “tenuousness of connections” between children and others and with it, a strong sense of isolation. Conventional ways of punishment and scolding by facilitators often increase the feeling of isolation associated with marginalisation.

It therefore becomes essential to refer to the relationship between power and knowledge, especially when discussing power relations and its isolating effects in

relationships between primary school facilitators and the young children in their care. Foucault (quoted by McHoul & Grace 1993:59) highlighted the vital link between power and knowledge:

We should admit....that power produces knowledge....that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

The poor are the least powerful social grouping in South Africa. They are often not skilled in the attainment of formal knowledge, something our society prizes highly. Because they are also economically powerless, they are not in a position to produce knowledge. Therefore, due to the functioning of knowledge-power relations, the poor become marginalised, with poor children being South Africa's most marginalised group.

For many children, the marginalisation that they experience as poor South Africans is not only an economic reality, but is often part of their experience in schools. Facilitators are, by definition, knowledgeable and are seen in traditional teaching circles to impart their rational (and therefore advanced) knowledge to rationally ignorant children. The discrepancies in the levels of knowledge between facilitators and children within such schools are obvious. With it comes the acknowledgement of the different values attached to the different types of knowledge - with rational knowledge being favoured over intuitive and somatic knowledge.

However, through our research, we discovered the many ways in which some facilitators in Kraaifontein are recognizing children as knowledgeable and are valuing the importance of somatic knowledge in their own lives and in the lives of children. These facilitators are thereby changing the power relations that keep them in superior positions and children in inferior positions in terms of knowledge, and consequently, of power (see 3.2.2). To do this is no small thing in a community in which discourses favour adult knowledge over that of children's knowledge.

3.2.2 What is meant by “solidarity”?

According to the Concise Oxford dictionary (1976) “solidarity” means “holding together” or “mutual dependence”. But how does “mutual dependence” move out of the dictionary and become a reality that makes a difference to the lives of facilitators and children in Kraaifontein? In this regard, I would like to link the idea of “solidarity” with what Emmanuel Levinas proposes when he refers to the relation with the other as an ethical relation, grounded in a face-to-face encounter. Levinas views the response to another’s face as the start of such ethical relationship: “I think the beginning of language is in the face. In a certain way, in its silence, it calls you. Your reaction to the face is a response. Not just a response, but a responsibility. These two words (Réponse, responsabilité) are closely related....” (quoted by Wright, Hughes & Ainley 1986:169).

The implications of Levinas’s idea for teaching in Kraaifontein is that a face-to-face encounter of a facilitator with a child invites the facilitator to leave the position of objectivity and to respond. Some facilitators, who view teaching through modernist lenses, might say that it is not their responsibility to be a mother, father or minister to the children of Kraaifontein. However, the facilitators participating in the research proved that solidarity with the marginalised means taking up responsibility - whatever that responsibility towards the other might be. Our research illustrated that accepting/embracing responsibility in Kraaifontein has become synonymous with a position of solidarity.

My second research question inquired about the kinds of values that assist the facilitators in transforming a school community toward caring solidarity. How the value of responsibility/solidarity assists the facilitators to transform their school community is dependent on the way we perceive the “other”. I therefore wish to explore this aspect as an introduction that is vital to the way the facilitators concretise their values in a theology of praxis.

3.2.2.1 The “concrete other”

The many stories about solidarity which the facilitators shared during our sessions and that will follow in this section, speak of communicative ethics with a concrete other.

Feminist writer, Seyla Benhabib distinguishes between the “generalized other” and the “concrete other” as that which defines a non-relational or relational theory of self. A universalist or non-relational moral theory is one that privileges a theory of self in which “our relation to the other is governed by the norms of formal equality and reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and to assume from us what we can expect or assume from him or her. The norms of our interactions are primarily public and institutional ones” (Benhabib 1987:87).

Within teaching, this non-relational approach becomes evident through the rules and structures in which children are viewed only as “generalized others”. Especially as regards disciplinary issues in school, children are often regarded as “generalised others” who have to be punished according to rules that disregard the individual. During our seventh session Gawie made the comment that: “To reach a child, you have to approach her from another angle than one set by rules. When you look beyond rules, you realise that the reason why a certain child is bunking school may be found in the fact that her father and uncle are sexually abusing her at home. Then rules become secondary.”

Gawie also spoke of the fact that he came into conflict with facilitators in the school who treated children as “generalized others”. According to the previous system of punishment in the school, children who received a certain number of marks against them were not allowed to go on the long awaited annual school outing. However, Gawie realised that some facilitators punished children more harshly than others would, thereby increasing (sometimes unfairly) the number of marks against individual children. Gawie spoke of his responsibility towards these children in changing an unjust system of detention. He described his anguish at the system of punishment that barred these children, who had already sat detention for a number of (sometimes minor) offences, from joining their peers on their annual outing: “I have witnessed children crying when that bus pulls out. It is the kind of thing that cuts

through my heart.” Gawie spoke of how he wanted the school to “create memories” for its children during these outings and how an unjust system deprived already deprived children of memories.

Gawie vowed to change what he saw as an unjust practice. Yet, he encountered opposition amongst his colleagues and was overruled. However, the following year, the principal saw it his way. The principal then vetoed the decision to continue to punish children twice and the system was changed. Facilitators who regulate their behaviour towards children as “generalized others” consequently view the relationships of facilitators like Gawie - who prefer to relate to children as individual, concrete others - as “overstepping the boundaries”. Gawie said that such colleagues felt that “the goalposts were being moved”, whenever people like himself were, for instance, proposing flexibility in dealing with disciplinary issues. Gawie used the analogy for “the person choosing to walk the road of individuality, as someone looking into a river and only seeing his own face.” This mirror image of the individualist’s face stands against Levinas’ idea of the face of the other that calls us to respond and to Behabib’s idea of a “concrete other”.

Benhabib (1990 : 346) proposes an alternative, “communicative ethics”, in which the “generalized other” of the modernist era makes way for the “concrete other” of the postmodern era. This “concrete other” is a specific person with a face, a concrete history, values and suffering. The “concrete other” is the sexually abused girl who bunks school, that Gawie referred to. The insitutionalised norms of our interaction therefore make way for norms that recognize the human individuality of the other: “The moral categories that accompany such interactions are those of *responsibility* [italics mine], bonding and sharing. The corresponding moral feelings are those of love, care and sympathy and *solidarity* [italics mine] ”(Benhabib 1987: 87).

Gawie’s narrative highlighted his vulnerability to injustice as a value that sustained him not only as a facilitator, but also in his decision-making capacity as deputy principal. Gawie’s story also speaks of the power of vulnerability and sympathy in becoming a persuasive relational force in the praxis of change.

For Gawie personally it meant working against apathy, but it also involved a deeper understanding of himself in relation to these children as “concrete others” (“It cuts through my heart”) and committing himself to work for justice, despite opposition.

In the sixth session, the group discussed the relationships they prefer to have with others. I asked the facilitators if there were examples within the Christian tradition of solidarity in relationships with the other that “stand against the spirit of individualism” and could support the value of solidarity in them. Gawie then highlighted the fact that Christ’s praxis of solidarity with others often brought him into conflict with people who formalised their relations with others through rules, like “the Pharisees who could not take it that he healed people on a Sunday.”

Gawie said that by making himself vulnerable to the suffering of the children who were barred from going on the outing, his position of solidarity was interpreted as weakness by some colleagues. Solidarity as praxis may therefore entail coming into conflict with those who prefer to base their relations with the marginalised on abstraction and rules. However, Gawie found support in Christ’s example.

Toekie then said that the story that stands out for her is Christ’s encounter at the well with the “whore of the town”. Toekie said: “He knew who she was, and it didn’t matter to him...” Thereby, “[t]he praxis of Jesus implies a new kind of solidarity, one that transforms class and natural differences” (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:184). The facilitators said that they regard the example of Christ’s solidarity with marginalised others as a resource for working with the marginalised in Kraaifontein. Christ’s praxis therefore provides an answer to the research question on how the values of the facilitators are supported.

Christ’s knowledge of the social context and the status of women and whores serves to highlight the ethical and political stand he took by his action. Christ’s healing praxis was indeed directed towards the socially and religiously marginalised, such as lepers, prostitutes, poor people, the unknown traveller. In teaching, the facilitators are also invited to take a stand: “[a]nd it is precisely the political nature of educational

practice, its helplessness to be ‘neutral’, that requires of the educator his or her ethicalness” (Freire 1999:77).

3.2.2.2 Participatory ethics

The relational view of the constitution of the self has profound implications for our views on a moral order and *doing* ethics. The individualist autonomy of the Enlightenment era resulted in a utilitarian ethics of hard evidence in which a position of neutrality regarding values (Christians 2002:137) became desirable. Within such an exteriority of ethics, intrinsic valuing was disregarded. The effect that this epistemology had on morality was the creation of “a single domain of the moral, that there is only one set of considerations which determines what we ought to morally do” (:138).

The result of this homogenized morality was that, for many people, it was meaningless because it did not take their contexts or lived experience into account. The positivistic ideas about “the truth” as being only rationally obtainable and centered within the self-contained individual led to authoritarianism in many areas of social life, including schools: “The effects of prescriptive ethics leave people on the receiving end marginalised and alienated from having a say in the truths that are supposed to shape their lives” (Kotzé 2002: 17). During the research, the facilitators spoke of their marginalisation where school principals ruled according to a prescriptive ethics and the detrimental effect this had on the life of the school community as a whole. They also told of individual facilitators who preferred to work within the positivistic tradition of the autonomous self: “They don’t last long. In this school community one has to relate to others” said Lizél.

By focussing our research on values and the effects thereof on the lives of the “other”, we therefore chose to describe the theory and practice of an alternative, participatory ethic:

Postmodernists tend to accept an interpretivist idea of knowledge, replacing both pre-modern ideas of religious truths and the positivist approaches that have shaped science, including theology, for many centuries. All knowledges, even knowledges of right and wrong, are part of a continuous stream of interpretation –

we cannot not interpret.

(Kotzé 2002:15)

FX told the group of a meeting that he had had at a parents evening with the mother of a boy in his class who told him that she cares for her child by providing food, clothes and a bed. *"Then I told her that that is her duty. You have not yet educated your child."* After this conversation, FX told his grade seven class: *"I am now your father for the rest of the year.' I was taking it upon myself to teach children about life; from saying 'please' and 'thank you' to teaching them about God, 'because it does not happen at home' (excerpts letter 1).*

When FX says that in this school one has to be a father, it implies an adherence to a social ethic that demands of him not to see his work as a single, clearly defined and rationally determined category, but to adapt to a context of social commitments with its multitude of moral challenges. The moral order therefore no longer exists on a conceptual level, but "need[s] a context of social commitments and community for assessing what is valuable" (Christians 2002:144).

Likewise, the recognition of the personal values and knowledge of moral agents becomes essential in the way the world is translated into action. In this regard Lous Heshusius proposes that "[T]o live morally requires, in the first instance, not moral discourse, but a relentless awareness of ourselves in the particulars of moment-to-moment living" (Heshusius 1996: 133-134). Such awareness, Ackermann (1998:90) suggests, marks the 'end of a life un-lived' and the beginning of a healing, ethical praxis which requires the 'willingness to hear, to see and to feel.'

In this way the reflexive, valuing self becomes an active participant in an interlocking relational process : "Rather than searching for neutral principles to which all parties can appeal, social ethics rests on a complex view of moral judgements as integrating into an organic whole, everyday experience, beliefs about the good, and feelings of approval and shame, in terms of human relations and social structures" (Christians 2002:142).

During our celebration, I told the facilitators about the ethical wisdom (Kotzé 2002:21) that some of their narratives spoke to me of. I, for instance, thanked Gawie for his story of the unjust disciplining of children and of how his own vulnerability had opened the possibility for change. Then Gawie replied that under the old political system in South Africa, unethical practices took place because we often did not open ourselves to the suffering of others. Gawie's awareness of himself in the moment-to-moment living of a departing school bus and the left behind children, led to Gawie's resistance to unjust practices and a commitment to construct new knowledges about punishment. Gawie's narrative therefore tells that "to live is to ethicise, and to ethicise is to participate in living" (Kotzé 2002:21).

Gawie invited me to attend a Friday break in the staffroom and listen to "the intensity of laughter" there. Then Toekie added that she had never before taught in a school where so many hugs were given. The facilitators' comments about the "moment-to-moment" living of doing of work, words, laughter and hugs in this school brought home to me as a witness the active nature of participatory ethics and its resulting morality in a profoundly concrete way.

The morality of participatory ethics also featured in conversations the research participants had about research itself. FX spoke of the futility of postgraduate research that has little or no relevance for anyone but the researcher him/herself. FX told the group how his daughter decided against some of these self-serving research projects for her Master's thesis and rather chose to work on the drawing up of a handbook for the teaching of violin to the blind.

Following on Gawie's comment during our first session that we should keep the purpose of the research in mind, I asked the group what they saw as the purpose of our research. Gawie replied: "The children must benefit from it." The other facilitators agreed. These words early on in our first session thus provided the ethical framework within which the research took place. When I reflected back on this, I was touched by the fact that the facilitators saw the self reflection, foreshadowed in the title of the research, not as a goal in itself but ultimately to benefit the children in their care.

By focussing on the values that the facilitators of Kraaifontein bring to teaching, we aligned ourselves in the research with the social morality “in which caring values are central but contextualized in webs of relationships and constructed toward communities” (Christians 2002:143). When we envisage the transformation of a school community, we may therefore concur as research participants with Levinas that “the for-the-other – the most upright relation to the Other – is the most profound adventure of subjectivity, its ultimate intimacy” (Levinas 1982:163).

3.2.3.3 The transformative power of solidarity

While keeping the research question in mind about the kinds of values that assist the facilitators in transforming a school community, it is especially useful to refer to Bronwyn Davies’ views on power as praxis: “[P]ower is not a thing or essence that can be described, but a complex set of relations amongst people, and in the relations between people and knowledge systems.” She goes on to describe power not only in its restricting properties, for “[p]ower is also the power to do things, to resist, to deconstruct, to imagine, to laugh, to move people to tears”(Davies [sa]:19). Likewise, to allow oneself to feel the pain of another can have transformative power: “Transformation occurs as the reformer feels the pain of the people who are oppressed” (Welch quoted by Kotzé 2002:18).

The facilitators have told how listening to a child can sometimes be a way of expressing solidarity, but when a child’s voice has become totally marginalised, such an act of listening can have the power to transform. In an addendum to our third session, I shared such a story with the group: *“During one of my regular briefing sessions with him, the principal told me of his relations with a grade seven boy who was often in trouble due to aggression in the school. The situation became so untenable to his facilitators and other students, that the principal called him to his office. The boy took an unyielding stance, whereupon the frustrated principal instructed him to go home and think about his actions.*

Just before the boy got to the door, Mr. Toerien said it was as if he was told “like Moses of old” to ask the boy back. This he did in a friendly tone. He thereupon

inquired about how things were at home. This question let the tears come. Through his sobs, the boy told the principal that he had been sexually abused by his stepfather for a period of two years.

The principal's question and his non-indifference of one to another, opened the way for the disclosure of a story of abuse – a story that the boy had carried alone as a secret for a long time. The implications of the principal's compassion were far-reaching. The abuse was not only disclosed but also reported to welfare agencies. The boy experienced that there were adults who believed him, other than his mother who had asked him some months before if "he did not dream it" At home he was told to follow the rules of "good behaviour" and to keep quiet about the abuse. For the boy, " good behaviour " thus became synonymous with the adult abuse of power.

The boy subsequently took steps to take back his life from aggression and helplessness. My experience was that it was the principal who started the process of healing. How different would it have been for this boy if the principal did not have the compassion to look beyond the norms of what constitutes ' good behaviour?' "
(excerpt, addendum to letter 3).

Because the principal heard and believed him, the boy experienced that his suffering was validated. The principal spoke to the boy no longer from the power position as principal, but as a concerned human being. The principal chose to use his power in the school not as a way of control, but rather to transform by responding to the boy's pain. This thirteen year old boy who had experienced suffering indeed found solidarity in the principal's compassionate stance towards him. The principal's praxis also speaks about the "communicative ethics" (Benhabib 1990) of feminism where :

[e]thics can no longer be grounded in a categorical imperative or in a respect for an abstract moral law. Rather, a feminist ethics is based on a responsiveness to others and a respect for the particular which leads to moral concerns connected to providing care, preventing harm and maintaining relationships.

(McNay 1992:92)

Therefore the position of solidarity stands against the tenuousness of human relations (Couture 2000) that result from marginalisation.

Bearing Davies ([sa]a) in mind, when stories and metaphors speak of the transformation that participatory ethics brought about in Kraaifontein, I refer to participatory ethics as being powerful because it works against marginalisation and towards solidarity.

Foucault stressed that there are no “universal forms for the exercise of power to take place: our society bears witness to the production of quite specific practices which characterize the ways in which power relations function within it” (McHoul and Grace 1993: 65). One such specific practice that spoke of the power of solidarity in creating community, was told during the third session: *“Lizél told of a colleague who was suffering from cancer and how she wondered how the school community could support her as she still had to work and to look after her family. Then you told us how you all ‘jumped in’ and how all the facilitators at the school brought containers of food to school on Fridays that could be frozen. You told how the colleague appreciated your efforts and how she thanked you each by letter before her death”* (excerpt letter 3). Lizél’s story proves that the spirit of “caring solidarity” that the second research question refers to, does not happen by itself. Lizél’s story speaks of the fact that the power to create community is a value that rests with individuals who choose to make it visible through specific practices that Foucault refers to.

3.3 COMMUNITY

During my first year at the school working as a trainee counsellor, I was struck by the sense of community that prevails here. During the research, the facilitators themselves referred to the sense of community between children, between colleagues and between facilitators and children in this school as being extraordinary.

According to the dictionary, the word “community” does not only refer to an “organized political, municipal or social body”, but speaks of “fellowship” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1976). The facilitators often spoke of the strong sense of

fellowship they have witnessed and/or experienced in Kraaifontein: *“Aubrey said that because you all worked amongst people in the community who suffer, it strengthened the bond between you as facilitators....Gawie said the sense of community he experienced amongst the facilitators of this school was much stronger than what he experienced elsewhere. You told us that many of your colleagues asked about how your Down syndrome son was doing when he recently had to go to a hostel. You said that the facilitators of your wife’s school, where she has been teaching for many years, never referred to it and that you experienced it as if they did not care” (excerpts letter 3).*

Within Christian feminism, the use of the word “community” centres around ideas of mutuality and caring (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:31) - exactly what Gawie’s praxis towards the unfairly detained children speaks of (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:32).

Gawie also said that the need to care for others is more strongly developed amongst the children of this community, than had been his experience elsewhere. The facilitators spoke of the care that they received from children. FX told of the thank you note with the words that “he has a heart of gold.” Lizél also spoke of a Valentine’s Day card that spoke of the love that a child felt for “the best teacher.” Toekie told of how a group of boys whom she encouraged to sand a table after school had brought her chocolates when she was ill. She spoke of the comments of a school inspector who said that he had never before witnessed a group of boys bringing chocolates for their facilitator.

Kotzé and Kotzé (2001) refer to this kind of caring as one that moves away from paternalistic ways of caring, towards one of “caring solidarity” (Sevenhuijsen 1998:147), where the caregiver opens him/herself up to also receive care: “Care without solidarity may strengthen the privatisation or moralisation of care, whereas caring solidarity acknowledges that people are differently situated. It brings care into the public dialogue and collective support ” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7-8).

According to Toekie few people are able to reach out to others without them feeling that they are being done “a special favour”. I commented that my experience of the mutual care they described in our sessions was contrary to this position, and that both

parties seem to benefit. Gawie then described this kind of mutual caring as “a double win situation, both ways.”

Through our response to the other as “concrete others”, we move the limits of our own individuality, and we create community. The research therefore offered Gawie the opportunity to re-evaluate his solidarity with children as a value that in fact supports community.

3.3.1 Mutuality

Mutuality is described in feminist theology as a process of continual change in which all persons are empowered, “thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them” (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:155). Through the research conversations the value of mutual care was identified as one which contributed to creating a community. However, Jeanette and Annetjie’s story defines mutual care both as value and as praxis.

For Jeanette, responsibility meant solidarity with a child who came into her class with a “problem” label. Jeanette’s solidarity with Annetjie implied a stand against the label that marginalised her from the other children in the class. The following is an excerpt of an addendum/letter written to the group after having a conversation with Jeanette outside of the group meetings:

“Jeanette and I met in the school corridor the day after the fifth session, during which she was absent. Jeanette told me of her delight at a little girl in her class who came to grade two with the label of being “different/weird/naughty”. She told me how well Annetjie was doing and then told me, ‘I decided that if I could get rid of one label of only one child in my class this year, I will be satisfied.’ She told how surprised she was that even the children of her class asked her whether Annetjie was ‘naughty’, whereupon she told them that ‘No, Annetjie is not naughty at all, and in fact she is doing very well.’ Verbally, Jeanette expressed her solidarity with Annetjie. Then Jeanette said to me: ‘I cannot tell this to everybody but I know you will appreciate it.’ The previous Friday was an unusually chilly day in the midst of a hot spell of summer

weather. Jeanette wore only a sleeveless dress. She sat shivering at her desk in the front of the class. To her surprise, she felt someone coming up behind her and draping a rain-jacket over her shoulders. It was Annetjie. While Jeanette spoke, tears welled up in her eyes, and in mine. I was moved by her story, but I was also moved by the realisation that Jeanette felt that this story would not be appreciated by everybody: that mutuality of care was still a foreign concept to many colleagues in teaching.

Jeanette and Annetjie's story speaks to me as researcher of the fact that, "[e]xperientially, mutuality is a process, a relational movement...As we are formed by mutuality, so too does the shape of our mutuality change as our lives-in-relation grow" (Heyward quoted by Isherwood and McEwan 1996:155). Through their relationships, men and women, adults and children, those with formal training and those without, can take part in the creation of knowledge and the praxis of care. Sevenhuijsen (1998) speaks of a *caring solidarity* because the idea of solidarity gives a political meaning to care and to mutual commitment. Caring solidarity is not a patronising doing care *for* someone, but is an interdependent caring *with* because "everyone in different ways and to different degrees needs care at some point in their lives" (:147).

In an evaluation sheet in which I asked each of the facilitators to reflect on our research, I asked if it was useful to reflect on their values and whether the reflection itself strengthened them in working in a poor community. Aubrey wrote that through the sharing within our sessions, he experienced a sense of fellowship with colleagues: "...by hearing where colleagues stand. It motivates one knowing that other colleagues are walking the same road." FX wrote along similar lines: "I realise that other colleagues experience what I experience. I cannot determine my role in colleagues lives, but I hope is that it will be a positive one. Some have said that they have drawn upon my experience." For FX and Aubrey, the research itself fostered a sense of mutuality in them as facilitators – not only in learning from one other, but also in standing with and supporting colleagues. I appreciated then, that in the speaking and listening we were constructing new dimensions of mutuality for both men. In the questionnaire I also posed the question: "Do you think that this kind of

research could play a part in strengthening facilitators against burnout?” To this question both Aubrey and FX saw the “strengthening” in terms of mutuality: Aubrey said, “*Yes. I experience it (the research) as a kind of support group and I believe that it would have meant something to everyone who attended.*” FX said, “*Yes, only to know you are not alone in the struggle.*”

Aubrey and FX’s comments illustrate the social constructionist premise that values such as mutuality are created within relationships. In their case, the relationship was with the colleagues who shared their values with them in the research.

3.4 PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

When we face the “concrete other” as Levinas and Benhabib propose, we know in ways that are not rational or universal, but emotive, somatic and deeply personal. *Personal knowledge* is mediated through our bodies and therefore, “a feminist theology of praxis is *embodied* [italics mine] practical theology” (Ackermann 1998:87). Embodied knowledge means to Heshusius and Ballard (1996:8) working toward an integration of mind and body within the social context because “a mindful body and an embodied mind are needed to tap into somatic and emotive sources of knowing.” Within a feminist paradigm embodied knowledge stand against the “disembodied rationality” (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:56) of the dominant ethical tradition that was discussed under 3.2.2.1 and 3.2.2.2.

Gawie’s description of the sobs of children cutting through his heart speaks of embodied knowledge. Even when we talked about poverty during research, it could so easily have become another word about which to reason objectively. Toekie reminded us of our “mindful bodies” in relation to poverty when she said that “poverty has a smell.” During the times when facilitators still made housecalls, “...you don’t even have to know the child. When you walk inside and you get that smell, you immediately feel for the child” she said.

Therefore, when they speak of solidarity with the marginalized, the facilitators of Kraaifontein do not describe it only in intellectual and moral terms, but allow for the physical response that comes with standing with the poor. Toekie's words illustrate what Denise Ackermann (1998: 87) describes as a vital feature of a feminist theology of praxis, namely that "[o]ur senses are sources of our knowledge."

The process thought (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:65-70) of feminist theology honours the insight that comes from experiencing the world through our senses.

Process thought starts with experience, our deeply intuited awareness of what it is like to experience human life. Generalizations are then made on the basis of what is known and change is always possible since our experience will constantly alter. This places metaphysics in a new mode, away from the head and disembodied reasoning and into human experience and emphatic feeling.

(Isherwood & McEwan 1993:67)

The social constructionist premise that "knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together" (Gergen 1985:270) means that knowledge is not an essentialist concept but rather forever changing. To be able to embrace the changing nature of knowledge demands of facilitators the value of flexibility.

Gawie answered the research question about how the value of flexibility is supported, by saying that there can be no flexibility without knowledge, but that knowledge is created through conversations. This then means that Gawie prefers to move into a position of curiosity and engage in a conversation in order to hear the child's or parent's local knowledge. In Kraaifontein, this knowledge pertains to family problems with alcohol, broken marriages, abuse and the material effects of poverty, such as unemployment. In this way the facilitator gains understanding of the specific effects which poverty and deprivation has had on the particular child or family's life.

Educationalist, Paulo Freire (1999:85), sees respect for the *local* as an essential part of education: "...respect for the knowledge of living experience is inserted into the larger horizon against which it is generated – the horizon of cultural context, which

cannot be understood apart from its class particularities, and this indeed in societies so complex that the characterization of those particularities is less easy to come by.”

Lizél told the group about the children in her class who often arrive late for school. She said that she knew that many of the children who “anxiously sneaked into class after the bell had gone” lived in poverty and therefore did not have access to transport and that she, as facilitator, has to “bend the rule of punishment for late arrivals, to fit the situation.” Lizél’s turning a blind eye to the rule therefore becomes not only the enactment of the values of sympathy and flexibility, but is an affirmation of her knowledge of these children as concrete others, with individual stories of poverty and deprivation.

This broadening of the attainment and application of knowledge came up in a conversation I had after one of our sessions with Gawie, who is also the deputy principal of the school (See Chapter 2, Adendum 2). In a subsequent session Gawie drew a picture of a human head, cut open and with knowledge being poured inside. “This is what primary school teaching is *not*”, he said. “Teaching relies on personal values and [embodied] knowledge to be able to make a difference.”

The postmodern epistemological grounding of feminist theology may therefore make it possible to place experience of personal values and caring firmly on an equal academic footing with the modernistic pursuits of objective knowledge as a source for insight in teaching.

Another humbling facet of embodied knowledge is that, unlike a concept grasped or a methodology explained, it does not lead to a structure or a point of “arrival”. Embodied knowledge remains a process through which the facilitators constantly open themselves and their values to the ever changing needs of the marginalised in Kraaifontein: “‘Truth for the time being’ means awareness of the values at stake in a certain time and place, knowing where one’s ultimate commitment lies and practising these commitments” (Bons-Storm 1998:19).

A deterministic view of cause and effect may leave the world explained but with little room for how things could be different. To view Kraaifontein through this kind of

modernistic lens may provide insights into the reasons why children suffer. However, practical theology proposes that theoretical knowledge is not enough. Unless we embrace personal knowledge and commitment as the driving force in our humane relations with people, we will not be able to generate hope and, consequently, children's lives and that of communities will not be transformed.

3.5 HUMANIZATION

Paulo Freire (1999:98) also speaks of "humanization as (the) ontological vocation of the human being." In standing against dehumanization, he notes that the concretisation of "[t]he dream of humanization" (:99) remains a process. In a broken world, we are therefore constantly busy working towards humanization (See also 2.3.3.3 for Lizél's comment on the value of "humanity" in describing a good leader).

I told the facilitators of a counselling session I had had with a boy of eleven years of age at the school the previous day. He told me how he had seen how one man broke another's neck in the street where they live in Kraaifontein. His words to me were: "In our street, people are very cruel." This prompted me to ask the facilitators what values speak of humaneness and stand against the cruelty and hardness that feature in the daily lives of so many of Kraaifontein's children. Gawie then quoted Galatians 5, verse 22: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Then the facilitators added "respect" and "discipline" to the list.

The facilitators thus found meaning in articulating the fact that their humane values were rooted in their Christian faith: "Hope, trust and faith gives people courage to look at themselves and the world critically, honoring the values as ascribed to the Divine in the Christian tradition and living accordingly" (Bons-Storm 1998:15). Christ lived a human life and thereby also gave new meaning to the word "humanity". As a value, compassion has a central position in the relational model of Christ's human life and teachings:

The compassion of God provides a pattern for Christians to follow and a standard against which to measure their lives. To have compassion as Jesus did is to feel

intensely the pain..the hurt, the sorrow, the brokenness of another... We are drawn back to Bergant's image of the womb of God. Compassion is the unifying dynamic of God's love that reminds us that we have all come from the same womb. In turn, we are challenged to a way of living that is as compassionate as God is compassionate.

(Anderson & Johnson 1994:78-79)

However, divine values have no bearing on life if they remain abstract principles. Values become meaningful in the praxis of humane actions. During the fourth session, FX spoke of the importance and effects of kindness and compassion in defining his ethical position in teaching:

“For me teaching is not about marks or writing with chalk on the blackboard: That’s mechanical. It is not what teaching is all about. Teaching is what you do after you have written on the blackboard. The meaning of teaching is often measured according to the thickness of your files and books. But there are some colleagues with these thick books that I would like to ask: ‘What have you done for the child? Nothing!’” FX also said that his own child has never commented on his facilitator’s paperwork, but he has told of the time when his teacher gave him a pat on the back on the rugby field. That gesture, FX thought, brought connection between people. FX also spoke about what it is that makes a difference in the lives of the marginalised when he told of a girl who came to their school from a school for the mentally handicapped. “She was completely bewildered”, he said. He gently encouraged her to take part in class activities, made her aware that he understood her sense of bewilderment, went up to her during breaks and asked her how she was doing on that day. FX said: “She became a human being.” At the end of the year he received a thank you note from her: “You were the only one who recognised my problems. Thank you. You have a heart of gold.” She did not thank him for his teaching methods or the neatness of his registers. She thanked him for his solidarity with her, and for the values of the heart.

In the light the process thought of feminist theology, “solidarity” implies movement - with the other: “On the ethic of care, individuals define themselves as connected in relation to others, they understand relationships as response to another on his or her own terms” (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:203).

FX's narratives are illustrative of the fact that to be a facilitator who holds himself ethically accountable ("what have you done for the child?"), he could not hide behind normative or prescriptive systems about ethics in teaching. He chose rather to participate with the new girl in living his values. Thus through the praxis of living the value of compassion, FX indeed changed ethicising and theology from philosophy - and a noun - into a verb: from naming to doing.

3.6 DOING THEOLOGY

FX spoke out against the abolition of Scripture periods in schools. The question was subsequently put whether the abolition would require the facilitators to embody the teachings of the Bible through their actions, even more so now than ever before. It was agreed that this was indeed the challenge for the facilitators: not only to rely on words when it came to theology, but to see theology as praxis, to place the emphasis on "doing theology" (Bosch 1991:424).

De Gruchy (1994:12) highlights the relevance that the words "doing theology" – rather than observing theology from the "outside" - have for the theologian who is part of the Christian community: "from this perspective, 'doing theology' can never be a neutral exercise, nor can it be a substitute for faith and commitment. It assumes faith, and it requires commitment."

David Bosch (1991:362) states that in our bid to "break the grip of the spurious doctrine of autonomy and retrieve what is essentially human....we must reaffirm the indispensableness of conviction and commitment...." During the course of the research, the facilitators often spoke of their commitment to care for marginalised children as that which kept them at this particular school. Toekie said: "There are many children in this school who are living without hope. They look to us for support and guidance." The word "calling" that FX used to describe his position at the school also speaks of commitment.

The facilitators spoke about their faith and commitment against the background of the diminishing role of the formal church and the Christian values it taught in

Kraaifontein specifically and in society at large. Gawie then said that he views the breakdown of structures like the church and the role of religion in schools as a challenge to all Christians to fight for his/her rights and to live their Christian values. He told of a comment he made to a school inspector who referred to departmental policies regarding the abolition of Scripture in schools: *“But we as Christians have to live the instructions of the Bible.”* In this comment Gawie, unknowingly, echoed the title of the research: Transforming a school community: facilitators living values. I asked the group whether the research has had specific relevance towards describing and supporting those values in the light of what Gawie had just said. All the facilitators agreed that it did. Toekie then added that a minister in church recently commented “that the church, worldwide, is going to ground.” Lizél then commented: “We will become the church.” Aubrey reacted by saying: “We are already the church. By living our values we attract people.” Although structures - including the church as an institution - may crumble, the facilitators taking part in the research are creating communities of care through the living of the values of Galatians 5. The concept of doing theology or “praxis” within feminist theology “is linked with the commandment of love and the demands for justice, and becomes the attempt to live the gospel by sharing in the lives and struggles of the poor and by striving to bring about the changes needed to eliminate such suffering and to liberate them” (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:184).

In giving their understanding of what it means to do justice, Anderson and Johnson (1994:81-90) speak of justice within families as a process of moral inquiry: “It is true that a family teaches justice by being just. Parents teach children values by the way they value children” (:81). The implication for the school community of Kraaifontein where family structures have often broken down, is that the facilitators often take on the responsibility of parents: they teach justice by being just. FX describes teaching as a “calling” in which he is for Kraaifontein’s children a facilitator and also a “builder of people” an artist, a mother, father and a minister. By valuing their needs, FX teaches children about values. FX told us of meeting a former pupil by chance at a rugby match. He remembered him as a child who sat in “the class for slower learners”. This man told FX that he works as a pastor. When asked why he chose this profession, the man replied that it was because of FX and his example. Then I asked

FX what effect this encounter next to the rugby field had had on him. FX replied: “life is not in vain; we are not without purpose.”

We live in a society that demands instant gratification. FX’s story and his own reflections on it, reminded me that in doing hope with others, we work without sometimes seeing immediate results. I told FX that his story re-evoked in me a reverence for the value of patience in working with children: a value that seems to emanate from the experienced storyteller himself. During the eighth session, I struggled to find a word to describe the kind of patience I was referring to. Then Gawie came up with a word: “life -patience” (tr. “lewensgeduld”). In our process of restorying FX’s story, Gawie created a new description for a familiar value.

FX’s story also spoke to me of faith. Reflecting on his story two months later, I am thinking of how the effects of our work may remain a mystery, but that we hold on to the faith that God will continue it and that our work has a purpose. The restorying of FX’s story meant transcribing in theological terms the value of patience in my own life as a counsellor.

3.7 GOD AND THE WORLD: RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUALITY AND INCOMMENSURABILITY

Within the process thought of feminist theology, God and the world exist in a relationship of mutuality: “God depending on the world as we depend on God” Isherwood & McEwan (1993:71). Facilitators often spoke of their dependence on their Christian beliefs as the essential element that made caring possible. Viewing caring as part of a relational anthropology made it possible for me then to ask if something of God’s hope for the world - his creativity, sensitivity, love, steadfastness and tolerance – became visible through the facilitators in their relationships with one another and with the children of the school. They agreed that it did.

Walter Brueggemann (1993) describes faith through the metaphor of a play or drama. This means that we are, within the play, affirmed as “other to God”: “...God does not so dominate the drama that we have no role to play in God’s life, but that our own

role in the drama has cosmic significance” (:68). Within the play-metaphor, it becomes possible to think not only of us needing God but also of God needing us (see 4. 2.2. for Lizél’s reflections in this regard). During our fifth session, Lizél told of the word “stewards” (“tr. rentmeesters”) she had read on the back of a church bulletin, following one of our sessions. These words made her think that their work as facilitators in the school were to be the stewards of God’s love. For Lizél, God was not acting in an autocratic manner in the world, but needing humans to be the stewards of his love in Kraaifontein. Theologian, Elaine Graham (1998:141) writes:

[i]n their relationships and actions of care, Christians believe they can effect some of the creative and redemptive work of God, but that such care will also express something of the divine reality. Thus human pastoral relationships, however expressed, will also be to Christians in some sense a disclosure of God.

The mutuality of relationships between the facilitators and God, therefore makes it possible to think of teaching in Kraaifontein as pastoral practice that “can claim to be situated knowledges about justice, love and the divine” (Graham 1998:152).

However, in our research we discovered that mutuality alone is not enough to describe the facilitators’ relationship with God. Brueggemann (1999:1-2) elaborates on the relationship with the ‘Other’. He calls it the “dialogical principle” or the “principle of alterity”, and asserts that “this restless, unsettleable relation is the irreducible core of what it means to be human....The ongoing process of life is to come to terms with this other who will practice *mutuality* with us, but who at the same time stands in an *incommensurate* relation to us” [Brueggemann’s italics].

Toekie highlighted the aspect of God’s incommensurability in the poem that she wrote about her relationship with God as the source that supports the value of hope in her as a facilitator in Kraaifontein. The fact that God is GOD (incommensurable), is the ground of her hope and therefore of her beseeching: God is the one who can bring newness and life where there is only barrenness. If we were left only with mutuality, there would be no sense of someone outside our situation who can impact on it in meaningful, life-transforming ways. Mutuality alone can end in common despair. However, the combination of being in relationship with One who is *both mutual and incommensurable* adds that dimension that makes transformation possible.

Toekie's poem reminded me of Brueggemann's (1993:40) words : "Hope is an act that cedes our existence over to God, in the trusting assurance that God is 'able to accomplish abundantly far more than all that we can ask or imagine' (Eph. 3:20)." In Toekie's poem, God's mercy fulfills her hope for the transformation of the barren Karoo landscape into flowering abundance. The poem also speaks of the value of imagination ("that almost-dead can blossom") and that in our hope for things to be different, God's deliverance sometimes exceeds our imagination (see 4.2 for the importance of the value of hope for the facilitators):

Clarity

*Godforsaken lies the Karoo, burnt
by the sun
No sign of life
Trembling heat waves
that only reptiles crave.*

*At last the long prayed for deliverance
and flowers as far as the eye can see
fills your soul with it's lovely fragrance
and I long to carry it in my arms with me.*

*Then you know – almost-dead can blossom
if you keep on beseeching
God until he replies, because he knows the barrenness of despair
that wants to crush his creation.*

*When grace from Above pours over me like rain
an image from the past indeed becomes plain.
The more I look, the clearer I see:
when hit by drought, His mercy will carry me .*

In my letter following Toekie's reading of her poem, I thanked her for the Karoo imagery that will remain a source of great comfort to me as a counsellor working in Kraaifontein: we are not abandoned in the desert to work alone between the rocks and reptiles. In working in the context of poverty and despair, we are comforted by the existence of a relationship with God in which there is an ongoing dialectic between our hope and imagination in the Other who is 'able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine' (Eph.3:20) – values which sustain us - and trust in God's incommensurable mercy and faithfulness.

Thus the poem speaks of connectedness on many levels that are all interrelated. It is significant that Toekie's poem has "Clarity" as its title. "Clarity" is a clear reference to seeing the patterns of our interrelatedness: in our relationships with neglected children, we are sustained by our hope in a merciful God who can transform even those places where our imagination has been blinded by "the barrenness of despair".

When the imagination is engaged in giving expression to the multiple connections - with God, nature, the other, work - we embark on a journey of discovery that may lead us not only to view our life for the reality it is, but to discover in mystery a resource that sustains it. Theologians, Neuger and Poling (1997:32) take up Brian Wren's proposal that we seek "metaphors for God that demonstrate the deep interrelatedness of all creation. He suggests that we are more likely to do God justice if we see God's love moving deep within nature." The nature metaphors in Toekie's poem indeed demonstrate "the deep interrelatedness of all creation". Chapter 4 will deal with the metaphorical aspects of the research as pastoral theology and how metaphors from nature use knowledge that is primarily "impressionistic, engaging with the imagination, evoking the mystery at the heart of the Divine-human encounter" (Graham 1996:122).

3.8 CONCLUSION

Theologian, Elaine Graham (1996:206) describes authentic pastoral practice as "that which draws us into encounter with the 'Other', towards a deeper understanding of our own identity-in-relation." This chapter has therefore described the research as pastoral practice. The facilitators reflected on their understanding of themselves in relation to God and the effect this has had on their living of values. They also reflected on how God as power-in-relation provides a model for egalitarian and just relationships in society (Isherwood & McEwan 1996:203). Finally, we discussed the facilitators' egalitarian relationships with "concrete others" in the school as a way of doing participatory ethics and doing theology.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH AS IMAGINING AND RE-IMAGINING

4.1 IMAGINING “COUNTERSTORIES”

In a society that longs for change, theologian Walter Brueggemann (1993:24) proposes that we have to imagine counterstories that can stand against the brutality, detachment and self sufficiency that have resulted from modernist thinking.

Educationalist, Carol Witherell (1991:85) speaks of the importance of the value of imagination to work against a spirit of detachment in teaching:

..... René Girard has suggested that in our twentieth-century drive to demystify daily life, we create the greatest myth of all – that of our own detachment... Within teaching, counseling and learning activities, it is a commitment to genuine dialogue, imagination, and ethical concern that guards against our detachment.

Modernity has favored reason above imagination and proof above mystery. When we imagine, we inadvertently also invite a sense of mystery back into our lives. The facilitators in this research used the value of imagination in order to see their positions in the school in a multiplicity of forms instead of the essentialist descriptions that a modernist society prescribes. Many of the stories told during the research filled me as a witness with awe at how the facilitators’ imaginative practices enabled the joining of the powerful and knowledgeable with the powerless and marginalised. They also imagined in the research a practicing faith community no longer bound by the structures of church but rather being the church for others (see also 3.6).

A sense of awe and mystery also became part of this research when the facilitators wrote into being the multiple and complex connections that constitute their living of values. This chapter will focus on this “writing into being” that took place during our research. Imagination, therefore, views the world not only as it is, but how it could be:

We cannot even begin to *know* what the postmodern present is unless we are first prepared to *imagine* what it has been and what it *may become*. To abandon this imaginative potential for historical *depth* is to surrender to a new positivism which declares that things are the way they are and cannot be altered [Brueggemann’s italics].

(Brueggemann 1993:28-29)

During our research the facilitators indeed re-imagined their own present. The re-imagining took place by revisiting memories from their past and connecting with Biblical metaphors from a faith community. Through the sources of memory and metaphor, new possibilities for the description of self, of their purpose as facilitators and of action in the school emerged.

4.2 RE-IMAGINING OURSELVES

Poststructuralist and feminist author, Bronwyn Davies ([s a]b:253) advocates a greater use of imagination and a freeing of the speaking that limits us to move beyond boundaries such as traditional expectations of the role of the facilitator. She quotes Hélène Cixous who advocates the use of the imagination “to explore the possibility of each of us becoming multiple, of moving across the boundaries” (:254).

A boundary that we crossed during our research was the one that traditionally separated the professional from the personal in teaching. The fact that the research questions had values as its focus, made some facilitators decide against joining the research as they thought that it would be “too personal.” In fact, the point of the research was to do exactly that: to honour the personal values of the facilitators as a legitimate resource for knowledge about teaching in an impoverished community.

To open space for the personal, I invited the research participants during our first session to introduce themselves as facilitators not by way of rational, objective data, (i.e. date and place of birth) or their curriculum vitae as facilitators, but by imaginatively relating to a personal metaphor in the form of an image from nature, that could speak of their values as facilitators in Kraaifontein. Nature imagery was therefore not simply validated as being part of the life stories of these facilitators, but became part of an embodied experience (that is a feature of poststructuralist thinking). Thus language and memory became resources for the facilitators’ description of their metaphors of “[be]longing” (Davies [s a]b:37).

Heshusius (1996:6) quotes Polanyi who states that somatic knowing or “indwelling” is central to all acts of knowing. Bronwyn Davies ([s a]b:249) refers to the ways of knowing the materiality of the body that this relationship opens up: “...the body that materializes with/in landscapes, the body...comes to know itself through the rich possibilities (and also the restrictions) of the languages lodged on its depth/surfaces.” I realised that in speaking about values during our research, our conversations could easily refer to these values in abstract terms. By asking the facilitators to link the nature metaphor with their values I hoped to gain richer, depth/surface descriptions of the kinds of values that sustain the facilitators but also how these values are supported. Davies (2000:181) describes the poststructuralist interest in the power of language to move us into the “not-yet-known.” In our research we also discovered the power of metaphorical language in describing the values that sustain these facilitators in ways that were “not-yet-known.”

4.2.1 My Camel-thorn tree

Gawie, the deputy principal, chose the Camel-thorn tree of the Kalahari “with its roots deep into the barren soil” as the image that spoke to him of his values as a facilitator in Kraaifontein. Those values are love, steadfastness and patience, Gawie said. The metaphorical language opened the way to explore dimensions to these values that were “not-yet-known.” For instance, I asked Gawie whether the fact that he chose to speak of his Camel-thorn standing in the desolation of the Kalahari as opposed to a suburban garden, added meaning for him. Gawie replied: “*God is the source of love to me, and I pass it on.*” I asked Gawie what he meant. He replied that because the tree is big, it has roots that can access the water deep down. It uses the water to grow and the tree, in turn, provides shelter to the sheep. Likewise, he as a facilitator reaches deeply into the resource of God’s love and steadfastness. In the course of the research this “underground reservoir” came also to include the love and the sense of community that he as a boy experienced growing up in a missionary household. He discovered that, as a facilitator in Kraaifontein, he relies on this resource in living his values. In his life as a facilitator, the values of love and steadfastness provide the shade and shelter to the school community: “I get the feeling that people come to me when they experience problems or want to share news.”

I then expanded on the significance of the tree in the context of desolation, by asking Gawie if the passing on of God's love and steadfastness is needed more in the context of the desolation of the Kalahari, than it would be in a suburban garden.

Gawie replied that a Camel-thorn in the Kalahari has more significance when it stands on its own, than when it is surrounded by other trees in a garden. Gawie agreed that in the barren landscape of the Kalahari, the tree's shade and steadfastness becomes essential to animals and people as a place of shelter. Likewise, it becomes essential to pass on the shade and steadfastness of God's love in the Kraaifontein school community, where children often have to survive the harshness of poverty and neglect. Gawie also included patience as a shade-giving value in Kraaifontein's school.

During the first two sessions, Gawie's tree consisted of shade and roots. The Camel-thorn embodied the kind of values that sustain Gawie: namely love, steadfastness and patience. The tree also became a metaphor for how these values are supported in him. The metaphor provided a rich description of significance of the values that Gawie brings to teaching, by being located in the semi-desert conditions of the Kalahari – a context that is analogous to teaching in Kraaifontein.

Gawie thereby discovered the power of his own imagination: "Our conceptual life, shaped by imagination and the qualities of the world experienced, gives rise to the intentions that direct our activities. Intentions are rooted in the imagination. Intentions depend upon our ability to recognize what is, and yet to imagine what might be" (Eisner 1993:7). Eisner goes on to explain that we need representation to make our experience public and that the form of representation chosen is also an act of invention.

Before our last session, I invited the facilitators to write about their nature metaphor, if they wished to do so. Gawie chose poetry as the form of representation for his metaphor. It made sense that he chose this form, as "[p]oetic meaning requires poetic forms of thought and poetically treated form" (Eisner 1993:7). What emerged through the poem was Gawie's intentions and its embodiment in metaphorical

imagery. Before reading his poem, Gawie explained the meaning of the word “street” in the context of the Kalahari: it refers to the flat space between two dunes. The word “aggerob” refers to a son.

My Camel-thorn

*His roots sink
far into the red kalahari-sand
deep, very deep do they drink
to let branches and leaves grow*

*Under branches lie shadows
for animal and man alike
In your steadfastness
they find shelter and shade*

*Everywhere between street and dune , upright and proud
you stand alone
You lend of your dignity and power
to me to pass on to child and friend.*

*Your perseverance, and steadfastness is so striking
What more can an aggerob ask of you...
Little did I know,
you became that which I value*

*Like your seeds and pods continue to scatter,
your image giving direction and impetus to me,
So do I want to it pass on
to children and hope that they will take you as value with them.*

Over our eight sessions together, Gawie referred back several times to the Camel-thorn metaphor and himself as a facilitator. For Gawie, the personal metaphor brought him to the realisation that his values need to be passed on. Gawie’s working with the metaphor in the course of the research, enabled him to discover other dimensions to the original Camel-thorn image. It was therefore significant that Gawie’s Camel-thorn had, by our last session together, developed seeds and pods. The use of metaphor in the research had allowed Gawie to make an important ethical discovery: values became meaningful only when they are passed on to the Kraaifontein’s children, parents and colleagues.

This ethical aspect of values in Gawie’s life was “not-yet-known” at the beginning of our research, but became known through the use of a specific personal metaphor:

Just as we seek out metaphors to highlight and make coherent what we have in common with someone else, so we seek out personal metaphors to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes and goals as well. A large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives.

(Lakoff & Johnson 1980:232-233)

Philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1964:201) speaks of “reverberation” as an interplay that takes place between the outside world and the inside world. This interplay by way of poetic metaphor leads to “an extension of our intimate space”. At the same time, in a sense it “recreates” the outside world by what we bring from our lives. The camel-thorn indeed extended the intimate space of Gawie’s values and its ethicality in the school community of Kraaifontein. But Gawie, on the other hand, through an act of imagination, created a unique lone Camel-thorn tree that could become the embodiment of his personal values and their ethicality. Thus the reality of living his values in Kraaifontein became for Gawie, within the postmodern epistemology of the research, “a multi-layered process where a continuity between all things exists” (Herholdt 1998b:227).

The power of this interplay between poetic metaphor and intimate space extended itself beyond our research sessions. Gawie told me some weeks later how he had read his poem over the telephone to his younger sister, who is a social worker. Gawie said that she was deeply moved by his reading of it.

4.2.2 The oak

During our first session, Lizél said that a group of old oak trees on a childhood farm yard embodies the value of steadfastness in her. She painted a word picture of them in their seasonal changes, emphasizing the fact that they “remained standing steadfast”. Lizél said that the leaves became mulch and the acorns provided food for pigs. She then linked the oak metaphor with teaching by saying: “What I have learnt, I give back to teaching.”

Through the course of the research Lizél has invested her oak trees with her “inner space” and its values. Not only did the metaphor expand, but, for Lizél, the practice of writing the words proved to be one that recreated meaning for herself regarding her purpose in life. Thus the aim of the research, proposed in Chapter one, of “seeking increased meaning” in the lives of the facilitators, became a reality.

Lizél chose to revisit her original metaphor in the form of poetry. Some significant changes had taken place to Lizél’s original metaphor. Instead of a group of trees, Lizél’s metaphor had changed to a single oak tree: hence the title of her poem. The children of the school had become part of the embodied oak tree. Lizél no longer speaks of her values in isolation, but about the effect which these have had on children’s lives. Another facet of the metaphor that developed was that God and his purpose for her life became linked to the oak metaphor. Thus, through Lizél writing the metaphor into being came the revelation: being a facilitator at this school for twenty eight years was no accident; rather Lizél discovered that she was “*planted here with extraordinary purpose ...Kraaifontein has been given to me as place.*” The poem therefore culminates in the expression of gratitude to God: “*Thank you Lord for twenty eight fulfilling years!*”

Lizél started the reading of her poem by saying “actually I cannot write...” I reflected on Lizél words and realised that discourses about “good writing” might paralyze or inhibit. However, in this poem Lizél had found her own voice that articulated deeply personal truths. I believe that Lizél , in speaking as an embodied self, had found a new relationship with language. When she read the poem , these embodied truths made it a moving experience for her to speak and for us to listen to:

Lizél started by quoting a Chinese proverb:

*When you hold a green tree in your heart
the singing bird will appear in it.*

The Oak

*The oak tree
To me*

*the embodiment of life's dream
My calling,
my place, my purpose, His will
- man proposes but God disposes -
planted here to be his representative
the tree reaches high, proudly, it stands firm like a rock
giving shelter, feeding body and soul
tries to see the best in everyone
branches like arms that embrace tenderly
that protect against unending, incomprehensible hurt
of young children who still have to learn so much of life's cruelty.
See how the old oak defies it.
Strong , upright, with Christian values,
planted here with extraordinary purpose.
After 28 years still here for children
Who else to help them carry their burden?
There are times of healing, success achieved
Other times of bitter failure*

*However!
New leaves every year
Spring – the oak buds again
A new beginning
Forget the hurt forget the pain
The new shoots reach upwards.
Although the oak looks barren, dry
She stands proud, reaching upwards into the sky
Just like children
who “seek attention” – is it not for love they cry?*

*Take time
Change course
Let go of rules
Look with new eyes beyond children's unruliness and moods
Underneath the roughness, hardness of the trunk
May be something else, surprisingly less stark.
Learn of God's creation under the coarseness of the bark.*

Discover the gems that had been polished by your hand

*In awe I stand
I have discovered something grand
Kraaifontein has been given to me as place
to fulfill His will, to let my talents shine, to bring His message of love*

Thank you Lord for twenty eight fulfilling years!

The research questions - “What kinds of values sustain the facilitators?” and “What kinds of values assist the facilitators in transforming a school community to caring solidarity?” - were answered through both oral and written facets of the research process. Initially, the values of steadfastness and the giving back to others were named by Lizél as values that sustain her. Later, the combination of love and strictness were added. In her poem we do not merely read the value “love” - we see it richly described in embodied and relational terms: *“branches like arms that embrace tenderly/ that protect against unending, incomprehensible hurt/ of young children who still have to learn so much of life’s cruelty.”*

The values of patience and flexibility were also added to the original metaphor: *“Take time/ Change course/ Let go of rules/ Look with new eyes beyond children’s unruliness and moods...”*

After she had read her poem, I asked Lizél if the reflection on and writing of her facilitator/landscape metaphor was useful to her. She answered: *“Absolutely! I brought two things together that I had never done before in this way: here (in Kraaifontein) I have a purpose and I am not here because I want to be here, I am here because I have to be here.”*

We can never fully grasp with our reason the extent to which our lives form part of a larger whole. We can, however, through acts of the imagination, describe some of the most intimate links between ourselves, nature, others and God. Within these complex relationships, God is also re-described in Lizél’s poem as the one who planted the oak tree in a specific position. The values embodied in the oak therefore gain another purpose – to fulfil a God-given task.

Through the speaking and writing, language was reclaimed (Davies [s.a]b:252), not simply for its own sake, but for the power it has to embody the values Lizél brings to teaching. Through metaphors the facilitators linked their values to others, to the natural world and to spiritual truths, in new ways. Metaphor therefore supplied the “new images that give life to previously unimagined possibilities” (Davies 2000:180).

In a personal note to me at the end of the research, Lizél wrote about the sustaining power of the new oak-metaphor in her life: “I want to thank you for being part of this group. It was fun and it enriched my life. That which I thought about became embodied and could be shared with others. In the future, I will always have a special connection with the ‘oak tree’. It will be my inspiration and source of strength to fall back on in times of despair. It will inspire me to persevere until I retire!”

Expanding on the Chinese proverb she had quoted at the start of the poem, it was as if Lizél had constructed a personal oak tree of values and relationships with poetic language, in which the singing bird of teaching could find a place.

4.3 HOPING

During the first session Toekie chose the metaphor of the Van Wyksvlei landscape in the Karoo to introduce herself as a facilitator working in Kraaifontein. Van Wyksvlei was Toekie’s first teaching post of her long career. I quote from the letter that followed that session: *“You told us how, at the beginning of your three year stay, you could not imagine how people could actually be happy in the midst of the drought and the grey bushes. Then it rained for the first time and all the grey bushes stood in white flower. You told us how you could not believe that flowers could bloom in this hard and rocky soil.”* Toekie also spoke how this landscape taught her that one needs to become silent and look beyond the obvious to see things that one would normally not see.

In our subsequent exploration of the richness that Toekie’s metaphor offered, a central theme emerged by which the landscape echoed the vision that Toekie has for teaching. This vision is to hold on to the hope that the landscape of children’s lives will be transformed. She said: “Many children in this school are living without hope, and they look to us.” Thus Van Wyksvlei reflects back to Toekie the interior portrait of hope and that there can be no hope without imagination: “[i]t is imagination that enables us to ask the “what if” and “as if” questions that can guide our explorations of human events and actions of the past and our sense of possibilities for the present and future” (Witherell 1991:88). Without imagination, the Karoo landscape has only the

possibility of barrenness. Likewise, linking the value of imagination to “hoping”, plays an important part in Toekie’s vision of her role as a facilitator in this school (see also 3.7 for Toekie’s poem, *Clarity*, on the interplay between the van Wyksvlei landscape, Toekie’s value of hope and God’s mercy).

Another facet of the metaphor that Toekie expanded upon was the fact that in the barren landscape one has to develop an eye for detail. Toekie’s metaphor highlighted the fact that to look with hopeful eyes “one sometimes has to be able to see the smallest flowers blooming amidst the rocks.” Toekie spoke with appreciation of the small but significant hopeful practice of some of Kraaifontein’s parents who took trouble in visiting the local library to ensure that their children had access to books.

During the research process Toekie often spoke about the importance of hope not only as a value that sustains her in teaching in Kraaifontein, but of making it visible in people’s lives. As the research had as its primary focus the values that assist the facilitators in transforming a school community, we wanted to look at what this community “may become.” As a value, hope was often spoken about since hope made it possible for some of the facilitators to work in this school community. This is because hope has to do with...

...a different order, a new earth. In the Second Testament I read that of faith, hope and love, love is the most important. But nowadays I think that hope is the most needed virtue. Hope nurtures the courage to love, that is, to be open to others and to see the best in them and to cherish them without being afraid. Without hope in the midst of dread there cannot be faith.

(Bons-Storm 1998:15)

Within a postmodern epistemology hope is a value that attains its meaning as part of what Levinas (1982) calls responsibility towards the other. Narrative psychologist, Kaethe Weingarten, also highlights the relationality of hope when she says: “it is the responsibility of those who love you to do hope with you. Hope is something we do with others” (Weingarten 2000:402).

Toekie said that she sees the bringing of hope as the main responsibility she has in teaching. She referred to poet Emily Dickenson who spoke of hope as “a thing of feathers that perches in the soul.” Toekie’s personal knowledge of her terminally ill adult son who lives his life as a quadriplegic, informs her belief that hope is indeed something we do with others: “I have to give hope to someone, because I have seen what life without hope looks like.”

Narrative therapist, David Epston (2002), prefers the word “hoping”, as an active value that has to be lived and created within the lives of people. He states that “hopelessness and despair requires our ingenuity.” In this regard then, the values of hope and imagination become interlinked through praxis.

4.3.1 Being a “safeguard of other’s hope”

David Epston (2002) proposed that where people experience hopelessness, hope could be encouraged and inspired in them by others. These people he describes as “the guardians of other’s hope” (Epston 2002). Kaethe Weingarten (2000) also highlights the crucial role of the witness in keeping hope alive in the context of people’s lives where hopelessness limits possibilities for action in the world. Toekie’s witnessing of her son’s deteriorating health and her personal struggle against feelings of hopelessness have not deterred her from being a witness or a guardian of hope in God’s love.

During the seventh session, Toekie made the comment that she often feels that she cannot reach the intellectually impaired children in her class through rational knowledge. However “ if you have taught him something about the love of God, then you would have made as big an impact as you would have with rational knowledge, maybe even greater.” She likened the love of God to a “gift”.

Then Toekie said that it was important to her that the children in her class should realise that they are all unique human beings. *“When I asked Toekie what she does in the classroom to foster a sense of uniqueness in children, she told us that she once brought a bag of semi-precious stones to school. She asked the ten and eleven year olds in her class to close their eyes . Then she placed a purple coloured stone into*

each opened hand. Only after all the stones had been placed, were they allowed to open their eyes. "Then I told them to keep these stones in their purses. And all through their lives, be reminded of their own uniqueness, every time they look at it. There is no one else like you." (excerpt letter seven).

Toekie's metaphor offered a rich description of the values of both love and of hope. Toekie's gift to the unsuspecting children became the metaphor for God's gift of love to us. Toekie's stones also become a tangible reminder that God's love remains with us. In the society that prizes intellectual achievement, Toekie's metaphor also speaks of the God who treasures the uniqueness of every individual. Her sense was that the stone metaphor made it possible for her to speak of uniqueness not in intellectual terms, but in terms of the wonder and mystery of God's creation of which these children were also a part.

Imagination enabled Toekie to move the boundaries of conventional ways of thinking, and to develop what Brueggemann (1993:24-25) refers to as the hopeful 'counterstories' of the imagination. Toekie's counterstory spoke of Kraaifontein's intellectually impaired children not in terms of their limitations, but rather in terms of their connectedness with God. Her counterstory invites these children to see their lives in connected, spiritual terms. "Spirituality", says Isherwood and McEwan (1996:219) "is a process of inner growth in awareness and sensitivity linked to reflection and transformation...a sense of feeling connected and interdependent, of joy and graciousness, of reverence and gratitude for the wonders of creation and the mystery of life."

Toekie's "counterstory" also highlights the constructionist principle within a postmodern epistemology that truth is relational. Herholdt quotes van Huyssteen and du Toit on the meaning of relational truth: "Relational truth wants to say that truth – also that of the Bible – does not solely exist objectively apart from humans for humans, it is also not subjectivistically created by humans, but becomes disclosed rather within a relation of the believer's involvement with something else" (Herholdt 1998a: 459).

Thus the children in Toekie's class holding the stones in their hands, listening to her voice, are not presented with the objective fact of uniqueness, but rather invited into an ongoing relationship with her words and the semi-precious stones and to discover and rediscover the truth about their own uniqueness within it.

This story also illustrates how Toekie, a temporary" teacher in Kraaifontein, acts as a guardian of God's permanent, eternal faithfulness. Toekie's placing of a stone in each child's hand, therefore, becomes an imaginative act of hoping – of doing theology.

Gawie also spoke of the way in which he was the "guardian" of hope for a talented athlete in the school. Gawie told how he recognized her academic and sporting abilities and how he encouraged her "to aim big " because, in his experience, many of Kraaifontein's children did not aim for more than "the till at Checkers." He encouraged her to go to university and that, if she did not know what she wanted to study, she should consider studying physiotherapy. Gawie told how he met her years later and heard that she was at university and that she was studying physiotherapy. Gawie said he regards the fact that she responded to his hope for her future and to his encouragement as one of the highlights of his teaching career at this school.

Through the research, the research participants became witnesses to Toekie and Gawie's stories of hoping. It was my experience that the research afforded these facilitators the opportunity to find and express their voice. In this regard, Kaethe Weingarten (2000:392) speaks of voice "not as an individual's achievement of self-knowledge but, rather, a possibility that depends on the willingness of the listeners that make up the person's community. In this view, voice is contingent on who listens with what attention and attunement. Voice depends on witnessing."

4.3.2 Research as a hope-inspiring practice

When one is working in a deprived community such as Kraaifontein, how do facilitators develop their own counterstories that can stand against hopelessness, despair and burnout? In a questionnaire at the end of the research, I asked the facilitators to reflect on various aspects of the research. One question in particular dealt with the context of their work: "Has this research been of benefit to you as a

facilitator, specifically in dealing with the effects of poverty and neglect in children's lives?" Toekie replied: "*[I]t [the research] made you realise why you are here and what life is all about. It brings you back to the source from which you draw*" (excerpt evaluation sheet).

For Toekie, the research was a practice that brought her back to the resource of hope in her life. The research also meant reconnecting Toekie with her purpose at this school: namely, to be a safeguard of hope for others.

The use of the value of imagination brought forth the VanWyksvlei landscape and the practice of placing stones in children's hands. Denise Ackermann (1998:88) describes theology as an "imaginative praxis which is effective and constructive." Both Toekie's metaphor and story are illustrative of the fact that hope sometimes needs imaginative praxis in order to become effective and constructive to oneself and others.

4.4 "SELVING"

An important advantage of employing the facilitators' imagination in the research was that it illustrated the fact that within a postmodern epistemology "meaning is multiple, and that forms of representation provide the means through which meaning is made" (Eisner 1993:8). All these diverse forms of meaning added to the richness of the research into the values and its effects in a school community: "[d]iversified forms of meaning are related to different forms of understanding and...different forms of understanding have great virtue for knowing how to act in complex circumstances" (Eisner 1993:8).

No longer bound by the discourses of what constitutes teaching, metaphors opened new ways of imagining and speaking as facilitators. For example, Gawie preferred to take up the position as "a conduit for God's love and steadfastness in Kraaifontein." Bronwyn Davies (1991:51) describes this taking up of new positions as "agency":

[it is] a sense of oneself as one who can go beyond the given meanings in any one discourse, and forge something new, through a combination of previously unrelated discourses, through the invention of words and concepts which capture

a shift in consciousness that is beginning to occur, or through imagining not what is, but what might be.

In the research, stories and metaphor became agents for what Bronwyn Davies describes as “selving”(Davies [s a]a:17). By referring to the subject as verb - “selving” - the self is no longer an essentialist concept, but rather one that is constantly shaped not only by its actions, in the first instance, but also by the stories it tells and the metaphors by which it connects. In this regard, Witherell (1991:89) refers to self-knowledge not as an entity but as an activity: “the desire to transcend an alienating consciousness begs for the reimagining not only of the boundaries between mind, body and emotions, but also of those we draw between the self and both the human and nonhuman other” (Heshusius 1996:131).

By speaking and writing their body/landscape connections, the facilitators were “selving”, in that they spoke of their body/landscape awareness and then wrote new poetic selves into being. Thus describing their relationship as facilitators with Kraaifontein in poetic terms in itself became a value that added to the “selving” process. Toekie commented how speaking and writing enabled her to form new ideas about herself or to give form to feelings that have hitherto remained unexpressed. She also mentioned how the theme of mercy in her life became more richly described through re-membling her mother and connecting those memories with the metaphor of the Karoo. Gawie said that his original metaphor gained pods and seeds through the course of the research. I believe that the seeds and pods of the extended poetic metaphor could speak about the transformative power of Gawie’s values and their continuity in the lives of children, in ways that “ordinary” language could not.

From the stories contained in all the preceding chapters, it seems clear that the six facilitators taking part in the research were following the example of Christ who transformed old structures and brought new meaning to clichéd values such as love, and a dictionary-style job description of “facilitator”.

Not only Christ’s actions, but his becoming human(e), stand in the light of “making all things new.” I believe that the research created space for the facilitators to reflect on their humane values and their capacity to “make things new” in their school

community. Davies quotes Probyn ([s a]b:254) on the idea that in our perception of ourselves, there can be no change without imagination:

Finally, I am brought back to the importance of imagination....In order to...work at the very edges and ends of ourselves in order to envision change, we must engage our imaginations more fully. Without blurring the material conditions of our difference, we can nonetheless stretch ourselves to the point where we break into other realms of possibility. In other words, the question “ who is she and who am I” necessitates a fundamental reworking of the theoretical and social terrain in which we are positioned. This also entails a radical rethinking of how we use and position ourselves. It is only at the extreme limits of who we think we are that we can articulate, respect and use our differences.

It therefore became possible in our research for the facilitators not to think of themselves as facilitators in dualistic terms, as a separate category, but rather to view listening/caring/solidarity with the marginalised of Kraaifontein from a multiplicity of positions: providing shelter and steadfastness like a Camel-thorn; keeping the hope of God’s mercy alive in the midst of barrenness; looking behind the coarse bark of an oak to discover the beauty of God’s creation; being footprints of Christ’s love into which Kraaifontein’s children can step; and reminding children of their uniqueness in the eyes of God by placing semiprecious stones in their hands.

The research discovered that imagination provided many answers to the research question about the kind of values that sustain the facilitators. I believe that the research itself has also created ways in which the value of imagination in the lives of these facilitators has been supported and strengthened.

4.5 METAPHYSICS OF IMAGINATION

Through, what Bachelard (1964) refers to as, “a metaphysics of the imagination”, the facilitators came to make sense of their lives in terms of the new connections that metaphors provided. Our research therefore made it possible for the facilitators to speak of their values not only in factual and theological terms, but also to recreate and re-describe values in terms of metaphors.

Bachelard (1964: xii) refers to “reverberation” as the measure of poetic imagery. He refers to Minkowski that the essence of life is not a static feeling of being, but rather a participation in filling the forms of life with new meaning (:xii). Thus metaphor in itself becomes a way for our minds and hearts to reverberate with the life of other living forms.

For Lizél, Toekie and Gawie, the writing of the poetry proved to be a powerful way of describing the detailed nuances of their values and their “reverberation” with or embodiment in nature: “The body is not separate from landscape....Bodies and landscape might be said to live in such complex patterns of interdependence that landscape should be understood as much more than a mere context in which embodied beings live their lives” (Davies [s a]b:23). Because of the complexity gained, body/landscape metaphors could therefore also provide rich poetic descriptions of the context within which the values are called upon and sustained. It was significant that three of the six facilitators chose desert or semi-desert imagery to portray the context of Kraaifontein.

Poetry was not the only used source used to metaphorically describe the values that sustained the facilitators and that contributed to creating a caring school community within Kraaifontein. Facilitators also richly described their values in terms of biblical metaphors.

4.6 BIBLICAL METAPHORS IN THE RESEARCH

Within a postmodern paradigm, the Bible features as a “contextual conversational partner, rather than a decontextualised collection of norms and truths” (Deist 1994:258). As our research was conducted within a postmodern epistemology, the Bible became a conversational partner to us that proved able to pose helpful questions regarding “our own practical decisions” (:258).

Metaphors play a crucial role in a postmodern hermeneutics in that they open up possibilities for new insights. Within such a hermeneutic the Bible as text becomes part of a relational process of interpretation instead of a fixed blueprint for

understanding (Herholdt 1998a). In our research, Biblical metaphors therefore invited some facilitators and myself into processes of meaning-making in terms of our own lives. Thus “[t]he locus of revelation [was] no longer the historical events behind the texts, but the text as language that involves the reader” (Herholdt 1998a :460).

Lizél, who introduced herself by way of a group of oak trees, spoke of her surprise when she came upon a text in her daily reading from the Bible, entitled : “Are you a tree?” The daily reading referred to Isaiah 61:3 – 4 (The New Jerusalem Bible):

“and they will be called ‘terebinths* of saving justice’,
planted by Yahweh to glorify him.

4. They will rebuild the ancient ruins,
they will raise what has long lain waste,
they will restore the ruined cities,
all that has lain waste for ages past.”

In a chapter on text from the Old Testament with an apocalyptic perspective, Vorster (1986) refers to chapters 56-66 in Isaiah as being “apocalyptic” in nature: “They were the products of conflict, of crisis and of the efforts which creative writers of the remote past expended in their attempts to present a symbolic universe that would enable their readers to live a meaningful life despite the conditions of their day” (1986:184). It is significant that the Biblical terebinths’ purpose were to symbolically rebuild the ruins. In a society laid waste by poverty, neglect and abuse, the terebinth thus became a metaphor for hope-creating praxis – so too for the facilitators of Kraaifontein’s school. For the facilitators of Kraaifontein, the metaphoric language of Isaiah in our research therefore “serve[d] as an encouragement and exhortation to perseverance” (Vorster 1986:184) in their healing of God’s creation.

The insights that the abovementioned text from Isaiah provided all support the postmodern idea of the imaginative use of the Bible as “ the compost pile that provides material for new life” (Brueggemann 1993:61). During the sixth session the

*terebinth *n.* Small S. Eur. tree (*Pistacia terebinthus*) yielding turpentine. (*The Concise Oxford dictionary* 1976:1194)

facilitators spoke about the tree metaphor (fig, cedar, olive and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) in the Bible mostly associated with its functionality.

The facilitators then used the text as “compost” in their own lives. They commented that to be a tree in the context of Kraaifontein meant to practice love and thereby to transform a school community to caring solidarity, in the same way that the biblical terebinth produced turpentine that had practical value in rebuilding “all that has lain waste for ages past.” This biblical text became especially significant in our research, as three of the facilitators chose to link their values with tree metaphors.

The biblical metaphor thus provided us with new ways of describing and understanding teaching as relational praxis in the complex circumstances of Kraaifontein. (see also 3.3.4 for Lizél’s interpretation of the “stewardship” metaphor)

4.7 “FREEING THE MORAL IMAGINATION”

Educationalist, Carol Witherell (1991: 94), proposes that narrative in teaching:

....has to do with the power of story and metaphor in offering up possibilities for human action and feeling....the teller or receiver of stories can discover connections between self and other, penetrate barriers to understanding, and come to know more deeply the meanings of his or her own historical and cultural narrative. Story and metaphor provide a form of educational encounter that renders us human and frees the moral imagination.

De Gruchy (1994) highlights the interpretation of our Christian faith in God in relation to culture (such as teaching in Kraaifontein) and the philosophical questions it raises as an important element of doing theology today: “Some would argue that theology has to be understood as ‘queen of the social sciences’ because it provides a way of putting together what has been torn asunder since the Enlightenment” (De Gruchy 1994:8). Therefore the “freeing of the moral imagination” made possible by narrative and metaphor in our research, enabled the facilitators to speak, during our final session together, of teaching as practical theology. (see: Doing theology - 3.6)

4.8 IMAGINING FROM THE POSITION OF THE OTHER

In her chapter on the importance of imagining in organizational structures, such as schools, Shirley Grundy speaks of the “thin line management style” present in many organizations. This approach favors attempts to “eliminate uncertainty” and works towards “the shortest route between decision and action, between policy and practice, between problem and solution” (Grundy 1996:110).

Grundy (1996) proposes an alternative that takes account of the multiple possible interpretations that present themselves when we see the world not only in empirical terms, but also in terms of values and of personal feelings. When Gawie puts himself in the position of the crying left behind children as the school bus pulled out, he puts himself in their shoes. He then becomes able to ask questions such as “can it be otherwise?” In so doing he honours the idea that there are multiple truths and a multiplicity of positions that we can take. He is able to position himself with those children who have been treated unfairly. The idea that we can take up multiple positions is an important principle in poststructuralist thinking (Davies 1991). In doing so, we can imagine what it means and feels like to speak from another position than that of our own. In order to stand in another’s shoes, we will make ourselves vulnerable and often invite uncertainty.

Grundy (1996) therefore proposes a leadership style in which imagining, rather than rationality, is privileged to invite others into the conversation : “then through the act of imagining , others can vicariously be drawn into the debate”(113).

Our research set out to describe the kinds of values that assist the facilitators in transforming a school community into caring solidarity. We discovered in imagination, specifically from the position of the other, a value that works towards solidarity. When FX says that the quality of teaching is not measured by the thickness of your teaching files but rather by what one has meant to children, this speaks of an imaginative approach to teaching - one that starts with children and their needs:

...privileging imagining within communicative practices reminds us of the need to seek evidence from “the other”, from the marginalised, from those whose

voices have not and cannot be given access to or space within the debate. It also opens up possibilities for the 'voicing' of experience by other means than through scholastically presented argumentation.

(Grundy 1996: 113)

Lizél told of a conversation she had had during a parent's evening with the mother of "the naughtiest little rascal" in her class. She heard that as a single parent, the mother was struggling to make ends meet and "that his alcoholic grandfather often vented his frustrations on the boy. His mother also told me [Lizél] that I had to take him by the hand, and I had to teach him." Lizél said she realised that his "naughtiness came from simply not knowing better."

Prior to her conversation with the mother, Lizél's judgement was based on the norm of what constitutes naughtiness. Through conversation, she was able imagine neglect and abuse from the position of the boy and how it sustained the problem of naughtiness. Lizél's imagining made it possible for her to allow the marginalised boy into the debate, thereby rephrasing "naughtiness" as "not knowing better" and to take up a position of solidarity instead of judgement.

Imagining from the other's position also had relevance for our positions as seven different research participants.

4.8.1 Folds in the landscape

In the eighth session, when the facilitators spoke about their revisiting of the nature image with which they had introduced themselves in the first session, FX commented that, for himself no change had taken place regarding the original image. "I only see it from a different perspective (from the others). All of us experience the same problems in teaching, yet every one 'builds from his own landscape'." FX's observation connects with the hermeneutical stance in the postmodern epistemology "that there is no single truth, only different perspectives, each one a 'true' or valid perception of the world from that vantage point" (Parry 1991:42). Davies likens the different positions in which people stand to the folds in a mountain landscape: "What is possible, desirable, even obvious from one fold makes no sense in the other"(Davies [s a]b: 41).

The implication of this hermeneutical stance for the research was an honouring of the complexity of the social world with its multiple interpretations. It also meant that when we asked in the research question “what kinds of values sustain the facilitators” we may use the same words to describe values such as “steadfastness” and “hope.” Yet the narratives arising from our different perspectives, may colour the same values in different ways.

One of the effects of the hermeneutical stance, is what feminist writer, Seyla Benhabib (1990:361) refers to as an “enlarged mentality”: “The more we can identify the different viewpoints from which a situation can be interpreted and constructed, the more we will have sensitivity to the particularities of the perspectives involved.” The identification of the different viewpoints of the six facilitators in the research has certainly created an “enlarged mentality” in me as researcher, as regards teaching in Kraaifontein.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the processes were discussed whereby the facilitators re-imagined themselves and their values. I have also focussed on the relevance of personal and Biblical metaphors in these processes and how these created new possibilities for meaning in the lives of the facilitators. Theologian David Ray Griffin proposes: “Our task is to envisage, and incarnate, a still better way, a way that fulfills the human potential more fully, a way that more completely realizes the image of God in us” (Griffin [s a]:26). The research provided imaginative ways for these facilitators to realize their human potential more fully and also to see something of God in themselves.

In chapter five all the research participants will reflect on the meanings that were made during the research and whether the research has lived up to its original ethical purpose.

CHAPTER 5 : REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 I indicated that this research would be done as participatory action research. In reflecting on the research in this chapter, I asked myself and the facilitators the following question: Was it indeed participatory? Because the research also focussed strongly on relationality as a theme, it also has to feature in our reflection on the research. In other words did the research enable the facilitators to rethink their relationships with themselves and with others? Did the research invite them into a different relationship with teaching itself as practice? If so, in what ways? In this chapter I will address these questions as they pertain to both the “participatory” as well as the “action” dimensions of the research. In addition I will pay attention to appreciative inquiry as a participatory research approach through which the research questions were answered.

5.2 DISCOVERING THE EMBERS: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN ACTION

In describing the sources for a theory of action research, Schubert and Lopez-Schubert (1997:204-205) state that the research community often directly or indirectly tell facilitators “that they are followers, or implementors at best. Researchers thus deskill teachers by delegitimizing a quest for purpose and meaning in their work by undermining their confidence.”

Schubert and Schubert-Lopez propose a different kind of research instead: “To teach seriously is to continuously ask oneself fundamental questions about what one is doing and why one is doing it”(205). Through this line of inquiry, the personal and the emotional also become legitimized as an important part of the research (see: Aims of the research in Chapter 1, 1.2.). As action research this research or co-search did enable the facilitators to become the researchers of their own lives, by inviting a reflective and appreciative stance towards their own values.

Toekie commented that the participation in the sessions had led her to self-research: “Things that one was not even aware of, became highlighted. Long after the session one keeps on thinking about everything and you look at things within yourself that had been buried deep.” Gawie spoke about how the sessions reinforced his commitment to see his work in Kraaifontein as a calling. During our celebration, Gawie likened being a facilitator to making a fire with camelthorn wood . He then likened the research to blowing away the ash that has formed and discovering the burning embers underneath. “I have discovered new embers in myself ...talents, family , values...that burn when you blow upon it. It is amazing. I never realised it...I feel I have to share (what I have discovered) with colleagues and children...”

5.3 PARTICIPATING IN THE CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE: THE ROLE OF NARRATIVE

Our research uncovered some of the teacher lore in the form of narrative, both personal and cultural. What emerged through the research process was that instead of having a guiding theory directing the research, facilitator’s reflections indeed formed the basis of getting to know their own values as well as the teaching praxis in Kraaifontein that had been shaped by these values. Facilitators’ knowledge became the force that both shaped this research and gave life to theological and narrative discourses. In our research it is precisely through their stories, ideas, writings and reflections that the facilitators gave their own individual and collective replies to the “what” they are teaching as well as to the “why” they are practising teaching in the way they do in Kraaifontein. Both replies - to the “what” and “why” of their teaching in this school community - centre around the values they live and the way these values are supported.

Through Toekie’s narratives about her quadriplegic son, Rikus, we heard how he values humor and looks beyond superficialities to what really matters in life. What was especially poignant to us as witnesses of this re-telling, was the fact that they (Toekie and Rikus) embrace humor in the face of death. Toekie told me during April 2002 that doctors had given Rikus no more than a few months to live. This new

information changed the significance of Toekie's humour as a value. For mother and son to hold on to humour as a shared value under these circumstances revealed the value of courage. Thus Toekie's personal narratives became more than the telling of the value of humour in her life. As we as research participants laughed at her jokes and stories in the sessions, the value of humour became embodied knowledge. Upon the news of Rikus' immanent death, the value of Toekie's humour then became part of a rich description of what it means to live courageously. Educationalists, Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings (1991a:8) quote Paul Brockelman on the "thickness of personal identity" that is:

revealed through an emerging personal story, a story that has a narrative plot characterized by connections across time, by intentions, and by an attitude toward life. This attitude to life is a preconceptual, passionate, and personal interpretation of what life and reality is about for *me*, [Brockelman's italics] a focal vision which does not precede my actions and behavior as much as it pervades them as their very sense.

Toekie and Rikus' narratives added meaning to my life and emphasised that in our research the stories never end, but live on in the lives of those who have shared in them. Frank (1995: 56) declares that: "[T]he self-story is told both to others and to one's self; each telling is a dual reaffirmation. Relationships with others are reaffirmed, and the self is reaffirmed." To honour this reaffirmation and to ask Rikus's permission to include his knowledge in the research, I wrote him a personal letter:

Dear Rikus

I was part of a research group in which your mother participated at the school where she teaches. We spoke about the values that sustain her and the people who support these values.

Your mother described the value of humour as a resource in her life. Toekie told the group that she regards your words: "my mother taught me to laugh at myself" as one of the greatest gifts she had ever received. The principal and some of the facilitators talked about their experience of your mother's special sense of humour. The deputy principal even likened it to "yeast" that works positively amongst the colleagues.

Toekie has touched our lives with the way she makes values visible: gifts, compliments and her active participation in our research sessions. Thank you for making visible, through your words, your appreciation for your mother's sense of humour in your life. These are words that she treasures as a gift because they stand as an example of the difference we can make in other's lives by what we say, or refrain from saying.

Your wisdom featured in our third session. I asked the group if they had ever learnt something from children, or whether it only works the other way round? Then Toekie told us of your father who could not keep a tune and therefore preferred not to sing in church, whereupon you told him: "But then you are singing for the wrong reason, Dad." It touched me as words of someone who looks beyond the exterior to the meaning of what we do. Thank you. It stands out as one of the many jewels that the research uncovered. If it is alright with you, I would like to include it, and maybe this letter as well, in the research.

Kind regards

Thérèse Hulme

Toekie told me that she read it to him and that he was deeply moved. He requested that the letter be put in his lap for him to reread at a later stage. In *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver 1999:438), the sorrowful mother, Orleana Price, addresses her beloved daughter who had died, on the significance of story as a celebration of life: "To live is to change, to acquire the words of a story, and that is the only celebration we mortals really know." Rikus' stories woven into Toekie's stories are reminders to me of how narratives enable us as research participants to honour and celebrate their/our lives and the values that give meaning to their/our lives. Thus the honouring, celebratory aspects of narrative were illuminated in our research.

5.3.1 Reflection and re-storying

The narrative processes within our research fostered reflection and re-storying on the part of the facilitators and myself as a researcher and counsellor at the school. Thus

[i]n narrative inquiry, the individual is shaped by the situation and shapes the situation in the living out of the story and in the storying of experience. These interpretations are offered because one of the main functions of research from a narrative point of view is to foster reflection and restorying on the part of participants.

(Clandinin & Connelly 1991:275)

Chapter 4 dealt with many aspects of re-imagining and re-storying that took part during our research. For the purposes of this chapter I will focus on the re-storying that the facilitators' narratives invited me into as a researcher. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on reflection during and after the research, both by the facilitators themselves and by me as researcher.

5.3.2 Participation as reflection

In order to be able to claim that the research had indeed been participatory in all aspects, I realised that this principle would also have to pertain to the reflection on the research itself, its effects in the lives of the facilitators and their perceptions of educating practices. I therefore drew up an evaluation sheet that my supervisor, Dr. Elmarie Kotzé, approved before distributing it amongst the facilitators after our eighth session. They returned it to me at our celebration ceremony.

I awaited the returned forms with trepidation. To open the research to their reflection meant inviting risk to me as the researcher. But, I thought, they invited risk into their lives by opening themselves to the research. Shouldn't I be doing the same?

Following Gawie's metaphor, I will therefore put the questions, the facilitators' and my own reflections into the reflective fire of this chapter.

5.3.3 Reflecting on participation as process

I asked the facilitators to reflect with me on their participation in the different narrative processes of the research.

5.3.3.1 Reflecting on the value of conversation

Our research was structured in the form of fortnightly conversations that became extended through letters. Harlene Anderson (1999:65-70) believes that conversation is the medium for transformation: “Transformation occurs in and through dialogue, and intrinsically, relationships transform”(: 65). She then quotes colleague Glen Boyd’s dream: “What if coming together in conversation creates something larger than both of us?”(:66). These words refer to meaning that is made in the process of a conversation. What emerged from the facilitators’ responses to the evaluation sheet was that our conversations did in fact “create something larger” than the conversations. However, what this “something larger” amounted to, was different for each of the six facilitators.

I asked the facilitators to share their thoughts on whether this kind of research has special relevance for facilitators who have to deal with the effects of poverty and neglect in the lives of children.

Jeanette said that she thought the conversations had value as “facilitators working with poor and neglected children can easily become despondent, because the challenges are great and one does not always see the results.”

Lizél answered the question as follows: “Definitely! To work in such an environment with its situations, sometimes drains you. You become spiritually and emotionally drained. You get so involved in these children’s hurt. It [the research] gives you insight. You learn from others again.”

FX thought that the research did provide some “food for thought (tr. “pitkos”) in the more personal challenges one faces” in dealings with children.

Gawie replied: “Yes. It focuses you on what really matters in life.”

Toekie wrote “[I]t made you realise why one is here and what life is all about. It brings one back to the source from which one draws.”

In the first chapter I saw the aim of my research as seeking a “feminist, communitarian moral ethic stressing the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers and civic transformation” (Lincoln & Denzin:1052). I wanted to speak about “what really matters in life” and the “source from which one draws.” Toekie and Gawie remarked that they had indeed discovered something of the communitarian moral ethic and the values that support this ethic.

In speaking values into existence, the language of our conversations could have drifted off into abstraction and philosophising. The facilitators spoke, however, in the first instance, as human beings who also became despondent and emotionally and spiritually drained in working in this school community. My wish for the research was that it would reveal the moral ethic whereby these facilitators live and work in Kraaifontein, but at the same time that our words should reflect our humanness:

At least one response to the question of how not to become dissociated is contained in Emerson’s message: our words need to be “loaded with life”. Our words as educators and educational researchers should never make the reader wonder if we had lived at all.

(Heshusius 1996: 135)

5.3.3.2 Reflecting on the value of letters

5.3.3.2 a) Letters after the sessions

After each session the facilitators received a letter containing a verbatim record of what was said, as well as questions about certain themes that had developed during the session. I therefore asked the facilitators in the evaluation sheet to reflect on the usefulness, if any, these letters had for them.

Aubrey found it useful to have the letters as a summary of our discussions. Gawie also appreciated that what was said during the group meetings was made visible in “black on white”. Gawie also remarked that within a busy school schedule the letters enabled him to “sharpen his thoughts” around certain themes. Lizél thought that the fact that our conversations took the form of written words enabled her to “digest” what was said during the sessions, “[c]onsequently one could follow the course of conversations and refresh one’s memory and come up with more ideas/stories.”

Jeanette said that she enjoyed the letters very much: “It was great to read again what everyone had said.” Jeanette remarked that she liked the questions that I often put in these letters, as it stimulated her to think around the issues that were discussed.

Toekie said: “It recorded our discussions and made one look anew at different aspects. It also verbalised things within yourself.”

FX said the letters helped him to remember what was said. He added that he used some of the “ideas” expressed in these letters, in practical teaching. FX also remarked that he read the letters also as a form of appreciation. For him it was valuable “to know how others regard your world in teaching.”

5.3.3.2 b) Letters from the group

After the re-membling of Gawie and Jeanette’s mothers, the facilitators participated in the drafting of letters to them. In these letters the group expressed their appreciation for the way in which these two mothers supported certain values in their children and told them what effects the living of these values have on their school community. I therefore asked: “What meaning did the writing together of the letters to Gawie and Jeanette’s mothers have for you?” I deliberately structured the question about our letter writing in such a way as to bring forth its potential capacity for meaning making. The facilitators indeed indicated the many ways in which letter writing created meaning for them and others.

Gawie highlighted the strengthening aspect when a community of facilitators speak,

instead of only an individual: “It increased the value of the letter. ‘I’ am strengthened by ‘us’.”

Toekie wrote about the revelatory power of such a letter: “It gave the parents an opportunity to gain a look into the souls of their children and to realise of what value their education was.”

Aubrey focussed on the importance of making appreciation visible: “It is good that people should know that they have a powerful and positive influence on others and that that influence lives on.”

FX said that for himself, personally, it did not mean much. However, he said, “ it was good to help to gladden a mother’s heart.”

Lizél wrote that, through letter writing, we (literally) extended the research:

“Someone else also benefitted from the sessions. How wonderful for a parent to realise what your child means to others.” Then Lizél went on to explain the meaning she made of it in personal terms: “It was as if I wrote such a letter to my own mother. She would have appreciated it very much if she was still with us.” For Lizél, letter writing turned into an honouring ritual of the personal bond that sustains her in living her values.

The facilitators’ participation in reflecting on the research made it possible to get rich and unforeseen descriptions of the value of the research itself. The facilitators’ responses to this question also sensitised me to the social constructionist principle that, through our relationships (for instance, embodied in letter writing), we indeed become the creators of meaning. The writing of letters formed part of appreciative inquiry as a research approach, through which the research participants participated in taking an appreciative stance towards the values that sustain them, the actions that emanate from these values and the relationships (such as Gawie and Toekie have with their mothers) that are supportive of these values.

5.4 REVISITING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESEARCH APPROACH

In Chapter 1, (1.4.2.1) I have referred to the focus of Appreciative inquiry, as outlined by Booy and Sena (1999:40), on that which empowers and gives hope, motivation and inspiration to the individual, and, through the individual, to the community. At the end of the sixth session, Gawie in fact commented that “[a]lthough we could have focussed on the negative in the research sessions, we chose to focus on the positive.” In our research we have discovered what empowers the facilitators working in Kraaifontein not only through narrative and conversation but also through spoken and written metaphors and poetry. As appreciative inquiry, this research has proved that appreciation and its inspiration and hope-giving properties can indeed extend itself into many varied verbal and written forms.

The conviction that the ordinary and personal holds the key to the creation of new truths reminds me of the narrative approach where one looks for unique outcomes – focusing on the alternative story “that open[s] new possibilities for action in the world” (White 1997:230). Within a school, the possibilities for action that appreciative inquiry opened up originated with the discovery of values by its facilitators:

It is in this way then, that appreciative inquiry allows us to put intuitive, visionary logic on a firm empirical footing and to use systematic research to help the organization’s members shape the social world according to their own imaginative and moral purposes.

(Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987:26)

I would like to substitute “values” as a synonym for “moral purposes”. In reflecting on the effect of the research on their lives and work as facilitators, the research participants indicated that the process of appreciative inquiry indeed allowed them to discover the power that their values have in shaping and transforming their school community.

At the start of the research I thought that questions - such as “When did you experience joy amongst your colleagues?” or “Tell me about a time when have you done caring from an alongside position?” - would invite the telling of stories. However, I soon found out that group conversations do not work in such a structured way. I also realised that to present the facilitators with a list of questions for which I wanted answers, would be contrary to the spirit of participatory action research in which the research participants themselves develop the most meaningful themes relating to working in the context of Kraaifontein. The facilitators were the ones who introduced themes - like community and relating to the concrete other - into the research. I therefore believe that our research subscribed to the spirit of appreciative inquiry by being a “collective research perspective” (see also Chapter 1: 1.4.2.1).

The aim of appreciative inquiry, outlined in Chapter 1, was “discovering, understanding and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes” (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987:25). The facilitators’ responses to the evaluation sheet bear testimony to the fact that the research was not merely regarded as “appreciation for” their values: the process of appreciative inquiry in fact led to the discovery of new values, new ethical positions towards others and new meaning. It is the discovery of new meanings through appreciative inquiry that I believe underpinned the facilitators’ replies to the usefulness of the research itself namely, that it made new understanding possible. These understandings may indeed “foster innovations” not only in terms of physical structures such a “problem mailbox” for troubled children, but also fostered within some of the research participants a new sense of purpose for teaching in a poor community.

Through specific questions in the evaluation sheet I wished to ascertain whether the principles of participation, discovery, understanding and fostering were indeed part of our research as appreciative inquiry.

5.4.1 Evaluating their participation in the process

In a direct question, I asked the six facilitators: “Would you describe the research as “participatory”? In other words, did you experience yourself to be a full partner in the process?”

All the facilitators indicated that they regarded the research as participatory. FX added that the participation led him to self-inquiry. Lizél replied: “ Yes! Definitely! One had enough opportunity to contribute. We could share precious stories and experiences.”

None of the facilitators regarded the research more than discovery of the values they bring to teaching, but also saw it as a fostering of values and practices. Gawie explained that through the research, “something was discovered in me, in the first instance, but then also encouraged.”

Participatory action research enabled the facilitators to reflect on the usefulness of the research processes, not in universal terms, but in specific, personal terms. However, I also asked the facilitators to reflect on the meanings the research allowed them to make and on whether the research had lived up to the ethical purpose the facilitators had outlined at the start.

5.4.2 Reflecting on meaning

5.4.2.1 Discovering and appreciating their values and relationships

The first question I asked in the evaluation sheet pertained to the meaning of research as a form of reflection: “ Was self reflection regarding your values and the difference these make in your work and to the broader school community, meaningful to you?”

All six facilitators replied “yes” to this question, but qualified their statements in different ways:

Jeanette said: “I became aware again of those things that ‘keep me going’ and where and how these values developed in me.”

Toekie said: “I realised that Christian values, like mine, are diminishing in our society and that I *have to* convey these to the children.”

Aubrey said that: “It is good to think and talk about these things [values] because we do not often do so, and it broadens our perspective.”

Gawie replied positively by saying “Yes, I understand and value myself more. I also treasure my origin and past more.”

Lizél explained that: “I have realised once again that educators have to regard teaching as their vocation. Without values you will not be able to function at this school. It gives you the necessary empathy and understanding. As an educator one has to set a positive example to these children.”

FX wrote that the reflection reinforced his realisation that his views and practices have contributed to transformation in children’s lives when experiencing alternative ways of being (for example in conduct and in language) to that which their community provides.

I then asked the facilitators if the research contributed to them rethinking their motivation for teaching, the personal and family values that they live, the role they have in children’s lives, and in the lives of colleagues. I also asked them if the research highlighted the mutual relations between facilitators.

For Jeanette, the research offered the opportunity to rediscover her motivation for teaching: “Sometimes one gets despondent and sometimes you wonder: ‘Am I at the right place?’ This research made me realise that I am here for a reason. It strengthened my vision again.”

Jeanette’s response reminded me of Bushe’s (1995:1) comment regarding the creative value of appreciative inquiry as a research approach: “Not only do we see what we believe, but the very act of believing it creates it” (see also Chapter 2: 2.2.3).

Lizél also referred to the discovery that “I have been ‘placed’ here for a reason!” as the one [reason] that motivates her in teaching. Toekie spoke of the research as inviting her to rethink her motivation for teaching by way of a metaphor: “It [teaching] is a chance to sow the good seed.”

In terms of the living of personal and family values, the research made Toekie rethink the fact that we speak from different positions: “Because it (personal values) is part of who I am, I must not assume it is so for everyone.”

Gawie wrote that the research made him rediscover his family and his history as “treasures”: “I realised that my past and my education were of the best. I have to share it with children, parents and colleagues. It is a privilege and the conversations made me discover my own treasures.”

Toekie wrote that the research made her rethink her role in children’s lives as “[H]opefully that of a safe haven.” Regarding her role in children’s lives, Lizél wrote about the multiple positions that teaching in this community demands of a facilitator: “One is not only an educator, one is a mother, nurse, ‘judge’ in conflicts; one admonishes, counsels, one is a ‘policeman’ and one is an anchor in need. Someone who can hug them. Someone who sometimes have to scold, to discipline, but not without love. You teach them that it is OK to make mistakes, but also to forgive.”

Reading Lizél’s words, I was reminded of the multiple descriptions of a facilitator in Kraaifontein that FX came up with during the research: A mother, father, minister, coach, artist, a signpost...

On rethinking her role in the lives of colleagues, Toekie wrote: “To bring a bit of joviality to a stressful day.” Jeanette, who was the youngest member of the group, wrote that the research also caused her to rethink the role she plays in colleagues’ lives: “I have come to realise that there are colleagues who also need me.” Thus the research as appreciative inquiry contributed to a new understanding for Jeanette regarding the difference she makes to other’s lives.

I thought it significant that both older women, Toekie and Lizél, whose stories so often spoke about a sensitivity towards community, contemplated how their own contributions help to foster a spirit of community and of mutuality. Toekie said: “We have to be available (to others) and not only look inward.” Lizél wrote: “We strengthen one another by sharing the bitter and the sweet, by having sympathy and by our support.”

5.4.2.2 Did the research live up to its ethical purpose?

During our first session, an ethical framework was established within which our discussions took place. When asked what they saw as the purpose of the research, Gawie replied: “The children have to benefit.” The rest of the group supported his stance. I see this as a new aim that was added and not included in the initial planning of research. Part of participatory action research is to embrace the changes in planning of the research (McTaggart 1997a:34). Thus the research aims were not explicitly formulated in terms of “benefiting the children” – but, in conversation with participants they expressed a need for this aim and therefore it was included as another aim for our research.

By taking an appreciative stance towards the preferred ethical position of the facilitators, an understanding was fostered of the effects such a position has as opposed to living a prescriptive ethics and its alienating effects. Because our research did not stand separate from, but indeed embodied the ethics of participation, I therefore invited the facilitators to reflect on the research as a doing of ethics: “With reference to the words : ‘the children must benefit’, I would like to know if you think that the children of this school will benefit from this research/ are already benefiting ? If so, how?”

Jeanette replied: “Yes, I think they will benefit from it when we as a team live that which we have discussed here.”

Toekie answered: “We reach out more; not only to children but also to colleagues. We do it more consciously, and not only instinctively.”

Aubrey: “Yes, most definitely. I believe that cross-pollination took place in our conversations and that others act on what they have heard.”

Gawie: “Yes, it already benefits them in invisible ways. But we have to try and add some other aspects like aspects like the mailbox and plants/ animals.”

FX: “They benefit in the sense that we, who took part in the research, look with “new eyes” at the children as regards our approach. But we should not expect direct results immediately.”

Lizél: “It [the research] made us aware again of the role we play in these children’s lives. As we live our values, children benefit.”

5.5 REFLEXIVITY

The research questions invited the facilitators to reflect on their values but also on these values as praxis and how this benefits their school community. Through the evaluation sheet at the end of the research, the facilitators were again invited to take a reflexive stance – this time regarding the research itself. All of these reflexive stances attest to the fact that our research was indeed participatory action research, if put against the theory of action research in teaching, as proposed by Scubert and Lopez-Scubert (1997:207):

If there is to be a theory of action research, it resides within the personal constructs of each teacher...reflecting on sources of meaning and direction in their own livesMoreover, this is not merely individual work; it requires that the teacher be reflective as a political being, that is, one who engages with other teachers and students to create and continuously recreate an authentic public space.

I have come to realise that this research would not have been possible without the practice of reflexivity. The research questions in Chapter 1 outlined that the values of the facilitators would be the focus of the research. To discover the kind of values that sustain and assist the facilitators and to describe how these values were supported, depended to a great extent on these facilitators’ capacity for and/or desire for self reflection as a practice.

In Chapter 1 I indicated the importance of reflexivity in the researcher and how “reflexivity answers an ethical and scientific need for researchers to stand and be counted about their role in the construction of knowledge” (Hall 1996:36). My

reflexivity on the meanings that were made became evident through the letters. However, in order to remain reflexive about the research process, I kept a research journal in which I recorded my knowledges and prejudices, but also the times that I enjoyed the research.

5.5.1 Excerpts from my research journal

E-mail to my supervisor, Dr Elmarie Kotzé. Sent March 01, 2002 3:37 pm

Elmarie

Today was World Day of Prayer for Women, and that meant that my session with the facilitators today shrunk to forty minutes. Just imagine: I look out of the classroom window and there are all the boys sitting on the playground. Then it hit me – the little girls have all been summoned to go and pray in the school hall!

Lizél and Toekie came to the classroom early so we discussed what was happening and Toekie said: “Why is it the women who always have to pray?!” I agree wholeheartedly.

We got to a few questions and had only started re-membering, when a colleague came to the door to complain that the children in the school hall are misbehaving. Gawie and FX have to leave and we have to stop. They apologize. I say: don’t worry – I am busy learning from you about flexibility!

Who would have thought what would emerge from a World Day of Prayer?

13th March 2002 - Part of e-mail Letter to Celene Hunter – former fellow M. Th - student and friend.

The research has become a source of joy in my life. The stories and metaphors are moving, the atmosphere is respectful and because the group comprises male and female, experience and youthful enthusiasm, it adds to the rich descriptions of the work of being a teacher in this community. My fourth session will be this coming Friday - please keep thinking of me as we are re-membering. It touched me last time

when I introduced the theme, that, at first they did not understand what I meant. I sensed that they have been so busy standing with others, that looking at themselves in this way was a surprise to them - but one that they told me they thought worthwhile to explore...

15th March

Making it visible. I am grateful for the facilitator's expressions of appreciation for our sessions together. Toekie says that it leads to questions within herself afterwards. Lizél nods. Gawie reiterates. In the corridor this week he told me that these sessions "meant a lot" to the teachers taking part. Toekie seems to know the value of making things visible; saying when something is meaningful. To me it feels like receiving a gift. I think of Kaethe Weingarten who spoke of this at the workshop. When I asked Gawie what it would mean to his mother to know that she contributed to the value of patience that he brings into teaching, he said that it would probably mean a lot to her. "Maybe I should sit down some time and tell her", he says. Toekie says it is not always easy to tell loved ones what they mean to you. I ask about letters. She thinks writing it down is a good idea. I enjoy Toekie's delight at new ideas. Jeanette shared more personal stories in the group. I am delighted that she feels comfortable enough to let her voice be heard. Maybe it was always a question of timing.

April 28th

Session 6. I listen to my own voice on the minidisc. Do I listen enough to the voices of the facilitators?

May 24th

Suddenly realise the truth of Levinas' idea about the face of the other and how it calls for response/responsibility. As a television producer I had faced many people, but did not see responsibility as that which means involvement with...To me responsibility meant moving as close as possible to the other in my story of them. The lens always separated us. I made the lives visible, sometimes, I told stories about "interesting" people, "interesting" dogs. I edited, summarized their lives in ways that I thought fit.

My sense of “so what? Did my work make a difference to anyone’s life?” moved me to look elsewhere for work that will, maybe, make a difference. I had to redefine my responsibility to others. Then I spoke to Prof Dirk Kotze and I became a Masters student in Practical Theology. I have since seen the difference that I hoped to make in the action of response. Maybe I will one day return to television work with Levinas’ new perspective. I suppose the focus will then rather be on “uninteresting” people and the beautiful stories they are able to tell over time, like those I discovered in my research. To stand back as a producer, maybe even give the camera to them. Then there might be tears when people tell that, after 28 years in teaching, they now know why they are here. Participatory action video.

Through the research journal I believe that I did make visible the emergence of “counterstories” in my own life and how some of the relational processes within the research shaped my thinking and feelings. Through the research journal I also documented my anxieties and reservations, thereby taking a reflexive stance towards my own role in the research process (see Chapter 1, for discussions on reflexivity - 1.4.1.2 and on the research journal - 1.4.1.3).

5.6 RESEARCHER INVOLVEMENT: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Participatory action research presupposes involvement and participation between the researcher and the participants. I would like to describe my involvement as researcher in line with feminist research’s commitment towards egalitarianism (Reinharz 1992). Ann Oakley describes feminist research (Reinharz 1992:27-28) as being characterised by a commitment to the forming of a relationship and by its ethic of egalitarianism: “To achieve an egalitarian relation, the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure and shared risk” (Reinharz 1992:181). Doing feminist participatory action research I was motivated to introduce an egalitarian relationship between the participants and myself:

[T]he researcher’s full participation (sometimes including self-disclosure) is seen as conducive to establishing the trust and reciprocity that facilitate

open expression, and the possibility of an egalitarian relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

(Franklin 1997:102)

The egalitarian relations in the research was partly created because I disclosed many personal aspects of my life, such as the fact that I was a married mother of two teenage sons. I also shared with the facilitators the stories of some of the children I have seen in counselling sessions at the school and the questions that these sessions evoked in me. However, when I invited the facilitators to write about their body/landscape connections, I intentionally did not disclose the fact that I am a writer of poetry and children's books. I did not want this knowledge to inhibit them in any way in their writing or to make them feel that they were sharing their work with some "expert". With hindsight I am glad that I did not disclose this as I could thereby have placed myself in an expert position who could judge other's writing, especially since Lizél apologised for "being not someone for writing."

In our group some voices spoke louder and more often than others. I wanted to honour all the voices, especially the softer voices and their preferences. I wanted to know from the facilitators if there were any topics in the research that they would like to revisit or continue with, or if they were ready to go on. I commenced by looking each of the six facilitators in the eye. Each one of them indicated that they were ready to go on to the final stage of the research, which was the reading of their writing on their body/landscape connections.

5.6.1 My commitment to the forming of relationships

My commitment to form relationships with the research participants is an extension of the social constructionist premise that in research itself we (the researcher and research participants) created knowledge and meaning through relationships: "In the same way that personal identity is realized within relationships, so can forms of relatedness themselves be constructed" (McNamee & Gergen 1999a:21).

There are many ways in which the commitment of a researcher to form relationships with the participants can be traced and described. Some of it had to do with practical

matters ensuring that some facilitators did not feel left out. This desire for inclusivity, for instance, motivated me to converse with FX in his classroom after one of our sessions to ensure that I got his input regarding the sharing of our research with the rest of staff. However, during our research the commitment to form relationship found its most moving expression in the emotive form of rapport.

5.6.1.1 Rapport

Within feminist research the relational aspect of rapport is regarded as an expression of an ethics of involvement rather than one of distance and role-differentiation: “By achieving rapport, the feminist researcher reassures herself that she is treating the interviewee in a nonexploitative manner. Rapport thus validates the scholar as a feminist, as a researcher, and as a human being” (Reinharz 1992: 265). Rapport also speaks of a “participatory consciousness” (Heshusius 1994) at work in the research (see also 1.4.1.2). Rapport becomes a newly constructed “form of relatedness” (McNamee & Gergen 1999a:21).

Within a modernist approach there is no place for tears. Research within such a paradigm is limited to the sharing of the factual and measurable. For the researcher working within such a paradigm, the ideal would be to remain “objective”.

Rapport, however, has to do with the immeasurable, the mystery of inter-subjectivity between researcher and research participants: “When one forgets self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status. It renders the act of knowing an ethical act” (Heshusius 1994:19). In our postmodern and participatory work, tears between Jeanette and me in her telling of the raincoat story and between me and Lizél when she looked up after reading the final lines of her poem, speaks of the immeasurable aspects of the research: it speaks of a shared awe, of kinship and rapport.

With Gawie, the rapport that the research created between us made it possible for him to tell me the punishment-story (see Chapter 3: 3.2.2.1). In a private conversation, I subsequently asked him what he thought the sharing of his story about living the value of vulnerability could mean to his co-researchers. He thought that sharing this

story could be useful. He told the story at a following session. Rapport thus did not remain as isolated moments of connection, but made Gawie feel safe enough to share the value of vulnerability as a force for creating justice with me and, later, with the group.

I was strengthened likewise midway through the research when Toekie showed her rapport with me in the form of a gift. It was a small cushion that she had embroidered especially for me, with the words: “die werk se bron is in die gees.” (The source of the work lies in the soul). These words by Afrikaans author, D.F. Malherbe, were specifically chosen by Toekie. Through this gift, Toekie made visible, in a creative way, her support for the research about their work as facilitators and the fact that soul-values sustain us all in our work. Toekie’s gift was illustrative of the special values that she lives in this school community: namely an intuitive awareness of other’s needs and generosity. The kind of gift that it was, delicately embroidered, spoke also to me of Toekie’s ability to bring beauty to the lives of others - whether by gifts or humour.

The rapport Toekie had expressed in this way also bonded two women, who did not know each other prior to the start of the research, into a community of support for one another.

I also experienced rapport in the way of connection with stories that reminded me of my own values. During our celebration I told each of the facilitators of the specific aspects of what they shared in the sessions, which had found rapport with me. I thanked Gawie for the story of his vulnerability. Toekie I thanked for the poetic story of the semi-precious stones. I thanked Jeanette for the story of her and Annetjie and the mutual care that it spoke of. Aubrey’s story of the funeral goer caused me to re-think the ways in which I respond to the other, and that symbolic acts can sometimes carry more meaning than words. I thanked Lizél for her beautifully crafted oak-poem and the many ways that it speaks of our relationship with children.

5.6.2 Researcher limitations

Narrative therapist, Michael White, was asked in an interview (White 1995) what the limitations of the narrative approach were. White then preferred to speak of narrative as more than an approach, but, amongst others, as an ethics, a philosophy and as part of a postmodern theory. Narrative invites the therapist or researcher to reflect on herself, and this means engagement with others and the work that we do:

In this work I do come up against my own personal limitations, which I then want to explore. These are limitations...in my awareness of relational politics,...limitations of experience, limitations in my perception of options for the expression of certain values that open space for new possibilities, and so on.

(White 1995:37-38)

In taking a reflexive stance towards my position as a researcher I also encountered my own limitations. After the seventh session, which also took the form of an appreciation of the values of the principal and the facilitators, I became acutely aware of how my own subjugation in the presence of a school principal inhibited me from asking questions. Reflecting on the session, I realized how I reverted to the subordinate position that the school principals of my youth had demanded of me. In our session, the appreciation of the facilitators consequently became rather like a monologue by the principal in which he used words like “loyalty” and “enthusiasm”, instead of a conversation. Through my silence, I limited the options for landscapes of action to emerge that may have richly described the facilitators’ values. In my letter after the session, I therefore wondered out aloud: “I wonder how “commitment” is made visible. How does the principal see it?” and “I wonder what stories are able to tell of the values that the principal recognises in you, Lizél?” Through a specific question in the evaluation sheet I invited the research participants to reflect on my limitations as researcher regarding seeing possibilities in the research.

5.6.2.1 “What would you have done differently?”

As full participants in the research process, I also consulted the facilitators on the content and processes of the research by asking them: “If we could do it all over

again, would you have done something differently, or have us include something else? If so, what?"

Gawie, Toekie, Aubrey and Jeanette responded by saying "No". Lizél qualified her "No" by remarking that it was a pity there was not enough time to extend the research to the rest of staff. "I think they have missed out", she said.

FX would have preferred a more modernist and structured approach to certain aspects of the research, with a view to getting "the truth" about how to deal with different groups of children in different contexts. However, within a postmodern approach, the world is not divisible, nor are formulaic answers to be found. I believe that the many stories FX himself told and the appreciation of the principal and his colleagues in the group, spoke clearly of the many times he had lived values of creativity and perseverance in his teaching career.

5.7. REFLECTING ON POETRY AND POETS

The research process has invited me to re-imagine the role of poetry in people's lives. As a younger poet, I believed poetry to be those words that are contained in slim volumes and read by a select and informed few. Such an elitist activity carries with it status and separateness, with poets being "different from others". This modernist discourse of the intellectual and exclusive nature of poetry has been challenged by the research. This research and my work as a narrative counsellor in this school in Kraaifontein has provided me with the opportunity to see that poetry, like Kaethe Weingarten's (2000:402) hope, as something we also *do* with others. It is often found in those sacraments of daily existence, moments of awe and beauty in the research, laughter and tears. Best of all poetry sometimes forms words to express it and sometimes it remains free from words - indescribable.

In October 2000, during a workshop entitled "[t]aking back our lives from the effects of violence and abuse", I thanked Gene Combs for introducing a poetry exercise, upon which he replied: "Poetry lies at the heart of this [narrative] work." Toekie,

Lizél, Jeanette, Aubrey, Gawie and FX have shown me how one can make poetry in people's lives, not with words, but through the living of values. Thus the title of this dissertation - "Transforming a school community: facilitators living values" - speaks not only of theology but also of poetry.

The Concise Oxford dictionary (1976) describes a poet as someone "possessing high powers of imagination, expression". Brueggemann describes the power of poetry as: "shattering, evocative speech that breaks fixed conclusions and presses us always toward new, dangerous, imaginative possibilities" (Brueggemann 1989:6). Being a witness to the facilitators' powers of imagination and expression, I would like to think that the research had opened the possibility for some facilitators to see themselves also as poets.

5.8 THE READER AS CREATOR

I would like to think that what counts for truth is continually being created and re-created in relationships, and therefore extends itself to another dimension of the research process: to you, the reader, making sense of the dissertation. New meanings are created thereby by you, the reader, who brings your own personal knowledge to our words. In his "Ode to Solitude", poet Pablo Neruda (1995:103) speaks of the power of words to connect us with those who have lived before us (as we have done by re-remembering), but also to connect us as research participants with the unknown reader to extend our conversations....:

....And this word
which I poise here suspended on a branch,
this song that yearns
solely for the solitude of your lips
to repeat it-
the air inscribes it at my side, lives
that we lived long before me.
And you, who are reading my ode:
you've used it against your own solitude.
We've never met, and yet it's your hands
that wrote these lines, with mine.

5.9 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question was: What kinds of values sustain the facilitators and how are these values supported? The second question asked: What kinds of values assist them in transforming a school community to caring solidarity?

Both questions were answered in a variety of ways. In the first chapter the processes of the research were discussed that enabled us to speak of values and its effects in the school community.

In the second chapter, the relationships of the facilitators were explored as an expression of values as part of the research within postmodern and social constructionist epistemologies. In this chapter we also took an appreciative stance towards the knowing, action and relating of the facilitators. In re-membering their relationships with people who supported values in them, these values became more richly described and supported. Some values were named for the first time.

The third chapter dealt with the theological dimensions of values such as solidarity and mutuality as part of a feminist theology of praxis. The effects of the living of values in transforming the lives of others were also discussed, thereby adding an ethical dimension to the facilitators' living of values.

In the fourth chapter, I documented how the facilitators, through the value of imagination, created personal metaphors and new descriptions of their work as facilitators. In this chapter new aspects to the living of values that were previously "not known" were described within a post structuralist approach to language and identity.

Therefore the research questions provided answers from different epistemological perspectives in each chapter, which all contributed to a rich description of the title of this dissertation - *Transforming a school community: facilitators living values*.

5.10 THE RESEARCH AS AN APPEAL TO DOING THEOLOGY: RECOMMENDATIONS

The “ordinary” facilitators of Kraaifontein have shown that the humane, personal living of values, is a key to doing theology. When theology becomes praxis it can have transformative power in a community. This research also raises the issue of our response to the concrete other as a person with a history and a face. In South Africa we have for too long been in need of a *doing* of theology (see De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1994). Kraaifontein’s facilitators have shown, through the research, that to practice theology means making oneself vulnerable when looking at the face of the suffering other, and that loving as a response to the face (see also 3.2.2), becomes a matter of faith:

Faith is not a question of the existence or non-existence of God. It is believing that love without reward is valuable. It is often said ‘God is love’. God is the commandment of love. ‘God is love’ means that He loves you. But this implies your own salvation. In my opinion, God is a commandment to love. God is the one who says that one must love the other.

(Levinas quoted by Wright et al 1986:176-177)

Levinas’ idea implies that by practising obedience to the commandment to love the other in the world, the facilitators become, in Lizél’s words: “the stewards of God in Kraaifontein.” In loving as pastoral care we therefore change from being the passive receivers of God’s love to people who enact God’s love. It therefore becomes possible to see God’s love at work in the lives of ordinary facilitators.

The question that arises is: What then is the responsibility of the faith community towards facilitators? This question becomes important especially if Patton’s (1993:23) words ring true: “[h]uman beings have been given the task of becoming a community.” Patton (1993) sees this kind of a community as one where God forms the centre.

This research provides a challenge to train faith communities to develop skills to support facilitators in their vulnerability to the suffering of children and in practicing

the value of love. Training should allow for an appreciation of and reverence for the power of the personal stories of faith that these facilitators live, and not silence them by the imposition of grand narratives of faith and “truth”.

The research also poses a challenge to the faith community to offer practical support to facilitators in living the values of mutual care, solidarity with the marginalised and “hoping” in the context of poverty and neglect. I am reminded of Jeanette’s comment that facilitators who work in the context of neglect often become despondent because of the volume and enormity of the problems they face on a daily basis. I therefore recommend that members of a faith community could make themselves available to facilitators in a very practical way to assist whenever specific needs arise: whether in the form of pastoral counselling, liaising with social workers or even creating time for prayer, reflection or the sharing of stories.

My hope as researcher is also that the faith community will become appreciative witnesses of the faith-work that facilitators are doing. Taking an appreciative stance may mean having regular meetings with facilitators during which stories can be shared that speak of the living of values. During these sessions a rich description of these values, interwoven with other metaphors or stories of faith, may emerge. The research has indicated that the appreciation of stories and metaphors through the research, has created support for the facilitators - for some, even a renewed sense of purpose for teaching. In the presence of compassionate witnesses, sharing and appreciation can serve as a ritual of blessing and honouring people whose important work is made visible.

To extend the research, I would propose that the children, parents and former pupils of the school, together with the faith community of Kraaifontein, be invited to also construct other unique forms of appreciation for the facilitators of their community. For pupils and former pupils, appreciation could take a written form in which they tell of the ways in which the living of values by facilitators have made a difference to their lives. Annual ceremonies could then be created during which children and adults could be invited to share their memories and stories of appreciation. Patton (1993:27) states that care and community are related to each other, “but it is memory that brings them fully into relationship.” Patton (1993:28) uses ideas of Casey and

Palmer to highlight that community is knowledge that needs to be remembered and recovered and that “remembered” means to “re-member”. He states: "Because I can remember I can care. Because I remember I can experience community in celebrating a God who remembers."

The opposite of re-member is not to forget but to dis-member - remembering is caring. Patton (1993:32) continues to describe pastoral care as hearing and remembering and emphasises the kind of careful listening that this research taught me.

Remembering may therefore lead to the development of a culture of mutual care – where the care of the facilitators is reciprocated through narratives of appreciation from the community. These forms of appreciation could serve as an extension of our research in that as members take responsibility for one another, they participate in the “task of becoming a community” as Patton (1993) suggests. Then a research question may develop that inquires: “What alternatives open up to us when responsibility is constructed in relational terms, where responsibility is an emergent sociogenic achievement, born and renewed daily in the conversational search for the “good” and the “possible?” (Cooperrider & Whitney 1999:57).

Coda

Through this research I was challenged by Geertz (1973:53) to be concerned “with the particular, the circumstantial, the concrete” when he says the following: “We must... descend into detail...if we wish to encounter humanity face to face.”

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CHAPTER 1

APPENDIX A

Transforming a school community: teachers living values

Information sheet for participating facilitators

Background to the project

Thank you for showing an interest in this research project, which is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters degree in Practical Theology – with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy.

Working as a counselor in the school, I have witnessed the influence of poverty, alcohol, sexual abuse and domestic violence and general neglect on the lives of the children in this community. Not only are children exposed to the effects of poverty, but in many cases, the home is no longer a secure place where love and hope are practised. Consequently, many of Kraaifontein's children are turning to the school and its facilitators as the source for physical, emotional and spiritual sustenance.

If a school becomes a place of refuge, facilitators, through their living of values - such as respectful relationships - can provide children with “alternative ways of being” that can stand against violence, abuse and a sense of powerlessness.

During my time at the school, I have often witnessed the healing that takes place in children's lives when the facilitators, by acts of care, open up other possibilities of living. I then became curious regarding what values enable these facilitators to stay and to care in such an impoverished school community.

I was therefore guided by your commitment to focus my research journey with you, using the following questions:

What kinds of values sustain you as facilitators and how are these values supported?

What kinds of values assist you in transforming a school community?

What is meant by “research”?

For some people, the word “research” conjures up images of surveys, graphs and providing “objective information” to a knowledgeable researcher. This is NOT what this research project is about.

I prefer to see this project as participatory action research, which means that you, as the research participants, will provide the direction for the research. Another important facet of action research is that it does not focus on “objective facts”, but takes the personal lived experience of the research participants as its source.

Traditional research is often content with the mere reporting of facts. In participatory action research, we will be interested in relationships and in transformation. If you are committed to transforming this school community through your unique contributions, this research project hopes to support you in this commitment.

What will participation involve?

Participants will be required to meet fortnightly for one to one and a half hours, for a total of between six and eight sessions. The venue will be arranged with the headmaster, who has also allocated time for this purpose to be put aside within or partly during school hours.

The sessions will be conducted in Afrikaans. The sessions will be audio-taped. To be able to participate in the reflection on the work that has been done, participants will

receive my edited version of the information and the meanings made by the group during each session, in the form of a letter . These letters will be called the “Friday Letters”, referring to the day during which sessions will be held. The letters and the final research paper will be in English. Reflection, comments and changes to the information contained in these letters by the participants, form an essential part of participatory research.

Confidentiality

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during the group sessions to be used in the research project, and to be contained in the final research document which will be published.

This consent will also pertain to information to be included in the “Friday Letters”.

Written consent will be obtained from each participant, should the group decide to publish personal information, stories or quotes with a view to sharing these with other colleagues within the school community.

You will have a choice to use your own name or a pseudonym of your choice.

The information collected during the project will be locked in a cabinet and will be destroyed after conclusion of the project.

Questions

Participants are hereby invited to contact me or my supervisor at any time during the research project, should they have any questions.

Thérèse Hulme tel: 913 2488 / 083 450 4606.

Or

Elmarie Kotzé (D Litt et Phil) at the Institute for Therapeutic Development.

tel: 012 – 460 6704

This project has been reviewed and approved by the the Institute for Therapeutic Development and the Department of Practical Theology, Unisa.

CHAPTER 1

APPENDIX B

**Transforming a school community: facilitators living values
Consent form for participating facilitators**

I have read the Information sheet concerning the research project and I understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage to me.

All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.

I am aware of what will happen to my personal information (including tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project; that the data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but that any raw data that the project depends on, will be retained for three years.

Thérèse's supervisors will read the material.

I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.

I am willing to participate in this research project.

.....

.....

(signature of participant)

(date)

.....

.....

(name of participant in capital letters)

(signature of witness)

CHAPTER 2

ADDENDUM A

Footprints in the sand

One night a man had a dream.

*He dreamed he was walking
along the beach with the Lord.*

*Across the sky flashed scenes
from his life.*

*For each scene, he noticed
two sets of footprints in the sand;
one belonging to him,
and the other to the Lord.*

*When the last scene of his life
flashed before him, he looked back
at the footprints in the sand. He
noticed that many times along the
path of his life there was only one
set of footprints.*

*He also noticed that it happened
at the very lowest and saddest
times in his life.*

*This really bothered him
and he questioned the Lord about it:
“Lord, you said that once I decided
to follow you,
you’d walk with me all the way.*

*But I have noticed that
during the most troublesome
times in my life
there is only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why
when I needed you most
you would leave me.”
The Lord replied:
“My precious, precious child,
I love you
and would never leave you.
During your times of trial
and suffering
when you see only one
set of footprints in the sand
it was then that I carried you.”*

Anon.

CHAPTER 2

ADDENDUM B

Reflecting on conversations with individual facilitators – March 19th 2002.

(All three facilitators gave their permission for the content of our talks to be disclosed in this addendum. The addendum was distributed amongst all the research participants.)

At the end of our session the previous day, Gawie told me that our research sessions had up to that point (5 sessions), “nothing to do with any of the training that we had undergone at college.” I decided not to wait until I got a reply from him after my next letter, but went to him the following day. When I asked him what his words meant, he replied that as facilitators, they were trained in the drawing up of exam papers, registers, and teaching methodology, even in the procedures of meetings. However, his experience at this school taught him that often, in dealing with children “all my papers do not offer me any help. Then I have to rely on my intuition, my humanity and the values of Galatians 5.” He came to regard the awareness of the vital contribution that intuition, values and empathy make to teaching in a deprived community as a gap in the training of facilitators.

Gawie’s words that healing does not come through knowledge, but through the actions of care, made me think of the feminist theologian, Denise Ackermann (1998:90) who quotes Stephen Levine: “The beginning of the path of healing is the end of life unlived.”

During our last session, FX mentioned that he did not agree with the group about the publication of a book containing stories and ideas of our sessions. I followed this up the next day, because I realised that his objection got lost when the conversation in the group moved on to something else...

FX is of the opinion that a book will not be read by colleagues. He felt it would be more useful if some of the stories that were told during our research could be shared verbally with the other teachers, the subsequent themes brought to light and then discussed in the bigger group. FX suggested that this could take place before school during staff meetings. I am not sure, however, that a 10 minute session would do justice to the richness of the stories shared in the research. Any other ideas? FX and I agreed that what should be avoided at all cost, is for the other teachers of the school to feel that the people who took part in the research are now “experts” who are going to teach them about being teachers! Could we perhaps invite them to some kind of “open session”, which will be more like a conversation?

I could think of many beautiful stories about community, healing, values, that I would love to hear their reactions to? How about you? What, if any, relevance would there be for sharing some of the work you have been doing with them ? For them ? For you?

Private conversation with Gawie (not distributed to the group).

Gawie, you described your own vulnerability when you told of your anguish at a system of punishment in the school that barred children, who had already sat detention for a number of (sometimes minor) offences, from joining their peers on their annual outing: “I have witnessed children crying when that bus pulls out. It is the kind of thing that cuts through my heart.” Gawie, you vowed to change what you saw as an unjust practice. But you found opposition amongst your colleagues. Would you say that making yourself vulnerable was interpreted as weakness by some colleagues? However, the following year, the headmaster saw it your way. Mr. Toerien vetoed the decision to continue to punish children twice, and the system changed.

You spoke of how you wanted the school to “create memories” for its children during these outings and how an unjust system deprived already deprived children of memories. Gawie, it seems to me that your vulnerability to the sense of loss that the left-behind children experienced, became a persuasive force for the praxis of change. Would you agree?

What difference do you think, Gawie, would it make to the individuals in our group to see “where you were coming from” in your actions, even if they disagreed with you? Do you think your story could, perhaps, lead to a rethink on the importance of vulnerability as a value?

(Gawie subsequently agreed to the sharing of this story with the group).

CHAPTER 2

ADDENDUM C

Letter to Gawie's mother

Dear Sally

In our research sessions with a narrative counselor, we got to know you through Gawie.

The question was put to Gawie as to who stands with him in his love for children and especially in his patience. He said that he likes to think of you as someone in which he recognised patience as a child and who supports it in him now; both at the school and in his relationship with Gideon.

As his colleagues at the school, we experience him as someone we can talk to and who understands. He is someone who has time for another's problems and who can work with children with the greatest compassion. We know him as someone with a genuine interest in people and as someone who is always willing to help. We remember how, during the research, he referred to the missionary house in which he grew up – where he learnt from you what it means to serve the community; that it sometimes asks of one to sacrifice personal comforts in aid of a community. The same spirit of love now makes a huge difference to the school community of Kraaifontein.

We thought we would like to share this with you and have the opportunity to thank you.

Kind regards

CHAPTER 2

ADDENDUM D

Letter to Jeanette's mother

Dear Jeanette

We got to know you through Jeanette during our research sessions with a narrative counselor. We understood from Jeanette that you and your husband worked in disadvantaged communities and provided her with the inspiration to walk along similar a road. She told us how you came with her to the school for her interview, and how you commented that it looked similar to the school where you taught: "With gates at both ends."

As her colleagues, we would like to thank you for the passing on of love in Jeanette's life: this strengthens her in being a loving facilitator in this school where so many children are in need of love.

We experience Jeanette, in the way she lives her life and in her involvement in the community - which include Sunday school and church activities - as a true child of God. What is noticeable about Jeanette is that she is not "noisy", but rather quiet and solid like a rock.

Jeanette told us of the times when you did more for children in need than what was expected of you, like inviting them to stay over at your house on weekends. Thank you for being the person who stands next to Jeanette whenever she decides to "walk the extra mile."

Kind regards