

Exploring the role of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy

Rhoda van Schalkwyk

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**Supervisor:
Professor B.L. Frick**

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Declaration

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Rhoda van Schalkwyk

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ABSTRACT

The question about the possible role of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy arose from my experience as adult literacy educator. Sensing parallels between my own refocusing of identity at post-graduate level and nuances of growth my students reported in practice, I set out to uncover the phenomenon of identity shift in the context of the learning which prepares people for work engagement. A literature review was done to explore the concomitance of identity and literacy. An understanding of identity, as seated in the being of an individual, was linked to literature which had revealed the sub-textual ontology of literacy development. Applying an interpretative lens to identity within the context of workplace literacy, a phenomenological methodology was adopted. Using unstructured interviews, participative observation during literacy classes and the analysis of reflective texts of students and the researcher, thick descriptions of the ontological identity of four students of a workplace literacy programme were co-authored dialogically. These portraits were interpreted in terms of the definitional frame to make sense of the voice which had been accorded to these students. The perceived identity shifts of the students were compared to those reported by the researcher and relevant literature. The findings of the study, although not generalizable, point to strengthening and nuancing of identity during learning which prepares for work on different levels. Learning for the workplace appears to reside in ontological identity. The possible implications of this study are that the epistemological lens of practitioners of workplace literacy development needs to accommodate the seat of being as the site of learning, which points to a need for a modification of practice.

SAMEVATTING

Die vraag rondom die moontlik rol van ontologiese identiteit by die ontwikkeling van geletterdheid vir die werksplek het ontspring uit my eie ondervinding as opvoeder vir volwasse geletterdheid. Die vermoede dat daar parallels is tussen my eie verstelling van identiteit op nagraadse vlak en die groeiverskuiwings waarvoor my studente berig het in die praktyk, het my genoop om die fenomeen van identiteitverskuiwing in die konteks van leer vir werk te verken. 'n Oorsig van bronne is gedoen om die samehangendheid van identiteit en geletterdheid te ondersoek. Die begrip van die gesetelheid van identiteit in die syn is in verband gebring met literatuur wat dui op die subtekstuele ontologie van geletterdheidsontwikkeling. Met die toepas van 'n interpretatiewe lens om te kyk na identiteit binne die raamwerk van geletterdheid vir die werksplek is 'n fenomenologiese metodologie gebruik. Ongestruktureerde onderhoude, deelnemende waarneming tydens geletterdheidsklasse, en die ontleding van reflektiewe tekste van die studente en die navorser is gebruik om in-diepte beskrywings van die ontologiese identiteit van vier studente binne 'n program vir geletterdheidsontwikkeling vir die werksplek dialogies saam te pen tot identiteitsportrette. Hierdie woordportrette is geïnterpreteer binne die raamwerk van die definisies van hierdie studie om sin te maak van die stem wat gegee is aan die studente. Die waargenome identiteitsverskuiwing van die studente is vergelyk met vermelde veranderings by die navorser en in relevante literatuur. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie, alhoewel nie veralgemeenbaar nie, dui op die verstewiging en nuansering van identiteit tydens die leer op verskillende vlakke wat plaasvind ter voorbereiding vir werkstoetrede. Leer vir werkstoetrede blyk gesetel te wees in ontologiese identiteit. Die moontlike implikasies van hierdie studie is dat die epistemologiese lens van praktisyns van geletterdheid vir werkstoetrede ruimte moet maak om die syn as die setel van hierdie leer te beskou, wat dui op noodwendige praktykaanpassings.

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For Willem and Willem and Clara.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Usually three ladies come to class. Today – wintery, dusty, fly-ridden – only one lady arrives for the scheduled literacy class. We work, we always *want to work*. We start to explore her struggle to find the courage to actually use her literacy to deal with her own life. I know that she *is* literate. I suggest that we do a scaffolding exercise where she speaks and I write her own words on her many sheets of paper. On this serendipitous Saturday, I am helping her towards her dream of writing her life story. She has been very ill and seems to have forgotten that she is literate. Later she will use my transcription to continue building her reflective journal. She sighs deeply, she searches the air with worn hands and then she is speaking, telling, narrating, interpreting and painting the landscapes of her lifeworld in stark, limbless metaphors of psychological and physical pain... I become the scribe of her poetry. By my hand she finds a heightened sense of self in the epic which is her own life. She gives me the words that cauterize the past and build the parapets of the present. She is radiant. On a Saturday morning, in an RDP village, she is a poet and I am her voice.

(Personal reflection in the period prior to commencement of this study, date unknown.)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

I have been working as a workplace literacy educator for about three years. I have observed changes in my students which do not seem to be linked to the content of the lessons. My informal observations prompted me to look beyond the content of moments of learning towards some kind of personal shift which lay beneath the acquisition of the necessary learning to enable students to gear into the world of work, to use a metaphor from Schutz (1945:549). This study arose from my own need to understand the process of adult workplace literacy acquisition. I was nudged towards investigating the possibility that identity plays a role in workplace literacy learning by the writing of Lave and Wenger (1991:115), who propose the inextricability of learning and identity. My interest in the links between workplace literacy and identity was also piqued because I began suspecting that there were parallels between changes my students reported at workplace literacy level and changes I was experiencing at post-graduate level. This study was undertaken to explore the role that the identity of students of workplace literacy might undergo in the development of learning for a particular place of work. The focus of the study was split between identity shifts at market entry level and at post-graduate level to move towards an understanding of what learning for the workplace entails personally.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale for this study was my practice based in the context of a non-profit organization. I had a vested, professional interest in contributing to workplace literacy. I would gain professionally from the research since it would contribute to a postgraduate qualification in the field of adult literacy. As embedded researcher, my stance lent ecological validity (Kara, 2015:68) although I risked imposing my personal bias and perceived needs on the study. Kara

(2015:72) proposes a correction of researcher bias through what she calls methodological reflexivity by way of a reflective¹ research journal. This corrective served the purposes of this study well since the study was probing for parallels between the researcher's learning and that of the students. According to Smith (1999) and Ortlipp (2008) this honesty about the process of the research would contribute transparency and credulity to the study.

The non-profit organization where I practice welcomed the study since it was understood that the organization's management, volunteers and students would benefit from the nature of the study. The organizational benefit thus served the needs of the organization, since it was dependent on improvement of the volunteer staff, since it was anticipated that some insight for practice enrichment would arise. The benefit to the students of the organization is embedded in the organizational benefits since the students involved in the study would be given a tutored opportunity for self-knowledge, self-awareness and empowerment by being given a voice. It is also likely that future students would benefit from the possible improvements in practice which might arise from the study.

Clough and Nutbrown (2002:12) point out that "all social research takes place in policy context of one form or another". It could be argued that workplace literacy training in South Africa is currently governed by the Continuing Education and Training Act (Act 16 of 2006) and the National Policy on Community Colleges (Republic of South Africa 2015). This is, however, only applicable if the students are registered with an accredited training institution². This study was within the context of a registered, but un-accredited non-profit organization, which submits annual reports to the Department of Social Development³. The reality in South Africa is that government has no policy regarding the provision of workplace literacy when the provider is not a registered and accredited governmental institution. The policies of the non-profit organization, within which this study was done, do govern training but are beyond the scope of this study.

For me, as a South African workplace literacy practitioner, the national context was a very strong motivation for this study. The General Household Survey of 2012 reveals that roughly 8% of South Africans are illiterate, meaning literate to be the self-assessed ability to read and write a short sentence (Pretorius, 2013). The work of Baadjes (2003) and Aitchison (2006) show that the disadvantages of illiteracy are widespread. From an ethical viewpoint, any disadvantage and

¹ I use *reflective* consciously, although *reflexive* is the term used in social science (Soanes, Stevenson & Hawker, 2008:1208) because etymologically *reflective* is from a Latin verb, translated as to reflect. It is the meaning of deep thoughtfulness that is most appropriate to this journal, although it is also looking back at the self, as the term *reflexive* suggests. Reflexive has been used when only that is meant: reflexive relates to personal ontological introspection after something has happened.

² Personal telephonic communications with officials of the Department of Higher Education on 10 and 13 June 2016.

³ Personal communication from director of said organization, dated 8 June 2016.

any number of disadvantaged people merits attention, also research attention. The reason I considered the South African national context to be relevant to this study was not for pragmatic and economic reasons, but for ethical reasons. As part of the present research community, I owe a future ethical contribution to society since this study aimed to explore a particular aspect of workplace literacy to elucidate the concept of workplace literacy. The description and ontological interpretation of workplace literacy and identity as inextricably linked could pave the way for further research into scaffolding strategies for optimal literacy development. This might contribute to aligning the South African research community with the sustainable millennium goal for the provision of quality education (United Nations, 2015).

1.3 THEORETICAL LENS

The theoretical considerations, which informed this study, are the concepts of identity and workplace literacy. Both key concepts were defined in terms of being, or ontology.

Based on the definition of Goff and Dunn (2004), **identity** was used in this study to refer to the state of being of an individual, under the headings of alterity, fluidity, constructedness and multiplicity. These concepts will be discussed in chapter two, but, by way of introduction, it suffices to define *alterity* as used by Levinas to indicate the “own particularity” of the individual (Bergo, 2015); Foucault uses the term alterity for the relational otherness of the individual (Revel, 2009:46). Alterity is a useful part of a definition of identity because it names that part of an individual's identity which is both particular and other. Alterity allows for individual engagement with others while keeping distance. It is alterity which causes the individual to engage with others, to take action and also to limit action (True, 2004:49). The *fluidity* of identity refers to the malleability of identity because of the dynamics of reality. Identity is ductile and fluid because our social reality is in flux. According to Frueh (2004:64-65) identity is fluid because it is made up of a number of descriptive identity labels. The *constructed* nature of identity refers to the narrating and interpreting an individual does while making meaning by connecting events and meanings in layers (Dunn, 2004:125). The *multiplicity* of identity refers to the unpredictable changes that an individual wishes to make because of the contextual situation. In Goff and Dunn's definition (2004) identity is conscious and dynamic personal change of being. This study was undertaken to explore a link between this understanding of identity and the development of workplace literacy.

The concept of workplace literacy hinges on the definition which is given to **literacy**. Literacy is defined here as the ability of an individual to give voice, by way of encoding and decoding language, to his or her lifeworld. I mean that literacy is a process of *becoming* vocal about being the person that one is by using the encoding and decoding strategies of language. Literacy is expressed in language as a copula verb linking the subject and the object. A person does not

express literacy as a possession, rather as a state of being: I do not *have* literacy as I would, for example, have a handbag. I *am* literate, where *am* is the conjugation of the infinitive copula *to be*. A person *is* or *is not* literate. If literacy relates to the *being* of a person, literacy is ontological. This definition echoes the call of Moje and Luke (2009:416) for

...accepting the idea that literacy is more than a set of autonomous skills demand(ing) the acceptance of the idea that learning literacy is more than simply practicing skills or transferring processes from one head to another. *Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified.* (Own emphasis.)

In this quotation, “the idea of literacy” is linked to how people identify themselves, amongst other things. In this study, I have employed this conjoining of literacy and identity to define literacy ontologically. This does not invalidate other definitions of literacy or identity.

From this ontological definition of literacy, *workplace literacy* is also used ontologically. It is the literate-ness for and of the world of work. Work is understood here to mean mundane employment, but it also refers to conscious, overt and physical engagement. Schutz (1945:549) explains that, from a phenomenological perspective,

(t)he world of working as a whole stands out as paramount over the many other sub-universes of reality. It is the world of physical things, including my body; it is the realm of my locomotions and bodily operations; it offers resistances to overcome which requires effort; it places tasks before me, permits me to carry through my plans, and enables me to succeed or to fail in my attempt to attain my purpose. *By my working acts I gear into the outer world;* I change it; and these changes, although provoked by my working, can be experienced and tested both by myself and others, as occurrences within this world independently of my working acts in which they originated. I share this world and its objects with others; with other, I have ends and means in common; I work with them in manifold social acts and relationships, checking the others and checked by them. And the world of working is the reality within which communication and the interplay of mutual motivation becomes effective. (Own emphasis.)

To use Schutz’s image, workplace literacy means being able to gear into the world of work. Work is primarily socially situated and workplace literacy is also social. Workplace literacy is then the voice or language encoding and decoding that an individual needs to participate fully in the social arena, or society, of the world of work. This entails not only the oral and written linguistic skills of the language of business, but also the tacit knowledge of the specific working environment even though the enactment of workplace literacy might differ in different contexts and often also entails technological skills.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question of this study is tentative because the logic is inferential. This study has sought to establish whether or not any identity shift takes place when workplace literacy is acquired. Therefore the research question was phrased as

What, if any, is the role of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy?

The underlying assumption to this study has been that workplace literacy development does not only take place at market entry level, but at different mental levels.

After an overview of relevant literature pointed to a concomitance of identity and forms of learning, an interpretivist lens was adopted to explore the role of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy. A phenomenological methodology was found to be best suited to uncovering identity in this particular context. Because the nature of inferential nature of the study, the definition of identity posited by Goff and Dunn (2004) was augmented by the definition of James (1892) to accommodate the perceptions of identity of the small purposive and non-probability sample of students of workplace literacy at a non-profit organization accessible to the researcher. The designation of narrative as identity by Bamberg (2011) and Schechtman (2012) was the trigger for seeking evidencing of identity in narratives. The emergent changes in identity of the students were read alongside the learning-induced identity changes in the researcher (as provided in Chapter 4). These narratives shaped the data compilation and analysis, from which conclusions and possible implications were postulated (see Chapter 5).

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In the second chapter an overview of the relevant literature was done to define the key concepts of the study, namely identity and literacy. The constructivist definition of identity by Goff and Dunn (2004) was used to split the unitary concept into alterity, fluidity, constructedness and multiplicity. This definition forms the base of the unstructured interviews during data collection. The inferential nature of the research necessitated an augmentation of this definition to include the value-based definition of James (1892) so that the definition of identity included aspects of the empirical self (material, social and spiritual). Following Floridi (2012), personal identity was read as ontological identity, which linked the study to the philosophy of Heidegger who declared “[o]nly as phenomenology is ontology possible” (1927/1962:60). The conceptual definitions of the study indicated the phenomenological stance of the study. Elements of literacy definitions from Roberts (2005), Maddox (2007), Ntiri (2009), Keefe and Copeland (2011) and Eakle (2007) were used to define literacy as a practice but also as an aspect of being. This study relies on the insight of Ferdman (1990) that literacy, the individual and society are in relationship. Research has shown that the outcomes of workplace are personal (Rhoder & French, 1994;

Waterhouse & Deakin, 1995; Dreher, 2000; Dole, 2000; Fenwick, 2001; Castleton, 2002; Iedema & Scheeres, 2003). From this research workplace literacy was read as ontological too.

In the third chapter Gadamerian hermeneutics was adopted as the research paradigm to link the reflexivity of ontology to the self-contemplation underlying interpretivism. The definition of the key concepts as ontological was thus suited to the paradigm of interpretivism, to which I am axiologically linked through my practice “to bring understanding around the topic” (Moules, *et al.*, 2015:123). A phenomenological methodology was adopted to gather rich, thickly layered data relying for augmentation on reflective texts of the interviewees and researcher. The base of the study, from key concepts through paradigm, methodology and research methods relies on reflexivity to bring a new understanding of the role of identity in the learning environment. The Gadamerian “fusing of horizons” contributed to the broadening of my own horizon of understanding (Gadamer in Bernstein, 2002:278).

Unstructured, dialogic interviews were conducted with the four students who comprised the non-probable, purposive sample from attendees of a course in basic workplace literacy at a non-profit organization where I worked. Entry questions for the initial interviews were prepared from the relevant literature and inferentially adapted for the subsequent interviews. Participant observation, contributing to the reflexivity, and analysis of reflective texts written by the students and also the researcher were collated into narratives of identity. This use of reflexivity in the data, because reflexivity thinks back to the self, links the reflexive data to the ontological definitions of the key concepts of the study and justifies the use of Schechtman (2012) and Bamberg’s (2011) definitions of narrative as identity. Sfard and Prusak (2005) conflated the concept of identity and narrative. The students were asked to verify the narrative portraits before interpretive phenomenological analysis was done. Effectively the students were asked whether they recognized themselves in the voice given to them by the researcher (Kelly & Howe, 2007), whereafter sense was made of these portraits (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). This narrative analysis is the “interpretative tool for phenomenology” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004:xi). These analyses were juxtaposed to the reflective journal of the researcher and findings from relevant research. The purpose of the research was to give the richest possible description of individual cases, bearing in mind that generalization is never the object of phenomenological research, a description and understanding of the phenomenon is the objective of the study (Megill, 1985).

Despite the vulnerability of the population, this study foregrounded the voice of the students, of which three out of four chose to use their true names. The significance of this is that this study did not usurp their identity but helped to crystalize it under their supervision. Standard calls

within the academe for anonymity were replaced with deep respect and empowering visibility through voice.

Besides the ethical restraint of working with a vulnerable population, the demands for a lengthy study to allow for reflection could not be met. Clegg and Stevenson (2013) suggest that a prolonged study provides for time for the insight of reflection, which is the basis of the paradigm, methodology and research method of this study. However, the duration of the research was limited by ethical restraints, the practical restraints of the environment of the non-profit organization and the vulnerability of the study population.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The professional, organizational, policy, national and theoretical contexts of this study provide not only a rationale for the study, but also a motivation for it. The gap in research lies in demonstrating the ontological nature of literacy, which, when recognized, could contribute to the development of workplace literacy. A search of the NEXUS and South African National Research Fund's portal for theses and dissertations yielded no research linking the ontological nature of literacy to practical development of any form of literacy. Boolean searches were done using configurations of 'literacy', 'workplace literacy', 'adult literacy' and 'ontological identity'. This study is *sui generis* because it seeks to investigate the possibility of the alignment of ontological identity development with workplace literacy. This particular conceptual alignment has not been researched elsewhere.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This study was a personal quest to make meaning of what was happening in my practice as an adult trainer for workplace literacy. My own journey towards post-graduate knowledge for this practice, which I have argued to be a form of workplace literacy, has augmented my understanding of the ontological nature of workplace literacy acquisition.

The strategy employed in this study has been to examine relevant literate as it relates to the key concepts of ontological identity, literacy and workplace literacy. My definition of these terms as fundamentally ontological is presented in chapter two. From these definitions I have presented argument for a methodology to access these concepts, as presented in chapter three. The lens brought to this study is interpretivist and this is implemented in a phenomenological approach to research design. Practical research involved unstructured interviews with a purposive, non-probability sample of students in a programme for workplace literacy development. This yielded thick⁴, in-depth qualitative data which were collated with reflective texts from the students and

⁴ "Thick" is used in the ethnographic sense of being richly detailed (Geertz, 1975:9).

the researcher. Narrative analysis was done to make meaning, not only of the data as such, but also to seek parallels between the data from workplace literacy students and the researcher. The data are presented in the fourth chapter. In the fifth and final chapter conclusions and possible implications of the study are tabled. The theoretical and practical aspects of the research are related to the original research question. The possible implications of this study are explored with reference to theory, policy, practice and possible further research.

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The intention in this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for this study. The research question of this study is based on definitions of identity and literacy. An overview of relevant literature is used to refine these concepts to their specific use in this study as ontological identity and workplace literacy. This is done because the purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of concomitance between these concepts. This eventual theoretical framework then serves as a motivation for the research question of this study, but is also critical for the formulation of conclusions to the study, where possible theoretical implications are discussed. Since the focus of this study is on identity, this concept is presented first, after which literacy will be discussed.

2.2 IDENTITY

Ironically the Latin etymology of the word *identity* means “same” (Soanes, 2008:707), whereas we like to think of our identities as being unique. A person can be understood to be the same individual although one’s identity can shift, alter and grow during the continuum of one’s life. Identity is thus individual but dynamic: I am the same person although I change. A study of identity would need to include the inherent dynamics of what identity is.

To explore the concept of identity, I shall use the constructivist definition of Goff and Dunn (2004). This definition of identity includes alterity, fluidity, constructedness and multiplicity. When reading Goff and Dunn with other research on identity, it becomes challenging to decide to which of these aspects of identity one should connect the work of a particular researcher. The base of my discussion on identity in research is the definition of Goff and Dunn, but I shall link their definition from the context of global politics, to the analysis of identity within literacy studies done by Moje and Luke (2009). In my discussion of the theoretical framework around identity it emerges that identity is an interwoven cluster of aspects (alterity, fluidity, constructedness and multiplicity) of one concept (identity), which can be expressed through different metaphors (difference, sense of self, consciousness, narrative and position) (Moje & Luke, 2009). Despite Svalastog and Erikson’s (1994) claim (as cited by Moje & Luke, 2009:420) that a consolidated and stable self emerges from adolescence, Turkle reminds us that “unitary identity” does not exist (Coutu, 2003:48⁵). The irony of discussions of identity is that the unitary concept is understood better when the concept is discussed as parts, as is done here.

⁵ The source Coutu (2003) contains an interview with Turkle.

2.2.1 Alterity as an aspect of identity

Alterity is a useful part of a definition of identity because it names that part of an individual's identity which is both particular and other. Alterity allows for individual engagement with others while keeping distance. It is alterity which causes the individual to engage with others, to take action and also to limit action (True, 2004:49). Levinas also uses alterity in this sense, as the "own particularity" of the individual (Bergo, 2015). This concept of identity as distinctive humanity is not novel; it is found in the writings of Aristotle and informs philosophical research into relative and contingent identity (Moje & Luke, 2009:416).

Foucault brings a relational dimension to alterity (Revel, 2009:46). The alterity of identity is that the identified individual stands in a unique relationship to others. This echoes the concept of *ubuntu* or humanness, from African socialism, wherein the individual is reified by the community (Otunga, 2005:55, Nafuko, 2005:10). Moje and Luke (2009:416) refer to "volumes of research" about the relativity of identity, meaning that identity is a social rather than an individual construction. Questions about the relativity of identity were used in the interviews of this study to explore the alterity of identity.

An extension of the alterity of identity is what Sen terms the "plurality of identity" (2000:24). He points out that it is "manifestly absurd" to claim identity without acknowledging the presence of many and different identities which make up the constitution of an individual's identity. It is as if different versions of ourselves sing together to make the song which is our identity. Or, as Seibt and Nørskov (2012:300) write so lyrically: "We are ourselves", and I add "I am myselfes".

If identity can lie beyond the self in other people and a multiplicity of selves, it follows that identity can lie in attachment not only to people, but to things. Rodogno's concept of attachment identity could then be brought to bear on alterity; we cannot claim to understand someone's identity until we understand what that person is attached to (Rodogno, 2012:313). An entry question asking interviewees what things they are attached to related to this point.

Following the notion of Sen (2000) that we experience identity in pluralities, an entry question about the different groups a person belongs to or identifies was formulated (see Table 3.2.). This question in the interviews would have also surfaced the emotional narratives of significance, which Sfard and Prusak (2005:16) define as hallmarks of identity.

2.2.2 Fluidity as an aspect of identity

Alterity suggests the multiplicity of identity, involving plurality of self, other people and things to which people are attached. A related aspect of identity is fluidity. Identity is fluid: it changes

because of the dynamics of reality. Identity is ductile and malleable because our social reality is in flux. An example of the malleability of identity is demonstrated in the continuously changing identities of online identities (Coutu, 2003:48, Floridi, 2012:272). The ductility of online identity is also an example of the interplay of descriptive identity labels (Frueh, 2004:64-65), where the social identity influences the conscious and continual construction of the personal or ontological self (Floridi, 2012:272).

The entry question during interviews for data collection about imagined identity during interviews was combined with a metaphor of identity-as-narrative from the research of Mischer (2004), and also Anzaldua (1999), cited by Moje and Luke (2009:417) (see Table 3.2.). Interviewees were asked how they imagine themselves to be. These answers were read as constructed narratives of possibility and malleability in the flux of reality. When entry questions were asked during the unstructured interviews regarding the changing of identities, I was testing the statement of Turkle that “identity is fluid and multiple” (Coutu, 2003:48).

2.2.3 Constructedness as an aspect of identity

The flipside of fluidity is stability. Turkle (in Coutu, 2003:48) states that the fluidity induced by changing technology prompts the researcher to question the authenticity of posted online identities. This concern about the veracity of identity invokes the idea of constructedness within identity. This aspect of identity seeks out the stabilizing balm of narration and interpretation (Dunn, 2004:125). It is as though identity is held together in the face of fluctuating reality because it is able to consciously weave stories about the self. Moje and Luke cite multiple studies of identity and literacy wherein the metaphor of identity-as-narrative is used (2009:417). This means that an individual constructs identity philosophically within a constructivist paradigm and epistemologically as personal meaning-making. Identity results in a narrative or story which builds its own identity. Narrative is a construct of identity, and identity is a construct of narrative. Sfard and Prusak (2005) take this argument further: they purport that an individual’s identity is more than the narration that the individual shares, for them *identity is narration*. Sfard and Prusak’s (2005:14) emphatic assertion behooves quoting, with the original emphasis:

Lengthy deliberations led us to the decision to *equate identities with stories about persons*. No, no mistake here: We did not say that identities were *finding their expression* in stories – we said they *were* stories.

For Sfard and Prusak (2005:16) narrative is identity if it is reifying, endorsable and significant⁶. I am following Sfard and Prusak (2005:18) in the formulation of an entry question about a critical

⁶ Sfard and Prusak (2005:16) state that particular verbs (be, have or can) and adverbs (indicating repetitive action) indicate *reification*. A narrative is said to be *endorsable* if the narrator confirms correspondence with reality. *Significance* is usually indicated when the narrator has emotion, often surfaced in stories about inclusion or exclusion.

story (see Table 3.3.). A critical story is a story that, if the main narrative were to be changed, it “would make one feel as if one’s whole identity had changed”. When I prodded interviewees for critical stories, I was doing this because I was equating narrative and identity. Questions about critical stories are fundamental to this study, which seeks to explore identity whilst workplace literacy is developed.

Moye and Luke (2009:424) cite the work of Georgakopoulou (2006, 2007) and Bamberg (2004, 2005) into “small stories” because critical stories are not always easily told. In prompting for vignettes and anecdotes, I was searching for examples of layering or laminating of identity through narrative (Moje & Luke, 2009:426). A small story can be a lamination of another aspect of identity, which is fluid and relational. When interviewees could tell small stories about themselves, the researcher could assemble reports of identity from small parts is a pragmatic choice to adopt the concept of identity as narrative although eminent scholars, most notably Heidegger, have rejected this notion. He postulated that being was in the things at hand⁷ and not in a story (Knell, 1993:46). Wenger (1998:151) is of the opinion that narrative is merely representational of a previously lived experience, narrative is not identity. In this study I have espoused the metaphor of identity-as-narrative for pragmatic and methodological purposes: the narratives reify the phenomena of being. I have found a wide range of studies using narrative-as-identity, for example refugee counselling (Clacherty, 2006), mental health nursing (Kelly & Howie, 2007), student mentoring (Tierney, 2013) and palliative oncological nursing (Moules *et al.*, 2015).

The telling of stories creates an opportunity for the individual to become a protagonist or agent. A sense of agency is linked to the idea that something is done, not by others, but by the self: the individual regards the self as being the mover, the agent. Seibt and Nørskov (2012:290) pointed out that identity is linked to the capacity to do something. Since the development of workplace literacy develops – theoretically at least – an enhanced capacity to function in the world of work, it can be argued that the development of workplace literacy does indeed influence the identity. Entry questions during the second⁸ interviews will rely on this connection that Seibt and Nørskov (2012:291) make between new capacities and identity construction and Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) idea of a critical story (See Table 3.2.). Theoretically these questions are exploring the possibility that capabilities for literacy contribute to what Bourdieu (1986) has called social capital, and adapted as family capital by Ren and Hu (2013), drawing on the work of Coleman (1990).

⁷ In German, *Vorhandenheit*.

⁸ Interviews were done over a period of three weeks. The second interviews, on completion of the literacy programme, were expected to surface narratives of nascent identity shifts due to the development of capacities for work over the course of the training interventions.

2.2.4 Multiplicity as an aspect of identity

The construction and reconstruction of identity is not only a function of the fluidity and constructedness of identity, it is the dynamic response of a person to the lived context, for which Manning uses the metaphor of a tango (2004:191). The unpredictable morphing of identity, akin to a sensual dance response, is called multiplicity. I understand the multiplicity of identity to signify the ability of the individual to respond authentically to a novel situation. The metaphor of identity's multiplicity as a tango is apt because a tango cannot be a solo. A tango is always a partnership, a responsive dance between a leader and a follower. For Manning, the unforeseen context leads the identity to follow in unforeseen fashion (2004:196). This signifies that although multiplicity leads to change and novelty, it is not random. Multiplicity is the product of the context in which the identity functions (Goff & Dunn, 2004:244).

The influence of context on identity is a focus in Rodogno's writing. Rodogno (2012) makes a strong argument for the shaping of identity by the context. He points out that embodiment makes it difficult to fictionalize identity (2012:319). This means that when a researcher is speaking face-to-face with a respondent, the real and live context of the conversation of the interview will yield a truer identity, than would a disembodied online profile. The compilation of this study relied on the collection of data from a lived, embodied interview context.

Since the focus of this study is the ontological identity of students, identity as a concept needs to be framed ontologically to be meaningful for the purposes of this study. Thereafter this framework will be aligned with the methodology of the study.

2.3 ONTOLOGICAL IDENTITY

Floridi (2012:271) equates personal identity with ontological identity. The reason that I am using the adjective *ontological* instead of *personal* is to bring to the surface the theoretical subtext of the adjectival modifier *ontological*, which informs the methodology of this study of identity.

The term *ontological* was first used by Lorhan in his *Ogdoas scholastic* (1606) and a little later by Göckel in *Lexicon philosophicum* (1613) to mean "general metaphysics" (Chisholm, 2008:21). In these citations ontology was understood to be the study of common beings. In his summer lecture series of 1923, Heidegger defined ontology as "the doctrine of being" (1923/1999:1). He traced the etymology of the word to the Greek *alētheia* "unconcealment" and *logos* "the power to gather and preserve things that are manifest in their Being" (in Knell, 1993:19). I interpret this etymology of the word ontology to indicate that Heidegger employed the word ontology as a revelation or uncovering of being. Ontology brings to light what lies in that most mundane and obscure concept we call *being*. The key to Heidegger's understanding of being lies in the title of his magnum opus *Being and time* of 1927: being is to be understood

in time, particularly the present time. Husserl, the predecessor of Heidegger, had labelled ontology as a theory of the present tense⁹ (Farber, 1943:206). For Heidegger a study was ontological only if it dealt with the “Being of beings”, but merely ontic if it dealt with beings in general (in Knell, 1993:53). From this reasoning of Heidegger I use *ontological*, rather than *personal* or *ontic* to modify the noun identity. I am exploring the role of the students’ being in the time that they are developing literacy capacities to function in the workplace. The challenge for this research was to concretize being beyond mere talk of and about personal identity. I follow the lead of Heidegger, who declared that “Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible” (1927/1962:60). In his essay *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger wrote that, “language is the house of being” (in Knell, 1993:217).

The dilemma of research into identity is that an understanding of the whole, unitary concept needs be done by searching for aspects of that whole. In the following chapter on methodology this multifaceted definition of ontological identity is broken into possible entry questions for the unstructured interviews (see Section 3.4.2, Table 3.2). This overview of literature provides the theoretical framework for the identity probing done during the interviews. The subsequent coding of the data from interviews and the reflective texts also rely on this exposition of identity, as does the interpretative phenomenological analysis.

In my discussion of literacy below, I shall argue that literacy is also an ontological construct. Based on Heidegger’s metaphor of language as an ontological home, I wish to argue that literacy is the house of being, as is borne out in the research of Juchniewicz (2012) amongst homeless, illiterate people in the United States, who evolved a participatory voice in their community through the development of a literate identity. I shall present a theoretical framework for a definition of literacy and then extend the definition to workplace literacy.

2.4 LITERACY

To review all the recent research on literacy would not serve the purpose of this study. Using the UNESCO¹⁰ definition as a point of departure, I shall review definitions of literacy from research of the past decade. I shall use the work of Roberts (2005, who adapts Scheffler, 1960), Maddox (2007), Ntiri (2009), Keefe and Copeland (2011) and Eakle (2007) to assemble a definition of literacy to frame this study theoretically. The significance of this compilation of definition of literacy for this study is that the practical implications of these definitions will be collated to form a broad definition of literacy. These definitions are summarized in a figure (Figure 2.1) and printed on the following page for practical reasons, but should be read here as

⁹ In German Gegenstandstheorie.

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

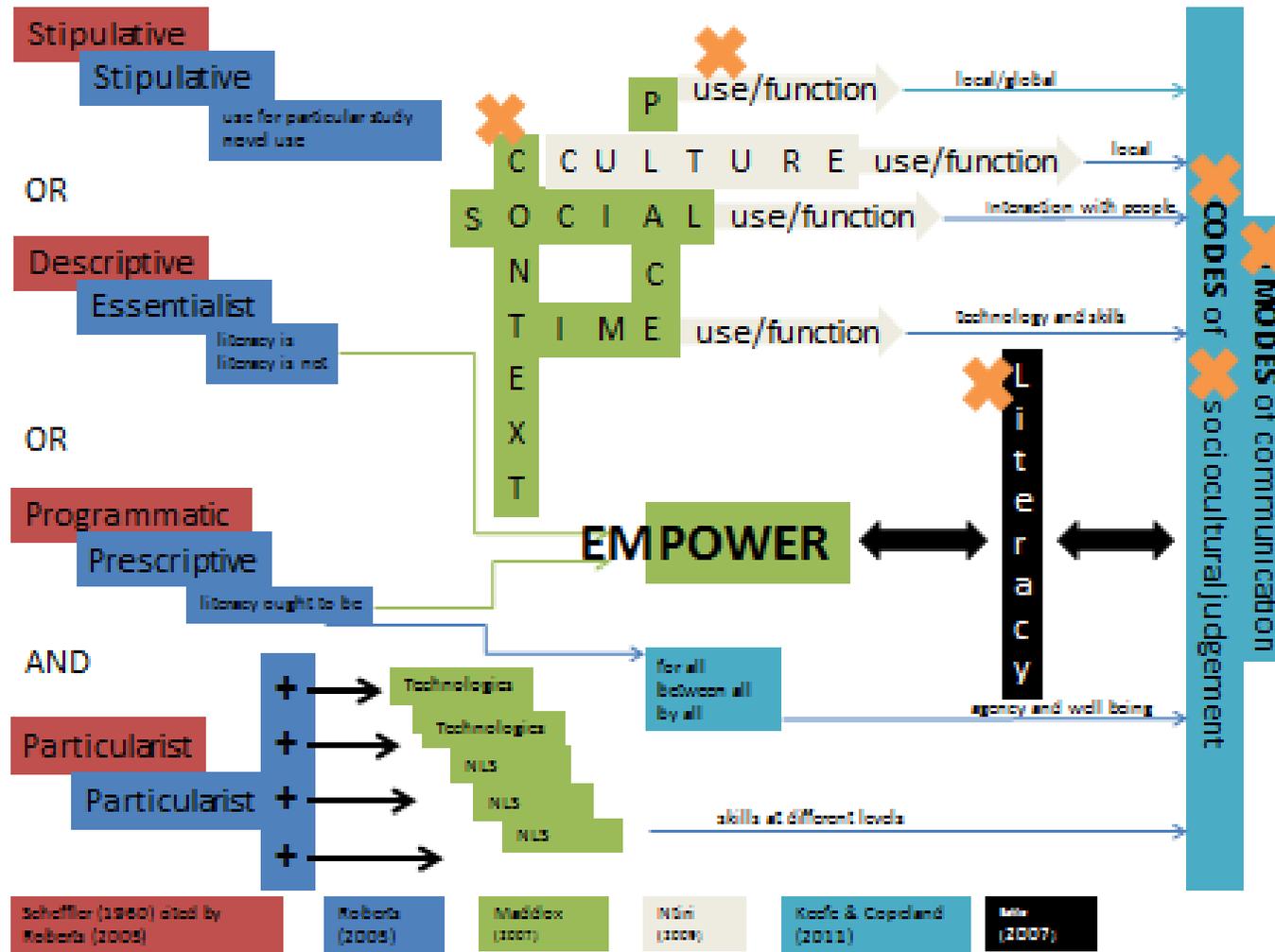


Figure 2.1: Definitions of literacy from selected literature

an answer to Wittgenstein's advice to anchor a study in a definition, rather than abstraction (as cited in Dressman, 2007:339).

The definition for literacy used by UNESCO has been used as the point of departure for this definition of literacy. In 1958, literacy was defined as the ability to read or write a short simple statement in the person's home language (UNESCO, 2006:162). As shown in Figure 2.1, Ntiri (2009:99) augments this definition of literacy as having moved from skills, to human rights and functionality. Literacy is thus defined as a skill which is not only a basic human right, but also has a purpose for the individual who lives in a particular context. As soon as I, or any researcher, attempt to define literacy, the definition becomes so broad, that it is limiting (Ntiri, 2009:98). It is, however, meaningful within this theoretical framework to investigate definitions of literacy to try to grasp the breadth of the concept. The order in which the definitions are discussed here is not chronological. This is to accommodate a layered compilation of definitions, as presented in Figure 2.1.

In Figure 2.1 I have shown that Roberts (2005:29) has staked out the types of definitions of literacy so that these definitions can be compared. Following Scheffler (1960), Roberts identifies definitions of literacy as stipulative (for a particular study or novel use), descriptive or essentialist (what literacy is or is not), programmatic or prescriptive (what literacy ought to be), and particularist (specialized types of literacies). It becomes possible to distill how a particular study defines literacy (prescriptive), what literacy is in practice (essentialist), what literacy is ideally (prescriptive), and the particular or specialized literacies beyond reading and writing. The relevance of this distinction of definitions of literacy for this study lies in the implications for policy arising from this study, although South African governmental policy does not govern the type of workplace literacy which is the context of this study.

Furthermore, Figure 2.1 refers to Maddox (2007), who has shown that ethnographic studies have anchored literacy in social context, which also relates to policies which govern the context. This abrogates the notion that literacy research is an autonomous variable: literacy studies are defined by the time and spaces in which they are conducted (Maddox, 2007:256). Literacy practice is embedded in the fabric of society, which is fraught with the tensions of society. Literacy is not neutral: literacy is power and illiteracy denies power in society. The technologies of New Literacy Studies (NLS) lend status and power to neo-literates (Maddox, 2007:259). Ntiri (2009) is included in Figure 2.1 because in discussing the literacy work of Freire (1970) Ntiri has shown that the cultural context frames and influences literacy development, which has direct impact because of the way that literacy functions in society. Keefe and Copeland (2011:92), as indicated in Figure 2.1, argue

that definitions of literacy can contribute to a positive narrative around literacy. For them, local and global interaction is possible when literacy develops practical knowledge of the tacit codes of sociocultural judgement. Literacy involves all the possible modes of communication on different levels, including technologies and skills, to give agency¹¹. Figure 2.1 includes agency in the definition of literacy because agency leads to a sense of well-being and empowerment, as demonstrated in the research of Eakle (2007). Literacy is the power that is borne of knowledge. Figure 2.1 shows how this research into definitions of literacy can be consolidated to define what present literacy is.

Taking the key concepts from the work of Roberts (2005), Maddox (2007), Ntiri (2007), Keefe and Copeland (201) and Eakle (2007) literacy could be understood *generally* to be *the use of all modes and codes of sociocultural judgment for a particular context*. The value of such a definition serves to frame the concept of literacy as,

- functional,
- multimodal¹²,
- manifesting in different encoded systems of language,
- embedding the hierarchies of society, and
- context-bound.

Literacy is thus not only a practice that happens in society, there is a personal aspect to becoming literate. In a remarkable case study of Mahiri and Godley (1998), the effects of the loss of literacy due to carpal tunnel syndrome show the personal value of literacy. The patient, one Viviana, feels intellectually diminished because a physical disability atrophies her literateness until she can no longer write. Her role as cultural family mediator and translator aggravates her sense of societal isolation. This study confirms the triangular relationship, which Ferdman (1990) describes between literacy, the individual and society.

Similarly studies from Bangladesh (Maddox, 2007), Scotland (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007), El Salvador (Prins, 2008), Texas (St. Clair, 2008), and South Korea (Kim & Merriam, 2010) have shown that literacy development does have a personal impact: self-efficacy, self-confidence, a sense of agency, social capital, and self-esteem were found to have developed, respectively, in these far-flung literacy development programmes. These studies confirm the link between individual identity and literacy development.

¹¹ Biesta and Tedder (2007:133) define agency as the “ability to exact control over and give direction to one’s life”.

¹² Modes of communication are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Rhoder & French, 1994:112).

From this compound definition of literacy it is clear that literacy serves an individual in their being personally and socially on different levels. The link to the research question of this study is that the degree to which an individual reacts to and is changed by literacy, in any form, will influence all theoretical and societal aspects of practice, as is discussed in the conclusion to the study (chapter five).

To conclude this overview of literature, I wish to present scholarly definitions of the specific context of this study, namely workplace literacy. I shall define how workplace literacy is defined in the non-profit organization where the data were collected. The definition of workplace literacy is the constant in this study where the role of ontological identity is explored.¹³

2.5 WORKPLACE LITERACY

In this discussion of workplace literacy I shall look at the need for workplace literacy, how workplace literacy programmes attempt to provide for those needs, what the expected outcomes are, and who the beneficiaries of workplace literacy are.

Castleton (200:1) has pointed out that the workers of the past have become unacceptable as employees of the present. Employees have to work differently because the world, not only the world of work, changes. Globalization has caused the central demand of work to shift from skills for a job to a conflation of work and learning (Farrell, 2000:19). Learning-as-work is a new constant in the post-Fordist working environment (Scholtz & Prinsloo, 2001:710; Fenwick, 2001:1+5). The learning that the post-Fordist worker needs is to do is to learn the literacies for coping with the complexities of technological and informational business systems (Rhoder & French, 1994:110; Waterhouse & Deakin, 1995:498; Frazee, 1996:115; Smith, 2000:378-379).

The changes in the world of work do not negate previous work and its accompanying literacies, but rather seeks to build change “with traces of the old” (Rhodes & Scheeres, 2004:175). This means that workplace literacy builds on basic literacy and then builds in new literacies, as demanded by the emergent changes of the workplace. The workplace still demands that the language of business, often basic Standard English, be spoken, but there is a new demand for the encoding of strategic competence and critical thinking. Workplace literacy seeks to activate participation and

¹³ If this study had relied on quantitative data within a positivist framework, the development of workplace literacy would be the fixed variable. This study is interpretive and the reason I belabour the defining role of the definition of the workplace literacy is to emphasize that the phenomenological exploration and eventual interpretation of this study is the role of ontological identity. The focus of this study is not the development of workplace literacy; it is only the context of the study.

involvement to the extent that workers take ownership through strategic participation (Rhoder & French, 1994:116; Waterhouse & Deakin, 1995:499). As the workplace becomes filled with more and more texts – Iedema and Scheeres (2003:321) refer to this a “textualization” of the workplace – in the real world, there will be workers who are not comfortable in this environment due to “unhappy experiences of schooling” (Ahlgren & Tett, 2010:23). Schloltz and Prinsloo (2001:712-713) also caution against the stressors of textualization for the semi-literate worker. The challenge of the changing workplace is to accommodate these less literate workers. Ahlgren and Tett (2010:24) report that an open door policy of management and conscious confidence building has helped to address this problem of vulnerable and semi-literate workers who have low self-esteem. The approach to the practice of workplace literacy can enrich the result of this practice because fundamentally practice and outcome must find residence in the house of being.

The expected and reported outcomes of workplace literacy help to explain what it is. Workplace literacy has been found to include a variety of possible outcomes. Workers experienced a *sense of validation* through their *improved ability* to do their work in a study by Rhoder and French (1994:119). The *efficiency, productivity, quality of work and safety* of the working environment were improved because of improved *communication and team work* (Waterhouse & Deakin, 1995:500). Castleton (2002:2) ascribes increased productivity to the taking of responsibility: workplace literacy teaches *collective responsibility taking* and team thinking. Workers reported *enjoyment* and increased personal and professional confidence because they had learned to *cooperate* (Waterhouse & Deakin, 1995:500). Castleton (2002:2) found that the triangular relationship between trust, support and confidence, as a product of workplace literacy, contributed to *efficiency* in the workplace. The worker with enhanced soft skills is a happier and better worker. Workers grow towards *professional autonomy* (Farrell, 2000:35). This autonomy is borne of *critical judgement*, or as Fenwick (2001:7) writes “judgement in hot action”. Iedema and Scheeres (2003:318) also report that workplace literacy is about the process of becoming a critical worker. Ultimately workplace literacy is about *rethinking* the problems of work (Dreher 2000:381) and learning to think deeply, mindfully and laterally (Dole, 2000:382).

The moot question in the arena of workplace literacy is who the beneficiaries are. Castleton (2002:9) cautions against the use of workplace literacy as an exploitation of the worker in the interests of management. She pleads for a direct benefit to the person of the worker. I concur with Rhoder and French (1994) and Ahlgren and Tett (2010) that the whole community benefits from workplace literacy: employers and their customers, as well as employees, their families and their communities benefit from workplace literacy. There is correspondence between research findings

about the outcomes and beneficiaries of workplace literacy and the mission statement of the site of data collection. The non-profit organization, where I work and where the data were collected, has a mission statement to contribute significantly (to) decreased unemployment levels in the area surrounding the town.

I conclude this discussion of workplace literacy with a stipulative definition of workplace literacy, following Roberts (2005). This means that I say what exactly I mean when I use the term workplace literacy. For this study workplace literacy was intended to refer to the development of skill and codes of communication for post-Fordist¹⁴ engagement in various places of work for the full development of the individual and community. The value of such a definition for this study is that the context of the study is individual and societal and it is the socially-bound individual identity which is the focus of the study. This means that identity and workplace literacy are reflexively bound: this literature overview has emphasized the ontological common ground of the key concepts of the study and points to conclusions centering identity as the site of literacy development.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This overview of relevant literature pertaining to the research question around the role of identity in the development of workplace literacy has identified the key concepts of firstly literacy and then ontological identity as phenomena of being. The literature pertaining to literacy and workplace literacy are relevant to this study because the site of influence of these literacies is socially contextualized ontological identity. This argument provides the theoretical scaffolding for doing practical research into aspects of being. The following chapter, chapter three, presents the methodological framework for doing research into the role of being in workplace learning. Since the research quest is to understand being, the paradigmatic lens of interpretivism is applied phenomenologically. Chapter three will explain the rationale for and practicalities of gathering data to answer the research question.

¹⁴ Farrell (2000) compares the traditional worker, or Fordist worker, who is like a human automaton at the behest of management with an independent professional worker who embodies the flexibility of the modern place of work. This worker is far removed from the repetitive work, typical of the assembly lines of the earliest Ford factories.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter on the methodology of the study, the research methods will be presented in such a way to argue that the design of the study is suited to this particular study (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:36). It has emerged from the literature review that there is some contingency between identity changes and the acquisition of literacies. To explore these contingencies and to uncover the role of ontological identities of students in a context of workplace literacy development the paradigmatic lens of this study is interpretivist; the methodology is phenomenological; the data collection methods involve unstructured interviews, participant observation and reflective texts so that identity narratives could be assembled for interpretative phenomenological analysis. It will be argued that the methodology of this study serves the purpose of the research and contributes to answering the research question.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

To understand the term *paradigm*, it is expedient to turn to Kuhn, the theoretical physicist whose seminal work, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1970), popularized the term *paradigm*. A paradigm is for Kuhn (1970:17/18) the best, although not only, explanation for facts that are encountered. Bearing in mind that Kuhn was exploring the notion of scientific growth, which he described as a revolutionary progression of theoretical frameworks, I shall use the term *paradigm* to signify the dominant, intellectual framework of mental habits and explanations applied at a particular time to a particular situation. A paradigm could be referred to as a specific lens for looking at and understanding the phenomena of life. When a scientist adopts or masters a new paradigm, Kuhn (1970:112) says that this is akin to seeing a new *gestalt*. To apply that to this study, it means that as researcher I am adopting an interpretivist *gestalt*: I take on the perspective and manner of seeing that marks this approach to doing research. Kuhn (1970:85) did not imply that a paradigm defines exclusively, but rather provides a framework, often an alternative to the dominant scientific narrative, for interpretation.

Although it is a challenge to do research into a phenomenon like ontological being, it is practically achievable as Gadamerian hermeneutics¹⁵, where a phenomenon is interpreted in its original

¹⁵ Since Gadamer (1985:177) defines hermeneutics as the philosophy derived from “the interpretive (*sic*) (verstehenden) sciences” and Moules *et al.*(2015:3), widely cited, working in the realm of palliative oncological nursing, define hermeneutics as the “practice and theory of understanding humans in context”, I argue that the interpretivist stance of this study is also hermeneutic. This does not imply that I am doing

context. Grondin (2002:38) points out that Heidegger “sorts out” understanding by interpreting *being* specifically, whereas Gadamer understands understanding in the reflexive sense, remembering that Gadamer was German speaking and that the verb *to understand* is reflexive in German¹⁶. Gadamer takes understanding beyond a focus on being and extends it to an open and very practical understanding of the life in which *being* takes place (Grondin, 2002:46). The hermeneutic paradigm is apt for this study since the practical life context within which workplace literacy is developed frames the understanding of the identity.

Nachthaus (2002:56) points out that Gadamer has argued for the necessity of reflection due to the limitations of human knowledge. This means that Gadamer adds a dimension of interpretation, the hermeneutic researcher must use reflective thought as a research lens. Gadamer proposes a circle as a metaphor for this approach to understanding phenomena to allow for constant revision of understanding until parts are understood in their relation to the whole (Nachthaus, 2002:56). This study has incorporated reflective texts of the students and researcher to interpret identities.

The supposition of interpretivism is that “every speech means more than it explicitly says” (Figal, 2002:118). During interviews I have used open-ended questions to uncover the subtexts of individual narratives: I was interpreting as I was searching for understanding. Truth or understanding is understood to include the whole spectrum of experience, knowingly identifying and isolating prejudices so that the present can be grasped. Gadamer, as cited by Zuckert (2002:206), has explained this aspect of interpretivism as the “fusing of horizons”. The time and specific context of an individual is understood in a unique time and space, and not generalized. Respondents in this study have not been depersonalized to foster generalization. The initial interviews with respondents explored their temporal and physical contexts. Individual narratives contribute to a layered and composite image of the shifts of being that workplace literacy triggered.

As researcher, as lifelong learner and as an adult literacy educator, the philosophy of Gadamer resonates with my own belief that I am moved and that I grow as I contribute to the learning of others. I am axiologically linked to this study: my practice and this study seek to “bring understanding *around* the topic” (my emphasis, quoting Moules *et al.*, 2015:123) of ontological identity shifts in the context of workplace literacy development. True to the nature of hermeneutic research, this study did not seek to present only a record of understanding, it sought to facilitate a fresh and new grasp of what is being looked at so closely. In the very process of observing and

classical hermeneutics, which relies on ancient text analyses. I make the link to Gadamerian hermeneutics because this is where interpretation relies heavily on reflection, as is the case in this study.

¹⁶ In German, *sich verstehen*.

asking questions I have sought to air¹⁷ an understanding of ontological identity in the moment of literacy acquisition. This study helped to create new understanding of what was happening to my students as I also strove to understand my own growth. Gadamer has called this growth of self-knowledge a type of conversation between the self and other parties so that frameworks are melted together. The reflection of my journal has been an attempt to capture my own growth and development as I have sought – in Gadamer’s words – “to expand and deepen (my) own finite horizon and historicity” (Bernstein, 2002:278). The transcriptions of the conversations which were engendered during the interviews for this study were “informed by a humility towards (my) own not knowing, a genuine curiosity toward what the other might have to say, and the goal of shared understanding”, to quote Moules *et al.* (2015:42).

For me, as a researcher working within a hermeneutic or interpretivist paradigm, this means that I had to find a way to record an aspect of lived and experienced reality in its fullest, relative context. It is a practical challenge to describe an aspect of consciousness, which is intangible, but Roberts (2013:215) cites Clark (2000) and Lobiondo-Wood (2002) who find that human phenomena are to be understood by looking at the lived experience of a person. An interpretivist study must pinpoint and observe manifestations of consciousness in the moment of experience. This means the concepts, here the ontological manifestation of literacy, had to be reified so that some form of understanding could be reached. The reification of the phenomenon of ontological literacy lies in the methodology, which Peirce notes would need an artist’s eye and resolute discrimination (5.42).

The interpretivist paradigm anchors the researcher in the research process and the product of the research bears the marks of the lens which the research holds to the research question. In interpretative research the researcher is much more than a data scribe: the researcher co-authors the data from which understanding emerges. Tierney (2013:3) underlines that he, as researcher, is undeniably present in the data, although his voice is in the background. The metaphor of research as a dialogue or conversation has been used to explain the interactive nature of this research (Moules *et al.*, 2015:66-68). Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:22) describe the hermeneutic researcher as a subjective insider who is in a meaning-making conversation with the respondent. *Conversation* as a word refers to the verb, *to converse*. Etymologically *to converse* is to “turn around together” therefore the research conversation is a co-operative delving of meaning so that the reference frames of researcher and interviewee are collated (Moules *et al.*, 2015:83). It can be argued that the data collected within a hermeneutic paradigm cannot be repeatable because of the individuality and unique synergy of the moment of the interview. Data from unique moments cannot

¹⁷ As cited by Moules *et al.* (2015:35), Gadamer has called language the air that understanding breathes.

be validated. However, Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:146-147), citing Kvale (1996 and 2002), dismiss the call for validity in favour of scholarly craftsmanship and transparent communication about the data collection and whole research management process. It can be argued that the referencing of the researcher's reflective journal contributes to transparency and credibility of the study.

Hermeneutics does not distinguish between separately observable worlds, but is based on an ontology of situatedness in the world (Moules *et al.*, 2015:75). The researcher's frames of reference contribute to the meaning arising from the research (Hirsch, 1976:246). It follows then that hermeneutic research is inductive since it emerges as the process of data collection proceeds (cf. Bitzer, 2013:3). Ayler (1968:91) points out that inductive research is a self-correcting process because the researcher is led by the emergence of evidence. Fann (1970:22) has labelled the "evidencing process" of research inference. I argue, with Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:150), that the nature of inferential, inductive research, if communicated transparently, negates the call for validity since rigour proves validity. The inductive approach of the research for this study will emerge from the discussion of the research design, since the research is designed to surface evidence of ontological change.

3.3 METHODOLOGY

Before presenting a design for the collection of data to be interpreted in an attempt to answer the research question, the approach to the data collection merits explaining. Ravitch and Riggan (2012:52) state that the researcher must find a relationship between what is studied and how it is studied. If the interpretivist paradigm demands holistic detail and the methodology demands hologram-like interconnected accounts, then a method must be found to elicit corresponding data of a descriptive nature. In this study which strives to uncover evidence of ontological identity within the context of workplace literacy training, the methodology which will surface this interpretable data is phenomenology.

For Husserl, ontology or *Gegenstandstheorie*, is a theory which describes phenomena in the present tense (Farber, 1943:206). Ryle (1971:167) points out that Husserl uses phenomena, not in the popular sense of "things", but as "manifestations of consciousness". The link of ontology to phenomenology is made by Husserl himself: he states that the "elucidation of the concept of being falls to phenomenology" (Farber, 1943:194).

The philosophical tenet of phenomenology¹⁸ is that the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body is rejected in favour of a holistic return to things themselves (Hammond, Howarth & Keat, 1991:128). Phenomenology describes the objects of consciousness: the act of experiencing, as well as what is experienced (Hammond *et al.*, 1991:46). I would argue that the interpretivist lens of this study is well served by the phenomenological methodology because phenomenology surfaces all the details which are then interpreted.

This study has sought to explore the whole context of workplace literacy development and to present a description of the processes in the moment of learning. The object of phenomenological study is interactive and inescapably in the world (Hammond *et al.*, 1991:97). In this study I have brought my own reflections to bear on the observation of students while considering their own tales of experience: I have interwoven my experience of the study process with my presentation of the respondents' narratives. Roberts (2013:217) points out that reflexivity in research ensures the rigour of phenomenological research.

A phenomenological approach to research implies reflective mindfulness and intentionality so that the whole, apodictic world is described (Hammond *et al.*, 1991:24+46). In 1934 already Peirce had called for students of phenomenology to open their "mental eyes and look well at the phenomenon and say what are the characteristics that are never wanting in it" (5.41). This study has attempted to give the fullest and thickest possible description of what happens to the individual during workplace literacy development. The approach of this study was undisputedly phenomenological because it sought to give the richest description of the lived experience of the respondents in a particular context towards understanding of that moment, without giving *explanations* for what was happening (Dukes, 1984:202). Idhe (1986:45) writes that "the task of phenomenology is to probe the structures of possibility", including "context relativity" (1986:190). Context has been the anchor of the narratives of the respondents in this study. Goudge (1950:78) points out that the phenomenologist points where the reader ought to look. Looking at or understanding a phenomenon includes awareness of its firstness (unique experience), secondness (the discrete contingency) and thirdness (generality) (Haas, 1964:98). The discussion of interview narratives of this study can be regarded as a phenomenological attempt at pointing the reader towards the unique context of each literacy student, with the hope of contributing towards an understanding of the process of literacy development for the individual.

¹⁸ Peirce (1.284) uses the term *phaneroscopy* as a synonym for phenomenology. Reference to Peirce is done by volume and paragraph in Hartshorne & Weiss (eds.).

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

The practical challenge for a study, which seeks to describe an aspect of consciousness, is the intangibility of consciousness. A phenomenological study must pinpoint and observe manifestations of consciousness. This means the concept must be reified. For the purposes of this study, this becomes possible when Goff and Dunn's definition is read with Schechtman's (2012) definition of identity as narrative. This means that various forms of narrative will be collected and analyzed to answer questions about identity.

What has been done to collect data for this study was to collect data from multiple sources, as advised by Babbie and Mouton (2001:282). Data was collected during dialogic interviews at the beginning and the conclusion of an entry level workplace literacy programme. Participant observation yielding field notes was done during this course. Reflective texts of both the students and the researcher were collated with these data. Finally an exit conversation was held to determine the veracity of a narrative identity portrait of each student which had been composed by the researcher. All these different data collected through different methods formed the basis of the interpretative phenomenological analysis in an attempt to answer the research question.

The method of data collection relied on interaction between the student and the researcher because of the constructivist epistemology of the study: the dialogic nature of the interviews is based on the assumption that the data are co-produced and arise from specific persons in a particular context. The data also relied on reflective texts, namely the self-written life stories of the students and the journal of the researcher.

The reason that reflective texts were included in the research design is because this study, being phenomenological and ontological, is by definition reflective. The use of reflective texts provides data which looks at itself, so to speak. The purpose of this study is to look at the self or being of the students so, using reflective texts provides reflective data for a reflective study.

When all the data were read together interpretatively, the research strategy of using different sources of data was twofold: Firstly, the data from different sources could be used to point out "replication and convergence" and secondly, the different sources of data contributed to a richness of detail which would yield thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:282).

The research methods used in this study seek to align the object of study with the method of study. The sampling and methods of data collection will now be discussed.

3.4.1 Sampling

The selection of participants for this study was primarily the choice of the researcher: as a literacy practitioner I wanted to study adults in a context of literacy development. The only access I had to this population was learners affiliated to organizations where I had been practicing. This narrowed the choice to a specific town in the area I resided at the time of the study. My choice was thus influenced by my own context at a certain time, 2015 to 2016. I was the filter for every decision. I would argue that the participants of my study are meant to be a general representation of functionally literate adults enrolling for workplace literacy although the selection of participants was limited to a place and time within my circle of influence. There can thus be no suggestion that this study is generalizable to the general context of workplace literacy development. The sample for this study was thus purposive and non-probable: *purposive* because students were drawn from a limited group of course entrants who would suit the purposes of the study (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:71) and *non-probable* because students who volunteered were incorporated regardless of whether they were representative of the study population (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:173).

Following Babbie and Mouton's (2001:173ff) definition, the study population for this study was the students who presented themselves for courses in workplace literacy at a non-profit organization in a town in the Western Cape on a specific date, 15 August 2016. From this study population a decision was made to invite certain participants for interviews after the head of training, who was not a party to the research, explained the purpose of the research and volition of participation in my absence, as discussed under ethical issues (section 3.6). I had to work with the few students who were willing to participate. This proved to be a challenge: students were initially very shy in volunteering for interviews. I abided by the ethical restraints of not trying to cajole participation, although this meant having less students to start interviewing, than I had hoped for. The sample for this study was thus not random: it was a purposive, non-probability sample, which represents nobody except itself (Plowright, 2011:42).

I had planned to interview nine students. Six students volunteered for the study, four students participated in the whole project. Phenomenological methodology calls for intensive contact with a few respondents, rather than a survey of large numbers of people because the purpose is to understand the individual's experience (Dukes, 1985:200; Roberts, 2013:216). The ethical restraints on canvassing students were strictly adhered to. I did not canvass directly since I was in a position of power as facilitator. This proved to be challenging: when arrangements were made to schedule additional interviews the person designated to inform the students about a next

opportunity forgot to do so. However, I had hoped to retain 50% of the intended nine students for the duration of the study to generate the descriptions and narratives for the study. The actual sample is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Retention of interviewees for duration of study

Stage during period of data collection	Actual dates of interviews	Total number of interviews	% of original population
Week 1 Beginning of Job Readiness Course	16 + 17 August 2016	6	6/9 = 66%
Week 3 End of Job Readiness Course	1 + 2 September 2016	4	4/9 = 44%
Week 5 Exit interview	13, 14, 15 + 19 September 2016	4	4/9 = 44%

The retention of 44% of interviewees is not significant for this study, since the question is about the richness of the data. What is important is that so few interviewees were retained. I would argue that the instability of the social environment of the study population, and their vulnerability contributed to the attrition. One candidate's husband was hospitalized and she dropped out of a three week course within the first week to nurse him. Another candidate dropped out on the second last day for reasons which could not be ascertained. This points to a serious limitation of the study, discussed in sections 3.7 and 3.8 below.

3.4.2 Unstructured interviews

Interviewing for this study was unstructured because of the dyadic nature of the interpretivist lens applied during this study (Ellis & Berger, 2003:503). An interview is an interactional event, according to Holstein and Gubrium (1995:2). This means that the interviewer's presence produces unique, unreproducible data due to interviewee and researcher synergy (Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis, 2003:650; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:115). This synergy between interviewee and researcher leads to "positioning and repositioning" of the self (Erstad, Gije, Sefton-Green & Vasbø, 2009:2). For Reissman (2003:331-342) the task of the researcher is to identify the positioning and subjectivity of the interview narrative so that the different guises of identity can be understood. Phenomenological interviewing is not about factual detail; it is about narrative truth (Tinggaard,

2009:1500; Haggerty, 2012:2). Phenomenological interviewing expects the unexpected and does not predict the outcome (Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis, 2003:648). Ultimately phenomenological research uncovers layers of meaning and makes sense of this detail by connecting the layers (Wiles, Rosenberg & Kearns, 2005:2). Phenomenology explores and then interprets.

The unstructured interviews to uncover the role of ontological identity used in this study were dialogic. Dialogic interviewing *is not* an abstract, untainted Saussurean transfer of messages from sender to receiver ¹⁹. Dialogic interviewing is based on an assumption that the interview is a creative construction of meaning, arising from the here and now of the moment of speech (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012:103-106). All the participants in an interview contribute to the ultimate meaning that is constructed (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:2). For Tanggaard (2009:1510) the research interview is a “multivoice scenario”: an interview is laden with layered, personal histories beyond the immediate socio-spatial context of the interview. The task of the interpretative interviewer is to surface a theme of meaning from the multivocal layers of the narrative and then point to possible meaning thereof.

A dialogic approach to interviewing accommodates the humanity of both researcher and researched: the researched is a human, who will logically have expectations of the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:56). Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003:63) point out that the researcher also needs to acknowledge that interviews call up emotions, which must be managed by asking about thoughts rather than feelings, particularly when gender or ethnicity might cause barriers (Reinharz & Chase 2003:79-85). This means that the researcher is mindfully aware of being the filter through which all the data are produced and ultimately viewed.

The researcher needs to respect the dignity of the interviewee (Dunbar, Rodriguez & Parker, 2003:133), while directing the conversation towards the interests of the research question (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995:38). The exploratory nature of this study compelled the use of *unstructured* interviews, but these interviews were anchored in the concepts of the research design, as emerged from the relevant literature. In Table 3.2 possible entry questions which emerged from the literature have been linked to the concepts central to the research question of this study. The questions are merely *possible* and not *actual* because of the dialogic and unstructured nature of the interviews. I used this table as preparation for the interview to translate the concepts to ordinary speech. The analysis of the data links the actual interviews to the concepts.

¹⁹ De Saussure's *Course in general linguistics* (1960) defined language as monologic transfers of content rather than a social construction of meaning from the context, as would Bakhtin or Billig (Roberts, 2013).

Table 3.2: Possible entry questions for initial interviews

Possible entry question	Source	Link to research question
If your life were a book, what would the chapters be?	Holstein & Gubrium (1995:40) Tanggaard (2009:1499)	Identity as narrative
Can you imagine yourself living in a story on TV?	Holstein & Gubrium (2003:21) Floridi (2012:272)	Identity as situated in context Fluidity of identity
Do you have different online names? Do different people call you different names?	Coutu (2003:48) Goff & Dunn (2004:244) Grasmuck, Martin & Zhao (2009)	Fluidity of identity Multiplicity Self-presentation as identity
Can you draw a picture of your life's people?	Holstein & Gubrium (1995:48) Sen (2000:24)	Alterity Relational identity Plurality of self
What is the event in your past that makes you who you are now?	Hirsch (1967:119)	Identity-shaping events
Is there a small story in your life that is special?	Moje & Luke (2009:424, citing Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2007; and Bamberg, 2004, 2005)	Small stories are closer to the surface than critical identity stories
Can you tell me a story – it doesn't have to be a true story – to show who you are?	Reissman (2003:337) Holstein & Gubrium (2012:15) Tanggaard (2009:1500) Sfard & Prusak (2005)	Constructedness of identity Narratives not always historically true Identity <i>is</i> narration
Do you have a story where you are the main character?		Narrator as protagonist Alterity Agency
What can you do well?	Seibt & Nørskov (2012:291)	Identity linked to capacity
What do you want your	McAdams (2012:17)	Memory of identity narrative

children to remember about you?		as inheritance
Do you have a favourite symbol? What is your favourite animal? Why?	Moje & Luke (2009:417) Reissman (2003:337) Kara (2015:99)	Identity expressed in metaphors
What is your favourite thing?	Rodogno (2011:313)	Identity as possession
Are you a real part of your hood? Are you always the same at home?	Rodogno (2011:319) Goff & Dunn (2004:244) Vandeyar (2010)	Identity shaped by context Context fosters multiplicity of identity Community participation as a function of identity

The interviews took place over a period of four weeks. Roberts (2013:216) points out successive interviews can be used to confirm emergent themes. Because the study intended to explore the extent of ontological identity on the continuum of workplace literacy development, questions were modified to surface possible shifts. This study differs from the cited research in that I sought to pinpoint the being of a respondent at the start of the literacy development and then revisit those points to explore whether anything had happened or changed. This meant that questions in the opening phase of the interviews changed in the later interviews, for example, “Are you a real part of your hood?” was rephrased as, “Are you still the same at home after you have been doing this training?”. “Do people call you different names?” became “Have you been called different or new names because of what you are doing?” This cautious attempt to go deeper into identity perception could only be done once I had gained trust, as I moved from general to personal conversation (Adler & Adler, 2003:153-173). Trust emerged in the continuum of interview conversations because I weighed every answer as valuable, so the respondents learned that no answer was “wrong” (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003:117).

Entry questions for interviews had to be augmented to accommodate a theme of spiritual identity introduced spontaneously to the dialogic interviews by respondents. Spirituality as a part of identity dates back to James (1892:176), who distinguished material, social and spiritual aspects of identity. James’ definition of identity is still definitive (Browning, 2001:652). Glackin (2004:29) and Williams (2005:515) also hold that identity has a spiritual base. The link between spiritual identity and the research question of this study regarding ontological identity is to be found in Aristotle’s definition of the self as the completeness of being (Hoeft, 2001:905). This means that self or identity is

ontological by definition. If spiritual identity is part of the “very sanctuary” of being, according to James (1892:181), then spiritual identity must be a part of an ontological definition of identity. Maslow (1968:iv) has pointed out that for non-religious persons, their value-system provides a surrogate religion. From this argument I take that values will point to the spiritual identity of a person. In preparation for the second interviews, questions exploring values were formulated, as indicated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Possible entry questions for second interviews

Possible entry question	Source	Link to research question
What is the biggest thing that happened during this course?	Williams (2005:517)	Spiritual identity as deeply-seated agent for change.
What is the strongest part of you now after the course?	Woodward (2002:19)	Individual desire for unitary self in face of changing self.
What are the important people in your life saying about you now?	James (1892:179)	The “social me” needs recognition from others.
Do you look different?	James (1892:177)	The “material self” as part of identity.

The interviews were conducted in the building housing the training organization, which is situated in a taxi rank. The recordings took place in the foyer of an unused classroom. It was relatively quiet but not private. With permission of the head of training, the interviews were scheduled for 20 minutes during afternoon computer classes. Three interviews were scheduled per afternoon. This was not ideal but the only practical option due to student presence at the training building. No respondent had to travel for interviews and I believe this contributed to the retention rate. Recordings were done using a digital Olympus DS-50 recorder.

Transcription of interviews was done within 36 hours of the recording of the interviews. Gillham (2000:71) advises speedy transcription so that the researcher’s memory can augment where technical inaudibility occurs. As researcher, I did all the interviews and transcriptions to take final responsibility for the many decisions of data interpretation inherent in transcription (Poland, 2003:268). Transcription was done according to the instructions of Poland and collated with post-interview reflections and field notes (Poland, 2003:267-287, Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit,

2004:77). Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003:69) suggest that the researcher ask the following reflective questions immediately after every interview:

- How did I feel?
- What impression was the respondent trying to create?
- Was anything surprising?
- Where there any mixed feelings?
- Did respondent seem to have trouble articulating something?
- What should I have asked differently?

To these questions Reissman (2003:342) adds another question, namely

- Was there a turning point in the discussion?

This question was added because identity shifts are indicated by accounts of turning points. In this study a copy of these questions was completed immediately after each interview and my responses were filed as part of the field notes. The content was incorporated into the interpretation underlying portraits.

3.4.3 Participant observation

In ethnography, participant observation is understood to be (c)overt observation of the respondents while the researcher participates to some degree in the activity of the study population (Becker & Geer, 1957:28). In this phenomenological study I also observed the respondents while participating in their literacy development by way of facilitation. My participant observation differed from the common ethnographic participant observation in that I was in a leadership role: my facilitation, however ideal, had the strongest agency in the interaction. I was a controlling participant observer, which contradicts the spirit of dialogic interviewing. While Becker and Geer (1957:29) used participant observation to explore meanings and intentions of group jargon to unlock assumptions, I was facilitating deep thinking about the mathematical functions underlying retail numeracy or business communication – I was not only testing use and meanings, I was cultivating new thinking about familiar habits of counting and speaking. My participant observation was done after two rounds of interviews so I could indeed use it to check the distortions from the interviews, which Becker and Geer argue are wont to feature in interviews (1957:31). From my facilitating position I was able to test the perceptions of behavioural and ontological shifts through collective reflection, with which I normally conclude the modules. I would argue that my facilitation of workplace literacy counted as participant observation and contributed to triangulation or construct validity of the data collected (Yin, 2014:47). Although participant observation is not routinely used during phenomenological studies, it adds rigour to this study and richness to the data (Trow, 1957).

A limitation of this participant observation was that I was focused on the facilitation and could only make field notes after the sessions had been completed. Notes taken for me by an assistant did not yield more than my own notes from memory and facilitation notes generated on a white board. Insights from these class reflections were incorporated into the field notes of my participant observation. Atkinson and Coffey (2003:418) argue that the concomitant use of interviews and participant observation are a form of checking mechanism for the data which is collected. Trow (1957) argues that science is best served when methods of data collection are checked, which he argues does indeed happen when participant observation is used alongside interviews, as has been done in this study. Following Cresswell (1998:211) and Yin (2014:47) I asked the respondents to review the summative narratives I had crafted for further *confirmation of the data*, providing triangulation and construct validity: I employed the respondents to validate the speaking that I had done²⁰ on behalf of them.

3.4.4 Reflective texts

The use of reflective²¹ texts as data in this study is to align the method of research with the paradigm of the research (section 3.2). The reflective texts used in this study include the self-written life stories of the students and the reflective research journal of the researcher. These reflective texts are based on the activity of looking back and creating meaning from the activity by thinking (Schutz, 1945:535). A part of this meaning of the labour or thinking back is also that aspects of identity become clear to the author of the reflection.

Reflective texts are used in this study, which explored a particular form of learning, since numerous scholars regard reflection as a tool for learning: for Fenwick (2001:6) reflection converts experience into knowledge; for Paris and Parecki (1993) learning is enriched in a climate of reflection; for Hirsch (1967) the reflection leads to a sense of agency; for Hanrahan, Cooper and Burroughs-Lange (1999) the process of reflection leads to reconceptualization and therefore facilitates new learning; and for Taylor (2000) learning of a transformative nature is inextricably linked to reflection.

It was hoped that the texts used would uncover the role of identity (reflexion) as the narrative of the process of life (students) and of learning (researcher) was reflected on in the texts to contribute to

²⁰ Gillham (2000:79) points out that the data do not speak on their own, but that the researcher gives voice to the message of the data.

²¹ Reflective, rather than reflexive is used because Ortlipp (2008) points out that reflection is the basis of a further process of reflexion.

answering the research question about the nature of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy.

3.4.4.1 Student life stories

The student life stories are simple texts written by the students during a basic course preparing them to enter employment. The exercise of writing a “life story” during the workplace literacy development programme of this study was not a biographic project but rather an assembly of life incidents as part of class exercises to create personal identity awareness. These stories are not part of communal story-telling, (as identified by Bell, 2010, and cited by Briggs, 2011) but personal narratives as students were coached towards self-awareness. Following Bamberg (2011:3) the student texts consulted in this study should be understood as “small story” narratives of identity, and should not be confused with life history studies (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:283-287).

The writing of life stories was an on-going project during the course and also served as an informal test of computer and typing skills. Life stories were in English, which is the medium of training although it was no student’s home language. It is possible that this could have contributed to the paucity of data yielded. In the interpretative discussion of the data there are considerably fewer quotes from the life story texts than from the transcriptions of interviews.

The writing of what the organization called a life story was an expected outcome of the training, although it was stated that it was a choice to participate. Part of the portfolio to prove typing and computer competence was this document containing the life story. I believe that it would have been difficult for any student to avoid submitting some form of life story. The submission form for the life story included a statement that submission implied permission to use details in promotional material shared with donors, volunteer trainers and other supporters of the organization. I venture to suggest that this contributed to the difference between the small story narratives offered in the life stories and the richness of the small stories shared during private dialogic interviews governed by confidentiality with veto rights for the students.

3.4.4.2 Researcher journal

Within the framework of this interpretative phenomenological study, a reflective research journal becomes the voice of the researcher whilst it is also a tool for making sense of the phenomenon being studied. Hanrahan, Cooper and Burroughs-Lange (1999:408) and Kelly and Howie (2007:4) advocate a reflective journal to separate the scientific (methodological) and the personal (reflexive) aspects of research. Ortlipp (2008:698) argues that this is not possible: the journaling exercise

serves to make the conflation of science and person visible (Ortlipp, 2008:702). The separation of science and person makes the bias evident and lends credibility to the study through transparency. The journal serves as a private audit because of researcher awareness (Smith, 1999:360), it is a tool for self-checking (Dukes, 1984:202).

Methodologically the journal contributes to credibility (Hanrahan, Cooper & Burroughs-Lange (1999:414). The salient personal advantage of journaling for post-graduate²² students is that the journal becomes a type of clarifying cognitive filter in the morass of research ideas. It serves to motivate the researcher and contributes to the depth of learning (Hanrahan, Cooper & Burroughs-Lange, 1999:414).

3.4.5 Schedule for data gathering

Besides the construction of the reflective and research journals, data collection was done over a period of four weeks, as is evident from Table 3.4. The table also indicates the different data gathered.

Table 3.4: Data collection schedule

	Stage during period of study	Actual date	Data collection event	Data
1	Throughout writing of thesis including data collection phase	10 March 2016 to 3 October 2016	Reflective and research journals	Reflective text
2	Week 1 Beginning of Job Readiness Course	16 + 17 August 2016	Unstructured, personal, dialogic interview	Transcriptions of audio recordings
3	Week 3 End of Job Readiness Course	29 August to 2 September 2016	Participant observation during business numeracy course	Field notes
4	Week 3	1 + 2	Unstructured,	Reflective text,

²² Hanrahan, Cooper and Burroughs-Lange (1999) focus on doctoral studies.

	Last week of course	September 2016	personal, dialogic conversation focused on self-constructed life story from course	field notes
5	Week 4 or 5	Mid September 2016	Reading of portrait and informal discussions	Field notes No recordings

The students of workplace literacy I interviewed and observed spent three weeks doing workplace literacy development.

3.5 DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The first presentation of data in this study is to 'give voice' to the interviewees through the narrative portraits (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:102). This aligns with the work of Mayhew (1861/2) who gave voice to the poor of nineteenth century London, cited by Holstein and Gubrium (1995:25). The portraits are called narrative because all data pertaining to an interviewee was collated into a first-person narrative: the portraits are more than a picture, they tell a story as if the interviewee is speaking, although I, as researcher, am the conduit²³. These portraits are narratives of identity.

To construct each narrative portrait of identity multiple readings of the data was done. I then constructed a word portrait from the various narratives to try to convert my understanding of the identity of each interviewee into words. In a sense I was co-authoring the portraits since I was using my words but also the words of the interviewee. Interviewees were asked directly whether they recognized themselves in the portraits, as was done by Kelly and Howie (2007:11), who report on a comparable study amongst psychiatric nurses undergoing Gestalt training.

Koopman (2015:5) sees the interviewee approval of the portrayal as a type of validity check, which answers to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit's call (2004:111-113) for verisimilitude between portrait and the authentic person. I am confident that these narrative portraits are a true picture of the identity of the interviewees at the time of interviewing and can be regarded as valid data.

²³ Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006:104) point out that the portraits *are not really first person* because the researcher is the author.

The purpose for compiling and presenting a narrative portrait of each interviewee is to initiate an understanding of each individual before I “surround their words with analysis” (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:1130). I felt obligated to allow each interviewee to speak in their own words before I brought my interpretative lens to their words. The narrative portraits are proof of what I understand of the phenomenon (each interviewee’s ontological identity), on which I base my talk *about* these identities²⁴.

The second presentation of data in this study is then to ‘make sense’ of the data (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:102). This is the interpretation of the data, which I shall now discuss.

3.5.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

I was compelled by the level of trust revealed through deeply personal and previously unshared revelations to be as sensitive and responsive as Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006:110) call for. The respectful revisiting of the narratives through interpretative phenomenological analysis echoes of my own epistemological belief in the value of dialogic communication. I have adopted this *approach* to the data because of the “most sensitive and responsive” nature of the interpretation yielded, although it is “neither complete nor perfect” (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:110). I concur with Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006:108) that any one moment of human interaction cannot be captured, but through interpretative phenomenological analysis a feasible attempt is made.

Roberts (2013), researching the significance of experience within the framework of midwifery, claims that the flexible and exploratory design of interpretative phenomenological analysis is best suited to research that seeks to grasp the perspective of a person embedded in a particular situation. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is, as the term suggests, an interpretative analysis of a phenomenon: in this study this means that ontological identity within a workplace literacy context will be described in such depth and detail that the description reveals its meaning. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is research that is “ideographic” (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:103), which means there is a focus on the individual. In this study, as in all phenomenological studies, the purpose of the study is to uncover an understanding of a phenomenon (Megill, 1985:154). In this study the phenomenon is the ontological identity of individual students, for which interpretative phenomenological analysis is particularly well suited.

²⁴ I am trying to distinguish between showing understanding *of* a phenomenon, as opposed to understanding *about* that phenomenon, which is for May, 1983:14-15 (as cited by Stevens, 1996:151) the difference between Kierkegaard’s understanding *of* anxiety and Freud’s writing *about* anxiety.

The source of this phenomenological knowledge is “first-person experience” (Smith, 1999:359, citing Maslow, 1966). This study uses the direct words of the interviewees as data. The words of the interviewees are taken to be narratives of identity, as proposed by Bamberg (2011). These narratives are pertinent to this study because, as Ajana (2010:242) points out, identity is a domain of narrative. The narrative data of this study was unlocked to reveal the identities of the interviewees. Narrative of the actual lives of the interviewees is, according to Beckett and Morris (2001), an ontological manifestation. This means the story told can be understood or can be read as a reflection of being. The talk or stories generated during interviews were key to an understanding of how the interviewees live their lives and understand themselves to be as individuals.

The aim of Hegelian phenomenology is to reveal the phenomenon in its singularity, whilst suspending “all possible interpretations and meaning” (Koopman, 2015:3)²⁵. Given the dialogic approach to interviewing used in this study, I wish to argue with Smith (1999:359, who also cites Koch, 1996, that it is not possible to sanitize the data of researcher influence. It is not possible to put myself in brackets, so to speak. The discussion of the narrative portraits juxtaposed to my own reflective research journal acknowledges my own immersion in the data-gathering process.

My un-bracketed presence in the process of interpretative phenomenological analysis enables the interpretative aspect of the analysis. Bamberg (2011:5) implies that the role of the phenomenological analyst is hermeneutic when he writes that the meaning of narrated events lies in what they represent. The research must surface the meaning of the vignettes from the dialogic interviews to uncover identity embedded in these “little stories”. Kelly and Howie (2007:11) propose that our understanding of our experiences is interlaced in the stories we tell to such an extent that each narrated story is multilayered with meanings. The story implies more than it tells (Figal, 2002:118). It must however be remembered that not all elements of every narration are of equal importance (Schechtman, 2012:342). Bamberg advocates for inspection of narratives for a movement between constancy and change, sameness and difference and what he calls the “the double-headed arrow” of agency between the person and the context. I have used this approach in this study to give meaning to the narratives against a definition of identity. Bamberg (2011:16) views small stories as the projection of desired identity. It is these small stories of identity which are the focus of this study. The supposition that identity is revealed in vignettes of narration is the strongest motivation for using this approach to explore the ontological identity of the interviewees.

²⁵ Hegel calls this bracketing of suppositions *epochè* (Hegel, 1901, in Koopman, 2015).

3.5.2 Coding

The practical tool used for the unlocking of the data is coding. The word *coding* suggest that meaning is hidden, but in the data analytic sense of the word, as used by Saldaña (2013), *coding* signifies the interpretative labels that are the basis of identifying and then grouping significant data content into meaning clusters. For Daiute and Lightfoot (2004:x) the narrative is the root metaphor which is themed to interpret the lives of others. The value of narrative to the researcher is that it allows the researcher into the narrated world, since narrative is *of* and not *about* life (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004:xi).

The eventual outcome of coding is that the researcher can sort meanings from the data into strands of meaning. I understand from Saldaña (2013:15) that coding is a heuristic activity almost like cartography: the researcher plots co-ordinates (codes) at certain meaningful places in the text. These 'places' of meaning are the actors²⁶, activities²⁷, time²⁸ and place²⁹ mentioned in the data (Saldaña, 2013, citing Lofland, Anderson & Lofland, 2006). Bamberg (2012:103) calls this spatiotemporal coding. Narrative analysis is done to identify the role that the speaker takes on. This is called the "positioning" (Bamberg, 2004:153). In the coding of the portraits, attention is paid to the situated action and the positioning events.

The work of the encoding researcher is to plot out the meaning: the researcher must literally connect the dots so that the data become meaningful. The activity of coding means that the researcher is active in the interpretative process. Coding is thus an interpretative process suited to phenomenological studies where the phenomenon is explored: Daiute and Lightfoot (2004:xi) have called narrative analysis the "interpretative tool for phenomenology".

The narrative portraits are coded for themes and the co-ordinates as suggested by Saldaña (2013) and Bamberg (2004; 2012), but also for aspects of ontological identity based on the definition Goff and Dunn (2004) as augmented by the definitive definition of identity of James (1892) to accommodate expressions of identity which arose from the data collection.

²⁶ Tanggaard (2009:151) pleads for acknowledgment of all the actors since the interview is a text of multivocality.

²⁷ Heiskala (2011:243) warns that not all action is agency.

²⁸ Rudd (2007:63) emphasizes temporality as a part of identity. Williams (2007:306) refers to stories as lived events that are simply reported at a later time.

²⁹ Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006:106) point to the Heideggerian emphasis on context, the Dasein or "being there".

To code for identity is to deny that identity is lived as a total experience, although researchers are wont to break it into categories (Ajana, 2010:241). Lumsden (2013/2014:172) advocates for an understanding of identity in and over time. This links to the phenomenological demand for understanding the phenomenon in the moment of the context in which it presents itself. Schechtman (2012:342) points to the intricate task for the narrator to weave together incidents from a whole life: the context of the retelling leans on the multiplicity of identity as the narrator follows themes and sub-themes to whittle down the small stories, knowing that each view is multivocal and multifaceted. It is not possible to account for all details of the moment, but Lumsden (2013/2014:165) emphasizes that the author of a narrative brings his or her own interpretative lens to the narrative through emphasis. Identity interpretation should therefore respect the stress which the narrator gives to the narrative. This interpretative study is the researcher's interpretation of the students' interpretations of themselves at a particular time.

The identity coding of the narrative portraits used in this study relied on the definitions of identity discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3, with were augmented inferentially to include the definition of James (1892) as reflected in Table 3.3.

3.6 ETHICAL CONCERNS

The application for ethical clearance from the university can be referenced under SU-HSD-003091. All documents relating to ethical requirements for this study are included in Appendix 1: Ethical documents.

To conclude this discussion of the methodology of this study, I wish to cite Plowright (2011:171) who argues that the ethicity of research lies not in the methodology as such, but in the completeness thereof. This discussion of the methodology can be regarded as ethically sufficient because paradigms and methodology have been fused.

Ethical considerations cannot rely solely on methodology. Ramcharan and Cutcliffe (2001:361) take Swedish ethics committees to task for drawing parallels between methods and ethics in research. Tee and Lathlean (2004:538) concur with Ramcharan and Cutcliffe to emphasize that the responsibility for conducting research with vulnerable people in particular hinges on the skill and flexibility of the researcher. This means that this study cannot be ethically justified through the methodology, but rather through a discussion of the role of the researcher.

My axiological and ethical stance illustrates that the principle of not causing maleficence was adhered to in the study (Ramcharan & Cutliffe, 2001:364). This phenomenological study is anchored in the principles for professional responsibility of the American Anthropological Association³⁰ since it considers “aspects of the human experience”. My ethical stance has taken into account what Duker (1984:198) has called the embodied human experience as the basis for this phenomenological study.

As researcher in this study, I was in a position of power. According to Eder and Fingerson (2003:50) a researcher always holds the sway of power. This was compounded by positional power from my work as unpaid volunteer in the organization where data were recorded. The organization could have felt obligated to consent to the research as compensation for services. On the contrary, the director of the organization welcomed a request to collect data because the organization had already benefitted from strategic studies done by students of the Stellenbosch University Graduate School of Business. It can be argued that this study was ethically responsible because of the beneficence to the organization. Smith, 1999:361, citing Hutchison *et al.*, 1994, points to multiple benefits of taking part in qualitative research interviews. I argue that this study also benefited the participants by providing an opportunity for self-knowledge, a sense of purpose, self-awareness, empowerment and giving voice³¹.

I also held positional power over my students, for whom it would arguably have been difficult to refuse to participate in the study. These students, being of low education, can be regarded as vulnerable (Rule & John, 2011:113). Tee and Lathlean (2004:541) suggest that this positional power can be mitigated by third-party recruitment, which was done in this study. The head of training invited students to participate in my absence.

At risk of disrupting my own discussion of ethical concerns I would like to link the fact that this study was done in a so-called vulnerable population to limitations of the study. There are myriad real life implications of being vulnerable and no posturing, or positioning, by the researcher can delete the hierarchies between a vulnerable student and a researcher who is in a position of power.

The ethic of a study is built on voluntary participation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:521). Throughout the recording of data respondents and trainers of the non-profit organization were reminded that volition was genuine, as is evident from the memoranda distributed (See Appendix 1: Ethical

³⁰ <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/>

³¹ Hutchison *et al.* also list catharsis and healing as potential benefits.

documents.). Transcriptions of the interviews included reminders throughout the period of data collection that participation was indeed voluntary. This is called “process consent” (Muhall, 1993, cited by Tee and Lathlean, 2004:539).

Soble (1978:40) has argued that *voluntary* consent must include *informed* consent to be regarded as ethical. Although Soble is discussing the informed consent of participant psychiatric patients, I concur that informed consent is indeed a limited achievement. To accommodate this, the information about this research project was presented to the respondents and management in different language registers (see Appendix 1: Ethical documents.).

Full disclosure of the nature of the research mitigates the power of the researcher and acknowledges the humanity of the respondents (Dunbar, Rodriguez & Parker, 2003:133). Holstein and Gubrium (1995:7) point out that the respondent in a dialogic interview is not merely a soulless conduit of information. The respondent is engaged (Shotter, 1992:10) and in a demanding affective situation (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003:102). I wish to argue that the transcriptions of the interviews and the reflective journals are evidence that I have accorded dignity and humanity to the respondents, by giving them a voice (Reinharz & Chase, 2003:77).

Part of the dignity of the respondents is that their anonymity is protected (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:523). Respondents were asked to choose pseudonyms, but were also given the option of using their own names as a personal voice, if they wanted to do so (Reinharz & Chase, 2003:77). In this study three out of four respondents exercised the choice of using their true names. The one interviewee, who did elect to use a pseudonym, also selected the name by which to be identified³². Which student was portrayed under a pseudonym is only known to the researcher. Svalastog and Erikson (2010:105) point out that anonymity and confidentiality are the default routes for research into vulnerable populations, in their case indigenous populations. They do point out that anonymity can be seen to be silencing the population for whom researchers speak by replacing the own voice with the voice of the researcher. In this study I discovered an explicit attachment by the interviewees to their own true identity. Scarth (2016) found this when doing thanatology research which is – in a sense – the exact opposite of my research into ontological identity: a dying patient or bereaved relatives sought to preserve identity post-mortem, whereas in my research the interviewees were evolving an acute sense of identity through the dialogic interviewing process and the development of workplace literacy. I wish to argue, with ADT Fourth World³³, an organization

³² This idea comes from Eakle (2007:482), who studied teenagers in a religious school.

³³ <http://4thworldmovement.org/>

for empowering marginalized poor populations that part of the value of this research is that the vulnerable persons articulate their own identity, albeit with the help of the researcher. This voice on behalf of the interviewees was subject to their approval and their feeling that they recognized themselves in the portraits.

This research project used true names but confidentiality has guarded where respondents shared opinions and personal stories, which in my opinion should remain unpublished, although respondents allowed tape recordings to take place. This was done in two cases where different interviewees remarked that the information was private but that they had a need to share it.

A degree of anonymity was accorded by the omission of surnames and the masking of the name of the organization. It was not however possible to guarantee absolute anonymity because the name of the organization could have been deduced from links made between myself and media announcements for promotional purposes. Confidentiality was strictly guarded to counterbalance porous anonymity.

Fawcett and Pockett (2015:154) argue that the protected storage of data is an ethical obligation. For this study all data and transcriptions are stored on a code-protected computer in my home. Data was not transmitted electronically, but with memory sticks. Transcriptions and audio recordings will be safely stored for five years as required by the university.

It is possible to use the demands for confidentiality to present data inaccurately. Ramcharan and Cutcliffe argue that data is ethical when respondents and supervisory academics have sanctioned it and when it is academically “auditable” (2001:362-364). The data of this study were sanctioned or “member checked” by respondents on the dates indicated in Table 3.4. Both the researcher and supervisor of this study are confident that the transparency of the journaling and the many and detailed discussions of the research process, processing of data and final analysis qualify as an academic audit for the study.

3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In concluding this argument for the ethicality of this study, it is inescapable to acknowledge the limitations of the study. I have chosen to discuss the limitations of the study following the ethical considerations because these considerations have contributed to limitations.

Ethical barriers to working with a vulnerable population were a practical obstacle to accessing interviewees (section 3.4.1). According to the ethical stipulations of the university,³⁴ I was prevented from engaging with the students to explain what I would be doing. I am convinced if I had been allowed to talk informally to the students to demystify the research process and relate as a human being, I would have been able to canvass more candidates for the study. However, it cannot be denied that I held positional power over the potential interviewees. The sway of the positional power of the educator or facilitator in the literacy environment is discussed by Deetz (1994:42), Castleton (2002:90), and Merchant and Carrington (2009:63). A limitation of this study is that it does not account for the power, skills or charisma of those people who provide the literacy. This would need to be investigated to benefit from the understanding of the students' identity, in particular the role of positioning and repositioning of identity (Bamberg, 2012).

A practical limitation to a study working with vulnerable populations is that the population can be reached for data gathering at a certain time and place. The interviews for this study were conducted on the relatively neutral grounds of the teaching venue. That particular place and the time of the interview cast the context of the interview. I was forced to question the influence of the venue of the interviews since, experiencing difficulty re-establishing contact with an interviewee after completion of the course for the member audit, I found a "different" person in a very different context. I also felt different and to be frank, unsafe. I could not really engage.

The time scheduled for the study proved to be a limitation. The time available for thesis development - once the course work had been completed - from conceptual development to written submission was not only limited, but also subject to the bureaucratic hurdles of ethical approval at fixed dates, which had to then be coordinated with flexible timetables from a non-profit training environment. In this study the duration of the study was shortened by six weeks because of the time I had to wait for ethical approval. If I had been given ethical approval sooner, I would have been able to do data collection for a longer period. By the time ethical clearance was finalized, courses had started and I could not interview those students on longer courses (the course had started) and I had to interview students on a shorter course.

The duration of the study is the greatest limitation of this study. Becker and Geer (1957:32) advocate observation over time when changes are being examined, and Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1280) find credibility in the "prolonged engagement" typical of phenomenological studies. The

³⁴ <https://su.rims.ac.za>

duration of this study was a mere four weeks and it is possible that a lengthier period of interviewing would have yielded more data with more meaningful interpretation, particularly since Roberts (2013:216) advocates supplementary interviews to explore themes. Prolonged interviewing and observation would have enabled me to question my own misunderstandings, as suggested by Becker and Geer (1957:290). Clegg and Stevenson (2013) argue that lengthy duration of phenomenological study would assist in reflection. For this study I take from Clegg and Stevenson that a longer study would have enabled reflection as a method of getting to an understanding of identity. I understand that the students would have benefitted more from the process of finding a narrative for identity if I had had more time. The question is whether the duration of the study provided the best possible benefit for those involved. Is it useful and beneficial to find a personal narrative of identity, talk deeply about it for four weeks, and then ... the researcher is gone? The limitation of this limited study is that, although counseling was available, there was no way to ensure that the surfacing of traumatic and previously undisclosed narratives were addressed. If the limited beneficence of the study is to be linked to the duration of the study, then it must be asked whether the short duration caused any harm to the interviewees. Did the surfacing of narratives do any harm? I hope not, but I cannot know. McGinn (2012:4) finds that "extended time in the field" creates trust between researcher and interviewees. In mitigation of the short duration of this study, the transcriptions point to surprising trust in the researcher.

It is in acknowledging the limitations of the study that the veracity of the study can be gauged (Moules *et al.*, 2015:180). Adler and Adler (2003:163) point out that truer data is obtained when respondents are not paid for their participation. Being barred ethically from direct canvassing, or enticing interviewees with payment is only a limitation in that I could not encourage or pay people to participate. I would argue that this is a strength, rather than a limitation, since participation was genuinely voluntary and did not have a price³⁵.

Another limitation of this study, as for any study, is the use of a particular method. Reissman (2003:342) writes that "science cannot be spoken in a singular, universal voice. Any methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete, and historically contingent." All methods have limitations (Trow, 1957:35; Moules *et al.*, 2015:180). The phenomenological methodology in this study is a reasoned pragmatic choice, as argued in section 3.3, despite the limitations under discussion.

³⁵ Because the tracing of identity and writing a life story had been part of the interviewing and also a part of the literacy development, I did present each interviewee with a bound, blank journal and pen at the final meeting. This was unexpected and offered as a gift of acknowledgement.

The limitation particular to phenomenological studies is that insights are often vague, favouring methodological contributions rather than factual delimitations (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:81). Dukes (1985:202) points to the flawed recipe which phenomenology has for research. The outcomes of phenomenological research are outcomes of understanding. This understanding is the starting point for empirical research. Phenomenological research begins, is does not prove or conclude. These studies are not generalizable and this study in particular is not generalizable. Phenomenology gives a snapshot and many snapshots would be needed to understand individual identity as spatiotemporally embodied life (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006:109).

The interpretative nature of the analysis done in this study hinges on my interpretation via the coding. The nature of hermeneutic research is that it involves judgement by the researcher. I subscribe to Saldaña's defence of coding as an art and a craft (2013:40), and I reject the critique of coding as a mechanistic reduction of data which distances the researcher from the data (Saldaña, 2013:38-39). I would argue that the coding draws the researcher into a better understanding of the data. The coding of narrative portraits has been accounted for in section 3.6.2. The coding, which is a part of the interpretation of this study, is not a limitation.

Eakle (2007:483) points out that the data analysis that seeks to make sense of the voices given is *expansive* rather than *definitive*. This means that the research reveals and explores layers of meaning, rather than defining a "core" meaning. An example of this kind of limitation in this study is the recurrent mention of empowerment. The problem is that this study can only point to empowerment but cannot pinpoint how to duplicate it. I do not know exactly what triggered the empowerment. Assuming that empowerment is a desirable outcome of workplace literacy, the source of empowerment would need to be researched further. The greatest limitation of the phenomenological paradigm is that is like amber that traps the moment of being, but does not show its history or future. This limitation of phenomenological methodology becomes the impetus for further research grounded in the full understanding of the phenomenon at a point in time.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The previous chapter has pointed to a concomitance of identity and learning, particularly forms of literacy development. The purpose of this chapter has been to set up a philosophical point of reference as research lens to investigate this concomitance. The philosophy of interpretive understanding, called hermeneutics, has been applied in this study to interpret the role of ontological understanding in the context of learning for employment. It has been argued that the inferential nature of such exploration of an ontological phenomenon merits a phenomenological

methodology, since phenomenology is an ontology of the present. The method proposed for doing this situated uncovering of the phenomenon of identity was to do unstructured interviews and participant observation of a purposive, non-probability sample of students in a programme for workplace literacy. Reflective texts of the students and researcher were collated to augment the data which was translated into narrative portraits. It was proposed that narratives of identity from the data be analyzed with reference to the findings from of the literature by way of coding and interpretative phenomenological analysis. The data will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The third chapter of this study has delineated the methodology of this study. The data that was surfaced by the phenomenological methodology includes the recordings and transcriptions of interviews, field notes of participant observation by the researcher and reflective texts by the interviewees and the interviewer-researcher. These data were collated into narrative portraits of each interviewee so that a member check could be done to verify the understanding of the researcher. As the starting point for the interpretation of the narrative portraits, these were repeatedly read and coded for identity and aspects of narrative, as explained in section 3.6.2. This data has been stored electronically and is available for inspection on request.

In this chapter the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data for each interviewee is presented alphabetically. A condensed reflection from the researcher's journal is then presented so that the discussion of the analyses can return to the original research question of whether ontological shifts play a role in workplace literacy development. The data prompts the question whether these shifts are comparable at different academic levels. This discussion is done with reference to the definitions of the key concepts of the study and relevant literature.

4.2 MAKING SENSE OF THE NARRATIVE PORTRAITS

In section 3.5 of the previous chapter it has been explained that the analysis of the data by the researcher is based on narrative portraits, which can be viewed as the first interpreted step. The portraits were created by the researcher to test whether the identity of the students, as perceived by themselves, was captured in the portraits. The importance of auditing these portraits for verisimilitude by the individuals being portrayed has also been discussed in section 3.5.

The visible joy in the body language of the interviewees whilst reading their portraits was an indication that they were satisfied that the texts were what Woodward (2002:19) calls a "mirror image", as illustrated by an entry from my research journal of September 20, 2016:

"All the interviewees were suppressing excitement and curiosity about the portraits. With each individual visit there was palpable emotion. Msa stopped reading and said, "I can stop reading because I recognize myself. This is me." A few days later Candy listened intently and then, inserting one of those hovering pauses, her voice dropped and she carried on the sibilance of "Yes.

This is me.” All the interviewees thanked me for the portraits. It was as if I was giving them something of themselves. It was deeply moving.”

The narrative portraits, having been accepted as credible data, then formed the basis for interpretation. The portraits, although not included here, are available with all other data for inspection. What is present here is an analysis of each portrait. Verbatim quotations in italics from the interview transcriptions serve to substantiate the claims of the analyses.

References for quotes are as follows: the name of the student, the data source (I for interview 1, 2, or 3; LS for self-written life story; FN for field notes from participant observation) and the line reference from the text of interview transcriptions and life stories. Dates are used to reference the field notes. For example “Nadine LS:5-15” would mean a quote from lines five to fifteen of Nadine’s life story and “Msa I3:2-3” would mean a quote from the second and third line of the third interview with Msa³⁶. The punctuation of the transcriptions follows conventions for direct speech, although inverted commas are not used, with diacritical marks from Poland’s (2003) notation for transcription. The words of the researcher have been deleted in these quotations so that the voice of the interviewee is foregrounded.

4.2.1 Making sense of Candy’s narrative portrait

Candy introduced herself as shy, with a vignette of herself as a shy and lonely girl alone at home. She juxtaposes shyness and her fear of the moment at hand:

I’m shy, I’m scared. (Candy I1:46)

During the second interview, she reports a change in herself:

... so now, before I couldn’t... understand myself really, I couldn’t understand myself before I came here. As I told you I was that lonely child, lonely girl. Never communicate with anyone, just be there at home, stay there alone. My boyfriend worked, I was there alone and the “Who am I” section, part... that was actually... the greatest part in this course because there, now... I... could tell someone else who am I... (Candy I2:106-109)

Candy has found her voice and she can articulate the insight that she has found a voice.

³⁶ Only two interviews were done with the interviewees but a third interview was conducted with Msa because the recording of the second interview with him was faulty. The third interview was based on a memory script of the second interview compiled by the researcher. The transcription of this third interview shows that Msa took over the “corrective conversation” and presented narratives of changes he perceived himself to have experienced.

She exhibits postmodern fluidity of identity in that she regards herself as a hybrid of emotions (Fenwick, 2001:11). She expressed how she felt before the course in the following words:

For five months you know how, how I felt, I felt useless 'cause I can't contribute to the house I felt so... I cried most of the times because I didn't bring any money in. So that's why I'm saying... I felt worthless... I felt... useless also. (Candy 11:84-87)

Candy confirms that she has no social capital because she is unemployed. Replying to a question about being viewed differently by the community because of unemployment, she says:

That is almost scary/ () Yes. Yes, I can definitely say yes because I'm staying in an area where everyone knows everything about the other one. (Laughs) They see me during the day and they skinnering³⁷ about that. So, at the end of the day... comes that I hear about that, and it makes me feel bad... See... and if I work, if I have a job, they don't see me at home and they won't talk about me behind my back. (Candy 11:90, 96-100)

Part of Candy's future narrative of hope for future employment is that she rejects the narrative of the community, who gossip about her, that she is disenfranchised because of her unemployed status:

They are people sitting at home don't want to work. /()/ Don't WANT to work. They DON'T go even look for a job. They that kind of people but I know myself... I know myself and I want to work. So that is the difference between me and them. (Candy 11:106-111)

Candy declares her own alterity in the difference between her attitude to work and those not seeking employment. She positions herself as taking agency despite a community which does not. This sense of agency gives Candy confidence. During the first interview held on the second day of the course she says:

Because in the beginning I didn't have that self- confidence... I'm very shy, I'm still shy but NOW, even when we speak here... in front of the others, I can see there's a... there's a.../()/ ... Coming out. Didn't used to be. I never could talk in front of lots of people/ but now I can. (Smiles). (Candy 11:64-65, 67 & 69)

Although Candy has mixed feelings about herself, she does have a narrative for the future:

Let me tell you this quickly: I believe that in the END of the day, I am gonna make a success of my life. (Candy 11:73-74)

This future narrative confirms her dreams for a better life, as expressed in her life story.

During the second interview she also expresses her future narrative:

³⁷ gossiping

So I think, I will be good. I think so... but, but I believe, I BELIEVE if you want to achieve something... you must work hard to achieve that goal.../()/ Yes. /()/
This is because three weeks ago, say no say, say in June I heard about this course... and a week later I came to register... and from that day... because everything I heard, my friends told me about this course what they doing here, what they giving that ... then I knew I'm making a start... I'm making a start... of becoming someone greater, ... someone... say... I'm gonna achieve my goal ... in whatever... I choose to do. And I want a better life for me and... my ma. I want a better life and I know I'm gonna achieve that better life that I always dreamed about. (Candy I2:119-130)

Initially she is painfully shy, but by the end of the course she has become emboldened to share previously-unshared experiences of abuse. She introduces the topic with:

hhhhh But, can I talk you about something else? Because I need to tell someone?
 (Candy I2:7-8)

After reassuring the researcher that the recorder can stay on, with a disclosure:

When I was on school... I was molested by my uncle... said that first grade, grade two grade two, grade three.../()/... and I realized today actually, I realized that, that that made me stronger /()/ Yes. In a sense that as I told you before, I was a very shy person I couldn't speak up, always by myself,.. but ... when I started here at this course... I realized that now (tone rising) I can speak. I can speak in front of twent-, lots of people, and I usually can't ... do that... and the the reason I said the molest thing make me stronger is... now I can talk. openly about that. I never could tell anyone about that... but... Saturday I told my mother for the first time. Do see see what I me – where I'm going? I think if I hadn't come to this classes, if I hadn't... felt the need to come to this classes because actually this classes this classes made me stronger... and. The lesson that I've learned today was information is power... and I feel,.. I feel like a different PERSON. I can't exp-, ex-... (Candy I2:14-27)

Candy has found a voice to the extent that she is not only making her private history of abuse known to her mother, she allows the story to be recorded, not because she has forgotten that the conversation is being recorded, but because she tells the researcher that it may be recorded. She is becoming articulate and allowing her story to be put in the public domain. This is an indication of her own awareness that she has acquired social capital.

She can even articulate her disappointment at her mother's reaction to this information. Her shyness is replaced by the empowerment of finding a voice to face her history, but also the self-awareness to articulate her own reaction to the reception of her story:

... and she, what she said was very disappointing because all she asked me was where and how did it happen..but there was no... there was no. She didn't comfort me... she didn't do nothing. That's all she said, so I felt at that time disappointed because I would like a hug. Something like that. (Candy I2:75-78)

Candy has moved from the shy girl with “another heading” or narrative that she will not succeed at the workplace literacy course, for which she is enrolled, to becoming her own spokeswoman. She points out during the interview that *she* told her mother. Although her boyfriend knew, it was her secret. She broke the secret:

I was the one who told my mother about this... but I think I'm stronger. I wasn't this person before. (Candy I2:91-92)

In the narrative she takes the initiative of disclosure. In the small story, her mother is a passive listener who does not offer comfort. Following Tanggaard (2009:150) and Bamberg (2012:104), Candy has assumed agency: her identity is fluid but stable because she perceives herself as acting with strength in present time by confronting and publicizing her past. Maslow (1968:84) has pointed out that nadir experiences give an acute awareness of identity. Here Candy sees herself as “strengthened” because of the abuse. She says that having been abused has given her the courage to stand up to abuse in the community and talk about it:

... and I feel... I feel like a different PERSON. I can't exp-, ex- /()/Yes, in that way AND the way that I relate to other people.

...but, Rhoda can you remember last time I told you... how it was where I lived. I told you about the skinning /()/ Yes, yes that... and now I can see now they see me in different light. They see me, not... I don't work. They used to tell people if you don't work, you are this and that. I am not, I am not employed. I came here but I can see the difference in their eyes when I go home. so there's definitely something different – /()/ Positive, definitely positive.. because now they can give me – how can I say (smiling)... they give me... they lift me up /()/ They lift me up. ... and I feel good about that. (Candy I2:26-42)

Candy uses different images to present layers of her identity. This is an illustration of constructedness of identity. She thinks of herself as Cinderella, explaining that happiness has come after sadness:

That time I thought to myself as being Cinderella.../()/... it was... although she had... bad days with her stepmother (both laugh) but at the end she met a prince and they were happy. (Candy I2:4-7)

Her allusion to Cinderella differs from a study by Mischler where one Betty thinks she does not deserve the expensive party dress which she loses accidentally (Mischler, 2004:108). In contrast to Betty, Candy accepts that she is presently happy.

Candy adds another layer to her identity narrative when she refers to herself as a tree.

A tree. Because the tree's in the ground. Hey. /()/The dinges³⁸ is in the ground, nê³⁹. And I'm that tree, know why ? Because – can I say it in Afrikaans?/()/ Daai ding is in die grond in en daai ding is stewig in die grond in. Nê, die stam, is stewig in die grond in. Ek assosieer my met daai sssstam omdat ek wil stewig – in dit wat ek gaan- ek wil... standvastigheid – ek wil stewig geplant wees.⁴⁰ (Candy I1:124-131)

The tree is a complex metaphor which has, according to Candy's own emphasis, a trunk, symbolizing steadfastness, and roots, which suggest that she is grounded and secure in her values. I think it significant that she brings the first interview to a close with the words:

I am IN the ground. (final pause) (Candy I1:146)

Candy's use of divergent metaphors to articulate her identity shows the different layers of her identity. As Candy chooses to use specific metaphors she is positioning herself as both vulnerable and steadfast.

During the first interview she is vague about the fruit of this tree, she says the fruit is

Different. It's not one fruit because the fruit indicates... The fruit indicates... all my good... I would call my eienskappe⁴¹... (Candy I1:139-140)

In the second interview, Candy returns to this image. She refers to both flowers and fruit on her tree:

And as I told you last time. I AM the tree. I am the tree /()/ I am the tree because... now they can see the flowers or the the fruit in the tree. Because there's different kinds of fruit in that tree... like different (Candy I2:46-50)

Roulston, deMarrais and Lewis (2003:656) write that progressive interviews take the researcher to deepened layers of the identity. Candy specifies that the fruit is “all her good characteristics, sort of my good assets”, she emphasizes that the fruit is “all good”. In the second interview she then lists

³⁸ That thing

³⁹ Not so

⁴⁰ That thing is in the ground and that thing is firmly in the ground. Just so, the trunk is firmly (planted) in the soil. I associate myself with that trunk because I want to be steadfast – in that which I want to – I want – steadfastness – I want to be securely planted. Is that right?

⁴¹ characteristics

her fruit as confidence, honesty and self-esteem. For Candy honesty is confronting the gossip of her community, which she would not have done previously:

NO! I would leave it like that. I would just leave it just like that. I would just leave it just like that. But now that's why I say I can see why I have changed... in a good way... (Candy I2:66-67)

Her identity is linked to what she does in her community. She has a strong sense of “social me” (James, 1892:177).

A theme of Candy's narrative is her alterity. She is of the community but different to it. Candy has what Bourdieu (1989:18-19) has called a “folk theory” of how society works. She can explain how her community works, whilst standing apart from it. Initially Candy demonstrates what James (1892:179) called our care about the opinion of our group. Candy tells a small story about malicious gossip because of her status as unemployed. In the second interview she returns to the issue and says that two things have changed in her community: she is different and the community is treating her differently. She is sure of this because she can “see it in their eyes”. Candy's identity is socially mediated (Moje & Luke, 2009:417). She perceives herself to be seen differently by others whilst also seeing her self differently. She ascribes this to her new-found voice. Candy sustains the metaphor of herself as a tree by using it as a frame for her narrative. She concludes the final interview with a last reference to the tree.

For Candy the pivotal point in her journey towards workplace literacy was that moment when she decided to enroll for the course.

...So, say in the fu- in a year's time I want to look back and see that – want to look at that moment and realized what I am THEN or what I'm going to be that guy... (Candy I1:6-8)

Her present confidence and articulated identity result from her own agency. She has found the voice to confirm her core (James, 1892:176).

During the interviews with Candy I experienced a rare synergy. The transcripts show that a spontaneous conversation flowed between researcher and interviewee, called “reciprocity of conversation” (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003:124). Adjacency of dialogue manifested as overlapping of syllables and dialogic weaving of the narrative. The transcriptions of interviews show relaxed conversation based on trust, shown by Candy's insistence that the tape recorder could remain on when she started her disclosure narrative. The richness of the detail from the interviews with Candy compared to the paucity of data from observation of her during class favours Trow's argument that interviewing should be used in conjunction with participant observation for the richest data collection (Trow, 1957).

During class observation, Candy displayed intense engagement in discussions, although she was unwilling to speak alone to the group. It was remarkable that she broke this silence at the concluding reflection of the course. She spoke spontaneously on behalf of the class to express appreciation. Candy was still shy but she had become articulate: she literally raised her voice during the final class. She had repositioned herself as strong, confident and vocal. In my interpretation the programme for workplace literacy development has surfaced the constructedness of Candy's identity, allowing her to become a stronger, bolder version of her true self.

4.2.2 Making sense of Liesl's narrative portrait

As researcher I had to accept Liesl's narrated truth as the valid phenomenon in the interviews (Tanggaard, 2009:1500; Haggerty, 2012:2). I had to bracket my wariness about the torrent of narratives of victimhood because she insisted that her own name be used:

I want to use my name. () Because... if you write something I will know it is me. (Liesl 11:1-2)

I had to respect the stories she told and the emphasis that she brought to the narrative she offered, as advocated by Lumsden (2013/2014:165). It became easier to suspend skepticism and listen attentively with Mischler's advice that every telling and retelling of a story is a revision of identity (2004:101).

The question of agency is pertinent to understanding Liesl's projected identity. Her sense of agency is revealed in the small stories that she tells. Most questions about her identity were answered with small stories about only four people: a stepfather who shunned her, a deprecating mother, a previously-jailed but now successful brother in another city and finally her beloved children. I shall discuss these four characters in her narratives in this order.

Liesl only ever referred to her step-father in her self-written life story. She came to understand his overt rejection of her and sublimated this as the wisdom that children should be loved and not neglected or rejected. In her life story she writes:

Till today I wonder why he can treat a child like that not loving the child but he could love the mother. I know that sometimes in life u come across thing like this, but to open your heart and to love. I think in a way he plays a big part in life, in the sense I love people specially children. Maybe if he was not that kind of person I wouldn't care about kids or their needs. For me it was hard but he tough (sic) me to be more open hearted. (Liesl LS:8-12)

Liesl's sense of agency in this story is shown in her annexation of this vignette to point to her own positioning as protagonist as a mediator for children. She disallows the step-father a dominant role in her life narrative, but rather takes the role as the wiser agent for change: she brings love although she was rejected.

Stories about her mother are the dominant narrative in Liesl's interviews. When she introduces the researcher to her mother, the mother is positioned as the undesirable role model against which she chooses:

And um, my mom is actually doing domestic work. I doan see myself as a domestic worker. I want to try to be better than what my mom have done. (Liesl I1:6-8)

Liesl not only wants to do work that is different to her mother's work, she also wants to be a different person:

And I start thinking but naa, that's not the way to do it (.). (Liesl I2:91)

In the short stories that Liesl tells about her mother, she is often the victim:

I have no support at home. () Um because my mommy see me as um it feels to me like I'm a failure... for Mommy. (Liesl I1:51-53)

In my reflections after the interviews I questioned whether Liesl's positioning of herself as a victim of her mother's continuous rejection and derision was a result of her manipulation of me as a researcher, as suggested by Erstad, Gije, Sefton-Green and Vasbø (2009:2). However, in the last interview she declared that the greatest progress she had made from the course was that she had shaken off the fear of her mother's stories about her as a failure:

I overcome the fear... /()/ Um of whatever my mommy thinks about me because she's not positive. It's very negative /()/ And um... here, now I stand for myself... I don't care if she's like disrespecting me or thinking that the course that I'm doing is like it's stupid but I, I enjoy it and I've leant a LOT. (Liesl I2:2-7)

She no longer felt like the "black sheep". As Liesl rejected her mother's voice, she was finding her own, to the extent that she was excluding her mother in the dialogue of her own life. Her mother should have been – according to Liesl – the listener in her life's conversation:

I never used to share anything with anyone 'cause I couldn't speak with my mom first of all that's the person you need to speak the most to because if you have problems and stuff like that but ja. (Liesl I2:11-12)

By the end of the course, Liesl has found listeners as she has gained confidence socially:

I am, I am, I've learned quite a lot. Especially um in the computer room and then here with the Life Skills and like sharing with people. I never used to share anything with anyone. (Liesl I2:9-10)

Liesl finds her own voice, rejects her mother's voice and replaces her with friends from class:

And the group, I love the group. Can speak to them without them speaking behind your back about it. And if they do, I doan care. But, () /()/ We gonna stay in touch with each other, that's one thing that's going to happen, ja. And yer, I 'm going remember them and cherish them as my friends and if I see them in the future - I hope we do see each other in the future (laugh) but we will stay in contact over the phone with each other... (voice trails off). (Liesl I2:108-116)

I interpret this as a movement from victimhood to agency. Despite this announcement that she had found her own voice and was taking agency in her own life, when we met for verification of the narrative portrait she immediately reported conflict with her mother and expressed powerlessness. In the short period of my communication with Liesl she vacillated between victim and agent. Bamberg (2011:4) brings the question of agency to narrative analysis. In her narratives Liesl is both victim and agent. Her victimhood is a personal historical narrative and her striving to change is the narrative she has for her future. Billet and Somerville (2004:315) emphasize that identity depends on the person, and by implication on the stories they tell about themselves. It is significant that Liesl uses the metaphor of war to describe her relationship with her mother: her narrative is about conflict and her metaphor is war. Liesl's identity is conflicting and so are her narratives.

In the stories that Liesl tells about her brother, the physical context of her narratives changes: when her brother is in jail she provides for him. When her brother is released and moves to another city, she feels imprisoned by circumstances. From the following transcription it is clear that she and her brother swap protagonist roles:

Yes, and he finish his matric. He did management. Business management. Everything he did in, in jail. But that time I was like, I was doing school. I finished my matric in 2002. Before that I was working: during the week, weekends and I was attending school as well. But I finished my matric because um, I wanted him to further his education in jail. He needed books and stuff. I applied him with that, I supply him with that... so ja...

()

Yes, yes and he wanted to better his life. Um ja and now things like I'm the black sheep because I have three kids and I don't have a job and look at my brother who's been in jail since he was 16 years old. Today he's 35, 34 and today he's got his own place, he's got

a car, he's got money. And me? I was at home, because I had my mom, I had a job and I'm at home now sitting with nothing. (Liesl I1:57-67)

She is troubled by her loss of caring agency and is embarrassed to find herself needing support. In the last interview Liesl reports that her brother is surprised and happy for her successes during the course. Liesl's embarrassment at having become the dependent is replaced with pride in her achievements:

So ja, he's helping me quite a bit and he was so um um um um um surprised when I gave him my test results /()/ And he was like wow my sister I can see you really want to do this. (Liesl I2:49-53)

Her brother lives in another city and her narrative about resigning from a job to move to this city seems to suggest that a different location will solve her problems. It is significant that she had resigned from a previous job on her brother's instruction:

I didn't go back to work. The last one I had I resign actually because my brother told me I think Liesl, it is better when you come stay with me. (Liesl I1:124-125)

This narrative about her dream job in that city makes only passing reference to having to abandon her children. Success in Liesl's narrative is presented as somewhere in the future in a different city without her children, although other narratives contradict this stance, for example:

To be honestly don't see myself without my kids /()/ Ja, lots of times when I feel like crying they (her children) they support me. They make me smile. Especially Amy, that was the smallest one of the two. She nearly DIED... with birth and um ja... so that's how I'm deep in my heart. (Liesl I1:139-143)

The present reality of caring for three children is the fulcrum of her identity. She identifies very strongly as a mother. The small stories she shares about herself are about being a mother caring for her children. In the small story about building a wire car, she is the agent who cares and spends time with her son:

I'm not perfect but I'm trying my best. And um (laugh) my child had this project. They must do a draadkarretjie⁴², what you call it? (laughs)/()/ So um yesterday so he took it to school, that's what I was working on during the night and um he received the best um points for his project, his car and I was like really proud (laughs) of MYSELF, because I helped him, AND of him. But I was doing it WITH him and we really enjoyed it. (Liesl I2:97-102)

⁴² small wire car

She expresses pride in this event and immediately contrasts this to her experience of a verbally-abusive mother. She guards this identity as mother and expresses fear that she will be usurped by her own mother whilst she is away from home working:

... and now she feels for me like she's trying to replace ME by becoming THEIR mother... (Liesl I1:76)

She is a caring mother but also a threatened mother. The narratives about her own motherhood are layered with contradiction. On the one hand she says:

Sometimes, just sometimes it feels like I'm failing my kids... in a way... because they used to having stuff and at the moment when they ask me, we doan have. (Liesl I1:72-73)

On the other hand she says:

I need to be the mommy when I get home. (Liesl I1:83)

and

I do have kids, I've got three kids and um, I wanted, I want to try and give them more. In the sense that to further their education. Not just only grade 12 but to go to 'varsity or wherever they want to go. And in order for me to give them that, I need to do something with my life which is positive. And I think this is like it is really positive. (Liesl I1:32-36)

The "this" of this quote is a reference to the workplace literacy programme which she is busy doing. In this quote she is the agent who is doing something to change the trajectory of her life.

The small story about her daughter suckling in hospital weaves the dominant themes of Liesl's identity; her motherhood and her faith. The following small story is introduced into her identity building with:

I want to tell you this story. (Liesl I1:152)

The story is about her motherhood, but it is also presented as the reason for her faith:

Um I was actually – they sent me home with the one child because I couldn't go in the ward with... with a child which is not sick. We had to go home and travel in and out of hospital every day. So this one day um I couldn't go because I had to be at the clinic with the other one and I sent someone else with breastmilk just to go and take it for her. And they told me but now your kid is like losing weight. You need to come in although you have another one you have to bring the child with. So I went in there. I was there plus minus two days and I was always talking to her. Just being there for her. So what she couldn't like suck on my breast because she couldn't just do it. (hhh) She was too small. And um, just this one day, it was like something told me like (mimicking voice) "Liesl, go

outside. Buy yourself a drink. And when you come upstairs you drink a little bit of it and you wash your hands and take your child and put the child on your breast. (HHHH Laugh) I couldn't believe my child, my child start sucking in my breast. I was like I was sitting and crying, just thanking the Lord the whole time. Even before that... He has always been there. Always. (Liesl I1:154-166)

This story was offered as a sequel after declaring that “God. Honest God.” (Liesl I1:149) was the one thing that kept her going in a life with multiple narratives of failure. While the dominant role that Liesl plays in her narratives is that of mother, the meaning in her life is derived from faith. She identifies as having faith beyond church affiliation. Buck (2008:348) points out that values and faith are critical to identity. At the end of the first interview, as an ad hoc codicil, Liesl asks a direct question about reconciling evolution and creationism. Bamberg (2011:4) deduces importance from the placement of a particular vignette within the framework of the interview: for Bamberg ad hoc placement signifies great importance. The question of belief conflict is important to Liesl and indicates that this is integral to her identity. She is trying to transmit beliefs to her son without contradicting her own traditional existential myths. She is the agent of faith for her son but the demands of the curriculum threaten her identity as a creationist. She listens to my suggestion and then reflects my answer as a report: she tells me that she has followed my argument exactly with her son. My suggestion becomes her reported narrative:

Because I, I try to explain to him like that because God made the humans They didn't describe how He made them so I try to explain to him just try to take like both and make it one. God made... MAYBE God did that shape. That's why we were called humans because God created you. That's how I explain it to him. (Liesl I1:187-190)

Part of Liesl's constructedness of identity is that she can resolve uncertainty by erasing temporal limits. She assumes immediate agency and reports as though the future conversation happens routinely. Quite simply, I understand that Liesl is doing what Mischler (2004) has called retelling of stories to demarcate her identity, or taking control by claiming agency (Bamberg, 2011:9).

An exploration of Liesl's identity has brought me to an understanding that she resides in conflicting layers of different versions of herself in relation to her family. The role which her identity played in this workplace literacy development phase of her life is that she has been able to separate and evaluate the narratives of her identity.

The outcome of this literacy development is that she has taken agency in rejecting her mother's narrative. She has been able to enjoy the intellectual challenge and scored exceptionally high

marks for tests. She has thrived on the social acknowledgement of the *handeklap* (applause) of fellow students. This contextual response of the individual is anchored in a sense of belonging. In rejecting her mother's narrative Liesl has realigned her identity with a nascent social confidence: she repeatedly expressed enjoyment of the classes and concluded her interviews with a description of the network created by the students. My sense was that she had found a new narrative of herself as socially connected. The sophistication of multiplicity of identity presented a palliative response to the fractured constructedness of her identity. For Liesl an ontological shift made the development of workplace literacy personally significant.

4.2.3 Making sense of Msa's narrative portrait

Msa has a very strong sense of his own alterity. The double construct of his identity derives from his singular sense of himself as a man, but also from his indelible connection to his community (Woodward, 2002:vii). His identity is plural in that he derives identity not only from himself but also from his community (Sen, 2000). Msa does not derive identity from communal reciprocity for identity, as in the African humanist concept of *ubuntu* (Otunga, 2005:49), but rather from his own agency for bringing hope and change to his community:

Even if I call them I can tell them some stories 'cause most of them they have no hope.
(Msa I1:43)

Msa presents himself as a deeply concerned outsider in his community because of his alterity. Rudd (2007:60) states that alterity manifests in stories told about the self. The social construction of alterity manifests in Msa's small stories about his childhood, always in a social and familial context. Of his first words to me are:

Apparently he is living he is living on his own, on his own. So now, after he has moved from his family. My family is not here – (Msa I1:125-16)

Msa describes the only meeting he had with his father while he was dying. The "image will never disappear on (my) life" (Msa LS:7-8) because that nadir experience at the deathbed of an uncaring, polygamous father changes Msa's definition of himself.

I have never seen him in my life as an (sic) loving caring and supportive man to his family as other man do – (Msa LS:5)

Msa takes on the mantle of manhood as he rejects his father's version of it. I interpret this as a rejection of his father as a role model. He was a boy of ten or eleven years old but from that time he considered himself to be a man. This narrative shows that Msa's identity as a man can be traced to a particular incident in his childhood. During the interviews Msa declares a life purpose to bring hope to his community by being a grown man. He says he will speak about life in his community

where fathers are absent or silent. Msa's identity as a man derives from this pivotal incident in his childhood and becomes his *modus vivendi* for the future.

Part of the constructedness of Msa's identity is that he tells different stories about himself in different places. He repeatedly tells me he is from the Eastern Cape.

So for now I have been move from there to Western Cape as to fix my life to make it better for my children try to settle my life /()/ I am now in Western Cape to make it better. To fix my life. To make it a better life for my future. (Msa 11:18-21)

Msa's narrative moves spatiotemporally between places: he is from the Eastern Cape, is now in the Western Cape and he intends to live out his future narrative back in the Eastern Cape. The context of Msa's future narrative in his place of origin and his community:

I mean a man even when even the younger young people can learn from him. Be a role model in the location because I've seen lot of kids have lost hope. Nowhere to go. Playing in the streets. Sitting around the corners. Smoking what what. Using drugs and alcohol. So I really want to be better man for them. Even if I call them I can tell them some stories 'cause most of them they have no hope. (Msa 11:40-44)

For Ferdman (1990:183), "to ignore group membership is to deny an important part of the individual." Msa explains how he as a black man will be heeded only once he has proven himself. His identity derives from his ethnicity and culture:

I do this to fix my community. I do not want to move up... I do not want to move up into the suburbs, I want to live with my people and speak to them. (Msa 12:19-20)

At the completion of the workplace literacy course he affirms his intention to return to work and work better so that he can afford to build a house for his mother:

Ja, I can say if... firstly, if I could build my home ja, for my mother ja ja, if I build my home- /()/ you have to prove yourself. You see if I could build that, to get that image to build my mother's home. (Msa 13:49-54)

He uses the literacy development to strengthen his cultural identity as a man who must provide. Another layer in the constructed identity of Msa is his reported narrative of his poverty:

Life wasn't easy for me as I grew up in a poor family, my mother played a vital role to ensure that we all attend school and trying to provide food for us as very well. (Msa LS:1-3)

He says:

Apparently I'm coming from a poor poor poor family. (Msa 11:23)

Bamberg (2011:4) regards the use of third person narration as a type of shying away from the events. Msa told me many times that he was from a poor family. What is significant is that the narrative was “apparent”, as if he was adopting this narrative from others.

This is borne out by the small story about the elderly hotel guest who questions Msa about his job:

*I have seen people who are living where I am working, who told me (Mimicks old man),
“Come here young man, why are you here?. What are you doing here?” I say no.
“What, why?” I told him I am coming from a poor village where there was no money to
take me to higher... higher... maybe colleges, what what but else that () He told me
that is not an excuse. (Msa I1:105-109)*

When Msa replies that poverty has put brakes on his dreams, the old man rejects this. At the end of the course Msa returns to this story and on two occasions emphasizes that he intends to seek out the old man and acknowledge that poverty is not a good excuse:

*...and I will tell him I am not happy with that answer. I do not have that excuse. I believe I
can do it. I can be strong. Even if my family was poor, it is not an excuse. (Msa I3:12-14)*

At the first telling of this story, the agent for change was the questioning old man, but in the final narration Msa has become the agent who rejects what had apparently been the narrative truth about poverty as his scapegoat.

Msa remembers youth counsellors who, after returning from working in larger cities, gathered the local children to encourage them to complete their schooling. Msa wants to become like the youth leaders of his story. On completion of the course he feels that he has the authority to encourage others to study. He has done the learning so that he can promote learning, as his culture demands of him. Msa thinks that the biggest difference the course has made to him is that he has found a voice, because he has done something and can now do something in his community. His agency has given him a voice. It was remarkable that Msa literally found his voice: the initial recordings were barely audible and by the end of the course he was speaking boldly during interviews and during class. He offered a small story about his own refutation of a childhood belief that all white people were racist: he not only revised his folk theories, but was able to articulate them. Msa’s voice became an audible bodily expression of his increased confidence and his reappraisal of myths.

A theme in the interviews with Msa is his love of learning:

Msa is like to read because if I see a paper I like to read () because if something is written I find contact. Something motivating, something impressing. I'd love to read. (Msa 11:50-51)

What is significant about this quote is that it was in reply to a question about how he distinguished between himself and other young people. He tells a small story about careless study and incorrect subject choices at school but then expresses the intention of going back to his community to encourage children to learn wisely. Msa's expressed future narrative is to correct the faulty narrative of his past.

Msa has a very high regard for education. He speaks of loving learning. Books "impress" him. Education is a passion and defines him.

I feel studying it is like the only thing that can open anything in the world I believe that education is the key to open everything in life – (Msa 11:97-98)

The metaphor of education as a key is also the key to Msa's identity as a lifelong learner. Msa's small stories about education position him as an agent for educational change:

... because when you have learned something you get more strength in life for, for to face your problems and even sometimes people lose hope, end up with drinking and committing suicide, crimes because they they are depressed they can't even help their own problems so if you have learned you get more knowledge, development. (Msa 11:67-70)

Msa expresses the intention to work differently by learning about his customers. He will be a different and better worker because he is learning:

So I think I will I will get another opportunity where I work now to be to learn more things than what I was doing before. That was just serving customers to get paid only. I have learned, I will try to learn more and more and more things and getting experience as I will become a hotel manager. (Msa 13:64-67)

Another aspect of Msa's values is his deep faith. James (1892:192) wrote that man finds deep comforting friendship or "socius" in faith, as illustrated in Msa's words:.

I will gain knowledge and I learn about being closer to Jesus. And learning more about being closer to Jesus He have good things for us and change our whole lives. (Msa 11:78-79)

It is clear from Msa's small stories about his religious mother and his own expressions of faith that spiritual identity (James, 1892:177) is dominant in his identity. He concludes his self-written life story with a short prayer for divine guidance and blessing:

I wish Lord may guide me to every decision I have taken in my life. (Msa LS:16-17)

I understand Msa as a man with bold alterity and constructedness of identity expressed in the themes of faith, community and lifelong learning. He seems to have become a more confident version of himself.:

Before I came here, you can say, I was having lack of confidence. But since I've come here I've got confi- self-confidence. I can speak, I'm not shy even if I come here, I've learned good communication skills. I will, I think I will do better. I will learn more, I can say that. (Msa I3:85-88)

He has gained stature and has a prouder bearing; he has embodied his empowerment:

Yes, I'm not like this (folds both arms inward and bends forwards) I'm not like this now. I'm open now, (opens arms wide, palms up) welcome and witnessing – (Msa I3:90-91)

His agency from his learning feeds into his dreams for fixing his community. This gives him the voice or authority he needs to reify the hope he has for his community.

4.2.4 Making sense of Nadine's narrative portrait

McAdams (2012:15) writes that meaning is derived from the compilation of stories that a person presents about themselves. This collage of personal narratives points to the layers of identity known as constructedness. The story that Nadine chooses to start her life story with is an allusion to Wonder Woman. She types the words in bold in her life story. In her own explanation Wonder Woman conquers the world with love:

*Why Wonder Woman? She was a hero of course. She was strong and courageous. And whatever life throws at me, I'll channel my inner "**hero**" and go for it. Regardless of circumstance and go for whatever makes me happy. (Nadine LS:18-20)*

Nadine is adopting a fictional title from childhood to depict herself as an agent for positive change. Her narrative moves from the realm of fantasy to reality and from childhood to adulthood. Her narrative has moved spatiotemporally to position herself in the future. This vignette of Nadine as Wonder Woman is the public persona of power which heals. During interviews she describes herself as caring and kind in the class: she is the Wonder Woman who plays the role of the queen of love.

The significance of the ad hoc insert at the end of the first interview confirms Nadine's image of herself as caring and brave. It is significant that she offers the image of herself as a lioness only after she has heard from me that there are no wrong answers, as Kong, Mahoney and Plummer (2003:117) suggest. It is almost as though this encouragement from the researcher emboldens her. The metaphor of herself as a lioness confirms the strong nurturing image of Wonder Woman. Nadine is indeed assembling small stories to narrate her identity (Bamberg, 2001).

Nadine's explanation of herself as a lioness includes what she calls the clan of the lion. For Nadine, her clan is the small circle of family of mother and sister:

"Um I always think of a lion... a lion is so strong /(/) is proud (deep velvet sound) and sometimes, sometimes I can be really really proud (smiling) /(/) so I'm um... and when a lioness... she always looks after her er... /(/) her cubs and she... sometimes she takes care of them... /(/) caring /(/) compassion. So I'm that lion. I'm strong. Courageous.
(Nadine I1:170-180)

She often refers to the approval given by her mother and her own motivation to "progress, move forward and make a better life" (Nadine I1:41) for her small family, which she calls a "knit" (Nadine I1:160). In her small stories she positions herself as a protagonist. She is the caregiver and protector. Her family is her identity and motivation.

Another layer of her identity lies in the traditional "churchy" upbringing she has had:

I grew up in a very Christian home. My father was very... very church..., he was a deacon, and my mother's... she's very... churchy (laughs)... churchy, but they, they... /(/) In a good way, yes. And the Christian people they raised me and my sister to be good Christians. We go to Sunday school. DO the right thing. GIVE unto others. And... the Lord will bless you. And that kind of... so I grew up strong Christian beliefs and we were taught to value yourself. Value other people's things. Respect yourselves. Respect others. (Nadine I1:94-101)

In the text of her life story reference to God is done in bold type. It is evident that she does not keep to the habits of church attendance, but she does subscribe to the values of her upbringing:

I am a believer and I believe God had different plans for my life. Although I felt like a failure and a let a down, I simply kept the faith. (Nadine LS:8-9)

She illustrates what James (1892:177) has called a "spiritual me" to derive a value-based individuality (Stevens, 1996:20). Given the verbs, *be*, *do*, *change* and *can* that Nadine uses to explain what she means to be the guiding values of her family's values, I interpret her values as ontological. Her being is faith-based, although not church based.

When Nadine is asked about her own eulogy, she wants to be remembered as a “good woman”, which she translates as “n geleerde vrou”⁴³. She wants to be remembered as an educated woman. Nadine wants her posthumous narrative to be about education. She uses the image of education as a line that is drawn across poverty. She positions herself in the present as an example to cousins and children in the community, encouraging learning, chasing children to do homework and teaching her aunt computer skills. She says:

I wanna better my life for myself, for my mother, my sister. (Nadine I1:42-43)

and

If they see... if they see me, they see me... or they ask where do you come from? (Mimicks a dialogue) From class (Joyful) I'm on a course. I say I learned stuff. You should go do your homework. Do this. Do that. Finish school. Stuff like that. (End of dialogue with children) Like that I wanna be a pioneer or a role model for others as well. (Nadine I1:59-62)

Her present narrative as student positions her to be eulogized as educated. Nadine’s legacy is also her redemptive future narrative away from poverty:

I think is education very important. It's that line. It's that line that will break you from poverty. It cuts the line. So if I'm educated I can survive, I can, I can do a lotta things. You can do a lot of things. It's like line – it cuts you. It can divide. You can do a lot of things with education... (Nadine I1:129-131)

Nadine identifies keenly with the students in the class. She regards herself to be a part of the class and uses the image of classmates as trace friends:

I was thinking there I was thinking some of the stories I can relate to and that we are not too different from each other afterwards. We have trace friends. We have a lot in common. A lot of us have fathers who have passed on. So I can relate on that level – (Nadine I1:16-17)

She adopts team work willingly during training. She identifies so strongly with the group that she is surprised when I ask what makes her special. She emphatically denies being special and underscores the shared narratives of the loss of loved ones and the feeling of wanting to move out of unemployment and financial dependence:

Special? (Gentle surprise, smiles) I'm not special, but what I can say.../()/ Is that um... a lot of them, they had hardships. I didn't have that. I always had food. There was always

⁴³ an educated woman

there when I want something. ... On that level I couldn't relate to all they said "We had nothing to eat... or we couldn't eat... or... I had to go to school on an empty stomach... so I couldn't relate to that but on OTHER LEVELS I could relate in terms of a LOSS and... in terms of living, where we are at, we doan wanna be there where we are at right now. We wanna study... we wanna go forward in life. (Nadine 11:29-38)

It is at the end of the course that Nadine expresses a sense of her own alterity because of academic success, illustrating Bamberg's interpretation of identity narrative as a movement from sameness to uniqueness (2011:4). During the second interview she says:

I thought about it – and I think I am special. Not in an obnoxious way, just what I've achieved here. I never thought I could do it. I would be able to... I wasn't good at maths at school but today I got 18 outta 19. (Nadine 12:83-85)

Her repositioning of herself as singular leads to a virtuous circle of identity reinforcement (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007:12). Nadine claims a change of mindset and attitude:

The biggest thing for me is I definitely gained more confidence and coming out of my shell more. /()/ Before this I was very withdrawn but now I'm a little more, I'm more open to new people, working in a team and so on. (Nadine 12:4-8)

She also says:

My mindset has definitely changed. /()/ The attitude has changed. (Nadine 12:75, 77)

She has discovered the power of questioning:

Nadine was moved by the power of asking why. She said that she had never ventured into that way of thinking before. She confirmed the notion that knowing the reason helped her to engage in the task and motivated her to complete tasks. (FN September 1, 2016)

Tagoe (2013:713) describes empowerment as a "multilevel construct". In her alterity and constructedness of identity Nadine presents multiple small stories about the layers of her own identity as it becomes virtuously strengthened during the training. She reports that she has applied for a bursary to study because she now realizes that she qualifies for funding, rather than accepting, as she had done previously, that she and her family would not be able to afford the fees. Nadine's repositioning of herself as empowered and unique emerges as a contextual response to the context of workplace literacy learning. The constructedness of her identity is the base of the virtuous circle of confidence she has identified in herself. The role of her being in this context of learning is that her own understanding of herself serves as the baseline narrative for the new narrative of an augmented identity.

4.2.5 Condensed reflection of researcher

For the purposes of this study a research journal was kept to reflect on methodology and a reflexive journal was kept to create a narrative of perceived ontological changes during the writing of the thesis. It was compiled over a period of eight months. The collated journal has been stored with the other data and is available for inspection on request.

A condensed reflection, presented in a different font to distinguish it from the academic text, is given here and followed by an analysis, using the interpretative parameters applied to the narrative portraits of the interviewees.

“I can feel the discomfort of unpremeditated definitionlessness”, are the first words in my journal. I use the image of learning as a journey, which I start off feeling under-estimated academically but also intimidated. I use the image of swimming and express growing confidence, using the image of turning to face the tide. There seems to be tension between intellectual excitement and physical exhaustion as the course progresses. The volume of the work causes social isolation but I have a sense that I am breaking the cycle of social acquiescence as I rediscover myself in my own eyes and in the eyes of my community. My family tells me that I have become mindful and that I am listening attentively to them: I am wearing phenomenological contact lenses! I am bolder and calmer. I refer to the sure knowledge that mazes do have exits. I find myself thinking that it is more than a belief: it is a fact that I will complete this course.

My narrative affirms my identity as a learner. I am finding a new sense of self in the rediscovery of myself as a scholar – this was later confirmed by my husband and my supervisor. I express a sense of agency in the metaphor of the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg as I sharpen my focus on learning and take responsibility for working ethically.

‘Calm’, ‘clear’, ‘less blinded’, ‘sift and discard’ ... these are words I use to reflect on my journey of learning. I am comparing myself to scholars, disliking some and emulating others. I have a reckless, joyful abandon and comfort in seeking out new theories and ideas. I have stopped apologizing for being passionate about my practice and how to grow it. I am emboldened and offer help with ideas for training. I am speaking up, getting involved. It dawns on me that I am developing a new literacy for my future work. I am a student of work and of life.

The final metaphor of my journal is that I am a deep river that looks forward to the precipice that causes the waterfall’s cascade.

A “double construct of identity” is evident in this reflective text (Stevens, 1996). Alterity is the anchor of an identity expressed as difference of self, whilst in the necessary context of the social (Woodward, 2002,viii)⁴⁴. The researcher is conscious of the alterity between the self and the social. The outcome of the journey of learning is that the researcher can position herself as having social capital which is perceived as personal empowerment arising from the learning. The dyad of alterity and the “social me” of James (1892:177) manifests in the reflective text as “the management of agency”, according to Bamberg (2011:3). The researcher is taking control of the exchanges with the world by rejecting imposed narratives and initiating opportunities for training.

The narrated identity is constructed by using imagery. There are two dominant metaphors in the text: vision (T.J. Eckleburg’s eyes, contact lenses, focus) and water (swimming, facing the tide, river becoming a waterfall). This indicates identity positioning as a contextual response to the changing environment, again perceived to be a result of the learning. The text depicts fluidity of identity as the self is perceived to be “dynamic”, in the sense of being engagingly responsive (Tanggaard, 2009:150). The researcher perceives herself to be looking at her world in a new way, with new eyes but also with intrepidity, having grown away from the discomfort expressed at the beginning of the journal. This is also reflected in the image of a river wanting the exhilaration of the waterfall’s cascade, which speaks of courage and empowerment- no longer fearing the tide, but facing it.

The empowerment is embodied as finding voice, expansive abandon and social courage. Elsewhere in the journal a reference to power dressing seems to be a manifestation of the “material me” of James’ (1892:177-178). The researcher becomes vocal and visible as ontological shifts are embodied.

4.3 DISCUSSION

This discussion which attempts to make meaning of the interviewees’ narration of their ontological identities is phenomenological in the sense that it presents separate accounts of the lived experience (Dukes, 1984:198). The discussions of the four interviewees are not collated because the phenomenological lens is phenomenon-specific. I shall discuss links between the expectations for workplace literacy learning and my understanding of these students of workplace literacy education. I shall then seek parallels between my own ontological journey as post-graduate student and the learning of my students from a workplace literacy context.

⁴⁴ James (1892:176) terms this the “self as knower” or “pure ego” which forms the total identity with the known, empirical self, which comprises a “material me”, a “social me” and a “spiritual me”.

The demands of workplace literacy manifest as a shift of identity, not away from one identity towards another, but rather as an augmentation and deepening of the present ontological constructedness of the individual. The interviewees of this study did not become different individuals but rather experienced a heightened sense of agency and an awareness of their own projected identity positioning. Their rejection of external narratives and the adoption of desirable future narratives point to emergent self-actualization. I understand that the context of workplace literacy development becomes personally significant as participants experience a heightened sense of self as being empowered or embodying empowerment.

Candy found the voice to surface childhood abuse. She moved from shy to vocal. She took agency to vocalize social correctives, which she called honesty. She gained the confidence to not only name her own good characteristics, but also regarded herself to have gained social capital which she could “see” in the eyes of the community.

Liesl’s hesitant movement towards agency was rejecting maternal narratives of herself as a failure. She gained social capital by growing a social network.

Of all the interviewees Msa demonstrated the boldest embodied agency: his voice literally became audible. He took agency by returning to work as a critically engaged worker with the intention of continued learning. His future narrative of being a “grown man”, which means that he will provide shelter and food and be an example in his community of origin is evidence of the virtuous circle that present empowerment leads to future agency. By doing this he rejected the narrative of himself as a victim of poverty.

Nadine reported confidence and finding a voice, not only to speak, but also to question. She expressed a future narrative as a role model and an agent for change.

The heightened sense of agency of the students was found to parallel that of the researcher. These perceived gains of researcher and interviewees are summarized in Table 4.1. What emerges from the comparison is that both researcher and most of the students perceived themselves to have found a voice, personally and in the community. Personal confidence and social engagement had led to a sense of agency and social capital. Most parties had found the courage to reject negative narratives from outside and displayed an embodiment of the confidence experienced. The sense of agency led to the adoption critical thinking and hopeful future narratives. This increase in confidence in the interviewees echoes what has been identified as a major outcome of workplace

literacy development relating to ontological identity: personal changes result in empowerment (Tagoe, 2013:7177; Rhoder & French, 1994:114).

Table 4.1 Perceived gains of researcher and interviewees

Perceived gains of researcher	Candy	Liesl	Msa	Nadine
Finding a voice personally	x		x	x
Finding a voice in the community	x		x	x
Personal confidence	x	x	x	x
Social engagement	x	x	x	x
Agency in community/social capital	x		x	x
Rejecting imposed narratives	x	x	x	
Embodied change	x		x	x
Critical engagement		x	x	x
Adopting future narrative			x	x

The parallels between students and the researcher could be summarized as forms of empowerment. Empowerment is when the person develops a sense of having potency for driving action. Eakle (2007:472) writes that literacies are inseparable from power. The sense of empowerment creates a “virtuous circle” as the person gains confidence and so exercises more agency or power in society (Rhoder & French, 1994; Maddox, 2007; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007; Juchniewicz, 2012). A feeling of empowerment manifests as social engagement and a new-found ability to speak: the figurative sense of finding voice becomes literal: the social capital gains are reified as the vocal and audible participation in the conversation of life on a community level (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007), but also in the family arena (Frazee, 1996:4-5). Personal capital becomes family capital (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When the analyses of interviewees and researcher are juxtaposed, empowerment on different levels is manifest. There seem to be many parallels between gains perceived by researcher and gains observed and reported by the interviewees.

The parallels shown in this table confirm the expectations from research reported by Deetz (1994), Vandeyar (2010) and Merchant and Carrington (2009:63) into identity formation in the workplace, shifting academic identities and literacy development respectively. The data and results of this study are not unexpected: identity has been found to shift in contexts of learning. This study done in the context of workplace literacy development confirms that ontological identity does play a role in the development of workplace literacy development.

What is interesting is the apparent similarity of refocusing of ontological identity between the interviewees at market entry level and the researcher at post-graduate level. Furthermore Bitzer and van den Berg (2012) find identity changes typical of doctoral candidates, specifically determination, criticality, persuasion and intellectual curiosity, which this study has surfaced as manifest in entry level workplace literacy students, as well as the researcher.

The adoption of future narratives (Nadine speaks of starting a foundation for education, Msa expresses determination to build his mother a house and become a youth motivator as he returns to do his same job “better” and the researcher’s metaphors of “facing the tide” and moving towards the waterfall) confirms the determination borne of learning.

Critical engagement is evidenced in the researcher’s rapacious appetite for theory, in Liesl’s questioning of existential myths, in Msa’s rejection of blanket racism and Nadine’s appreciation of “why” as a part of learning as an adult. Rhoder and French (1994:116) and Waterhouse & Deakin (1995:499) have also identified critical thinking as a necessary outcome of workplace literacy.

The empowerment to persuade, translatable not only as becoming audible (Msa and Candy), is evident in the rejection of imposed narratives and the perceived gain of social capital, which Candy can “see in their eyes”. For the students of this study their greatest empowerment is that they have persuaded themselves to take up agency, resulting in personal confidence and social engagement. Intellectual curiosity is the subtext to the narratives about the value of education as the break from poverty (Nadine), the chance of a better future for children (Liesl and Msa), the love of reading and learning (Msa) and the positioning of the self as a lifelong learner (Msa and researcher).

Standing on the shoulders of Iedema and Scheeres (2003), who report commonalities of identity shifts (at all levels from academics to workers) needed to cope with postmodern organizational shifts, I wish to argue that the data of this study has indicated that ontological identity is a derivative of learning, rather than a derivative of the context and level of the learning.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented data as a voice for identity and has also attempted to make sense of these voices to answer the research question about the role of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy. The interpretation of the data points to ontological identity as the site of learning. When the data analysis is reframed by research in different contexts of learning for

the changing world of work, the results point to implications for theory, policy, practice and further research, which will be discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The stimulus for this study was questions which arose during my practice as an adult literacy trainer. I started noticing changes in students which I could not explain in terms of the content of the learning material. As I started learning to do my work as literacy trainer, I found anecdotal evidence of parallels between outcomes of my own learning and that of neo-literates. This study was conducted to explore the nature of personal changes in the arena of workplace literacy development, my area of practice. My reading of research about literacy development lead me to numerous studies linking literacy and identity, confirming my experience in the field. I started exploring the possibility of defining literacy in terms of identity. This led me to the domain of ontology.

This study was designed to interpret what the role was of ontological identity in the context of workplace literacy acquisition. Unstructured interviews were conducted with four students from the learning context at the beginning and end of a short entry level job readiness course to uncover whether or not identity shifts had taken place. My findings were collated with field notes from my participant observation and juxtaposed to reflective texts by the students and my own reflective journals during the research. The data were amalgamated as narrative portraits, which were then interpreted according to definitions of identity inferred from the interviews. These findings were again weighed against existent findings of identity formation in different contexts and at different levels. The data confirm the juncture of this workplace literacy education and ontological identity strengthening, paralleled in other learning contexts.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

Despite warnings by Dukes (1984:202), Babbie and Mouton (2001:81) and Eakle (2007:483) that phenomenological research does not give clear, categorical answers to the research question, this type of research does create understanding.

The research question for this study concerns the role, if any, of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy. I answer this question in the first person since as un-bracketed researcher I am co-producer of the data. This research is a unique record of four students entwined with me in conversations about identity during August and September 2016 at a specific place. Context defines phenomenological research; Haas (1964:98) points out that phenomenological

understanding builds on uniqueness, contingency and generality. This means that the findings of this study are bound and limited by the specific time and context of the study.

The understanding that has emerged from this study is that ontological identity does indeed play a role in the development of workplace literacy. The site of workplace literacy development is understood to be a refocused ontological identity, regardless of the academic level of the workplace literacy development when the findings of this study are collated with research into learning at different academic levels. This means that being is the seat of learning for the workplace.

5.3 POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Two potential areas for further research have arisen from this study: questions about the site of learning and the possibility for a need for a theory of learning.

5.3.1 Identity as the site of the learning

Given these limitations I have found that ontological identity does indeed play a role in the learning environment for workplace literacy development. The demands of workplace literacy manifest as a shift of identity, not away from one identity towards another, but rather as an augmentation and deepening of the present ontological constructedness of the individual. The interviewees of this study did not become different individuals but rather experienced a heightened sense of agency and an awareness of their own projected identity positioning. The context of workplace literacy development became personally significant as participants experienced a heightened sense of self as being empowered or embodying empowerment. This means that learning for the workplace is personally important and somehow contributes to a re-appreciation of the personal power to engage and gear into the world of world.

This view that workplace learning is ontologically situated is significant because, although the link between identity and literacy has been researched and reported elsewhere (Moje & Luke, 2009), and the desired outcomes of workplace literacy have been linked to identity shifts (as discussed in section 3.5), this study has brought an understanding that the being of the student is the site of the learning for workplace preparation. If the site of learning is the personal identity, or phrased differently, if nuances of identity are derivatives of the learning, then the locus of learning is the phenomenon of being. In practical terms this might mean that a workplace literacy trainer teaches for personal nuance and strengthening, rather than for skills transfer. The vehicle of learning would be the various contents of workplace literacy programmes but the epistemology informing the facilitation must needs change because it becomes ontological.

The possible **implications for practice** are that workplace literacy facilitation becomes ontological practice, which confirms Åkerlind's (2012) suggestion that research with a phenomenologic lens tends to inform practice, rather than being theoretically generalizable. Following Scheffler, 1960, cited by Roberts, 2005, I argue that this study points to a prescriptive definition (as it ought to be) of a particular (here, workplace) literacy: workplace literacy ought to be regarded as located in the ontological identity of the student. A possible implication of this study for practice is that practitioners would need to make an epistemological shift so that the delivery of workplace literacy accommodates this paradigmatic shift from content and skills to epistemology. I am arguing that the outcome of workplace literacy is possibly enhanced when the epistemology and methodology of workplace literacy education is ontologically based. Workplace literacy is about the person more than the content. Practitioners would need to be trained to facilitate identity refocusing through the presentation of the literacy content: content is the vehicle for the learning outcomes which manifest as nuancing of identity.

Practice is usually shaped by policy (Robinson, 2013:232). If practice were to change, the governing **policy** would also have to change. Ironically the non-profit organization where the research for this study was done is not governed by any governmental policy. I would argue that the onus is on organizations operating in the sector of workplace literacy development to generate practice-informing policy "to reflect (the) particular set of values and intentions for education" so that practice accommodates the ontological site of learning, to follow Robinson. I am suggesting that organizations facilitating workplace learning should train facilitators to adopt this stance, regardless of whether government formulates policies. However, it is not feasible to advocate change until the impetus for change can be identified. I am saying that practice could change but this needs to be informed by research. For example:

- What specifically in the course of workplace literacy development is the trigger for the sense of agency which is perceived to arise during this learning?
- If agency is linked to perceptions and revelations of power and hierarchies, what role does empowerment play in the arena of workplace literacy development?
- What is the role of the reflective stance of the facilitation of workplace literacy development?
- Does the methodological stance have an ontological outcome? Related to this question is the question whether the site of interviews would influence the data, since the site of interviews could be imbued with power for the researcher.
- Is there a link between skills transfer and ontological shifts?
- Why do some, but not all, students grow a sense of agency?

Empirical research needs to be done to determine the exact ontological nuances brought about during workplace literacy development, and then the catalysts for these nuances would need to be identified, and perhaps refined.

The sustainability of the evident ontological benefit of the training would need to be investigated. Questions arising from this are:

- What would qualify as sustainable benefit when life, identity and work are in postmodern flux?
- What would make workplace training meaningfully sustainable?

The possible implications of the finding of this study that the site of workplace literacy development is ontological identity and that identity nuances are derivatives of this learning point to a need for a revision of practice and the underlying and governing policies, based on empirical and transferable research, to which the phenomenological stance does not lay claim to.

5.3.2 Ontological nuances at different levels of learning

A possible question arising from the results of this study raises questions about theory of learning. The results with the literature seem to point to parallels between similarities between the nuancing and shifting of identity as a result of learning for the world of work. I have identified similarities between learning-induced identity changes between entry-level students, myself as researcher at magisterial level and doctoral students (Bitzer & Van den Berg, 2012). I would argue that the workplace literacy students, myself as researcher busy acquiring certification for my practice and the doctoral students were all in some form of learning environment to better equip them for gearing into work. They were arguably all students of workplace literacy, albeit at different levels. If there were comparable- although not identical- ontological shifts at all the levels of learning, the moot question is whether this can be explained in terms of a theory of learning? Is ontological identity change or nuance a derivative of workplace learning specifically or of learning in general? This is a **theoretical question** which merits investigation.

5.4 CODA

I would argue that this study is a contribution towards bringing an understanding that workplace literacy development should inhabit the spaces of the house of being since the findings have pointed towards commonalities of ontological shifts for learning which facilitate gearing into the world of world.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL DOCUMENTS

A1 TEMPLATE FORMS

A1.1 PROJECT INFORMATION FOR NPO STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

RESEARCH PROJECT

INFORMATION TO STUDENTS

One of our trainers is learning about how people carry on learning throughout their lives. She would like to learn from your experience here at XXX. If you would like to – you don't have to do this – she will have about two **conversation interviews** with you. She will write a mini story about you and you can approve it or delete it. You can choose a name for your story of use your own name. She will use this story about how you are learning *to help other people to learn*.

If you would like to join, please tell the head of training and she will contact our student /trainer.

.....

INFORMATION FOR TRAINERS

Student: Rhoda van Schalkwyk

Title of project: Exploring the role of ontological identity in the development of workplace literacy.

Institution: Stellenbosch University – M Phil (Lifelong Learning) II

Practical work: I shall be doing interviews with students in the afternoons to try to get an understanding whether there is any identity change which happens during the training at XXX. I am using story-telling and creative informal discussions. I am obliged to protect anonymity and confidentiality very strictly. No student **MUST** take part, it really is voluntary. I am under strict academic supervision and all my data will be checked for accuracy. Nothing will be used without the students' permission.

Potential benefit to XXX: It is difficult to say whether there will be real benefit but I hope that I will learn something about what actually happens when a student engages with this kind of learning. I hope to learn how we should be teaching. If we know how our students see themselves in the whole process of learning to become employable, we might be able to help them even more meaningfully.

Queries: Please do contact me if you would like more info. I cannot share any confidential data with you, but I am so passionate about this projects that I could talk for a week of Sundays about it with you, if you are interested... perhaps over coffee?

Rhoda van Schalkwyk

021-xxx-xxxx

076-xxx-xxxx

A1.2 PROJECT INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

RESEARCH PROJECT

I am a student at Stellenbosch University.

I am learning how people can keep learning for their whole lives and I need your experience to help me to learn, please. May I speak to you, please?

If you would like to meet me for some informal interview conversations I would be very grateful.

Please tell the head of training that you are comfortable to join the project if:

- you want to help and
- you are doing at least three weeks of training.

I would like meet you for about two 20 minute interviews in the afternoons here at XXX.

I would like to discuss the life story that you write later on.

I will help you to explore stories about yourself as you learn here at XXX.

I will write a small story about you and share it with you.

You can ask me to delete anything.

You can stop being on the project at any time.

You will not be paid.

If you are going to join, **think about a name I can use for you** - like a name in a story - or decide if I can use your real name.

I think I can learn a lot from you. I can learn more from you than I can learn from many books so I do hope you will help me, please. Remember that you only join if you want to. I am sure that you will also learn something from me because I will be listening very carefully to all your special moments as you learn to find a place in the world of work.

Thanks for reading this.

I hope you can help me.

.....
Rhoda van Schalkwyk

076-xxx-xxxx

Student Number 17901357 M Phil (LLL) – final year

A1.3 CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

CONSENT TO BEGIN INTERVIEWS

I heard about Rhoda's research project from the head of training and I would like to be a part of it.

I do this because I want to – nobody is forcing me.

Rhoda will respect me and all information I share with her.

I know that I must approve before anything is used for research.

The name I will you use

.....

Signature:

Place:

Date:

Contact number:

E-mail:

A1.4 CONSENT TO USE LIFE STORY**CONSENT FOR REFLECTION + LIFE STORY**

I am taking part in this **second interview** because I want to do so. I know that I can withdraw if I want to.

Rhoda is doing this study to understand how we all learn during this course. She hopes to use the research so that the volunteers can improve their service to the students who come in future.

I have given Rhoda permission to read my first reflection.

I have given Rhoda permission to read my life story.

Rhoda will respect me and all the writing I share with her.

Rhoda will contact me next week to show me the small story or “picture” that she has written about me. I will then only decide whether she may use this for her research.

My name in the story will be:

My contact number is:

My real name is:

Date:

Place:

.....
Signature

A1.5 APPROVAL OF NARRATIVE PORTRAIT

APPROVAL OF NARRATIVE PORTRAIT AND DATA

**I have read and discussed the portrait which Rhoda wrote about me.
I give her permission to use my portrait in her research.
The portrait that she has written is a true picture of me.
Rhoda may use what she has learned from my interviews in her research report.
Nobody forced me to take part in this study.**

Signature:

Place:

Date:

A2 CLEARANCE DOCUMENTS

A2.1 APPROVAL FROM NPO

From: XXX [mailto:directorXXX@gmail.com] **On Behalf Of** XXX Director
Sent: 20 June 2016 08:57 AM
To: 'Rhoda van Schalkwyk'
Subject: RE: Formal request to do research

Hi Rhoda, I feel quite excited about the learnings we will gain – you have our consent and full support.

Regards
XXX

From: Rhoda van Schalkwyk [mailto:rhodavs@telkomsa.net]
Sent: Monday, 20 June 2016 8:29 AM
To: 'XXX Director' <director@XXX.org.za>
Subject: Formal request to do research

Good morning XXX

Would you please take time to read the attached request to do research at XXX. It is the formal, prescribed letter from the university's ethics committee. I am happy to come in and explain anything. I anticipate that I shall be giving you informal feedback as the project progresses.

Thanks for your encouragement and support in my attempts to get myself responsibly qualified. I am learning from every engagement I have with the students and the organization.

I would appreciate a speedy reply, since I have academic deadlines looming.

Regards
Rhoda

A2.2 CLEARANCE FROM UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

Approved with Stipulations New Application

01-Sep-2016
Van Schalkwyk, Rhoda R

Proposal #: SU-HSD-003091

Title: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF ONTOLOGICAL IDENTITY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKPLACE LITERACY

Dear Ms Rhoda Van Schalkwyk,

Your **New Application** received on **01-Aug-2016**, was reviewed
Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **25-Aug-2016 -24-Aug-2017**

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to:

1) Informed consent and voluntary participation

There are some inconsistencies between the proposal and informed consent form. The informed consent form indicates that participants can use their own names but the proposal says that participants can choose alternate names (as pseudonyms). This should be aligned.

2) Risk to participants

This area does raise some issues of concern. It is a medium risk study and not one that is low risk as identified by the researcher. It is a medium risk study by virtue of the nature of the participants and their marginalised societal status. The researcher, in fact, pays very little attention to ethical consideration of the participants. More focus is placed on ethical consideration of the organisation. Equal emphasis should be placed on both the organisation and participants as it could indicate possible bias towards the organisation and minimise the role of participants in the study.

It is a medium risk study as the researcher cannot predict what may arise when women “tell their stories”. Women may want to highlight really difficult (and possibly traumatic) experiences precisely as they may have a rare opportunity to do so. The possibility of emotional distress should be indicated in the consent form and adequate support in the form of counselling should be offered. [RESPONSE REQUIRED]

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate

ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number** (SU-HSD-003091) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032. We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

Included Documents:

DESC Report

REC: Humanities New Application

Sincerely

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)