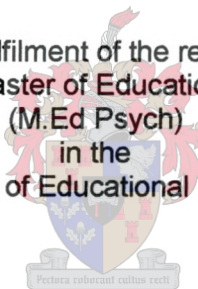# JONATHAN'S BUDDY SYSTEM:

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF BEING

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
(M.Ed Psych)
in the
Department of Educational Psychology

at the

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

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STELLENBOSCH: December 2004

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university in order to obtain a degree.

Abstract

The labelling and marginalisation practices implemented and sustained by conventional methods of education and psychology motivated the research curiosity. The significance of the learner's own experiences, the learner's own meaning-making through his/her own story-telling or the stories others tell about him/her and the constituting effects of alternative identity conclusions are explored as means of creating more preferred identity conclusions

In engaging in the re-tellings of a learner's experiences at home and school, a qualitative research practice has been apllied, revealing meaning-making of alternative stories. Feminist theory and post-modern ideas and discourses have assisted me, and the participant, in the deconstruction of ADHD, depression, identity and divorce which contributed to the marginalisation of a learner due to dominant discourses within culture, education and psychopathology. Narrative approaches to therapy and an ethic of participation have guided us to emphasise the necessity of recognising a learner's preferred ways of understanding his/her experiences and what that tells about the person.

Pseudonyms have been used to respect the participant's privacy.

Abstrak

Die ettikettering en marginaliserende praktyke wat gebasseer en onderhou word deur konvensionele opvoedkundige en sielkundige diskoerse, het die navorsingsnuuskierigheid by my ontlok. Die beduidenheid van 'n leerder se eie ervarings en pogings tot betekenismaking deur die oorvertel van sy/haar eie stories en die aanhoor van ander se stories oor hom/haar word uitgelig. Die konstitusionerende aard van hierdie alternatiewe identiteitskonklusies word geeksploreer om meer verkose identiteitskonsepte daar te stel.

Met my deelname aan die oorvertelling van die leerder se ervarings by sy huis en skool, is 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering gevolg, wat die betekenismaking van alternatiewe stories kan uitlig. Feministiese teorie, postmoderne denke en diskoerse was die sleutels wat gebruik is deur my en die deelnemers, om die betekenis van ADHD, depressie, identiteit en egskeiding te ontsluit en te dekonstrueer. Die marginaliserende praktyke wat in die naam van hierdie fenomene gepleeg word binne die dominante kultuur, opvoedkundige praktyke en psigopatologie word bevraagteken. 'n Narratiewe benadering tot terapie en 'n etiek van deelname het ons gelei om die nodige erkenning aan die leerder se verkose maniere om sy ervaringe te verwoord en wat dit omtrent sy identiteit impliseer.

Pseudoname is gebruik om die deelnemer se privaatheid te respekteer.

Honouring Actions

For allowing me the opportunity to share in his life story, I thank Jonathan and his parents.

For encouragement, love and support throughout my academic journey, I thank my mother, father, both grandfathers and grandmothers, Liesl and André.

For introducing me to an ethical way of being-therapist, I thank Elize.

For inspiration, support and feedback, I thank Mariechen and Rona.

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1. THE JOURNEY BEGINS

1.1 STANDING AT A CROSSROADS

1.1.1 Looking at a new map

"There are definite moments, moments we use as references, because they break our sense of continuity, they change the direction of time. We look at these events and we can say that after them things were never the same again".

(Atwood, taken from Kotzé, 2000:1)

In 2003 I did my first year of a two years Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. I counselled a young man who had been diagnosed with ADD, who was struggling at school and felt isolated after moving house with his mother when his parents got divorced.

My experience with Jonathan, his parents, his school and the journey of our work together to explore ways for him to discover preferred ways of being, changed my life and way of being a psychologist in many ways. As a student I was introduced to poststructuralist thought and a narrative approach, which challenge taken-for-granted beliefs and realities that have constitutive effects - shaping lives and relationships (Epston & White, 1990:12).

I have approached my work as participatory action research, by challenging the privileging of the researcher's voice above the subject's, aiming for a more collaborative way of interacting, shifting the power relations towards shared co-research (Babbie & Mouton, 2002:61). I have kept careful documents and notes as the journey unfolded, along with the guidance and supervision of more experienced therapists in the field of narrative therapy and working with children. In choosing to write about Jonathan and my 'diving' together, I hope to explore and inspire useful ways to stand with young people and families in a culture where performance and academic success have become the standards to measure our self-worth against.

1.1.2 A psychologist in training

My interest in Psychology goes back to 1995 when I started my undergraduate studies at Stellenbosch University. I particularly enjoyed Philosophy and the way we were introduced to think about our thinking. The different theories, worldviews and reasons for being, stimulated my questioning about taken-for-granted 'truths' in my own society and culture, but applying new ways of thinking into new ways of being was difficult for me. Few of my friends shared my excitement in these new ways of looking at things and opportunities for discussion and debate were little.

Feminist Theory made me more aware of the power relations and patriarchal dominance within our white, middle-class, Afrikaans speaking society. It forced me to look at my own way of relating to people of other races, class, language, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. I became more actively involved in Adult Basic Education programs for farm workers in the Stellenbosch region and voiced my opinions at residence meetings on topics relating to the freedom of choice for female students on campus.

My way of relating to a spiritual being or a God also came under questioning, realising for the first time that I can relate to my God in a way that I prefer. I could leave the restrictive practices of a male dominated church behind and build a new relationship with a Being that I experience as influential in my life. Taken from the social constructionist discourse, Griffith and Griffith is quoted in Kotzé (2000:331) as describing "spirituality as being a most significant conversation with a most significant other known by many names one of which is God".

These experiences and knowledge gained made me wonder about others' experiences and how they might defer meaning from lived events in their lives. What do people do when long accepted realities or pillars of truth come tumbling down? In what way can Psychology contribute to living our lives in an enriching and meaningful way? Thus I applied for my Educational Psychology Masters after teaching primary school children in London for two years and qualified to enter the program in 2003.

1.1.3 Significant others in my training

During my first year of study three very influential women were sent on my path. Dr Rona Newmark, Director of the Unit for Educational Psychology and coordinator of our masters program was my gateway to new possibilities. Her openness to exploring new ways of doing therapy and emphasising to us that our own values and worldviews must be clearly defined to become responsible and accountable therapists, guided me in venturing out of the safety of what-is-already-known within psychotherapy. She encouraged and challenged us to first become comfortable with ourselves and our own way of thinking about life, how we view others and the values that inform our behaviour, before we engaged with others in their life experiences. This instilled in me the value of reflection, not only in my own life but also in my collaboration with others.

A second woman who became a guiding light in my search for a therapy that could stand with my postmodern stance about multiple truths in the world and being respectful of different ways of doing life, is Elize Morkel. A Clinical and Counselling psychologist who fought her own battles against an oppressive patriarchal system for years and found an alternative ethic in ways of working with people in Narrative therapy (Morkel, 2002:6). Elize introduced Narrative therapy to our class and taught us how "using the narrative metaphor leads us to think about people's lives as stories and to work with them to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:1). Elize continued to play a supportive, supervising and training role in my attempts getting to grips with this new approach to therapy. Her belief, passion, creativity and commitment to her work encouraged me to keep on trying, taking up daunting challenges in my therapeutic work and staying true to what I believed in.

Mariechen Perold , a lecturer at the Department of Educational Psychology became my supervisor in my therapy with Jonathan. Mariechen also preferred to work narratively with her clients and joined me in my excitement and despair while trying to find my feet on this new road. Her creative use of language and guidance in keeping me on the right track with regards to my questioning, helped me build my confidence. She pointed out the small, yet significant changes that were taking place in our therapeutic discussions and kept the hope alive when Jonathan and myself were struggling to see it.

What I experienced as a trainee in psychology, was being treated as an equal, with a voice and opinion that was welcomed and heard. We co-collaborated and shared our experiences in a respectful and accountable way regarding our clients. I felt the space to explore my preferred way of being in an academic setting, not being forced into any specific 'role'. Reflecting on the way in which we were encouraged to find our own feet in therapy, it reminds me of Michael White who used Geert's quote of Trilling to ask: "How come it is that we start out Originals and end up Copies?" (Kotzé, 1994:63).

I explored different ways of being as a therapist and with the guidance and collaborative teaching methods of my lecturers, I could live and partake in co-authoring of my 'life as psychologist in training'. White continues by saying that "the narrative metaphor opens up a novel interpretation of training and supervision as a context for the re-authoring of stories about therapy and of the participant's 'life as therapist'".

Reflecting back on my first experience of 'life as a therapist' with Jonathan, under the support, guidance, training and supervision of these three women, I started to find my own voice in being able to express my own lived experience within the therapy and the real effects it had on my life. This also spilled over into my work with Jonathan, in being open and willing to explore new ways of being with him. The 'ethic of collaboration' that Michael White advocates (1997:198) encourages therapists to join in multiple actions that will contribute to people's lives.

1.2 NEED FOR AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"We live our lives according to the stories we tell ourselves and the stories that others tell about us", according to Winslade and Monk (1999:2). There are many dominant stories that influence the way we think about ourselves that were generated from our experiences at home, at school, in the neighbourhood and other local institutions. These stories and ways of thinking are in turn influenced by dominant stories within our society and culture. These taken-for-granted realities, "or truths, are split off from the conditions and context of their production, these disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices", according to Michael White (1994:121).

Within our schools there are certain stories about children with 'learning difficulties' or 'special needs' that are favoured above others. The modernist assumption of a belief in

a universal child nature, "has become a barrier to achieving an individually appropriate pedagogy for children in all their personal, ethnic, racial and cultural diversity " according to David Elkind (1997:241). This archetypal concept of the child is difficult to erase within a modernistic society and has contributed to practices that underlie educational dysfunction.

One learning disability that challenges the normative education tailored to the needs of a uniform child nature, is Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) is a growing phenomenon in the classroom identified by teachers, parents and therapists alike. ADD has attracted enormous media and scientific attention over the last few years. Mash and Wolfe (2002:99) point out that despite the controversies, confusions, hope and disappointments that the description of ADD has generated, "no single cause for the many behavioural patterns of children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) has been identified". Instead, the description of ADHD has become an umbrella term to describe several different patterns of behaviour that differ slightly.

Questioning the validity of the diagnosis for ADHD is a question that will not be explored here, but looking at the effects such descriptions have on the identity of the child is one of the main themes of this re-telling. Modernity's three unquestionable assumptions of progress, regularity and universality have been challenged with a growing post-modern awareness of the importance of *difference* (Elkind, 1997:243).

Young people encounter in the course of their school years a range of descriptions of themselves according to Winslade and Monk (1999:53). The descriptions vary, based on their performance in the following:

> "academic learning tasks (average, slow, able, lazy), the social context of their lives (wrong side of the tracks, single parent, disadvantaged), the specific world within the classroom (troublemaker, behavioural problem, disruptive), to social groupings within the school community (cool gang, surfies, skaters)".
>
> (Winslade & Monk, 1999:54).

These descriptions can lead to what Michael White (2001:2) calls 'negative identity conclusions', where the person starts believing that these descriptions are inherent to him or herself, that they are the problem.

Narrative therapists have done a lot of work with children, families and adults on "the unpacking of identity conclusions" (White, 2001), (Epston, 2004), (Epston & White, 1990), (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997), (Kotzé & Morkel, 2002). Michael White (2001:3) points out that "the sense of personal failure has never been more freely available to us, and has never been more willingly dispensed as it is in these contemporary times".

The effect of these "negative'" identity conclusions are that they tend to last for long periods of time and people tend to experience these conclusions as quite dominant in their lives. It has been a challenge in my work with Jonathan to open up space for other conversations that could generate identity conclusions that were more in line with Jonathan's preferred way of being.

1.3   RESEARCH CURIOSITY

The journey that this work has taken me on and the influence it has had on Jonathan's life, according to himself and his parents, as well as my life as a therapist, made me reflect on the constituting effects of a narrative approach. I felt a strong connection between some of the beliefs and purposes that I stood for as a training psychologist/person/woman and the practices that I read and witnessed in Elize Morkel and Michael White's work. The curiosity and excitement that I felt made me eager to try out narrative practices in my own work, but as Alice Morgan (2002:85) put it, "at times I found it tricky to know where to begin, how to make a start and then what to do next".

My research curiosity was informed by the narrative journey that Jonathan and I explored as buddies, together with my own self-reflections about working towards being a narrative therapist. The beliefs, values and ideas a narrative metaphor for therapy is based on guided me through our sessions, influencing not only those specific therapeutic conversations, but also the way I would prefer to work as a therapist in the future.

The work on Narrative therapy of Michael White and David Epston (1991), Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (1997), Freedman and Combs (1996) and Kotzé and Morkel (2002) guided my work, regarding the basic principles and theories underlying the therapy. Winslade and Monk (1999) and Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (1997) were strong influences in how to approach children regarding scholastic problems and emotional difficulties.

1.4   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When I set out on this journey I was interested in reflecting on the ways in which narrative therapy gives the therapist the space, guidelines and opportunity to stand with a client against dominant discourses within society. What took me by surprise was the constituting effect it had on me, in becoming:

- A student to training therapist
- A training therapist preferring a post-modern, post-structuralist worldview
- A self-reflecting therapist in training

My research question that focused my research was:

How do I as a narrative therapist in training engage, collaborate or participate with a young learner struggling with 'negative identity conclusions' in his life?

While on my research journey, other questions came to the fore, guiding my therapeutic work and reflecting on my own participation:

- What have I learnt about working in the narrative metaphor?

- What are learners' experiences in terms of school discourses, labelling and academic marginalisation?

- What was the effect of this therapeutic journey on the participants (Jonathan, his parents and me)?

- What have I learnt about working with young learners within a narrative approach?

- In what ways does a narrative approach create possibilities for constructing preferred identity conclusions?

- What are the responsibilities of a narrative therapist towards the people we collaborate with?

1.5   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to describe and discuss a way of collaborating with a child who has a long standing struggle with negative identity conclusions to living out preferred ways of being within his world. I will reflect on the work I collaborated in with Jonathan who is a primary school learner in a middle-class community.

My journey's reflections on myself as a therapist, my experiences in engaging with Jonathan and the difficulties and challenges I faced will be retold. In refraining from involvement or supporting prevailing power structures within research, I position myself within a feminist, postmodern, participatory action research space. The researcher must "take a position and make it implicit to their readers and those they are researching" according to Kincheloe (2003:60). This 'taking a position' is not to impose my preference of positioning or imply that my interpretation is the truth. The main focus of the work will be on how we collaborated in co-authoring preferred ways of being for Jonathan.

The participating stance and active involvement from all parties correlates with participatory action research, where according to Kincheloe:

> "respect for subjugated knowledge helps construct a research situation where the experience of the marginalized is viewed as an important way of seeing the social-educational whole, not simply as a curiosity to be reported"

> (2003:61)

My own participation resonates with other woman researchers who admit that the emotions they experience in the process of knowing and getting to know, does influence the strive for traditional logocentric (rational man's) ways of enquiry (Kincheloe, 2003:63). Feminist perspectives and critical constructivist researchers point out that this

"disorganisation is a positive step in the attempt to accommodate and integrate our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us" (Kincheloe, 2003:63).

Elize Morkel (2002:12) states her commitment to "make explicit what is implicit" in her work as a narrative therapist regarding her community work in standing with children against stealing. I will also aim to be as transparent, on the choices I have made during this journey of discovery, where I have 'situated/positioned myself' and the way narrative therapy commits me to a particular way of being in the world:

> "When we say 'situating ourselves', we refer to the practice of clearly and publicly identifying those aspects of our own experience, imagination, and intention that we believe guide our work. In so doing, we enter therapeutic relationships as fallible human beings, rather than as experts. We present ourselves as particular people who have been shaped and affected by particular experiences"
>
> (Freedman & Combs, 1996:275)

1.6   RESEARCH APPROACH

1.6.1 Qualitative research

I wanted the voice of Jonathan to be heard, particularly his experiences and local knowledges surrounding the constitution of his preferred identity. I therefore chose a qualitative, participatory action research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) describe qualitative research as having:

> [A]n emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured...in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape enquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experiences is created and given meaning".

Thus I focused on the social influences and interactions that open or close up space for meaning making around lived experiences. Believing in the possibility of enriching and

celebrating Jonathan's alternative story through unique outcomes of hope, courage and resistance to the dominant problem-filled story.

1.6.2 Feminist participatory action research

McTaggart (1996:248) sees action research "not [as] a method...but a series of commitments" to practice in a collaborative, co-owning way. This awareness of the location of power within the research process, emphasises benefits for the participants and an acknowledgement of their experiences. According to Babbie and Mouton (2002:38) the key words in this approach to research are "participation, engagement, involvement, collaboration". Within an ethics of risk (Welsch 1990) the commitment to act and care together however, has no guarantees of success. Beginning small might be a good place to start, according to Couture (Nieuwmeyer, 2002:16), "Do not underestimate the accumulating value of small regular commitments".

According to Gergen (1985:272), feminists have been in the forefront in employing interpretative research strategies, placing the emphasis on the communal basis of knowledge.   Feminist thought can provoke us as researchers to "reconceive the concept of action research in terms that integrate it into a study of power" (Jennings & Graham, 1996:171). We are required to consider meaning-making "in terms of relations of struggle embodied in everyday practice" (Jennings & Graham, 1996:171). Our research becomes practice-based in the sense that it "seeks to change for the better (within the context provided by our system of meaning) the issue being researched, the research process and the researcher" (Kincheloe, 2003:191).

The feminist awareness of power relations and the oppression/silencing of certain groups (women and minorities) also influenced my work as a therapist. I attempt to avoid the use or abuse of power relations to dominate in my practice and relations with others.

1.6.3 The researcher knowing with the researched

From a social constructionist viewpoint within psychology, knowledge is socially constructed through the interaction of the researcher and the researched. Feminist theory points out that "a separation of knower and known, produces a tacit logic of domination between researcher-researched" (Kincheloe, 2003:61). She also points out that this kind of epistemological distancing moves into domains of hierarchy, power relations, race, gender and class. It made me realise that the knower and the known are intimately connected in our collaborative construction and sharing of knowledge.

In my approach to re-tell my experiences with Jonathan, I also shared with him the knowledge and insights I gained from him during our discussions. My way of opening up space for therapeutic discussion was based on the assumption that:

> "We cannot know for people what is good *for* them. We also have to know *with* them. To be ethical, the participation of the people about and for whom we do research is of primary importance at all levels of research".
>
> (Kotzé, 2002:27)

1.6.4 Self-reflecting

Kincheloe (2003:51) argues that "an awareness of self and the forces which shape the self is a prerequisite for the formulation of more effective methods of research". Being aware of the discourses that shaped and is shaping my understanding and way of making meaning of events, allows me to make ethically accountable choices in the way of engaging with others in the world.

The dynamic processes involved in the sharing of knowledge, places me as researcher in a position where according to Kincheloe:

> " They are always concerned with the expansion of self-awareness and consciousness…engaging in a running (meta)-dialogue, a constant conversation with self, a perpetual reconceptualisation of his or her system of meaning".
>
> (2003:69)

1.6.5 Shared meaning-making (feedback sessions)

Johnella Bird (1994:44) draws therapists' attention to the existence and use of professional talk that happens when we as therapists interpret the dialogue between therapist and patient based on the writings of other professionals and give more weight to that interpretation than the client's. She warns that " professional talk immediately relegates clients to the status of other, and in doing so, objectifies them'.

In my and Jonathan's therapeutic discussions, I aimed to be attentive to the language that he used to describe his experiences with, privileging his voice and knowledge above my own. Avoiding using 'specialist' terms or descriptions, I aimed at shared meaning making and inviting Jonathan in to participate on a more equal basis. At supervision, in discussion with colleagues and at a presentation I also attempted to privilege Jonathan's descriptions of his life experiences.

1.6.6 Validity and ethical considerations

Validity within this research is viewed as creating space for alternative knowledges, rather than 'scientifically prove' the truth of dominant knowledge. Lye (1996) explains it as follows:

> "It is possible that texts which 'confess' the highly mediated nature of our experience, texts which themselves throw the reader into the realm of complex, contested, symbolised, intertextual, interactive, mediated experience, texts which therefore move closer than usual to deconstructing themselves, are in a sense closer to reality (that is, the truth of our real experience) than any other texts".

Thus, in the complexity of a re-telling of a re-telling, in the contradictions, in the silences, in the alternative stories lies transgressive validity – replacing the monologues and power-knowledges of modernist, structuralist approaches (Van Rooyen, 2002:29). Transgressive validity proposes that validity itself is multiple, ever-changing, endlessly deferred.

As a therapist I have an ethical responsibility to be aware of my own situatedness within the therapeutic context and where I am coming from. My values underpin my perceptions and I need to be sensitive to my own views as well as my client's.

Freedman and Combs (1996:266) refer to a "margin-in approach to ethics – one which values the experience of people at the margins of any dominant culture…(by) making space for such people's voices to be heard, understood and responded to".

Permission was obtained before making video recordings, observations, and descriptions of our therapeutic conversations together, as well as taking notes during sessions. Similarly, points of view were negotiated with Jonathan and his parents before being published. In writing about Jonathan's and my journey together, I need to be aware what is put down in written form "takes on a wider truth beyond the therapist/client relationship" (Bird, 1994:45). The language I used within our sessions and that I write this re-telling with, should not be exclusive to "professionals" only, but should encourage "co-authoring" and participation of all who engage in this story.

1.6.7 Relatedness

Postmodern thought challenges the modernistic idea of the "observer remaining objective and separate from the observed within the scientific research process" (Botha, 1998:65). This form of "objectifying" and "otherness" (White, 1995:113) is an aftermath from the scientific revolution according to Heshusius (1994). She points out how this "alienated consciousness" has left us "alienated from each other, from nature and from ourselves" (Heshusius, 1994:17). She suggests a "participatory consciousness", which requires an attitude of openness and receptivity, where there is greater identification, and which creates a greater wholeness. Thus I approached our journey as a joining of a greater reality that had the promise to enrich and change both of us.

Jonathan and I shared differences and similarities. I grew up in a home with both parents still wedded and didn't experience any learning difficulties at school, while Jonathan's parents were divorced and he experienced pressure to perform academically in a school culture where little accommodation was made for his specific learning needs. Yet, our shared interest and love for diving, the value we place in friendships and our sense of humour connected us to the advantage of the therapeutic relationship and our journey.

Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:9-10) describes research as "relatedness and enchantment", which made me realise in my writing this re-telling that:

"Research too often becomes an intellectual activity with researchers obtaining degrees on or receiving acknowledgement based on the suffering of others – with the latter most likely not to benefit from the research. We are committed….to participatory action research that will be to the advantage of the participants".

Situating myself as a therapist and researcher within my own lived experience (Kotzé and Kotzé, 2001), is to challenge the idea of authority, objectivity and universality. The 'I' positions me inside the story and implicates the personal, in a particular context, with specific experiences. This enables me to claim a form of personal agency that Epston and White describe as following:

"The narrative mode redefines the relationship between the observer and subject. Both are placed in the 'scientific' story being performed, in which the observer has been accorded the role of privileged author in its construction. The transcendental 'we' and 'it' of the subjectified person are replaced by the pronouns 'I' and 'you' of the personified person".

(1990:82)

1.7   EXPLORING PREFERRED WAYS OF BEING

In Jonathan and my exploration of identity conclusions that he preferred, we focused on what Michael White calls:

"Opening space for conversations, where this re-authoring conversations could contribute to the identification of and to the exploration of the very knowledges of life and practices of living…which leads to thicker, richer descriptions of people's lives and their relationships"

(2001:4).

During this process, Elize Morkel brought my attention to the idea of a 'migration of identity' (Epston & White, 1990), where Jonathan experienced "being broken from his life as he knew it, to another way of living in the process of his parents' divorce " (Morkel, 2004:3). This implies multiple understandings of self, where identity becomes less rigid and inherent and more open to choice and commitments valued by a person.

According to social constructionist views on identity, Davies and Harré claim the following:

> "Who one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives. Stories are located within a number of different discourses, and thus very dramatically in terms of the language used, the concepts, issues, moral judgement made relevant, and the subject position made available within them".

(1991:46)

As therapist, I also moved in my awareness of the number of different discourses and witnessing the crippling or powerful constitutive effects it has had / can have on my own and other people's lives.

1.8   THE STRUCTURE OF THE RE-TELLING/RE-SEARCH

I was inspired in my way of structuring and re-telling this exploration by Elize Morkel's Thesis in Pastoral Therapy (2003). In Chapter 2 I discuss the theoretical framework that informs the research. Chapter 3 hosts a description and discussion of the journey Jonathan and I undertook in standing together against the "can't talk", "unfair judgement" and "sadness". Chapter 4 reflects on the value of the work and re-connecting with Jonathan 6 months after our sessions together. Chapter 5 includes a reflection on the research question that guided the work and to see how the knowledge shared and gained might stand with other youths in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER 2

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 PREFERRED WAYS OF BEING AND SEEING

I prefer to position myself within a postmodern, poststructuralist context. Degenaar compares modernists with post-modern discourse as follows:

> "While modernists "strive towards a rational explanation of the world, assuming that rationality has a universal validity which enables us to develop a Grand Theory about reality...postmodern discourse manifests itself in an ironic relationship towards all claims to finality whether based on myth or reason".
>
> (1994:2)

Postmodernist thought offers multiple possibilities for ways of being in the world. Freedman and Combs (1996:22) summarise this worldview as follows:

i. Realities are socially constructed

ii. Realities are constituted through language

iii. Realities are organised and maintained through narrative

iv. There are no essential truths

Just as postmodernism challenges the taken-for-granted, "feminism questions and challenges dominant ways of understanding gender relationships and the effects of patriarchy on people's lives" (Thomas, 2002:86) This approach seemed unsettling to me at first, because it had the same effect on me as Michael White describes as:

> "Thinking beyond what I routinely think .... question what I take for granted and to have my settled certainties shaken up, further develop the skills of therapeutic practice and (to) explore yet more considerations of personal, relationship and community ethics".
>
> (1995:13)

I needed to challenge myself in facing my routine ways of doing and thinking to be able to join Jonathan in an respectful and ethical way along his journey.

2.2   MULTIPLE FOUNDATIONS

2.2.1   Postmodernism

"Postmodernism indicates an era in which society has become decentralised, heterogeneous, local and flexible" (Snyman et al, 2004:73). It questions the ability to lay claim to absolute, objective truths and facts that modernism clings to. The postmodern worldview draws our attention to that which is easily overlooked in the search for replicable procedures and generally applicable rules, namely the "specific, localised meanings of individual people" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:21). Positioning myself within a postmodernist paradigm I believe that there are limits in our ability to measure, describe, control and manipulate the universe in a generally applicable way.

The modernist epistemological stance leads to what Keeney (in Snyman and Fasser, 2004:74) calls "psychiatric nomenclature and the classical model of psychopathology", which results in "the reification and labelling of human behaviour according to singular descriptions". So the psychologist is placed in the position of "expert" regarding the problem, diagnosis, objective "truth" and specialist know-how.

Postmodernism questions the posture of authoritative truth, according to Freedman and Combs , relating it to the following:

> "The limits of human ability to measure/describe the universe in precise, absolute, generally applicable ways. This does not imply that postmodernism is against medication, research or the diagnosing of a problem, but takes a stand against using it in a mechanised, routine and dehumanising way".
>
> (1996:21)

The assumption of universality has undergone revision within the post-modern paradigm. Michael Foucault is quoted in Elkind (1997:243) writing about the end of man, in which he was arguing "against the metaphysical idea of a universal human nature and for a fuller and deeper appreciation of human individuality".

Relating to the approach I took in writing my re-telling, I found the narrative format to link the ways in which knowledge is socially constructed with 'appropriate ways of writing'. Winter, (1996:26) describes it as a sequence of practice and reflection, which pays attention to not use "styles, tones and vocabulary which seem to express the expert role [that can lead to] a withdrawal from personal involvement and a sustained abstraction from concrete detail".

Winter refers to a feminist approach to writing, with the following:

> "[The] instructive analogy offered by feminist writers, who have chosen innovative formats such as blending the autobiographical reminiscences with interspersed passages of social history, sociology and psychoanalysis, or the weaving of varied themes and general reflections within the accounts of everyday lives".

(1996:86)

Thus as an individual, a white Afrikaans-speaking woman, as a therapist in training I prefer to engage within the discourses of the local, the specific, and the personal of people with whom I collaborate, within the context of my own lived experience and in the shared experiences with others. These ideas relate very strongly with poststructuralist thought.

2.2.2 Poststructuralism

Structuralism's aim was to inquire and search for "deep structures" and "essential truths" about people (Thomas, 2002:87). Poststructuralism is akin to postmodernistic thought and denies that the surface structure of texts or actions of people is fully representative of inner and essential qualities. An effect of structuralist thought was to create various norms and beliefs about what people's lives are *supposed* to look like for them to be *normal/healthy/functioning* individuals.

In describing the behaviour of others as normal/abnormal, Mash and Wolfe (2002:9) ask "Whose standard of 'normal' do we adopt, and who decides when this arbitrary standard has been breached?"

The accepted, taken-for-granted ideas for ways of being in the world were set within the discourses of our society. Burr (1995:48) defines discourse as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events". Thus it is in the sharing of experience through language, stories, metaphors and images that we construct meaning for ourselves. This implicates that there are no fixed, absolute truths, because we are constantly renegotiating meaning through tellings and re-tellings of our experiences. Language is always changing. Meanings are always unstable and on the move (Freedman & Combs, 1996:29). This leads us to social constructionism.

As researcher, I also realise that the language I use and the knowledge I share in this text, is always open to critical question and debate. "Relative truths are set within the human and political context of research" according to Melrose (1996:52). Thus I will not attempt to only describe individual experiences of meaning-making, but hopefully encourage others to question and examine the 'truths' of social structures and control mechanisms that they construct their realities with, to participate in the authoring of more preferred ways of being.

According to Davies and Harré a strength of a poststructuralist research paradigm lies in the fact that once a researcher have:

> "Taken up a particular vision position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned".
>
> (1991:46)

Thus I position myself within the personal and the political, a researcher-in-the-world.

2.2.3 Social Constructionism

"Selfunderstandings are mediated through language" according to Michael White (1990:28). This builds on the assumption of social constructionist thought that "all forms of knowledge are historically and culturally specific...and our use of language can therefore be thought of as a form of action" (Burr, 1995:7). This implies that it is through

our social interaction or "communal interchange" (Gergen, 1985:266), which is mediated through the language we use, that knowledge is constructed. However, our interactions are dynamic, varying in content, context and the experiences that inform our perceptions. 'Truth' therefore shifts constantly, or rather, as many voices as there are, as many truths exist.

By questioning a stable, reliable map as reflection of the world on which to base our knowledge, social constructionism moves beyond the dualism of empiricism (the real world *out there* can be mirrored or accurately reflected in our use of language) and rationalism (the real world can be understood through our own, rational *inner* processes using language) (Gergen, 1985:269). The focus is placed on the performative way in which language is shared in human activities, implying that "Knowledge is not something people possess in their heads, but rather, something people do together" (Gergen, 1985:270).

The attempt at certainty of meaning, experience and common language has been abandoned. The price that we have to pay according to Kincheloe (2003:145) is "untidy diversity, but the world itself, especially the social and educational world, was not at all that neat!"

Jacques Derrida mocks the certainty with which empirical, rational science makes 'valid' arguments. "Meaning, like an eroding hillside, slowly dissolves until language and texts take on a configuration quite different from their original state" (Kincheloe, 2003:147). These taken for granted truths lead to claims of certainty that enforces privilege for the privileged and oppression for the oppressed.

As a critical researcher, I attempted to proceed tentatively, always conscious of untidiness and uncertainty. "When we know for certain, little need exists to pursue alternative ways of knowing" (Kincheloe, 2003:157). The certainty with which dominant methodologies approach research privileges the knower above the known, making questioning seem superfluous.

2.2.4 Feminist research practices

Feminist theory suggests a new research position that radically transforms traditional approaches, conceptualising new relationships between the knower and the known. It offers us the possibility for ways of being and seeing that reconnect the knower and the known within the everyday, mundane, localised ways of living. "They have uncovered the existences of silences and absences…by applying their own lived experience to the research process, connecting the knower and the known" (Kincheloe, 2003:53).

I use this discourse together with post structuralist and social construction as guidelines to my research process as they specifically take a "critical, progressive and political stance to the truth claims made by discourses which help maintain oppressive power relations" (Burr, 1995:172). They also focus on language, social organisation and the role of subjectivity.

The realisation that the dichotomies of rational/emotional, objective/subjective, male/female were based on the oppression of the thought-feeling hierarchy. This historical structure within all domains of society was used by men to oppress women (Kincheloe, 2003:53). The power dynamics of this relationship also extends into the research domain, making research on various different levels not a value-free, non-ideological activity. Feminist research theory have opened up new possibilities of research, making use of one's own empathetic understanding in engaging with other's experiences, making the private public.

Lous Heshusius (1994:16) advocates that researchers "free themselves from objectivity and turn towards a participatory mode of consciousness", thus bridging the gap of a regulated distance between the self (researcher/knower) and other (researched/ participant/known). She refers back to a time before the scientific revolution where the "act of knowing had always been understood as a form of participation and enchantment". The idea of participatory consciousness asks of the researcher to partake with all your being in an open and receptive way. This way of connecting self and other creates a deeper form of kinship according to Heshusius, where:

"Concerns about truth and degrees of interpretation are replaced by positioning a transformative process of merging, and then differentiation,

which results in rethinking the boundaries of self and other in the knowledge of their permeability".

(1994:18)

The questions Heshusius asks in relation to participatory consciousness and being ethical, guides me as researcher in my attempt to re-tell my journey with Jonathan:

"Given the inseparability of ourselves as researchers and as persons, the questions we must ask are no longer on the order of epistemological ones like, are my results correct in the sense of accurate? But rather on the order of moral ones like, what kind of person am I or do I become? Or what kind of society do we have or are we constructing?"

(1994:20)

2.3   IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FOUNDATIONS

2.3.1   Using a narrative metaphor

Postmodernist writers stress the role that narrative plays in our attempts to structure, understand, maintain and share knowledge of our worlds and ourselves:

"We organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on".

(Bruner in Freedman & Combs, 1996:30)

"I would like to suggest narrative as a meaningful way to present and produce ethical ways of being in a participatory manner. Stories can carry the ethical wisdom of people across generations and different cultures in a way quite different from the purely logically and rationally organised normative systems".

(Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:20)

Using the narrative metaphor has implications for the way I approach meaning-making within the therapeutic context:

"In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them....these accounts can be referred to as a story or self-narrative" (White & Epston, 1990:10). David Epston and Michael White further propose that successful storying of lives create a sense of "continuity" and "meaning in people's lives", through the narrative that guides them in "organising of daily lives" and "the interpretation of further experiences".

The social construction of meaning through storying also emphasises the importance not only attending to individual's stories, but also the cultural and contextual stories that influence our ways of making meaning. Michael White points out the political aspect of engaging in language:

"When engaging in language, we are not engaging in a neutral activity. There exists a stock of culturally available discourses that are considered appropriate and relevant to the expression or representation of particular aspects of experience".

(1990:27)

Being aware of the politics involved in the meaning making process, in the use of language, I then need to tread wearily in my role as therapist, as researcher, not to subjugate other knowledges and stories to my own narrative worldview. Kincheloe reflects on the researcher's constitutive effects when engaging in narrative research:

"Just as we understand that the world is socially constructed, we understand that research of any type creates a world – it does not reflect a world....the process of living itself is a process of world-making".

(2003:193)

2.3.2 Power/Knowledge

There lies power in the idea that 'one truth' or 'one reality' is the one and only true and objective way of being. For one narrative to dominate, it has to "disqualify, deny, limit, deny and contain" other views and experiences of reality (Epston & White, 1990:18). The writings of Michael Foucault (1980) influenced Michael White's understanding of power (1991, 1995, 1997, 2001).

Foucault studied the way modern science was used to label, categorise and organise people into different groups, whom could in turn be separated, controlled and oppressed by the powers that be. The labelling took place through language, so to Foucault "language is an instrument of power, and people have power in society in direct proportion to their ability to participate in the various discourses that shape that society" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:37-38).

Based on Foucault's writings, White and Epston warn us that:

> "Power is constitutive or shaping of people's lives….we are all caught up in a net or web of power/knowledge, it is not possible to act apart from this domain as we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others".
>
> (1990:19-22)

It is therefore necessary that we are aware and on the look-out for the ways, in which we use language, engage in conversations, by being critical of the knowledges we partake in and that shape our lives.

According to Kincheloe (2003:200), "the power-sniffing abilities of feminist theory, post-structuralism, discourse analysis, and post-colonialism are invaluable to critical interpreters (researchers) in this (discerning covert works of power) process". Therefore I have studied, applied and used the spyglass of these different approaches to understand my own particular positioning within this web of multiple realities. It has helped me to become conscious of my own ideological inheritance and how it has influenced my beliefs and values, interests and questions about my practice.

I found it empowering that Foucault (Townley, 1994:8) concedes that: "Power is positive and creative, not just negative and repressive" which has given agency to voices of marginalized persons because of power/knowledge misuse.

2.3.2.1 Subjugated knowledges

Foucault talks about subjugated knowledges in relation to the connection between power and knowledge. Foucault (1994:21) describes it as present but disguised, "naïve knowledges, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity ". Epston and White (1990:31) argue that "the identification of and provision of the space for the performance of these knowledges is a central focus of the therapeutic endeavour".

In participating in action research, I am also allowed " to walk the crooked path, to explore particularity, intuition, emotion, rage, cognition, desire, interpretation, experience, positionality, passion, social theory, and knowledge" (from marginalized and subjugated voices) (Kincheloe, 2003:195).

2.3.3 Deconstructing discourses

Deconstructive thinking denies that there is a single fixed meaning in texts (stories) and perpetuate the postmodern assumption that there are as many meanings as there are readers of texts. Meaning is therefore brought to the text, to events and experiences, through language, expression and interpretation (Derrida, 1986:396-400).

Elkind (1997:243) points out that "while there are still universals, particularly in the physical and biological sciences, they are much less common in the social sciences, where particularity is more likely to be the rule".

Deconstruction refers to attempts to take apart texts; it is a way of looking at texts, or words, that reveal the "hidden" contradictions which overshadows repressed or absent meanings (Burr, 1995:164-165). Deconstructive listening is a way of "unpacking"

(Freedman & Combs, 1996: 57) meanings, or finding different ways of looking at issues, investigating their limits and potentials.

In using deconstruction within therapeutic conversations, we aim to look at the language used in a narrative from various viewpoints, questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and also constructing alternative stories. Derrida (1986) and Foucault (Epston & White, 1990) focus on meaning-making through *difference* (French pronounciation). Foucault (Parker in Van Rooyen, 2002:27) therefore argues that "we are all *difference*, that our reason is the *difference* of discourses, our history the *difference* of times, our selves the *difference* of masks".

In the "unpacking of negative identity conclusions" through "externalising" of the discourse, description, idea, belief, trait or norm, we are thus deconstructing the meaning of the word. In the process we try to understand how history and culture or other relations of power have come to influence the construction of this problematic use of language. "By giving consideration to the politics involved in the shaping of identity, it becomes possible to enable new understanding of life" and alternative identity conclusions (Carey & Russel, 2002:77).

2.3.3.1 Deconstructing identity

Michael White (2001) proposes "Narrative practice and the unpacking of identity conclusions". In storying one's life and lived experiences, "different selves come forth in different contexts, and no one self is truer than any other" according to Freedman & Combs (1996:35). However, dominant discourses specify the preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving in a certain culture. It is in the "unpacking" or deconstructing of these dominant stories' "truths" that preferred identities are constituted through language and the celebration of people's differences are voiced and acknowledged.

In unpacking ideas around identity, Michael White (2001:7) points out the powerful and pervasive historical and cultural influences of Modern liberal theory that emphasises the individual's democratic right to ownership of private property. This dominating ideas of possession, of improving assets and capitalising on resources have influenced the way we have conceptualised identity. "It was understood that the self was a manifestation of

internal property" which enabled us to "possess" ourselves. White does not attempt to discredit or dishonour these ways of thinking, but he aims to point out that this naturalistic account of identity have limitations and dangers within therapeutic conversations.

I will briefly review some of these limitations (White, 2001:9-11):

- If during a therapeutic conversation a person's preferred identity claims are deemed natural, it reduces the options for the therapist to take responsibility for what is being constructed in the name of therapy.

- If the results of these conversations are assigned naturalistic status, ethical responsibility by the therapist to embrace the real effects of the conversation, becomes difficult.

- If human expression is a surface manifestation of inherent, natural elements of one's own nature, it binds us to "single-voiced individualities" that closes up opportunities for people to partake in multi-voiced experiences of identity.

- Naturalistic accounts of life and identity are closely related to the "modern phenomenon of the production of weaknesses and deficits, and of the disorders and pathologies". The naturalistic discourse of resources and strengths contribute to the understanding of difficulties in life as expressions of weaknesses and deficits.

- Using naturalistic accounts of identity to compare life experiences, one's strength to survive an ordeal could lead to an understanding that the other's failure to do so is a sign of a deficit of weakness. It obscures the context of people's lives and the politics of their experience, leading to marginalisation of the other.

I agree with Michael White that therapeutic conversations shaped by naturalistic accounts powerfully restrict what otherwise might be rich conversations that open up space for multiple ways of preferred being.

An example of a naturalistic account of identity is Erik Erikson and the eight stages of the life cycle that he developed. Stage 5 is a crisis point where the early adolescent becomes preoccupied with the question of identity. In contrast to *stabilising an identity* based on the " accrued ability of the ego to integrate these identifications (of childhood) with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles", an unstable identity can lead to *role confusion* (Sadock & Sadock, 2003:211-212). Erikson indicates that the onset of this stage is from about 13 years to about 21 years. Failure to develop a stable identity could lead to role confusion that may manifest in "such behavioural abnormalities as running away, criminality, and overt psychosis" (Sadock & Sadock, 2003:211). Erikson was of the opinion that delinquency, gender-related identity disorders, and borderline psychotic episodes can result from such confusion.

Developmental knowledge can be very helpful in providing ways of making sense of children's experiences and actions. These ideas also provide ways for adults and parents to behave in order to care for children. Deborah Nelson (2000:24) points out however, "this discourse opens up certain understandings and closes others down, and it has its limits and can create relationships that are experienced as limiting".

Talking about or applying these kinds of developmental guidelines as "global or universal knowledges" is dangerous. Foucault warns against the belief that there exist objective or intrinsic facts about the nature of persons that are constructed ideas given a truth status (Epston & White, 1990:19). The power of this kind of truth subjugates people and prescribes people's actions according to these "general truths" or "unitary knowledges". Applying Erikson's eight stages of a life cycle universally to all people, will subjugate them to be:

> "Judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertaking, destined to a certain mode of living and dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power".
>
> (Foucault, 1980:94)

These kinds of dominant stories create conditions for perfectionism and failure. The language used collapses the problem inside the person, having the person experiencing

negative descriptions of him or herself as totalising and paralysing. Michael White says that negative identity conclusions:

> "Are often found to be paralysing of action in regard to the predicaments of people's lives and can contribute to a strong sense of being in suspense, of one's life being frozen in time".
>
> (2001:3)

Through externalising conversations, where the problem is separated from the person's identity, descriptions such as "lazy good for nothing", even that he was "useless" and "I'm a failure" are no longer collapsed onto a person's personhood (White, 2001:2). These "thin descriptions" of a person's identity are deprived of their "truth status" through the deconstruction of the powerful dominant discourses. Externalising conversations brings forth the effects of the problem as well as people's resistance to the problem (unique outcomes), which enables a person to revise their relationship with the problem.

In terms of identity, externalising conversations create the space for other conversations, ones that contribute "to the generation of more positive identity conclusions" according to Michael White (2001:4). He also calls these conversations "re-authoring conversations" (White, 1995) that contributes to the exploration of the knowledges of life and practices of living that a person associates with positive identity conclusions.

Externalising conversations enables us to claim a form of agency in which according to Davies:

> "The speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, can use terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other, both in terms of her own experienced subjectivity and in the way in which she chooses to speak in relation to the subjectivities of others".
>
> (1991:46)

The way in which I prefer to speak in relation to the subjectivity of Jonathan and all other people is a way in which I attempt to open up the space for the expression of alternative identity claims of hopes, dreams, purposes, values and commitments.

2.3.3.2 Deconstructing divorce

In accepting Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge, as therapists and researchers " we should become wary of situating our practices in those 'truth' discourses of the professional discipline, those discourses that propose and assert objective reality accounts for the human condition" according to Michael White (1990:28).

One such discourse centres on the idea of the 'nuclear' family and what is deemed normal or functional within the professional psychological discourse. "Parents and children living under the same roof in harmonious interaction" is the expected cultural norm in Western society. Deviations from the norm (e.g., divorced- and single-parent families) are associated with a broad range of problems in children" according to Sadock & Sadock (2003:34). In our current South African context a 'normal, functioning' nuclear family is very rare. Poverty, Apartheid, worker migration, HIV/Aids, discourses surrounding sexual activity; alcohol use and success all have powerful influences on the relationships within families.

The dominant story about a naturalistic structure of family marginalizes the commitment, caring and nurturing given by gay couples, grandparents, single-mothers or fathers, foster parents or adoptive parents. Is there only one way to raise a child? The individualistic view of a nuclear family unit cuts off multiple ways of relatedness, not only between a biological parent and child, but the support and "harmony" created by a caregiver, a teacher, even a therapist!

Michael White points out the historical and cultural situatedness of the idea of a nuclear family:

"Take the grand design of the nuclear family. It doesn't really fit with what is happening in the world – not that it ever really did fit. After all, it was basically a production of the dominant ideology of the 1930'. [There] are virtually as

many family forms out there as there are families, and many significantly differing forms appear to work quite well".

(1995:18)

Dominant narratives surrounding divorce creates ideas of self-blaming, self-doubt, a lack of commitment, being unsuccessful, incompleteness, disappointment, failure or even pathologising. Sadock & Sadock claim according to research that:

"Immediately after a divorce, an increase in behavioural and emotional disorders appears in all age groups. Recovery from, and adaptation to, the effects of divorce usually take 3 to 5 years, but about one third of all children from divorced homes have lasting psychological trauma".

(2003:34)

Being part of a divorced family has many negative connotations according to the dominant stories psychology tells us. These fixed ideas leave little room to create new options and space for family members to continue with their lives in preferred ways.

In trying to categorise and explain mood disorders in young children and adolescents, it is noted that "different kinds of traumatic or stressful events, such as parental divorce or serious illness" could cause depression (Ingersoll & Goldstein, 1995:19). This linear understanding of cause and effect disqualifies the uniqueness and difference within each family's context and the multiple influences that other experiences could have on a child. Dr Richard Harrington (1993:38), a British psychiatrist points out that it is difficult to draw direct connections between parental divorce and depression in young people, because there are so many factors involved.

Michael White (1991:121) points out that unpacking these dominant ways of being makes possible the privileging of "local knowledges" above "global truths". He describes the process as follows:

"Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them. In this sense, the methods of deconstruction are methods that exoticise the domestic".

(1991:121)

By "exoticising" the ideas of 'nuclear family' and 'divorce', one might be able to look for gaps and blurs that provide entry into other moments, experiences or attempts, which describe alternative discourses about 'family' identity and preferred ways of relating to one another.

2.3.3.3 Deconstructing ADHD

> "Darwin confessed that his brain was not constructed for much thinking and wisely gave up the attempt to use it for pursuance of his special subjects for more than an hour or so at a time. Had he not done so, much of his invaluable work might never have seen the light. If a man like Darwin's gigantic intellect found it impossible to concentrate his attention for any lengthy period without fatigue, surely allowance should be made for children who doubtless suffer as he did. Yet bright intelligent children are often expected to concentrate their attention for many hours at a time, and when they fail, are regarded as simply lazy".

Leonard G. Guthrie, Functional Nervous Disorders in Childhood (1909)

In his work, Foucault (1975) highlights the way in which social sciences have categorised people into normal and abnormal. "Behaviours that are considered useful and have a special function in some societies are regarded as pathological in others. Since the eighteenth century, these definitions have been used to regulate behaviour" (Kotzé, 2000:37).

ADHD is a late twentieth century description of learners (can only be diagnosed at age 7) who do not fit into the normal (accustomed?/provided for?) way of behaving at school or home. Pathology is based on the modern assumptions of universality, regularity and progress according to Elkind (1997). Postmodern thinking has modified this by accepting the normality of *irregularity*. According to Elkind:

"Some phenomena are, by nature, chaotic and have no underlying regularity. The *DSM IV* definition of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as involving any four of five out of eighteen (18) neurological, behavioural, or attentional symptoms is recognition that this disorder has no underlying regularity".

(1997:243)

Could it be that the modernist assumption of regularity and universality have created labels that reduces a *problematic* learner to a few characteristics, dictating certain assumptions about the learner, to then box the learner and release them into the predetermined educational system?

I do not question the existence of behaviour characteristics, social or neurological influences on a learner's ability to learn and adjust to a normative educational environment. I am however aware of the negative influences that labels can have on the identity of a person.

Being able to diagnose a learner as ADHD by age 7 (*DSM IV-R*) is partially based on the assumption that children should progress uniformly through the grades. However, Elkind points out that in the early childhood years:

"Roughly from age 3 to age 8, is a period of rapid intellectual growth ….some may attain Piaget's concrete operations at 4, some at 5, some at 6 and some at 7. They will all attain concrete operations, but at different rates".

(1997:244)

These wide individual differences in growth rate and early childhood experience create a vast variety in their readiness for formal instruction, which can lead to large numbers of children being retained or placed in transitional classes. Jonathan still recalls the fact that he was held back a year in Grade 1 and put on Ritalin for the first time. He saw the problem as something within him, "That I've had since I can remember" and that there wasn't much he could do about it, "It's just the way I am".

I was curious whether his "day dreaming" (Bester, 2000:22) didn't come in handy when he sat in Art class, mixing colours or sketching. Wasn't it perhaps a source for creativity,

to imagine other possibilities? Yes, to be able to concentrate in class is vital to stay within the main stream of the educational system and to be able to *function* appropriately. Sometimes the individual learner must subordinate his or her unique learning style to acquire basic tools of language and concepts. However, Elkind (1997:244) wonders whether "creativity in classroom learning or in the arts or in the sciences, isn't necessarily chaotic and irregular".

Do our forms of education and curricula accommodate both? Or does the system prefer one way and problematise the other? Onto whose shoulders are the guilt and shame placed once a learner is described as "lazy" or that he has "attitude problems" within the classroom? Thomas Skrtic (1999:193) identifies education as a social goal that is shaped by a certain kind of "schooling", through the medium of an organisation. He advocates a reconceptualisation of the nature, diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities from an organisational perspective. "My main contention is that learning disabilities are best thought of as organisational pathologies, rather than as intrinsic human pathologies" (Skrtic, 1999:193).

As a philosophical pragmatist, Skrtic argues that "the diagnosis of learning disabilities is subjective and harmful to students and to public education as a whole" (1999:197). He is not as concerned whether the conventional assumptions about learning disabilities are right or wrong, but questions the usefulness of these descriptions as a guide to practice and advocacy in the field of learning disabilities today.

Dr Mel Levine (2002:46) warns against the misuse of terminology such as ADHD. "I will advocate an approach that stresses close observation and accurate description instead of lumping kids together in a category, such as ADD". He suggests that the identification and celebration of strengths may be even more important. The co-morbidity of ADD with behavioural and emotional problems could point to too much emphasis on what is problematic with a learner's mind rather than what a learner has to offer to the classroom. "I believe that when your child has strengths that are suppressed, abilities he is prevented from using while growing up, he becomes a virtual time bomb primed for detonation" (Levine, 2002:46).

2.3.3.4 Deconstructing depression

Ingersoll and Goldstein (1995:3) describe depression as a "whole body illness" because it has an influence not only on mood, but also in almost every other aspect of a child's life. Areas such as sleep, appetite, energy and general health might be impaired. Physical complaints such as headaches and stomach-aches are common. Depression also interferes with attention span and one's ability to concentrate and think quickly. This can influence school performance. Relationships are strained and tested due to depression's use of moodiness and emotional outbursts. This leads in turn to becoming increasingly withdrawn and isolated or aggressive and argumentative (Ingersoll & Goldstein, 1995:3; DSM IV-R)

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV-R) categorises a major depressive episode as having between five and nine depressive symptoms over a two-week period; there also has to be a change from previous functioning. Based on this diagnostic system, a diagnosis of depression can include having a diminished interest or pleasure in activities, a depressed mood most of the day, feelings of worthlessness, and a diminished ability to think or concentrate.

The effect of such a diagnosis creates a sense of "legitimacy, confidence, and predictability both to the professional and to the client" according to Gergen, Hoffman and Anderson in Kotzé (2000:272). McLean (2000:272) points out that "the process of consulting an "expert" for help and obtaining an official diagnostic label for the problem suggests to the client how they ought to change their behaviour, emotional state of biology to get well". Gergen et al in Kotzé (2000:272) mention that the availability of a diagnosis may suggest "that the client's problem is common, well-known, well-understood and treatable".

Dominant discourses such as the ones surrounding pathology or depression may include ideas around the 'right' way of experiencing, managing or living with depression. From a social constructionism viewpoint, dominant discourses are seen as objectifying individuals and their bodies and are critical of the way that depression has constructed the identities of people. They point out the extent to which the problem is produced from unequal structures in society, such as gender, race or age (White 1995).

However, the popular ideas and discourses around depression have the power to infiltrate a person's identity. School is a context that provides a multitude of normalising discourses for children. There are clear messages given on ways to be accepted within the classroom or on the playing field, acting, achieving or looking a certain way. Usher and Edwards point out that it is ironic "how educational practice is seen as the vehicle through which modernity's grand narratives of individual freedom and self-determination are made possible" (Kotzé, 2000:273). Elkind (1997:245) questions this assumption and asks whether school is in fact a social organisation that hampers the "creativity, [which] is necessarily chaotic and irregular", having individuals whom differ culturally, ethnically, in personality and race.

The kind of prescriptions used gives one little space to be your own person. The opportunities to experience failure are inevitable and limitless and according to Michael White (2001:2) those learners who have perceived themselves to have failed in their attempts to be a person proceed to subject themselves to normalising practices, losing their individuality. Could depression be seen as a method of self-defence against limitless demands of normalisation?

Depression is described in such totalising, powerful terminology, that it can halter conversation and create a sense of stuckness or permanence.

According to Michael White both biology and cultural conditions are useful in identifying depressive symptoms:

> "[White] does not believe that the use of classificatory systems, labels of depression, the possibilities of biology, or the use of drugs for the alleviation of these problems should be disregarded, but rather questions how the use of these can be enabling for the client".
>
> (McLean, 2000:273)

These systems should be used to the clients own advantage, using the labels and drugs in a way that adds to the client's agency over the problem.

Ingersoll and Goldstein (1995:25-26) classifies depression as an "internalised disorder" while behavioural problems are classified as "externalised disorders". Michael White

questions the use of language that locates a problem within a person. Cheryl White (1999:219) points out that "if you see yourself as the problem there is not much you can do except maybe act against yourself". There are also many invitations for people to blame their relationships for the negative effects of a problem. This causes further division at times when those relationships are most needed.

Are theories on mood and emotions generally applicable, when 'truth' is often culturally and historically specific? (Burr,1995:8). Arthur Frank said the following regarding theoretical approaches to attain the "truth":

> "Theory has been used to categorise rather than open up people's experiences. Instead of guiding us into what is particular about an individual's experiences of illness (not necessarily equating it with depression) these words create distance and can draw other professionals into the illusion of understanding".
>
> (1991:45)

2.4   NARRATIVE THERAPY

2.4.1 The text analogy

As therapist and researcher, I agree with Ballard's (1996:31) way of participating in research: "We construct our understanding through dialogue with one another and with many poets and other storytellers that we choose to illuminate our lives". I found my own way of positioning myself in the world resonated with the principles and commitments reflected within Narrative therapy. This approach to being in the world guided my steps as therapist with Jonathan and my "co-search" to re-tell our story.

In using the text analogy, one is able to consider the actions of people as the interaction of readers around particular texts, according to Michael White:

> "It is then possible to conceive of the evolution of lives and relationships in terms of the reading of texts, insofar as every new reading of a text is a new interpretation of it, and thus a different writing of it".
>
> (1991:9)

This implies that we know our lives through the way we live it, through our experiences of events and the stories we share with each other.

The success of this storying of our lives, in making sense of it, depends on the way in which "events are arranged in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of them, (our)selves and the world around them (us)" (White, 1991:10). However, the whole story is never told. We are always 'pruning' our stories according to the available discourses, vocabulary and preferred ways of being within our society.

Narrative therapy makes the general assumption that:

> "Persons experience problems, for which they frequently seek therapy, when the narratives in which they are "storying" their experience, and/or in which they are having their experience "storied" by others, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience, and that, in these circumstances, there will be significant aspects of their lived experiences that contradict these dominant narratives".
>
> (Epston & White, 1990:14)

Epston, White and others have thus developed ways of thinking and working that are based on:

> "Bringing forth the discontinuous, particular and local stories of individuals and groups and performing meaning on those stories so that they can be part of an effective insurrection of subjugated knowledges".
>
> (Freedman & Combs, 1996:40)

This allows people to inhabit and claim ownership/agency of their lives and the many possibilities that extends beyond the given dominant discourses.

2.4.2 The problem is the problem

The linguistic practice of externalisation (Epston & White, 1990; Freeman, Epston, Lobovits, 1997; Carey & Russel, 2002) separates the person from the problem. "In

contrast to the common cultural practice of identifying the person as the problem or the problem within the person, this work depicts the problem as external to the person" (Freeman, Epston, Lobovits,1997:8). Epston points out that it serves not to see the problem as objectively separate, but that it creates space for more creative and freeing linguistic constructions.

White (1990:39) has concluded that this practice decreases unproductive conflicts between persons, undermines the sense of failure that develops when a problem persists despite attempts to resolve it, creates the opportunity for persons to work together in uniting against the problem and opens up new possibilities for persons to take action to claim their lives and relationships from the problem and its influence. Externalising conversations also allows for a "lighter, more effective and less stressed approach to 'deadly serious problems' and presents options for dialogue, rather than monologue, about the problem" (White, 1990:40).

In the dialogue that ensues around the person's relationship to the problem, questions are introduced that attempts to 'map the influence of the problem', 'map the influence of the persons on the problem' and 'defining the problem' (Freeman, Epston, Lobovits, 1997; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Epston & White, 1990; White & Denborough, 1999; Carey & Russel, 2002). This allows one to place the existence of the problem into a story line.

With the externalising conversation, broader considerations can be taken into account, understanding that people's relationships to problems are shaped by their history and culture. "It is possible to explore how gender, race, culture, sexuality, class and other relations of power have influenced the construction of the problem" (Carey & Russel, 2002:77) This opens up the space to preferred stories and the subjugated knowledges of people in their ways of making meaning of their lives. This is brought forth during the therapeutic conversations in the form of 'unique outcomes'.

2.4.3 Deconstructing discourses

Through externalising conversations, the problem is to an extent disempowered, as it no longer speaks the only truth to persons about their identity, who they are as people or about the nature of their relationships. This is made possible through the deconstruction

of "truths". Michael White (1995:24) states that he believes "internalising conversations obscure the politics of experience, externalising conversations emphasises the politics of experience".

Through deconstructive questioning and listening, people are invited to see their stories from different perspectives, "to notice how they are constructed, to note their limits and to discover that there are other possible narratives" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:56). This 'unpacking' of a dominant narrative or discourse (based on a certain belief, attitude, action or value) offers persons the possibilities to challenge it and commit themselves to protesting it. By this protest, we are taking a political stand against certain practices of power within our society.

2.4.4 Unique outcomes

"Once details of the effects of the problem have been established, it becomes easier for persons to specify their own influence in relation to the problem" (Epston & White, 1990:56). These 'unique outcomes' or 'sparkling moments' are actions, feelings, intentions, motives, thoughts that stand in contrast to the problem-saturated story. In attending to the outcomes that are at odds with the influence of the problem, the therapist invites the person to attribute their meaning to these events and whether they are significant in opposing the problem's version of events (Carey & Russel, 2003(b):61). Once an event is richly described, the therapist might then seek to link it with other events, co-authoring a preferred story with the person.

2.4.5 Re-authoring

A major focus of a narrative approach is the relationship between the person and the problem. One way to initiate an alternative story is to contrast the person's qualities, abilities and knowledge with the traits of the problem. "An alternative story must be established in which the characters, their intentions and their circumstances are as well developed, colourful, and convincing as the problem's" according to Freeman, Epston, Lobovits (1997:95).

Freedman and Combs (1996:88) point out that "we can't know where people's stories will go" and that we can only co-author "a story a piece at a time". These new strands in weaving a preferred story are constructed through the use of questions. "We ask

questions to generate experience of preferred realities…privileging the knowledge of the people we work with over ours". This stance encourages "a sense of authorship and re-authorship of one's life and relationships in the telling and re-telling of one's story" according to Michael White (1990:83).

2.4.6 Re-membering

The intention in narrative work is to contribute to the thickening of preferred stories of identity, enabling persons to claim a stand in their chosen way of living. Re-membering practices are based on the post-structuralist understanding that our identities are constructed through our interaction with other people. Connecting persons in their standing together in preferred identities, provides a great deal of support for future actions a person might plan or wish to take.

The term 're-membering' develops the idea that "people's identities are shaped by 'a club of life'" (Russel & Carey, 2002(b):24). Using the concept of a 'club of life' where people have membership status, persons can "suspend or elevate, revoke or privilege, and down-grade or upgrade specific memberships of their lives" (White, 1997:23). Michael White also points out that this metaphor gives opportunities for persons to actively and directly acknowledge the valued and important contributions that others have made to their lives:

> "The sense of being joined in this way, and of experiencing one's life more richly described, contributes to new possibilities for action in the world. It also renders a person less vulnerable to experiences of being alone in the face of adversity – it provides an antidote to a sense of isolation".
>
> (White, 1997:24)

2.4.7 Letters

Therapeutic letters are closely associated with narrative therapy (Epston & White, 1990; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997; White, 1997). Epston describes the rationale for using therapeutic letters:

"Conversation is, by its very nature, ephemeral. After a particular meaningful session, a client walks out aglow with some provocative new thought, but a few blocks away, the exact words that had stuck home as so profound may already be hard to recall….but the words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalising it".

<div align="right">(Morgan, 1999:95)</div>

The letter is literary rather than diagnostic, focussing not so much on developing an argument rather than wondering what might happen next. Letters often play the role of thickening the alternative story at the expense of the problem's dominant story.

2.4.8 Publishing and sharing the news

Freedman and Combs explain the appeal of spreading preferred stories:

"Although in the dominant culture therapy tends to be a secret enterprise, in the narrative subculture the people who consult with us are usually enthusiastic about the idea of letting other people in on the process. We think that externalising and anti-pathologising practices offer people a different kind of experience in therapy. When therapy becomes a context in which people constitute preferred selves, they have nothing to hide and much to show".

<div align="right">(1996:237)</div>

There exists different ways for recruiting an audience for the development of preferred stories, ranging from family members to friends, co-workers or representatives of involved agencies. Significant others can be invited in to witness a re-telling of a person's claim on a preferred ways of being, or an audience can be created in the imagination of the person.

These witnessing practices, also called outsider-witness practices, "enable a link to be made between what happens in the therapy room and the rest of a person's life" (Carey & Russel, 2003(a):5). If a person's preferred story of who they are only remains a conversation in their own head, it will not have the sense of 'realness' or 'authenticity

that comes with their stories being witnessed and responded to by a significant audience.

2.5   ETHICAL POSITIONING

2.5.1 Feminist ethics

Feminists have devised alternative systems of ethics that challenges the prescriptive, fixed moral systems upheld by dominant scientific and religious discourses. According to McNay in Kotzé and Kotzé, feminists argue that ethics can no longer be grounded in abstract moral law:

> "Feminist ethics is based on responsiveness to others and a respect for the particular which leads to moral concerns connected to providing care, preventing harm and maintaining relationships".

(2002:17)

Reinharz (1992:196) emphasises the self-reflexive nature of feminist research, positioning oneself in a stance of honesty and openness, to be transparent as a therapist about what one has learned from the research experience. It also involves reflecting the way power relationships operated in the production of knowledge (Kotzé, 2002:26)

2.5.2 An ethical-political process

In preferring to position myself as therapist, psychologist and researcher within a narrative framework, participation of all the persons involved is a primary commitment if I aspire to be ethical. According to Kotzé:

> "We can no longer hide behind systems of norms....we can no longer avoid participating with others and avoid engaging in the challenges of real life

dilemmas....research is therefore not a neutral or innocent act, but an ethical-political process".

<div align="right">(2002:21)</div>

In refraining from partaking in standardised ways of doing research, I attempt to challenge the mind/body, mind/emotion split, that separates the researcher from her social or personal influences. The effect of the subject/object dichotomy is:

"To place oneself in a detached, non-participatory relation to that which one wanted to know, including towards oneself. The knower was no longer allowed to be enchanted in the act of knowing, that is, to fully participate at the spiritual, psychological, emotional and somatic levels".

<div align="right">(Heshusius & Ballard in Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:23)</div>

2.5.3 My ethical position

In situating myself as researcher within my own lived experiences, "we enter therapeutic relationships as fallible human beings, rather than as experts" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:275). David Epston (White 1991) has introduced the term *transparency* to the process of deconstructing and situating therapist's contributions to the therapy process.

However, these attempts at transparency regarding the therapeutic process, take place within a pre-determined power-based context. Michael White points out the danger in assuming that therapy can ever be totally egalitarian due to the inherent power relations and structure of the context between therapist and client:

"To blur this distinction....would make it possible for therapists to ignore the special moral and ethical responsibilities associated with their position".

<div align="right">(1995:70)</div>

Critical thinking is one way to encourage a review of one's assumptions and notice some of our everyday taken-for-granted practices of life and relationships. According to Michael White:

"One outcome of this is that we become more aware of the effects of these ways of thinking and acting, and a second is that it becomes more possible

for us to take responsibility for the real effects of our work on the lives of those persons who seek our help".

(White, 1995:15)

2.5.4 Consulting my consultants

David Epston and Michael White (1992:12) have developed a therapeutic practice called "consulting your consultants" that encourages persons to "document their alternative knowledges about their lives and relationships that has been resurrected and/or generated in therapy". The knowledge shared and documented is the client's own. With their permission, this knowledge can be made available to others who share experiences of similar problems and used by therapists who could learn from others' lived experience.

A participatory mode of consciousness, which is respectful of the client's way of being, creates conversations that take place with the client and not about him or her. Understandings are in this way co-created in what Dirk Kotzé (2002:25) calls "co-searching for new knowledges". This invites co-participation of researcher/therapist and participant:

> "When we appreciate, utilise and circulate the hard-won knowledge of the people who consult us, we participate in the creation of communities of concern in which problem conquerors' wisdom is at least as important as therapists' wisdom".

(Freedman & Combs, 1996:286)

This chapter tells of the ideas that informed my worldview and my therapeutic approach to this journey. Chapter 3 will describe the path explored by Jonathan and myself, chartering the therapeutic process in greater detail.

CHAPTER 3

3.   EXPLORING PREFERRED WAYS OF BEING WITH JONATHAN

3.1   STARTING THE JOURNEY

3.1.1 An introduction

As an educational psychology intern, we have clients assigned to us as part of our training program in our first year Master's program in the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. I received my first client and his assessment folder on my shelf sometime in May 2003.

The folder held descriptions about a young man named Jonathan, 13 years old and in Grade 7. His parents got divorced when Jonathan was in Grade 4. He has been living with his mother and younger twin sisters and has recently moved to another suburb, further away from his school. The siblings visit their father every Wednesday and sleep over every other weekend at his father's home. Jonathan's father is self-employed and his mother is a teacher. Jonathan has been on Ritalin LA since Grade 2 for ADD. The information in the folder informed me that Jonathan has repeated Grade 1 due to attention difficulties and have recently been brought to the Unit for Educational Psychology, because of his "poor progress" in school and his "lack of motivation" with regards to schoolwork and sitting detention frequently.

3.1.2 The person is not the problem

This information left me uneasy and feeling overwhelmed by the way in which all the possible problems were highlighted and I wondered about how I might approach Jonathan when I first met him, knowing all of this without his side of the story. People tend to bring a problem-saturated story to therapy, but in the work that I do, we tend to say that the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem. Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (1997:33) point out how we need to be careful in not subscribing to other's descriptions of a person or a child, because of the disempowering and disrespectful ways we then engage with them:

"How can we as therapists act so that the problem does not define the child's identity, dominate the agenda, and set the tone for the introduction of a young person to therapy?"

(1997:34).

They suggest that one tries to get to know the child apart from the problem, by starting conversations about the child's interests, abilities, knowledge, and characteristics. By focussing on getting to know the child apart from the problem, we can "separate a person's preferred experiences from the confines of the problem-saturated story, we find ourselves oriented towards inspiring histories, present strengths and future dreams and hopes. The way a problem works to restrain these is then brought to life" (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997:49).

3.1.3 Choosing relatedness

In reading a story of Linda van Duuren and Annie (in Kotzé & Morkel, 2002), where Linda as the therapist made a conscious choice not to limit her "journey to walk on the path of what is perceived to be truth in the field of learning difficulties, but to explore the spaces in between", gave me a map for my way of exploring Jonathan's story. As Linda, I hoped that by exploring aspects of Jonathan's life, where "weaknesses", "disabilities", "dysfunction" and "inadequacies" weren't dominating his understanding of himself, we might stumble upon hidden treasures in caves and crevices, behind rocks and in kelp forests that have been swum over before. I was also very fortunate to have the support of my narrative therapist, Elize Morkel to share my experiences with, as well as my academic supervisor, Mariechen Perold.

Thus, through my reflection on the power relationship within the production of knowledge (Kotzé, 2002:26) I tried not to dominate the conversation with my views, but rather to create a space for the sharing of experiences. This can lead to what Heshusius describes as kinship:

"When one forgets self and become 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)

3.1.4 Getting to know Jonathan

At our first meeting, Jonathan's parents preferred not to join us in an initial discussion, but said that they would like to give Jonathan the opportunity to have his say. They mentioned that I would be welcome to contact them at any time during our discussions if we wanted them to join us or part-take in our discussions.

Jonathan and I didn't hit it off immediately. I noticed a pale and tired looking boy, who was hesitant to talk to me and share his experiences. He avoided eye contact and sat in his chair cracking his knuckles. Seeing that this was my very first experience as a therapist-in-training, I felt a little bit daunted by the feeling of self-doubt and nervousness that joined me in the room. When I asked him why he thought his father brought him to the Unit on this Monday afternoon, he said he wasn't sure.

3.1.4.1 A "not knowing position"

I approached our discussions from a "not-knowing" position (Anderson, 1990:194), where I positioned myself not as the expert on people's lives, but as a participant in the experiences of Jonathan's life. This implies that therapy is seen as a process in which "we are always moving towards what is not yet known" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:44). However, this "not knowing" position does not imply "I don't know anything". My knowledge as a therapist is of the process of therapy, not the content and meaning people make of their lives.

3.1.4.2 Transparency

The main ingredients of trust are transparency, reliability and, dependability and honesty. Only by being transparent about my involvement with Jonathan, keeping appointments and by being honest regarding the things Jonathan wanted to talk about, might he begin to trust me. In time I was trusted with his personal experiences of divorce within his family, the battle he had with scholastic expectations and pressure and sadness and the caring and joy he experienced from his friends, parents and nature.

I asked Jonathan's permission to engage with him in curious questioning, explained to him why I was taking notes of our conversations and inviting him to join in the re-writing of his story, by making my notes available to him at any time during our conversations. I would read my notes back at him to make sure I got his words and meaning down correctly, to make myself accountable to him and in an attempt to create a more equal power balance between the two of us.

In checking out with Jonathan whether this arrangement suited him, he only shrugged his shoulders or would give a slight nod of his head. I asked him if it would be okay for me to assume that this slight nod of the head meant that it was all right to proceed with my questions and that he would indicate to me if he disagreed? I got a slight nod again.

3.1.4.3   Reflection

I later had to reflect on why I based a trusting relationship on transparency, reliability, dependability and honesty. What did it mean to me to place emphasis on this within Jonathan and my therapeutic relationship? The events noted within his folder indicated to me a lot of "professional", adult voices that claimed to know what would be best for Jonathan. I do not question their intentions, but was wondering what the effect was on Jonathan's identity. Did he experience agency in his own life?

Davies (1991:42) describes how the modern humanist definition of agency excludes children. Agency requires "taking oneself up as a knowable, recognisable identity" who "speak for themselves" and who "accept responsibility for their actions". Agency is a feature of each "sane, adult human being", which by definition excludes women, children and natives according to Davies (1991:42). Agency is thus the exception, rather than the rule for children.

I think my aim was to avoid marginalising Jonathan's agency and local knowledges, by not claiming to act on behalf of him and protect him for his own good. I was unsure how to go about it, but I thought allowing him the space of an hour a week to explore how he would prefer to engage in our discussions might be a good start.

3.2   JONATHAN AND CAN'T TALK

3.2.1 Introducing the problem

During our first three therapeutic conversations, Jonathan was still exercising his vocal cords in this new found space for sharing experiences. I had no idea how Jonathan was experiencing our time together and was very grateful for the support of my supervisor Mariechen Perold. Can't talk's powerful influence over Jonathan has dictated his voice, blinded him to his special abilities, knowledges and creative resources. He experienced a sense of stuckness at school and at home. He said that he had no options or choices in what happened to him and that no one ever listened to him.

Instead of allowing can't talk to get a hold on our discussions together, Freeman, Epston and Lobovits suggest:

> "Given a choice, most children prefer to interact in a playful way. Serious discussion and methodical problem-solving may impose on children's communication, shutting out their voices, inhibiting [them]".

> (1997:3)

Through persistent and curious questioning Jonathan engaged in our discussion and seemed to warm up to the idea of talking about activities he enjoyed. He described to me the way he and some friends would go BMX-ing down steep slopes, around 90 degree bends and flying over jumps. His eyes seemed to sparkle a little bit more and I thought I might have noticed a small smile at one stage. These descriptions of his abilities to be in control of situations and handle difficult challenges on the BMX track, were noted down and kept in as possible unique outcomes for later discussion.

3.2.2 Externalising can't talk

Asking him whether he has ever shared this activity with mom and or his father, he become withdrawn and I thought I felt some sadness. He told me that he couldn't talk to them about it. I then used the narrative approach of externalising the conversation with him about can't talk.

"Externalising conversations can open space to assist people in breaking away from negative identity conclusions and to pave the way for the introduction of other conversations which contribute to the exploration of more preferred (positive) identity conclusions, associated with specific knowledges of life and practices of living".

(White, 2001:5)

I noticed that Jonathan seemed uncomfortable talking about can't talk, that perhaps he was overwhelmed with emotion and struggling for words. I thought we might try other means of communication. The field of expressive arts therapy is akin to the practice of externalisation. "The very process of drawing, sculpting or dramatising the relationship with the problem naturally evokes a visceral sense of the problem as located for reflection outside the self" (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997:147).

Keeping playfulness in mind, I suggested that Jonathan might like to build his problem in the sand tray or draw it on paper. He seemed eager to try out the sand tray and took his time looking at the toys on display before he started building. Slowly, meticulously he build a story where two worlds were divided by a rift in the sand. On the one side were his parents (soldiers with ammunition, tanks, and reinforcements) facing the way of the rift down the middle of the tray. On the other side were three figures (Jonathan and his two sisters) also facing the way of the rift. Both Jonathan's sisters were protected by army soldiers from all sides.

Jonathan's figure was lying on his back on the sand, one leg missing and a snake curled up on his chest.

"The snake is all my problems" he told me. "It is very heavy and it is keeping my down, I can't seem to lift it off".

When asked whether can't talk, the divorce and sadness formed part of the problem, he quietly shook his head in agreement.

I did not attempt to employ his story in the sand tray for objective diagnostic criteria and interpretative purposes, but invited him to make his own meaning of his expression. "The therapist takes a stance of curiosity and facilitates the expansion of preferred

meanings for the client, rather than offering an expert opinion on his artistic productions" (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997:148).

3.2.2.1 Reflection

I was moved by Jonathan's experience of the problems in his life and the ways in which it has convinced him that he is powerless, not strong enough to stand up to it, separated from others who could support him in his struggle. In supervision I was reminded of the role of a therapist, according to Epston and White, to externalise the problem to the extent of:

> "Freeing persons from the problem-saturated descriptions of their lives and relationships encourage the generation of resurrection of alternative and more rewarding stories of lives and relationships and assist persons to identify and develop a new relationship with the problem".
>
> (1991:65)

In doing so, I could foster a new sense of personal agency. However, the problem has had a long, dominant story in Jonathan's life. It's influence, life support systems and future plans for Jonathan had to be explored to acknowledge its power and not to disregard Jonathan's struggle up to this point in time.

3.2.2.2 The influence of can't talk

Jonathan described to me how can't talk has come into his life since his parents' divorce when he was in Grade 4. Can't talk seemed to grow bigger as he saw less and less of his father over time. It got Jonathan wondering whether his father "even cares?". Jonathan said it appeared that his father had much more important things to do than listen to him. According to Jonathan his father didn't have the time to sit down and get to know him and how he experienced life.

From what Jonathan told me, can't talk also seemed to feed on incidents like when his mother comes home tired from a long day at school, "she seems crabby and doesn't have the patience to sit through homework with me". He was sensitive to his mother's

full schedule of teacher, mother, house-keeper and homework assistant and didn't want to tire her out at night with his homework struggles.

Jonathan continued to say that he then prefers not to make mom even more cross, so that he just keeps quiet, struggles through the "torture" and tends to be unable to finish all the work on time. Can't talk grows stronger with the vicious cycle of teachers then calling Jonathan in to ask him why his homework is not finished, have him sit detention and anger getting hold of mom when she hears he has to sit detention again.

Can't talk has made Jonathan come to the conclusion that "I just keep my things my things. No one understands anyway". He prefers to be alone in his room and have nobody pestering or annoying him. Jonathan expressed mixed feelings about being alone, saying that where they are living now, takes his friends even further away and "that it's not nice having no one to talk to, it's boring".

Other times can't talk spoils his friendships at school, when someone would make a comment about homework or detention. Jonathan hated sitting detention he saw it as a waste of time and an unfair way to punish him for not having done all his homework. Once a friend asked Jonathan why he is sitting so much detention and Jonathan couldn't explain, "because they don't know what I've been through". When I asked what he meant by that, he softly mentioned his parents' divorce and their move to a new house, separating him from his friends.

Can't talk also made use of emotions such as unhappiness, sadness and anger to fend others off from approaching Jonathan to talk to him. This lead to the strengthening of can't talk and convincing Jonathan that he was the one with the problem. The can't talk invited in anger at school when other boys mocked or joked about Jonathan getting into trouble again and having to sit detention. The anger made Jonathan want to tell the other boys exactly how "stupid they are", because can't talk made it difficult for him to share his experiences of sadness and struggle.

I also felt sadness and frustration creep into the room during our conversations at times. Can't talk didn't like to be challenged and tried to scare me off from engaging with Jonathan and examining what kept the problem alive. When Jonathan did engage in our conversations, it seemed to take a lot of will power and energy for him to stand up to

can't talk, but it was a sign to both of us that he "refused to cooperate with the requirements of the problem" and that he was actually undermining it, which renders the problem less effective (Epston & White, 1991:63).

3.2.3 The unfair-judging feeling

3.2.3.1 The unfair-judging

Jonathan found that the can't talk made it really difficult for him to describe how he feels about his schoolwork and how he is experiencing school. Jonathan seemed to be struggling against can't talk to describe to me the unfair judging at school from teachers and peers in class. The unfair judging tried to convince Jonathan that he was "just another average scholar", that "I have not options, you just have to do what they tell you" and "once a teacher has labelled you, you can forget about it, that is the way they will always see you". The unfair-judging made him feel that there were so many things he had to do to keep up, that "sometimes I just want to give up".

3.2.3.2 Reflection

Thinking back on Heshusius' (1994:20) idea of participatory consciousness and how the researcher should focus on moral questions such as "what kind of society do we have or are we constructing?" I reflected on unfair judging. The dominant and universal discourses surrounding education and what determines successful academic progress seemed to have influenced Jonathan's perceptions of himself as a learner and what he is capable of. Foucault (1980:94) warns us against the subjugation of ourselves to these dominant views of what is normal and becoming docile bodies regulating our own behaviour, administering our own punishment and thus sustaining the constituting effects of this power.

Jonathan's experiences of having no options, being stuck and stereotyped into the role of an ADD learner within the classroom have left him feeling powerless and paralysed. These thin descriptions of his identity have been reinforced time and time again through scolding, sitting detention and critical comments on his abilities and progress in school, creating almost a fixed truth status of who Jonathan is.

I felt his anger at this unfair description of himself, where certain views and voices were privileged above others and his frustration and not being able to break free from it. This anger and frustration told me however, that Jonathan has not yet given up the struggle and that there was a lot more to him than what these thin descriptions led people to believe. This reinforced my hope and belief in him and myself and the journey we were exploring together.

3.2.3.3 Jonathan's influence over the problems

Jonathan shared some of his clever and cunning ways to side step unfair judging and opportunities for the problem to extend its hold on him. These unique outcomes or exceptions to the problem-saturated story provide a point of entry into alternative story lines of Jonathan's life, that at the outset of these conversations, become visible as thin traces (White, 2002:6). As a therapist it is my job to build a scaffold through questions to encourage Jonathan to fill in the gaps of this alternative story line, until it is thickened out and deeply rooted in Jonathan's history. Jonathan's influence on unfair judging and can't talk constitutes more preferred identity conclusions for him to live by.

Singing in the school choir made Jonathan feel freer and less judged, being part of a larger group and not having to sit in class. They participated in local competitions and it was important to Jonathan to always be on time for practice. There can't talk had to sit in the audience as Jonathan could sing out loud to his heart's content and share the experience with other choir members.

Jonathan described how his friend, Peter, didn't judge him because "he knew where I was coming from". Peter lost one of his parents and Jonathan described being there for Peter, listening to him and understanding how he felt. According to Jonathan, unfair judging didn't come into play in their relationship. They took Art together and while Peter was good at painting, Jonathan was excellent at mixing colours. It sounded like team work to me and Jonathan said that they did make a good team together. They always found one another at break time and played soccer or stingers together. Jonathan described to me how they would always stand together when other boys tried to pester them and that he could trust Peter in always being there for him.

Even the distance created since Jonathan's mom's move to a new suburb, couldn't come between their strong friendship. They only made more of an effort to see each other over weekends whenever possible. Jonathan introduced Peter to body boarding and they enjoyed cycling together.

This re-membering conversation of Jonathan's relationship with Peter leads to what Michael White calls:

> "[A] contribut[tion] to a multi-voiced sense of identity, that opens up possibilities for the revision of one's membership of life, richly describing of preferred accounts of identity, knowledges of life and skills of living".
>
> (2002:8)

This metaphor of membership allows for the upgrading, downgrading, honouring and revoking of members. It gives Jonathan the opportunity to grant authority to some voices, such as Peter's in regard to matters of Jonathan's personal identity and for the disqualification of other voices in regard to his identity.

3.2.3.4 Reflection

Reflecting on the narrative practice of deconstructing taken-for-granted realities, I was aware of the discourses of performance and academic success at school that might have had a real effect on Jonathan's life:

> "The sense of personal failure has never been more freely available to us, and has never been more willingly dispensed as it is in these contemporary times".
>
> (White, 2001:3)

The pressure to perform at school seems very strong within our culture, and children who are identified as having special needs within the education system, seem not to help them, but rather lead to the children being described only in terms of their difficulties.

Jonathan experienced the unfair-judgement built on the belief-system that either you do the work the same way as everyone else, or there must be something wrong with you. Jonathan seemed to be measuring his identity according to his successes at schoolwork and performance in tests, developing ideas about himself as being "just another average student" and "that people expected too much from him" that made him question his own abilities even more. Jonathan seemed in danger of believing that these "failures" and "incompetence" were inherent or intrinsic in nature to him as a person.

Michael White warns against the assumptions of accepting these naturalistic descriptions as accurate reflections of a person's "true nature":

> "It is my contention that therapeutic conversations shaped by these (naturalistic) accounts powerfully restrict what otherwise might be rich conversations – conversations that attend to multi-faceted and multi-storied character of all expressions of living. In doing so, many of the alternative territories of people's lives are left unexplored".
>
> (2001:11)

3.3 A SCHOOL MEETING

3.3.1 Whose story is it anyway?

Jonathan's father contacted me after one of our sessions, inviting me to join him and Jonathan's mother in attending a school meeting with the principal and two of Jonathan's teachers. I was unsure whether I should attend or not so I asked Jonathan what he thought.

Jonathan saw the meeting as an indication of his parents' concern about how he was coping in school. He found can't talk hampering him from voicing his own opinion about how he was coping in school and said that the meeting was not an opportunity to give his view, but rather "only to find out what is happening, what is going to happen, why it is going to happen and what is going to change".

It seemed to me that Jonathan found these meetings to be excluding of himself making him the object of discussion, not acknowledging his experiences and negating himself as an agent in his own life. The discourse of an adult knowing what is best for the child, "disqualifies, deny, limit, deny and contain" Jonathan's views and experiences at school (Epston & White, 1990:18).

These marginalising practices had the silencing effect on Jonathan's voice and discouraged his attempts to believe in his own knowledges and ways of living that he preferred. Consulting Jonathan about his problems and how to deal with them were not accepted and caused him to lose power over his own learning.

As therapist I decided to attend the meeting, only if Jonathan would agree to it. I offered my services as his representative being instructed by Jonathan what I could share of his experiences with the others in the meeting. I thought it might be an opportunity to create space for Jonathan's voice to be heard, relating only what he allowed me to. Jonathan made it clear to me that I could re-tell his experiences of school, the struggles he experienced in the classroom (being picked on), with homework and detention. Sharing anything about his relationship with his parents, sadness or the divorce was out of bounds.

3.3.2 The absent but implicit

I drove to the meeting, nervous and uncertain of what to expect. I was met by Jonathan's father and mother. They greeted me warmly and we chatted for a short while outside the head's office, before we were invited in. As I was introduced to the head and the two teachers, Jonathan's absence was palpable. His silence screamed at the disrespectful and marginalizing way in which decisions were made and progress discussed without acknowledging Jonathan in the process. I experienced practices of marginalisation and being treated differently, in the way Jonathan was spoken of and about. Linda van Duuren (Kotzé & Morkel, 2000:32) describes it, as "a child's happy progress at school being sabotaged by disabling ideas regarding special needs children".

During the school meeting there was talk about "manipulative behaviour". The use of parental letters to explain unfinished homework were questioned and preferential

treatment to allow more time for homework would be seen as unfair to the other learners in the class. Blame was attributed to Jonathan for "his lack of cooperating with the school system in the way in which homework had to be noted down and handed in at a certain time". The continuous use of his Ritalin medication was encouraged by the school members.

Accommodation was viewed as being overindulgent by the teachers, saying that Jonathan cannot hide behind the label of ADD forever and that he had to show more enthusiasm and interest in his work. "It is difficult to reach him, he never talks to me [teacher] unless I pay him special attention". One teacher noted however that when she made an effort to engage Jonathan in discussion, eye contact was made and he came up to her desk to proudly show her his finished task. She was pleasantly surprised by his friendliness and said it had encouraged her to approach him more often.

When the parents voiced their concern about whether continuous communication between the home and school would be possible to strengthen and encourage Jonathan's attempts to pass Grade 7, the importance of "treating all children equally and not to make any exceptions" was strongly emphasised. The concern from the head was that Jonathan should be ready for high school, because "there will be no spoon feeding in high school and he will be a lost boy".

3.3.3 Organisational pathology

This school organisation seemed to adhere to the dominant discourse that everyone must conform to learn, thinking that all children and learners are the same, that they will process the material in the same way and that they only need to train them. These dominant views on education infiltrate organisations and has a powerful effect not only on learners but on teachers too. Michael White describes the possibilities open to teachers:

> "There are teachers who, because of certain frustrations, many of these relating to the structure in the workplace, wind up responding to children in ways that go against their own better judgement, in ways that compromise how they really want things to be in their relations with children. There are also teachers who willingly reproduce the relations of power and the abuses

that are associated with ageism, including those informed by the politics of age, gender, culture, race, class and so on. But there are also teachers who challenge all of this in their relations with children....these teachers are instrumental in responding to troubled children in ways that make it possible for these children to get into touch with a different and more positive version of their identity, and in ways that open up possibilities for their lives".

(Kotzé, 2000:232)

3.3.4 Reflection

I was struck by the rigidity and fixedness in the way learning difficulties were spoken about during the meeting. I sensed feelings of anger, frustration, resentment and helplessness from the head, teachers and parents. I myself also experienced the powerful silencing of my voice in the loud noise of the problem-saturated story surrounding Jonathan's learning career.

I felt as if I accomplished very little in relating to the group Jonathan's experiences of labelling and unfair judging. I was afraid that I have failed Jonathan in being his voice at the meeting and that I did not take a strong enough stand. I almost forgot my belief in taking small steps, making small commitment that I could keep and not disqualifying the difference it makes. As we left the office, both his parents thanked me for being there, the effort I made and how grateful they were for my commitment to Jonathan. I got back into my car with a lighter feeling in my heart. A journey takes many turns.

3.4 PREFERRED IDENTITY CONCLUSIONS

3.4.1 Believing in the journey

"We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without and falsely identified as lying within".

S.J. Gould (Kotzé, 2000:240)

During the next few sessions Jonathan seemed to put can't talk outside the door at times, while at other times sadness and can't talk joined us and made both our voices really soft. I found it difficult at times to hang on to hope during conversations, because

can't talk still had some influence over Jonathan's voice. I realised that I was being pressured by "professionalism" to stay in control of the therapeutic process and to make continuous progress during our sessions to achieve a sense of competence as a therapist.

These thoughts indicated to me that my self was not put aside during my listening to Jonathan. Heshusius (2001:118) points out how listening can be influenced by the listener's own concerns, wanting to keep control of the direction of the conversation, separating the self-other. "Typically maintaining control over the perceived self-other distance was made possible by turning the conversation into an interview". My supervisor encouraged me to become comfortable within the conversation and that she noticed a spark of real interest in the way I engaged with Jonathan. I needed to explore this more and not allow self-doubt to high-jack this journey.

3.4.2 Sharing exciting adventures

I approached our next session with a sense of openness, just allowing myself to get to know Jonathan by being there with him in the room, listening without a purpose or wanting anything from it. Heshusius describes this kind of participatory consciousness as:

> "The space that exists between the having in common and the not having in common that the possibility for true dialogue can occur and the generative conditions for real listening, talking and learning exist".

> (2001:119)

I think Jonathan sensed this feeling of openness and interest during this session. Jonathan started to tell me about his love and interest in bonsai trees, sharing the interest with his grandmother and been given the responsibility to look after three bonsais for his grandmother. A feeling of genuine concern and empathy gave us both the space to get to know Jonathan apart from the problem in order to develop an understanding of his interests, abilities, knowledges and characteristics (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997:35).

Jonathan described to me in detail how one looks after a small bonsai by giving it only a teaspoon of water when it is still very small, support it by putting a rock underneath a tree and the art in bending the trunk without snapping the very thin trunk. I asked Jonathan whether these skills he spoke about described something about him as a person, the way BMX-ing down a steep hill demonstrated his ability to concentrate and being able to handle difficult situations. Jonathan then pointed out to me that his recent scuba diving experience really stood out as being challenging. I asked him for more details about the dive and a wealth of knowledge and experience seemed to bubble through from Jonathan. "It's great, I can just get away from it all and enjoy myself".

It seemed to me that this was the start of developing a true kinship within our therapeutic relation.

3.4.3 Strands of an alternative story/Exploring alternative paths

My questions about his BMX-ing and trying to link it with other activities in his life, such as the bonsai trees and the scuba diving, was aimed at linking unique outcomes together, because:

> "No matter how significant a single event might become, no matter how strongly it may contradict the dominant problematic story-line, one event on its own will always be vulnerable".
>
> (Carey & Russel, 2003(b):62)

By linking up different events that spoke to Jonathan of his abilities, interests and dreams that could stand against the prominent descriptions of weaknesses and disabilities. White (2002:6) named this linking of events in a person's life in sequence through time according to a theme of plot, "re-authoring conversations". In developing this story line I tried to encourage Jonathan to re-engage with events in his life and what it means to him. "It provides options for people to more fully inhabit their lives and their relationships" (White, 2002:7).

Weaving these strands of a preferred story together was a challenge for me as a therapist. Jonathan was kind and patient with me when I started repeating myself, stumbled over my wordings or phrases and moved too quickly. He would quickly

indicate to me when I was re-authoring a strand of experience that he did not find significant or used a metaphor that he did not agree with. It reminded me of the "co-search" for meaning journey that the two of us were on together and that I always had to approach my talking from a tentative and "not-knowing" position, which Freeman, Epston and Lobovits describe as:

> "In a therapy of literary merit, the process of 'restorying' requires painstaking work. With the ingenuity and care of birds building a nest, we create the counterplot. Strand by strand, actions and ideas are woven into a narrative convincing enough to serve as an alternative to the problem-saturated story".
>
> (1997:98)

3.4.4 The buddy system

3.4.4.1 Different route markers

Asking Jonathan about the people that he dives with and the training he has received, his father and instructor stood out for him as people who recognised his love for diving and that "I was good at it". During our discussions it sometimes seemed to me that Jonathan easily dismissed or overlooked details of competence and achievement, perhaps due to the dominant stories of failure and the way sadness coloured in his experiences for him. I persisted in my questioning him about his diving and what he brought to diving that might have had an influence on unfair judging and can't talk.

"I don't worry about other stuff while I'm diving" gave me a clue to his ability to put unfair judging on the water's edge while he was exploring new dive sites with his father and his instructor. "His father is relaxed while we dive, we can talk about diving" was another one of Jonathan's comments that I pointed out to him and that he identified as standing against can't talk at home. The thin tread of hope that I held tightly in my hand when I first met Jonathan, seemed to start weaving through all kinds of different sites we visited during our discussions, whether it was while body boarding, diving, BMX-ing or mixing colours in art class, which Jonathan was "excellent in", according to him.

3.4.4.2 Being buddies (co-authoring)

"The client and therapist together must carefully construct a story line that is invigorating, colourful, compelling and as convincing as the problem story".

(Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997:98)

I took my queue from this approach and tried to make our discussions as vivid and interesting as the underworld marine life that one encounters while diving off the coast of Simon's Town. I drew a very big scuba diver in an A1 poster and thought it might loosen up our ideas around scuba diving and what it takes. Jonathan had a big grin on his face and pointed out that the mask I drew was very old fashioned, then grabbing a pencil and started to correct it.

This playfulness kept can't talk at bay and invited Jonathan in to speak on his own terms, being a buddy in our scuba diving adventure of exploring alternative ways of being himself.

When I tentatively mentioned the buddy system in scuba diving as one where people look after one another, Jonathan enthusiastically pointed out that what makes buddies important is that:

- They look out for one another

- You have to trust your buddy while diving together

- You must be trustworthy enough to come to your buddy's aide in difficult situations

- You must be able to adapt to difficult situations

Jonathan seemed to take great pride in the fact that he successfully passed all the theoretical exams for qualifying at Level 1 Open Water Scuba Diving. Being a qualified diver myself, we shared diver jokes, dive terminology, knowledge of special diving sites along the False Bay area and appreciation for commitment and training it required to become a good diver. Jonathan and I discussed the training involved, varying from swimming, snorkelling and assembling the gear to the theory one has to get to grips with. It's not easy! Physics, air pressure calculations, gasses, depth formulas, biology, marine life and calculating dive times and using dive tables.

I couldn't keep up as Jonathan mentioned one skill or special knowledge after another. Relating these preferred ways of experiencing life to what it said about Jonathan opened up rich alternative possibilities for his identity conclusions. In narrative therapy "we believe that clients already have the experiences that are problem-defeating" (Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996:60). These exciting and encouraging discussions reinstated my belief in Jonathan and in the direction of our journey.

3.4.4.3 Re-membering

After writing down all the skills and why he chose these, I was curious to know whether Jonathan might be interested in establishing his own buddy system for life. I made use of the metaphor of Michael White (2002:8) where re-membering conversations are therapeutic conversations that "evoke life as a membered club and identity as an association of life". Jonathan thought long and hard before he named his scuba diving instructor and his father. They have supported and believed in him "from the start". His grandmother was also a possibility, because she taught him the finer tricks of swimming very well, which comes in handy while diving. Jonathan said he would think about it a bit more and who else he might like to put on his list.

3.5   DOCUMENTING THE SAYING

A practice that really attracted me to narrative therapy was the use of letters. It assists in the building of a narrative, according to Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, in the way that it is:

> "Structured to tell the alternative story that is emerging along with the therapy, it documents history, current developments, and future prospects".
>
> (1997:112)

I wrote Jonathan three letters during our journey together. The first one was after our very first meeting; quoting verbatim notes from our session about the skills Jonathan mentioned he needed while BMX-ing. I mentioned the ways in which the divorce brought about changes in his life how which skills he might have used to handle it. Questions were inserted frequently along the way in the letter, opening up multiple roads for reflection and speculation (Freedman & Combs, 1996:208).

Letters also allowed me time for reflection, creating co-authoring opportunities for both Jonathan and myself and continuously weaving the different strands of unique outcomes into a meaningful, comprehensive storyline (see Appendix A and B).

My second letter (Appendix B) was written after Jonathan's sharing of his love for bonsai trees and what it required to look after a tree. It was a way to capture what was said and to make it permanent, so that we could go back and visit what was said.

> "Letters often play the role in a narrative therapy of thickening the counterplot
> at the expense of the problem's plotting of events".
>
> (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997:113)

I read the letter to Jonathan during our next session and it enabled us to pick up from where we left off to explore even further.

3.6   SADNESS ALONG THE ROUTE

3.6.1 Sadness' influence

Although can't talk has been sitting outside the room during our discussions and Jonathan's sense of humour started to bring giggles into our sessions, I still detected sadness lurking around in the room. I decided to address the presence of the sadness in the room and asked Jonathan whether he noticed sadness at all? He found it difficult to talk about it but was able to describe some of the areas in his life where sadness hung out:

- Irritability and anger in class and at home made it hard for Jonathan to be around other people.

- Lack of sleep, finding it difficult to fall asleep and lying awake for hours.

- Hope, experiencing everything against him at school and sadness trying to convince him there are no other options.

- Tears, having to fight them off during school when unfair judging takes place or when he tries to talk about it.

- Energy, Jonathan often felt tired and just wanted to be left alone in his room.

In my second letter to Jonathan, I reflected on some of the ways in which sadness' influence on him was perhaps similar to the tending of one of his bonsai trees. Jonathan mentioned that if a tree becomes neglected, it could grow wild. He told me that you can tell by the yellow colour on the leaves of the tree that the tree is suffering from lack of water and might die. I asked Jonathan in the letter whether can't talk and sadness dried up his water supply, such as the support of family and friends.

Jonathan drew me a sketch of a bonsai tree during the session, with lots of branches and no rock at the bottom of the trunk to support the tree. Jonathan explained to me that for a tree to stand on his own is harder to do, especially with all the branches it had to support. Asking what the branches were, he mentioned school, homework and sadness. He also mentioned to me that when anger teams up with can't talk, he sometimes felt like "snapping".

3.6.2 Reflection

I tried to think of metaphors that could create possibilities of learning how to come into harmony with certain emotions and life circumstances, rather than assuming that Jonathan and I can get rid of them permanently. The metaphors of "fighting", "beating" or "struggling" often create the idea of expelling a problem from one's life. Freeman, Epston and Lobovits ask:

> "Whether it isn't setting young people up for disappointment to introduce the
> idea that they can expel human emotions such as anger or fear forever?"
>
> (1997:63)

I took their recommendation to use externalising conversations to look at what "feeds" the problem or supports it and what can be done about it. I attempted to open up different possibilities for the kind of relationship Jonathan would prefer having with sadness.

3.6.3 Jonathan's influence over sadness

However, Jonathan did mention that sadness seemed to stand back when:

- He was in the water, diving with his father or his instructor.

- He was busy with his bonsai trees

- He thought about high school and how much he was looking forward to it.

Jonathan declared that he preferred happiness to sadness, but like tending bonsais, "there are no quick fixes, I have to be patient, out of the bad, something good will come". I was moved to tears when he voiced this wise insight into the way that he preferred to relate to sadness. I was humbled by his willingness to continue on this journey despite the obstacles along his path.

3.6.4 Requiring assistance in our journey

By then Jonathan's parents have already contacted me to inform me that they have seen a paediatrician to re-evaluate Jonathan's medication and that they were looking at the option of an anti-depressant.

Michael White advocates the use of such systems in a way that is enabling for the client:

> "Clients should not be marginalized by the application of labels and drugs to them, but to ask what such labels and drugs can contribute to the individual's power over the problem".

> (Kotzé, 2000:273)

Jonathan started using Tofranil. He told me that he felt comfortable taking it and that he believed the medication could stand with him in his wish to improve academically. In two weeks time Jonathan said that he felt it was helping him cope and that it has lessened the sadness "a little". Sadness wasn't going to disappear out of his life however, but Jonathan said that he knew he could talk to Peter when sadness was trying to make a come back.

3.7   SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE

3.7.1 Witnessing

We were coming towards the end of our consultations, when I asked Jonathan whether he was interested in inviting mom and his father in to share in his re-discovered knowledges about diving and how he was able to apply it to other areas in his life. He seemed hesitant at first and wanted to know more about what would be shared during the conversation.

I then proposed that we could get a consulting therapist to join us in our discussion, questioning me and Jonathan about our explorations and discoveries and for mom and his father to witness our tellings of Jonathan's story.

This practice of outsider-witnessing enables "a link to be made between what happens in the therapy room and the rest of a person's life" (Carey & Russell, 2003(a):4). Making the suggestion to Jonathan to invite his parents into one of his sessions might create the possibility that the steps Jonathan has taken in the therapy room could be translated into action in his daily life. Michael White brought the idea of outsider witnesses into the therapy realm. Jonathan's preferred identity claims could be acknowledged and supported by his parents, by sharing his stories of what is important to him in life.

3.7.2 Making a mistake

My narrative therapy trainer and supervisor Elize Morkel, was willing to join us as a consultant therapist, together with both Jonathan's parents. On the day of the outsider-witnessing session, Elize asked me if I brought up the subject of a outsider-witness team consisting of students with Jonathan. I said that I did not but thought we could breach the subject at the start of the session.

Reflecting back on that one moment when I didn't privilege Jonathan's position in deciding for him with what he would be comfortable with during this session will stay with me forever. Jonathan and his parents came into the room and Elize introduced herself and explained her role as supervisor of the students. She then asked Jonathan if he would be comfortable with the outsider-witness group of students behind the glass or if they can be invited into the room. Jonathan replied that he wasn't informed of a group

behind the mirror and that he would prefer only his parents. We respected his decision and asked the group to leave.

This action of disrespect from me as his therapist, from someone who is supposed to be mindful of his preferences in being informed beforehand and not put on the spot, was unethical. I failed him on a day which was meant to be a sharing and celebration of the steps Jonathan has taken in re-claiming his preferred ways of being, causing disappointment not only to him and myself, but to his parents and Elize.

3.7.3 Witnessing change

The session continued with Elize interviewing both parents on the changes they have noticed in Jonathan's life since the start of our therapeutic conversations 4 months ago. His mother mentioned an improvement in schoolwork, with his cooperation in homework and getting it done on time. His mother explained that in the past it could take up to 2 hours of grinding to get the homework done, but she now experienced Jonathan as having a lot more direction. He took charge to get things done and prioritised, not allowing small problems to get in the way of his work.

Jonathan's mother said that the effect this has had on her was a huge blessing. She said Jonathan's commitment took the stress out of the house at night time and homework needed much less supervising.

Jonathan's father also commented on the change in Jonathan's academics, quoting teachers who noticed an improvement in Jonathan's coping skills. On a personal level, his father noticed Jonathan took more initiative at home. All three the children had various chores at home. In the past dishwashing tended to be a problem. However, the previous Friday Jonathan got up and started washing the dishes without any reminding and even tidied up the whole kitchen.

3.7.4 Acknowledging achievements

Elize reflected on the parents' achievement to both stay involved in their children's upbringing and was curious on how they managed to do it. Both parents agreed that their concern and care for their children came before any personal differences they

might have. Top of their priority list were the children's welfare once they started considering divorce.

Jonathan was asked about the effect that divorce had on him and the ways in which he coped or lived a little bit more comfortably with the idea of divorce. The support of his friend Peter and being able to share experiences and being there for one another was mentioned by me. Spending time with his father while scuba diving also gave Jonathan the opportunity to talk and get to know his father better. A sense of togetherness was created when they shared their love and excitement for diving according to Jonathan.

Jonathan's father mentioned that he thought Jonathan seemed a lot more content in dealing with life's challenges. He had a better rapport in dealing with people. His mother added to that and said that a deep, deep sadness that seemed to lurk underneath the surface has become lighter. The outbursts at home have lessened and there are more occasions of laughter and fun over weekends. "I think there will always be occasions where the sadness will be, tough times to deal with, but [there is] a more positive change" according to his mother.

On Elize's question whether school might be a little bit more tolerable, Jonathan said that he thought it is a little easier to cope with. Some of the teachers' attitudes have also changed for the better according to him. Reflecting on the fact that attitudes are hard to change, Jonathan agreed with Elize.

After asking whether anyone else had anything they would like to add or ask, we ended the session by thanking Jonathan and his parents for partaking in the discussion and asked them whether this was at all helpful. Both parents agreed that it was really good and that they were glad to be able to participate. Jonathan gave the discussion a rating of 3 out of five, defining it is okay.

3.7.5 Reflecting

How does one mend a breach of trust? How does one go about preparing the damage of something so precious and elusive? I reflected back on my principles with which I approach my journey with Jonathan, namely transparency, reliability and honesty. I had

to be open and honest in acknowledging my mistake to Jonathan and his parents and ask their forgiveness for the difficult position I placed Jonathan in.

3.8   COMING TO THE END OF OUR JOURNEY

3.8.1 Asking forgiveness

"As space is opened for family members to perform the alternative and preferred stories of their lives, and for the acknowledgement of many of the alternative claims associated with these performances, the therapist becomes increasingly decentralised in the whole process, and eventually s/he is discharged from the therapy".

(Michael White 1995:20)

We were coming towards the end of our sessions. When Jonathan arrived for our next therapy session, I was grateful for the opportunity he gave me to explain myself and ask his forgiveness. I was open and honest about my mistake and acknowledged the fact that I did not take into account his preference before suggesting an outsider-witness team.

He listened to me quietly, nodding his head in agreement to what I said and when I had finished, he look up at me and said, "Its okay".

3.8.2 Mapping our journey

I told him that I had written a letter to summarise our journey together and as an apology for my disregard of his feelings during the witnessing session. He allowed me to read it to him and we both felt the sadness of the end of the journey and the relief that our kinship was still intact. Jonathan did not respond to a word in the letter, but only thanked me for it when I handed it over to him.

I suggested that I would also like to write a letter to each of his parents, explaining my mistake during the witnessing session, to thank them for their commitment to our journey together and to summarise Jonathan's achievements to them. I thought of a letter because:

"They can be helpful in encouraging persons to recruit a wider audience to the performance of new stories and inviting persons to enter into an experience of the audience's experience of the new meanings".

(Epston & White, 1990:114)

Jonathan co-wrote the letter with me, making suggestions of what to mention and how to frame his words and meanings correctly. He proofread the final copy and decided to give it to his parents personally after our last session together. During our last conversation we were looking forward to what possibilities and challenges lay ahead for him. He talked excitedly about his new high school, the friends he knew that were going with him and believing that he will be able "to put my skills and knowledges to good use in making a success of it".

He thought that his sense of humour would stand him in good stead and that "even if things don't always go my way, I'll live through it". He said that his buddy system is there to help him and that he could always rely on his father, mother, instructor, grandmother and friend Peter to be there for him. This conversation indicated to me that:

"As persons go some way in the articulation and they experience some of the purposes, values, beliefs, commitments that are associated with these alternative accounts of life, the approach a point at which the therapist's contribution is unnecessary".

(White, 1995:20)

3.8.3 Multi-storied lives

Reflecting on the privilege I had to be part of this exciting exploration with Jonathan, I am reminded of the following:

"The novel which each individual has lived remains an incomparably greater composition than any that has ever been written down".

(Victor E. Frankl)

CHAPTER 4

4.   REFLECTIONS

4.1   Therapeutic conversations

Meeting with Jonathan and walking a journey together through narrative conversations has been tremendously enriching to me and I hope to him. I appreciated the open sharing we have experienced together and the fellowship of our journey. I used a social constructionist approach in the conversations with Jonathan, together with narrative therapy.

I was interested in trying to be "on the way to understanding" (Anderson, 1990:194-196) ways of collaborating with a child who has had a long-standing struggle with negative identity conclusions. I explored with him his experiences at home and at school in terms of problems influencing his identity, his relationship to others in terms of preferred ways of being and his actions in performing preferred identity conclusions.

Yet during this "way to understanding" I have encountered many new understandings regarding the cultural discourses and influences within which Jonathan struggled to make his own voice heard. The research journey, narrative practice and participatory consciousness introduced ways to legitimise the voice of those marginalized by "expert" knowledge. In this chapter I will reflect on the meanings and knowledges shared and created between myself and the research participants.

4.2   Development of the journey

I started to explore where the reliance and belief in these so-called truths about expert knowledge came about and what possible role these beliefs have in subjugating (Foucault, 1980:81) a child regarding his own identity and life experiences. The personal became the professional as my personal concerns for marginalizing of alternative knowledges and the powerful role of a psychologist/adult/teacher, changed to become a concern for the silencing of children's experience. Feminist writings focus on the meaning-making practices of "relations of struggle in everyday practice" (Jennings & Graham, 1996:171). Our research become practice in seeking "changes for

the better the issue being researched, the research process and the researcher" (Kincheloe, 2003:191).

The development of the research curiosity and questions originated as I was investigating ways to honour Jonathan's story. The questions and curiosity highlighted the significance and value that this story has in clarifying a child's preferred ways of being. I realised that children do not have scientific or expert knowledge to express their views, but they do have important stories, which constitute their realities (Davies & Harre, 1991:45-47).

4.2.1 The development of stories

Storytelling as a practice and a research methodology is in line with "performative psychology" that uses "modes of expression from the dramatic arts, visual arts, music and other media [which] promotes the mingling of the scientific with the secular and the spiritual" (Gergen, 2001:45). Stories are way of participating in an ethical manner that is different from the scientific and rationally organised meaning systems within society (Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:20).

The challenge for me as a listener was to learn to think *with* Jonathan's stories and not *about* them. Heshusius (1994:18-19) guided my approach in not concerning myself with the "truth" and "degrees of interpretation" possible in listening to Jonathan's stories, but to rather position myself in merging with the other in a stance of openness and receptivity. Achieving this form of "participatory consciousness" (Heshusius, 1994) in being, thinking and listening with stories, requires entering into the relationship from a "not-knowing" position (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) with reverence for the storyteller. I had to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention with Jonathan resulting in awareness of the level of "kinship" between Jonathan and myself (Heshusius, 1994:15-19). Jonathan's stories moved me to forget "the self" and become part of what I was trying to understand and to discover about his experiences. This rendered the act of knowing and discovery an ethical act (Heshusius 1994:19).

The opportunity to listen was created by Jonathan's appointments at the Unit of Educational Psychology on a weekly basis. I saw Jonathan at least 15 times for 6

months. A "participatory consciousness" (Heshusius, 1994) opened up the opportunities to be moved and informed by Jonathan's stories, and also opened up the opportunity for the research to be ethical.

4.3   Reflections in terms of research questions

In Chapter one, the following research questions were identified:

- What have I learnt about a narrative approach to therapy?

- What is a learner's experience in terms of school discourses, labelling and academic marginalisation?

- What was the effect of this therapeutic journey on the participants (Jonathan, his parents and me)?

- What have I learnt about working with learners within a narrative approach?

- In what ways does narrative therapy create possibilities for constructing preferred identity conclusions?

- What are the ethical stances of a narrative therapist towards the people we collaborate with?

Conversations, reflection and *doing* ethics based on these questions proved to be very informative and enriching to me as a voice was given to the subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980:82) of a learner within his specific context.

4.3.1 A narrative approach to therapy

Reinharz (1992:194) claims that a consequence of feminist research is that the researcher herself experiences change and also learns "about herself, about the subject matter under study, and about how to conduct research". My studies and work at the Unit for Educational Psychology and the research process have been enriched by the new learnings and have given me a depth of understanding about narrative approaches to therapy. What started out, as another "type" of therapy, became a way of living and approaching life for me.

Narrative's voice opened up possibilities for me as therapist to question ideas in culture that have the effect of reducing the power of a person. It looks critically at the discourses surrounding what is considered normal and prevents a person becoming an object of study. Throwing away the "cracked lenses" of dead metaphors used for decades to pathologise people with, therapy becomes the sacred space of the person to explore their own preferred ways of being (Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996:15).

The thought underlying the narrative perspective is "that human beings are interpreting beings- that we are active in the interpretation of our experiences as we live our lives" (White, 1995:13). Each person has his or her own unique story, making us active participants in our own constituting of reality. We are not made passive under the normalising gaze of dominant power discourses, but are able to claim agency and authorship over our own lives. In the re-authoring process, the therapist uses questions with the aim to enhancing those aspects "of the emerging story that support personal agency" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:97). I witnessed Jonathan's sense of agency and power over his own life grow with each encounter, suggesting to him that he might not be so helpless and out of options as the unfair-judging and sadness wanted him to believe at first.

> "The challenge lies in the fact that if we do acknowledge that stories make up, shape or constitute our lives, and as therapists we collaborate in the re-authoring of lives, that we really have to accept responsibility for the real effects of our interactions on the lives of others".
>
> (White, 1995:15)

I learnt this the hard way in my interactions with Jonathan. It was only after I started experiencing the constituting effects of my thoughts, actions and intentions within therapy, on myself and Jonathan that I was taken aback by the power of words.

A narrative approach gave me the faith and hope in Jonathan, that when I asked questions about his alternative story lines, he would come to experience his life and himself in new ways as he focuses on previously neglected and unstoried aspects of his experience. His scuba diving abilities, knowledges and skills regarding the care of

bonsai trees and his strong bonds of friendship with Peter stood outside the realm of his problematic stories in which he found himself caught up in.

As a therapist I found the picking of the questions that determines the kind of stories that Jonathan and I constructed, challenging. The unique outcomes I identified as possible strands to be woven into an alternative story put me in an influential position. In an ethic of collaboration however, Jonathan participated as much in naming the aspects that he preferred in response to my preference questions. I realised that "our values, the narrative metaphor, and our experience influence both our choice of questions and our decisions on which sparkling moments to focus on" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:140).

This made my situating of myself as a person, a psychologist and a therapist clear enough to the people I work with so that people can understand that I am not neutral (White, 1995). I could only offer my ideas to Jonathan based on my own particular experiences of school, my family life and scuba diving, not as truth claims.

A narrative approach emphasises the ethical ways of being as therapist and researcher, clearly identifying those aspects of our own imaginations, intentions and experiences that guide our work (White, 1991). In so doing, I entered my therapeutic work with Jonathan as "a fallible human being, rather than as [an] expert" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:275). I was able to present myself as a particular person who has also been shaped by certain ideas, discourses and experiences.

Narrative therapy has however lent me a spyglass with which to "move within and between discourses" (Davies, 1991:46). It has enabled me to see how discourses subject people, how to use the terms of one discourse to challenge, deconstruct or go beyond the other:

> "In terms of [my] own experienced subjectivity and in the way in which [I] choose to speak in relation to the subjectivities of others".
>
> (Davies, 1991:46)

I hope and belief that Jonathan and I did journey beyond the limitations set within his cultural discourses and that we explored new and unchartered routes, diving and

salvaging local knowledges that lay rusting at the bottom of his ocean. A narrative approach was the map that guided our co-search.

4.3.2 A learner's experiences of school discourses, labelling and academic marginalisation

Winslade and Monk (1999:viii) say that one of the advantages of the narrative metaphor is the space it opens for "fresh ways to talk about the intimate, daily struggles of young people and teachers in the midst of institutional demands and pervasive social forces". In my conversations with Jonathan, I found that the storying of his experiences of can't talk and unfair judging helped me to notice and work with the ADD leaner and child-of-divorced-family discourses.

Jonathan experienced suffocation (snake on chest in sand play) under the weight of his academic problems and labels plastered onto him. This led to Jonathan blaming himself for his problems, immobilising him with guilt (can't talk) and shame (unfair judging) that stood in the way of change. The dominant stories regarding scholastic achievement and successful learning influenced the way Jonathan thought about himself, convincing him that he is "just another average scholar". Winslade and Monk (1999:3) warn that once the contours of a problem story have been laid out before learner "these character descriptions often stick like glue".

Jonathan also felt himself the object of study by teachers and other scholars at school, having different learning abilities and ways of engaging with new material. "Once a teacher has labelled you, you can forget about it, that is the way they will always see you" according to Jonathan. Jonathan was not regularly asked to reflect upon and evaluate the effects of his actions and the consequences that lead from that. His parents and teachers seemed to do the work for him with ready-made conclusions. Jonathan's voice was so muffled by the weight of descriptions, labels, and distance from the discussion, that I found it very challenging to access his knowledge.

However, with persistent questioning and providing the therapeutic space to just be himself, Jonathan spoke of actions and interests that testified to gifts and abilities still to be discovered. I had to win Jonathan's trust first. "As with any therapy, the

establishment of a strong relationship with the client is crucial" (Winslade & Monk,1999:5).

I had to be careful not to fall into the trap off being captured by totalising descriptions of Jonathan's identity, refusing to get stuck in a problem-saturated story of failure, academic problems, learning disabled and behavioural problems. In seeking out competence, we weaved a story of diving and cycling ability, knowledge of caring and commitment to bonsais, perseverance and loyalty in difficult scuba diving situations, humour and laughter in the therapy room, hopes and dreams of achieving personal goals in life.

This new sense of direction in our journey created opportunities for constructing a preferred identity, based on Jonathan's lived experience, which did not exclude challenging aspects of his education, but could hold multiple accounts of his life together. "Counselling does not stop with the desire for a new identity in the client" according to Winslade & Monk (1999:15), so I invited in Jonathan's parents, an outside counsellor and re-membered significant others in his life that could stand witness to his new developments. This could stand against the marginalisation of the scholastic and learning discourses, by inviting others to celebrate and acknowledge Jonathan's performance of his preferred way of being.

I have become acutely aware of the "precision with which normality has been described" (Winslade & Monk, 1999:59) within organisational settings such as school and the devastating effects it can have on the identity of a learner. There are so many deficit descriptions available within the dominant academic discourses, that people find it easier and easier to just assign it to a learner.

The question that I will always ask is whether these descriptions of deficit lead to positive change for people to whom they were applied? Jonathan's diagnosis of ADD leads to helpful and effective medication to support his attention and concentration in class. When such a diagnosis starts to permeate a person's identity however, it becomes problematic in itself.

Jonathan protested at how he got described by others in school, by expressing anger and feelings of sadness. Winslade and Monk aptly describe his resistance as:

"He kept for himself the right to believe, or not believe, any particular description. In so doing, he keeps alive a different option for describing himself [for constituting his identity]".

(1999:65)

4.3.3   The effects of our therapeutic journey/experiencing transport

I can quote the words of others and speak only for myself. The benefits for me as researcher and therapist can only be described as life altering. Reinharz (1992:195) said "Perhaps we can only hope that our research will clarify our vision and improve our decisions". My decision in where I would like to situate myself as a person/woman/therapist have been greatly influenced by my studying of, participating in and witnessing of a narrative approach.

Michael White (2002:10) describes the witnessing (participation) of the re-telling of a person's story, as "being moved in the sense of being transported, in the sense of being elsewhere in life on account of this participation".

Positioning myself within a postmodern, poststructuralist, social constructionist worldview, I can no longer hide behind a predetermined system of norms, as Kotzé and Kotzé claims:

"We can no longer avoid participating with others and avoid engaging in the challenges of real-life dilemmas. Daring not to find shelter in normative systems changes ethics from a noun to a verb - from ethics to ethicising".

(Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:21)

I have experienced the encouragement of my supervisors Professor Rona Newmark, Mariechen Perold and Elize Morkel to *do* ethics, to *do* care and to realise the responsibility of taking up such a position. The weight of this commitment does not wear me down however, because of the sharing between colleagues, supervisors, fellow therapists and the clients whom I have the privilege to engage in conversation with.

An ethical way of living reflects within my therapy, making the personal professional, as McNay describes:

> "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".

> (Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:17)

My disregard for Jonathan's preferences relating to the outsider-witness session, has stayed with me and will be a measurement to me of participating in an ethical and respectful way with future clients.

4.3.4 Having a narrative approach to working with learners

The travelling of this narrative journey with Jonathan has made me realise the truth in the words spoken by Freeman, Epston and Lobovits:

> "The price of choosing seriousness for us as therapists may be the dampening of our own resources, such as the ability to think laterally, remain curious, be light-hearted enough to engage playfully with the child, and have faith that the situation is resolvable".

> (1997:3)

I found myself to be lacking in this approach at the start of our journey and had my wits severely dulled, losing almost all the appeal that I had to Jonathan and became overwhelmed by the dominance and seriousness of the can't talk and sadness.

I experienced the problem as having an immobilising effect on me as a therapist, softening my voice and lessening my influence in addressing the effects of the problem on Jonathan's life. Only when I stopped taking myself-as-therapist so seriously and thereby switching off the problem's life support within the therapy room, could I with an attitude of openness and receptivity, which creates greater identification and wholeness according to Heshusius (1994:17). I came to discover that young people use their imagination and abilities in ways that often went unnoticed by me before. Jonathan shared special knowledges and abilities that I would not have guessed at the start.

In my experience with Jonathan, I learnt to pay heed to the warning of Morss:

"[W]e should be on our guard against the implications of the developmental attitudes to people's lives and hopes. It treats others as behind or below ourselves, but destined to follow the same path".

(Kotzé, 2000:25)

I was blinded at first to opportunities for different ways of relating to Jonathan. With the introduction of playfulness, laughter and curiosity, Jonathan and I started to relax, leaving the coldness of the problems outside the door and allowing the warmth of our togetherness and kinship to fill up the room with creativity and new possibilities for being.

According to Winslade and Monk the:

"Skill and expertise of the counsellor using a narrative approach lies in carefully assembling, with the client, a story line that is invigorating, colourful and compelling".

(1999:44)

Although I believe that Jonathan and I have co-authored an action packed, richly descriptive story which constitutes a more preferred way of being for him, I still have along road to walk in sharpening, gathering and experiencing more ways of weaving stories with young people, children, families and adults. I need to unpack more of the dominant ideas surrounding my own upbringing that lay claim to the right of adults to speak on the behalf of children and protect them "for their own good".

By accepting the ethical stance of the narrative approach, I am challenged to encourage agency when working with children. I need to reflect on my own self-as-therapist, in *doing* ethics by privileging children's special and local knowledge.

4.3.5 Constructing preferred identity conclusions

As Jonathan and I travelled our therapeutic journey, I was privileged to witness the process of unpacking his negative identity conclusions such as being "an average student" and "I have ADD and there is nothing anyone can do about it". The dominance

of these normalising truths seemed to possess a power that kept Jonathan docile and silent, convincing him that these descriptions spoke the truth about him as a person. Words constitute our ways of thinking about ourselves and our world.

Michael White (1995:30) said "We have to be very sensitive to the issue of language. Words are so important. In so many ways, words are the world". The use of language and words has been the one area, which in my understanding has contributed most to the understanding and meaning-making of Jonathan's preferred identity. Jonathan's experiences of voicing his interests, abilities, values that he stood for and hopes that he held, lessened the oppressive power of having to achieve academically according to a set standard. The words we used to re-tell his story shifted the scales of measurement in what it took to be clever, successful, determined, brave, committed and acknowledged in his life.

Unpacking of the negative identity conclusions isn't enough. Michael White (2001:17) emphasises the importance of richly describing "alternative knowledges of life and practices of living" that might seem like faint, barely visible traces at the onset of one's journey. It is only through the exploration of action, beliefs, commitments, hopes, goals and dreams that counter the negative identity conclusions, that we are able to create new possibilities for action and life.

Through the retelling of the story of Jonathan and of the unpacking of ADD, divorce and knowledge, I aimed to describe some of the options that became available for therapeutic conversations, when Jonathan and I moved beyond the naturalistic accounts of identity and into the contexts of history, culture and family. As Michael White (2001:17) mentions, it was through the unpacking that I came to realise how Jonathan's life was linked to the lives of others such as his father, mother, Peter, his grandmother and me, around shared themes and values. "It is through this unpacking that we can engage with the unexpected. This, I believe, can make all the difference" (White, 2001:17).

4.3.6 Ethical collaboration

In doing participatory action research, I was challenged by a commitment to confront my power position as adult/therapist/researcher/the expert fulfilling an academic role. Making use of an earlier quote, Heshusius (1994:19) guided my attempts at participating in a way that freed me "from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity". I attempted to enter each session with a sense of openness and receptivity, holding knowledge lightly, because Kotzé and Kotzé (2002:6) reminds us that "all knowledges are the result of ethical political acts and that they have ethical-political consequences", making knowledge neither neutral nor innocent.

I was mindful of Foucault's work (1980:96-98) that all knowledge implies practices of power/knowledge and thus doing ethics. I was challenged in how to participate ethically in this therapeutic/researching process. Epston and White assert that:

> "We are all caught up in a web or net of power/knowledge, it is not possible to act apart from this domain and we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others".
>
> (1990:22)

Seeing that I had a voice and power within this context, I was obligated to ensure the participation of Jonathan as a marginalized and silenced other. I engaged in listening to him and had to be careful not to decide for him as I did during the outsider-witness session. My aim was for Jonathan to benefit from this therapeutic journey we were on.

It wasn't for me to decide in which ways he would benefit along our travels. I could only create the opportunity and space for him in which to explore his preferred ways of being, of making himself heard and re-authoring his lived experiences in a way that celebrated who he was. I was privileged to be allowed in as a "co-searcher" (Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:25), where Jonathan and I participated in co-searching for new knowledges about which both of us had a say.

As researcher/therapist I had to be aware of the fact that knowledge and research are means of "creating, constructing or discovering new knowledges" (Kotzé and Kotzé, 2002:26) that create reality and therefore should allow all participants the right and

responsibility to participate in each aspect of the research. This form of power as being shared could be viewed in terms of Foucault's (1980:119) use of power as a productive network. The laughter, fun and smiles during our exploration of constructing meaning reflected power, which "induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse".

Committed to making the research participatory, I challenged the subtleties of power relations in the following way. In our initial interview, I explained in a transparent way the working of the Unit, the video recordings and the process of supervision. Although I admit to being the only one asking questions persistently to arrive at an understanding of Jonathan's life experiences and his way of making meaning of it, I attempted a tentative approach to my questioning, asking if the questions were relevant, suitable and working for him.

Another way in which an attempt was made to balance the power between myself as researcher and Jonathan was to make my notes available to him at any time. The narrative letters I wrote also aimed at inviting Jonathan to reflect and comment on what was said and written down. By using his suggestions, Jonathan was co-constructing the research and contributing to some of the research documentation. I realise that in writing the final version of this re-telling of our "co-search" it is my voice, which comes through, and my interpretations of what took place during our journey. Jonathan might express a different story of what he experienced from the one I'm telling. I acknowledge that, in terms of a post-modern approach, Jonathan and I can be expected to have his/her own truth or reality of the experience.

4.4   AN ONWARD JOURNEY

Reflecting on the negative effects certain discourses have on people's identity conclusions, how can we as therapists *do* change? In my experience the effectiveness and powerful ways in a narrative approach dismantles "taken-for-granted" truths and challenges oppressive and abusive usage of power, make it an ethical way of participating in the exploration of preferred ways of being in the world. The isolating narratives of modern discourses surrounding "self-preservation" and "self-reliance" can be countered by creating "communities of concern" (Freedman & Combs, 1996:237).

Once we create opportunities for people to constitute their preferred selves by performing their stories, we can make up audiences that can construct and circulate alternative knowledge, such as the invaluable experiences of Jonathan as a marginalized learner within a dominant institutionalised discourse of scholastic ability.

This process of "acknowledgement" and "authentication" of Jonathan's claims is something that I could have explored and encouraged further. These "outsider-witness" practices:

> "Make it possible for people to assume responsibility for inventing themselves and yet maintain their sense of integrity and authenticity, for people to become aware of options for intervening in the shaping of their lives".

> (White, 1995:178)

In looking ahead along the road that our young democracy will hopefully travel and the role that I would like to play in making our society a more friendly, tolerate and accepting context, the ethical positioning within a narrative approach speaks to me of participation and accountability. I prefer a narrative approach because of the way in which, according to Michael White (1995:197) the ideas and practices of this work go some way towards:

- Providing a check on potential power imbalances within a therapist/client or researcher/researched relationship.

- Assisting therapists to break from the discourses of pathology and the formal systems of analysis that are so marginalizing and objectifying of people.

- Challenging the supremacy of expert knowledges.

- Privileging alternative knowledge systems.

- Providing some options to address the propensity of therapeutic contexts to reproduce many of the negative aspects of structures and ideologies of the dominant culture.

In writing my last words about this incredible journey, I know that I can't sit too long, but need to get up soon and continue onward, carrying the invaluable knowledge and experiences that Jonathan and I shared with me, because:

"The simplicity of solving the problem may be satisfying, but in our opinion there is no end to the story. The ending is about possibility....we prefer to leave open the question of whether problems are "solved" and we wonder whether they "disappear", however much we would like them to. Perhaps, as the relationship between the problem and the [person] changes, we are all able to find ways of affording ourselves more say in determining the way in which our stories unfold".

Deborah Nelson (Kotzé, 2000:122)

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APPENDIX A
First letter written to Jonathan

Unit for Child and Adult Guidance
3RD June 2003

Dear Jonathan,

I'm sitting here in front of my computer, thinking of our first meeting today and the conversation we had. I appreciated the time you took to come and talk with me. I imagine it must take some guts and also courage to walk into a room with a stranger and just start talking. How did you experience it?

We talked about a lot of things in your life. You spoke about the different activities you part take in, namely soccer at break time at school, BMX-ing near (   ) in the past, body boarding at (   ) and (   ) at the beach, and also diving with your dad. These activities all seem to require some skills, a level of fitness and perhaps a bit of daring? You named skills such as a good sense of humour, being able to have fun and to know what your limits are. Can you think of other situations where you might be using some of these skills?

When I asked why you stopped your BMX biking, you told me it was because of your parents' divorce and your moving with your mom and sisters to (   ). I was wondering if the skills you used in biking, might have come in handy during these changes? Did the Change carry a black bag full of nasty things?

When we spoke about living in the new suburb, you told me about how you just want to get away, because your sisters are always pestering and bugging you. You also said that you can't talk to mom about it or about anything else. This Can't Talk problem seems to creep into the house often from what you told me. Did Can't Talk come in Change's black bag? Does the Can't Talk thing sometimes try to make you feel lonely, sad, ignored or maybe not cared for? When mom treats you differently from the girls, you said we can call it Unfairness. Does Unfairness work together with Can't Talk? Does this thing stand between you and other people in your life? Does Can't Talk have a friend called unhappiness?

You did say that the one time you, Peter (is his name spelled correctly?) and Andy went body boarding at the beach, you caught a tube and knew to pull out before it dunked you. You smiled when you said Andy got dunked right onto the beach! Does Friendship sometimes stand with you against all the nasties?

Remember you told me how you could go on riding your bike from 8am till 12:30pm, take a break and then ride from 1pm till 6pm? You described to me the challenging terrain, going at 20km/ph, the 90 degree bends in the road and the high cascade drops you flew over without falling. The only one to ever do it. It seems as if you didn't give up when the road got tough, but you used all your skills and came out a champion! It also sounds to me as if you applied the same skills when you surfed that big tube wave at the beach.

Do you think that there are areas in your life where Unfairness and Can't Talk don't appear, where it can't get in? Could the friends you body board or bike with, be you allies, your team mates against it? Can you think of any other people who would want to stand by you and help push Can't Talk off its body board ?

I have asked you a lot of questions. Remember I warned you at the beginning that I might? If you could think about these questions, then maybe we could talk about it some more at our next session.

Interested in biking skills,

Janine Brink

APPENDIX B

Second letter written to Jonathan

30th July 2003

Dear Jonathan,

I'm sitting here thinking about our last conversation we had on Monday the 28th of July. We spoke about your weekend with your father, going diving and about being back at school.

I would like to mention that I noticed that something has taken away some of your energy since the previous week when we met, just after the holidays. Did you also experience that? Was there a difference in how much energy you had before and after school started? What do you think could have made this happen?

We spoke about your interest in bonsai trees the last two weeks. I am really interested in this hobby of yours. The way you described how the trees need looking after, exact amounts of water, making sure it gets sunlight and the careful pruning and bending of the tree. You said that if the tree gets neglected, it can grow wild, its leaves might turn brown and the tree could die.

Taking good care of a tree reminded me of how people also need attention, care, looking after. You have mentioned before that you feel mom hasn't got time to help you with homework, sometimes 'gives up' on you, that 'no one cares' and that you 'have no one to talk to'. Is your bonsai drying up? Does the problem Can't Talk try to keep you from growing tall and healthy? What would help your bonsai to grow stronger?

You said that your bonsai would have 'a lot of brances', and the tree would be standing ('which is harder to do'), with no rock to support it. The branches are all the work at school, homework and chores you have to do. Are there other kinds of heavy branches too?

You said you would prefer to take the weight off. What have you tried in the past to do, to take some of the weight off? Did it work? What didn't work? Is there anyone who could help you prune the branches or help you carry some of the weight? Can you think of a rock that you could put under your tree for it to rest on? Could you think of anyone in the past that have helped you carry something heavy? You told me about the school you are going to next year, where there will be smaller classes and some of your old friends. Do you think that would displace some of the weight?

You said that sometimes you feel like 'snapping'. You mentioned that Aggressiveness sometimes tries to take over. It pushes people away from you. Does it work for Can't Talk? Have you tried to fight Aggression in the past? How did you go about it? Can you detect any signs when Aggression is lurking in a corner, ready to jump? Where do you feel in it your body? Do you prefer to have Aggression in your life?

I value the discussions we have had so far, Jonathan. It is important for me to know that you are finding the discussions helpful. Is it going in the right direction for you? Do we talk about the things you want to talk about? Is there anything else you would rather to talk about? What do you think would help?

I hope these questions might lead to discussions that you prefer. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me.

From a new bonsai enthusiast,

Janine