ENHANCING A SENSE OF SELF IN A GROUP OF SOCIALLY MARGINALISED ADOLESCENT BOYS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

by

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sought to understand the experience of six participants as members of a cluster group of socially marginalised youth in a farmworker community. Through a collaborative process, the study sought to reframe the perceptions around the behavioural outcomes of membership to such an outcast group. Theories of empowerment through active participation underpinned the whole study. The study was qualitative in nature and used a Participatory Action research methodology which created the space for creative exploration with enabling methodologies such as the Youth Engagement Cycle and Activity Theory. Data were collected through focus group- and semi-structured interviews; participant observation and participant generated artefacts. Six adolescent males who were part of an already established cluster group of socially marginalised youth at a school were purposively selected into the study. The analysis of data was an ongoing and iterative process informed by the theories that underpinned the study and through content analysis of emerging themes.

The study revealed that the cluster group was not formed with delinquent intent. Instead, it was created as a space that allowed its members to feel a sense of belonging, security and being valued. However, the group dynamic caused individual self-efficacy to become so enmeshed with collective agency that if left unchecked, it had the potential to propel its members along a trajectory to delinquency. The dissertation recommends understanding cluster groups as unique heterogeneous entities that show insight and empathy into the challenges their cohorts experience. Recognising that this elevates the peer group's influence above that of adults the study recommends a collaborative, well-structured and strategic intervention that allows individuals to experience success and self-influence in attaining mastery within the group dynamic.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling het ten doel gehad om ses deelnemers se ervaring as lede van 'n 'cluster' groep gemarginaliseerde jongmense binne 'n plaaswerker gemeenskap te probeer verstaan. Deur middel van 'n proses van samewerking, het die studie gepoog om die persepsies rakende die gedragsuitkomste van lidmaatskap binne so 'n geïsoleerde groep te herformuleer. Die hele studie is gebaseer op teorie van bemagtiging deur middel van aktiewe deelname. Die verhandeling was kwalitatief van aard en het gebruik gemaak van 'n Deelnemende Aksie Navorsingsmetodologie wat ruimte geskep het vir kreatiewe ontdekking met bemagtigende metodologieë soos bv. "Youth Engagement Cycle" en "Activity Theory". Data is ingesamel deur middel van 'n fokusgroep en semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude; deelnemer waarneming en deelnemer gegenereerde artefakte. Ses adolessente mans wat reeds deel was van 'n gevestigde groep sosiaal-gemarginaliseerde jongmense by 'n skool, is doelbewus geselekteer vir die studie. Die analise van die data was 'n deurlopende en iteratiewe proses wat belig is deur die teorieë waarop die studie gebaseer was asook deur inhoudsanalise van die ontluikende temas.

Die studie het getoon dat die 'cluster' groep nie gevorm is met misdaad as doel nie. Inteendeel, die groep het ontstaan as 'n ruimte wat sy lede toegelaat het om 'n mate van geborgenheid, sekuriteit en waardering te ervaar. Die groepsdinamiek het individuele self-doeltreffendheid toegelaat om so verbonde te raak met kollektiewe agentskap dat indien dit nie gekontroleer was nie, dit die potensiaal getoon het om sy lede op 'n trajek van jeugmisdaad te plaas. Die verhandeling beveel dus aan dat 'n 'cluster' groep gesien word as 'n unieke heterogene entiteit wat insig en empatie toon met die uitdagings wat lede ervaar. Op grond van die feit dat dit die portuurgroep se invloed bo die van die volwassenes verhef, wil die studie 'n samewerkende, goed-gestruktureerde en strategiese bemiddeling aanbeveel wat die individu sal toelaat om sukses en selfgelding te ervaar met die bereiking van bemeestering binne die dinamiek van die groep.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 168

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

[end of the document]

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

At-risk youth

According to the World Bank (2008:2), the population referred to as at-risk youth is a subset of young individuals between the age 12 and 24 who face "environmental, social, and family conditions that hinder their personal development and their successful integration into society as productive citizens." The concept varies based on the context in which it is used. For the purposes of this study, the term at-risk will relate to the cause and effect dynamics that, according to (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007) place the adolescent on a trajectory to negative future outcomes.

Social marginalisation

Social marginalisation in the context of the study refers to the social exclusion or alienation of the participants in the school environment. The alienation is seen on a continuum which sees marginalisation as a process that develops over time and has as a consequence participants experiencing limited physical, social and academic engagement with the traditional school culture. The experience is marked by behavioural and relational challenges with adults and peers within the school context.

Cluster Group

Within the broader marginalised population at school, smaller groups are formed by individuals. These, sub-cultural groups develop very distinctive cultures and practices. According to Dayton (2007) these groups are well structured and evolve in response to the perceptions of vulnerability and the unique needs of its members.

Group Dynamic

The group dynamic was a very important part of this study. It sought to understand how the group had evolved, and to understand with the participants how the dynamics in the group influence the lived reality of participants. Within this group, it

considered the sense of belonging, shared purpose and vision that members experienced as members of the group. While this created a sense of connectedness and security for the members, it also inhibited their willingness to speak up or to offer different ideas or alternatives to the way they do things. The group resisted anyone or anything that presented challenge to group cohesion. In addition, members were considered disloyal if they challenged the norm or consensus position (Yemm, 2012).

Trajectory to Delinquency

Children at risk of delinquency, tend to display developmental and behaviour patterns that include oppositional defiant behaviour, disruptive behaviour that includes being physically/verbally aggressive, relational aggression and school functioning challenges. The term implies the potential to engage in increasingly anti-social acts that place the individual in direct conflict with authority figures or symbols of authority.

Beneficial life choices

A beneficial life choice is a term used to describe attitudes and values that reflect a prevalence of positive behaviours with regard to choices that impact the quality of life. Responsible decision making that veers away from engaging in behaviour that may be considered risky to their well-being.

Socio-emotional Intelligence

The socio-emotional intelligence frame of reference that will be used in this study is based on the four construct model proposed by Daniel Goleman. This model considers; Self-awareness, the ability to read one's emotions and recognise their impact on yourself and others; Self-management, involves exercising control over ones emotions and flexibility in dealing with changing circumstances; Social awareness, in this context deemed as the ability to sense, understand and react to others emotions and finally, Relationship management, the ability to influence and motivate others while effectively managing conflict (Goleman, 2004).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the extent to which people believe they are capable of exercising influence over events that affect their lives. A strong sense of efficacy influences people's sense of accomplishment and sense of personal wellness. (Bandura, 2006)

Pathways

In this study, pathways is the term used to refer to the interactive and creative actions taken in collaboration with participants to address barriers or resistance to change and to explore new ways of being. The term is adopted in the context of experiential learning, which mediated moments of mastery as stepping-stones to strengthen self-efficacy of the individual participants within the group context.

Scaffolding in Zone of Proximal Development

It is a co-operative learning exercise which sees less competent individuals, developing new skills with help from their more skilful peers. The facilitator mediates learning by creating opportunities for participants to be challenged and exert self-influence in experiencing mastery (Vygotsky, 1978).

Empowerment

The understanding of empowerment in this study aligns with the World Bank's (2008) definition of it being a process that seeks to increase the capacity of individuals to make choices and to transform those choices into actions that produce outcomes beneficial to the individual and the social and occupational context of which they are part.

Alternative Story

This narrative therapy approach represents a shift from a deficit oriented focus to one that focuses on the assets of the individuals and the group in promoting the present

and future well-being of its members (Bandura, 2006). Narrative therapists use the alternative story view as a means for the person to reflect on how things are, how they would want it to be and what they would need to do to create the preferred outcome. This approach further acknowledges that while the challenges may not go away, the person's relationship with the problem can change. To this end, a collaborative approach is adopted that has as its core reflexive practice (Freedman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997).

Symbolic interaction

This refers to the ability of participant's to navigate the complex social dynamics of the group. It requires one to adapt attitudes and behaviour in response to social environment. Among the participants there existed a complex symbolic communication system that was concerned with a process of social affiliation and meaning making within the group. It is tied to communicating connectedness but is also a way in which the group ensures conformity to agreed upon norms, attitudes and practices.

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Conventional discourse around youth gang culture in high-risk communities would have us suppose that when young men gravitate towards each other, the primary reason they do so is to engage in gang or delinquent activity. Research on at-riskness of youth in communities marked by risk factors such as poverty, the absence of positive role models, a high incidence of substance abuse and violence, mostly focuses on the negative aspects of relationships between members. There is a strong suggestion of a simplistic linear causal relationship. I wondered if the relationship was not more complex. While an abundance of empirical evidence suggests that membership in a cluster group has the potential to groom young men in high-risk communities for participation in gangs, this may not necessarily be so. In the absence of positive role models or within the context of challenging social dynamics, I wondered if these groups do not represent more than just a group of friends; in other words, if in essence such groups do not play the role of surrogate families in which young people provide for themselves the elements they need to navigate life successfully in their context.

Adolescence is considered an important transition period from childhood to adulthood. There are innumerable theories that focus on the physical, cognitive and social transitions that a young person navigates as part of this developmental phase (Cooper, 2008; Schmied & Tilly, 2009). Social marginalisation has been described in a number of ways, but its most common feature is the experience of disconnection from key activities in various contexts. Many factors trigger youths' feelings of isolation and disconnection at school, where they operate on the fringes of the school environment and are labelled as disruptive (Schulz, 2006). According to Dayton (2007), youths who feel disconnected from their peer environments tend to gravitate towards those who are also disconnected and form cluster groups. Over time these groups evolve and develop norms and values that establish a sub-culture. Most

research around socially marginalised cluster groups tends to focus on four dimensions of alienation at schools, viz., powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and social estrangement (Mau, 1992 in Schulz, 2006).

In schools those youths who are identified as at-risk are often considered by teachers as too difficult to work with and are often left to their own devices. My interest lies in ascertaining how social marginalisation is experienced by middle-adolescent schoolboys, the sons of farm workers. While a great deal of research has been done on the at-riskness of such boys, there has been very little focus on the alternative story that these boys have to tell from their own perspective. Very little is known about the value of the group in helping at-risk youths navigate the tumultuous period of adolescence in high-risk environments. I am of the view that there is an agentic role that young people can play in this transitioning process.

The aim of this study was to engage with a group of socially marginalised middle-adolescent boys and investigate the specific risk and protective factors experienced by them during this transition period. In this study I set out to research what happens when a group of adolescent boys who were labelled as at-risk are engaged in an intervention that reframes the perception of cluster-group formed as an asset-based response as opposed to a dysfunctional behavioural outcome. This study sought to research and develop a greater sense of self-efficacy, emotional and social intelligence amongst a group of school going adolescent boys considered to be at-risk youths.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A few years ago I was part of a project facilitated by the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch in Winelands farm school. This was an intervention developed to assist the school in developing strategies for working with a group of troublesome youths. During the course of this intervention I observed what appeared to be a sub-group within the generally troublesome populace of the school. These young men appeared to have established a social support network for themselves by forming a closed community in which the members appeared to enjoy a measure of acceptance and support from each other. I was intrigued by the adolescents' ability to create their own system of social support. To me, they seemed

to be showing resilience and agency in the face of rejection in a hostile school environment. The existing socio-cultural perception is that groups of socially marginalised youths in high-risk environments present a risk to themselves and those around them because of the maladaptive behaviour they normalise. It appeared that this group had been established in response to their perceptions and experiences of vulnerability as marginalised individuals. They appeared to be a well-established group, with clear expectations of its members. Each member appeared to have a clearly defined role within the group. The youths who formed part of this group would be classified as belonging to the Type II profile of at-risk youths. The World Bank (2008:2) describes this group as being "vulnerable and at-risk school-based youths who have been identified as difficult and who have formed alliances with other similarly identified 'outcasts'". However, scholars emphasise that we should remain cognisant that behaviours considered problematic in some contexts may in effect help individuals experience themselves as resilient in other contexts.

Doing any research or intervention with regards to self-efficacy, emotional and social intelligence would have to engage with perceptions that achieving or learning alternative ways of being may come through pathways typically thought to indicate vulnerability (Goleman, 2006). It was interesting to note that while the group appeared to have been formed in response to individual perceptions and experiences of vulnerability in the school environment, their confidence in the group's authority had supplanted their individual efficacy. According to Bandura (2006), people function as contributors to their own motivation, behaviour and development within a network of reciprocally interacting influences. While this served the young men at the time in their context, it also made them very vulnerable to ever-shifting peer influences. I wondered how one could work within that group efficacy to strengthen the individuals' sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (2006) identifies four sources of efficacy that could develop over time within a group context: these include efficacy that promotes individual efficacy through the experience of success; self-efficacy that develops through observing the success of similar models; encouragement and persuasion as a source of efficacy; and a balance between internal and social factors in creating experiences of success. As this group appeared to have an already established sense of group efficacy, I saw the potential to work within that group dynamic to reposition, with them, the group's focus from one of resistance to

authority and the school context, towards a focus on using that context to develop the individual member's self-efficacy and the group as a community of support which would reinforce that.

1.3   MOTIVATION FOR THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

It is "to better understand children in their context as their psychological drama unfolds" (Miller, 1991:4). The primary aim of this study is to investigate what happens when the trajectory of delinquency is interrupted. This will be done through a participatory methodology that facilitates the creation of a safe space where the participants can learn a set of skills and understandings that will enable them to navigate life in safe and productive ways. Through a participatory process, the participants in the study engaged in processes to strengthen self-efficacy, enhance emotional and social Intelligence, and shift perceptions of the self from being a member of an "outcast and difficult" peer group to being their own healthy community of support. In my practice as an educational psychologist, I have become acutely aware that if we hope to facilitate sustainable alternative ways of being, we have to explore creative ways in which we can use our knowledge and skills base to support access to psychological support services that complement the contextual realities of our country. Combining conventional therapy with other forms of complementary modalities such as art, music or alternative healing practices based on popular education can afford greater access to support services for at-risk youths and the communities from which they come (Gadd, 2003; McWhirter et al., 2007; Garafat, Futcher & Digney, 2012). However, the processes and outcomes of such interventions are seldom formally researched. This study engaged with the contextual knowledge of the participants, as well as the researcher's experience and knowledge of the South African context, in order to develop contextually responsive practices that could address the immediate challenges to self-efficacy and personal agency among the participants. In addition, the study seeks to prepare the soil for a training protocol that will promote collaborative practices among psycho-social professionals and lay people in addressing the needs of an ever increasing at-risk youth population.

My assumption is that traditional training models do not necessarily prepare people who work with youths for what they will encounter in an ever-changing socio-

economic context. Scarce highly skilled human resources and an ever-increasing at-risk population mean that it is constantly necessary to add new information to the discourse around at-risk youths that may help researchers and practitioners perceive unrecognised patterns, authenticated by at-risk individuals themselves.

Nokoneg (in Foskun et al., 2005) also points out the importance of understanding the behaviour and thinking of African (all races) people from their own rather than a Western perspective, particularly with regard to the way that they interact with their environment and their particular social experiences. This study also seeks to engage with existing emotional and social intelligence training models in order to create a space that incorporates the development of the self in relation to adolescents' need for identification with a peer sub-group within a Southern African context.

1.4   RESEARCH FOCUS

Ungar (2004) stresses that change must emanate from the youths themselves and not simply be formally required of them if they are to incorporate the change into their self-identity. The profile of at-risk youths is not a homogeneous one. Risk factors are contextually constructed and indefinite across population groups. This study seeks to research a life-skill set that promotes a greater sense of self-efficacy, emotional and social intelligence amongst a group of school-going adolescent boys considered to be "at-risk youths".

The context for the study was a farm-school community in the Stellenbosch district of the Western Cape. The population was a purposively selected group of adolescent school boys who had previously been participants in an intervention programme that works with at-risk youths who were identified by their educational institution as being on a trajectory towards juvenile delinquency. The inquiry posed the following research question: **How can the trajectory to delinquency in a group of socially marginalized youth group be interrupted to transform the group into a supportive community?**

In order to fully explore my research question, I asked the following questions:

- How did the participants come to be in the group and how does being part of that group serve them?

- How do members' perceptions of the group's efficacy influence their perception of their own efficacy?

- What are the pathways to assisting participants to make more beneficial life choices?

1.5   THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

According to Goleman (2006), as a result of their academic and social exclusion at-risk youths are often isolated from the rest of their classmates and at greater risk of dropping out of school. I am interested in exploring ways in which at-risk youths can strengthen their self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and social intelligence. As part of the research process I explored the extent to which interventions can be made more accessible to an at-risk youth population. I did this by utilising complementary psychosocial wellness programmes that have their roots in popular education and that could be used to train auxiliary youth focused psychosocial support staff and educators.

The contribution of this study is the exploration of a practical experiential model that can be used when working with socially marginalised groups of at-risk youths. The model challenges the culture of defiance and interrupts the trajectory to delinquency in such groups.

The intervention uses positive youth development practices and works within the already established dynamic and structures of the group.

1.6   SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study explored ways of working within an already established cluster group of socially marginalised at-risk youths. The purpose was to work within this group to establish a group culture that was supportive of individual efficacy and which encouraged its members along life paths that promoted beneficial life choices. It used a multi-modal approach to promote socio-emotional intelligence and self-efficacy among individuals, while transforming the group culture. The study focused on the promotion of socio-emotional development as a precursor to creating a health-promoting group dynamic. My experience as an educator and educational

psychologist working with young people has exposed me to the reality that the voice and influence of the peer group often silences even the voice of the individual in his/her own life. An ongoing challenge for me has been to find a way to increase the influence of the individual's voice in their lives, while honouring their need for belonging in a peer group with which they identify either by choice or default. The participants in this study were a group of 6 middle-adolescent boys deemed by their school to be at-risk of a trajectory towards delinquency. The young men had formed a cluster group at the school and were by all accounts demonstrating increasingly problematic behavioural tendencies.

1.7   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Our self-concept is greatly influenced by the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories others tell about us (White & Morgan, 2000). The views contained in these stories in turn have the potential to significantly influence our behaviours or life choices. I concur with Chopra (2006) that choice is a complex yet critical process in determining the quality and direction of our lives. Not only is the process of choice important, but so also is the context in which this choice is made. The focus of the research was the empowerment of the participants and the researcher in a collaborative learning process. According to Ungar (2004), sustainable change must originate in partnership with youths, if they are to incorporate the change into their daily practice. This was particularly important, as there was very little that would change in the youths' socio-economic environment.

The methodology of the study is guided by a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm recognises that the research does not take place in a vacuum and that participants have to be an active part of the process of gaining insight into their social world. This paradigm recognises the capacity of the participants to engage in reflective practice and actively seeks this reflection as part of the research process. By interacting with people in this way, the researcher collaborates with participants to understand their social world from their perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A qualitative research design was used. According to Mouton (2003), this approach has the potential to enhance and re-orient our present understanding of a situation.

This paradigm was specifically selected for this study, because according to Ungar (2003:358), qualitative methods have the potential to afford an all-embracing picture of "lives lived under adversity." The participants inform our understanding of the phenomenon under study. This paradigm is a good fit for this study as researchers in the field of qualitative research are encouraged to strive not only to "generate relevant data and knowledge", but also to create a platform for the researcher and participants to generate avenues for initiating and implementing change (Barbour, 2008:176). Ungar (2003:358) recommends a qualitative research approach when working with at-risk youths, because "it creates a space in which the volume of the marginalised voices can be turned up. However if qualitative research hopes to add to the body of research knowledge that informs practice, Mason (1996) recommends that it seeks to generate social explanations which have wider resonance than just the research context.

1.7.1   Research methodology: Participatory action research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) created a platform for participants not only to gain an insight into, and a better understanding of, their challenges, but also to be activists in mobilising for change (Bhana, 1999). The group had a say in every aspect of the research, from establishing the phenomenon of interest, to delineating the activities that would guide the process in the pursuit of improving understanding and practice with the phenomenon. I understood my role as researcher to be that of facilitator of experience and resource person in creating opportunities that would mediate the participants' process of understanding their practices and their motivations, and to introduce new ways to respond to these (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Babbie, 2010). According to Montero (2000:140-141), by engaging in this way the participants and the researcher together create "new scientific knowledge and a new kind of ordinary knowledge to be applied in everyday actions". This approach is supported extensively in the literature as one that centres on empowerment through a spiral-like process that encourages the active and reflective engagement of all parties throughout the process (Wadsworth, 1998; Babbie, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Smith (1997:187) describes PAR as "a thoughtful reflection on reality and the focus is on the possibilities for change". The focus is therefore directed at practical problem

solving that facilitates participants gaining self-confidence as they interact, use effective communication and gain experience in having their voice acknowledged (Garvin & Bargal, 2008).

1.7.2 Data-generation strategies

To stay true to the spirit of shared knowledge and experience, data collecting is referred to as data generation because, according to Barbour (2008:89), this acknowledges that data are created as a consequence of a reciprocal engagement of participants and researcher. It was also imperative that I should remain cognisant of the impact on the data generated as well as the impact of the research process on myself as the researcher (Barbour, 2008; Morkel, 2004; Viljoen, 2001).

1.7.2.1 Observation

Observation was the primary method of data collection for this study. In the study I was a participant observer who acted as facilitator for some of the activities and a witness to participants' process in others. In deciding how to manage my dual roles, I was guided by Gold (in Allard-Poesi, 2005:177), who indicated that my role as observer should be twofold: firstly, as participant observer, I spent most of my time in active participation with the group in the data-stimulus activities and a limited time in formal observation; secondly, I spent the time observing, with only a small portion of time spent participating in normal group activity. So, for example, in the study I facilitated the social autopsy conversation sessions and recorded the drumming circle. From time to time I was called upon to reflect to participants my observations of what was happening in the drumming circle with regards to their own performance and group dynamics that may be impacting on the particular drumming session. The role of participant observer therefore allowed me to gain first-hand experience with the meaning-making process and practice of participants as it unfolded in the research sessions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Allard-Poesi, 2005; Turnock & Gibson, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998).

1.7.2.2 Interviews

In the course of the research two types of interviews were conducted, namely individual and focus group interviews.

I conducted interviews with key informants to gain an insight into the psycho-social context in which the participants function and also to understand the language, perceptions of resilience and social practices prevalent in that particular context. I used a semi-structured interview format to elicit personal experience and environment specific insight narratives from key informants. In this interview format I set an agenda with questions aimed at acquiring situated narratives on particular topics (Barbour, 2008; Harding, 2006; Rosenthal, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005) (See Appendix 1).

I conducted focus group interviews with the participants as the small group focus group session is considered to be a particularly effective space for young people to explore their own identities and be exposed to others' identity formation. One can also work within a group dynamic in ways that may differ from that which they are used to (Babbie, 2010). In this study observing and engaging with the group dynamic in meaning making was important. How this process was facilitated was challenging as the stimulus activities selected had to promote the development of socio-emotional insight, while remaining interesting and not too threatening. Learning to express a view that may be contrary to the views and the opinions of the group presented a particular challenge, and I chose to use a Freirian code to facilitate this process. Kelly (in Bhana, 1999:232) describes Freirian codes as stimuli that are used to generate conversation around specific themes, values and ideas related to the participants and the phenomenon under study. The Freirian codes used in this study were scenes selected from the classic martial arts film, *Snake in the Eagles Shadow*. This particular film was chosen because the character was fairly similar in age to the youths and, though from a different culture, he was challenged by the same socio-cultural challenges experienced by the participants with regards to the phenomenon under study.

1.7.2.3   *Drawing (a creative way of self-expression)*

A third method that the study used was drawing, which is a process that is often used in therapy and research with children, as it allows them to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences without words. It has been described as giving emotions a visual expression. It provides a means to mediate conversation around feelings, emotions or experiences that participants may be reluctant or unable to verbalise

(Mohangi, 2008; Nobel-Carr, 2006; Malchiodi, 2002). In this particular study it also provided valuable insights into the inner world of participants who had limited verbal and socio-emotional literacy. According to Malchiodi (2002: no page), drawing creates a space in which a single drawing or image can contain "multiple feelings, relationships and hours of narrative". The emphasis is not on the product, but on the process that creates a space to express the self, increase self-awareness and create an opportunity to scaffold an alternative story for life. Chapters 3 and 4 provide a full description of how this was used in practice in the study.

1.7.2.4 Activities

In addition to the above, during each school term the participants were exposed to activities that challenged them as individuals to practise self-efficacy. Among these activities were an animal encounter, two excursions to a climbing wall centre and a male mentorship programme. All these activities and how they related to the various phases and scaffolding of individual experiences are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My training as an educational psychologist has instilled in me guidelines for ethical engagement, as informed by the Health Professionals Council of South Africa. As the research context was a state school, all efforts were taken to protect the privacy of the individuals and the setting of the research. Identifiable data were scrambled in subsequent reports or papers (Barbour, 2008) to minimise exposure and harm to those who participated.

The cornerstone of the research relationship should be mutual trust and collaboration. In my interactions with the adolescents, I acted in such a way as to preserve their dignity, respect and privacy as human beings (Cohen, Marion & Morrison, 2000; Mohangi, 2008). Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were assured of their right to anonymity and their right to withdraw from the research should they in any way feel threatened. In protecting the right of participants and because of the way in which qualitative studies evolve, researchers suggest that it may not be ethical to obtain blanket informed consent at the outset of the study; instead, one should engage in on-going negotiation as the project unfolds;

this is referred to as "process consent" (Munhall, 1988; Daniels, 2008; Barbour 2008).

According to Milner (2005), a participant gives informed consent if that consent is based on knowledge of the process, it is exercised in a non-coercive situation and the individual is deemed competent to make such a decision. Schenk and Williamson (2005) recommend, when working with children, that this be a process that recognises the child's age and level of maturity. I discussed the proposed research in detail with the participants; I was mindful of the participants' mistrust of adults and therefore took every precaution not to appear patronising (Mohangi, 2008). I aimed to subject all decisions to both moral and ethical guidelines to ensure that participants were not harmed by the research decisions made and the findings that would finally be disclosed. Every effort was be made to preserve the dignity, respect, privacy and confidentiality of participants. As the participants were minors, consent was obtained from their parents and assent from the participants.

As this is an ever-evolving field of research, it was important to ensure that decisions I made about the research design and process did not compromise access for other researchers interested in the field because potential research subjects are reluctant to participate in future research (Fine, 1993; Cohen et al., 2000; Punch 2000). I did this by promoting transparent and democratic research, following protocol with regards to the acknowledgement of the rights of the various stakeholders to access to information prior to, during and after the research.

Being in qualitative co-research relationships, I had to foster an environment in which the participants trusted me, would feel safe to share and reflect on their lived experience, and would create opportunities to co-facilitate interpretation (Kong et al., 2002). In this vein Silverman (1993) cautions researchers to remain aware that the "tension between the desire to get things done and the need to understand what is happening requires careful management". I continued to respect and honour the participants' stories and experiences by assuring them that I remained accountable to them; with regards to their wellbeing while on this journey with me and in the ways in which I would represent the stories of their lived reality.

To this end I decided to adopt a reflexive research approach. Guillemin (2004:275) says:

> adopting a reflexive research process means adopting a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and data but also to the researcher, participants and the research context.

I remained vigilant and thorough on-going careful observations, reflections and member checks ensured that I remained responsive to the needs and comfort levels of participants. In some instances, I adapted or changed activities and levels of engagement in consultation with the participants.

1.9 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data, a stringent audit trail was maintained (Cuba & Lincoln, 1989). Internal validity was ensured by on-going member checks, triangulation (crystallisation) and peer review (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). The lengthy engagement with the participants in the field provided an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived reality; according to Lincoln and Cuba (1985), this enhances the credibility of the study. Developing the research strategy was a dynamic process that sought to ensure research relevancy, information adequacy, efficiency and that all ethical questions were adequately considered Marshall and Rossman (2011).

1.10 CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter 2 provides the conceptual framework for my study. In this chapter I reflect on the literature review conducted in the domains of emotional and social intelligence, at-risk youth and complementary wellness practices.

Chapter 3 is a discussion and justification of my choice of research design and in it I outline the methodology that I chose. In this chapter I also discuss the ethical aspects, challenges and dilemmas that I encountered during the course of my study.

The findings are presented in Chapter 4. Here I attempt to honour the participants' in their journey by giving a narrative voice to their experiences. The findings are presented by means of direct quotations, participant-generated metaphors and vignettes as well as images and written texts.

An integration of my findings with the literature will be presented in Chapter 5. In this chapter I discuss the findings and share some of my interpretations of the participants' experiences. I reflect on the strengths and limitations of my study. I conclude this study with recommendations for future practice and research and attach as Appendix 10 the experiential intervention protocol generated by our shared experience.

1.11 SUMMARY

In Chapter 1 I attempted to introduce the research project. I gave some background to the social marginalisation of at-risk groups and the current responses to this; I will elaborate further on these issues in my literature review. The research aimed to explore ways of working within an already established cluster group of socially marginalised youths considered by their school to be at risk of delinquency. It proposes to work within the already established group dynamic and, through collaborative practices, explore with the participants ways of transforming the group culture so that it is supportive of the strengthening of self-efficacy practices among its members. The chapter also introduced my research design and methodology, discusses various ethical issues as they pertained to my study and addressed the issue of quality assurance. I concluded the chapter with an overview of the areas that will be addressed in the various chapters.

The following chapter will present the literature review.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Every door has its own key" Swahili proverb

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The use of the term "being at risk" is a recent and still contentious one, and its use varies across cultures and domains of interest (Dill, 2011:2). In this study I use the term as it relates to five middle-adolescent boys from a farming school community context. I argue that risk or protective factors are not mutually exclusive, and that they occur in cumulative sequences that result in positive or negative risk chains that set the young person on the path to beneficial or negative life choices. Current trends in research and theories pertaining to resilience suggest that resilience should be viewed as a transactional process between the child and the environment. This then implies that the development of resilience is dynamic and influenced by the interplay between processes within the child and the environment over time. Adolescence is synonymous with change. A key development task for boys in this life stage is establishing a secure identity, and greater autonomy from their parents or significant adults in their lives. Whilst they may require a great deal of guidance in this quest, boys in middle-adolescence do not readily seek this from the adults in their lives; instead they turn increasingly to their peers. This stage is marked by seeking social success among peers and resisting adult influence, a combination of events that places most adolescents at great risk of increased susceptibility to the influence of peers. The need to find a niche, to belong and be considered good at something also increases the likelihood of many adolescents engaging in behaviour that could have a negative or positive impact on the course of their lives. Failing to making connections where you feel valued results in feelings or perceptions of isolation and social failure. Studies in the field have found that this search for group identity and acknowledgement leads young people to seek youths similar to them in some way.

The researcher considers group identity to be a key variable in determining the paths or outcomes of life. Having conducted an extensive review of the literature, I have

selected to focus on the studies and theories related to the middle-adolescent phase, and more particularly the constructs related to group identity as an important variable in the social marginalisation of at-risk youths. The literature review was undertaken to clarify the focus of my study, as well as to refine the key research focus and the questions that guided my thinking during the process of conducting this study (Kloppers, 2006; Zajko, 2007; Erasmus, 2007; Tonga, 2011).

2.2   ADOLESCENCE

Current trends in the study of adolescence indicate a significant shift to a multi-dimensional perspective that, while it acknowledges the psycho-biological constructs as central to the transition, suggests the phase also needs to be studied as a socially constructed variable, marked by intense and rapid individual changes that unfold against the backdrop of numerous environmental and interpersonal stressors (Zajko, 2007; Schmied & Tilly, 2009).

The common understanding of the stage of adolescence in the literature is that it is a time of transition from childhood to early adulthood, marked by significant physiological, cognitive, psychological and behavioural changes (Kaplan & Saddock, 2003). There are multiple views about the chronological age of onset, however, and current views suggest that chronological age should only be considered a rough indicator of onset (Kaplan & Saddock, 2003; Zajko, 2007; Schmied & Tilly, 2009). My understanding is that it is a process, marked by various phases and challenges that occur on a continuum which varies from person to person. Kaplan and Saddock (2003) set the chronological markers of early adolescence at around 11 to 14 years, middle-adolescence around ages 14 to 17, and late adolescence from 17 to 20. This particular study focused on the experiences of young men who fall in the middle-adolescent phase as represented by Kaplan and Saddock (2003).

According to Kaplan and Saddock (2003:37), a key outcome of the middle phase is the establishment of "secure sense of self or self-awareness" (2003:37). According to them, this pursuit of a sense of self in relation to the world is one that is often marked by "identity diffusion". Identity diffusion is successfully resolved when the adolescent experiences challenges to establishing psycho-emotional independence; inherent in this view is the notion that the independence spoken of refers to independence from

the significant adults in their lives. While this is so, I would argue that this emotional independence as a part of a secure identity formation may be compromised by enmeshed relationships within counter-cultural peer groups. Additional changes highlighted as significant in this phase include the onset of puberty. Puberty is a period which sees increased hormonal activity, which stimulates growth spurts, changes in weight and muscle mass, and physical sexual development. These changes happen in unique synchronicity in the individual and this often challenges the adolescents' self-image and identity (Saddock & Saddock, 2003; Zajko, 2007; Kloopers, 2007; Reintjes et al., 2010).

Changes in cognition include the ability to think abstractly. Abstract reasoning is considered to be integral in the formation of morals and ethics. These in turn guide how we self-regulate and respond to the world. Zajko (2007:3) identifies challenges in the development of abstract reasoning to be a significant contributing factor in youths who manifest with troublesome behaviour. He refers to Kohlberg's (1969) stages of moral development. This model presents moral development as a 3-stage process which is tied to chronological age. In the pre-conventional stage (4 - 10 years) there is a preoccupation with self-interest and the interplay between obedience and punishment. At the age of 10 children are thought to have progressed to the second level or conventional stage (10 - 13 +). During this stage there is a greater awareness of self in relation to others. There is a greater consciousness or perception of what is right and what is wrong. The child, then progress to the final level, in which more abstract cognition, is applied with regards to universal principles which are necessary to maintain social order. This phase is referred to as the post-conventional young adult phase. It is during this phase, according to Kaplan and Saddock (2003) that the young person sets in place the foundation for their own belief system, a system that serves as their moral compass. They do, however, assert that in the process of developing their own moral compass, young people may be prone to bouts of negativism in which they attempt to assert their right to independent thinking, often in an aggressive manner. A progression to maturity would imply acquiring a skill set and confidence in one's ability to apply those skills as and when necessary to assert one's autonomy or make decisions beneficial to one's life. Though this negativism is viewed as part of the normal developmental stage, Kaplan and Saddock (2003) and others suggest that youths who do not

resolve the progression beyond the ego state often present with excessive challenges to authority. Some of the ways in which this shows up in their relationships is often exaggerated perceptions and expressions of vulnerability and powerlessness, hypersensitivity to criticism, hyper-vigilance with regards to fairness and excessive fault finding (Levy, 2001; Kloopers, 2007; Zajko, 2007).

2.2.1   The peer group in adolescence

Social acceptance is an important part of adolescence and adolescents replace the influence of adults as a critical reference group (Reintjes et al., 2010; Avontaires, 2012). Whoever the individual considers important as a part of this social referral network is often the cause of a great deal of discord with adults and siblings. It also impacts greatly on the adolescent's perceptions of connection and rejection within the social contexts in which they function (Schulz, 2006). Adolescence is a period of self-consciousness and is characterised by "discomfort, discontent and bouts of real and imagined ostracism" (Sikking in Schulz, 2006:11). How well they survive the trials of that turbulent time is mediated by the extent to which adults or others are able to buffer the experience for them. The absence or lack of confidence that they have in adults to be responsive to their needs during this process can leave the young person feeling isolated and increases their vulnerability to peer influence (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

2.2.2   Risk-taking behaviour in adolescence

According to the literature, a key marker of this period is the increased tendency for adolescents to indulge in experimentation and risk-taking behaviour. Some theorists link this to the psycho-social and biological changes that take place in the individual during this period. However, according to Schmied and Tilly (2009), while risk behaviours that occur in adolescence tend to be transitory, factors within the individual and their various contexts could result in long-term negative consequences for the individual. Zajko (2007) agrees with this perspective and identifies cognitive abilities, barriers to learning, volatile home contexts and negative peer groups as some of the variables that influence adolescents' vulnerability to negative future outcomes. There are escalating practices that shift experimental risky behaviour natural in adolescence to behaviour that places individuals and groups on an at-risk

trajectory for maladaptive life choices. The concept of being at-risk, which I take up in detail in section 2.3, should be differentiated from risky behaviour, as it is one of the central themes in understanding the phenomenon under study.

2.2.3 Efficacy

In developing a positive sense of self one evaluates one's ability to exercise influence over the outcomes of one's behaviour and environment. During the middle phase of adolescence the young person's sense of self is very tenuous and is greatly impacted by others' perception of them. Bong and Skaalvik (2003) refer to this as reflected appraisal. This sense of personal efficacy is not tied to the person's chronological age; it is a process that develops over time with real experiences of mastery and having those efforts acknowledged (Bandura, 2006). It is not always the outcome that determines one's beliefs around efficacy, but the belief one holds about one's ability to act in one's best interest. According to Bandura (2006:6), "the self-efficacy beliefs that young people develop during adolescence play a central role in strengthening their individual sense of self". This view is supported by the findings of Erasmus (2007) in research conducted with South African male youths. In that study she argues that the individuals' sense of self and their perception of the world as a welcoming place is influenced by factors internal to the individual, such as cognitive ability, personality predisposition, perceptions of talent and worth. It is also influenced by external factors such as involvement or acceptance by peers, their relationship with a caring adult or older peer, stability of family circumstances and experiences of school culture. I share the view that the often fragile and complex interaction of internal and external factors, some within the control of the individual and others beyond this possibility, influences one's self-concept. Developing emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are considered central to strengthening the individual's sense of self. These two conditions will be explored in greater detail for their contribution to the overall functioning of the young men in the study.

2.3 DEFINING THE PHENOMENON OF AT-RISK YOUTH

According to the World Bank (2008), the population referred to as at-risk youth is a subset of young individuals between the age 12 and 24 who face "environmental, social, and family conditions that hinder their personal development and their

successful integration into society as productive citizens." In my exploration of the phenomenon I found great variance in the understanding and definition of the term, and I therefore concur with Camilleri (2007:17) that "the term [appears to be] adapted according to the context in which it is used". In line with that perspective, the term 'at-risk' in the context of this study will relate to cause and effect dynamics that, according to McWhirter et al. (2007) place the adolescent on a trajectory to negative future outcomes. When one views the concept through this lens, then risks do not occur in a vacuum nor are they one-dimensional; instead risk should be viewed as a complex and interrelated set of variables which if not addressed timeously could have the potential for lasting and damaging consequences for the young person. Potential critical outcomes include the greater likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour such as school or class avoidance, risky sexual behaviour, substance abuse, verbal and physical aggression, and affiliation with delinquent peer groups. The outcome of engaging in these activities is consequences that hinder the ability of young people to make a successful transition to adulthood. Some of the consequences cited in the literature and gleaned from longitudinal studies include dropping out of school, unemployment or low-income employment, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, addiction, involvement in anti-social activities that may result in incarceration and overall social marginalisation (World Bank, 2008; Zajako, 2007; Ungar, 2004; Schmied & Tilly, 2009; Keer, Van Zak & Stattin, 2011). However, I concur with Kumpfer (1999:190), who argues that defining "what constitutes high risk should be done with due consideration for the context and responsiveness to that context". This view is underscored by McWhirter et al. (2007:6), who in their own work and reviewing of many longitudinal studies have found the at-risk category to be one that develops over time through a series of interactions between the individual and risks along a continuum. Figure 2.1 below illustrates their views of how the at-risk phenomenon develops along the continuum.
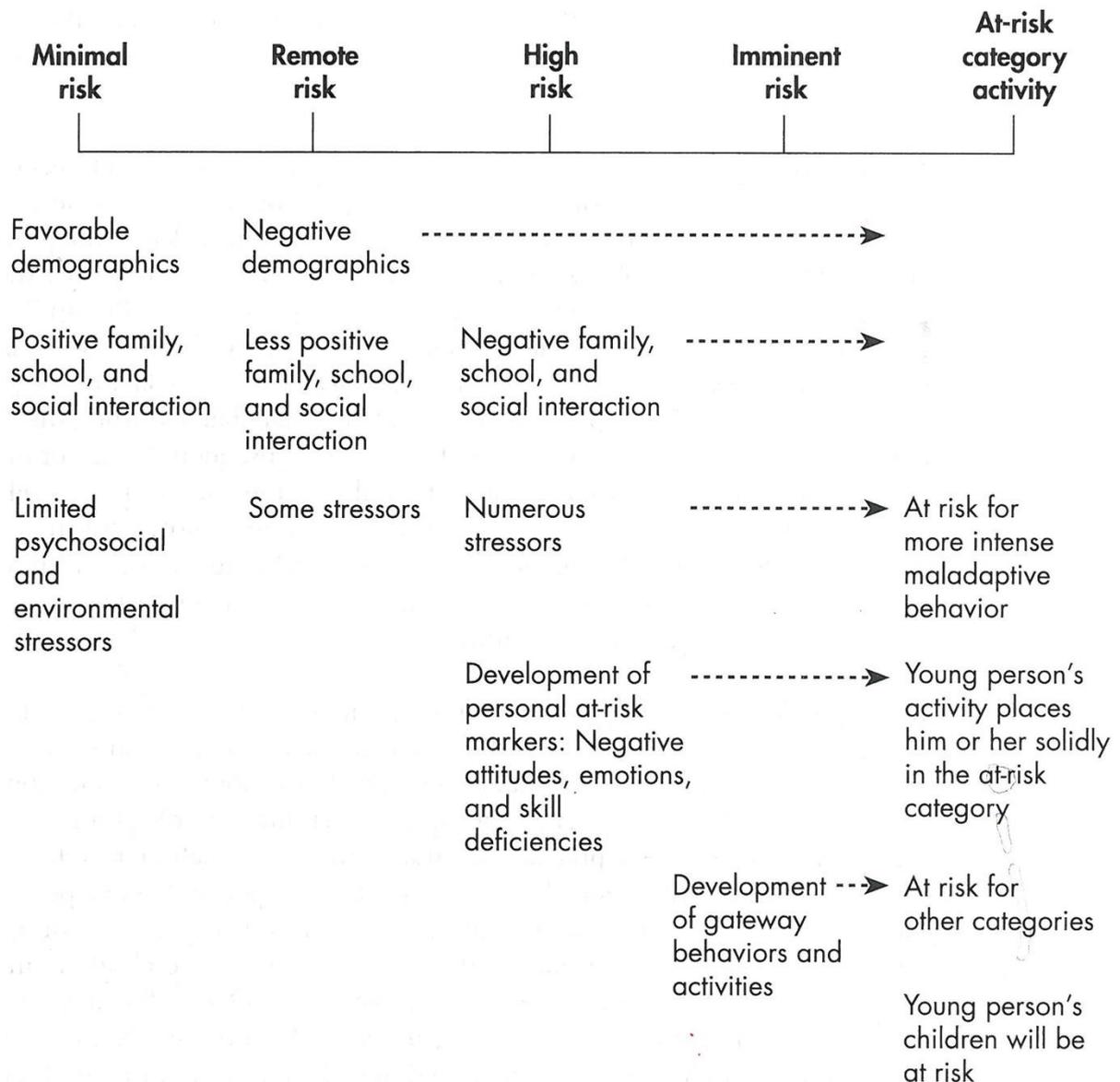
Figure 2.1:   At-risk development continuum (McWhirter et al., 2007:7)

The above figure illustrates what researchers have come to allude to as the dynamic interplay between risky personal behaviour and risky environments.

This interplay is widely acknowledged as a more realistic portrayal of how a young person comes to be classified as at-risk. The World Bank (2000:10) acknowledges this interplay and further recommends that the following categories of risk be acknowledged.

Table 2.1:   Categories of at-riskness in adolescents

Type	Description	Example of type
Type I:	Young people who face risk factors in their lives, but who have not yet engaged in risky behaviour	Youths living in disadvantaged situations who are at risk of dropping out of school or of being unemployed.
Type II:	Young people who engage in risky behaviour, but have not yet suffered severe negative consequences	Youths who are often absent from school, but have not yet dropped out. Youths who engage in risky sexual behaviour, but have not yet acquired a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Youths who are involved in delinquent activities, but have not yet been arrested.
Type III:	Young people who are experiencing severe negative consequences as a result of risky behaviour	Youths who have dropped out of school. Youths who have contracted HIV/AIDS. Youths who are incarcerated. Youths who are addicted to alcohol or drugs.

From the classification it appears that great emphasis is placed on how the person responds to or engages with risk factors.

2.3.1   Risk factors

Some studies on at-riskness focus specifically on the factors that define it. I proceed from the premise that the relationship between risk and protective factors is a complex one that cannot be viewed as something that takes place in a vacuum. In understanding what constitutes a "high-risk child", Kumpfer (1999:190) cautions that attaching labels have a ripple effect. A number of variables related to the child, the environment and how the child relates to the stressor need to be considered. From this and other studies it appears critical to differentiate what the child experiences as stressors, the extent to which the individual is able to exercise influence over the stressor, their awareness and response to the influence of the stressor in their lives,

the knowledge of the resources available to them to mitigate that influence, and their ability to access those resources. In a study that exemplified this view Camilleri (2007) contends that stressors that contribute to young people being considered at-risk can be classified as either chronic or discrete. She points out that both these categories are considered complex and that their influence is reciprocal and a product of time and context.

> Chronic stressors are considered to be stressors over which the individual can exercise relatively little control and are generally related to the broader social system of which the child is a part by virtue of his demographics, for example, his socio-economic status, where he lives, attends school and the types of resources to which he has access. Discrete stressors, on the other hand, relate to the more unique circumstances of the child, such as parenting style, divorced parents, whether or not the child is in foster care, and exposure to domestic violence (Camilleri, 2007:17-18).

While none of the stressors represented above is necessarily predictive of at-riskness, researchers' state that the cumulative effect of multiple stressors can result in a negative outcome. Fuller (2001) suggests in his risk chain theory that risk factors must be considered in relation to a chain of events. Figure 2.2 below is an adaption of his example of how children from the same environment can experience the same stressor with very different outcomes.

In a negative risk chain	In a positive or protective chain
A child grows up in violent circumstances ↓ and learns to distrust others. ↓ Interprets the intentions of others as hostile. ↓ Acts warily or aggressively towards peers, ↓ experiences peer relationship problems, ↓ resulting in the child feeling rejected by peers. ↓ The child then lashes out by bullying others. ↓ Experiences social isolation. ↓ Alienation.	A child grows up in violent circumstances, ↓ but learns at school there is a trustworthy adult ↓ to assist with peer relationship difficulties. ↓ Positive interaction with peers, acknowledged. ↓ Child begins to feel accepted. ↓ More appropriate engagement with peers, ↓ develops a diversity of friendships. ↓ Experiences social inclusion. ↓ Active engagement.

Figure 2.2:   An adaption of Fuller's risk chain (Fuller, 2001:40)

The above figure illustrates why it is important not to deal with children on the basis of our limited knowledge of their contexts. Many vulnerable children disappear in the education system because of a tendency among teachers and school administrators to focus too much on presenting behaviours. So, for example, the extremely well-behaved child may be facing the same risks as the child who acts out. This complexity in defining at-risk, McWhirter et al. (2007) argue, means that the narrow symptomatic focus may cause us to miss the more the less visible challenges which the child may not be able to articulate. I concur with their view that in narrowly

focusing on adaptive behaviour, we lose sight of the fact that it often masks anxiety around barriers to learning, emotional concerns or problems in the school or family context. Failure to do so means that we can feed into the negative risk chain and reinforce the at-risk student's belief that adults are not responsive to the unique experience of their lived reality, and this translates into increased feelings of frustration, anger and acting-out behaviour. Kumpfer (1999:190-191) proposes what he refers to as the 'critical dimensions of risk factors and processes'. The following dimensions guided my engagement with the participants of the study:

1. Establishing whether the child has actually experienced a risk factor;

2. Establishing whether what you consider risky is actually perceived as such by the child. This illustrates the importance of taking the time to understand how the 'risk factor' is perceived in the context. Criticism of researchers working in the field of at-risk youths is that they use a dominant discourse lens in assessing the impact of risk factors and neglect to engage with contextual discourse in establishing the riskiness of factors;

3. The cumulative nature of risks in the environment and how these risks are buffered in the environment by caring others or the children themselves;

4. Factors in the child's life that serve as protective factors and work to create a counter-balance to the risks;

5. A clear understanding of what serves as a risk or protective factor at various developmental stages in particular contexts and any given time.

2.4   DEFINING SOCIAL ISOLATION

Throughout the 20th century the concept of alienation has received substantial attention in the social sciences. Youths in the middle stage of adolescence, who are the focus of this study, place a high premium on peer connection and peer opinion and feedback. The school, the occupational centre where they share a large part of the day, is a concentrated cauldron of various stages of adolescent development. In section 2.3 I unpack how perceptions of people or systems being unresponsive can result in the escalation of acting-out behavioural challenges. This in turn elicits further negative responses from the teacher; trapping the young person in what Walker

(1997 in Arvantidis, 2012:2) refers to as "the process of being shut out, fully or partially from any of the … systems which determine the social integration of a person in society". The term 'outcast' is used in the literature sometimes to refer to this phenomenon. It is a controversial term that elicits a lot of debate. For the purpose of this study the terms 'isolation', 'alienation' and 'marginalisation' are used interchangeably with it to denote the subtle variations of disconnection that students feel from school. The terms do, however, suggest a sliding scale along which the young person progresses in his experience of the phenomenon across time.

Social isolation ▭⟹ marginalisation ▭⟹ alienation

Next I explore conceptual areas that may be relevant to the study of alienation in the school setting. Real and imagined ostracism are considered part of the bouts of discomfort and discontent that adolescents experience as part of the individuation process (Sikking in Schulz, 2006:28).

2.4.1   Environment risk factors in social exclusion

Multiple studies cited in Arvantadis (2012) allude to the fact that the experience of social isolation inhibits the healthy development and integration of individuals. This maladaptive transitioning is often reflected in both internalised (anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide) and externalised behavioural responses (ODD, aggression, low level of frustration tolerance) and relational challenges, and inability to form trusting relationships, particularly with adults. A classic definition that was developed by Seeman (in Reinjtjes et al., 2010) identifies five key dimensions that should guide studies on youth alienation. Over time various theorist have engaged with and offered their interpretations of this definition. Based on their representations I use the framework of constructs proposed by Seeman (in Reinjtjes et al., 2010) to organise the key constructs in this experience of alienation.

- Powerlessness refers to the individual's perception of their inability to exercise influence in one or more areas of their lives, particularly with regards to the outcome of their behaviour.

- Role estrangement refers to the disconnection between who individuals perceive themselves to be and the social role in which they are cast. In this

condition the individual experiences the devaluing of their authentic self and a disassociation from self occurs.

- Meaninglessness refers to the perception of lack of purpose of one's life. It is closely related to the individual's belief that they lack the knowledge or ability to access the knowledge or influence that will assist them in predicting the future.

- Guidelessness reflects a resentful learned helplessness that the individual develops in relation to a society he/she believes has let him/her down by not providing him with the sources and support he needs to attain his aspirations.

- Cultural estrangement develops as a consequence of the frustration of being let down by the system responsible for their wellbeing. In this process, also referred to as normlessness, the individual, while fully acknowledging the values, rules and expectations of society, voluntarily chooses to reject them.

If individuals choose to affiliate with an outcast group, they find that the counter-culture mimics the way that society operates in that it limits access to the culture and is guided by very clear structures and norms; however, this time around these practices encourage the use of traditional cultural norms and values in ways that defy convention.

2.4.2   Labels attached to alienated youth

Labels are commonly assigned as descriptive expressions of problematic behaviour displayed by alienated youths. In order for these labels to exert an influence "they have to be storied over time and be supported by those with authority" or influence in the young person's life (Bandura, 2006:11-12). As in any story, the character that you are assigned as a part of the institutional narrative casts you in a role that creates expectations of you to behave in certain ways. The character assignment also influences the ways in which other role players in the narrative relate to you and the expectations they have of your behaviour. Some of the most commonly assigned descriptors of the character roles as identified by Bandura (2006:11-12) are dangerous, delinquent, deviant and disordered.

Dangerous young people present a clear and present danger to themselves and others; however; they fall just short of medical diagnosis or contact with the criminal justice system. The second group, **delinquents**, are young people who have broken the law or flirt with breaking the law. The third group, referred to as **deviant**, are the social misfits in the system; these are the young people who operate with little regard for the social norms that define how society or the context expects them to act. It is a label that changes over time as the individual matures and develops a more strongly developed sense of themselves in relation to the world. The final group, the **disordered youth**, are the ones commonly associated with mental health diagnoses such as conduct or disruptive behaviour disorders and attention hyperactivity disorder.

These labels reinforce the youths' perceptions of rejection by the culture and often elicit responses that place them in direct conflict with traditional school culture.

2.4.3   The school as contested terrain

According to Bandura (2005:9), efficacy in school is reflected in students' belief in their ability to regulate learning activities and to master academic subjects. What students believe about their academic ability in turn influences the students' occupational aspirations and their motivation to meet those aspirations. Teachers play a pivotal role in reinforcing these beliefs. Research findings suggest that teacher responses vary based of their belief in their efficacy to guide and motivate students in the attainment of their goals. This belief about their efficacy is in turn motivated by perceptions of organisational competence in creating an environment conducive to the attainment of those goals, historical experiences in the social context and their often unconscious assignment of expectations for performance based on students' exposure to risk factors in their environment. The consequence of this is an environment that assigns learners to categories that relegate them to a statistic, with the learners in turn experiencing the adults as non-responsive to their individual needs and so they disengage (Bandura, 2004, 2005). According to Mohangi (2008), the mixed messages teachers communicate can severely compromise the child's sense of safety and security within the school environment. In turn, an interplay between the mixed messages the child receives, coupled with the uncertainty associated with the developmental phase in which they find themselves, creates social distance, which has a direct consequence of increased vulnerability to social isolation and limits the young person's access to resources they may very much

need. Examples of these resources are additional academic support to address specific barriers to learning and psychosocial to address challenges intrinsic to the individual or related to their familial or environmental context.

Aggression at school could lead to academic failure. Often the aggressive behavioural response styles to which the young person is exposed at home are mimicked by them in the school environment. Findings in research suggest a strong correlation between antisocial behaviour and poor academic performance. The link between aggression and poor academic performance is the result of several factors, most of which have developmental roots. Children who are aggressive are disruptive, and disruption itself means less on-task behaviour, leading to less concentration and study. Disruptive young people are often physically absent from the class because of referrals to the principal's office, inclusion in diversion programmes or suspension. This results in less contact-learning time with their teachers and consequently poorer academic performance (Mosley, 2009; McWhirter et al., 2007; Rowe, Maughan, Costelo & Angold, 2005). According to McWhirter et al. (2007:189), "limited academic achievement contributes to the student's negative self-perception, which encourages more negative behaviour that in turn leads to even more limited academic achievement." A student's inability to progress at school further increases his vulnerability to alienation within the school culture and, according to researchers working in the field of juvenile crime; poor academic progression is a significant factor in young people's progression along the trajectory to delinquent behaviour. Poor performance at school serves as a reminder of failure and frustration, and it eventually comes to be experienced as a toxic environment (Mosley, 2009; McWhirter et al., 2007; Rowe et al., 2005).

Feelings of powerlessness as a consequence of on-going peer abuse such as bullying and failure by influential adults in the system to intervene increases the learners' vulnerability. Furthermore, it could feed their lack of faith in the system's ability to support them. Such alienated youths might respond by withdrawing and isolating themselves, while others seek out social support networks that will afford them a measure of physical, emotional and social protection (Dayton, 2007).

2.5   RESPONSES OF YOUTHS TO PERCEPTIONS OF SYSTEMIC ABANDONMENT

2.5.1   Disengagement

I concur with Arvantidis (2012), who asserts that socially excluded students show a marked lack of commitment to their educational attainment. According to Clark and Peterson (in Schulz, 2006:8), "the most important beliefs teachers have about students are those which deal with the teacher's perceptions of the causes of student's behaviour". A teacher's beliefs about whom and how students are form quickly and suggest "failing students gain information about the causes of their failure from the affective displays of teachers" (Graham in Schulz, 2006:6). Students' decision to try and influence their performance at school, to take greater responsibility for their learning, is greatly influenced by their perception of teachers' willingness to assist them with their individual challenges. Perceptions of a teacher's lack of interest in them results in disengagement from academic and other aspects of school life (Schulz, 2006). According to research findings on at-risk youths, disengagement is considered the second most commonly cited contributing factor in students being considered at risk of harmful trajectories. However, disengagement is considered to be a complex attitudinal response that is related to motivation, academic performance, involvement in school social life and the overall experience of school (Kloopers, 2007; McWhirter et al., 2007; Bandura, 2006). In addition, Guerin and Denti (1999) locate alienation from school among the factors related to limited language proficiency, lack of connection with positive adults in the environment and poor self-concept. Students communicated this disconnection in various ways, ranging from active behavioural disruption in class to inattentiveness. However, McMillan (in Schulz, 2006:7) suggests a checklist for screening the level of disengagement that indicates students' feelings of being alienated from the traditional school system. Behaviour problems (in and outside of the classroom, and being well known by the principal and teachers for regularly causing or being in the school community) include:

1. Potentiality to attempt or complete suicide;

2. Absenteeism or being present but disengaged

3. Grade retention (being condoned, passed on through the system because of systemic requirements or criteria; undiagnosed barriers to learning because of a lack of capacity or will to identify and address; inaccurate perceptions of learners' failure to perform resulting in labelling, which means that they have little or no intervention);

4. Lack of respect for authority, feelings of alienation from school authorities (also learners expressing feelings of not being respected; of being treated unfairly; unfair bias; the way in which educators speak about and to learners; perceptions of never being given the benefit of the doubt results in other learners manipulating teachers responses in learner conflicts);

5. Dissatisfaction and frustration with school;

6. Suspensions and expulsions;

7. Course failure, poor academic record;

8. Lack of available and adequate counselling opportunities;

9. School climate hostile to students who do not 'fit the norm'.

2.5.2   Alienation and aggression

While there are indications that peer rejection is often a precursor to aggression, there is a lack of substantive empirical evidence. There are, however, sound theoretical suggestions of some causal link. This link is underscored by the findings of a study conducted by Reintjes et al. (2010), which point to alienated youths responding with more aggression than other youths when they experience acute rejection. I would add that it does not have to be an actual experience but often the mere perception of rejection that acts as a trigger in what Warburton, Williams and Cairns (in Reintjes et al., 2010:1394) refer to as the "outcast lash-out effect". The findings of this study suggest that the aggression of alienated youths appears to have an interpersonal meaningfulness that is directed specifically against people or institutions from which they experience rejection. I concur with this view and suggest that the acts of aggression may be symbolic and not always related to whether or not the recipient understands the reasons for the act. The symbolic significance of resistance that the act represents to the executor is often enough for them. It would thus appear that peer rejection or the perception of it is an important cause of youth

aggression and, in a vicious cycle, results in further rejection with an often resultant escalation in aggression (Morano, 1998).

There appears to be little consensus around a common definition of what constitutes youth school-based aggression (Longa, 2011). According to Harre and Lambe (in Longa, 2011), researchers have proposed over 200 definitions of aggressive behaviour. Common factors demonstrated in research include the intent to inflict harm and the perception of harmful intent by the intended target of the behaviour. Research has demonstrated that children engage in a variety of aggressive behaviours. Some of the ways in which this presents in reality include physical or verbal aggression, embarrassing the individual by attacking their self-esteem or social standing, for example undermining or mocking the teacher's authority (Longa, 2011). Findings from extensive research with young people add to the list aggression that has developed as a social engagement strategy. This includes indirect aggression, relational aggression and social aggression, which are more subtle and hidden forms aggression thus making it difficult to detect or to make a meaningful intervention (Longa, 2011; Reintjes et al., 2010; Morano, 1998). This process results in limitations of intervention by supportive persons in the child's environment. As Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) and Backe-Hansen (2008) argue, troubled and troublesome young people are often left to their own devices, because they are considered to uncooperative or difficult to engage with. This perception of abandonment by those who are in authority influences the experiences of vulnerable youths further and might propel them along the trajectory to alienation. Alienation can affect adolescents in their home and social life and as well as influence future opportunities. The scope of the study delimits marginalisation along with alienation experiences at school, as creating a pivotal context in determining trajectories to non-beneficial life choices.

2.5.3   Using language to turn the tables

"The pen is mightier than the sword" is a classical expression alluding to the power of written communication in social contexts. Communication takes place in a multitude of ways, including variations of verbal and non-verbal communication. The meaning making attached to the ways in which we communicate is very strongly contingent on the social context and meanings assigned conventionally or culture specifically.

According to the social constructivist perspective, communication allows us access to how people make sense of their worlds. As previously indicated, one of the key risk factors among at-risk youths is limitations around academic performance and language. Research findings (Knapp & Hall, 2007; Dayton, 2007; Gottman, 1997) indicate that socially marginalised groups often develop complex communication systems to reinforce their identity as a group. They are used and adapted in ways that communicate social affiliation and conflict with the traditional school culture (Knapp & Hall, 2007; Dayton, 2007; Gottman, 1997).

Some theorists are of the view that up to 93% of emotional communication occurs without words (Gottman, 1997). Non-verbal communication is therefore an important part of how socio-emotion is developed and expressed. According to Knapp and Hall (2007:10), "the limbic brain ... reacts to the world around us reflexively and instantaneously, in real time, and without thought." Therefore, according to this school of thought, before verbal language comes into use, we have already developed a "rich tapestry of gestures and actions to communicate our needs and desires". This happens as a function of the limbic brain and social interaction. (Dayton, 2007:199)

2.5.3.1   Non-verbal communication skills

Non-verbal communication is a process of communication through sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) cues between people. Non-verbal messages involve a process of coding and decoding that is influenced by shared meaning making by people in a particular context. Argyle (1988) concludes that there are five primary functions of non-verbal bodily behaviour in human communication:

- Express emotions;

- Express interpersonal attitudes;

- Accompany speech in managing the cues of interaction between speakers and listeners;

- Self-presentation of one's personality;

- Rituals (greetings).

In many cases we communicate information in non-verbal ways using groups of behaviours. In non-verbal communication one can distinguish between body language, which includes gesture, posture, distance, touch and gaze, and object language, which includes signs, designs and clothing (Kirch, 1979:417). Next I discuss some of these non-verbal ways of communication.

Facial expression is considered one of the most important communication channels. According to Navarro (2008), it entails looking at each other during communication. In the process of communication people focus on the facial zones, namely the overall expression, the eyes and the mouth. There are commonly held conventions on how these zones are used and, according to Knapp and Hall (2007) and Navarro (2008), facial expressions are categorised as either positive or negative. These conventions, however, can vary according to culture and context. In subversive activity people may choose to use commonly held associations in opposite ways, so that a slight smile that ends just short of a smirk may be read as a challenge instead of an acknowledgement of something agreeable.

Eye contact is a very contentious communication tool, which is deeply rooted in cultural practice and perceptions of interest, attention and deception (Hogan & Stubbs, 2003). The eyes are used to indicate a range of emotions and therefore eye contact is considered one of the more complex non-verbal strategies. When interpreting eye contact, researchers suggest the following variables influence the meaning conveyed: the length and duration of the eye contact, the patterns of contact and aversion, the frequency and length of glances, direct or 'through the lashes' (Argyle, 1988; Eckman, 2003; Weiten, Dunn & Hammer, 2009). In addition, Pease and Pease (2004) express the opinion that together with facial expression and overall demeanour, eye contact is considered an important source of attitudinal information.

Kinesics refers to the subtle ways in which people communicate through deliberate movements, like postures, gestures, gaze, stance and facial movements (Pease & Pease, 2004; Knapp & Hall, 2007). The distinction needs to be made between learners who adopt certain postures and gestures unconsciously and those who do so to communicate disengagement or active resistance.

Para-linguistics, also referred to as para-language, refers to vocal communication, such as sounds, tone, speech rate, speech patterns and inflections. In sub-cultures the use of non-word sounds, rate of speech and other linguistic cues are used to communicate a sub-text meaning to which only the members of that culture are privy (Pease & Pease, 2004; Knapp & Hall, 2007).

Proxemics refers to the space people feel comfortable with between themselves and others. This level of comfort varies and is influenced by things like social norms, situational factors, levels of familiarity and personality. Hall (in Knapp & Hall, 2007) identified four spatial zones among Americans: intimate zone (nearly touching to 18 inches away), personal zone (18 inches to 4 feet away), social zone (4 to 12 feet away) and public zone (12 feet and more). This is closely tied to hepatics, which refers to communicating using touch (Knapp & Hall, 2007). People tend to have very strong views about what is considered appropriate when it comes to physical contact (Argyle, 1988). Learners who have difficult peer relations often operate in violation of these engagement zones. They may not have the body-mind connection that enables them to realise the importance of the need for these various boundaries in engagement with others and would therefore not be very likely to respect it in their peers. According to Remland and Jones (2005), despite how some young people may view it, hitting, pushing, pulling, pinching, kicking are not playful activities; in fact they are to be considered a direct violation of the other person's body and space. These inabilities, to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate touching, in addition to failure to effectively read and respond to non-verbal cues from others, are another source of potential conflict in learners with limited socio-emotional competency. These transgressions often result in conflict, rejection and even alienation over time.

The symbolic way in which people show their affiliation to groups is referred to as objectics. According to Knapp and Hall (2007) this symbolic representation of affiliation may include material possessions, the use of language, dress code and attitudes. At school the attitude towards traditional school culture and authority are an important part of how young people seek to communicate their connection with a group or subversive counter-culture within the school culture. In socio-economically challenged environments it may not refer so much to what you have, but what you do

with what you have; so, for example, while you may not have an iPod, having trendy music on your cheaper cell phone could have as great an impact in setting you apart from your peers.

2.5.3.2   *Sub-cultural communication systems*

Limited in what they have at their disposal as a means to respond to rejection by their peers and traditional school culture, socially marginalised adolescents who form cluster groups often develop complex communication systems that enable them to feel connected and 'special'. Research with marginalised groups has found that many turns to symbolic interaction, which is heavily dependent on non-verbal communication strategies as a rebuttal to a system from which they feel excluded. According to Dayton (2007), this symbolic interaction is subject to agreed-upon cues and the exchange of emotionally laden signals happens so quickly they are hardly noticeable by those not in the know. Sometimes these non-verbal signals are accompanied by verbal communication and are used to convey specific intentions, attitudes or feelings (Knapp & Hall, 2007:16). I argue that in attempting to develop socio-emotional literacy, unearthing or gaining insight into this symbolic interactional process is important; this corresponds with the view of social constructivist theory that language is not just words, but is rich in meaning, motive and design. It has a strong relational connotation and should therefore be considered an important expression of social identification or divergence (Tsourvakas, 1997; Gottman, 1997; Dayton, 2007). Interactions or patterns of interactions are key components supporting group dynamics and, depending on the context, developing a dual communication system can be used as a subversive practice in disruptive behaviour. There is common agreement among researchers that being able to identify emotional cues that are embedded in non-verbal communication is an important skill in working with counter-cultures (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). These cues are laden with shared meaning making. Conflicting verbal and non-verbal messages within the same interaction can sometimes send opposing or conflicting messages. Conflicting messages may occur for a variety of reasons, often stemming from feelings of uncertainty, ambivalence or frustration (Levine & Adelman, 1993) or be used to purposefully exclude people who are not part of the inner circle.

2.6   COUNTER-CULTURAL GROUPS AS AN AGENTIC RESPONSE TO SOCIAL ISOLATION AT SCHOOL

According to Bandura (2005) lives are historically placed and socially developed in milieus that present unique opportunities, constraints and challenges. The series of transactional life events to which individuals are exposed play a major role in the course and outcome of their development. Therefore Social learning theorists support the view that "we are not mindless robots responding mechanically to others in our environment; rather, we think, reason, imagine, plan, expect, interpret, believe and compare" (Bandura, 2005:2). When others try to influence or control us, our values and beliefs allow us to resist or be more open to their influence (Van Breda, 2006). Thus social cognitive theory places a great deal of importance on the reciprocal interplay between personal factors and diverse influences that interact over time. This underscores Bandura's (2005:5) view that one can only ever fully understand human behaviour by engaging with the "integrated causal system in which socio-structural influences operate through psychological mechanisms to produce behavioural effects".

2.6.1   Agency in group formation

Group formation is rarely accidental, or coincidental, according to social cognitive theory; "by exercising personal and collective influence, human agency operates generatively and proactively on social systems, not just reactively" (Bandura, 2005:6). This school of thought distinguishes three modes of agency used by people in an attempt to influence the course of their experience or life path. According to Bandura (2005), these can be referred to as personal, proxy and collective agency. Personal agency refers to the individual's attempt to exercise control or influence on their own functioning and on environmental events. Proxy agency is a socially mediated mode of agency, in which people seek out other people whom they view as having access to resources or skills they need and are not able to mobilise themselves. It is considered a socially interdependent effort that requires self-awareness, awareness of others and how they relate to the environment. Collective agency refers to people getting together to pool their knowledge, skills and resources, provide mutual support, form alliances and work to secure together what they know they need, but have come to realise they cannot accomplish on their own.

People often seek out others with skills complementary to their own. Every member of the group brings something to it that adds value.

2.6.2   Group emotional competence (GEC)

Emotions are a source of motivation and action (Izard, 1991). Multiple studies have shown that emotion influences the way individuals act towards each other. The relationship between emotion and behaviour leads to changes between the individual and the environment (i.e. the group and its members) (Koman, Wolff & Howard, 2008:45). The term 'group emotional competence' (GEC) refers to the ability of a group to create a culture that effectively shapes the group's experience of, and response to, emotion in the group (Koman et al., 2008:39). In socially marginalised clusters, groups could almost be compared to work-place teams, people who would not necessarily have gravitated towards each other naturally, but who instead have come together to form a team that needs to function within a broader organisational culture. The members of these occupational teams develop a group culture that influences the emotional processing of its members and can influence both the group's perceptions and experiences of success in a specific context. This view is supported by Koman et al. (2008), who highlight the fact that the influence that a culture within a group exerts on its members involves an intricate web of cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes that occur in dynamic relationship to each other. Their view on this dynamic interplay is strongly influenced by cognitive appraisal theories of emotion (Levy, 1984; Solomon, 1984; Lazarus, 1991 in Koman et al., 2008:41), which put forward the notion that emotional processing happens in two phases, each of which is moderated by cognition, interpretation of events and decisions around how to respond to them. Within groups the response styles are determined by cultural norms and practices that develop over time. As in any group, some individuals are more influential than others. While agreeing with the preceding notion of groups developing particular cultural practices that influence their members, Druskat and Wolff (1999) argue that groups vary in their level of cognition, sophistication and exposure in developing a wide range of responses.

From a review of the literature it would then appear that the culture within a group exerts a great deal of influence over its way of thinking, as well as the emotional and behavioural responses of its members. This in turn determines how group members

interpret events and delineates what they would deem to be appropriate responses to stimuli (Koman et al., 2008). I would then argue that the contextual discourse in the group dictates the experiences of the individuals and collective. This discourse often develops contrary to dominant discourses in the traditional culture. The scale depicted in Figure 2.3 below serves to illustrate that this is not a linear process but rather an intricate balancing act that is often as carefully policed as the enforcement of dominant discourses around pro-social normative practice.
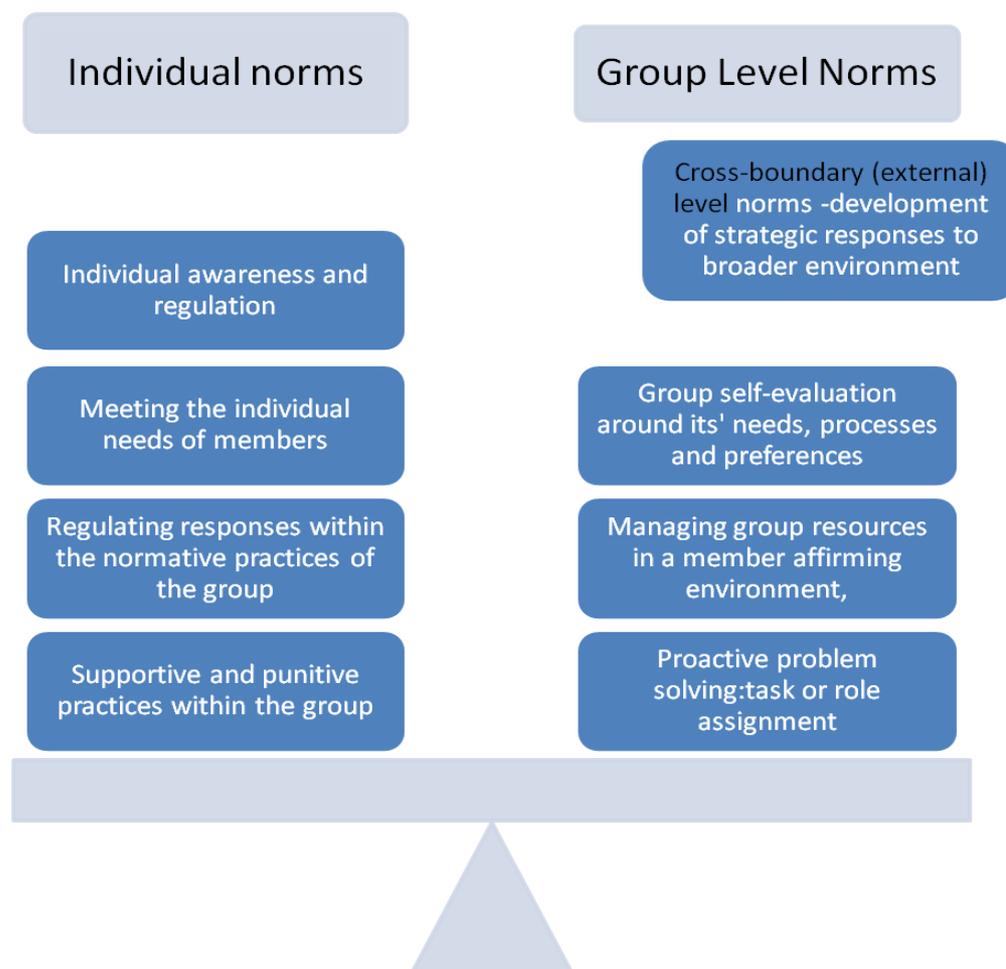
Figure 2.3:   An adaptation of Druskat and Wolff"s Classification of ECG Norms (Druskat & Wolff, 1999:15)

2.6.3   Ensuring conformity

Peer pressure, also referred to as disambiguation, may refer to a set of group dynamics whereby a group pressures an individual to do something he or she wouldn't normally do. This implies a measure of coercion. Peers become an important influence on behaviour during adolescence and peer pressure has been called a hallmark of adolescent experience (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). My perception, in line with a growing school of thought, is that members of cluster groups willingly subject themselves to group norms in order to ensure continued membership. When faced with the option of returning to social isolation, the at-risk individual chooses conformity. The group and the individual exercise what social cognitive theory refers to as bi-directional influence (Bandura, 2006; Ausubel, 2002). Studies on peer influence among pro-social youths have found that these young people often experience the same pressure to conform to good and bad practices prevalent in their peer group's culture (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007; Berns, Capra, Moore & Noussair, 2010). It would appear that group solidarity is an important social structural influence and that there is the perception that the group has the power to facilitate or withhold access. Any person with marginal status would thus be excessively sensitive to the threat of forfeiting what little status he enjoys. He would also be careful of incurring the disapproval of those on whom he is dependent. To allay the anxiety from the threat of disapproval, he conforms more than is objectively necessary to retain group acceptance or to avoid censure and reprisal (Cooper, 2008). The individuals in the group may have a perception that the collective efficacy of the group will afford them a measure of status and protection they are not able to muster themselves (Zajko, 2007). Not all socially marginalised groups are anti-social; thus one should guard against assumption that individuals who feel socially marginalised in the dominant culture gravitate towards groups that are inclined to anti-social behaviour.

2.7   INTERVENTION

Intervention mediates the gap between the already established and what is possible by creating opportunities to learn from experience. I found very limited body of literature that focused on working within already established socially marginalised peer cluster groups with the goal of enabling the individual members to exercise a

greater deal of personal of agency within the groups. The intervention approach adopted in this study acknowledges the group as a safe space for its members, but seeks to collaboratively influence the pathways the youth use to navigate adolescence. Much of the literature deals with developing the resilience of the individual outside of the group context, and while I value this as an important variable in interrupting the trajectory to delinquency, I witnessed first-hand the important social role that a socially marginalised group played in protecting its members from the effects of physical, emotional and social isolation. Much of the literature review has been dedicated to understanding the dynamic at play in peer cluster groups; I adopt an approach inspired by Bandura (2006), White and Morgan (2006), Fletcher (2006) and others who propagate the agentic role of youths in determining what they need to be well. Social constructivists place participants at the centre of research; it acknowledges them as organic intellectuals who are able to review and reflect on their realities and practices, and then decide how they wish to engage with that reality. These theorist and researchers argue for social practice that encourages the researcher to be more than a passive observer; adopting this approach implies a transactional agreement with the participants to create safe spaces that will honour their knowledge and experience, and that will engage in empathic practice that will allow them experiential opportunities to engage with new ways of being in response to what they identify as important to them. White and Morgan (2006:42) refer us to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development when embarking on exploratory journeys that "envision taking children to realities they may not have imagined". According to them, this zone refers to the unfamiliar area between what the child knows and is able to achieve independently and what is possible for them to achieve in partnership with others. I purposely use the word 'partnership', because I concur with Bandura's (2006) stance that sustainable change is only possible if we acknowledge the young person's agency in deciding the paths they will follow. Creating authentic moments of mastery to strengthen individual and group agency in transforming current practice involves a process Vygotsky's theory refers to as scaffolding. According to White and Morgan (2006), this entails using narrative practices that create an opportunity for the young people to create distance between themselves and the 'immediacy of the problem' by breaking the task into 'manageable portions' and presenting through what they refer to as 'chains of association' opportunities for the child to experience self-regulation in purposeful and meaningful ways. Futcher and Digney (2012:18)

recommend as a foundation for any such venture "the creation of co-created spaces that respect the mutuality of the relationship and its purpose between the participants and the researcher." So while Chapter 3 addresses the methodological aspects of this process, in this chapter I introduce the underlying principles of the process as it pertained to working with an at-risk research population.

2.7.1   Co-creating accountability

Gaining insight into the lived realities of vulnerable youthful participants and the variables that influence their ways of being meant intentionally empowering myself with knowledge gleaned from my colleagues working in the field with at-risk youths on resilience and their responsiveness intervention. A key aspect raised by researchers was that there was no one-size-fits-all approach; the field is laden with dissent. However, despite the controversies, most agreed that in establishing "the mutuality of the relationship both parties to the relationship create it and are influenced by it" (Fewster in Garafat et al., 2012:18). Having said that, though, findings from research related to youths presenting with problematic behavioural patterns recommend that the researcher be intentional in what they are doing and why they are doing it. This does not mean abandoning spontaneity; rather, it is about understanding the potential dynamic interplay that will emerge in the co-created space as tied to time, context and the moment. Ainsworth (2012) alerts us to the fact that the inner working model of the young person may be caught up in a cynical distrust of people and practices that have let them down before, and they come into the process not expecting anything different. White and Morgan (2006) suggest that one of the ways we can counter this cynicism and learned helplessness is for facilitators to make an empathic shift away from focusing on the child's behaviour, separating the young person from the behaviour. Instead they are encouraged to focus on establishing a relationship with the young person and the group apart from the problem, by creating experiential encounters that allow the youths to experience a different way of being and engaging with the world (White & Morgan, 2008; Ainsworth, 2012; Futcher & Digney, 2012).

2.7.2   Preparing to meet the group where they are at

As a fundamental approach based on my understanding of the findings of other researchers, my experience as an educator and educational psychologist, my premise was that the youths were seeking meaningful connection with peers at school, something that is an important part of any adolescent's life. How and with whom they establish those connections is often tied to their experience of how they experience the school context. Socially marginalised young people who establish cluster groups often experience school with a degree of ambivalence. For many it becomes a place where they experience their greatest pleasure and their greatest pain. Where they apportion blame or give credit for their experience is linked to how welcoming they experience the traditional school culture and its custodians as being. Research findings in various aspects of adolescent experience of school allude to a dynamic interplay between the young person and the school context over time. McWhirter et al. (2007) refer to this as a continuous and dynamic process during which the adolescent may experience the school culture as alienating along a continuum. Depending on where they are along that continuum at any given time will determine the extent of their need to defend their niche in a cluster group of peers that they perceive as being more welcoming than the school culture.

In addition many children who fall into the at-risk category have come to distrust the agendas of the adults in their lives. Therefore research findings pertaining to interventions alert us to the fact that understanding the role of the peer group, accepting the cynicism towards adults and working within the unique existing dynamic of the group as you meet it are central to progress (Bandura, 2006; McWhirter et al., 2007; Ainsworth, 2012). I agree with the view that the young person is influenced by all of these variables, but I also believe that it is important to acknowledge and bring to their consciousness the extent to which they exercise an influence over the norms and practices in that group. I expect resistance to anything that challenges group cohesion, but my assumption is that resistance would vary from individual to individual. This view is influenced by Bandura's (2006) argument that the group can be viewed as the creative collective effort of at-risk individuals in an alienating environment to utilise the resources available to them in ensuring their wellbeing, as they understand it at the time. He goes on to recommend that one work

with the creative agency of the individuals and the collective in developing healthy substitutions instead of trying to stifle that creativity in a divide-and-conquer approach. To this end one would consider a shift from labelling the group dysfunctional or marginalised to a view of the group as a team with the common goal of protecting the wellbeing of its members. The intervention process and tools used in it should be seen to complement and enhance what is already there by firstly acknowledging the functionality of the group (section GEQ); secondly, by considering the collaborative practices of the team; and thirdly, by collaborating in an on-going reflective cycle with the participants influenced by their past and current experiences (see PAR and youth engagement cycle in section 3.4.2). I agree with Bandura's (2006:3) assertion that "in our haste to change children's behaviour we overlook that those behaviours make sense to the children themselves". I concur with the view that despite our best intentions in doing acknowledging the voice and experiences of the group, we must remain alert to the potential for communicating disrespect for the agency exercised by the group in being proactive in facilitating their own pathways to wellness. Having said that, I am not proposing that we blindly accept or condone their behaviour, but rather that we take the time to know with them what motivates their behaviour and in that process create spaces in which they can hold their current practice up to scrutiny and consider alternative ways of being. Cooper, Hoofman, Marvin and Powell (2000) argue that when young people feel safe, their natural curiosity is activated and with the proper verbal or non-verbal support are open to self exploration. They further argue that this sense of discovery is augmented by allowing them active participation in the process. Refer to section 3.4 to see how this need was accommodated in the research design.

2.7.3   Setting the scene for collaborative action

2.7.3.1   *Establishing the group as a circle of courage*

Figure 2.4:   The basic tenements of the Circle of Courage (Brokenleg, 1998)

The "circle of courage" is in line with what the literature has identified as the basic developmental needs of adolescents in that through its underlying principles it creates a culture that allows members of the circle to experience membership (or belonging), voluntary participation in the group, and acknowledgement of both their individual and group voice in what will happen in the group (independence). Activities are structured so that members are able to experience cumulative moments of mastery at different paces (mastery), and finally give and receive time, attention and access to resources (generosity). I argue that all of these practices are already in place in the group and at our disposal; however, they have been used in counterproductive ways to respond to perceptions of marginalisation and not to serve the best interest of the group and its individual members in the long term. I proceeded from the assumption that any intervention, no matter how well intentioned or democratic, will present a direct threat to the existing group culture. I anticipated that a problem-saturated story will dominate and that it would exert a great deal of pressure on the facilitator and transformation process as the group transforms from cluster to team. In addition, I was aware that each of the members of the group has a unique risk chain that contributed to their seeking membership in the group and

continuing to conform to the demands of the group, because they have a vested interest in the status quo. I was therefore of the view that the process of acknowledging the "sparkling moments in the problem-saturated story" (White & Morgan, 2006) may be an unrealistic precursor to reframing group dynamics. One would thus have to spend time just being in the moment, as Ainsworth (2012) argues, for one, as researcher, to understand that the behaviour and participant we see represents only the tip of the inner world of the individual participant. I therefore proceeded from the premise that authentic acknowledgement of the ways in which they have exercised agency in response to perception of risks in their environment creates a bridge between the problem-saturated story and what is realistically attainable, in an attractive alternative story. Dayton (2007) warns against studies related to what he refers to as sociometry, underestimating the importance that group members attach to the dynamics at play in that group. Membership of the group and the dynamics within the group have also created opportunities for its members to experience individual efficacy in the group dynamic and greater collective efficacy in response to the experience of social isolation within the traditional school culture. So while the circle of courage will address the ethos that will guide the group, I will also begin to challenge the behaviour that brought the participants to this collaboration in the first place.

An extensive review of the literature illustrated the multi-dimensional nature of the research focus area and magnified the challenge that creating a safe space would create. Because of the diversity of the group, their unique bouquet of risk factors and the complementary skills and ability sets that they present with, the research project had to involve many components. In seeking to develop socio-emotional skills from a zone of proximal development perspective, I ran the risk of alienating individual participants, and as a consequence the whole group, if the group members were not invested in the process from the beginning. A survey of studies that presented findings from the perspective of youth involvement brought to my attention the circle of friends approach to socio-emotional development among young people. This approach has been used extensively in the United Kingdom and elsewhere for a number of years and the move towards of the proponents of this approach in highlighting participants' experience in their own voice motivated me to introduce the concept into the research process. In the light of the academic, language and

cognitive challenges in the group, strong emphasis was placed on a visual storyboard presentation of what would be done and how it would be done. As part of their orientation to the research process, the participants were presented with what would happen and how I had adapted the original practices it to the needs of the participants and the study. Because some of them had been part of a previous intervention, I incorporated one of the strategies used in that intervention to act as a bridge. In the next section I present the aspects of the circle of friends' approach that I used in this study.

Circle time refers to a process in which young people meet weekly and engage in an inclusive democratic process that affords everyone equal status and encourages participation in non-coercive ways. This meeting focuses on creating an environment that fosters practising various key socio-emotive skills and emphasises the importance of a fun, non-threatening environment through practising skills such as speaking, listening, turn-taking, problem-solving and enjoying and appreciating each other's company. Mosley (2009:121) argues that in the circle of friends approach, offering a structured schools-based intervention has the potential to influence participant's perceptions or judgments of their own and other people's behaviour, with members being classmates, and not necessarily members of the same social peer group. The participants in this study were purposively selected individuals who had had very similar negative experiences of the school culture and those negative experiences were the glue that bound them together. So the stimulus material for conversation had to be carefully selected so that it would elicit real experiences, but also to create opportunities to move towards shifts in participants' perceptions. Carr, Robinson, Taylor and Carlson (1990) refer to this as a process of making pro-social responses more probable.

The second challenge this framework presented was what Mosley (2009:125) refers to as "the key ground-rule from the outset … no person may mention another in a negative way" and everything else is negotiated between the adults and the children. While this may appear to be a reasonable basis from which to work, in this study I had to consider that referring to each other in a negative way could be a normative part of the group dynamic, and that any effort to unilaterally impose a different way of relating to each other would in all likelihood be met with stringent resistance. This

would also take into account what Bandura (2006) referred to as the intervention undermining the agency of group practices and as a result dishonouring their preferred way of being in the world. It also presented a challenge in that what I considered negative in terms of dominant discourse might be acceptable in contextual discourse. I resolved this dilemma by adopting the social constructivist view that people as the experts in their lives and co-researchers and decision makers in this process would collectively decide what the rules of engagement were. I was not, however, naïve in assuming that the participants would not use my limited knowledge of what was acceptable in the context against me. Findings of research related to how individuals in at-risk groups relate to each other speak of the ways in which members of deviant peer groups reinforce negative behaviour and, according to cluster theory, may even punish behaviour that they consider pro-social (McWhirter et al., 2007). So what at first appeared to be a reasonably accessible way of ensuring equitable participation of members evolved into a complex process that illuminated the peer cluster in this study as a dynamic entity in which the members were very active in co-determining the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that drove the group (McWhirter et al., 2007). In their cluster group theory McWhirter et al. (2007) point out that while members have a fair amount of influence in group dynamics, there are still some members who exert greater influence than others. The culture of secrets and dual communication systems presented a challenge to the emergence of authentic participation of individual members at first; there are studies that cite this as a reason for separating members of cluster groups. Oetting and Beauvais (1987), however, express the view that removing young people from their peer cluster and working with them individually or as part of another peer group does not provide a sustainable solution, as the individual has to go back and function in the same environment that generated his challenges in the first place. Like them and cluster theorists, I argue instead for an approach that seeks to work within the group to influence the sub-cultural practices that normalise problematic behaviour. A practice, McWhirter et al. (2007) refer to as the influence the peer group exercises in reinforcing norms which adults are often not able to influence or modify. While I agree with McWhirter et al. (2007) that the more viable alternative to addressing problematic behaviour is working with the whole peer cluster, I disagree with their suggestion of an in-school approach. This is because I perceive the school as a terrain of contested power, where authority figures such as teachers may place

undue pressure on facilitators of such interventions to report on the progress of the cluster group or individuals in the cluster group. Careless disparaging remarks by authorities who are often frustrated by their failure to influence the cluster group may serve to reinforce the "us and them" perception of participants, placing the facilitator in the "them" category and limiting the willingness of the cluster group to participate fully in the intervention.

2.7.4   Using activity theory to structure intervention

Garafat et al. (2012:16), speak of "rituals of encounter". This view aligns with Mosley's (2008) circle of friends approach in that it encourages the use of interesting and varied activities to assist young people to reflect on current practice and to experience first-hand the possibility of creating new ways of being. These and other studies related to mediating change speak of the importance of experiential models that broaden young people's exposure and challenge them to extend themselves in new and often previously unattainable ways. It requires the facilitator of the process to develop a toolkit that purposefully selects activities mindful of the opportunity that these will create for meaning making within the individual and the group. In deciding on the activities the facilitator remains flexible, and secures the provision of resources that will ensure the safe implementation of activities and how access to them will be negotiated, before presenting them to the participants for consideration. Engeström's model in Figure 2.5 below illustrates the dynamic interplay of the wide range of factors that impact on development, selection and engagement.
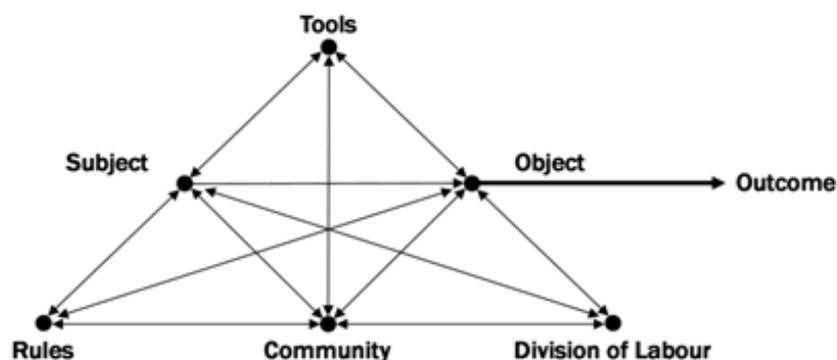
Figure 2.5:   Engeström's model of activity theory (in Garafat et al., 2012)

The model illustrates that in order to reach an outcome it is necessary to produce certain objects (e.g. experiences, knowledge and physical products). This process is mediated by artefacts (tools, documents, etc.) that are material and symbolic. Above and beyond the doing and producing, one must take cognisance of the context of the community involved in the activity and how its dynamics may impose rules that affect the activity and influence the outcomes. In addition, one must clearly articulate in age- and level-appropriate language what participants can expect to experience, what may present challenges to them and whether there is any potential for harm. When working with a cluster group, one should make allowance for the group dynamics that could come into play during an activity and should attempt to mediate that.

This presents an ethical challenge when using research as intervention, as one may then miss valuable data around how group and individual needs and efficacy unfold naturally. Decision making in deciding which activities will form part of the process can become a contested terrain and the source of undue tension, if the researcher does not allow the group to engage with its natural decision-making process away from the research context. Participants should thus be allowed an opportunity to exercise their right to use the resources at their disposal in deciding which activities to engage with (Bandura, 2006). Exposure to activities, novel in their experience, consultation around clarifying reservations and allowing young people to exercise or experience agency in decision-making allows for the empowerment of individuals. I agree with the view that one should not impose interventions on young people without due regard for their social, psychological and physical safety. It is my view that often scholars pursue knowledge without due regard for the comfort of participants in being confronted with their limitations in a public arena. Garafat et al. (2012) recommend that we honour young people's awareness of their limitations, as well as the level and the pace at which they are willing to challenge themselves. The types of tools selected are an important component of mediation that has as its primary focus the accumulation and transmission of social knowledge through activity. Activities have to be carefully selected so that while they influence the external and internal functioning of the individuals, they maintain the interest of the participants and accommodate the shared focus on change over time in the individuals, the group and the activities with which they interact and the way in which

they interact with them. (See Chapters 3 and 4 for a discussion of the activities and how they were used in this study; see also Appendix 2 for an example of an activity planning sheet.)

2.7.5   Social autopsy conversations

These were in essence conversations held with the group to dissect behavioural responses in between sessions. The purpose was to provide a living experience of accountability in a safe space. Though flexible and informal conversations the youths were guided by narrative practices of externalising conversation. This is a narrative therapy linguistic technique, which is used to separate the person from the problem (White & Morgan, 2006). In this way, narrative therapists believe, we create a space in which "the problem is the problem; the person is not the problem" (Freedman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997:8). Although there is a road map, the process remains flexible and responsive to the requirements of the individual, the group and significant moments as they emerge in the session (Dayton, 2007). The purpose is to playfully develop a rich description of the "problem". It relieves the pressure of allocating blame and resorting to defensiveness. Instead of being defined as inherently a problem, a young person can now have a relationship with the externalised problem (Freedman et al., 1997:xv; Lobovitz & Seidel, 1999) in order to develop a broader understanding of the ways in which a person is influenced by, and is able to exert influence over, the problem at hand (D'Zurilla & Goldfried in Salvin & Madden, 2001). This value of this approach is supported by Lavoie (1994) who recommends using social skill autopsies after the learner experiences a negative or positive social outcome as a consequence of interactions in their daily lives. The choices we make are shaped largely by the meanings we attribute to events and the options we consider or believe available to us in responding to them (Freedman et al., 1997: xv; White & Morgan, 2006). In this way we stretch both thinking and practice, and create opportunities for people to reposition themselves in relation to the problem.

The actual activities included an animal encounter, capacitar practices related to non-verbal trauma practices, indoor wall climbing, a protracted male mentoring programme and drawing. All of these are discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

2.8 SUMMARY

In this chapter I reviewed relevant literature to inform my understanding of the issue under investigation, and develop a framework within which to conduct the investigation. In addition, I presented thoughts, theories and experiences from various practitioners in the field of at-risk youth. At-riskness is a highly contentious field with various schools of thought, depending on area of interest. I move on from this chapter with the view that there really is no new knowledge. What will differentiate future practice is integrating the lessons learnt from the past and being creative in how we use them. The effectiveness of what we do will be greatly determined by the extent to which we understand and acknowledge the unique experiences and organic intelligence of the young participants with whom we conduct our research and our ability to establish meaningful relationships with them. Practices we engage with should thus be based in the here and know, underpinned but not imprisoned by past experience and knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

To do no harm (Bird, 1996) that was the underlying philosophy that guided my collaborative journey with a group of socially marginalised youths in re-envisioning a future that promoted self-efficacy in the pursuit of healthy life choices. This study was a consciously implemented social process that was steeped in social constructionism. This paradigm and the research design sought to open communicative spaces where the voices of those who are less often heard could harmonise with scientific knowledge and generate reflexive practices in the here and now. The study engaged in an exploratory process that acknowledged life as a multi-layered complex process. Over and above understanding it in the present, I was also keen to consider how it could be in the future (Gilbreath, 2008; Bhana, 2006; Baum et al., 2006; Wadsworth, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

3.2   THE FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

In a university driven school based intervention program with youth who were presenting with ongoing disruptive behaviour patterns, I observed what appeared to be a well-structured sub-group. The existence of such a sub-group among learners with problematic behaviour in schools is supported by Dayton's research (2007) that found that socially marginalised or problematic youths tend to form cluster groups. The dynamics in these cluster groups are often very complex and while they are often viewed as dysfunctional by outside observers, research has found that these cluster groups serve an important role in allowing their members to feel less socially isolated (Dayton, 2007; Bandura, 2006). My observation revealed this sub-group to be a well-established group that had established practices and roles, some of which were obvious, while others were more covert. I was intrigued by the suggestion that this group was an established sub-culture, guided by the normative values and expectations of its members. As an educational psychologist, I have often worked with disruptive youths, but had not conducted research with them before. I

recognised in myself a response described by Barone (in Barone & Eisner, 2012:137), as "the sudden realisation of my vast ignorance about the ways of people ... and about the fundamentals of a world no longer honoured in the dominant". The main purpose of my study was to explore, understand and describe what happens in such a group. I was guided in my inquiry by the primary research question: **How can the trajectory to delinquency in a group of socially marginalized youth group be interrupted to transform the group into a supportive community?**

In order to fully explore my research question, I asked the following questions;

- How did the participants come to be in the group and how does being part of that group serve them?

- How do members' perceptions of the group's efficacy influence their perception of their own efficacy?

- What are the pathways to assisting participants to make more beneficial life choices?

Being an educational psychologist I was motivated to provide interventions that could provide sustainable alternative and healthier lifestyle choices. These alternative choices are most likely to be adopted by youth if they originate in collaboration with the youths whom they target. (Rush, 2011; Ungar, 2004).

3.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

I became intrigued by the prospect of finding a different way of understanding this cluster group as more than a dysfunctional socially marginalised group. I wanted to come to know the group beyond their label, to understand their group dynamics and the ways in which they supported each other; I also wished to explore whether in that knowing together we could come to reflect and experience ways to bring about change that would assist them in making more beneficial life choices (Cohen et al., 2011).

I hoped that by engaging them in a participatory research process, they would develop social competencies and that a training protocol could be developed that would promote collaborative practices among youth, professionals and lay people.

Nokoneg (in Foskun et al., 2005) also points out the importance of understanding the behaviour and thinking of African people from their own rather than a Western perspective, particularly about how they interact with their environment and their particular social experiences.

3.4   THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

An extensive literature review of methodologies strengthened my decision that participatory research practices would best facilitate the creation of a space conducive to the promotion of emotional and social intelligence among participants, without threatening the value they attach to their peer support group. In this study I decided with the participants and allowed them to be the co-authors of the intervention focus. I decided on this approach in an effort to honour their voice in the experience of the phenomenon. I explored their unique challenges and needs and used this knowledge to develop with them an experiential and interactive model on wellness, that we used to shift their group dynamic to a more health promoting one (Goleman, 2002; Ungar, 2004; Cane, 2005; Chopra, 2006). The model leaned heavily on interventions based in popular education and what appealed to the interest of the participants. The experiential program that emerged will be presented in Appendix 3. One of the recommendations of this study is considering how this experiential programme can be transformed into a tool for use in training auxiliary youth workers or psycho-social support workers when working with at-risk youths.

This study focused on the intra-group dynamics and worked with what the participants invited into the space. Informed by this approach, I then set out to design a research procedure that would facilitate the generation of data in a way that honoured the participants' unique experience.

3.5   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Knowing with and not about was the underlying perspective of this study. The research was premised on the view that ordinary people are the experts in their lives and that "social reality is a construction based upon the actor's frame of reference within the setting" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985:80). Social constructivists, therefore rely on the knowledge and experience of the participants in understanding their lived reality.

Its focus is on participatory democratic research with the people as opposed to for the people (Groux, in Cohen et al., 2011).

In order to develop this understanding, interactional spaces were created in which I collaborated with the participants in understanding their socially constructed realities. Social constructivism moves from the premise that because reality is socially constructed, there are no ultimate truths and reality can therefore be re-constructed. In the process, participants then become co-researchers, who bring unique knowledge and experiences to the process of reframing their realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; De Vos et al., 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In addition, my research is underpinned by the belief that the people with whom we engage are fully capable of understanding their challenges, can engage in "reflective and critical analysis" of the factors that contribute to those challenges and use these insights to initiate change (Cohen et al., 2011:37). My research design therefore had to be a portal through which the participants and I could explore the complex and subtle dynamics at play in their group and how this informed their behaviour and identities. The research process was therefore one that Merriam (2009:4) describes as "an exploration of the patterns and connections unique to the participants within the research context."

An extensive literature review of the experience of socially marginalised youths led me to believe that the creative flexibility of qualitative research would allow me to gain intimate knowledge of the participants' experience as members of a socially marginalised group. At the same time the approach would empower participants to have a voice in the discourse on matters pertaining to their experience of being part of a cluster group of youths who experience social marginalisation in the school environment.

There is extensive literature on socially marginalised youths, profiling of participants, interventions and recording of youths' experiences. But I did not find a large body of research in which the voices of the participants conveyed their stories, drove the interventions targeting them, and afforded them the space to do this within the reality of their context. In this study I set out to add to the limited pool of participant-driven knowledge around understanding what being part of a group of socially marginalised

youths' means to its members. According to Lewin (in Cohen et al., 2011:38), if one wants to "really understand something, [one should] try to change it". This study aimed to do just that.

I will address some of the basic assumptions of conducting a qualitative study and give an indication of how they informed this study.

3.5.1   The road to qualitative research

Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Salvenye and Robinson (2010) support the view that any research conducted with young people that has as an intended outcome recommendations or the development of any intervention needs to honour the voices, needs and experiences of the young people from their perspective. However, they caution researchers against dealing with participants of a group as if they were homogeneous; instead it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of multiple realities. This view is supported by Ritchie (2003), Creswell (2009) and Babbie (2010), who view qualitative research as a process that acknowledges and honours the complex, subtle, multi-layered and unique individual meaning-making processes among participants. Research with groups therefore seeks not only to highlight the voice of the collective, but also to strength the voice of the individual within that collective.

I was therefore of the view that qualitative research would enable me to focus on the process and engage with participants in an on-going dialogue with the purpose of gaining meaningful insight into their meaning-making process and how they applied this meaning in their realities and to the research process (Gay & Airasian, 2003:169). In addition, this approach afforded me an insider's view of the frame of reference that the participants were using to function as individuals and as a group in their social world. This promised to be a complex process made more so by the possibility that the perceptions, motivations, behaviour choices and attitudes of participants may be largely unconscious and invisible to the participants (Merriam, 1996; Creswell, 2009). According to Patton (1990:51), qualitative research has the potential to mediate this process as "greater attention can be given to setting, nuance, interdependencies and context".

The literature emphasises that in our pursuit of giving a voice we need to make sure that the authentic voice of participants is heard. As such, I undertook to make every effort to ensure that the participants' perspectives were always privileged. This stance is particularly pertinent in this type of qualitative research, which locates the researcher in the social world of the participants in a role where one is the primary data-collection instrument. I remained cognisant of these issues, as well as ensuring the protection of the rights and dignity of participants, by developing and implementing protective mechanisms throughout the study (Mason, 1996; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These mechanisms are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. According to Cohen et al. (2011), participatory research, as an aspect of critical theory, is concerned with doing research with the people and communities, which form the focus of the study instead of doing research on them. In addition, this paradigm focuses on research that investigates how the knowledge generated as part of the process can be used to impact on the quality of life of the participants. Participants therefore play and active agentic role, sharing ownership of the process and outcomes with the researcher.

Voice and ownership are only ensured when all parties involved in any project experience the safety of open two-way dialogue, equitable power and knowledge sharing, and flexibility in decision-making and implementation (Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The qualitative research approach creates an opportunity for two-way dialogue between participants and the researcher. However, I anticipated that relying only on verbal communication in engagement placed serious limitations on the freedom of expression of participants. Qualitative research allows the creative flexibility to open up communication channels to include non-verbal and symbolic gestures in the communication schema as well (Neuman, 2001; Viljoen, 2001; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Broadening the spectrum of communication would also provide a medium for member checking in the moment, drawing attention to unconscious or unquestioned patterns of response or practice by participants (the significance of creating a space for this is indicated in Chapter 2). Ritchie (2003) reminds us that meaningful qualitative research seeks not only the pursuit of scientific knowledge but also the empowerment or education of participants through their participation in the research process.

Based on my experience in the field, I embraced the emergent model approach within the qualitative research paradigm. This model recommends extensive preparation and the creation of options that would allow for flexibility in the implementation of planned activities. I found, as was pointed out in the literature, that once in the field I could not always predict responses or outcomes. This required me to remain reflexive about the interplay between what was happening in real time, the theory, the data collection and analysis processes. Creativity, flexibility and being in the moment in an informed and calculated way required extensive preparation to ensure that I was able to remain open and responsive to the dynamic of the research process as it unfolded (Neuman, 2001; Viljoen, 2001; Bogden & Knopp-Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Using a qualitative research paradigm provided me with a framework which mediated the generation of scientific data sets, and allowed me to provide thick and rich descriptions of participants' perceptions, symbolic interactions and meaning making. I used participatory action research methodology as the qualitative research approach in this study. I decided on this methodology because of its focus on knowing with people how to transform current practice and to mobilise with them for collaborative empowerment of the participants and the researcher.

3.5.2   Participatory action research (PAR)
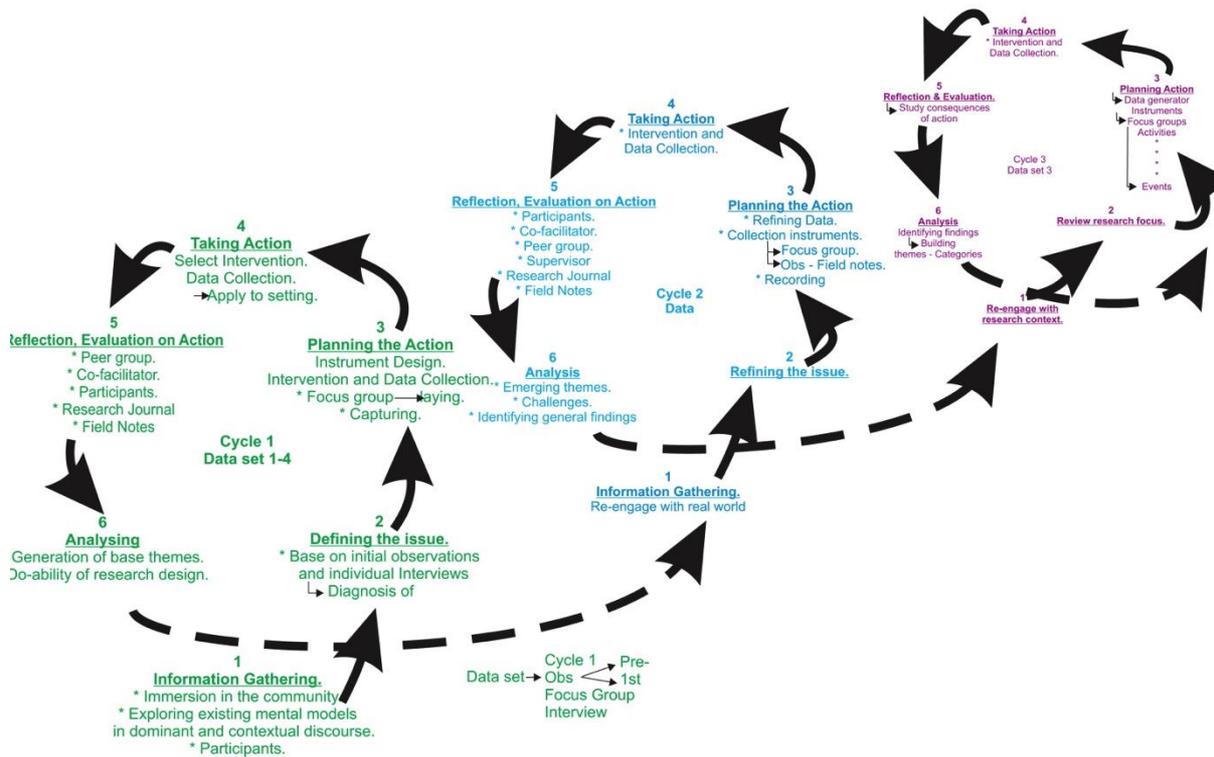
Figure 3.1:   Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is considered to be a pragmatic approach to research that collaborates with participants to address issues identified by them as important. Tied to social constructivism and critical theory, PAR is about more than knowledge production; it is about knowledge for capacity building and action. Implicit in this approach is the notion that knowledge generation and transformation are attained through collaborative reflection and action (Strydom, 2004; Babbie, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). PAR therefore involves combining theory and practice in an iterative cycle of planning, action and reflection. Tandon (in Cohen et al., 2011:38) refers to this as a process that "blends knowledge and action".

The process is set against the backdrop of the broader social, political and economic factors that may be at play in the research context (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011; Baum et al., 2006; Wadsworth, 1998). Wadsworth (1998:6) refers to this as a collective reflection in which participants focus and refocus their understanding of the process over time. This research design requires the researcher to remain vigilant and

reflexive with respect to all the activities and practices that form part of the research process. A reflexive researcher will enhance the experience of empowerment of everyone involved in the process and this will potentially create multiple opportunities for a deeper understanding of the issues and increased exposure to a rich variety of alternative solutions. For this reason researchers in the field recommend a multidisciplinary approach with real practices for participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Babbie, 2010; Bhana, 2006; Greenwood et al., 1993).

Within the PAR methodology my role as the researcher was to serve as a bridge between social science and local knowledge in a way that enabled the participants to act in their best interest (Babbie, 2010). My role as facilitator was to focus on the 'micro development' of this group. I wanted to facilitate their experience in growing their socio-emotional intelligence by providing access to knowledge, information and resources that would enable them to establish and implement interventions that would bring about change, development and improvement to their lives by acting collectively rather than individually. This addresses what Cohen et al. (2011:37) refer to as the "emancipatory and eclectic nature of research ... that adopts whatever research methodology will deliver the results that enable action and local development to follow."

The underlying research principle of participatory action research is the sustainable empowerment of the marginalised. However, before one is able to discern what empowerment in their context would entail for the participants, the researcher has to facilitate a process that will generate authentic understandings of participants' perspectives and experiences of the phenomena being studied. This begins by engaging with the participants in understanding what is important to them and why it is important to them (Cohen et al., 2011). This process of meaning making ensures that the researcher gains insight into the implicit and explicit meanings attached to their experiences. This meaning making places the participants at the centre of the study and the process of empowerment begins with the acknowledgement of them as the experts in their lives and the primary agents for change (Babbie, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Freire, 1990 in Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This acknowledgement of the participants as the key collaborators in enabling research that focuses on challenges identified as pertinent to their life is important. Engaging in critical reflective practices

aimed at gaining deeper insight into how these practices influence their lives and can be acted upon promotes the personal development and agency of participants, both as individuals and a group. This process was particularly relevant in this study, as it is in any study with young people, where their voice is what matters; why it matters and what they consider necessary to change are rarely heard. So the collaborative and co-generative nature of participatory action research creates from the outset an experience of being able to influence not only the outcome, but also the focus and the process throughout (McCouron, Schubotz & Murphy, 2012; Brydon-Miller et al., 2011; Baum et al., 2006). Refer to Appendix 4 for an illustration of how the participatory cycle was used in this study to strengthen participants' agency in an on-going generative cycle that promoted critical reflective practices.

Wadsworth (1998) recommends that the process is interactive and promote on-going communication. Communication in this study, however, was not always a straightforward process and entailed an often intuitive awareness of and attention to verbal and non-verbal communication. Contextual nuances in communication as well as symbolic gestures and interactions presented particular challenges. Immersion in the context of the participants and key informants, and careful questioning of them, assisted in acquiring an insight into how language and communication strategies were used in this particular context. This understanding of the complexity of communication was important if I wanted to honour the participants as the experts in their lives and my commitment to knowing with them instead of for them.

The research aimed to encourage the participants to be reflexive in engaging in meaning making and transformative practices; this would encourage everyone involved in the study to think about what they were thinking and why they were thinking that way (Babbie, 2010). I therefore embraced the participatory philosophy that we celebrate and actively seek an openness of practice that does not impose a perspective of wellness or a way of being in the world. Instead I sought to create safe spaces in which the participants could explore and express without fear of judgement their views and perceptions of their experiences. This was premised on the view expressed by Cohen et al. (2011:37) that "ordinary people are entirely capable of reflective and critical analysis of their situation". My role as the researcher was in

facilitating the creation of a space in which those voices could be honoured (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; White, 2000).

3.5.2.1   The process

The participatory practices in this study were underpinned by the cycle of youth engagement, which was developed by Fletcher (2006). The figure below graphically illustrates the components of the cycle.
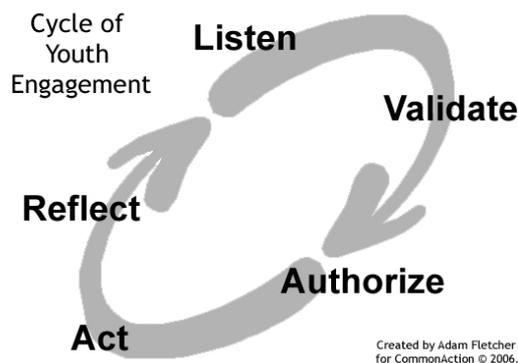
Figure 3.2:   Cycle of youth engagement

In what follows, I describe the philosophy that guided my engagement with the participants, and my data collecting process.

- **Listening to the participants**

As I have already argued, the voices of marginalised research populations are often unacknowledged in research studies. To address this in my study I employed empathic listening in a variety of communication strategies during my engagement with the participants. These included the informal conversation, focus group discussion, observation, participant created media and artistic expression. I listened both for the explicit and the implied message during my interactions with the participants. I made sure to regularly check with the participants that how I understood something was how they intended it. I did these member checks, in the moment as well as afterwards, upon reflection on and review of my recordings. My motivation for this was twofold; it was to limit researcher bias and to ensure that my research design remained flexible and responsive to the needs of the participants,

while addressing the focus of the research (Mason, 1996; Fletcher, 2006; Babbie, 2010). I relied heavily on my experience and training as a therapist when I listened for both the explicit and the implied meanings of individuals' thoughts as well as for when group alliances overrode personal preferences. In the process I remained aware of the advice by Marshall and Rossman (2011:61) and others that the researcher needs to be sensitive to the power relations at play when working with youthful participants.

After the initial information session, in which I outlined the aims of the research and the approach that I was proposing, I allowed two weeks to pass before inviting the potential participants back to a consultative meeting. At these meetings I invited comment and input on what we had discussed in the first session. I decided to let this time lapse in order for the group to meet on their own and discuss their participation in the study. In my previous work with these same participants, they had been part of a larger group referred to me as part of a punitive action by the school; I therefore wanted to emphasise the democratic nature of this study. In addition, I hoped that this action would sow the seed that participants would have a voice in all aspects of the research, including their involvement. In addition, I wanted to communicate an acknowledgement of the group dynamics that I had observed during the previous intervention.

I was also conscious that the group had presented a cluster group profile suggesting an oppositional defiant disorder and was hyper-vigilant about coercion by adults. So opening the spaces for engagement required authentic dialogue of the sort that Marshall and Rossman (2011:62) refer to as "intertwining the research, I and real world significance". Engagement was about more than dialogue; it was historically a contested terrain for participants with adults and could potentially lead to the validation of the participants as people with a voice.

- **Validating the participants**

After engaging the participants about their experiences and expectations, I explained that the model of research we would be using would require active participation, capacity building, encouragement and mobilising, and that it was in essence a research process in which the total community (parents/guardians, school, parents,

employers and intervention team) and researcher are seen as partners (Strydom, 2004). I then opened a communication space, being sensitive to the advice given by Bartunek (1993) and others that a participative research design and processes should actively strive to avoid communicative domination by the researcher; that it should strive instead to create communicative spaces that honoured open, frank and honest dialogue among research participants. I prepared the participants for an environment in which debate and confrontation were encouraged.

According to Greenwood and Levin (1998:11), "diverse understandings and the dynamic tension they lead to are understood as crucial resources for the development of creative solutions and meanings". So too Garvin and Bargal (2008) emphasise the importance of creating spaces for meaningful two-way dialogue in which young participants give and receive sincere comments, criticism and feedback. This indicates that we acknowledge their voice and authority in their lives. As the researcher I remained conscious that both my verbal and non-verbal communication needed to communicate that I had heard the explicit and implicit meaning of what participants had said; that I was taking cognisance of what they had said and was applying my own knowledge and experience to it. This became the foundation and a testing ground for showing the participatory commitment to recognising the participants as 'organic intellectuals' and experts in their own lives.

This process established the research environment as a space in which dynamic dialogue was encouraged, where we would learn to suspend judgement and embrace diverse views (Babbie, 2010). This component of PAR was particularly relevant as I was hoping to encourage increased self-awareness, self-reliance and confidence in the ability of the six participants to make healthy life choices. The process would also create a safe space for participants to rehearse their new response styles and what would be required to sustain the changes they had adopted. This approach aligns with what Strydom (2004:42) refers to as "using PAR processes to build courage to take on challenging tasks and the stamina to make sustained efforts to accomplish them".

- **Authorising the participants**

The young male participants in this study had a history of actively rebelling against authority and so power dynamics and democratic engagement were situations that they viewed with cynical caution (Fletcher, 2006). I remained mindful that empowerment is an active and interactive process. Authorising the participants would have to involve methodologies that mediated experiential learning, boundary negotiation, creating safe spaces for active learning and the rehearsal of new ways of engaging with the world. The process entailed "going beyond historical expectations for children" to strengthen self-efficacy and resilience (Garvin & Bargal, 2008:177).

While my role was to be a resource in exploring alternative ways of being, I also had to be knowledgeable and confident about what we were doing and why. I had to be mindful that this youthful population were the experts on the phenomena in this context. Marshall and Rossman (2011) remind the researcher who works with younger participants that age and power differences between adults and children are always salient features, and researchers may therefore, from force of habit, adopt overtly authoritative roles. I was made aware very early on that there is a very fine line between facilitating and enforcing change. This may sound like mere semantics. However, in this research context, given the profile of the participants and their history as a well-established cluster group, failure to pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues of how participants were experiencing the facilitation process could hamper the process. Acknowledging young people as the authorities in their lives and working with them as partners in the transformation of their practices meant accepting and making allowances for their right to express their views about the experience in whichever way they felt comfortable.

- **Mobilising the participants as active agents in their transformation**

Adolescence is a period of experimenting with voice, personal agency and autonomy. Various writers have commented that when working with participants from this age group, one should be prepared for variations in the participants' level of involvement across tasks and aspects of the research (Bandura, 2006; Mosley, 2009; Avandtivis, 2012). I made every effort to remain sensitive to, and navigate the changing needs of the participants as their confidence in their own skills and abilities changed and as

they found their voice in the research (Montero, 2000; Fletcher, 2006; Garvan & Bargal, 2008; McCorton, Schubotz & Murphy, 2012).

Doing justice to the participants' contributions and properly engaging with participatory practices required support from someone with experience in working within the research paradigm, one who shared a long-term mindset of sustained interest in the project and who had a skill set that complemented mine. I was fortunate in my co-moderator, who had worked with me in the initial intervention and possessed the necessary mindset, skill set and network to support the implementation of this research journey (Gillbreathe, 2008).

3.6   THE POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population for this study was an established group of socially marginalised youths who were part of a school project that I was a member of in the past. This study, however, is not linked to that project. Of this population, a purposively sampled group of six young men was selected. An extensive review of literature pertaining to qualitative research suggested that when detailed information about a phenomenon is sought, using the purposive sampling approach would be best, because participants can be hand picked for their wealth of information and their "relevance to the research topic rather [than] their representativeness" of the population (Neuman, 2000:196; Flick, 1998:41). This view is supported by Polkinghorne (2005), who recommends that participants, practices and documents be purposively selected because they provide "significant accounts of the experience under consideration". The literature further recommends the pursuit of information-rich cases for in-depth study, as this will allow the emergence of occurrences central to the phenomenon under study, the relationships linking these occurrences, and provide a rich description of them. Individuals, sites and activities are thus purposefully selected to inform an understanding of the research question; hence the term, purposeful sampling (Babbie, 2010; Merriam, 2008; Bless et al., 2006; Patton, 2001; Neuman, 2000; Neuman, 2000; Flick, 1998).

According to the literature, qualitative researchers rarely predetermine the number of participants, but are instead guided by the research focus. In this study, however, the sample size was determined by the number in the group, which in this case was six.

In this group there was enough variety to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon under study and gain multiple perspectives, while exploring variations in experience. The use of a pre-existing group as participants brought with it its own set of challenges, for example, how they communicated within the group and with people outside of the group; the various roles assigned to individuals within the group; and how strictly the group adhered to their practices. However, my extensive experience of working with young people led me to agree with Lewis (in Flick, 1998) that friendship groupings are an important criterion for convening groups of young people.

As the aim was to study the group dynamic within this purposively selected socially marginalised group of youths, pre-acquaintance and the perception of homogeneity was important. The six male youths were between the ages of 12 and 15, attended the same school and lived in the same peri-urban community. The literature suggests that participants who view themselves as being fundamentally similar spend more time discussing the issues at hand and less time explaining themselves (Flick, 1998; Neuman, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2005; Bless, Kagee & Higson-Smith, 2006; Babbie, 2010).

3.7   DATA GENERATION

The acknowledgement of multiple ways of knowing in the qualitative paradigm and the participatory action research methodology allowed room for creative experimentation with enabling communication methodologies which leaned strongly on the use of innovative art methodologies. So, for example, drumming and drawing were more relevant as communication tools than traditional verbal dialogue (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011). The decision to engage with alternative forms of communication was greatly influenced by my knowledge of the participants particular communication challenges and the need to create pathways to understanding the participants' active experience of the world. This was done to align with the participatory philosophy that foregrounds participant's experience as the "real source of knowledge" in research (Allard-Poesi, 2005). In the process multiple and often contradictory interpretations from the participants were actively sought.

3.7.1   Observation

According to the literature, observations together with reflection and introspection allow the observer to interpret what is being observed and to tap into participants' reservoir of knowledge, experience and networks to determine which interventions and data-generation strategies would best serve those with whom I would be engaging with in this study (Babbie, 2010; Silverman, 2010).

3.7.2   Participant observer

As the researcher I took on the role as participant observer during the observation sessions. This is considered to be a more complex type of observation as the researcher is simultaneously a member and observer of the group under study (Babbie, 2010; Silverman, 2010). Although daunted by the prospect of these dual roles, I realised that I would engage in varying degrees of participation. Marshall and Rossman (2011) alert the researcher to the need to be clear about his or her positionality before embarking on the research project.

In defining my role, I had to clarify the nature and extent of my participation for myself, the activity facilitators, the participants and other interest groups. The roles I adopted during the course of the research process were multi-focused; key among them was facilitating the participatory research cycle, acting as a resource for data-generation activities and recording encounters with what Barone and Eisner (2012) refer to as the raw phenomena of the study. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) remind us that because the researcher is the main data-collection instrument in qualitative research, she has to have a very clear plan about how and when she will be involved in the data-generation activities, how she will ensure non-intrusive data capturing and facilitate the administrative side and practicalities of the research process. They caution that if involvement in concurrent actions is not well co-ordinated, the result could be loss of valuable data. To this end I decided to delineate explicitly what I would be observing and how I would be recording my observations when I was participating. I decided to make extensive use of memos and field notes, and also to video record sessions where possible. My resolve to gain an insider or emic view made it necessary that in recording the data I remained as unobtrusive as possible. While I assumed an active participant role in the research process, I set in

place checks and balances to ensure that I was not unduly influencing the dynamics of the research process. I adopted this approach, as I was of the view that being actively immersed and participating in the process would enable a deeper understanding of the finer nuances of the phenomenon under investigation as well as enabling first-hand experience of often subtle shifts in perception, attitude and behaviour of participants (Savenge & Robinson, 2012).

However, this hands-on approach brought with it a number of challenges. As I was actively participating in the process at various stages of the sessions, my opportunities to observe and record data were limited. In such instances I reflected on the drumming circle facilitator observations and e-mail correspondence after the sessions. Though my research process was guided by the aims for the study, the emergent nature of the research design resulted in more and different outcomes to what I had anticipated. My educational psychology training together with my previous experience in working with oppositionally defiant adolescents influenced the assumptions and preconceived notions I had of the term 'at risk'. I was aware that my prior experiences with these young men could bias the lens through which I was observing their actions. To contain this, I built into my design debriefing sessions after each session with my co-moderator to reflect on what happened during the sessions. I would also go back to review video, audio and field notes after each session, as I was constantly on the lookout for ways in which to make the invisible visible. I had a well thought out and well researched intervention strategy when I started, but being a participant observer helped me to realise that what I thought or what looked good in theory would not necessarily translate well into practice within the context in which I was working. So I took the advice of seasoned qualitative researchers and remained open and flexible, adopting a kaleidoscopic view as opposed to tunnel vision (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Babbie, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.7.3   The focus group sessions

If researchers want to listen to the voices of young men and work with instead of for them, then we need to create spaces that do not leave them feeling vulnerable or exposed. I considered the focus group session to be such a communal space that I created for these young men to feel safe enough to share their views. The focus

group session was arranged to engage them in extended conversation, a process that is regarded as an in-depth data-generation tool in qualitative research (De Vos et al., 2011).

Adolescence is a particularly self-conscious and social phase of life in which the peer group exercises a great deal of influence; thus any research conducted with adolescents should be sensitive to such developmental issues (Ajodhia-Andrews & Berman, 2009) (refer to section 2.2 for a discussion of adolescence as it pertains to this study). During the middle-adolescent phase of a young person's life the peer group serves as the primary reference group. Young people in this developmental phase more readily accept the views of people they view as being similar to them in some way. Through the use of stimulus material and specific facilitation strategies (see section 2.7), a platform was created in which the participants were able to engage with complex and often subtle variables that impacted on their way of being in the world. The emphasis is on externalising the challenges so that a buffer is created between the individual and the challenge they face, thus making scrutiny in the focus group less threatening. Emergent interactions allow the facilitator to be in the moment with participants and responsive to moments of learning and teaching as they unfold in the course of engagement. The sharing of these moments often sheds light on experiences as participants engage in real-life interactions (Hershell, Linds & Ippolito, 2002). My skills as a facilitator and therapist allowed me to utilise a bricolage approach to the research, tapping into multiple methods that would suit the moment (Borg & McCormack, 2012).

As I was trying to make sense of group dynamics, I considered a focus group approach to be a gateway to gaining a better understanding of how participants experienced their membership of the group and their participation in its practices. Powney (in De Vos et al., 2011) refers to the focus group process as structured eavesdropping. The eavesdropping in the context of this study was intended to observe the verbal, non-verbal and symbolic communication by these six participants. This data-generation tool was considered to be particularly relevant for this study as it could illuminate multiple viewpoints or responses.

Observation of the way in which participants interacted with each other, as well as of their verbal and non-verbal responses during the focus group sessions, allowed me

to gain insight into how the participants' views are formed, what participants think and why they think the way they do. I expected the group process to create a dynamic in which the participants played off each other's responses. In the course of the focus group sessions, and the various stimulus activities related to it, I was able to access issues that were salient for the participants and which provided valuable insights into how they experienced social marginalisation and the cluster group as part of their lived reality (Barbour, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Babbie, 2010). Creating safe spaces for this process to unfold required a great deal of flexibility and creativity. Safe spaces in the context of the study would be spaces that encouraged the participants to show their authentic selves, spaces in which participants experienced positive regard and where they were able to rehearse new ways of being. One of the ways in which I did this was to formalise the structure as well as the sequence of activities within the sessions, as past experience with this group had taught me that the participants were not comfortable with surprises.

As part of negotiating access to the group, I explained their rights as participants. Though they knew that participation was voluntary, we had collectively agreed that an attendance register be kept and that we would do a follow up inquiry with the group and participants who were absent from sessions. The participants negotiated a provision that attendance of these sessions be a criterion for inclusion in end-of-term excursions. They also negotiated the right to exclude any member from the group after a number of unexcused absences. Though I was concerned about this, I used my uncertainty as a springboard for learning and teaching trust and accountability.

The sessions were scheduled for every Friday during the school term. The structure of the sessions generally followed the format as illustrated in the following graphic:
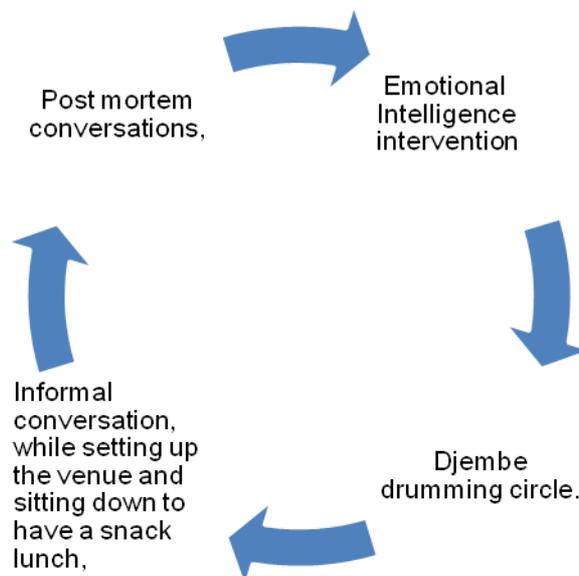
Figure 3.3:   Friday session structure

I now briefly outline how these were used in the study.

3.7.3.1   The use of informal talk

From the time that they entered the venue until they left, I actively listened to the participants' conversation, something that was negotiated with them, and referred to as eavesdropping with their permission. The format of each session was to formally sit down around a table and to share a snack that we provided for them. During this time conversation was allowed to unfold naturally with very little structure. During the initial stages of the study, this was identified as a space where the participants would engage in informal discussions as well as make suggestions about key issues they would like to have addressed. These informal conversations were filled with spontaneous humour and had humour had to be transformed as vehicle through which the participants could laugh with each other and not at each other. During such sessions the drumming circle facilitator and I modelled and encouraged appropriate verbal self-defence with the intent of tracking the shift from negative teasing to regular teasing, learning to tease and accept being teased. We spoke frankly about what is off limits and why. We also paid attention to, and showed that we were valuing, informal talk to demonstrate that no topic was trivial or frivolous. We pointed out that such talk helped to illuminate aspects of the research context. The reinforcement of natural conversation created a gateway into the more social autopsy

Social autopsy conversations

What are referred to as social autopsy conversations in the study were a more structured form of informal conversation in which we reflected on what had happened in the week preceding the session. We spoke about what the participants had experienced during the week, their successes and also their challenges. Such conversations had an accountability element built into them. We would start the conversation by inviting the participants to voluntarily share anything they had done to get themselves or someone else into trouble. After a few minutes had lapsed, participants were afforded another opportunity to share voluntarily; if they were not forthcoming, the space was then opened for any of the other participants to share any transgressions they had witnessed. This was a practice that we had continued from the previous school-based intervention.

The participants were assured that there would be no judgement about their actions; rather their confessions would be used to encourage accountability. These conversations took place over a snack lunch. I recorded my observations outside of the sessions as I did not wish to interrupt the flow of the conversation. I did, however, inform the participants that I was making notes and would occasionally take a photograph or allow one of the participants to visually record the session on my telephone or my electronic tablet. I used their natural curiosity about technology and my limited technological savvy to create a space for them to be in a power position such as that of a teacher. These were opportunities to experience success, build trust and to experience healthy teasing.

3.7.3.2   *Non-verbal communication*

According to Onwugbuzi, Leech and Collins (2010:699), "voice" refers to verbal and non-verbal communication and being aware of this can allow the researcher access to a deeper and richer understanding of communication in the research context. They do, however, point out that because language usage is contextual, one needs to learn how it is used in the local context. Understanding the local interpretation and usage was particularly important as the study was also interested in how verbal and non-verbal language was adapted to reinforce sub-cultural practices. The approach is supported by Fontana and Frey (2005:5), who remind us that "communication

includes more than spoken words and the researcher should therefore pay attention to body language as well". Body language can express unconscious thoughts that may be essential for observers to decode if they are to analyse situations accurately (Babbie, 2010). The use of non-verbal language is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

3.7.3.3   Freirian codes

Freirian codes are photographs, visual stimuli or role play that the researcher uses to depict themes that have emerged in preliminary interviews, conversations or observation (Kelly in Bhana, 1999). This is a process that I used to depersonalise the problems and initiate discussion on issues that are currently challenging the participants. The Freirian code that I selected for this study was a classic Jackie Chan karate film, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. My decision to use this film was motivated by the fact that martial arts films were a familiar genre and the actor Jackie Chan was familiar to the participants and popular in their social context. This particular film was specifically selected for its depiction of a socially marginalised young man's journey to self-efficacy.

I used the film in various ways in the engagement with the participants. So, for example, the trials and tribulations that the character experiences in developing a new skill set and self-concept is used to talk about their own lives. The film is rich in descriptive and visual depictions of the challenges and perseverance required to develop inner strength and a healthy sense of self. The film engages with humour in learning life lessons; it celebrates struggle, failure and success in various situations. It also introduces the value and struggles of working with a mentor in guiding the personal development process. This film became the underpinning metaphor for our work together. I used scenes from the film as a stimulus for discussion around various themes that were generated in the focus group discussions. Certain scenes from the film were used intermittently as part of a reflective process in the participatory action research cycle. As I was familiar with the film, I could select scenes that related to the themes generated from the preliminary analysis of a previous session or to highlight learning and progression. Though this was a time-consuming process, by externalising challenges the participants were afforded an opportunity to confront emotionally painful or challenging situations in a less

threatening manner (Mohangi, 2008). A final aspect of this process was that the film was shown in its entirety. After that, during a discussion the participants were asked to select the parts in the film that spoke to them most directly and relate them to their experiences in the research journey.

3.7.3.4 Drawing

Creative activities are considered effective vehicles in aiding troubled adolescents to move beyond personal development hurdles and uncover underlying conflicts (Oster & Crone, 2004). The participants in this study were not verbally or conceptually fluent and so drawing was used to give emotions a visual voice in a non-threatening way (Interactive drawing therapy, 2011). Voice here is not only used in a language sense, but to indicate the empowering of the participants to expand their range or nuances of emotions. This view is supported by a number of authors (Mohangi, 2008; Nobel-Carr, 2006; Malchiodi, 2002), who describe drawing as a process which mediates the expression of thoughts, feelings and experiences, more so than if we were simply to ask children to talk about them.

The drawing tasks involved drawing in response to music and drawing as a tool in facilitated discussion around topics or experiences, which the participants may have found particularly challenging to articulate. No artistic talent was required and participants were provided with a range of drawing materials from which they selected what they needed. Drawings were done as individuals or as a group. For the individual drawing activities participants developed a colour palate that was tied to an emotions palate; so, for example, red would represent peace for participant X, while it would represent anger for participant y (see chapter 4 for an example of how colour and emotion palates were used) (Therapeutic toolkit, 2011). Like all data-generation activities, I used drawings intermittently throughout the various sessions. In all such activities the participants were informed of their right not to have their drawing included in the data set and were reminded that any identifying information would be concealed if any of their drawings were used as part of the final thesis.

3.7.3.5 The djembe drumming circle

The drumming circle was an integral part of the focus group sessions and generally lasted for thirty minutes. Though some drumming technique was taught, the purpose

of the session was not to provide a music lesson; rather the drums were used as a non-verbal communication tool for individual self-expression. Although the co-facilitator was a trained music teacher, the drumming circle was initiated to complement the development of coping skills. Each participant in a drumming circle was requested to express himself through his drum while listening to the other drums at the same time to help create a unique situation in which individual creative self-expression could contribute to the empowerment of the whole group or community. For this session in drumming we started with the basics and progressed at the participants' own natural pace. The facilitator of the drumming circle, however, set clear boundaries and gradually, as listening skills improved and the sense of natural rhythm developed, exercises became more complex. The drumming was used to complement the other interventions aimed at increased self-awareness, practising self-expression and experiencing themselves as individuals within the group (Drake, 2011; Friedman, 1997).

Chapter 4 gives a detailed description of how these activities were implemented in the context of the study.

3.8   DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis tends to be an on-going and iterative (non-linear) process in qualitative research. It is an emergent cyclical process in which revisions are made through engaging in a process of constant questioning and creatively applying your mind as the process unfolds. It evolves as the study does, and it is remains open and flexible to adaptation so as to provide the best opportunities for the meaningful understanding of the research focus (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While the literature recommends remaining open to multiple possibilities or ways of thinking about the phenomenon and data generated, researchers remind that this be done against the backdrop of the context in which the research process is unfolding (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2010). Coupled to this emergent process is a need for the researcher to position herself, to be open about how previous knowledge, presuppositions and prejudices may tint the lenses through which she views the process and the data. Meaning making is subjective; thus every precaution should be taken to illuminate the understanding of the phenomena by engaging in what Patton (2002:514) refers to as "mental excursions using multiple stimuli, creatively changing patterns of thinking

while engaging with the data. In this study the stimuli comprised of video recordings, field notes, researcher memos, participant generated artefacts". I did this in an attempt in to identify categories that would 'illuminate the data'. Silverman (2010:35) refers to this as a "simplified mode of grounded theory" in which one actively pursues a new integrated understanding from the perspective of the participants.

According to Babbie (2010) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011), grounded theory does not refer to an existing theory of human nature, but instead it refers to an inductive analysis that could result in theories of behaviour. In addition Glaser (1996) refers to grounded theory as "the systematic generation of theory from data" that takes into account that nothing happens in a vacuum.

This study will use what Barbour (2001) describes as a "pragmatic variant of' grounded theory". Grounded theory will be an outflow of the participatory action research approach. I chose to work from this perspective because in addition to an extensive literature review related to working with at-risk youths, I also had a working knowledge of the research focus and would therefore have an insider's anticipation of potential themes that might emerge. The interconnectedness of what I know and what I will come to know, as part of my experience in the research process, presents the potential for conformation bias. However, in Chapters 4 and 5 a step-by-step scaffolding of how theoretical insights were built and how these emerged through extensive engagement with the data is presented to address any possible perceived bias.

I used reflective and analytical memos throughout to track and identify in a systematic way what informed my decisions and thinking at various stages of the process (see Appendix 5 for an example of this). Although Gibbs (2010) and others recommend this as a key component in an audit trail of the data collection and analysis process, Patton (2002) reminds that there are no set formulae for transforming raw data into a meaningful body of knowledge. Instead qualitative researchers recommend structuring emergent data into a coherent whole through a process of constantly comparing emerging data, which facilitates the development of a scheme for classifying and understanding the data in relation to a conceptual framework.

According to Merriam (2009), each writer makes sense of the field in a very personal way. However, in order to facilitate our understanding of complex phenomena and protect the integrity of the study, we need to engage with the data in ways that will provide rich descriptions across data sources. The literature further cautions that we remain mindful of the process because, despite our best intentions, the task of organising the data in readiness for analysis is at best "messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011: 207).

Figure 3.4 represents the sequence of events followed in the data analysis process.
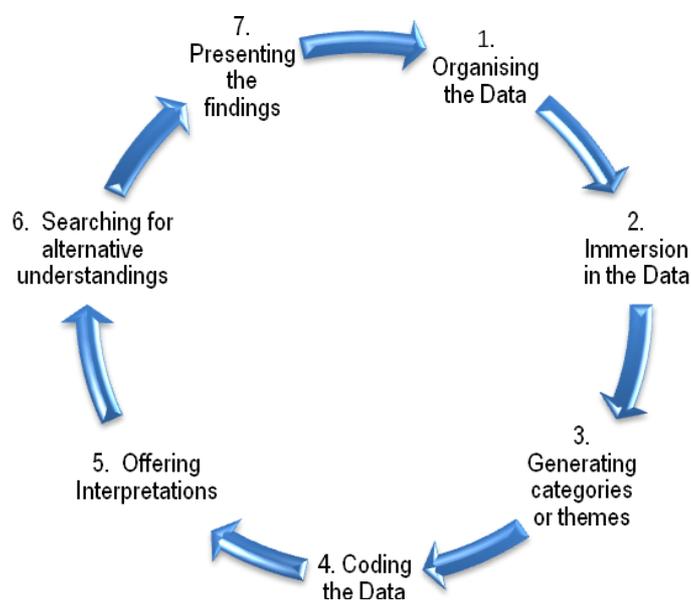
Figure 3.4:   Framing the data set

3.8.1   Organising the data in preparation for analysis

Data collection and analysis are about giving voice to the lived experience of participants in a particular context. This reminder is particularly valuable in this study as the group of participants and the nature of the research required understanding and drawing the attention of the participants to their voice within the context of their experience. The data-generation process resulted in the accumulation of vast amounts of qualitative data. When I started with the analysis process I put in place strategies that would organise and classify raw data collected in the field in a way that would provide a credible audit trail. The data for the study took on a variety of

forms, such as written text (transcripts, researcher memos and field notes), video recordings and participant-generated drawings. During all the processes of data collection and activities, I wrote reflective memos that described the ways in which the process unfolded, documenting on-the-spot changes to the initial design and changes made as a consequence of post-session reflection and member checks (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Qualitative researchers recommend that the vast reservoirs of data generated as part of qualitative research need to be constantly examined, re-examined and sorted, as they may reshape the nature of the research process. I decided to use a chronological timeline tied to the field notes for each session. So, for example, for each session I made an inventory of the observational notes, video or voice recordings (if any), use of discussion stimuli, artefact creation activity and drumming activity. From this process I created manual folders and later converted them to electronic databases. These databases included the transcripts and summarised portions of verbal and non-verbal information relevant to the study. Barone et al. (2011) refer to this as sampling for fitness for purpose of information pertaining to the focus areas of the study. In cases where the participants did not want the conversation recorded, I obtained permission from the participants to write up detailed notes of what transpired after the sessions. Appendix 6 contains selections from two interviews; one is a transcription from a videotaped session and the other is a write-up based on a non-recorded interview.

3.8.2   Immersion in the data

As I was a participant observer my immersion in the data was an on-going process. As the primary research instrument, I remained vigilant about which segments of the emerging data set would be responsive to the research question. Merriam (2009) recommends this on-going analysis as a means to avoid the data set becoming an unfocused, repetitive and an overwhelming mass of information. In addition to the emergent and on-going data analysis approach, I identified data units that offered information pertinent to the study and which would be concise and readily interpretable within the broader understanding of the study context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In line with the research focus of this study, I identified key potential units of interest as specific behaviours, coping mechanisms or strategies and their

development over time, interaction processes and patterns, and verbal, non-verbal and symbolic gestures of participants as individuals and as a group (Gibbs, 2010).

Data analysis is closely tied to how the process unfolds and therefore meticulous reflexive notes about my thinking and what was happening in the research context at the time of the data generation and analysis would be recorded and integrated in an interpretative stage (stage 5) of the analysis process.

3.8.3   Generating categories and themes

Coding is about reducing masses of data into smaller meaningful chunks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Gibbs (2010), the coding process starts with descriptive coding. During this stage of the analysis, I made initial descriptive summaries of the texts or video clips to get a feel for what was happening in the study at that stage. This process entailed simply describing and identifying potential clips. After this stage I started looking at what was happening in the clips with a more analytical lens and with the conceptual framework informing what I was looking at. At this stage I also started creating a visual representation of what I was seeing. I decide on a colour-coded mind map and logged what and where I saw evidence of interest (see Appendix 7). From this mind map a frame started to develop. Patton (2009), using the grounded theory approach, refers to this phase as open coding and describes it as a stage in which a picture of identifying ideas, experiences and behaviours of participants starts to form. I worked my way through the data, isolating and marking text, video clips and participant-generated artefacts of individuals, all the time making notes of links and connections within the data related to individuals, the group and individuals in relation to the group.

3.8.4   Coding the data

Through this process of coding, recurrent themes or storylines started emerging. According to Patton (2009), this phase is known as axial coding, or progressive focusing. During this phase I re-examined the data for the purpose of identifying possible relationships or patterns among the codes developed in the first phase. I started grouping coded data around conceptual categories. These two processes ran concurrently with the data collection. So, for example, I verified some of the initial themes as well as probed some more during the social autopsy conversations. I felt

that these member checks were necessary for me to understand what was happening from the participants' perspective. Sometimes these member checks took up most of the first part of the session. This verification process also allowed me to gauge participants' responses to what was happening and to decide in the moment whether or not to revise our approach to activities, or to allow the process to unfold as it provided an opportunity for rich descriptive data to emerge. Some decisions about changes could be made immediately after the sessions, while other decisions were made after reviewing a recording and the field notes, or upon reflection after liaising with my co-moderator.

3.8.5   Offering interpretations

During the final stages of the grounded theory approach to analysis, category links were established. Here I was looking to discover patterns and to identify typical and atypical incidents. At this stage of the analysis I was exploring preliminary theories around my research questions. This was a sense-making process that required regular member checks and consultations with the co-facilitators, my supervisor and critical friends, as I did not wish to bias the findings as they emerged. The literature alerts one to consider various interpretations and relationships in the data before making a definitive interpretation. I made every to ensure that constant comparison and the same coding framework applied to all the data in the data set. I took cognisance of the caution that failure to be consistent could result in premature or inaccurate conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009) (Appendix 8).

3.8.6   Searching for alternative understandings

I found the extensive audit trail which I had kept as part of quality assurance to be an invaluable tool in ensuring that I had revisited all the data along my analysis time line. This was particularly important, as analysis had been conducted concurrently with the data-collection process. My findings and categories were then applied to my conceptual framework after my supervisor and I were satisfied that saturation of the data had occurred (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2009).

The findings of the study will be presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

3.9   ENSURING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

In the qualitative paradigm reliability and validity are conceptualised as quality, rigour and trustworthiness. The onus thus rests on the researcher to provide a detailed account of the study, the context in which it was conducted and the judgement and skill of the researcher and the appropriateness of the collected data to answer the research question (Le Compte & Goetz, 1984). A brief outline of the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study and how they relate to recommendations from qualitative research are now discussed.

Qualitative researchers recommend prolonged and recurrent time spent in the field; this is also referred to as immersion in the field. The data collection was conducted over a 10-month period in which I met with the participants every Friday of the four school terms. The extended period of time spent in the field allowed for recurring and revised implementation of the participatory action research cycles (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A second strategy to ensure the validity or trustworthiness of data is triangulation. Triangulation means using and comparing different data sets obtained from various data-generation strategies to test for consistency of results. Qualitative researchers encourage the use of a combination of strategies in an attempt to obtain a more valid, reliable and diverse understanding of reality construction among participants. In addition, I concur with numerous other researchers that the use of multiple methods in concert had the potential to mediate possible limitations in individual data-generation strategies while exploiting their respective benefits (Johnson, 1997; Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The different data sets generated in this study provided a kaleidoscope which enabled the same theme or issue to be considered from various angles. This ensured a space which accommodated, focused on and encouraged multiple worldviews, voices and experiences of the participants (Barbour, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1996).

The data-generation strategies used to elicit the multifaceted and rich descriptions of participants' lived experience in this study-included observation, participant observations, focus group sessions and participant-generated artefacts (Flick, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2008) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) support the

view that using multiple methods over an extended period of time in the field enhances the trustworthiness of the study and inspires confidence that the findings of the study are a valid and reliable representation of the diverse way in which participants construct their reality.

Another key strategy in ensuring that qualitative researchers spending protracted periods of time in the field maintain a measure of professional detachment is the inclusion of **critical friends**. Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommend on-going peer scrutiny of the project as they are of the view that engaging with knowledgeable critical friends brings a fresh perspective on our processes and actions, and that this may challenge conscious and unconscious assumptions held by the researcher. Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans and Oost (2006) support this view and go on to suggest that it is a key strategy in making the invisible visible to the researcher. The critical dialogue I engaged in with my peer review team helped me to remain focused and on task. In order to maximise the value these critical dialogues could add to my reflexive process, I adopted Schwandt and Haplern's (1988) suggestion that these conversations take the format of semi-structured interviews guided by set of questions related to quality assurance.

A fourth strategy employed in ensuring the trustworthiness of the study was member checks. In member checking the researcher incorporates a course of action in which she regularly invites participants to respond to whether or not she 'got it right'. I adopted two approaches to member checking in this study. The first was to reflect aloud on my perception of what was happening as it happened during my engagement with participants. Secondly, I reviewed my field notes, viewed video recordings of the sessions or held debriefing meetings with my co-moderator and then shared my perceptions of what had unfolded at the next session. I was interested in participants' responses to my perceptions and wanted to create opportunities for participants to challenge or correct my perceptions of what I had witnessed. This process also allowed me to gain greater insight into participants' meaning-making processes and scenarios, or situations that had played out in the course of our contact sessions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Where appropriate, I asked individual participants, pairs, or the group about particular patterns or changes in patterns of interactions I had observed. This communication often took place

during the informal conversation segment of our contact sessions. I depended greatly on my therapeutic skills to assist in creating a safe space for this on-going two-way dialogue. Member checks further assisted me in ensuring that the selected data sets and my analysis of them remained as close as possible to reflecting the authentic voices of the participants and that these data sets, analytical themes and findings would reflect a reasonable and realistic account of participants' experience with the phenomena, the research process and the participants' journey (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Power relations between adult and children

Researchers have the responsibility to ensure that no harm will befall children as a result of their participation in the research process. Researchers therefore need to spend time understanding children's contexts, the discourses that operate in that context and how they may differ from dominant societal discourses. The researcher should guard against being patronising and should respect the views, opinions and dignity of the young participants. A key strategy in doing this is ensuring that communication is tailored in a way that makes the two-way communication easily accessible to participants (Maguire, 1995; Swartz, 2011). This was particularly relevant to this study, because we were asking these adolescents, who were known to be distrustful of adults, to enter into a relationship of trust with me for an extended period of time.

Entering into this relationship with the research team and the research aim also represented a real test to group cohesion and individual meaning-making processes. This aligned with the view espoused by Maguire (2005) that research-as-intervention could be an invaluable ethical strategy in putting into play the importance of respecting participants as organic intellectuals, who were the experts of their lived reality and thus developing engagement strategies that purposively seek to flatten the power gradient and develop mutuality as a key ethical strategy. According to Davis (1998), one of the key strategies we employ in flattening the power gradient is to ensure that the methodological tools we use create a medium for participants to share their views and practise their voice confidently and courageously over time.

This also highlighted for me Maguire's (2005) caution that when working with children, one has to be ready for unexpected conversational turns that could easily present an ethical or methodological dilemma.

In addition to the above ethical considerations the study also had to comply with the ethical guidelines for research conducted at the university and in schools. The proposal for the study had to be presented for ethical clearance to the Faculty of Education, the University's Ethics Committee and the Western Cape Department of Education (Appendix 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d, 9e).

As a registered educational psychologist, I am also legally bound to adhere to the ethical code of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa:

> ... the entire framework of a research project needs to be under ethical scrutiny, not just dilemmas that arise in the field ... the choice of the research topic already is an ethical decision (Barbour, 2008:146).

This comment, supported by Savenge and Robinson (2010:1189), directs the researcher to consider "whether the pursuit of scientific knowledge will justify the means". I understood this to mean that I would need to make every effort to ensure that the research would be mutually beneficially to the participants and the researcher. I therefore ensured that accountability measures were built in which ensured transparency and allowed the participants access to information that would allow them to make informed decisions. This view is underscored by Babbie (2010) and Silverman (2010), who remind the researcher to focus not only on the obvious pitfalls but to anticipate and vigilantly protect participants from experiences that could have harmful consequences for them.

Informed consent

As this study developed from a school-commissioned intervention, it was important for me to explain to all role players that the dynamics and parameters of the study were different from the school-commissioned intervention. When I explained this to the participants in the study I was very conscious of the importance of communicating in age and level-appropriate language with the participants. I devoted a lot of time to explaining what the study would entail and created space for

participants to ask questions about the process and to confirm the agreed-upon boundaries that were negotiated (Silverman, 2010; Babbie, 2010, Maguire, 2005).

The emergent nature of the research design meant that obtaining blanket consent at the onset of the research was not sufficient. I met with the parents of the participants to obtain their consent, as the participants were all minors. At that stage I informed them that the consent would be reviewed verbally on a quarterly basis and that their specific consent for some of the intended activities would be required as the research process unfolded (Barbour, 2008). I went through a similar process with the potential participants to obtain their assent.

I also asked each participant to complete consent forms and we agreed to renew these verbally on a quarterly basis too. Because of the exploratory and interventionist nature of the research, there was a very real prospect of unearthing issues and experiences that were beyond the scope of the research context. To protect the wellbeing of the participants I ensured that, should they require it, the participants would have access to a psychologist who is experienced in the field of working with at-risk youth. The participants and their caregivers were informed about the support available to them. I assured them that no one would be coerced into using the service and that the proviso was there to ensure the wellbeing of the participants.

Confidentiality

According to Christians (2005), confidentiality must be assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. Confidentiality was also something that had to be negotiated and renegotiated as the research progressed. The research had to be seen as separate from the school intervention. As such, I engaged in a dialogue with the potential participants around how we would navigate their participation in the new intensive research process. I also discussed with them the limited role of the school in the research process. The participants were comfortable with the school principal knowing that they were part of the 'drumming' research process. However, they needed a lot of reassurance about confidentiality and privacy issues around their data contributions. I explained to them that our only obligation was to provide the school with an outline of the activities that we would engage in. Any data that were collected during the activities and in group discussions were to be treated as

confidential and would not be accessible to their teachers (Babbie, 2010; Silverman, 2010).

I did, however point out that the research was being conducted for a doctoral study which would be published as a dissertation that would place the information in the public domain. I assured them that I would take every precaution to ensure the confidentiality of their contributions. They were assured of the right of access to all data pertaining to them and the right to refuse the usage of such data for publication. This right was exercised by some or all of the participants in certain of the research sessions. The information acquired in those sessions was not included in the data-analysis process. The key mechanisms for ensuring confidentiality of the data generated by this research process were anonymisation and restricted access to the data. In the course of this study we would essentially be working with 3 categories of data sets that would require a range and varying degrees of anonymity. These, as highlighted by Silverman (2010), were:

a. *Word processed data.* In essence transcripts, and journal entries. I would keep an original copy to which only my immediate supervisor and I would have access. *Paper documents.* In the context of this study these would essentially be participant generated. Here I used a black marker to black out any identifying information on originals and copies. I assigned a colour-coded numbering system to ensure that I did not lose sight of the participant or the context in which the documents were generated. I cross-referenced this with journal entries. I ensured that only I and my supervisor would have access to my referencing system;

b. *Audio and video recordings.* I sought permission from the participants and their guardians to record the sessions. The motivation for the use of video and photo images was discussed with the boys and it was agreed that the raw data, original recordings, could be used by my supervisor and I, and that no images in which the participants could be identified would be used in the public domain. Patton (2008) refers to this as adopting an ethics of care approach to visual data. Anonymising video was virtually impossible, so I transcribed what was relevant to the research focus and where video or photographs would enhance the meaning-making process, we agreed their

faces would be shaded out and their names withheld. This was a very complex process and I eventually decided to pursue the route of anonymised transcripts and limited access to the raw data. The participants were also assured that they could refuse to be recorded or included in any of the sessions of the study. I did, however, inform them that I would note the sessions, the topics of those sessions, and that those sessions were not recorded for use in the study at the request of the participants. This commitment was honoured throughout the research process, even though it was sometimes very difficult for me as the researcher to leave out some gems of information at the time. Prior to and during every session I reminded participants of their right to privacy (Silverman, 2008).

We agreed that prior to publishing this thesis we would have a briefing session in which I would share with them the data sets, stories and artefacts I would be including as part of the dissertation.

- **Prevention of psychological abuse, stress or loss of self-esteem**

Here the primary issue was practice not policy. Learning new and different ways of being would place participants in situations they would potentially experience as stressful, embarrassing and anxiety producing. The basic principles of ethical social research pertinent to this study recognise that, while challenging the participants to participate in activities new and often outside their comfort zone in order to promote the development of a new and different frames of reference, the primary ethical responsibility rested with me not to coerce or humiliate. The underlying culture of machismo teasing in the research context meant that this terrain had to be very cautiously negotiated.

We put in place a process where, prior to participation in any activity, participants were given ample information and exposure to the activity, so that they knew what would be expected of them. The explanations were provided in age-appropriate language (Neuman, 2011). Reflexivity and regular consultations with my research journal assisted me in pre-empting which activities would be threatening to whom and how the group dynamic would be affected by the perceived threat. An extensive literature review around ethical research had as a golden thread the principle of

researchers and the research process not causing needless or undue stress. I was therefore very vigilant about scaffolding experiences in ways that would minimise the measure of discomfort required by the research process. Regular member checks, close monitoring of behavioural changes and regular debriefing sessions were mediated in order to address any perceptions of manipulation experienced by the researcher, the co-facilitator or participants. I actively pursued empowering experiences that would build participants capacity for self-reflexivity and self-expression. We never pursued any activity or change of plan without first consulting and reaching consensus. This was challenging, because one could not always predict the outcome but had to respect the process (Maguire, 1999).

I concur with Baylis, Downie and Kenny (1999:7) that "respectful involvement in decision-making about research participation" should consider what is known and understood by the young persons and their capacity to make and execute decisions. Once the capacity was established, the member-check strategy, common in qualitative research practice, quickly became a standard ethical strategy in an attempt to fairly represent the voice of respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Christians (2005: 126) refers to this as "restorying ... [a] co-joint construction of ... meaning", in which one seeks to understand rather than control. This was a very important ethical consideration of the study, as we were setting out to engage in communicative processes that would know *with* young people not *for* them.

- **Beneficence: to do no harm**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child, Article 13 (United Nations, 2008), affirms the right of children to enjoy freedom of expression. This right includes "the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice" (Boyden, 1997). As the researcher I interpreted this as making it incumbent upon me to act as a gatekeeper in ensuring that these rights are protected. During the course of this study as a consequence of using projective techniques, many informant-generated artefacts were amassed. I explained in age and context appropriate language that when we use projective techniques the activities may reveal more than the participant may be willing to share.

The participants were uncomfortable with this at first and in an effort to be transparent and honour their voices, I opened a dialogue with them, demonstrating which activities would possibly be used for artefact data generation and which would be used in observation. I allowed the participants to experience the activities first-hand, and I demonstrated what I intended to do with the each of the informant-generated artefacts and projective exercises. We agreed that I would remind them before each activity what the purpose of that activity was and how the process and outcome would be used and their right of refusal to have it included as part of a data set. A taxing and unnerving exercise at best, but I was comforted and cautioned by Smith and Taylor's (2003:213) assertion that it is "not so much [about] ... the child's ability to provide information, as it is of the adult's competence to elicit (or observe) it in the context of a trusting, supportive and reciprocal relationship".

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the research process utilised in this study. It gave details about the research design and methodological procedures that were used in working with a cluster group of socially marginalised at-risk youths. It presented a justification of the choice of data-collection methods used, how they were used and the role of the participants in all of these aspects. It aimed to give an overview of the research intervention in a holistic manner and discussed the ethical guidelines and principles that should be considered when conducting this type of research with young people. In addition, the chapter considered the data-analysis methods used and the measures put in place to ensure the validity of the study.

The next chapter will discuss the implementation of the study and expand on the themes derived from data categories.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTING THE STUDY AND PRESENTING THE DATA

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence that a peer group, even if it is considered an "outcast group", exerts on the individuals in it. I argue that by gaining insight into the role the group plays in assisting each individual in the group to deal with their unique challenges, a window of opportunity may open that transforms a deviant group dynamic into a health-promoting one. My observations of these individuals in practice in a previous project that I was part of led me to decide that the phenomenon and how it presents in any given context is sufficiently complex to warrant a carefully planned research process. Through the complementary use of traditional and alternative practices in working with a purposively selected group of at-risk youths who are part of an "outcast group", I sought to creatively explore ways in which this group of boys could strengthen their self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and social intelligence.

In addition, I explored the extent to which interventions can be made more accessible to an ever-increasing at-risk youth populace by utilising complementary psychosocial wellness programmes that have their roots in popular education and could therefore be used to train auxiliary youth workers, psychosocial support staff and educators.

For this study a social constructivist paradigm was used as the perspective from which I assessed and analysed the data. A critical determinant of the quality of any empirical study and the significance of its findings lie in the soundness of its research design; for this study the design was participatory action research. In this approach to research, knowledge production centres on shared meaning making, the empowerment of participants and a spiral-like work process that encourages the active and reflective engagement of all parties throughout the process (Wadsworth, 1998; Babbie, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

4.2   PRESENTING THE PARTICIPANTS

4.2.1   Identifying and accessing the research population

The six participants were purposively selected because they were part of an already established group within an initial referral group from Keenan secondary school in the Winelands. As stated before, these boys were participants in a school-university collaboration that had at its heart an intervention for pupils with behavioural problems. When I approached these boys, it was to seek confirmation of my understanding of their relationship. When this was confirmed by one of the group that they "loop saam", which I loosely translated as "hanging out together", I entered into discussions with them about becoming participants in the proposed study. I explained to them that the research was not linked to the school nor the school-university intervention that they were then part of. In my meeting with the prospective participants, I presented a brief outline of the proposed project in which I highlighted my interest in working with them as a group. In response to the question from one of the members as to why I had selected them specifically, I shared my observations of them as being a circle of friends who appeared to be having challenges staying out of trouble at school. I also informed them that I was interested in researching how they supported each other. Given the social constructivist paradigm within which the study was conceptualised, I wanted to create a democratic space in which the participants, as experts in their lives, were the co-creators of knowledge. The participants agreed to participate in the study, but had two stipulations for their involvement. One was the inclusion of an additional member to their group and the other was that there would be no parental or school involvement in the research process. I pointed out to them that this presented an ethical dilemma for the research as they were all minors and scholars, and I was therefore obliged to obtain permission for their participation from their parents or guardians and permission for access from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). This led to a lengthy consultation session during which I excused myself at one point to afford the prospective participants an opportunity to mull over the information presented to them. At the end of the process they agreed to comply with the ethical stipulations.

4.2.2   The things that bind us as a group, and those that make us unique

In this section I start off by looking at what makes these six participants similar and caused them to cluster together. I follow this up with a comprehensive word sketch of each of the participants. The information for the word portraits of the participants was obtained from various data sources such as their initial education assessments, as well as the transcriptions of interviews with a key informant and the participants.
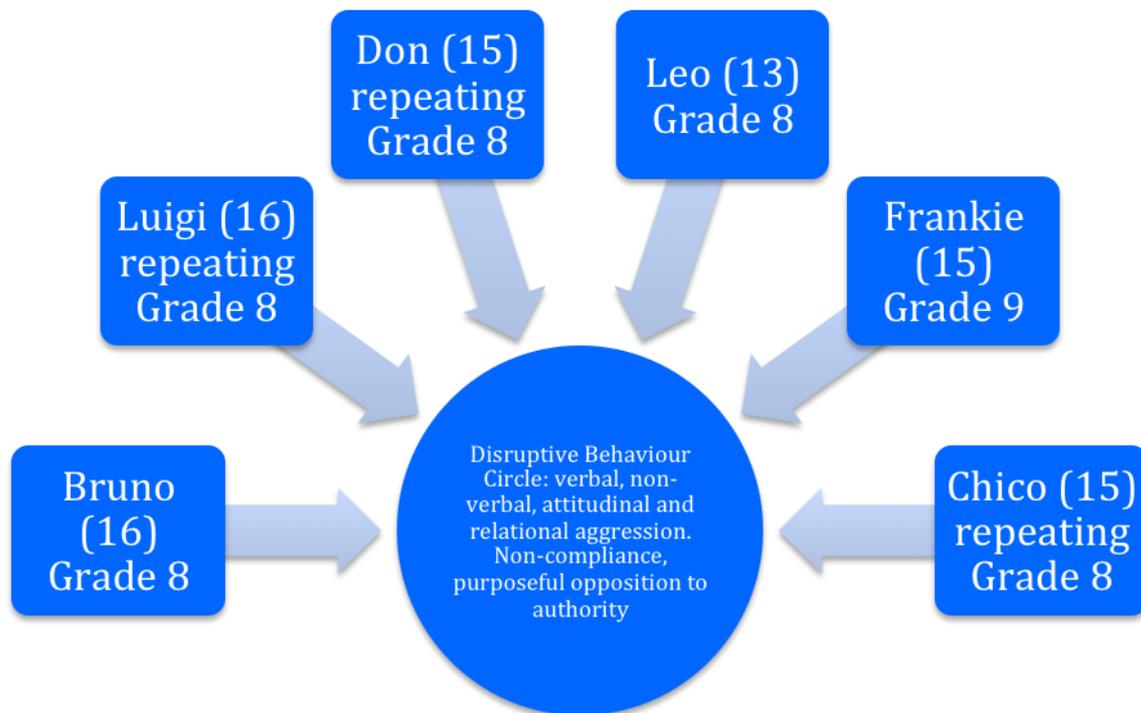
Figure 4.1:   The participants and presenting behaviour of group[1]

What brought these participants together are their transgressions at school. The centre circle lists the factors that make up the disruptive profile of these six boys: verbal and physical aggression, defiance, non-compliance, teasing and swearing in class. According to the members of the group, they had gravitated towards each other as a consequence of being excluded from classes for various transgressions. Members of the group had intermittently been excluded from class at the same time. Over time, their shared interest in soccer encouraged them to manipulate their individual class room exclusion so that they could be outside together at the same time in order to play soccer.

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[1] Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to protect their identities.

According to the literature on group formation among adolescent boys, they tend to form groups around complementary facets that its members have (Ausubel, 1998). Although the participants share some commonalities, they are not a homogeneous group. Thus, in the section that follows I provide a comprehensive picture of each of the six participants as compiled from the data collected from a teacher who knew them well and artefacts such as school assessments and reports that the researcher had access to. In addition, the participants' descriptions of their peers were also used to add nuance to these word portraits.

4.2.3   Who we are as individuals

4.2.3.1   *Don*

Don appears to be very influential in his group and his aggression plays out mostly on the soccer field, where his friends accuse him of kicking the man and not the ball, (*hy skop die man en nie die bal nie*) and also of being sneaky (*hy is a skelm*).

According to Don, he "ended up in this place" when his father was killed in a motor vehicle accident. The unexpected death of his father resulted in economic challenges that forced his mother and him to relocate and live with his older siblings in their current home on the farm. According to Kay who knows Don's family background well, his siblings abuse alcohol and Don and his mother are exposed to regular episodes of domestic violence. However, there was no indication of Don being a direct target of violence during these episodes. According to Chico, one of the participants, Don had had a hard time adapting to life on the farm when he first arrived. He had been bullied by children in the community and at school. Don verified this and acknowledged that Chico had "shown him the ropes". Don readily acknowledged that he experiences difficulty in most learning areas, a perception supported by artefacts such as an academic assessment and records of his school performance. Don admits that he finds it embarrassing to ask his teachers for assistance, as he experiences most of them as being unhelpful and uncaring when approached for guidance or support. According to Don, he has therefore decided that seeking assistance was wasted effort and that his willingness to listen and co-operate in the classroom is dependent on the teacher's attitude towards him. According to the Mr Addo (a teacher at the school), there appears to be a dynamic

interplay between Don's attitude towards his teachers and their response to him, and this interplay had impacted the quality of his learning and behaviour. Despite his significant deficit in numeracy and literacy skills, as well as non-compliance with multiple academic tasks, this is the first time in his school history that Don is repeating a grade.

Don's referral to the initial intervention was for passive aggressive and defiant behaviour towards adult authority figures in the school context. According his teacher, Mr Addo, Don never backchats, though he smirks, stares at the teacher and remains unresponsive. His teachers believe that Don enjoys irritating, challenging and frustrating them. Mr Addo expressed his frustration by saying, "You never catch him, but you know that he is involved" (jy vang hom nooit nie maar jy weet hy is betrokke) (KI: A: D).

4.2.3.2 Luigi

Very little information was available on Luigi, who was in foster care. According to Mr Addo, he was removed from his maternal home because his mother abused alcohol and he was neglected. No information was available on his father. Although his teachers suspected that he has Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), he had never been assessed for this, nor had he received any additional support at school to assist him in this regard. Psychological assessment findings suggest that Luigi presents with significant cognitive impairments and his school reports suggest that he experiences immense difficulty in most learning areas. Like Don, it was the first time that Luigi was repeating a grade.

Luigi is older than his peers because he had been enrolled in school by community-based social workers only at the age of 9. An earlier psychological assessment recommended that Luigi be considered for placement in a special needs school. However, at the time of the assessment Luigi was not considered eligible for placement at a special needs school because of his age and the fact that at that stage he had not repeated a grade. Luigi appears to function on a very concrete level. He has limited communication skills and at the onset of the research process he often depended on Don to communicate on his behalf. Mr Addo expressed a concern that Luigi might be particularly susceptible to peer influences and described

him as not being very assertive and as someone who was very loyal to his friends. The other participants described Luigi as a quiet person who often got into trouble for not doing his school work and for fighting on the side of his friends when they got into trouble. According to the other participants, Luigi was often unduly harassed by the alcoholic brother of his foster mother. He was also only rarely allowed to play with the local children after school, because he always had to do chores.

4.2.3.3   Frankie

Frankie lives with his mother, two siblings and his grandmother. He has a close relationship with his maternal uncles, but throughout the research he never made any mention of his father. An informal exchange with his maternal grandmother revealed that she experienced him as sullen and cheeky, and she went on to say that his mother was often frustrated by her inability to control his behaviour.

Frankie was in Grade 9 and presented with no particular barriers to learning. While he performs reasonably well at school, Frankie has the potential to perform better. He did, however, mention his reluctance to ask his teachers for help, because he experiences some of them as uncooperative and rude. Frankie's academic performance fluctuated, depending on his perception of the teachers' attitudes towards him.

According to Mr Addo, many of Frankie's teachers experienced him as defiant and rebellious. While he is never rude, he openly challenges authority and will not back down from an argument. During the initial intervention, Frankie appeared to be very vigilant about policing fairness. Any perception of unfairness was met with a verbal challenge, a sarcastic retort or sullen withdrawal. Of all the participants, he was the most likely to expose the misdeeds of the others and minimise his own. He seemed almost immune to scathing responses to this kind of behaviour or the disdain with which they referred to him. Frankie appeared to enjoy dropping bombshells and standing back and observing the ensuing responses of his peers. He was very knowledgeable about prison gang culture, language and symbols, and often dropped this knowledge into conversation and in the gestures he used.

4.2.3.4 Leo

Leo was the youngest and physically the smallest member of the group. He started associating with the group only as a consequence of his inclusion in the initial school-university intervention. According to Mr Addo, Leo was referred to the initial intervention because of a subtle but veiled disdain for authority and his increasing non-compliance in class. His scant disregard for the authority of the peer group was evident in the beginning too. He appeared to enjoy biting sarcasm that was often above the comprehension of his peers in the group.

He lived with both his parents and though both were employed and worked long hours on a farm, the family experienced serious financial constraints. According to Leo, his family is very active in their local church and he is involved in a church-based music development programme. Leo was the only participant who volunteered information about his social life outside of school. According to him, he had a different circle of friends outside of school. These boys lived on various farms in the immediate area and, according to Leo, he enjoyed many activities and adventures with them. He had no contact with the group outside of school.

Leo was in Grade 8 and achieved in the top 20% of his grade. Mr Addo referred to him as a bright and diligent student, and the formal psychological assessment identified no particular barriers to learning.

4.2.3.5 Chico

Chico was orphaned at an early age and is in the foster care of his sister and her husband. He was very reluctant to talk about anything related to his family or background, and very little information was available from other sources.

According to a school-based assessment conducted at his former school, Chico presented with moderate cognitive impairments. His school showed that he experienced challenges coping with the demands and expectations set by the mainstream-learning environment. One of the recommendations of the school-based assessment had been that he be placed in a school that accommodated learners with special educational needs. However, no action had been taken by the school, and so despite the recommendation made on the basis of the psychological

assessment, he had never been referred to the District Offices of the local education authority for placement in a special needs school. Chico is aware of his limitations and readily admitted that he struggled with reading and that he did not always understand what was expected of him. According to him, he stopped asking teachers for assistance because they are easily irritated, not very helpful and often accused him of not paying attention.

According to Mr Addo, Chico often gets into trouble for clowning around and parodying teachers for the entertainment of his classmates. He often seeks attention from his peers and adults, and does not appear to have developed healthy ways of accessing this. Chico was referred to the initial intervention because of repeated verbal and physical violence towards girls. According to Chico, these girls purposefully taunted him because they knew that teachers would side with them. The key trigger to his outbursts appeared to be teasing or swearing related to his late parents. He considered his response justified and despite repeatedly getting into trouble for this, he refused to change his stance. More recently Chico had been getting into trouble for writing on the school walls.

4.2.3.6 Bruno

Bruno's parents were never married. His mother worked as a live-in housekeeper and his father lived in another town, so he had very limited contact with both of his parents. Bruno was under the informal guardianship of his sister and her husband, and lived on a remote part of a farm with very limited opportunity for social interaction with his peers. An assessment process conducted at the school found that, although he presented with significant barriers to learning in the areas of reading and mathematics, he had the potential to perform better than he was performing at that time. However, in order to improve his school performance, he would require mediation at school and at home. Like Luigi, he too was older than his peers because he had been enrolled in school only around age 9.

According to the cluster group, Bruno rarely if ever got into trouble with the teachers at school. However, according to Bruno and his cohorts, this did not mean that he was not breaking rules; merely that he had avoided detection. According to anecdotal evidence shared by the group, he acted as a physical enforcer for the group because

he was physically bigger and more muscular than most of the other children at school. According to his Life Orientation teacher, he had been caught masturbating in the boys' toilet at school. This teacher also mentioned that Bruno had previously been involved in a pregnancy scare involving an older girl. I witnessed Bruno driving, and when I quizzed him on this, he acknowledged that he was able to drive and that he often drove his sister's care with her permission.

4.3   IMPLEMENTING THE STUDY

The study was conceptualised as taking place across 5 participatory action research cycles (see Appendix 4), with the first two cycles essentially being focused on establishing rapport with the participants and to create a safe space for them. This was facilitated through exposing them to, and giving them experience of, novel activities which allowed me to refine my decisions about the research design and methods.
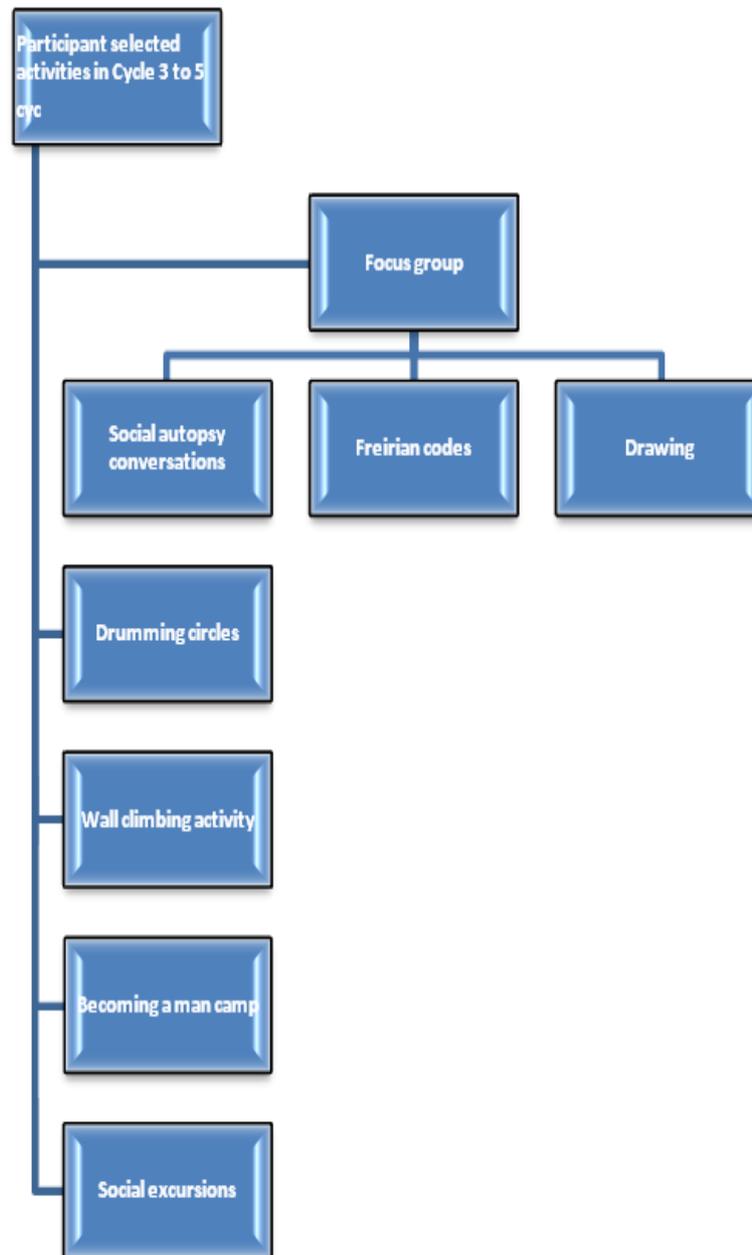
Figure 4.2:   The facilitation activities

From the first two cycles the themes of managing anger and anxiety as well as complex trauma emerged, so cycle three addressed these emotional domains. While the participants were part of deciding which activities we would continue with, I remind mindful that the focus of the intervention strategies was the development of socio-emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and team building, How this was done is presented graphically below.
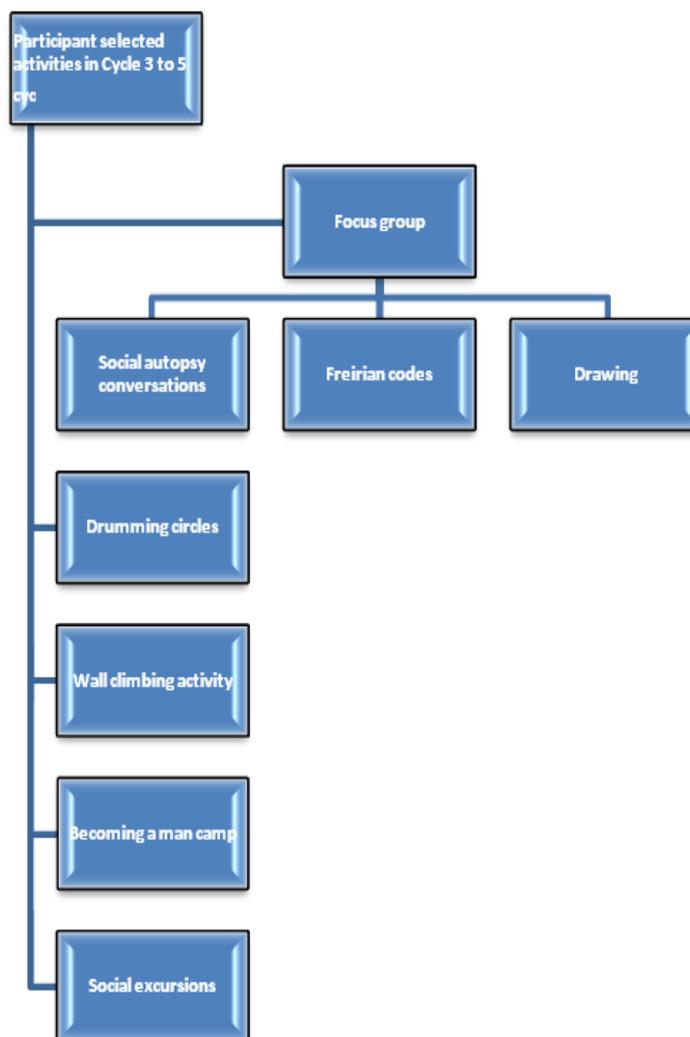
Figure 4.3:   Facilitation activities across cycle 3 to 5

White and Morgan (2006:40) are of the opinion that there is "some distance between the known and the familiar on the one hand, and what is possible for people to know and do on the other hand". In order to bridge this gap a mediated intervention was planned in which - with some assistance and appropriate scaffolding of experience - tasks are broken down into manageable portions. The process took place in collaboration with the participants and the facilitators of the activities with which we engaged. All of the facilitators were experienced in their field, but needed mediation in how activities would be scaffolded to challenge participants while at the same time allowing opportunities for participants to experience moments of mastery. While the process of engaging with the activities was aimed at expanding the knowledge, skills and experience repertoire of participants, I always had to remain cognisant of the influence of the past experience and perceptions of individual and group efficacy when engaging in these activities. The rationale underpinning the mediation process

was influenced by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory and Engeström's activity theory. The way they were adapted for use in this study will now be presented.

In this social collaboration experienced facilitators assisted the participants in activities that I consciously selected to attain the goals. The goals centred on the development of socio-emotional intelligence competencies as a pathway to more beneficial life choices in a cluster group of at-risk youths. The activities chosen for inclusion were selected around these principles and adaptations of Engeström's (1987) activity theory. In the discussion of the activities included in the research projects, the activity theory triangle (Figure 4.4 below) underpinned implementation.
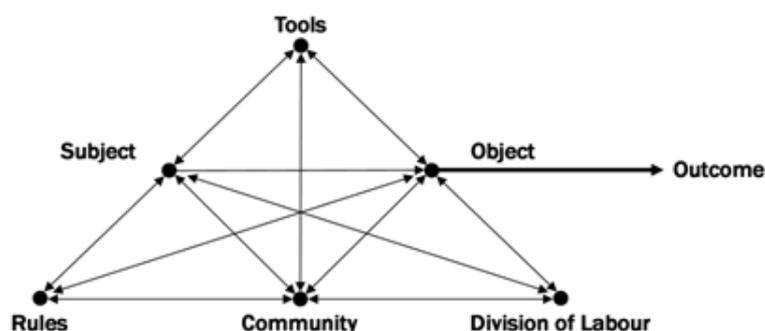
Figure 4.4: Activity theory triangle (Engeström, 1991:267)

Engeström's model above is useful for understanding how a wide range of factors work together to impact on an activity. In order to reach an outcome it is necessary to produce certain objects (e.g. experiences, knowledge and physical products). Human activity is mediated by artefacts (e.g. tools used, documents, recipes, etc.) The component of this theory that focuses on how the community may impact on the outcomes of the activity by the rules it imposes was particularly pertinent to this study, as it was a particular area of interest. The focus was on how the individual as part of the community would engage with the activities and how the engagement in those activities would be influenced by the community's culture. According to Hardman (2008), the implementation of the triangle is accompanied by an activity theory (AT) checklist. Table 4.1 below is an adaptation of the checklist suggested by Hardman (2008), and an example of an actual session plan used during the data-generation process is included as Appendix 9.

Table 4.1:   Adapted activity theory checklist

1. Outcomes	• What do we hope to achieve in this session? • Will it be a physical object, an experience or an illumination of ways of being?
2. Mediating artefacts	• What tool(s) will be used? • Are we able to adapt these to be responsive to the group or session dynamic?
3. Object	• What is the purpose of the activity used? • What is the facilitator working on and why is she/he working on it at that time?
4. Division of labour	• Who does what in this session? • Who determines what is meaningful? • How do we ensure that there is a balance between what the facilitator and the participants consider meaningful?
5. Community	• What community is involved in this activity? • How is the introduction of outsider facilitators mediated in the community for the session or activity?
6. Rules	• What kind of instructional and pacing rules will be introduced into the session? • What are the expectations around social order rules like discipline and communication? • How will this process be navigated so that it doesn't interfere with the research interest of the group's own social order practices.

4.3.1   The physical space as transformation space

The focus group sessions were held in the Grade R classroom of a crèche on a farm. Though I left the organisation of the room as we found it, I allocated different spaces for different activities, and created a relaxed flow between activities. Figure 4.5 below illustrates the outlay of the room.
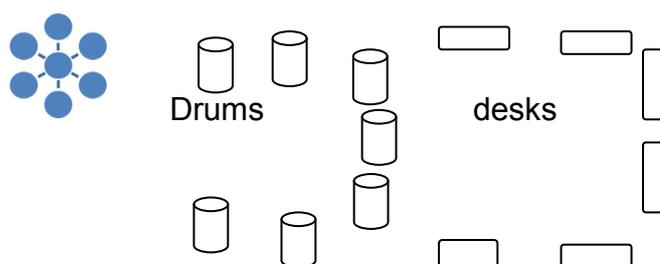
Figure 4.5:   The session room layout

The chairs and tables at the front and centre of the room were sized for younger children. We sat at the tables to have our snack and engage in the social autopsy conversations. An unintended consequence of using the pre-school classroom was that it placed us all at the same level. Though the seating arrangement was physically uncomfortable for me, the participants appeared ambivalent about it, some preferring even to lie on the floor instead. The single desks that lined the wall were used for drawing or individual reflection exercises, while the open carpeted space used by the learners of the crèche during story time was used for the drumming circle. The organisation of the classroom space reinforced the idea that some activities would be collective, some would be individual and some would focus on the individual within the collective.

The way that the participants navigated the movement between the different spaces provided valuable insight into group interactions, as well as the power dynamics within the group. For the participants some seats appeared to be considered prime seating. Where the individuals sat and how they came to occupy those seats provided me with insights into the group's formal and informal interactions, positioning, dominance and influence within the group. So, for example, nobody seemed to challenge Don's choice of seat. Luigi and Bruno appeared to have

decided where they were going to sit and moved to those seats both around the table and when the move to the desks took place. Frankie and Chico seemed always to scramble for the same seat, while Leo seemed willing to wait until everyone had made their selection and then accepted whatever option remained. In the first two sessions I allowed the participants to decide where they wanted to sit; however, I assigned seats for the drumming circle session during the third session. The participants were very vocal in their resistance to this and some of them refused to move. Mindful of their hesitation, and not wanting to undermine the work we had done thus far to create the group as a safe space, I explained that the changes were necessary to facilitate the drumming circle process. I had purposefully selected this as a vehicle to introduce the idea that change would be part of our process. I anticipated resistance to this interference with the group dynamic; it was interesting to note, however, that while most of the participants displayed non-verbal displeasure at this imposition, only Chico and Frankie protested verbally.

4.3.2   Creating a co-research relationship

Though we had agreed in principle what we would be doing and why we would be doing it, the process was formalised and I tabled the following proposal for activities and explained that the first two cycles of our engagement would essentially be about gaining first-hand experience of the activities and that we would make a collective decision around which activities we would pursue in the course of our research. Table 4.2 is the activities catalogue presented to participants. This catalogue reflects the study's endeavour to create spaces for participants to experience a new sense of agency by scaffolding the learning into activities that took cognisance of the heterogeneous nature of the group, while expanding the skills, knowledge and experience of the participants. The emphasis was on creating moments of mastery, taking into account the variations in ability and interests.

Table 4.2:   Activities catalogue and data-generation strategies

Data Set	Data-Generation Strategy	Stimulus Activities
1. Field notes	Observation (FN)	- Non-verbal communication - Interactions - Response to novel experiences - How they related to adult facilitators
2. *Field notes; photographs, video and audio* recordings	Focus group (FG)	- Informal conversations - Social autopsy conversations - Freirian code response conversations - Tai Chi - Finger hold meditation - Drumming circle
3. *Participant-generated artefacts; field notes, video and audio excerpts*	Individual activities during focus group sessions	- Music response drawings (projective techniques) - Draw a person (DAP)
4. *Field notes; photographs, video and audio excerpts and transcripts*	Focus group	- Animal encounter - The in-door climbing wall - Becoming a man programme
5. Research Journal (RJ)		

The way in which the data were captured became about more than recording or documenting the process; in the study I started off capturing data using a dictaphone and a video camera. Though they consented, the participants were initially uncomfortable with being recorded and expressed concern about who would have access to the video and audio recordings. They were reminded of the confidentiality agreement we had entered into and that they would have the right of refusal in any session or part of it. The negotiation became part of democratic research in practice; the participants requested and were allowed opportunities to manage the recording

equipment, and I also agreed to share my observations and reflections during the snack session or as part of the social autopsy sessions. Member checks are considered a key component of ensuring the validity of qualitative data. I religiously shared my notes and observations, allowing an opportunity for participants to reflect on what I shared.

After three sessions, some of the participants suggested that instead of a video camera or Dictaphone, I use my smart phone as the data-collecting device. It appeared from their response that the group had discussed this outside of the sessions and Frankie had been mandated to indicate that they would be more comfortable with the mobile telephone as they were used to cell phones. Aware of the youth culture penchant for documenting their lives and experiences on cell phones and sharing these on social media platforms, I readily agreed. But I had limited knowledge of my mobile telephone's functions. My admission of my limitation in this regard created what Holliday (2007:64) refers to as a spontaneous "moment of interaction" between me and the participants as they readily "taught me". Using the mobile telephone, however, had serious limitations as data capturing device because of its limited battery power. This, however, allowed me to introduce into the space other smart phone devices to assist in overcoming this hindrance. My navigating the data-recording terrain provided what is termed in narrative therapy a "sparkling moment" and served to "thicken" the alternative story. The participant's natural curiosity and my willingness to play into their view of me as an "old person clueless about modern technology" had the unintended consequence of fast tracking rapport. My admission of not knowing would become an important tool in the process. I modelled permission that "not knowing" was okay in the process of exploring together new healthier ways of being. I had to be cautious that my "not knowing" was read as authentic by the participants as these young men were particularly vigilant about "being played". Teasing within boundaries was introduced into the research arena. Teasing was a particularly sensitive area in the engagement process as most of the teasing done by the individuals and the collective was usually to belittle or to show aggression.

4.3.3   Experiencing the stimulus activities with the participants

As a key focus of the research as determined by the research questions was to explore how the dynamics at play in the group could be influenced, I make a fairly comprehensive presentation of how the use of the stimulus activities played out in practice. The activities and the rationale for their inclusion in this study are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3, I highlight how they complement the participatory action research methodology.

4.3.3.1   Focus group

Working with small groups of adolescents provides an effective way of helping participants, develop their own identities and witness the development of the process of others. Peer culture plays a major role in shaping the attitudes and perceptions of adolescents, so working within the already established group context, but introducing differing ways of engaging, allowed a space for the researcher to examine attitudes and behaviours that have been taken for granted, and exploring and rehearsing alternative or healthier ways of being (Garvan & Bagal, 2008).
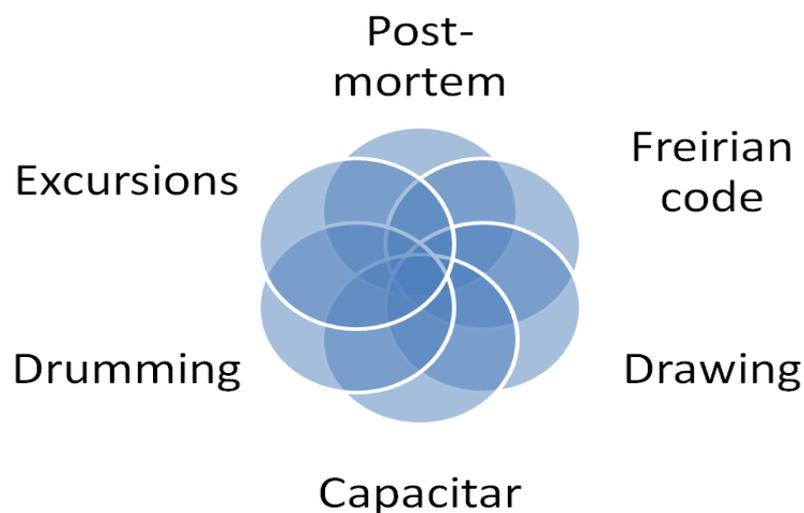
Figure 4.6:   Overlap of Focus Group Activities

4.3.3.1.1   Post-mortem or social autopsy conversations

According to Ritchie (2003:37), "groups allow us to hear from others". The social autopsy sessions were in essence informal conversations that were conducted while we served a light home-made snack to the participants. The snacking process provided valuable insights into alliances within the group and it was possible to witness their vigilant policing of fairness in ensuring that nobody received more than another. The first time the participants were invited to help themselves to the food, instead of being served by us, the result was chaos. It seemed as if they were disoriented by a lack of clear direction and did not trust other participants to share the food fairly. This chaos allowed a valuable learning moment and reality check on how these participants viewed one another. Chico's defence of why he had grabbed the juice bottle from Don was that "he does not like to share, he eats alone" *(hy hou nie van deel nie, hy eet alleen)* (FG: FN: S8).

The social autopsy sessions were reflective spaces into which participants brought behavioural challenges that they had faced during the week. The participants would often simply share what transpired during the week and at other times they would reflect on how they could have handled it differently. Importantly, this was the space in which participants were held to account by their peers. Participants who had experienced behavioural challenges during the week were allowed an opportunity to share their transgressions. If a participant had not shared his transgression by the end of the conversation, he would be cautioned by one of the other participants that they were going to share what had happened on his behalf. Whether this should in fact happen was decided upon by the participant concerned and it served to introduce participants to the idea of acting as agents of change.

The data analysis, however, showed that the "sharing on his behalf" process was initially staged by the participants and that they were manipulating these sessions of the research. Upon reviewing the taped sessions, I realised that the participants did not appear to be particularly distressed about being exposed by the other participants. I found this interesting as the group had a particular culture of protection through silence. The group would not reveal any information about the behaviour of the participants that might have the potential to get them into trouble. The video replay, my consultation of my notes and my conversation with the drumming

facilitator who had been present at all the initial sessions confirmed my perception that the system was being manipulated. Consultation with my critical friends together with reflection on what was happening allowed me to understand that the process of trust and relationship building with adults was still under construction.

Ritchie (2003:33) cautions that adolescent participants will require time, patience and encouragement to trust adults and this is a process that cannot be forced. Therefore, by the beginning of the third cycle, after consultation with my own peer group and upon reflection, I decided to change my approach. I discontinued the practice of asking the participants to report on their transgressions; instead I allowed the conversation to develop naturally. I also reduced the time allocated to the post-mortem component and extended the drumming circles. This change did not go unnoticed. I noted the covert exchange of glances when the first snack time after my decision ended without any probe. One of the participants asked if I was not going to check who had been *naughty* (FG: FN: S6). I informed the group that they were free to bring whatever they wanted to talk about to the snack-time sessions. What the analysis of the data shows is that, in later cycles, as the group dynamic changed members would spontaneously raise concerns and struggles they were experiencing as individuals, such as their academic progress in class, their relationship with teachers and peers, or with each other. So, for example, it was at these sessions that it first became apparent that Luigi and Bruno were starting to separate from the group and that they were developing different interests.

4.3.3.1.2   *Understanding through body-mind connections*

In cycle 2 the participants engaged in practices that were taken from the Capacitar programme that had been developed by Cane and Duennes (2005), and which were adapted for use with participants in this study. The practices are based on popular education methodology and the focus is on teaching people skills that they can use independently of a therapist. The programme is used to support the development of emotional intelligence and for the processing of complex trauma in children through body-mind consciousness. This group of participants are all adolescents who have experienced challenging lives and who could benefit from simple practices that were easy to remember and use.

Finger holds meditation for emotions

Finger holds are used to manage emotions. According to Cane (2007:30), finger hold meditations are "a simple way to work with emotions and develop emotional literacy".
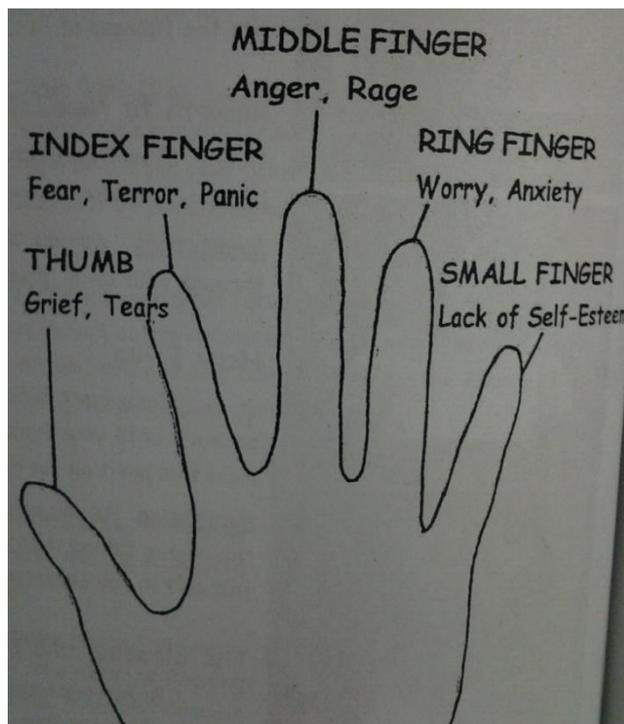
Figure 4.7:   Outline of finger hold meditation

Cane describes this activity as follows:

> Hold each finger with the opposite hand for 2 to 5 minutes. The person breathes in deeply; recognize and acknowledge strong feelings or emotions you hold inside yourself. Breathe out slowly and let go. Imagine the feelings draining out your finger into the earth. Breathe in a sense of harmony, strength and healing. And breathe out slowly, releasing past feelings and problems. Often as you hold each finger you can feel a pulsing sensation as the energy and feelings move and become balanced (Cane, 2005:30).

During the session the process was demonstrated on the hand of each of the participants. I then asked each of the participants to hold a finger until they felt a pulsing; I demonstrated the strength of the grip and drew their attention to the fact

that as they moved from finger to finger they might feel variations in the pulsing. Initially the participants were not eager to participate in this activity and seemed guarded, even suspicious. However, the tangible experience of feeling the pulsing easily made them embrace the process. Chico, one of the spokespersons of the group, exclaimed, "Wow ... a person can really feel it" (*sjoe, mens kan dit nogal rerig voel)* (FG: FN: S2). Each of the participants was then given a sheet of A4 paper and asked to trace the outline of their hand and to shade the finger where they had felt the strongest pulsing. At this stage I informed the participants that each of the fingers represented an emotion. We used a portion of the teaching DVD on this programme to guide the session. However, I found the participants were distracted or overwhelmed by the accent of the presenter and lengthy script of the presenter. Thus, when we next used the handhold meditation in a session, I refreshed their understanding of the process and what the fingers represented. During this session I chose not to use the DVD and instead played an instrumental meditation music track to accompany the finger hold meditation. The participants were much more responsive this time round.

Chico blurted out that it works and shared that he had held his finger during a storm the previous week and that it had helped. He could not remember which finger he held, but was convinced of its effectiveness. We used these meditations across the cycles from time to time, and over time the participants associated the emotions with the fingers. During the course of the cycles this activity appeared to provide a tangible non-verbal way to connect with emotions and to externalise those emotions without having to analyse them. We often traced the outline of the hand (see Figure 4.7 above) and shaded in the finger (emotion) that needed special attention. The drawing and shading were always done at the individual desks, which allowed the participant a measure of privacy. They were also requested not to share their work in the sessions. Whilst walking around to check if they remained on task, it was interesting to notice the intensity with which they engaged in the drawing, colouring and drumming circle related to the emotions they had expressed in the drawing.

The practical/concrete level of this finger activity to identify what they were feeling without having to find the words to words to express it appears to have strong appeal. For these drawing exercises the participants appeared to respect each

other's privacy. At the request of the participants I allowed them to keep these visualisations of their emotions and asked for, and received, permission to record a sample of the activity as it related to a later activity. Having had first-hand experience of the finger hold meditation, I knew it to be a potent experience; therefore I respected their right to privacy. I also observed that after the finger hold drawing sessions, all the participants except Leo rolled up their drawings and put them in their trouser pockets.

Tai Chi

Tai Chi was the second activity that was adapted from the Capacitar programme (Cane, 2005). I selected this activity for its movements, which are based on fighting and defence stances that are used in Kung Fu. This ties into the martial arts focus of the Freirian code, which was used to externalise conversation in the focus group. The Tai Chi movements, however, focus on movement in a slow, deliberate and unyielding way, and require focus, a consciousness and connection with bodily responses within the individual. They further require the individual be a part of a community of practice. Tai Chi sessions were used in the second cycle of the study. This was included as a means to help individual participants process trauma, to see how the group responded to novel experiences, and to set the groundwork for scaffolding emotional intelligence learning. However, as the presentation of the process in practice highlights, it allowed for much more in the process, as will be shown below. The sessions were facilitated by using a training DVD which required the participants to work with a sequence of movements in synergy with the rest of the group. The movements did not require any particular skill or fitness level, only for the participants to look, listen and follow. The script was simple, though the excerpt that I selected was challenging but at a level that would allow all participants to reach mastery.

The sessions were held as part of the focus group and structured as follows. The participants were shown the 10-minute DVD sequence twice. They were then invited to try it themselves. I was a participant in the activity and intentionally placed myself at the front of the group with my back to the participants. My intention was to model the process of being uncertain, as well as indicate risk-taking, self-correcting and discomfort. It was easy for me to be authentic about these experiences as I am not

the most physically co-ordinated person. Authenticity was important to this group, as they appeared to be constantly on the look-out for reasons to prove that lies or insincerity are typical of adults. I felt that my participation in the activity would expose my vulnerability to the participants. As I was expecting the participants to engage in a new and potentially embarrassing experience, it was only fair that I also participate. The group's giggles and teasing reflected the embarrassed self-consciousness of the adolescent participants. It appeared to help the comfort levels of the participants that I was willing to be included in that teasing. I noticed a subtle shift in the type of teasing and an increased willingness to take the lead from an adult in the environment. I wondered if using the DVD as facilitation tool created distance and safety, or if in the age of social media it was a more familiar and acceptable way of learning or experiencing new things. My review of the video footage of the session showed that after a period of initial self-consciousness and focus on what others were doing and how they were progressing, the participants appeared to shift their focus to mastering the moves in synergy with the presenter. It appears that once imitating or looking to their peers for direction was not producing the desired result, and observing some participants who had chosen to focus on the facilitator appearing to experience a measure of success, all the participants shifted their attention to the facilitator. However, only Leo managed a successful repetition.

The way the participants had arranged themselves in the space also impacted their level of success. Initially, I did not interfere with the way that the participants chose to arrange themselves in the space; I had merely indicated that they would require some space between them in order to complete movements without bumping into each other. In this group, where the participants often showed little regard for respecting each other's personal space, being compelled by the activity of negotiating personal space and coming to grips with the need for it in order to attain a measure of success served as a non-threatening way of introducing the importance of respecting personal and social space. Some of the participants initially exaggerated the movements and purposefully bumped and chopped fellow participants, eliciting verbal protestations and some scuffling. Though it was challenging not to take charge of the situation, I thought it prudent to the process for the participants to negotiate their space and claim their right to unhindered participation. The activity allowed for moments of success within the sequence, so

there was room for all of the participants to experience some measure of success; this appears to have shifted the focus from fooling around to paying attention. I also remained unresponsive to attempts to provoke a rebuke because of the disruptive behaviour of some of the participants.

During this activity session we did three repetitions of the segment. Each repetition was followed by a reflective session in which I asked participants to state what they had found difficult or challenging, how they attempted to overcome this, and which parts they thought they had mastered. After the initial segment, the participants blamed their inability to successfully complete the task on the distracting behaviour of their fellow participants. None of the participants accepted responsibility for their part in their failure. Leo, however, shared that he was fairly satisfied that he had done it right. Leo was the new member of the group whom we had co-opted and who appeared to operate on the fringes of the group, with very little influence in the group. His obvious cockiness at having been the only one to successfully complete the sequence appeared to annoy the rest of the participants, who challenged his assertion of personal success. The drumming master (DM) who had been observing the process, however, validated his claim. I asked Leo to share with the group what it felt like to have mastered the experience. The facial expressions of the group indicated that they were not happy at having been bested by the physically smallest member of the group, who was often treated as the runt of the litter. I wondered if there would be a consequence for him breaking ranks with the group and asked the DM to monitor any untoward physicality aimed at him. They were asked to attempt the activity again and were coached on ways in which they could experience greater success. They decided that they needed to create more space around themselves, that the taller participants move to the back and that Chico move next to me. The shifting appeared to be orchestrated by Don and the rest of the group conceded without protest. This was the first indication that Don wielded a fair amount of power in the group.

The second engagement by the group was quieter, with only the occasional expression of individual frustration at not being able to master some of the movements in the sequence. Their reflections on their experience at the end of this session showed that it had been easier. Bruno had been relocated to the back of the

group because of his physical size, commented on the clumsy and failed efforts of the group. There was immediate dissention and the assertion that at least they were trying, while he was playing around. Their body language indicated that they were not happy with his ridiculing of their efforts and they appeared to ignore him for the rest of the session. The first Tai Chi encounter appeared to have been a valuable teaching tool in proxemics and highlighted to the participants how the group dynamic could interfere with the mastering of skills.

Upon reflection (RJ: C2: S2), I realised that mediating individual challenges would create an invaluable opportunity for me to assert myself within the group as a conduit to successful experimentation with new experiences. So at the next research session I asked for the group's permission to enter into their circle and their individual personal space to assist with correcting the small obstacles to their experience of mastering the sequence. There was an almost tangible hesitation and I demonstrated on Leo what I would be doing, I purposely chose Leo to reinforce the point that even with success, there is always room for improvement if we allow others to assist in this process. I knew that if I were afforded this opportunity that it would open the gateway into gaining an insight into how the participants responded to adult intervention in their group dynamic and individual learning. Though their hesitation remained, I asked for an opportunity to demonstrate this during the Tai Chi session. While the DVD recording facilitated I moved around the group, shifting some of their poses such as slight lifting of an arm making sure to make contact with all the participants. Stone (1992:28) cautions that "adolescents are particularly self-conscious and vulnerable to the influence of peer pressure and so in working within groups one should limit the level of discomfort". After the first set I asked the group to reflect on their level of success and if my involvement had assisted in any way. This was intended as a concrete demonstration that, while the research process would mediate, intervene, and challenge their level of comfort, it would always be done incrementally and the participants would have a voice in what they were willing to allow. The targeted intervention had been designed after studying the video recording of the previous session and annotations in my research journal based on my own reflections and a conversation I had held with the DM after the initial Tai Chi session.

All the participants agreed that my intervention had improved their success rate, some indicating that there were some more complex movements that they continued to find challenging. I proposed continued assistance and pointed out that the nature of the challenges highlighted would require me to get closer into their personal space, touch and move with them. Before we did the next set, I asked who would like to be assisted and Don and Chico indicated they would, and so those were the only two I worked with. Their obvious experience of success as a result of the more targeted support elicited outcries of unfairness from Frankie, and responses to this from Don and Chico that it had been his choice not to accept the guidance on offer. I include this as an example of how the Tai Chi, initially included to address complex trauma, created opportunities for learning about personal and social space, individual and group responses to novel experiences, and the opportunity to demonstrate in practical and readily understandable ways how the research project would introduce alternative ways of being as a collaborative process.

4.3.3.1.3   *Kung Fu as a vehicle for making their voices heard*

As stated before, the participants had a limited vocabulary and were struggling to express their feelings or views effectively. I selected the film *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, a classic 1980s Kung Fu film, to use in order to facilitate communication. The process is known as finding a Freirian code and is used to create some space between the participants and challenging issues under review. The film is from a different era, but the film and genre are popular in the social environment and participants appeared to easily identify with a young Jackie Chan. The motivation in selecting this particular film lies in the theme of resilience which is prevalent in the classic kung fu genre. In such films the plots develop around the hero who overcomes adversity through the learning of mental, emotional and physical skills. This skill acquisition usually occurs in response to a personal crisis that the lead character experiences which leaves him feeling dejected and hopeless. The scaffolding process of acquiring a skill set using an inverted triangle approach replicated one of the outcomes of the research.

I explained that the film would be used as a facilitation aid and that we would watch specific scenes. Prior to each viewing the participants were asked to focus on what was happening (the action or behaviour), why it was happening (motivation or

environmental factors), and what they thought the main character was feeling in the scene. The clips were never more than 10 minutes long. By focusing their attention on specifics in the clip, I hoped to shift participants' focus from what they were watching to how they were watching. The participants willingly shared their views, something I put down to their familiarity with the medium and discussing the movie with their peers. During the course of the research the participants often spontaneously lapsed into informal conversations, with spontaneous demonstrations of the action that they had witnessed. I shared my memories of similar responses by my male siblings when we were younger, and this appeared to create a connection between us. Though the process required a fair amount of intervention, I worked to keep the spontaneity alive in the space, creating opportunities for the participants to experiment with their voice, both literally and figuratively. So rather than being symptomatic of chaos, the lively engagement was an exercise in empowerment and scaffolding self-efficacy. As the facilitator of the process, I made sure that everybody's voice was heard in this process by inviting those who were more reticent to participate. The viewings were followed by a brainstorming sessions in which participants were invited to respond on the focus areas presented to them prior to the viewing; these views were then recorded on a flipchart (see Figure 4.8 below).
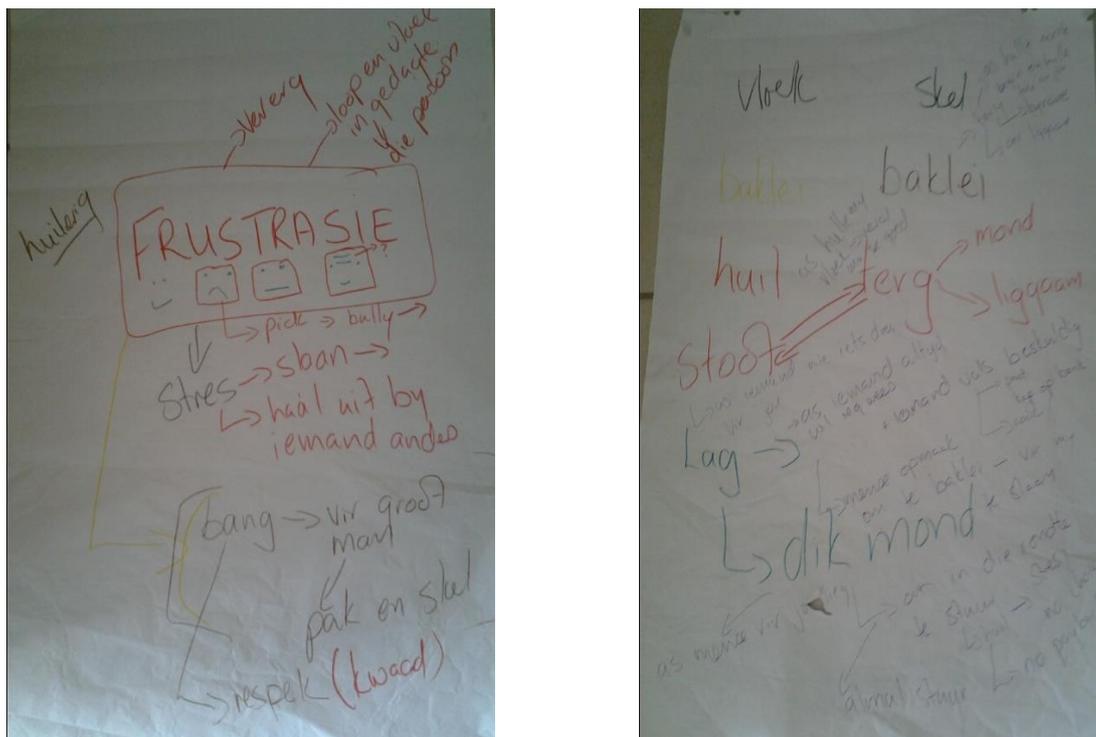
Figure 4.8:   Post-Freirian code brainstorm

All responses were recorded without comment. Some of the participants appeared surprised that their views were recorded on the board, so writing on the board appeared to validate their views, which in turn appeared to animate them. The theme that came through strongly in their responses was that of anger. I then used coloured chalk lines to make links between similar responses and question marks to indicate dissenting views. We engaged with the response separately from the person who had made it. The use of film provided a medium for identifying emotion and learning to name it, for expanding emotional vocabulary, encouraging reflection, and engendering empathy. This process created an opportunity for us to expand emotional literacy and explore the finer nuances of a particular emotion. This is illustrated around the recurring theme of anger, which we renamed "*the anger*" (**die kwaad**). Externalising it separates the emotion from the person, so it becomes less threatening to engage with the emotion. In this way the anger can be exposed and explored as a complex emotion which elicits a range of responses. Some of the responses shared by the participants around how emotion presented included being fed up or irritated, sad, anxious, feeling aggressive and an escalation to rage. See Figures 4.8a and 4.8b for an illustration of how the Capacitar finger hold practices were used to externalise these anger responses and how participants related what they saw in the film to their own lived experience.
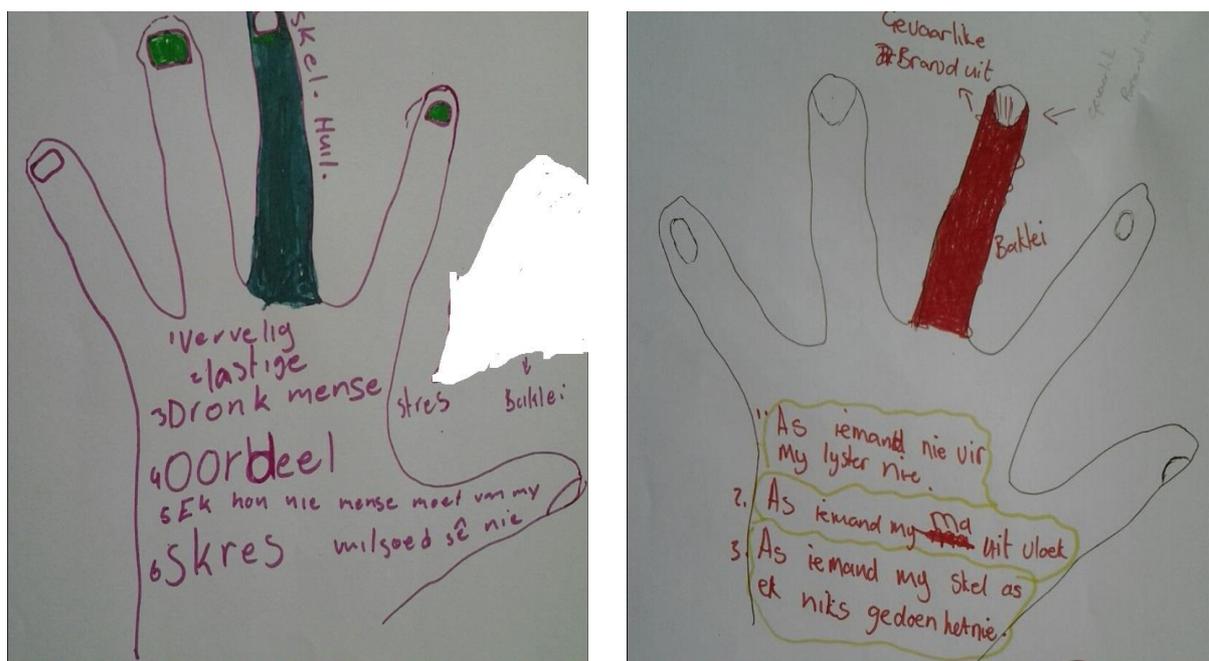
Figure 4.9:   Partnering the finger holds and the Freirian code discussion

In the process participants volunteered information that provided insight into what kind of behaviour was allowed or experienced as reasonable in the context, contextual discourse around resilience and defence, colloquial language, group dynamic and dyadic relationship. It also allowed insight into traumatic experiences to which participants were exposed.

Film as an educational tool enables different types of learning styles, such as visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. The reality of this in practice is indicated by the responses of various participants to the character's response to something in the same clip (FG: VN: S3):

> Visual focus: He is sad because he is crying *(hy is hartseer want hy huil)* (FG: FN: S3: F)
>
> Auditory: The man is angry because he is scolding *(Die man is kwaad want hy skel)* (FG: FN: S3: C)
>
> Kinaesthetic: They are not talking to him because he cannot fight. *(Hulle praat nie met hom nie want hy weet nie hoe om te baklei nie)* (FG: FN: S3: Le)

Differing individual focal points resulted in different responses to the same stimuli and reactions, allowed dissenting views into the collective space. These dissenting views were held up for scrutiny and the participants were encouraged to engage each other around their views.

4.3.3.1.4 *Drumming circle*

The drumming circles were included in the study as a vehicle to enhance self-awareness, listening skills, co-ordination of breath and movement, co-operation and patience. By using the drums and basic drumming techniques, participants can learn to recognise and differentiate emotions in themselves and others. Through the process of externalising these with drum beats, some distance is created between them and the emotion, creating a space for the containment of those feelings and accompanying impulses, and to pause, reflect and channel in healthier ways behaviour that would otherwise be acted out as disruptive or destructive.

During the first few sessions the master drummer focused on basic skills such as teaching the participants how to position the djembe drums, how to use their hands

when drumming to the basic tenets of slap, tone and base; and how to work with the master drummer and follow direction. Initially the drumming circle lasted for 30 minutes and took place after the focus group stimulus activity. As the study progressed, the drumming activity became the central activity of the session as the participants started reaching varying levels of mastery.

Historically, the djembe drums have been used as communication tools across time and space. Playful approaches were used to mediate the learning and emotions elicited in the activities prior to the drumming circle. In the research context it was used as a mediation tool to assist participants with a limited vocabulary to externalise emotion by beating their interpretation of it. This was part of the externalising therapeutic process used in narrative therapy to create some distance between the individual and the emotion or experience they are engaging with. The drums allowed the participants to access and express their emotions as individuals. The drumming allowed the participants to engage in a process that acknowledged the emotion the individual was experiencing, the intensity with which they were experiencing it and how they expressed it. By engaging in a communal activity, they also listened to how differently the same emotion was experienced and expressed by others.

Figure 4.10: Talking via the drums

This was another method for engaging in externalising conversations that created some space between the participants and their often intense responses to emotion. The participant was then allowed some space to engage with the emotion by beating as an individual together with the other participants in the collective. Then the drumming master facilitated a process in which the participants beat their interpretation of the emotion individually, while the other members listened. The other members then had to respond to what they heard. In the first few sessions the responses were done collectively; after the fourth session the facilitator would point to individuals, invite them to play back to the participant sharing the emotion what they had heard and then to beat in response to that. The experience created an opportunity to engage with the emotion, to share it, to have it heard and then to have it acknowledged. The circle thus provided a space to introduce and deepen the understanding of the emotion; the variation in drumbeats and rhythms imitated the multiple nuances implicit in emotion and set the foundation for the transformation process to begin in a non-threatening environment, where engagement with the drum often overrode self-consciousness.

Figure 4.11 illustrates how the drawing and drumming were used to allow participants a more nuanced experience of an emotion. The drawings presented in Figure 4.11 illustrate Leo's experience of fear before (4.11a) and then the drawing done after the drumming circle (4.11b).
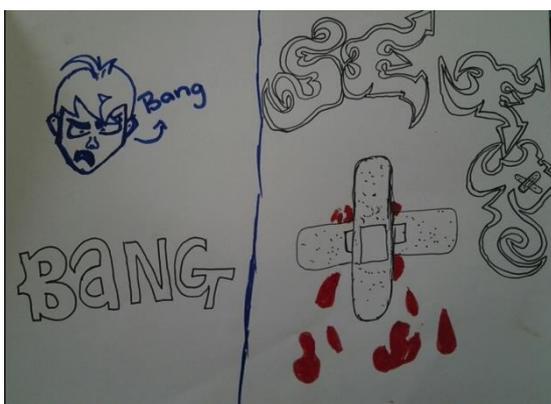
Figure 4.11a   Figure 4.11b

Figures 4.11:   Illustration of how the drums were used to nuance emotion

Though drumming they were encouraged to introduce that emotion into a public space and to communicate how they had received and interpreted that message. Before the drumming circle, participants often drew emotions as they experienced them. After the drumming circles in which the emotion, e.g. fear (as illustrated in 4.11), was mediated through drumming, they were encouraged to draw their responses to the emotion again.

The participants were told that the emphasis in the drumming circle was not on the demonstration of technical competence or talent. This seemed to encourage them to embrace the process as an opportunity to experience mastery, and shifted the focus from external competitiveness to a more internal focus. During the initial drumming sessions the only person who was allowed to speak was the drummer or the researcher. This did not mean, however, that there were no other conversations taking place. The facilitator and I became aware of this covert communication when we noticed a pattern emerging in what initially appeared to be accidental disruptive drumming. After reviewing video recordings of the sessions, I observed changes in behaviour that preceded the disruptions. As the sessions progressed and the participants started experiencing greater mastery, they started listening to and attempting to correct fellow participants. Over time, though, they shifted their focus from their fellow participants to listening for their own mistakes. As the research process progressed a changed group dynamic emerged. The fact that they shifted the focus from other participants' drumming to their own, and then started to listen to themselves in relation to the group, represented a major shift in these participants' behaviour. It seemed as if a tacit respect for one another was developing as they would often stop playing if they felt they were disrupting the flow of the group and would listen for what they considered to be the right moment for re-entry. The six participants' responses shifted from highlighting their and others' mistakes to differentiating between good and bad drumming sessions, reflecting what had influenced the session and how things could be done differently. The participants started engaging with reflexive practice in applying these reflections under the guidance of the master drummer and experiencing the consequences of their choice.

Beliefs around efficacy are therefore important considerations in empowerment as these beliefs impact on the "choices people make at important decisional points"

(Bandura, 2005:4). The confidence and the belief in one's ability to influence the outcome of one's actions will, according to Bandura (2005:4), "impede or enhance motivation to engage in sustained activity that has the potential to create discomfort and challenge the status quo". An example of this discomfort and decisional points became evident around the third drumming circle session, when I observed and shared with the group that covert communication and habitual disruptive practices, especially when individuals were feeling challenged, drove the group to revert to playing "follow the leader". After consultation with the master drummer, I suggested to the participants that we allow the master drummer to re-arrange the seating to maximise the possibility of everyone having a positive experience in the drumming circle. They seemed apprehensive about this suggestion, though only two of the participants made verbal protestations. Interestingly, these were the two participants who appeared to be struggling the most with mastering the shift in adaptations to the basic techniques. Frankie, one of the two who was struggling, expressed his resistance as "*No man, this now feels like school*" (FG: FN: S3). Mindful of the PAR research ideology that guided my research, I motivated the change. However, I also allowed the group to meet on their own in order to discuss this change. I was mindful of the power differential and did not wish to have any of the participants feel that their dignity was under threat. I was always also aware of my research focus, namely the potential of the group dynamic to transform from one in which the group valued dysfunction to one that encouraged its members to risk the discomfort of healthier choices. I felt that this was a very risky stage in the research, given the participants' scepticism about adults' ability for sustained commitment to honouring or respecting their voice. After the group had time to discuss my suggestion for change, they agreed to the change, but with conditions. I found this to be one of the most harrowing negotiation processes that I have ever engaged in, and was given a taste of the group asserting itself as a unit. The negotiation process was successful and we agreed that the changes would be implemented over the next three sessions, after which they would be reviewed.

In the new outlay the master drummer decided on a half-moon formation, with her sitting at the front, and the most easily distracted participant placed directly across from her. The potential for unduly distracting each other was limited in this outlay as everyone faced her. As agreed, at the end of the third session we reviewed the

process. It was clear that the participants had already discussed this and had made their decision already, which was to keep the outlay. After Chico conveyed their decision, the group took their drums and set them out, there was no further discussion and the format was retained throughout.

4.3.3.1.5   Drawing as expressive voice

Drawing was essentially used as a projective technique to create a space for the externalising of thoughts, feelings and emotions (Oster & Crone, 2004; Moussouri, 2004). Here too the focus was on the process not the product or artistic skill of the participants. From the outset I emphasised that we would be looking at the story depicted in the drawings. I informed the participants that they would have the option to share what they had drawn or not, and that they would also be allowed to take the drawings with them if they chose to. Although the drawings were intended to form part of two distinct exercises, over time they came to be used in various ways by the participants to express their thoughts, feelings and attitudes.

In various activities the participants were presented with a sheet of paper, pencils and colour markers. From the onset they were encouraged to select a palette of at least three colours to which they assign an emotion, feeling or attitude. These palettes were drawn into the back of their books or on the back of the sheets of paper, though they were not bound to use them. I explained that their palette would remain private and encouraged the use of colour as a means of getting in touch with feelings they may be experiencing at the time of the exercise. The way that the drawings were used and impacted on the research is presented throughout the findings; I include Figures 4.12a, 4.12b, 4.12c and 4.12d as examples of how differently Leo and Don chose to use the drawing circles and colour palettes in the same exercise.
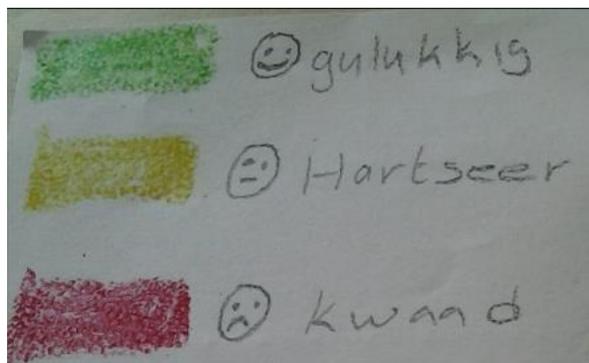
Figure 4.12a:
Colour-emotion template
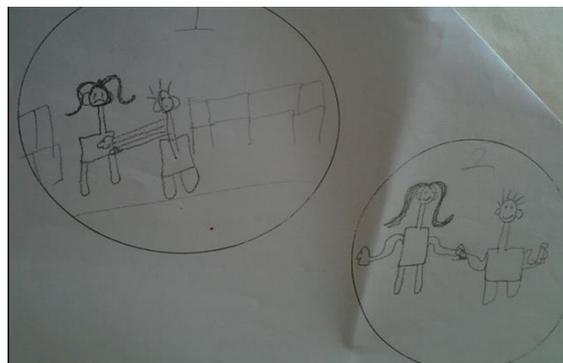
Figure 4.12b:
Music response drawing circle
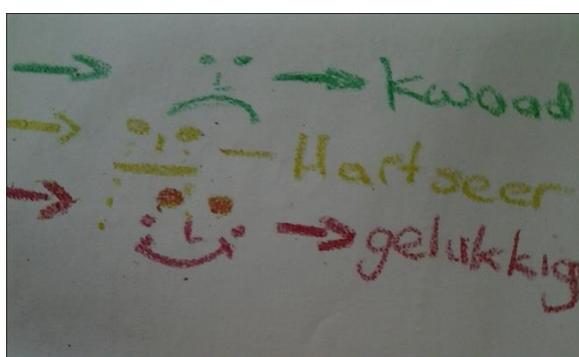
Figure 4.12c:
Colour-emotion template

Figure 4.12d:
Music response drawing circle

4.4 THEMES

I attempt to present the findings in a narrative format that reflect key moments of learning or insight into the participants' experience. Since the dominant language of the respondents is Afrikaans, the qualitative responses from the data are translated, with the original Afrikaans comment in brackets.

4.4.1 The importance of the group

The first theme or category that I discuss is the importance of the group in the lives of these participants. In order to help me in contextualising their experiences, I conducted interviews with three key informants, who come from the contexts within which these boys are growing up and functioning in.

4.4.1.1   Peer groups in the socio-cultural context

The key informants were Mr Addo, a teacher; Kay, a community-based worker; and Clover, a man who grew up in the community and still has very strong ties to it. My interviews with them brought to light a range of views with regard to the role and value of groups in the community explored in this study. The phenomenon is complex and the participants showed a tendency to focus on the aspects of groups as they pertained to their experience growing up in this farm-worker community. I found that Mr Addo, the educator who had not grown up in the community but who had had extensive experience being a teacher at the school, was inclined to focus on the negative aspects of group affiliation and expressed his apprehension about the potential of group dynamics to place boys such as the participants in the school context on a trajectory to delinquency. Kay and Clover, on the other hand, focused on group affiliation as a valued tool in helping them to navigate their lived realities in this particular farm-worker community.

Being part of a group was an important part of Kay's and Clover's lived experience and they shared anecdotes of how their peer groups had supported and encouraged them. According to Clover, his experience had been that the group often serves as surrogate parents and families whose influence surpassed that of the biological family. To illustrate this he stated that he was still very closely connected to the members of his group and, even though their lives had taken very different paths, they had remained supportive of each other for over forty years. When I asked them about an earlier statement by Mr Addo about negative peer group influences, both respondents referred to the historical and social realities of the community being unable to properly support young people. Factors such as parents working longer hours, substance abuse and a lack of structured extramural activities and physical restructuring of the community spaces appear to have played a huge role in how the dynamics of groups had changed over time. However, for Kay and Clover not all peer group alliances are problematic. According to them, they offer support in areas where the families may not have the capacity or inclination to. The data contain examples that support this view, such as Chico defending Don from bullies on the farm and at school when he first arrived at the farm; Frankie assisting other participants with

homework; and Chico building a bicycle for Frankie when his mother could not afford to buy him one.

According to Kay and Clover, their groups were formed around shared interests, locality and availability of likeminded peers. According to Clover, the decline in inter-farm social activity, such as sports tournaments and cultural events, resulted in increased isolation of the people in the community (KI 3: IN: 4).

4.4.1.2   How and why this participant group had evolved

The participants related that their group was largely formed in primary school and had continued into high school. The participants were not very responsive to direct questioning about how they had come to be together, so information related to this aspect of the research was gleaned from anecdotal information shared spontaneously during the course of the research. The initial members of the group were Chico and Don and their acquaintance started when Chico defended Don from bullies when he first arrived at the farm and school. The rest became members of the group when they met up after being excluded from their classes for behavioural infringements. The overall indication was that when excluded from the classroom for various infringements, the participants would gather on the playground at the back of the school, where they would play soccer to pass the time. According to the participants, these informal soccer matches were laden with conflict. However, because the pupils were offenders, they could not go to the teachers to complain about the other offenders. Over time the participants said they developed various adaptive strategies to cope with this, such as manipulating the exclusion process to establish an informal soccer team. The members of this team looked out for each other during these impromptu games and this "being together" *(saam loop)* led to them hanging out together during break times.

However, two of the participants had not joined the group in this way. Bruno could not remember how he had become involved in the group as he had never been expelled from class nor does he live on the same farm. Leo, a more recent affiliate, was considered to be a fairly good student by Mr Addo, who referred him for the initial intervention. He was referred because of his deliberate defiance of teachers' instructions. According to Mr Addo, he had referred Leo as a preventative strategy,

and was disheartened by the fact that Leo's misbehaviour appears to have worsened since then. The escalation of Leo's transgressions and Bruno's voluntary participation in the initial intervention might be an indication that the participants may be willing to risk school sanctions in order to secure a place in the group. It was interesting to note that while the group had been forthcoming about the behaviour that had got them into the group, they were less forthcoming about the behaviour required to keep them in the group. My impression was that the group felt a certain bravado in using the system against itself. Mr Addo's assertion that the educators were at their wits' end (*despondent about*) about getting this particular group to comply with school rules and behavioural expectations for any length of time supports the perception of the group's success at undermining the school's authority. The information gleaned showed a trend in group member attitudes that condoned and even encouraged problem behaviours, such as non-compliance with teacher's instructions, various forms of aggressive behaviour both in and out of the classroom, writing on the walls, and generally disruptive behaviour (KI1: IN: 2).

4.4.1.3   Group membership: benefits and responsibilities

While the participants spend time together at school, they do not refer to themselves as friends. According to Frankie, *"*they only hang out together at school" *(ons loop net saam by die skool).* None of the participants appeared to be offended by their cohort not considering the group to be a circle of friends. The participants' responses suggested that the group had been formed out of expedience and that membership was "better than being alone" (*dit is beter om nie alleen te wees nie*).

As I got to know them better, I found out that for most of them the need to belong and to feel protected had been a primary motivation for the initial establishment of the group. Participants appeared to have various motivations for seeking membership in the group. So, for instance, for some it appeared that it was the validation of physical strength - Bruno and Luigi appeared to be physical enforcers; for others, like Frankie and Don, the motivation for being part of a group was that it provided a sense of safety; and for Chico - he had a willing audience that encouraged his antics and Leo recognised their power in provoking opponents or challenging authority. According to Chico, Don was "fighting on credit"; what he meant was that Bruno and Luigi usually dealt with any physical fights on his behalf that of the other members, should it be

necessary. Bruno did not have a record for getting into trouble at the school for fighting. It seems that in exchange for benefitting from his physical size and strength outside of school, the group members protected his reputation at school. It was interesting to note that the same protection of reputation within the school culture was not afforded to any of the other participants. The success of this strategy is confirmed by the fact that Mr Addo had not included Bruno in the initial intervention. My observation of the group during the initial cycles of the research was that none of the participants appeared to question the status quo. They seem to not to question the roles assigned to them or that some of them were placed in positions of greater vulnerability to sanction by authority figures. An example of this is Luigi's acceptance of his position as the in-school physical fighter; and Bruno's as the outside of school fighter. This is referred to in the literature as self-subordination to group interests (Ausubel, 1998). Leo, the last to join the group, had never been assigned a role. Yet, despite often being purposely marginalised within the group, he appeared to cling to his affiliation. The overall impression was that membership was voluntary and not bound by any rules or expectations. However, it became apparent that in exchange for the benefits that group affiliation afforded its members, the group had its own established code of practice and accountability, which I take up in the next theme.

My analysis of the data on the activities that the participants were engaged in suggests an expectation of self-subordination to group interests. There were instances, according to them, when they got into trouble simply because of their association with the group. Though they indicated that they found this to be grossly unfair, there appeared to be an almost resigned acceptance that it was a natural consequence of their membership of the group. When confronted with the fact that they could distance themselves from the group, it seemed to an option that none of the participants was willing to consider during the first three cycles of the research. It was, however, interesting to observe a shift in their thinking and stance from cycles 3 and 4, when there appeared to be limits to what the individual members were willing to tolerate or accept from other group members. This is illustrated by the decision of the group to distance themselves from Bruno and Luigi at school, because their behaviour put the whole group at risk of the ire of the new principal. I drew the participants' attention to the fact that misbehaviour had not previously been considered by them to be grounds for exclusion from the group; in fact, it had been

what bound them together as a group. Now, though, the type of behaviour in which Bruno and Luigi were engaging was not something they condoned. What is apparent in this exchange was that, although the participants still engaged in questionable behavioural practices such as bunking school, being defiant at times and breaking rules related to school clothes, they appeared to be choosing a less confrontational path with authority figures at the school.

From this response of the participants I deduced that there were limits to what the group was willing to tolerate. This also suggests that the participants were only willing to protect members as long as they conformed to an agreed-upon code of behaviour. This notion was confirmed when the participants became very vocal in differentiating the types of behaviour that they sanctioned. So, for example, Luigi appeared to have broken the agreed-upon code when he did not heed their caution about hanging out with the "dog fighters", who are older boys who are considered delinquent in the community.

4.4.1.4   *The group dynamic*

During the initial stages of the research engagement (cycles 1 and 2), it seemed that the group found it particularly important to present themselves as a well-functioning unit, while ensuring clear identification of any one person as a "ring leader" was not possible. At that stage a strong emphasis was placed on communicating collective decision-making and collective adherence to the group. Initially participants always used the collective pronoun *we* when they communicated their thoughts and views, and there was very little deviation from this use of collective reference in the first two cycles. My impressions were that such responses appeared scripted and rehearsed, especially in key decision making with regards to the nature and level of participation. There appeared to be an overt and more covert communication strategy in place about what was shared that determined what would be acknowledged in the moment and what would be deferred. If the group decided that it is necessary to talk about an issue, the appointed spokesperson would introduce the topic either during the informal snack-time conversations or before activities. There was no clear leader amongst the spokespeople and there appeared to be differentiation in their roles and what they were allowed to say. It was, however, interesting to note that group decisions taken outside of the sessions were communicated by Frankie, while Chico

communicated more in-session group responses. This served to confirm that the group had a communication system. The following phrases that the spokesperson used illustrate how this collective voice was communicated: "we have discussed" *(ons het gepraat)* and "they told me to speak" *(hulle het dan gesê ek moet praat)* during cycles 1 and 2. My questions about the assignment of roles in the group were not answered. My observation nonetheless shows that the assignment of roles or tasks appears to take the strengths of individual members of the group into consideration. Don's explanation of why Frankie always seems to speak about issues first was that "he likes to talk". Another example is how Chico would ease the tension by using exaggerated facial expressions or body contortions to parody confusion, or would make fun of the facilitator or the activity.

My analysis of Chico's comic relief act in cycles 1 and 2 is that it appeared to be an established coping and defiance mechanism that the group was used to, though they argued that "that was just the way he was" *(hy is maar net so)*. My attempt at exploring the practice was met with an escalation in Chico's standard parodied surprise and chuckles from his fellows. During the data-analysis process it appeared that this particular mechanism came into play when the group wanted to create a diversion, or wanted to distract attention from a certain topic or at the start of their non-compliance act. It was noticeable during the initial contact sessions that, while most direct communication around the process was taking place via these two participants, they were operating within clearly defined parameters set by the group. This is illustrated by the often apparently spontaneous outbursts or protests from Frankie: "but you said I must", or "they told me to say so", or "they told me to ask". Though his responses appeared random at first and matched his tendency to protest, a closed review of video recordings and session notes pointed to this being an almost sessional occurrence. The group appeared to be collaborating outside of the sessions and were tasking Frankie to communicate their views. This was demonstrated in the often sneaky glances that the participants passed before or after he responded. These outbursts reflected a degree of ambivalence that alerted me to the two levels of communication in the focus group sessions. These responses implied that there was overt and covert communication of the sanctioning of responses during the sessions. It was only towards the middle of cycle 3 that the

participants appeared to feel free to voice their individual opinions. It was at this stage of the research that the schism in the group came out into the open.

Cluster group theory (Dayton, 2007) suggests that the power of the group lies in its protective value. The value of the protection varies from individual to individual and over time. The group also appears to have great insight into the strengths and limitations of its members and has adapted its engagement to suit the assets of the group. This is illustrated in the following exchange:

Don: ... I don't like to fight. I just look at them, then I walk away. *(... ek hou nie van baklei nie. Ek kyk hulle net en dan loop ek weg).*

Chico (interjects): ... Uuh, he likes to tackle the man and not the ball. Then he walks away, because he knows Bruno will deal with them. *(... Uuh, hy hou van die man en nie die ball tackle nie. Dan loop hy weg want hy weet Bruno gaan hulle uitsort)* (Group chuckle).

I probe and ask if this implies that he is scared. All deny this. I then asked if it was a planned strategy, to which Don responded, "We didn't plan it that way, that's just the way it works" *(ons het dit nie beplan nie, dit werk net so).* The group made sure, however, that Bruno "never gets into trouble at school" (*maar ek kom nooit in die moeilikheid nie*).

This claim is confirmed by the fact that Bruno had not been identified as a participant for the initial intervention. For the research the members of the group had sought permission for him to participate in the intervention. The group cohesiveness took precedence over Bruno's potential exposure as a participant in their misdeeds when he became a willing participant.

4.4.1.5   How the group adapts to the personal needs of its members

By the second term (at the start of cycle 3) there appeared to be shifts in the blind group allegiance that had prevailed in the earlier cycles. As mastery of the drumming activity increased, the individual members were challenging themselves to perform better. During the first two cycles this personal drive was absent, or appeared to have been suppressed as participants appeared to be engaging at a level which accommodated the least competent members. This was demonstrated by the attitude

of participants no longer to accept shared responsibility for errors or challenges that occur in the drumming circle. The participants started calling each other out by name, acknowledging challenges or disputing them in the moment. The way in which participants echoed each other, suggests that this had not occurred spontaneously. When prompted, some of the participants indicated that they have been working on their weakness and appeared to seek recognition for their improvements. From Don's statement that he had been practising with a tennis ball to strengthen his left arm (*ek oefen met a tennis ball om my linker arm sterker te maak'*), I deduced that the need for personal mastery had challenged the stranglehold of conformity.

During the wall climbing activity I noticed that Chico appeared more focused and cooperative, as well as a visible change in his muscle mass. In response to my observation, Chico flexed his muscles and boldly stated that he had been preparing for this second visit to the indoor climbing wall by climbing trees, because he wanted to do better this time around. From these responses it appears that the participants had identified areas in which they would like to experience greater mastery and had set about working towards the attainment of those individual goals. An interesting dimension to working towards this mastery was that in the third and fourth cycles of the research the participants were actively seeking acknowledgement of their efforts from both their peers and the adult facilitators of the various activities. Before this, the participants would be hesitant to progress until everyone had mastered the skill or was at the same level. A participant's failure to wait had previously incurred the severe sanctions of the group. This change in attitude demonstrated that the group dynamic was changing.

However, it could also have been that some of the participants might have experienced the changes as threatening to their position in the group. A heavier atmosphere became apparent in the group and at this time I also noticed that the seating arrangements in the group had changed. Bruno and Luigi were the first to ignore the agreed upon seating plans. In successive sessions it became apparent that Luigi and Bruno were growing closer, as they scrambled to sit next to each other at snack time, displacing Chico, and only shared sweets or other food with each other. I also observed that they often exchanged silent smiles. Luigi's and Bruno's roles in the group seemed to potentially be under threat. During this time none of the

participants were in fights at school. When I asked specific questions related to how they managed to stay out of fights, Don remarked that the new principal had given everyone an amnesty for prior transgressions, while at the same time cautioning that blatant flouting of school rules would not be tolerated. It was also at this time that Bruno and Luigi had become members of peer groups outside of the research group. Some of the behaviours they were engaging in with the other groups did not appear to meet with the approval of this group, because it was getting them into trouble at school. Don mentioned that the group had cautioned Luigi and Bruno that they were headed for trouble, but they had chosen not to listen to their warnings. There appeared to be an uneasiness in the group and the rebellion of the two participants against group sanction spilled over into the sessions. During the drumming circle sessions in the third cycle, Luigi and Bruno were often purposefully disrupting the flow of the session. When I followed this up, I observed the sly glances towards Bruno and Luigi. Luigi's response of "ask them" (*vra maar vir hulle*) told me that there was tension in the group. According to Don, they (referring to Bruno and Luigi) are "unnecessary" (*hulle is onnodig*). This was a colloquial term often used in a derogatory manner to refer to someone who is being irritating or problematic. When I probed this shift, it was interesting to note that most of the participants were sharing their views as individuals; the collective *we* had been replaced with *I* responses. The only two participants who still used a collective pronoun were Bruno and Luigi and they did so to say that they were "not doing it on purpose" (*ons doen dit nie aspris nie*). The shift in the group dynamic was further illustrated by Chico directly challenging their response and reminding them that the group had told them to stop disrupting the drumming circle. This was a further illustration that Luigi and Bruno were no longer complying with the group sanction. This apparent challenge to the authority of the group resulted in a power struggle that exposed the leader of the group and the roles each of the participants played in the group.

At the subsequent session Don wore an *Ed, Edd and Eddy* t-shirt. The *Ed, Edd and Eddy* series is about socially marginalised boys who get into trouble but never break ranks. Bruno, Luigi and Frankie stated that they "do not watch cartoons as it is for children"*.* I used the opportunity to probe the history and significance of the series in the group. Don shared that it is "their" favourite television show. In the cartoon show each of the characters plays a very specific role and the leader is clearly identifiable.

Intrigued by what this had the potential to reveal about them, I asked each one of the participants which character they identified with. Only Don identified with the ringleader, who is particularly bossy. Frankie and Leo identified with the brainy character, and Chico, Luigi and Bruno identified with the character who never questions anything as long as he is having fun. Their ability to identify with a character makes it clear that they had discussed the characters and the way they relate to them. In addition, I wondered what Don wanted to communicate by wearing the t-shirt at that time.

This series of incidents then served to bring into the open the changing dynamic within the group and what appeared to be a loosening of ties. Intra-group teasing and shaming of members re-emerged. At this stage there were two distinct camps in the group, with Don, Chico and Leo on one side, and Luigi and Bruno on the other, and Frankie floating in between. Chico disparagingly refers to Frankie's position as a phase through which he is going and therefore it is more acceptable. Luigi and Bruno, on the other hand, were more deliberate in their disregard of the group and how it has operated to date. The changing group dynamic again spilt over into the research process when Luigi and Bruno blatantly disregarded previously negotiated rules of engagement for excursions and attendance. The other participants were vocal in their opposition to the behavioural choices that Luigi and Bruno were making within the group and outside of the group. It appeared they no longer condoned the behaviour of these two and withdrew their support. The withdrawal of group approval served to alienate Bruno and Luigi from the group. Their attendance became erratic and in their absence the group appeared to implode and a different group dynamic emerged. It is a dynamic that appears to allow space for individual views and sees the participants being more tolerant of individual views. The following incident is offered as an illustration of this. The participants were engaged in a joint tattoo drawing exercise. Don, however, preferred to do an individual drawing separate from the group and on a blackboard. In addition, Don agreed to attend individual therapy sessions that had previously been offered to him and Chico. Chico, however feels no compulsion to do this and when I attempt to motivate him to attend, Don and Frankie appear to be irritated by my efforts, and Frankie commented that Chico "has the right to say no". The participants were asserting their individuality and appeared to be choosing to spend time together beyond the initial protective boundaries of the group.

The participants who lived on the same farm shared anecdotes that suggested they were spending more time together during breaks at school and after school hanging out as friends. Don also shared that they had encouraged Frankie to go to the school's feeding scheme by comparing it to going to a restaurant. As the study progressed, Leo appeared to become more isolated from the group. According to Chico, they had attempted to include him at school but he said that he had his own friends. When I drew his attention to the use of the word "friends", he jokingly responded that they were friends (*ons is mos vrinne*). Collaboration on the drawing of the logo of the group towards the end of cycle 3 illustrates the assertion that, though they form part of a unit, they had come to accept the differences within that unit. See Figure 4.13 for an illustration of how this acceptance of difference in the collective is depicted by the participants.

Figure 4.13: A drawing collaboration depicting participation in the sessions

4.4.1.6   *Intra-group interaction*

Mr Addo, one of the key informants and a teacher of the participants, had shared his knowledge of the participants' history of being verbally and physically aggressive with

each other. The participants had different strengths and functioned at different cognitive levels. Don, Frankie and Leo were verbally strong, while Luigi, Bruno and Chico operated on a very concrete level. One way of interacting was through teasing. Teasing during the sessions was mostly aimed at humiliating or embarrassing one another. It was obvious that the participants knew each other's triggers. According to Frankie, when the group first got together there had been a lot of arguments and fighting, but that had decreased as they grew older As the research progressed, the data showed that the participants were less prone to physical engagement. So too the teasing appeared to become less malicious and later served more of a motivational or encouraging purpose.

The one area where the participants struggled with throughout the research was defining themselves as individuals within the group. Each of the Draw a Person (DAP) exercises had resulted in very disruptive behaviour from the participants. Prior to the research and doing the exercise as a collective, each of the participants had successfully completed a DAP, which is a projective drawing technique which allows insight into people's perception of themselves without too much difficulty. In the group context there appeared to be a great deal of discomfort and I observed all of them acting out in various ways. I observed Chico mimicking a confused clown; Don sneaks a picture under his page and traces the outline; Frankie rebels and refuses to draw, saying it is too difficult; Leo copies the picture of a cartoon girl from the wall; I mention to them that I am baffled as I had seen evidence of their ability to do this during a previous intervention. I wondered if defining themselves as individuals in the group made them feel vulnerable. My perception was confirmed by Frankie, who blurted out that "it was different because you were alone and there was nobody there to tease you". I wondered about the vulnerability expressed by Frankie, but allowed their marked resistance to play out reasonably unhindered, as it allowed a lot of insight into how they related as individuals within a collective space. The participants made fun of each other's efforts and invaded each other's privacy, despite very defined seating arrangements. They constantly sought to distract each other. During the year they had to complete a few DAPS, where their response to this activity remained fairly consistent, which was to produce something unrelated to what they were instructed to do.

During Cycle 4 one of the activities that they participated in was going on a 1-day camp with a male facilitator. It is only at the Becoming-a-man camp that they completed a partial DAPS. Though they were seen deferring to one other, they also allowed one another more space and privacy than had been witnessed in the focus group sessions before. Though this was an improved response, all the participants only partially completed the task and all of them chose to include it as part of a collage. In contrast though, when they were involved in other drawing activities which allowed them to externalise their lived realities, the participants showed greater regard for each other's privacy and listened quietly when others spoke about the stories depicted in their drawings. My analysis of their responses would suggest that they experienced the DAP drawings as anxiety provoking and were unable to differentiate themselves as individuals within the group, whereas in the individual experience activities they were more respectful. Though the instruction for the DAP did not indicate that the drawing represented them, the participants recognised that it had the potential to represent them and actively resisted this. The participants came across as feeling unsafe about exposing themselves in the group. Figure 4.14 (a sample of Leo's DAP drawings) is an example of the participant's identity confusion within the group. Figure 4.14a is the DAP done before the research commenced and Figure 4.14b and Figure 4.14c were done during cycle 1 and cycle 3 of the research.

Figure 4.14a:
Pre-research

Figure 4.14b:
Cycle 1

Figure 4.14c:
Cycle 3

4.4.1.7   Sanctions

During the middle adolescent phase, which is the phase these participants are in, the peer group exercises significant influence on the adolescent. One of the ways in which peer groups exercise influence over their members is in the regulation of behaviour through norms or sanctions. The sanctions served to motivate or inhibit members' participation; conformity in the initial sessions was essentially managed through non-verbal sanctions through looks or by ignoring one another. It would therefore appear that being looked at in a certain way implied censure. The group dynamics suggested that the group had a set of sanctions in place that matched the seriousness of the offence, and these include both verbal and physical actions. So, for example, a first-level warning for stepping out of line was eye contact; failure to elicit the appropriate response would result in pushing, shoving or sharp short kicks, which could be interpreted as horseplay; this was then followed by teasing or snide remarks aimed at embarrassing or humiliating the offender. These methods of sanction were witnessed over time in the sessions and allowed for the generation of valuable insights into how the group kept its members in check.

The most extreme sanction witnessed in the course of the research was ostracising of a member or members of the group. However, even within this process there seemed to be variations in the way this was applied as illustrated by the following event.

After the initial wall-climbing activity during cycle 2, Bruno had worked with the facilitator to move ahead of the rest of the group. Their perception that he was breaking ranks with the group led to them not involving him in any post-activity recapping, teasing, ridiculing or horseplay. I noticed that after an initial attempt at inclusion, Bruno demonstrated an almost passive acceptance of his being deliberately cut out of the group interaction at that time. However the exclusion was temporary and he was part of all interactions by the next focus group session. When Bruno and Luigi formed friendships outside the group and engaged in activities the group did not appear to condone, however, they were totally ostracised. When I probed the exclusion of Bruno and Luigi and the apparent lack of sympathy from the group when they were suspended from school, Chico's assertion that "they thought they were being clever" *(hulle het gedink hulle is slim)* illustrates how seriously the

participants took compliance and conformity. The dynamic interplay in the process would suggest that all members had bought into a code of good practice, had agreed to the application of punitive measures, and understood that various infringements of this code would elicit various levels of enforcement and sanctions.

4.4.2   Relations with others

4.4.2.1   Peers outside of the group

From the data I learnt that over time the participants had learnt to limit their social contact with peers outside the group. Most social contact with others was confined to the informal soccer matches before or during school. According to the participants, they had decided on that route because playing soccer generally ended in verbal or physical fights, even among themselves. According to them, they were often treated unfairly by the teachers who would blame and punish them if they were involved in fights with children at school. According to Chico, the girls particularly exploited this as they knew that he was particularly sensitive about anything related to his late parents. They would swear or make derogatory comments about his mother to provoke him. When he retaliated, he got into trouble because these provokers were girls. Their reflections in the social autopsy sessions show that the group had decided the best way to avoid trouble was to stick together at school and to limit their contact with other children at school.

This group coherence changed when first Leo and then Bruno and Luigi started straying from the group. No one appeared to be particularly concerned that Leo no longer hung out with them at school and that by cycle 3 the only time he spent with them was at the research sessions. The group, however, had a very different response when first Bruno then Luigi started hanging out with different people. They made concessions for Bruno at first, and said that it was because "he liked girls" that he is hanging out with boys who share his interest in girls. Initially the group did not appear to feel threatened and seemed to allow this interest apart from them. But as Bruno started spending more time with his new friends both in and out of school, and made decisions apart from the group, this changed. The social autopsy sessions became a space of malicious teasing and shaming, and required repeated intervention from the music facilitator and me. When I shared my observations with

the group, they at first denied it. However, when Bruno missed a session because he went to spend the weekend with one of the new friends, the gloves came off. Don declared, "We are finished with him, he doesn't want to listen, he is going to get into trouble". Luigi appeared not to share the strongly held view of the group and the next week, when Bruno returned, he did not give him the cold shoulder treatment; in fact, it was one of the rare occasions when he spoke up voluntarily and informed the group that he had told Bruno to come that day. During the drawing activity I saw him sharing a sweet with Bruno, which was a definite first for him, as he only ever shared food with Don, the person who had been the most vocal about excluding Bruno. This action signalled the start of an alliance between Luigi and Bruno that saw them both breaking ranks with the group and its practices. In the next session Luigi was absent, and Don remarked disparagingly, "He is probably sitting at the shops with the dog fighters … he does not want to listen … and is already in trouble with the aunty (his foster mother)".

They felt that their concerns and cautions had been validated when both Bruno and Luigi were suspended from school for not doing their schoolwork, bunking and fighting. Though Chico and Don were also guilty of not doing their school work and bunking from time to time, the group did not view their transgressions as being as serious as those of Bruno and Luigi. This is because the two were getting into trouble because they were hanging out with the wrong crowd. In contrast, they consider the group as a safe and protective environment in which the members looked out for each other. Moving outside the parameters of the group left its members exposed.

4.4.2.2   Adults

The data show that when they engage with others, they would defer to their peer group instead of to adults. Although all the participants present with symptoms that suggest oppositional defiant disorder, the symptom profile of the participants is not homogeneous in how it presents, nor in the resistance strategies which individuals and the collective use. However, from my experience with the participants over a protracted period of engagement, they generally used non-verbal responses when engaging with adults. These non-verbal responses include being non-responsive, withdrawn, symbolic gestures and facial expressions.

4.4.2.2.1   Engagement with adults in their social environment

When I approached the group to seek their participation in the study, I established that none had consulted with or informed their parents about the project and their potential involvement in it, as they "did not think that it was necessary" for their parents to be involved. They communicated that they were willing to participate in the study on condition that their parents, guardians and teachers be excluded from any part of the programme. Only once I pointed out to them that their participation depended on their parents knowing did they concede to my making contact with their parents and guardians for the completion of the initial consent form.

According to Kay and the participants, the children living on the farms were often invited to get involved in various activities arranged by NGOs and community-based churches. Leo reported that he was very active in his church's music development programme, but that it was sporadic at most. The remainder of the participants said that they were involved with a particular pastor and had joined his after-school programme because Chico had told them that they get fed and are taken on excursions, such as swimming in the summer. They became involved as there was not much to do on the farm and because they experience the pastor as relaxed and as someone who "did not scold them". The participants disengaged from the NGO when its focus shifted from fun activities to after-school academic support. However, they later revealed that they had broken ties with the "pastor running the NGO", because he had scolded them, had been rude and was not behaving like a pastor should.

Their resistance to enforced rules and regulations and the association of this with adult figures influenced what they participated in. Though all of them, with the exception of Bruno, expressed a passionate interest in soccer and rugby, they preferred not to participate in these activities in a formal way either at school or in their communities. Their non-participation seemed to be linked to their not wanting to follow the rules and structures enforced by coaches and teams. According to one of them, "he is full of nonsense, and just wants to reprimand one". From their attitude it would seem that the boys struggle with accepting the authority or guidance of adults, institutionalised rules and expected codes of good practice. According to Mr Addo, the participants caused their educators a great deal of frustration because they

refused to listen to them. Information gleaned from both Mr Addo and Tom (the facilitator of the Boys to men camp) illustrated that the participants rarely challenged authority directly or verbally, but appeared to have mastered the art of communicating disdain by using non-verbal cues such as smirks, posturing, attitude, disregarding instruction and refusing to make eye contact. The group also appeared to have other well-defined ways of asserting their authority or showing their disregard for adult intervention. The following example from the data illustrates this.

During cycle 1 we went on our first excursion. At the end of the day, when the participants boarded a mini-bus, their behaviour was acceptable.. However, as soon as they were out of range of our direct influence, but still in sight, they erupted into misbehaviour by hanging out of the vehicle's windows, screaming and moving up and down in the vehicle. What was interesting about this behaviour was that the driver of the vehicle told us in a follow-up conversation that the participants reverted to good behaviour once they were outside the gates of the facility. It would seem as if their outburst was orchestrated for my and the facilitator's benefit only, as it died down as soon as we were out of sight.

During the initial drumming circle sessions in cycle 1 and 2, while participants were still learning the skills and behaviour required of them to participate effectively, there would often be what appeared to be spontaneous chaos. When I raised this in the group, the only response to this was Chico's miming lip zipping and silence from the rest of the participants. These two examples seem to suggest that the outbursts that I talk about were pre-planned by the group and were aimed at eliciting a response from the adults who were engaged in the research.

4.4.2.3   *Educators and school*

According to the data, the teachers at the school were often frustrated by the participants' attitude. The participants also cite the teachers' attitudes as reasons for their misbehaving or not seeking assistance at school. The Table 4.3 below contains data on why the participants say they have troubling relationships with teachers.

Table 4.3:   Why we do not cooperate with teachers at school

Participant	Reasons why they do not cooperate	Code
Chico	*They scold when you tell them you don't understand*	RJ: C2; 3: Ea
Don	*When you tell them that you can't do something because you don't understand what you are supposed to be doing, they are rude to you*	RJ: C3; 1: Ea
Frankie	*I do not go to that teacher's class, because he speaks to me in a rude way in front of all the other children*	RJ: C3; 1: Ea
Frankie	*I will not do her work - she is too rude (to me)*	RJ: C2; 3: Ea

From anecdotal information shared during the social autopsy sessions, it appeared that this perception of lack of co-operation with adults and their experience of adults as being unwilling to help was a recurrent theme. Their report cards indicated that although they were underachieving, not completing assignments and not attending all their classes, there was no intervention to remedy their lack of progress. None of the participants reported being sent to the principal's office for poor academic performance. It appeared to be a factor only in Bruno's and Luigi's suspension after they ended up in the principal's office for fighting. The participants' perception of adults' lack of interest in supporting them academically spilt over into their unwillingness to accept the after-school support offered by Tom and the pastor's programme. They never got sent to the principal's office. Though Don arrived on time for his therapeutic intervention with Tom during cycle 3, he did not stay for the academic support programme.

4.4.2.4   Researcher

I knew the boys from an earlier university-school intervention, and was aware that they had a history of misbehaving. The data collected in the initial stages of the research report on them following instructions and being very well behaved in this first cycle. There was almost no evidence of the boys I had encountered in the previous intervention. When I probed this, Frankie responded that they "wanted to show me that they knew how to behave". However, during other cycles they were rarely well behaved. On one occasion when I reprimanded them for their lack of cooperation with the drumming facilitator, their resistance was evident in the body

language and non-verbal cues of the participants. There appeared to be ambivalence around my justification of my attitude towards them, though Chico supported Frankie's assertion that my "scolding" suggested too many rules or guides.

This comment led to a process through which we came together to draw new boundaries. It also led to an understanding that the researcher and participants would need to share responsibility for ensuring that those boundaries were honoured. Though this scenario reflects a tacit testing or establishment of the boundaries, it became apparent that the participants viewed me and the drumming circle facilitator as outsider middle-aged females who were removed from their context and lived reality. They initially deliberately excluded us or held covert conversations by using colloquialisms or words in ways that have different meaning in local context. The participants appeared to enjoy the confusion this created and often mimicked or mocked my accent. Some of the participants were more vocal than others in engaging in this practice, but from their facial expressions it would appear that this was a purposeful strategy aimed at subtle taunting and testing the limits of teasing.

Reflexive practice led me to consult with Kay and Clover, the key informants, to understand the colloquial language and gestures common in the boys' communities and to differentiate what may be unique to the group. I introduced my new insights naturally into the conversations and over time the participants acknowledged that I was no longer as clueless about their communication strategies as I had been at first. In addition, my willingness to admit that I had resorted to using my "teacher voice" to get their cooperation resulted in a marked shift in the group's attitude and their willingness to cooperate.

The responses of the participants to my transgression of tacit rules of engagement had resulted in a full-on experience of how the group asserts itself in the face of adult authority. The responses of participants indicated that the research process would need to establish clear but flexible boundaries, as well as limited and negotiated rules of engagement; and that activities should have clear instructions and expectations. It was interesting to note that once the dynamic interplay and the authority of the group had been acknowledged, they became less defensive and more open to cooperating and engaging with novel experiences. What I learnt was that, before engaging with any activity, I had to provide full disclosure as to what, why and how the processes

would unfold, and to listen to what the participants thought of it. This is illustrated by the response to the novel experiences they had during cycles 1 and 2, experiences that Frankie remarked as being "strange activities that we are not used to". The participants' response also illustrated their desire to be acknowledged by the adults with whom they engage and that they were prepared to assert themselves to ensure that. The research process was typified by on-going engagement around boundary setting. The participants acknowledged me as the facilitator of new ways that challenged them and that, in facilitating that process, she was sometimes strict. They jokingly referred to me as the "Drunken Master", a character in classic martial arts films who comes to teach new skills in strict and unconventional ways.

4.5   A SUBCULTURE OF DEFIANCE

Observation as a primary method of data collection allowed me to observe and reflect on the actions and gestures that the six adolescent boys used to navigate and communicate in the research space. The observational data uncovered the existence of subcultural practices in this particular group. The application of these practices is represented by a complex communication system that went beyond the spoken word. In this section I will illustrate the components of this communication system and how it was used by the participants. The headings serve to categorise the often difficult to define conceptualisation of these practices.

4.5.1   Coded communication

When I engaged verbally with the six adolescent boys in the successive sessions it became apparent that they were using a complex coded communication that suggested a private subtext. The first indication of this was that they appeared to use more formal or conventional language when communicating with the facilitators, while using language that was more interspersed with colloquialisms and slang when engaging with each other. I drew their attention to this observation and asked them to explain the dual communication approach. The participants said they were using a communication system that had evolved over time and that had become the private domain of the group. This is illustrated by Frankie's laughing assertion that I would not understand what they were saying, even if they tried to explain. I made a conscious effort to observe how they had adapted conventional and colloquial

language and when they resorted to using it in the research sessions. I became aware that my limited knowledge of colloquial use of language could become a barrier to communication and consulted with Kay and Clover in an attempt to address this deficit. However, further engagement with the participants revealed that the adaptation of their language was much more complex than merely a mix of conventional and colloquial language.

They were using language in both conventional and unconventional ways. I also noticed much of the language and gestures used by the participants showed similarities with prison gang language. When I probed this, I gleaned from their responses that the language and communication style had evolved seamlessly over time. They seem to enjoy it that they could communicate in front of other people without those people always understanding what they were saying. It would seem that language was a way of cementing group solidarity among the members.

Frankie identified himself as an expert in the field of adapting language as a means of secret communication. When I asked him to elaborate, he explained that he had introduced the group to secret prison gang language. He explained that he had learnt the secret language, gestures and practices of gangs because "he was clever and listens" (*ek is slim, ek luister*). Being able to access and be part of a hidden and counter-culture seemed to be important for them. However, in contrast to their fascination with the language and gestures of the counter-culture of prison gangs, they were taken aback by my suggestion that they seem to be condoning the criminal activities of such groups. This was refuted by the participants. Their response implied that they may be more interested in the group function of such language and what prison gang culture symbolised rather than their criminal activities.

As the group continued to use this dual communication system in the first two cycles, I left it largely unchallenged only asking them to clarify meaning or to check my perceptions of what was happening in the process. Prior knowledge gained from earlier academic assessments revealed that all but two of the participants experienced significant barriers with expressive language. I found it interesting that this complex communication appeared to rely heavily on non-verbal communication and seemed to accommodate the limitations of its members. This was further supported by observations that, in addition to this communication system, the

participants often allow the more verbally astute participants to complete sentences or responses on their behalf. It also became apparent in the course of the sessions that some participants, particularly Frankie, would interpret instructions for other participants. From their responses it seemed as if they depended on him to make sure that they had understood what was required. This was not done in a formal lecturing way, however, but rather by means of informal complaining, as illustrated in the following exchange.

The participants were each given a sheet that contained two circles and asked to listen to two pieces of music. After each piece of music they were asked to draw whatever came to mind in one of the circles. Frankie responded by complaining, "we understand why we have to always draw different things to different pieces of music, why can't we just draw the same thing", when I asked him to elaborate on what he found confusing. Don interjected that *he* was being unnecessarily difficult*, "*because he could see there were two circles" on the page*.* Upon reflection, it would appear that Frankie interprets the instruction and Don confirms that the instruction has been understood. This verified for me that the group had developed an adaptive strategy that could support them in times when they needed assistance in understanding instructions for tasks. This pattern of engagement continued well into the third cycle and, while it suggested a great deal of intimacy and trust amongst the group members, it also served as a mechanism to shield more vulnerable members.

4.5.1.1   Talking as a vehicle for expression

The participants varied in their responsiveness to activities. From the onset some, like Frankie, were more vocal than others, while others found it easier to express their views in externalised conversation (projecting their views on to external stimuli) like when speaking about their drawing or the film. Another theme closely related to language but varied in its nuance of how it was used provides key insights into participants' initial co-dependence and the shift to autonomy. Participants' responses varied in relation to experience and perceptions of their ability to express or master the experience. Still for others, like Don, who found vocalising their responses difficult, the drums became an important medium of communication and engaging with emotion.

During the third cycle the research activities revolved around the themes of anxiety and anger, themes that had emerged as significant in the lived experience of the participants. In the course of these sessions the participants verbalised, graphically represented and drummed the nuances of their emotions. I observed marked changes in Don's behaviour during the drumming sessions. He demonstrated an attitude that was less focused on the policing or monitoring of others' responses and was more inwardly focused. The shift had happened less as a conscious decision by him but more as a natural progress of finding a means to fully explore and express his emotions. I deduced that tying the drumming to the themes of anger and anxiety during the focus group drawing sessions had resonated with him and created a pathway to articulate unexpressed emotion. After this phase Don voluntarily agreed to accept the previously unacknowledged offer of individual therapeutic sessions that we had offered to help him address the loss of his father. This responsiveness to the mediation provided by the activities suggests a pathway to engagement around their challenges not previously experienced by the participants. It appears to have provided participants with a means to experiment with non-verbal expression that allowed them and their experiences to be heard. With more time in the field some participants, notably those with limitations around verbal expressiveness, started gaining the confidence to express themselves in ways that impacted on the group dynamic. Luigi, who had previously allowed Don and Frankie to speak on his behalf, started making his physical voice and authoritative voice heard. In one of the sessions, when Don responded on his behalf, Luigi retort "*that is not what I meant, don't speak for me*". This response by Luigi is in marked contrast to the way he initially related to Don or Frankie.

This verbal challenge illuminated a shifting dynamic in the group. I decided to become more vigilant in my observations of this new dynamic as I realised that this new interplay could produce invaluable insight into how communication practices served to cement or challenge group cohesion. Bruno and Luigi dropped out of the research and by the fourth cycle were no longer part of the group. In the fourth cycle the participants' responses demonstrated a greater willingness to allow individual voices into the space. It was marked by more direct and spontaneous verbal communication between the researcher and the facilitators. My analysis shows that

the changes within the group had opened the space to changing normative practices within the group.

4.5.1.2 *Eye contact as communication*

During the research I observed that the participants used their eyes to communicate their willingness or resistance to participate. The participants would often tilt their heads and lower their gaze when speaking to adults, especially when they were resisting. However, their direct eye contact appeared to be a significant part of communication with their peers. The types of eye contact ranged from stealthy glances, piercing stares, narrowing to subtle stretching of the eyes.

The participants' use of eye signals amongst group members was very similar to their use of gang language. I observed that there were variations in the messages conveyed with their eyes. The messages, though subtly communicated, were conveyed and interpreted with relative ease by participants. So, for example, I observed during the drumming circle that the subtle exchange of glances would often trigger an onset of disruptive playing, and that closed eyes signalled an escalation of the disruptive drumming in direct opposition to the facilitator's instructions. When presented with video evidence of my observation, their masked expressions, protestations of innocence, Chico's exaggeratedly shocked expression and Leo's giggles confirmed to me that the disruption had been deliberately orchestrated by them. This deduction that participants were using eye signals to distract each other was further validated by participants when in the later cycles they often accused others of distracting them or looking at them. It was also interesting to note as the research progressed and as the participants attained a level of mastery with the drums that they often on their own initiative positioned themselves in ways that limited their eye contact with the other participants.

The observational data also produced evidence that shows the group members making direct eye contact to sanction its members. I concluded that direct eye contact was meant also to encourage and support each other. For example, Chico always faced Frankie when talking about his challenges at school, and when he shared his bad report card with me.

4.5.2   Symbolic gestures

During the time I spent in the field I became much more astute at identifying the subtle gestures that are often not easily detected by outsiders. The power of such gestures appears to be in the coded message they communicate to members who are privy to this code, as will emerge from the discussion below. Often when participants were resisting, it appeared to be enough for the participants as individuals and as a group to know what they were doing to act against authority.

4.5.2.1   *Pinkie nail*

The growing of the nail on their baby finger was common practice among participants. My closer inspection of these nails revealed that not only were they longer than the other fingernails, but they had also been filed and were better groomed. I gathered that while it is a fairly common practice among the young men in their social context that was not the reason the participants were growing their nails. My probing revealed that this practice of growing your pinkie nail was an act of defiance, as it was in contravention of school rules. The group had spent time devising strategies to conceal their nails. The length of their baby fingernail had become a status symbol and they appeared to take great pride in the length of their nails and the fact that they were well groomed. From their responses I deduced that growing and maintaining the nail was a deliberate act of defiance.

The longer pinkie nail had the potential to harm both the drummer and the drum in the drumming circle. After protracted negotiations with the group, an agreement was reached that they will keep the nail short and a "pinkie nail policeman" was appointed. Chico volunteered for this position and agreed to remind participants to keep their nails short. The issues that were tied to the nail gesture inadvertently became a source of rich data, because it provided me with insight into resistance. Responses to the agreement varied among participants, with all initially cutting the nail; however, the nail re-emerged intermittently in ways that would suggest it was an indicator of participants' willingness to be held accountable or as a symbol of resistance. Meaning related to the presence of the nail appeared to vary and this variation in meaning and purpose was often reflected in other related behaviour. The monitoring of the nail was purposely used in the study as a playful, non-threatening

way in which participants could monitor and encourage each other along the path to change. The nail and its symbolic presence developed many nuances over time, for example, the length of the nail in relation to the other nails on the hand; the extent to which the nail was groomed; whether the length was hidden or displayed; and whether or not the participant with the nail had spoken to about growing the nail outside of the sessions. When I attempted to probe these variations and the sporadic emergence of the nail, the participants echoed each other in reminding me that we had agreed that they could decide when they did not want to share something with me. Figure 4.15 indicates the various ways in which the nail entered the research space; it show the nail police in action; the pretence of willingness to be held accountable; and the bragging rights that a long well-groomed nail could earn in the group.

Figure 4.15: The pinkie nail

The following example illustrates the ambiguity that the participants' experienced in the presence of adults when they held each other accountable. I notice that Frankie's nail is long and comment on it:

> Frankie (looking at Chico) responds: I asked Chico for a nail clipper to cut it.
> Chico retorts: He is lying, he did not.
> Silence
> Chico bursts out: But he really did not!

> Lynne: But nobody said anything.
>
> Chico: But they are looking at me.
>
> Lynne: Who is looking at you?
>
> Chico: Them (he looks around the group but does not focus on anyone in particular).
>
> Lynne: Who are them?
>
> He remains unresponsive.

From Chico's response it became clear that he was taking some of the responsibility for Frankie's nail being too long, and that the participants were policing what they were allowing into the collective research space at that time. I refer to the silences as roadblocks that the group uses to allow and disallow some acts.

Another example of such a resistance roadblock was observed during the third cycle. While the rest of the participants were scrupulously monitoring and adhering to the shortened nail agreement, Luigi and Bruno appeared to be at odds with the group, resorting to growing the nail and almost flaunting this practice. The rest of the participants' lack of response to what appeared provocation suggested that they had taken a collective decision not to acknowledge these acts of defiance. Though I was keen to explore this changing dynamic in the group, I suspected that doing so would be undermining a significant group process. So while I asked Luigi and Bruno directly why they were breaking the agreement, I desisted from further probing the other participants' responses to their defence. I did wonder whether the group silence on their behaviour was interpreted by them as rejection by the group. It felt like the elephant in the room. The responses of the participants suggested that the nail as a symbol of connection to the group was no longer being acknowledged as relevant and that Luigi and Bruno had not been informed of the discontinuation of this practice. Being ostracised appeared to include acknowledgement of using the group's subcultural practices to make a statement.

4.5.2.2 The school uniform as contested terrain

During the first cycle all of the participants except Leo attended the research sessions in their school uniforms. Several of the participants, however, wore their school uniforms with minor adjustments that suggested a personalising of the school uniform. From my experience as an educator I knew that these adjustments were not

permitted in most schools where a school uniform was required. Frankie confirmed this for me by saying that you could get into trouble for adjusting the way in which the uniform was to be worn, as you contravened the school rules. They adapted the uniform in different ways and at different times. Bruno, Frankie, Chico and Luigi shortened their school ties and then zipped up the school tracksuit top to just above the shortened tie. They enjoyed the fact that they were able to break the school uniform rules without being caught out. All the participants, even those who did not engage in this practice, showed support for the way in which their peers were able to manipulate the rules.

The participants also introduced two other practices less common in the group. Bruno often wore his collar turned up, because the girls at the school liked boys who wear it that way. According to Bruno, it added to his appeal and it was easy to adjust the collar when he spotted a prefect. During the research process Luigi and Frankie also started wearing their collars flicked up. According to Don, they thought they were being "cool". I deduced that he did not approve of it. Don also related how some boys rolled up one of the legs of their school pants to the knee as soon as they were out of the school gate. This was against the school rules and the pupils who did this usually did so just outside of the school gates where the prefects had no authority. The responses of the participants and observations of how the school uniform was worn may reflect the belief that school uniforms could be used to make a statement to peers about the individuals' willingness to flout the school norms. The shortened tie was a practice shared by all the participants, while the others were practised mainly by Bruno and Luigi, and suggests a need to relate to other similar peers outside of the group.

4.5.2.3   The message in the ink

I also noticed a tendency for the participants to draw on themselves in ink. When I asked about the practice, they informed me that these were ink tattoos and not simply drawings in ink. These drawings seemed to hold significant meaning for the individual and in the group. Some of the drawings were done by the participants themselves and some were done by Luigi. When I commented on the quality of the artwork, the participants shared their pride in the fact that, because of Luigi's talent, they often had the best tattoos among their contemporaries. The ink drawings by

Luigi were considered works of art that were done during lunch breaks at school. Luigi's skills were applied only in the group. These ink drawings on the body were also not allowed at school and the participants demonstrated the ways in which they concealed them. These works were done on areas of the arm that could be covered by their school shirts and thus be kept out of sight of teachers. From their responses, I gleaned that these drawings held a particular significance and were often a reflection of their lived experiences or feelings. The participants sometimes showed up at the research sessions with these drawings intact. What I observed about the drawings was that they often depicted prison gang numbers and symbols, like the numbers 26, 27 and 28; or a single teardrop and a broken heart with a knife in it. These seemed to mimic the single colour, more crude and less artistic markings commonly used by prisoners to indicate their gang affiliation.

As these were drawn during the school time, I wondered whether they experienced school as a sort of imprisonment. All the participants said that doing the drawings made them feel better and felt that teachers over-react when they see these creations. They were not particularly perturbed by teachers' responses and willingly washed off the drawings at the teacher's request. However, this act was also a way to provoke teachers and get time out of their classes. Most of their drawings suggest that these were acts of self-expression rather than acts of defiance. Drawing opened up a creative space in which they could echo each other's feelings and views, a way of communicating that did not need words or conceptualising. The need for belonging and being understood was being communicated in the subcultural practices of the group to communicate support and understanding of each other and their experiences. Once a participant had made a request for the drawing, he would suggest what he wanted and members would then add their suggestions as the drawing evolved. From their responses it appears that it was then up to the initiator to accept or reject these suggestions. However, these drawings were sometimes initiated by Luigi to showcase his skills and talents. The participants recognised his talents and often deferred to him when engaging with drawing activities.

The following drawing by Chico (Figure 4.16) I found was a powerful expression of his feelings and school experiences.

Figure 4.16: Chico's timetable tattoo

Chico's drawing depicted the daily school roster, with a tear in one of the squares. When I asked about what the drawing depicts, he explained that it represents a class that he found particularly challenging. English is a learning area he found particularly difficult because of his reading challenges. Participants were selective about what they showed during the research sessions; sometimes one or other of the participants would draw my attention to a tattoo and, based on the responses of the participant, an opportunity was created to use it as a medium of communication with his peers and facilitators. My analysis showed that the practice served the dual purpose of defiance and expression. In addition, it reflects a level of trust in the members of the group to help each other in interpreting and portraying feelings they may have difficulty experiencing and expressing.

4.5.2.4 *Posturing*

Posturing and gesturing were often very subtle physical indicators of insolence and appear to be an extension of the coded verbal communication. I observed that some postures like the tilt of the body when walking or talking was used differentially when the participants were communicating with peers and when they were communicating with adults. Some of the posturing was common in the social context and others were

an adaptation of a conventional practice to fit in with the group needs. An example of this is a pose that the group members adopted, which was to purposefully drop one shoulder and to hold their chins, with fingers across the mouth. Frankie volunteered that it had no particular significance and that it was just something they did, but when I pointed out that Leo did not do it, Chico responded that he had not been a part of their group for very long.

Frankie, the spokesperson of the group during the initial cycles, often adopted a complex pose. It involved twisting his legs, bending his body slightly forward, crossing his arms across his chest and supporting his chin with his hand. He would often assume this position before communicating a decision the group had taken outside of the research contact sessions. This pose resembled one commonly used by older men sitting around in the community. His indicated that he purposefully adopted this pose to reinforce his perception of himself as the "wise one" in the group, a view that was not necessarily shared by his group members. Frankie appeared unperturbed by the group members' view of him and often used colloquial slang to refer to himself as the "larney" (most important guy).

4.5.2.5   Gestures

The participants often intersperse their informal talk with sign language. This involved very subtle body or facial inflictions. When I asked about this practice, Frankie volunteered that it is based on the code and symbols used by the prison gangs when they communicate with each other. He elaborated that it was used so that only the members of that gang are able to understand each other. Don provided an impromptu lesson on prison gang culture in which the participants used a selection of sounds, exclamations, facial expressions and laughter to signify mocking, rejection or acceptance. It was not easy to decipher this complex code as these gestures were often used unconventionally and appeared to change from time to time. The overall indication in the course of the research indicates a well-developed and dynamic system that demonstrated how members could be excluded at any time when they fell into disfavour with the group.

Just how effectively they were able to do this is illustrated by the confusion that Luigi and Bruno expressed when their previously accepted practices of resistance were no

longer acknowledged in the group. Their interpretation of the meaning of this as rejection is reflected in their attempt to introduce their own codes that saw them engaging in direct opposition to the group during the drumming circle activities. The responses of the group and the excluded participants indicated that gesturing, an important part of the groups' complex communication code, was used to communicate messages of resistance towards peers in the group, to contemporaries outside of the group and to adults in contact with the group. Throughout the research process, Leo appeared to have limited access to the intricacies of the code. His tendency to giggle when he saw aspects of the code come into play may have inhibited the groups' confidence in his ability to protect the secrecy of their practices.

4.5.3   Proxemics

Initially the participants' actions in the way they related to each other implied limitations in their social spatial awareness, as their responses demonstrated little regard for their own and others' personal space. The participants would often point or wiggle their fingers in each other's faces as part of teasing or making a point, bending over each other or hanging onto each other, pushing and shoving, even grabbing food from each other's plates. In the first two cycles it seemed that there were no personal boundaries in place, or that they were not being respected. However, it could also be reflective of the fusion between self and group when sharing a space. This suspicion was confirmed by the difficulty they had in doing the Draw a person (DAP) projective drawing exercise in the presence of their group. At first their responses looked like acting out, but consequently their co-operation in other drawing activities suggested their instinctive insight that the DAP was somehow reflective of themselves as individuals. They would move around the room to look at each other's work and ignored cues by some of the participants to protect their privacy, as illustrated by Chico who physically moved Bruno's upper body to gain access to his drawing.

The lack of spatial awareness is further illustrated by the way that participants positioned themselves during the initial drumming circles. They demonstrated their inability to navigate personal space by the little regard or awareness they showed in determining how much space would be required to perform effectively and to navigate or negotiate that space. While the participants complained about being

hindered by the proximity of other participants, Leo was the only one who physically repositioned himself to facilitate improved performance. This required the facilitator to physically move among the participants and creates room to move in a way that would enable them to engage more effectively in the drumming circle.

Negotiating personal space and who and why you allowed others into it appeared to be a novel experience for the group. However, once they grasped its value in promoting success, they became almost hyper-vigilant about protecting it. This response suggested that this new awareness had the potential for increased conflict, as was experienced during the Tai Chi exercises. I modelled respect for personal space by seeking participants' permission to come closer to them or to touch them. From their responses I deduced that having control over how people used their personal space was an almost novel experience for the participants. I had the suspicion that in their personal lives there was no regard for space; this was demonstrated in the way that they related to themselves and others in that space. What they were experiencing in the research sessions had made them more conscious of how to engage with personal space when playing soccer and this resulted in less violence or fewer physical altercations. They reported that they were experiencing greater inclusion in informal extramural activities with their peers outside of the group.

4.5.4   The culture of silence

One of the communication themes that emerged was the power of silence as a tool. During the research there were many instances where the lack of responsiveness to certain verbal prompts suggested that the group had defined the boundaries of what would be spoken about during the sessions. This is illustrated by the numerous times during the research that participants would simply stop speaking or responding to prompts. Especially during the first two cycles, I deduced from their responses that the group was deciding how to regulate engagement in the group. Their responses suggested symbolic resistance rather than direct confrontation. So, for example, during the first two cycles, it became clear to me that the group members had made a decision not to talk about their family lives.

This changed in cycle 3, however, when they broke that silence around Luigi's living circumstances, and when they spoke about the anti-social acts of Bruno and Luigi. From participants' responses in consecutive sessions, it appeared that they had spoken about the changes in Bruno and Luigi's position in the group and had made the decision no longer to shield them. Bruno and Luigi appeared to struggle to come to terms with this and their attendance became increasingly erratic from that point on.

4.6   ACTIVITIES AS A VEHICLE TO EFFICACY

My observations show that the participants were distrustful of adult direction and encouragement during their engagement with novel experiences. They preferred to look to each other for direction and guidance or, in the case of the novel experiences, to other children. The following data were recorded when they visited a bird encounter programme.

During the animal encounter they were given a lecture on the different species of birds at the sanctuary and were afforded an opportunity to have a close encounter with a particular species. The audience was invited to wear a protective glove and extend an arm so the bird would land on the glove. Despite encouragement from the facilitator and adults in the audience extolling the fun and excitement and harmlessness of the encounter, none of the participants participated. However, when they witnessed a younger member of the audience successfully completing the activity, only then did Leo look at the group members, put on his glove and stick his hand out to allow the bird to land on his hand. He turned around, looked to his mates and said that was fun (*dit was lekker*). Without uttering a word, the next boy extended his hand and opened himself up to the experience, and so did the rest of the group.

By cycle 3 a trust relationship seems to have developed, at least with the researcher and facilitator, the adults with whom they were engaging during the research process. I observed that the participants began to engage more with the drumming facilitator and actively sought her intervention or recognition. In this next section I explore their relationships with such strategic adults in navigating to achieve greater self-efficacy.

4.6.1   Drumming facilitator

The drumming circle, though not focused on musicality, requires a measure of skill to ensure mastery and to prevent injury. Initially the group showed a blatant disregard for the instructions given by the facilitator. The participants appeared to be happy to play at the lowest level of competence and were easily distracted by the struggling members. At times it appeared that certain participants were purposefully derailing the process. One such incident occurred when the drums were allocated democratically to the participants. Frankie was unhappy with the drum he was given and refused to use it during the drumming session. I found out that Frankie was upset because he was not given a choice in selecting his drum, something that the others had been allowed to do. Aesthetically and musically he had been given one of the better drums. He accidentally damaged the drum skin while carrying the drum to the car, something that is usually unlikely to happen, given the hardiness of the skin. My questioning of the incident brought unanimous denial of wrongdoing by Frankie and protection of him from the group. Frankie showed a lack of remorse and the group's attitude appeared to condone the problematic behaviour of their group member. Even once the drum had been repaired and returned, Frankie continued to find a reason to use another drum instead of the drum that was assigned to him.

During the research period the relationship with the facilitator improved when she scaffolded, through musical games, their experiences of mastery. As each of the participants experienced varying degrees of mastery, the group became more receptive to accepting direction from the facilitator. Furthermore, the drums became part of a process of sharing participants' emotional and life experiences, and were linked to the drawing exercises. These, in turn, became vehicles for the expression and honouring of individual experience. The willingness of the drumming instructor to listen to their stories opened up a pathway to their willingness to listen to her direction and experience greater individual success and success as a group.

Figure 4.17: The drumming circle

4.6.2   Indoor wall climbing instructor

The indoor wall climbing activity was a novelty activity that was included in two sessions. During the first wall climbing practice (end of cycle 2), I observed that the participants paid only cursory attention to the instructor's directions. Instead they looked to the group to guide them in the climbing process. Only Bruno, an avid sportsman, paid particular attention to the facilitator and experienced a greater measure of mastery than the other participants. For making this decision, Bruno was subjected to sanctions by his fellows. The participants left the session having reached the top of the easiest wall and only Bruno having successfully progressed beyond that wall to more difficult walls.

Figure 4.18: Indoor climbing wall

Figure 4.18 above illustrates Don's experience during the second indoor climbing wall experience, which happened at the end of the third cycle. During this visit to the indoor climbing wall, there was a marked shift in the way that the participants engaged with the instructor. All the participants allowed the instructor and his assistant to assist them individually. From the responses of the participants, it was clear that their increased engagement with the instructor had been decided prior to the session and that they wanted to challenge themselves to go beyond their previous levels of mastery. The participants appear to have acknowledged the role the instructor had played in Bruno's success and appear upon reflection to have decided that a greater level of engagement with the adult facilitators was necessary to experience personal mastery.

4.6.3 Becoming a man facilitator

The Becoming a man activity was facilitated by Tom, a trainee psychologist, who had been attending the regular Friday sessions as a full participant for most of the third cycle. This activity entailed four weekly encounters and a weekend away during cycle 4. During these sessions the participants would engage with various aspects of manhood from the biological to the more psycho-social. At the request of the participants this part of the process was conducted without a female presence. I was informed by Tom that the participants regressed to their initial stance of resistance and opposition to adult influence in relation to Tom. In a debriefing session, by their

own admission, they reported that they initially arrived late at the regular Friday sessions, brought a boom box along and refused to cooperate in the activities. According to them, it had not made sense because all they had done in the first session was to kick a ball and barbeque meat. Because Don and Chico had shared that they were experiencing academic challenges at school, Tom had suggested an academic support programme that was scheduled to run concurrently with the Becoming a man programme. Although the participants had appeared to agree with the format of the overall intervention plan proposed by Tom, they had initially participated selectively in the activities arranged by him. So, for example, though Don and Chico expressed an interest in individual therapy, only Don chose to attend. Both of these participants had also scheduled time with Tom for a weekly academic support intervention, though neither of them attended these sessions. When I explored with them why they had not used the opportunity to get support for their scholastic challenges, they informed me that Frankie was already helping them. Four of the six participants participated in the programme, as Bruno and Luigi had dropped out of school by then. Their suspensions had never been resolved, because no parent or guardian attended a meeting with the principal. Though Tom facilitated an attempt to keep Bruno and Luigi in the intervention, the group did not intervene when they failed to show up. Tom's decision to work with those who attended was welcomed and the data show that the process was concluded successfully with the remaining four participants. I was invited to a definitional ceremony at the end of their weekend away and while they shared with me the artefacts and stories of their process, we agreed that the content would not be included in the presentation of the study.

4.7   SUMMARY

Each of the activities and the facilitators was carefully selected for the study. The aim was to expose participants to new experiences, new ways of engaging with themselves and each other, and new ways of engaging with adults. Some of the experiences took the form of events (the animal encounter), while others served as a process that allowed participants to put into play new ways of approaching challenges. An example of this would be the time lapse between the first indoor wall encounter and the second one. These time lapses allowed participants to incorporate

lessons they had learnt across the research. Other activities, such as the Becoming a man programme, developed in response to real needs expressed by the participants. The drumming circle was an integral part of the focus group sessions throughout the research.

In this chapter I set out to reflect the experiences of participants as they changed over time through exposure and participation in various experiential activities. It highlights the various changes experienced and how they were experienced. The chapter set out to give voice to the participants about their experiences. In chapter 5 I will discuss the findings and relate them to other studies, I will also present reflections on the research as praxis.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research findings through interplay between knowledge about previously conducted research and the lived experience of this research context (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher hypothesized that it may be possible to transform the group dynamic of socially marginalized youth that are considered to be on a trajectory to delinquency. Based on my prior experience with at risk populations, I went from an assumption that cumulative risk chains in the socio-economic situation impact young people's sense of self efficacy and sense of safety in the world.

In some socio-economic environments, affiliation with marginalized peers serves as a rite of passage to gang membership (Argus, 2013). In this study I explored the purposively selected group of six adolescents' navigation of their world within the context of their school environment. According to Daniel, Wassel and Gilligan (2003:228) schools are social worlds that are more than an environment for the learning and development of cognitive and development skills. The relationship that adolescents such as these six have with the school environment is at best a complex one and has the potential to either shield or further alienate them.

Navigating the research was a complex process that started with the decision around the research design. I was interested in addressing the gap in current research as it pertains to the first hand experiences of socially marginalized youth and their participation as collaborators in research on their experience of the phenomenon. Experience gained from working with the participants in a prior intervention, led me to use a research design that would engage the participants as co-creators in the research process. The participants were very vigilant about being acknowledged in the decision making process. Shared decision making is a key element in developing critically reflective practice that embraces uncertainty (Taylor & White cited in

Sharland, 2006) this point of view is in direct opposition to the views of practitioners working with at risk youth that place order above diversity of experience and heterogeneity of at risk populations. In my review of the literature, I found that gaps in the knowledge available on working within already established peer groups among socially marginalized youth who were not engaging in delinquent behaviour. In fact most of the literature I encountered made direct reference to gang groupings or deviant and delinquent socially marginalized groups. My primary research question was interested in exploring the possibility of these marginalized groups being on a trajectory to delinquency, my research findings suggest that while the potential for this trajectory exists, it is not always the natural outcome of being a member of a peer group in high risk communities. Instead it found that in forming a group, the participants were exercising what Walace and Kotavtchvka (cited in Sharland, 2006) describe as being "… the architects of their own lives, free to negotiate their own pathway, to take or avoid their own risks". In my engagement with the study's participants I found them to be vigilant in protecting their right to exercise these choices, even when the paths they chose put them on a collision course with the people and practices in the traditional school culture. In the research process they asserted their intention to do more than pay lip service to being co-creators in the research by engaging from the strength of their collective agency. The group would come to a decision before engaging with the researcher on issues.

5.2   REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study was designed to give a voice to the experiences of a group of socially marginalized at-risk youths. Groups of youths labelled as problematic are often viewed with a great deal of cynicism and mistrust in their school communities. In interventions with such groups, the trend is to divide and conquer. However extensive research into this phenomenon has shown that youth removed from these groups often return to them and their practices (Dayton, 2007). I was curious as to what happened in these groups that made their members risk being ostracized from the traditional school culture and even their community in order to remain in these groups. From an extensive review of the literature it became apparent that this phenomenon was a complex one, fraught with debate and a lack of consensus about how these groups who often operate on the fringe of society should be feared or

respected. It is clear that one cannot consider the socially marginalized a homogenous constellation, no can one assume that all such groups are on a trajectory to delinquency. However from the literature and the research it became clear that there are multiple stressors that increase the likelihood of progression along that trajectory.

In the shaping of the study's theoretical framework, I considered the risk and protective factors (Appendix 11) in the ecosystem that impacts youth's lives, and I considered the dynamic interplay of the various factors that result in the much debated label of at-risk and the role that these play in the social marginalization of youth deemed to be problematic. The sample population of six participants was already an established cluster group. The findings shed light on how school based social marginalization is in essence a spill over from different types of marginalization participants experienced in their community. While the results revealed that it was possible to interrupt that trajectory, ensuring the sustainability of practices that would maintain that interruption, required the acknowledgement of what already established group practices and the organic intelligence of the participants in choosing this method to influence their response to the cumulative stressors in their environment. While I initiated and guided the process, participants were very assertive in ensuring that their voice was heard in every part of the process. They exercised this voice ways that were not always easily understandable in the moment, member checks, reflective journaling and post sessional reviews of the video allowed me to access the subtle and often not so subtle ways in which the group and its members asserted themselves. Working with this group required a great deal of reflection, flexibility and reflexive praxis.

Not wanting to stay in what narrative therapist refer to as the problem saturated story, I set out to explore with a group of young men their experiences of and their responses to being considered socially marginalised and at-risk for delinquency. The research paradigm and design I adopted for the study enabled a dual process: it enabled me to know with them, as well as allow them to empower themselves to consider more beneficial pathways to life.

5.3   REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Choice is a complex and critical process that takes place in a specific context (Chopra, 2006). The inquiry posed the following research question: How can the trajectory to delinquency in a socially marginalized group of school boys be interrupted to transform the group into a support community?

Bridging the researcher-researched divide

My experience of the researched, in this case six adolescent boys who were considered at risk of being on a trajectory to delinquency were that they wanted to be the co-creators of any intervention of which they are part. I found that they are street smart enough to know that there would be disparities in the knowledge each party had. I was not privy to their complex communication system and they did not always fully understand the motivation behind the activities. My willingness to honour their practices and not negate their collaborator-voice in the process, helped to establish trust and rapport. However, while I did not resist the paralanguage and gestures, I did consult with key community based informants to understand which of the communication strategies they were using were endemic in the context and which were unique in the group. By gradually introducing my understanding of colloquial language into the research space, I succeeded in contributing significantly to the growing rapport amongst us. The participants even expressed grudging respect for the effort I had made in trying to understand the ways in which they were comfortable in expressing themselves. Their response to my curious exploration, pointed to the significance that participants attached to an adult being responsive to their preferred way of being. This highlighted the importance of ensuring that when we set out to know with the people, we do it in ways that are easily accessible to them. The lessons I learnt from this experience greatly influenced my selection and mediation of activities, the findings of which I discuss in 5.4.3.

The challenging behaviour of participants meant that I had to develop very clear strategies for negotiating with and retaining participants in the study. I turned to the practices and processes of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the Youth Engagement cycle and Activity theory to guide the process. These democratic engagement processes opened pathways to collaboration that allowed me to gain a

better understanding of the meaning making process that guided participants' attitudes and behaviour. My sense was that they felt undermined by adults making decisions in matters pertaining to their lives and this was one of the many factors that contributed to acting out behaviour or resistance. Knowing this did not however make the initial sessions any easier as they never clearly communicated what they construed as infringements of their rights. They appeared to often just purposefully enjoy disrupting the research process or displaying attitudinal aggression. Initially the research process was dynamic and every changing though it settled into a structured routine as participants' needs and level of research sophistication changed.

Their needs as participant-collaborators of the research were seldom directly communicated and required me to pay close attention to verbal, non-verbal and level of engagement cues. This process had to be carefully balanced as I had to be cognizant of their history of avoiding situations perceived as 'too difficult' and the need for the participants to master challenges in order to scaffold their experience of mastery and self-efficacy. Therefore the stimulus activities that I used in the data generation process were workshopped with the participants before they were selected. The data generation process also took cognizance of the unique life paths of the individuals and the experiences that had influenced their adaptive style. The Participatory Action Research Spirals (see Appendix) and the Youth Engagement cycle allowed for on-going engagement with their changing needs and the research goals.

At the onset of the research design process, I had failed to acknowledge that the research is the intervention. I initially positioned the research and the intervention as separate entities. However in working within an empowerment mind set, I came to understand that intervention with youth is in essence a research process that builds on the knowledge generated by all the people involved in the research process. A significant part of the process of empowerment and exercising efficacy in this study was done by helping the six participants to understand that they could influence the direction and process of the study. This reinforced the earlier assertion that while I brought an experienced skill set to our collaboration, I recognized them as the experts in their lives.

5.4 FINDINGS

5.4.1 The participants' experience of social marginalization

What the data shows is that the participants were all experiencing social marginalization in the school context. However, during the research, it soon became apparent that the label of socially marginalized was almost being used as a euphemism for anti-social youth by teachers and administrators and that the labels reinforced the youths' perceptions of rejection by the school culture. This in turn was propelling them along a path of direct conflict with the traditional school culture. The additional challenge for these adolescents was that being labeled a "problematic group" at school contributed to their increased social marginalization in their home environment. Though the study was delimited to the school community, some of the experiences of this label in the home context also emerged in the study.

Middle adolescence is a stage marked by biological internal and external biological changes that often result in the young person feeling "less confident than they care to admit" (Vernon & Al-Mabuk, 1995:12). This was the stage of development at which I met these adolescents, two of them were nearing the end of the stage and one was at the onset stage and the rest of the group was in middle adolescence. I mention this as the stage in the adolescent developmental phase impacts the extent to which young people attach significance to peer conformity; this in turn influences their openness to intervention. In my interaction with the adolescents, I found those in the middle phase to be more amenable to intervention. As the adolescent progresses through the various stages of adolescence, their needs and how they address these needs change. Socially uncertain and wanting to be a part of a social group is an important part of this adolescent stage, and this is confirmed in the study. For the participants, rejection by peers and significant others in their lives cause confusion and insecurity, and they, responded by disengaging from various aspects of the school culture. They then chose to hide their "confusion … and insecurity behind a screen of bravado and rebellion" (Erasmus, 2007:14). The experience of having their sense of social success undermined was further compounded by their academic challenges.

What is considered to be a measure of success varies according to the group the adolescent affiliates with, the participants often referred to 'that does not matter to us' or 'we don't care about that' when talking for example about not being selected for a team or not being able to participate in a school social activity. Experiencing increasing alienation from their peers at school, the participants set out to create a group in which they could determine the conditions for inclusion. This group also purposefully set out to establish itself as a formidable force not to be messed with. From being vulnerable and invisible, they were known, and being acknowledged was more important than what they were acknowledged for. One of the participants had been bullied before he was part of the group, since he joined the group and his affiliation with the group members became know at school, no one 'interfered with' him. Within this group as in many others, establishing your niche was an important part of securing your place in the group. Finding your niche, what different or makes you special is an important part of feeling included (Erasmus, 2007). The participants each had their roles in the group, and each one enjoyed the acknowledgement they received for the skills those roles required. The acknowledgement, such as "have the best ink drawings, because we have the best artist', when referring to Luigi's skills as an artist; or 'we never have problems with our bicycles because we have a mechanic', when referring to Chico; 'nobody messes with us, because they know they will be sorted out'. However this recognition within the group was always related to the acknowledgement of skills as they referred to the promotion or service of the group. The insight the participants had into each member of the group's, life circumstances, response styles and skills indicated that they had been together for some time. This is supported by Agnew's work (1991), where he states that "the attachment to peers, the time spent with peers and the extent to which peers present with delinquent patterns" all play a significant role in the success and sustainability of any intervention. This I find to be reflected in my experience with the participants. Though they had been together for a while, they did not spend time together outside of school. In the group there appeared to be very clear guidelines about what was considered 'right and wrong'. So while the participants did not consider class absenteeism problematic, they did not condone truancy. They also steered clear of what they referred to as 'wrong friends' and exerted pressure on two of their members to disassociate from these 'wrong friends'. The failure of these two participants to do so resulted in them being excluded from the group. They showed a

lack of sympathy for the two when they were eventually suspended from school for activities pertaining to their involvement with the 'warned-off' peers. What the findings show is that while the group engaged in activities that the school community viewed as anti-establishment (examples of these being the attitudinal aggression they showed towards teachers and peers, the flouting of school rules with regard to class attendance, dress code and ink drawings, etc.), and engaged in problematic behaviour, they appeared to have their own moral code by which they operated. This code ensured affiliation and acceptance within the group and its influence.

The peer group was a critical reference group, which made it virtually impossible for the adults in the school environment to exert any influence over the group. This finding is supported by other research on the influence of the peer group (Avontaires, 2012). Their affiliation to the peer group instead of accepting the guidance of adults is tied to the cumulative stressors and trauma the participants experienced in their families, community and school contexts and their perceptions of adults' inability or unwillingness to be responsive to their needs. Fuller (2001) suggests in his risk chain theory that risk factors must be considered in relation to a chain of events. Managing young men's responses to trauma or stressors is complex, as they rarely spontaneously share their experiences or internal responses. Many prefer the route of acting out behaviour and McWhirter et al. (2007) alert us to the fact that focusing too narrowly on the externalized symptoms may result in missing the internalized responses that result in that behaviour. When one considers the cumulative trauma experiences the participants were exposed to, their perceptions of failure to act to influence the outcomes of these events as individuals. Their experience of adults' failure to protect and support them has led to an almost blind allegiance to an adaptive strategy that protects them. The need to ensure their own protection in what they considered a hostile school environment seem to be due to their personal experiences and feelings of anxiety, vulnerability, acute peer and adult rejection and being trapped in a cycle of aggression that placed them at the mercy of others. It was also based on a perception that the adults in their environment would not support them, as illustrated by the following assertions. The other children at their school continue to mock them because they know that teachers are on their side; 'it is no use trying to defend yourself, they don't believe you any way'; 'they (teachers) don't like me, they always scold me and put me out'. These perceptions reinforce the at-

risk student's belief that adults are not responsive to the unique experience of their lived reality, and this translates into their increased feelings of frustration, anger and acting-out behaviour.

It became clear from the findings that the collective agency that they demonstrated when addressing their experiences of vulnerability and increasing alienation had resulted in the willingness to surrender individual efficacy to group influence. So while the study was able to interrupt the trajectory to delinquency, the timing and the willingness of the whole group to participate facilitated this process. However throughout the research, I was aware that some of the members were participating because of the group influence. The decision of each individual to participation was also influenced by the fear of isolation, awareness of their limitations and vulnerability when on their own together with their knowledge of greater influence in determining the outcomes of their experiences when part of the group. It is important to note that when two of the participants who were resistant to the shifting group dynamic felt their positions were under threat, they did in fact seek affiliation in more delinquent groups. This concurs with the findings McWhirter et al. (2007:191) that the experience of collective agency, makes these young people very susceptible to peers who 'reinforce deviant behaviour and punish behaviour that is socially conforming" (McWhirter et al., 2007:191). It is however important to note that it is not a natural progression or true for all members of groups. The group excommunicated two of their members when they failed to break ties with other delinquent peers.

5.4.2   The origin and purpose of the group

The data indicates that the historical and public discourse about the value of groups in the farm worker community and the view of broader society differ markedly. In the participants' community, which is a farm worker community, peer groups form an important part of 'growing up' and are therefore viewed very positively. However the converse appears to be true in the broader public discourse, where according to Sharland (2006) the problem of peer groups has "become inflated (and) stereotyped almost to the point of moral panic." This view is represented by the teachers at the participants school who live outside of the community.

Though the study indicates the potential link between socially marginalised peer group culture and an increasing tolerance towards normalizing anti-social behavior, the study also underlined the importance of knowing why adolescents become part of such groups. The findings suggest that the participants' membership was a protective response to their social marginalization as individuals in the overall school culture. It supports the findings in Zajko's (2007:8) study which point to the tendency for groups to form when "students become attached to others with similar habits or behaviour". The participants in the study had had similar experiences in the school environment, came from family backgrounds marked by instability and the absence of one or both of the parents, and had been exposed to ongoing cumulative stressors and trauma in their various social and occupational environments. These experiences resulted in internal conflicts that were displayed as disruptive behaviour at school and during the research activities. The disruptive behaviour displayed by the participants included various forms of aggression ranging from attitudinal to physical aggression and oppositional defiance aimed at authority figures and peers. This type of behaviour is a common response of children who according to Lewis (1999:32), "may try to block out and deal with these feelings (of helplessness and insecurity) by acting out after a trauma. They may become uncooperative, suspicious and guarded when relating to adults and experience a greater sense of understanding among their peers for what they are experiencing." This unveiled a complex network of support that the group provided for its members. This group's members showed a high level of empathy with each other, which was communicated in many unconventional ways. Dayton (2007) refers to this as being the essence of members looking out for each other or 'having each others back'. I use the term to allude to the protective nature that members demonstrated towards others. In this group symbolic gesture or objectics are not only used to communicate resistance or show affiliation; they were also used as a way for participants to express feelings that appeared to be too complex to express verbally. Doing ink drawings on each other was a purposeful act in which the 'tattoo artist' interpreted and depicted graphically experiences shared by the individual on whom he was drawing. The 'pinkie nail' was grown and groomed as a deliberate act of resistance or an expression of suppressed anger, emotions that the individual could not express verbally. Growing and grooming the nail was a deliberate act that happened over time. When the group 'understood why' the participant needed this passive aggressive symbol of resistance, they did not expose the presence of the

nail, however when the group felt that the nail had served its purpose, the participants 'outed' the person. The dynamic around the nail was significant because it allowed insight into how the group functioned as a protective team, working together to provide a space of safety and an outlet for the aggression that they are not allowed to express elsewhere. This implied that the participants turned to their peer group as they viewed them to be more accepting of and empathic to the often unexpressed and conflicted emotional responses to complex and cumulative stressors. In addition the group allowed the participants to experience a measure of social acceptance which was being denied the participants elsewhere. Social acceptance is an important part of adolescence and having found it in the group, the participants' influence of the group became more valued than that of the adults in the participants' lives (Reintjes et al., 2010; Avontaires, 2012).

In developing a positive sense of self, one evaluates one's ability to exercise influence over the outcomes of one's behaviour and environment. Being labelled as problematic youth by their teachers resulted in the participants being stigmatized in the school community. In response to this, the participants "started avoiding situations that had the potential for negative outcomes for them" (Shih, 2004:180). Consequentially the participants increasingly became social disengaged from the school community and withdrew into the tighter social circle of the group. In the group they could exercise a measure of control over social processes or engagement. The significance of this adaptive response is that it also resulted in a reluctance by the participants to engage with situations and experiences that were outside of their control, even when those held the potential for positive outcomes for the individuals and the group. Positive risk taking was seriously inhibited in all the participants and this resulted in participants being trapped in a downward spiral of increased learning challenges, conflict and marginalization. The practical significance of this fear of failure was their reluctance to attempt new experiences and to persevere in the face of challenges. An example that illustrates this was the decision made by the participants to adopt a strategy that saw them trying to 'stay out of trouble' by not playing soccer or any other contact sport with each other or others. Soccer is one of the major activities that the participants and their peers engage in as part of socializing in their school and community environments. However in time, as the intervention progressed, and participants gained new insight and experience in

rehearsing the importance of personal space, fair play and other social skills, they became more confident in their ability to negotiate effective boundaries with each other. The outcome of this, was that the participants started to refer to each other as, 'we are friends' who 'have each others back' as opposed to a previous assertion that they were not friends but were 'hanging out' and were looking out for each other. Initially this looking out for each other related to the mutual security they enjoyed from being in the relationship. As their experience of each other changed, they became more confident in engaging with others outside their circle at school and on the farm. They started to engage in social activities like soccer, dominoes and other social activities. From their feedback, they continued to use their coded system as a safety net and had adopted a conflict avoidant style which saw them walking away or encouraging each other to walk away from potentially volatile situations. These findings then concur with the findings of the study conducted by Longa (2011:62) which suggested that "social aggression and exclusion can serve to forge and maintain group cohesion among peers".

5.4.3 The role of efficacy in the group

The groups' efficacy is related to the safe haven the group represents for its members. Discussions with teachers, information gleaned from the participants and previous studies indicated that teachers' often feel helpless in the face of these hostile stay in school youth who function on the fringes of school communities (Dayton, 2007). The portrait painted of the participants presented them as students who are functioning on the physical, academic and cultural fringes of the school community. Their marginalization could therefore be described as being multi-dimensional. Each of the participants, experience marginalization differently, how they experience it is influenced by what had influenced their path to alienation. The process varied, for some of them the process had began with seemingly insurmountable barriers to learning, while some were responding to the psychosocial stressors that they experienced in the school or home context and for others it related to the search for an identity. Within the broader marginalised group at school, there exist sub-cultures with exclusive membership. It would however be remiss to consider these sub-cultures homogenous in their composition. Failure to recognise the often subtle differences in composition and motivation for group formation

reinforces the perceptions young people in these sub-cultures have of being misunderstood within the traditional school culture. Contrary to the perception that these counter-cultures are lawless or unstructured groupings of individuals bent on mischief, the findings of this study imply that it is not so for the members of this group. The group had adopted normative practices that appear to mimic the school's culture. However, unlike their experience in mainstream school culture, where the perception in the group was that only their weaknesses were being responded to, the group culture focused on the individuals' strengths and the value they add to the group. Phrases such as, 'he draws well', and 'he is good at that' often peppered their conversations when referring to a member. In creating a space that allows them the recognition they do not experience in the traditional school culture, a high level of tolerance for behaviour that is not beneficial to their future life path developed, examples of this are, encouraging each other to skip classes in which they were experiencing relational or academic challenges, not attempting assignments that they deemed to be too 'difficult', attitudinal aggression towards teachers, verbal and physical aggression towards peers. School was the only site of contact or connection between the participants at the onset of the research. It was only at school, that the participants 'walk together' a term that they used to describe their close allegiance as a group.

This study's finding supports Cluster group theory's assertion that there is a level of emotional intelligence in how groups are formed and in the way some of these socially marginalised groups are responsive to the needs of their members. They are able to do this, because they come into being to serve the needs of the members at a particular time (Monahan, Steinberg & Cauffman, 2009) and in a particular place. This then implies that the group as a unit exists only as long as it is needed and valued as a unit by its members. As suggested by Ausubel (1978) the composition of the group was a purposeful exercise, in which each of the members brought specific but complementary skills to the group. So for example, the more physically strong members such as Bruno and Luigi provided physical protection, while the more verbally astute members, such as Frankie, Chico and Leo communicated on behalf of the less articulate. So too, the group appointed a custodian of the norms and values of the group, this role was assigned to Don. Each of the participants was clear about what was expected of them as members within the group as well as what they

in turn could expect from the group. All but one of the participants of the group had been part of the formation of the group and had therefore been part of the decision making around norms, values and practices that governed the group. This study did not generate any data that would support a finding of the group as a breeding ground for delinquent behaviour, despite the presence of data on anti-social behaviour by participants in the school context. Within the group, a strictly enforced code of conduct was in place that resulted in the exclusion of members who engaged in what the group considered to be serious transgressions. They excommunicated two of their members because, 'they have wrong friends' and had been 'warned not to be friends with those people'. Despite these defined limits, there were clear indications of the potential for anti-social acting out behaviour. Failure to intervene timeously in groups like the one in the study can result in members developing a higher tolerance of incremental acts of anti-social behaviour over time. In South Africa currently, the media regularly reports examples of how violence in schools escalate. There have been examples of how school ground pushing and shoving had ended in sometimes fatal stabbing and shooting. Loitering after being excluded from class often resulted in the time out from class being used to vandalise school property. More recently attitudinal aggression towards teachers has escalated to more physical attacks. The significance of the findings of this study is that it provides evidence that with timeous intervention in the group, attitudes can be adapted in ways that reconcile negative risk chains and allows individuals to resist trajectories to delinquency.

The findings point to the protective role that groups play in high risk communities. This is supported by the findings of a study into youth violence conducted by the Argus newspaper (Argus, 2013). The participants had come together in response to real and perceived threats in their environment. In doing so, they had developed their own definition of what is considered acceptable behaviour and what constitutes a 'serious transgression', there definition of what was considered acceptable or what was tolerated was often at odds of what was expected in the traditional school culture. The tendency to be a law unto themselves, points to the potential for increasingly more serious anti-social behaviour. This dynamic left unchecked, the practice of self-subordination to group norms and the potential for these norms to be manipulated by more influential or sophisticated members over time, also point to increased vulnerability of members for recruitment to more delinquent groups. In

addition, the older members' interests and the type of risky behaviour they were drawn to changed and they started associating with other already established groups who were engaged in delinquent anti-social acts, such as illegal dog fighting. This study supports the findings of McWhirter et al. (2007) that the age of the individual and length of participation in marginalised group activities create greater vulnerability for engagement in more serious anti-social groups. The length of time a group stays together, the level of intimacy and the extent to which they are willing to engage in delinquent or deviant behaviour all have the potential for propelling them to greater anti-social acts. Though these two participants did not stay in the group for long, their brief association with the group still created a negative risk chain that saw them being suspended from the school and eventually dropping out of school. After they had left the new groups, their attempts to re-join the participant group were rebuffed, an outcome that challenges a public discourse that all groups are homogenous in their motives. The members in the research group had been active in determining the rules of engagement in their own group and did not want to be held accountable to rules to which they had not been a party in developing. Their pattern of disruptive behaviour is similar to the description of the 'gap group' in disruptive behaviour disorders classification, in that they do not accept authority which they have not been part of creating (Sadock, Sadock & Kaplan, 1999). This group was not only interested in disregarding the rules of the dominant school culture, they wanted to be able to influence the outcomes of their actions and experiences by setting their own rules.

Self-efficacy experiences of individual members in relation to the group.

The participants in this study struggled to assert themselves as individuals. As a collective, though, they could make use of each member's particular strength. The fragility of the individual was replaced by a machismo tied to group membership. As the researcher, it was most disconcerting for me to watch the change in demeanour when the group was together as opposed to when I encountered them as individuals. This presented an indication of the participants' poor sense of self worth or efficacy when alone that was transformed in the presence of the other members. At first I thought the participants were putting on an act for each other, but over time it became apparent that the participants presented two very different personas to me: fragile and insecure when apart from the group and confident and cocky in the group.

Kaplan and Saddock (2003:37), describes a key outcome of the middle phase of adolescence as the establishment of a "secure sense of self or self-awareness". According to them, this pursuit of a sense of self in relation to the world is one that is often marked by "identity diffusion". Identity diffusion is successfully resolved when the adolescent establishes psycho-emotional independence. Inherent in this view is the notion that the independence spoken of refers to independence from significant adults in their lives. While this may be so in conventional discourse, I would argue that this emotional independence from adults is not always a sign of secure identity formation among members of at-risk youth in socially marginalised groups. This sense of identity may be compromised by enmeshed relationships within counter-cultural peer groups.

Developing emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are considered central to strengthening the individual's sense of self. As stated previously the group as a collective exercised more influence than the individuals. Despite this, it did not appear that the participants were being unduly influenced to participate in activities with which they were not comfortable. In fact, it appeared that the members of the group appeared to welcome the clear boundaries and rules of engagement set by the group. Despite the clearly defined parameters of engagement which were similar to codes of conduct in conventional groups, the participants' were adamant that the code of conduct had evolved spontaneously over time. The group did however exert pressure on its members as to the extent to which they would engage in activities. The expectation of members to comply to previously agreed rules were illustrated by the random out bursts of 'they are looking at me' or a member defending what he had said, 'but you told me to say so'. The group did not encourage its members to act independently and used a complex coded communication system to ensure compliance. In addition the code of conduct was tied to punitive measures, and ranged from chastisement to permanent exclusion from the group. Exclusion from the group appeared to be the most severe level of sanction, with the threat of exclusion came the very real prospect of return to a state of vulnerability and isolation. When the infringement was considered severe enough to warrant the ultimate punitive action, in this group exclusion, the group did not hesitate to execute it. It must however be noted that this was only done after attempts at 'reforming' and 'helping to change' had failed. The way in which the group exclude members was to change the

groups unique communication code and not including the marginalized members in the changes. The transgression that had caused the two members to be excluded related to their resistance to stop their association with delinquent groups. It is significant to note that the reason for this action being taken against them related more to the fact that their actions threatened the group's safety in the school environment than it related to any moral judgment about the nature of their behaviour. This finding is significant for interventions as it illustrates that the group is more concerned with protecting the unit than it is with doing the right thing. While this illustrates that the moral and ethical motivations of the group remained underdeveloped, it did represent a substantial shift from the total disregard of whether or not their actions would place them in conflict with the school authorities. This counter-culture thus appears to mimic the dominant culture in its expectation of conformity to established group norms.

There were various levels of self-efficacy in the group. However this did not translate into varying levels of influence within the group. The person enforcing the group's norms was doing so with the permission of the group and was only permitted to do so within the parameters assigned by the group. There was thus no space for 'individual leaders to emerge. Influence in the group was tied to the role assigned to that member by the group. This placed limitations on any individual in the group to exercise influence beyond what had been decided by the group. In the data there is lots of evidence that support an assigned task, an illustration of this is the regular assertions by members of 'they told me to say so'; 'you told me it was ok'; 'you said I must say this'. The dynamic interplay of having experienced isolation and vulnerability; the fear of being relegated back to that isolation; awareness of personal limitations and vulnerability when on their own and then as members of this group experiencing their ability to exert a greater influence in determining the outcomes of their experiences all serve to make these young people do whatever it takes to continue their membership in the group. As such, the participants willingly surrendered self-influence for the external validation of the group. According to Bandura (2005), self-influence is enhanced or hampered by the social engagement with people perceived as influential in influencing the outcomes of our actions. The experience of being able to exert any influence over the outcomes of their actions or

lives is further undermined by the persistent exposure to traumatic experiences in their lives.

All of the participants had experienced environmental violence due to their socio-economic status. Some had experienced the loss of a single or both parents through death, abandonment or neglect and had experienced violence in their families or neighbourhood. They also have experience of aggression at school in the form of verbal, physical or attitudinal aggression from peers, teachers and the school system. Lewis's (1990) assertion that children who are repeatedly exposed to violence or danger, find different ways of responding to trauma, seem to be applicable to these participants too. The participants' acting out behaviour set them on a collision course with authority figures. This has contributed to their marginalisation and increased alienation from the people and systems that could be a gateway to accessing the support they needed. The findings indicate that the way in which the school community responds to these at-risk youth has the potential to trigger a negative risk chain which saw participants losing faith in adults such as teachers. Doing what Bandura (2006) refers to as the best they can with what they have, the participants established the group as a protective shield against what they experience to be a hostile environment. Once they had experienced the ability of the collective in attaining more successful outcomes than they had experienced as individuals, they willingly surrendered to the collective agency or authority of the group.

It must however be noted that this group was created by the members. All of the participants in this study had had a history of defying authority at school and at home. They themselves established the norms and values of the group, and this was influential in their willingness to voluntarily subject themselves to the authority of the group. The collective efforts of the group to protect or 'help each other' together with the level of trust that they placed in each other's ability when attempting novel experiences was evident throughout the research process. Despite adult encouragement, and visible displays of competency and experience by the adults during the activities, it was only once 'one of them' had successfully completed a task that they were willing to risk doing the activity.

The group also provided support to the more cautious members via its complex non-verbal communication system. By using this communication system, members were

shielded from experiencing undue stress, risk or embarrassment. Despite visible shifts in participants' level of competency in mastering the various activities and the obvious motivation of members to push themselves in the activities with which they connected, the group did not acknowledge these efforts until the middle of the third research cycle. This suggests that any intervention needs to be done over a protracted period if it hopes to see significant shifts in individual and group dynamics. Untangling themselves from the enmeshed efficacy of the group presented significant challenges for the individual participants. The ambiguity with which each individual experienced his strengthening self-efficacy is illustrated by the lengths to which they went to keep their individual efforts to improve their performance a secret from their group. The researcher and facilitators acknowledgement of any improvement in the individual abilities of participants during the first two cycles often resulted in a display of disruptive behaviour within the group. The disruptive behaviour was an effective means of distracting the rest of the group from displaying their improved individual efforts. The participants experienced a great deal of uncertainty as to how change would be received in the group. From this practice, it would appear that members self sabotage or sabotage each other when the collective's agency is at risk. Anything presenting a risk to the unity and influence of the group was actively resisted. Instead of motivating themselves to persevere, members shielded each other's inadequacies. According to Bandura (2006) self-imposed limitations on one's ability to influence an outcome positively is indicative of low self-efficacy. The challenge this presented during the challenge, was that any member who sought to improve his level of functioning was almost held to ransom by the group. The group displayed their disapproval by applying sanctions. It was only later when a marked shift in the group dynamic had occurred that individuals freely spoke about their challenges and the ways in which they were attempting to address these. The individual's experience of success with influencing the outcomes of their actions, appeared to have empowered them to pursue and actively seek support in attaining greater levels of success or effectiveness.

In this paragraph the school's efficacy in working with the participants who present with challenging behaviours and complex family and environmental challenges is discussed. The participants experiences at school have had a direct influence on their perceptions of self-efficacy. The data suggest dual streams of efficacy. One

stream centred on the student's perception of their inability to exercise influence in their learning environment while the second centres on the teacher's beliefs around their ability to work with learners who present with multi-dimensional barriers to learning. The complexity of the barriers presented by learners living in high risk environments who present with cognitive and other barriers to learning result in these learners not being able to access the support they need to maximise their learning potential. These findings mirror Bandura's (2005:9) findings that the dynamic interplay between student's sense of academic efficacy and teacher's beliefs around their or the school's ability to guide and motivate student's to their full potential often result in a standoff between students and teachers, who then get trapped in a cycle of disengagement and escalating attitudinal and relational aggression.

This reciprocal attitudinal aggression between teachers and problematic learners' influences the willingness of both parties to co-operate in the learners' successful participation in the school culture and attaining successful educational outcomes congruent with their cognitive abilities. For the participants, the study found that they are pulled into a negative risk chain that resulted in less contact-learning time with their teachers and consequently poorer academic performance. Resigned to the experience of academic failure, the participants manipulate the school system, by planning exclusions to happen at the same time, or by being sent out to wash off ink drawings; thus maximizing their social experience with other members of their group. In the process a self-fulfilling cycle is created that further undermines the motivation of students and teachers to bring about change. However there were indications that an attitudinal shift, in one of the parties can influence the risk chain significantly. While the participants had not experienced any significant changes at school, they had been exposed to situations that challenged them to consider new ways of being. These opportunities allowed them to reframe the way they defined success, by creating opportunities for them to experience success through self-regulation within the consciousness of their strengths and limitations. Having a first-hand experience of being able to positively influence the outcomes of their experiences, resulted in a more pro-active stance when confronted with new challenges. While intellectual limitations and socio-economic status of the participants continued to limit their access to academic support. As their sense of self-efficacy grew, they were more willing to seek and receive help, less likely to be disruptive in the classroom, spent

significantly less time in the office and engaged in markedly less aggressive behaviour. These findings are supported by Bandura's (2005:25) findings that "good guidance can turn potentially troublesome activities into opportunities to develop self-regulatory skills to avoid future problems".

5.4.4   Co-creating pathways to more beneficial choices

The key phrase in the above statement is co-creating. Though the collaborative nature of the research methodology was communicated to the participants, it became clear that the participants would be vigilant about ensuring their involvement in the decision making process of the research. The multi-modal approach worked best in promoting the socio-emotional development of individuals within the group as a precursor to creating a health-promoting group dynamic. This process had to be carefully mediated because of the participants' initial penchant to resist anything that was considered too challenging. Navigating challenges within their personal and environmental constraints was an important part of creating opportunities for them to experience 'moments' of mastery and strengthen their self-efficacy.

These socially marginalised youth have a history of poor relationships with adults and peers in their various social contexts. They approached the intervention process with cynicism, telling me that they did not expect the process to last through the cycles and across the time frames presented to them in the pre-research session. Their terms of engagement entailed a willingness to engage, on condition that the process remained interesting and that they had some voice in the process and content. It was important to understand that this group's formation was a conscious process with a purpose. This was indicative of a level of socio-emotional intelligence already present in the group, so when I embarked on the research, it was important to acknowledge their agency in establishing and maintaining a group that served them well. The group had been established in response to threats experienced in the environment, as a consequence of its establishment participants had by their estimation managed to address and neutralize those threats effectively, there was thus little incentive for them to change the status quo (Dayton, 2007; McWhirter et al., 2007; Piehler & Dishion, 2007; Ungar, 2006). Approaching the group with an attitude that communicated authentic empathy I honoured their meaning making process. Doing this, created opportunities for what Camilleri (2007:57) counsels enables the

intervention to "assist a child to integrate his experiences and to effectively cope with subsequent ones". The participants' transformation to less disruptive and more self-efficacious ways of being developed over time and passed through various phases as the research progressed. Throughout the study the participants were exposed to opportunities in which they were able to exert influence over themselves and their experiences towards a positive outcome. The activities were structured to be challenging but also in a way that would allow each participant to be able to experience some level of mastery. Ensuring that everyone experienced some measure of success was an important part of the process as failure to do so resulted in disruptive behaviour that had the group resorting to maladaptive practices to protect those who did not succeed. During the initial stages of the intervention, this required me to pay careful attention to verbal and non-verbal cues of participants. Ritchie (2003:33) alerts us to the fact that when working with adolescents, one "remember it will require time, patience and encouragement to get participants to pause and reflect" on what they are doing, how they are experiencing it and how they can influence what they are doing in order to attain the desired outcome.

Each intervention used for the study started with what was known and familiar to the participants and over time moved along a continuum that built on success at a pace dictated by the participants. One of the key strategies thus entailed incorporating existing group practices, like the coded communication system. Working in an already established system, through the carefully selected activities I introduced new ways for the participants to engage with these practices. I was cautious not to attempt to decode their system but looked to incorporate general principles I had observed, like their preference for non-verbal symbolic gestures. The drumming circle focused on non-verbal communication while creating a space for participants to practice listening, empathy, expression and connecting with the finer nuances of emotion. However the drumming circle initially also spoke to participants' experience of limitations of self-influence, because it required participants to acquire a basic skill set in order to participate fully in the process. This required a lot of encouragement from the facilitator and the researcher. I however had to make sure that the encouragement was done in a way that proved comfortable for the participants. In a group process where self-efficacy had become enmeshed with group efficacy, the process involved first creating some space between individuals and the group. I

created this space by privately acknowledging participants who were working to improve their skills. Initially these participants did so separately from the group and went to great lengths to protect the 'secrecy' of their actions. Building on this practice and the awareness that participants had different levels of verbal expressive skills all our activities worked consciously to allow space for participants to experience their physical voice in a way that encouraged the less confident to rehearse with the physical act of hearing their voice in a public space. An example of how I did this was to use the 4 What, approach (see appendix) during the social autopsy sessions. This meant participants knew before hand what would be expected of them, and those who had anything to share could rehearse their responses on their own or in the group outside of the session. Once the participants had experienced a measure of success they sought ways in which to experiment with the various skills like assertiveness, communication and social skills outside of the research environment. Despite their success in acquiring skills, the participants resisted any attempts to show off their skills at their school or in their community. The researcher's motivation to showcase their skills in the school community was to allow their teachers, peers and the communities to experience them in a different way from their label of 'problematic'. This is a strategy recommended by Camilleri (2007:82) "as a means to reducing social marginalization and negative perception". It would appear that the risk of being teased or ridiculed by their peers was still too big a threat to their sense of self. Even so, the participants' experienced increased confidence in engaging with novel experiences as the study progressed. It was apparent that re-establishing trust in communities which the participants viewed as hostile would take time. This did not bode well for the extent to which participants would willingly participate in efforts to re-integrate them into the school community.

The study highlighted the need for the facilitator of an intervention with socially marginalised youth to be willing to invest significant time and resources. One has to listen to both the explicit and the implicit in communicating with the participants. In order to do this, I paid close attention to what was said, how it was said, by whom it was said and when it was said. Reflexive practice, flexibility and experience enabled me to discern the subtle differences between mediating and teaching moments. The initial cycles of the intervention process included trial and error experimentation in search of best-fit practices for this group of participants and what would provide a

rich source of data. I was trained and competent in the activities I facilitated, and ensured the same of the facilitators of the other activities. Underpinning all the activities was the principal of collaborating with participants on this journey, ensuring that the process was consistent in providing structured challenges that strengthened individuals' experience of self-regulation, social competency and a more positive sense of self. As the participants each experienced success in various activities, they became more tolerant of individuals' pursuit of agency, were more spontaneous in the expression of their views and opinions; more tolerant of dissenting views and some participants even challenged the right of the group to speak on their behalf.

The study sought to develop a training protocol for auxiliary youth workers, as based in popular education practices. While it is possible to develop a toolkit of activities and an intervention strategy, the framework of which is presented as Appendix 3, the findings of the study suggest that the process is more complex than that. The facilitator is central to the process. Working within the complex dynamic of marginalised groups requires the facilitator to have a strong sense of identity, to have had personal experience of undergoing the process of developing their own socio-emotional competencies. In addition the facilitator would have to possess a skill set that includes basic therapeutic skills, facilitation skills, conflict resolution and mediation and be able to identify potential barriers to learning. Developing the training protocol thus proved to be beyond the scope of this study and is included as part of my recommendations for future research.

5.5   REFLECTIONS

There are various types of groups in any given environment. Even in counter cultures, young people get together to meet the need to belong to a social group. The developmental tasks and human needs are still applicable, even if one lives in a high-risk community. In addition children in a high-risk community are exposed to cumulative stresses and various types of trauma as part of their daily lives. Failing to account for the full effect that this can have on the individual child leaves them very vulnerable in the situation. Children respond to trauma in different ways and studies, including this one, have found that boys in particular do not spontaneously share information about the type of trauma they have been exposed to, and that it makes them feel particularly vulnerable, unsafe and insecure. These are feelings that are

internalized. However what adults such as teachers and researchers do see though, is acting out behaviour, more particularly displaced anger towards adults and authority systems whom the child feels have failed to protect them.

There is a level of socio-emotional intelligence evident in adolescents such as the participants. However, it is a level of self-awareness that unfortunately focuses on their deficits and belief of their inability to successfully influence the outcome of their experiences as individuals. This belief is reinforced daily in their encounters with the reality of their lives. Belonging to a group is therefore more than socializing, it is a place in which they are reminded that they matter, have value and are guaranteed that 'they are not in this alone'. As a facilitator of workplace team development, I saw similarities in the function and purpose of this group and a team that comes together to perform a task in the work place. The team decides what is required to get the job done and will continue with their strategy because it works for them and yields them with the results they have determined are important. When you set out to show teams more effective ways of engaging with their tasks, it is always important to help them understand what they are doing, to explore why they are doing and the potential consequences of their approach. It is very hard to convince a team that they can be more effective if they are happy with the results their efforts yield and that they can do better. In working with the six adolescent participants of this research intervention process, I was reminded of the training video I use as a facilitation tool in teaching team dynamics in the work place. Though I in no way want to equate the participants to wild dogs, I believe that the way in which the pack organizes itself and how it functions, reflect similarities with the group of participants in this study and what I experienced in the research process. The wild dog is one of the least revered wild animals; however those in the know will tell you that they are considered among the most effective hunters in the wild. They are not very attractive, are often clumsy and their methods do not make sense to the naked eye, but close scrutiny and aerial views show them to have a well orchestrated strategy which instinctively plays to each of the members in the pack's strength. The key elements of their approach in the hunt is a clearly defined purpose, clearly assigned roles and expectations, a willingness of individuals within the pack to accept leadership and comply with whatever is required to produce a kill. The dogs, know that individually they are not likely to beat the more powerful animals, as they lack speed, strength and agility.

They have however learned that if they work together, they are more likely to experience success and never go hungry. Wild dogs are very sensitive to the needs of their members, so the weakest are always fed first, and they ensure that everyone eats. So while they may not be the most popular of the wild animals they are considered to be the most effective in ensuring that the pack meets the needs of all its members. I include this as understanding the group as a team in an occupational space, signified a significant turning point in my understanding of the group dynamic at the end of cycle 2. So while it is possible to interrupt the potential for a trajectory to delinquency, it requires a well-developed strategy that includes the intended recipients from creation to conclusion. This process needs to be broken down and be facilitated in a way that recognizes the collective agency of the group. It needs to make provision for them to engage their meaning making process in ways that are familiar to them. It takes an investment of time, patience and skill to develop this sense of competence in the participants, and the facilitator needs to be prepared for participants' confusion and resistance to the process. This I found to be the consequence of distrust participants expressed in adult's commitment to being consistent in what and how they allowed young people to exercise influence in their lives. The uncoordinated and inconsistent interventions which these participants have been part of, has over time created a cynicism amongst them and ties in to their belief that no one has their best interest at heart. I refer to it as intervention fatigue, akin to battle fatigue experienced by soldiers. So I concur with Lewis (1999) that when we engage with young participants, we need to focus on developing their sense of competence by exposing and engaging them in tasks that are appropriate to their level of functioning. In addition we need to challenge them to move past their perceptions of learned helplessness by acknowledging the effort (no matter how paltry) made by them, understanding that they have to struggle to overcome beliefs that are embedded in their psyche. When we present participants with challenges it is important to create an opportunity for them to share how they are addressing these challenges and the ways in which they are taking responsibility for their level of mastery. We need to provide opportunities that speak to participants' ability to express themselves, it is therefore important that this expressive space should provide for both verbal and non-verbal communication. Paying attention to and being responsive to the particular needs of individuals, the collective and the dynamics within the collective, ensure safe spaces that create opportunities for all participants

to experience a measure of control over the outcome of their actions and exert some influence in their world (Lewis, 1999; Bandura, 2005; Dayton, 2007). Appendix 11 alludes to how I used my critical friend circle to ensure this.

Another of the insights I gained in this research is that teachers play a key role in the determining negative and positive risk chains. However because children respond so differently to trauma it is easy to write off the acting out or aggressive behaviour in adolescents as it just being problematic. Often teachers working in high-risk environments have themselves been exposed directly to threats to their safety and trauma. In addition they may be repeatedly experiencing vicarious trauma through witnessing the lives and experiences of their learners. These experiences may undermine their sense of agency to act in any way to exert positive influence when they are confronted with oppositional behaviour. This may then trigger a cycle of attitudinal and relational aggression with these learners that sees them creating physical and emotional space between themselves and the learners. They, after a while, simply give up on these learners and miss out on opportunities to intervene in interrupting this trajectory to delinquency when they adopt a 'them and us' stance.

One of the key findings of the study is that the purpose of the group determines its composition. The purpose is however dynamic and changes over time. Given the very limited body of knowledge around working within groups, a strength of the study was that it firstly acknowledged the importance of establishing why the group was formed. An assumption that all groups that are formed by youth in high-risk communities are done as part of a trajectory to delinquency, can limit the impact of interventions. It is however important to note that the willingness of members to submit to the efficacy of the group undermines their own efficacy and in the long term increases their vulnerability to conform to more delinquent group culture. Interventions should therefore acknowledge the importance of the group in the individual's life at that time, and should seek to strengthen the self-efficacy of group members and equip them with the confidence, knowledge and socio-emotional skills necessary to resist self-subordination to group agency. It is important to work with what is available in the space at the time of contact. Creating a safe space for transformation, should not be confined to the contact sessions, it should be created for any encounter you have with the participants. I found that participants judged

more facilitators more stringently by how they engaged with participants outside the formal sessions than by how they facilitated the sessions. It is important that one honours the group dynamic and its processes, and that one look for what White and Morgan (2005) refer to as sparkling moments in which you notice and acknowledge even the most subtle of shifts towards healthier life choices. This acknowledgement must be done in ways perceived as meaningful by the participants and blended verbal and non-verbal practices. The fact that I was allowed limited access to the coded communication system over time, I came to view as having established trust and rapport with the group.

Within educational psychology the norm is to consider an eco-systemic approach in addressing challenges of social significance. However, in most communities, the child labelled problematic is often only able to exert a measure of influence in the micro-system of which they are part. Left feeling powerless, meaningless and hopeless by their life experiences and alienated from mainstream society marginalized youth find acceptance within sub-cultural groups where they can exercise some influence.

This study chooses to celebrate the agentic role of young people in standing against the perception that they are powerless to affect positive change in their lives. The participants in this study are by no means unique in the stance they take; they are doing the best they can, given their circumstances (Bandura, 2008). In their complex lives finding playful but meaningful ways to exercise their pursuit of healthy lifestyles was an adventure. An additional challenge was working within the resources available in the environment, this was important as a community based training program will be put in place. The selection of these activities also tied in to a broad based youth empowerment research approach that had the participants as co-creators of their journey. Together the researcher and the participants explored and selected what was available and how we could access these resources. We started out drumming on buckets, in a room without tables, and progressed to djembe drums and a well-resourced room. In the journey we learnt together and added value in a reciprocal experience.

5.6   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One important limitation was the sample size. Because this research was interested in working within an already established group, it was bound by the members included in that group, which were six.

Another limitation is the way in which social marginalization is understood. The focus on learners presenting with externalizing disruptive behavioural challenges, meant a very narrow definition of the phenomenon, socially marginalized youth.

The scope of the study did not allow for a more thorough investigation into the individuals' personal history. As such, not enough is known about the types of violence the participants experienced as individuals. They were also very reticent about speaking about anything personal in their families or home environments.

The study was confined to boys, which presents a narrow gender focus. However the literature reflects that problematic teens are more likely to gravitate towards others who are similar in sex, socio-economic status, geographical location, race and grade By limiting the context of interest to the school, participants experience of social marginalization was not explored in a great deal of detail.

5.7   RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings, this study would like to make the following recommendations:

- School is a powerful resource for mediating risk and protective factors. As such they **should collabor**ate with community-based resources in developing practices that look at the re-integration of disengaged youth into traditional school culture. Interventions should not be focused on punitive action; there is enough empirical evidence to prove its failure in ensuring sustainable transformation. Remember, "the child is not the problem, the problem is the problem".

- There should be school-based initiatives for the development of site specific intervention programs. I am of the view that developing a core of auxiliary youth workers with a special interest in working with youth at-risk for a trajectory to delinquency would go a long way in debunking the perceptions

that there is an organizational lack of interest in youth at-risk. The auxiliary workers could be drawn from a volunteer core that are, carefully screened and trained by educational psychologist from an accredited institution. The popular education model used in this study shows that with the proper basic training these youth workers could provide at-risk youth intervention before they come into contact with the criminal justice system or drop out of school.

- The safer schools initiatives should focus more on the psycho-social needs of the learners who have disengaged from the traditional school culture as they present an in-school threat to the overall well-being of themselves and the institution. There are health promoting models that are supposed to be in place; however, my research and review of the literature, shows that the socially marginalized are marginalized in those interventions as well.

- Teachers should be trained in the development of socio-emotional competencies and how these can be incorporated into the curriculum. The school is for many a learner the only access point to learning. The focus should therefore be on the holistic development of all learners, not only the pro-social ones. Failure to make the school culture more inclusive, results in a growing number of frustrated and angry young people who lash out at society and its educational institutions.

- Research should be conducted into how teachers who live outside such at-risk communities understand the contextual discourse around risk and resilience in the communities they serve.

- The extent to which teachers direct or vicarious experience of trauma contributes to undermining their efficacy in dealing with learners presenting with complex risk chains, require scientific research.

5.8   CONCLUSION

It is ironic, that the main attraction of school for the six socially marginalized peers in this study is the contact it affords them with their group affiliations. Adolescence is a time of discovering who you are and how you want to be in the world. It is also a period in which young people look for input from others to inform the choices they make. In the absence of positive adult involvement and contact with pro-social peers,

the pool from which they are able to satisfy their need for connection is limited to peers who are experiencing similar challenges to them and who too are struggling to navigate the multitude of challenges they encounter as part of their daily lives. Failure to engage these young people and guide them on pathways towards more beneficial life choices creates a ripple effect in the impact it has on the micro, macro and ecosystems of which they are part. This research aimed to explore and discover the dynamics present in a group that was formed by six at-risk adolescents who were being marginalized within their school community due to their anti-social behaviour. It sought to shed light on the ways in which they protect themselves in ways that makes sense to them. The study partnered with them in creative ways to uncover the resilience and agency they show in the face of increasingly overwhelming odds in their community.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE USED WITH KEY INFORMANTS

First hand experience

Mentors/ Intervetions

Social Analysis

Peer relationships

Community

Growing up in that community

Which experiences stand out as guiding life choices?

First hand experience

Challenges:
1. social;
2. academic

character builders in experience
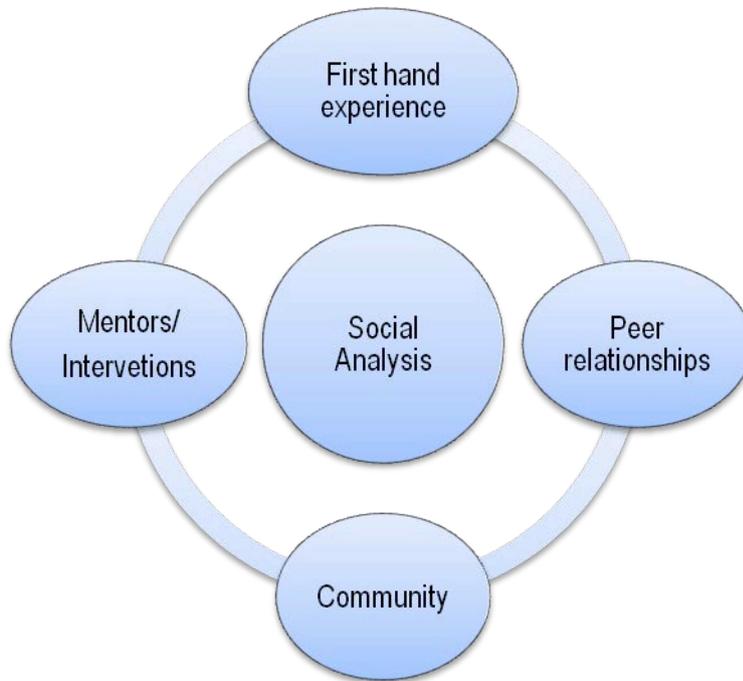
Friendships:

1. Groups/ group dynamics

2. Gaining access to group(inclusion or exclusion)

3. Activities' (what, why)

Decision making:

1.   What dominated peer/family/other (different stages)

2.   Influence of peer pressure

Continued contact:

1.   Sustained relationships (any)

2.   How is life different/the same to people who were in your group (why do you think?

Interview 1.4

Community

Challenges:

1. Social
2. Socio-economic
3. Family
4. Past and current

Community support:

1. Involvement in each others lives
2. Church/social and community support structures
3. Mentors
4. Your involvement

Extra-mural

1. What
2. Structured or unstructured
3. Where you part of any intervention programme? What or why?
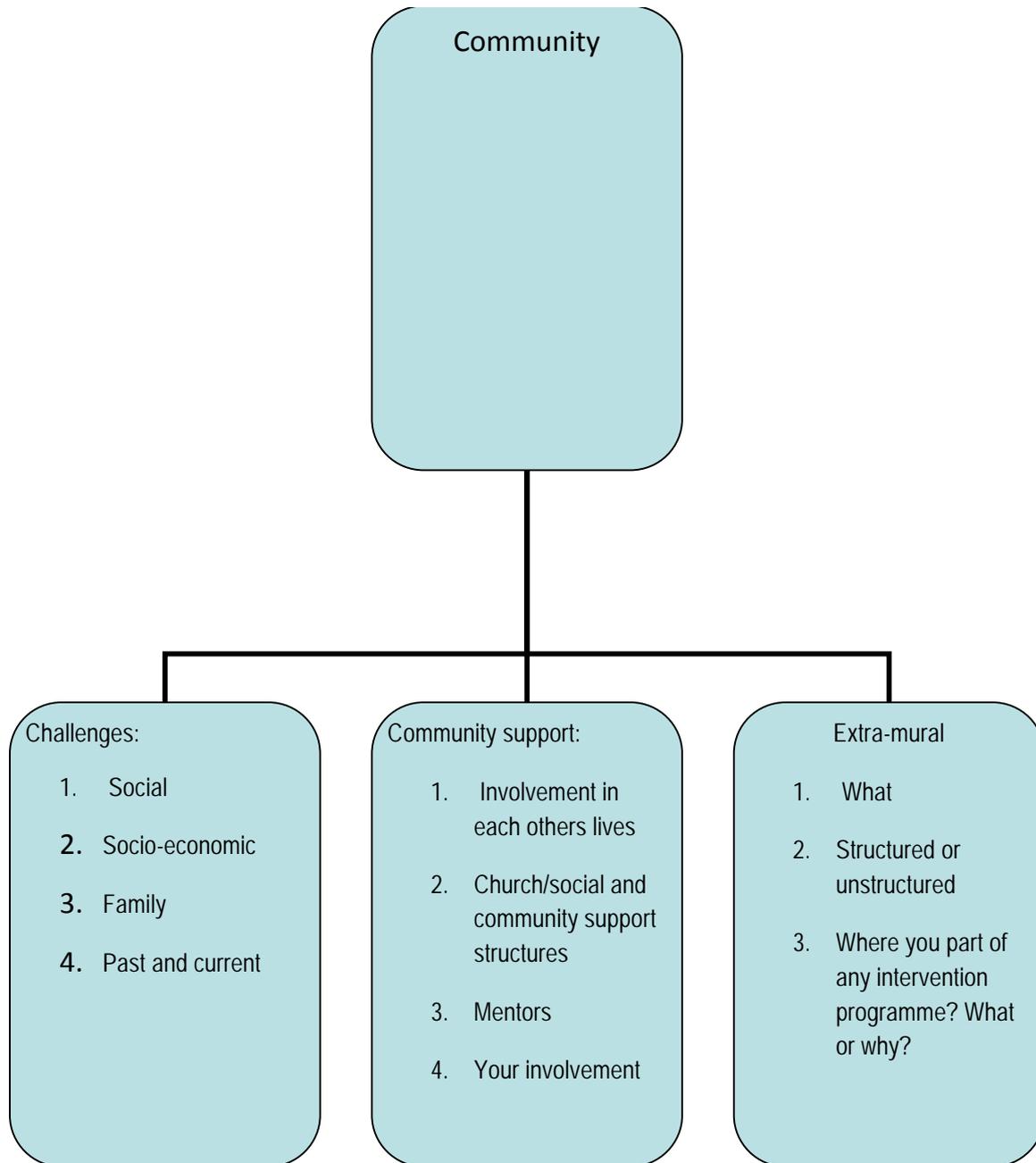
APPENDIX 2

Cycle 2: Session 2 Theme: "Die Angs" (The Anxiety)

Session plan based on adapted activity theory checklist:

In red – My session planning

1. Outcomes	•	What do we hope to achieve in this session?
	•	Understanding the different ways in which one can experience anxiety.
	•	Will it be a physical object, an ==experience== or an illumination of ways of being?
2. Mediating artefacts	•	What tool(s) will be used? Snake in the Eagle's Shadow – clip in which Jackie Chan is being bullied by his peers and an adult at school.
	•	Finger hold meditation and drawing the anxiety (means of externalising)
	•	Drumming circle, imitating variations in heart beat. Individual interpretation of what it sounds and feels like.
	•	Are we able to adapt these to be responsive to the group or session dynamic? Acknowledging anxiety may be threatening in 'machismo' group culture, so creating space between the individual and their experience of anxiety.
3. Object	•	What is the purpose of the activity used? Safe space to explore anxiety, body mind consciousness of the experience. Listening to the difference in

		experience of the emotion.
	•	What is the facilitator working on and why is she/he working on it at that time? Break all or nothing thinking; introduce nuances of emotions. Establishing non-verbal pathways to expression. Encouraging participants to reflect on what it feels like for them and for others. Empathy training. Build on differentiating individual experiences within the group.
4. Division of labour	•	Who does what in this session?
	•	Lynne – movie and finger hold meditation. Participant observer
	•	DM – drawing, drumming game around listening, interpreting and giving feedback. Speaking via the drums.
	•	Who determines what is meaningful? Personal experience.
	•	How do we ensure that there is a balance between what the facilitator and the participants consider meaningful? Freedom of expression
5. Community	•	What community is involved in this activity? All participants
	•	How is the introduction of outsider facilitators mediated in the community for the session or activity? N/A as DM is part of every session.
6. Rules	•	What kind of instructional and pacing rules will be introduced into the session? Session divided into three parts: Drumming takes up most of the session.

	- What are the expectations around social order rules like discipline and communication? Listen and respect difference - How will this process be navigated so that it doesn't interfere with the research interest of the group's own social order practices? It is meant to interfere with the group's social order process, as it is creating a space that encourages conscious experience of themselves as individuals within the collective. It is part of introducing new ways of being as individuals and as a collective.

APPENDIX 3

The experiential intervention protocol generated by our shared experience

A. Circle of friends

Snack time – focus on informal engagement as a means to establish rapport and model basic social skills competencies. Don't teach, mediate, acting as a role model of how to be instead of focusing on how not to be. Key activities for Facilitator, listen, notice, bring your sense of humour and check your ego at the door.

Circle of Courage

Transform the snack time session to a circle of courage in which we engage in the social autopsy conversations

The Circle of Courage portrays the four developmental needs of children: Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity (Brokenleg, 1998: no page)

1. Belonging. Significance is assured by belonging,

2. Mastery measures competence by an individual's progress relative to past performance rather than in comparison to others. The achievements of all are celebrated.

3. Independence is the only principle that allows all persons to exert power over their lives.

4. Generosity is the measure of virtue in Partnership cultures, where relationships are more important than possessions

The Social Autoposy conversations follow a template that allows participants to become familiar with the type and format of questioning. It is an accountability activity. In addition Lavoie (1994) recommends using social skill autopsies after the learner experiences a negative (or positive) social outcome.   Because the focus of the intervention is to not stay stuck in the problem saturated story, the conversation always needs to scaffold personal agency in addressing challenges. The following sequence is recommended and is an adaption of the 5 What sequence suggested by (Lavoie, 1994)

    1. Define the problem.

    2. Generate possible solutions.

    3. Select a solution.

    4. Predict outcomes if solution is implemented.

    5. Select an alternative solution if predicted outcome is not positive.

    6. Evaluate outcome after solution is implemented.

    7. Decide what to do in a similar situation.

The obvious advantage of social skill autopsies is that they can be used any time and any place.

Socio-emotional Session Plan:

1. Pre- contact session planning. It is important to remain reflexive, flexible and creative.
2. Adopt a playful approach, keep it interesting and challenging.
3. Ensure that you pay close attention to the strengths, interests and ways of engaging of the individual participants, so that you are able to adapt your intervention to accommodate the needs of the individual and the needs of the individual within the group. Pay attention to non-verbal cues, and check that you are interpreting them correctly, do so with due regard for the dignity of the participant and with sensitivity for their life phase. Keep it challenging but ensure that the activities you select allow all participants to experience moments of mastery. Always have a reflection session immediately after an activity or during the social autopsy of the next session in order for participants to share their meaning making of the experience, what learning if any took place and how they apply what they learn in the intervention outside of the sessions.
4. Look for moments to witness, and reinforce self-influence, however be sensitive that you acknowledgement happens in a way with which the participant is comfortable.

Adapted activity theory checklist

1.	Outcomes	• What do we hope to achieve in this session? • Will it be a physical object, an experience or an illumination of ways of being?
2.	Mediating artefacts	• What tool(s) will be used? • Are we able to adapt these to be responsive to the group or session dynamic?
3.	Object	• What is the purpose of the activity used? • What is the facilitator working on and why is she/he working on it at that time?
4.	Division of labour	• Who does what in this session? • Who determines what is meaningful? • How do we ensure that there is a balance between what the facilitator and the participants consider meaningful?
5.	Community	• What community is involved in this activity? • How is the introduction of outsider facilitators mediated in the community for the session or activity?
6.	Rules	• What kind of instructional and pacing rules will be introduced into the session? • What are the expectations around social order rules like discipline and communication? • How will this process be navigated so that it doesn't interfere with the research interest of the group's own social order practices.

Drumming Circle

Each participant in a drumming circle is asked to use the drums to express themselves. The rest of the participants, listen and respond using the drums, this helps to create a a space in which individuals can rehearse self, expression, listening, social skills and empathy.

The focus is on the process not the skills competencies, however it is important that participants master the slap, tone and base basic drumming competencies for participation in the structured drumming activities. Progress at the participants own natural pace. The facilitator of the drumming circle needs to establish clear boundaries and gradually, as listening skills improve and the sense of natural rhythm develops, the exercises became more complex. The drumming is used to complement the other interventions aimed at increased self-awareness, practising self-expression and experiencing themselves as individuals within the group (Drake, 2011; Friedman, 1997).

Proposed sequence of engagement in drumming circles with cluster groups:

1. Musical games that serve as social skills training, listening, interpreting, responding, practicing empathy.
2. Skills development
3. Theme related drumming
4. Improvisation
5. Containing emotion/ ease out

It works within the group dynamic, introduces new ways of being and self-expression.

Activities

Creative activities are considered effective vehicles in aiding troubled adolescents to move beyond personal development hurdles and uncover underlying conflicts (Oster and Crone, 2004).   While the facilitator acts as a resource person, she/he needs to acknowledge the agency of the individual and group in deciding all aspects of

intervention. It is important to consult the participants before committing to anything on their behalf. The cycle of youth engagement serves as a reminder of how this could be facilitated.
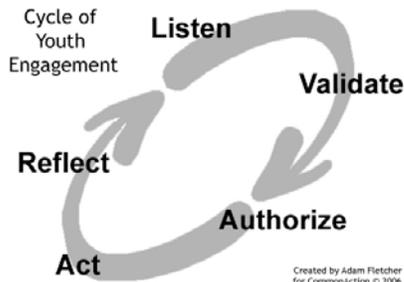
Specific factors to consider:

- Novel but familiar. Establish a community asset map. Experiences outside of the community allow for the experience of different realities.
- Challenging but accommodates different ability levels
- Create opportunities for peer learning and adult-peer engagement
- Fun and challenging. Prepare participants for what they can expect; be conscious of the potential for embarrassment and the group dynamics that may interfere with how participants engage with the process.
- Patience, flexibility and transparency.
- Do not coerce participants to participate. Respect their pace, there is a fine line between encouragement and coercion.
- Remember to get consent from parents and assent for participants. Allow time for the group to engage in their established decision making process.
- Establish a working relationship with facilitators of activities, have a pre-meeting and share information that may be pertinent to how they facilitate participant's experience of the activity without creating undue bias.
- Always debrief, create an opportunity for participants to share their experiences, the challenges they encountered, how they navigated those challenges and explain if anything significant happened e.g. my need to explain why they were reluctant to engage.

APPENDIX 4

4
Taking Action
* Intervention and
Data Collection.

5
Reflection & Evaluation.
* Study consequences
of action

3
Planning Action
Data generator
Instruments
Focus groups
Activities
*
*
*
*
Events

Cycle 3
Data set 3

6
Analysis
Identifying findings
Building
themes - Categories

2
Review research focus.

1
**Re-engage with
research context.**

4
Taking Action
* Intervention and
Data Collection.

5
Reflection, Evaluation on Action
* Participants.
* Co-facilitator.
* Peer group.
* Supervisor
* Research Journal
* Field Notes

3
Planning the Action
* Refining Data.
* Collection instruments.
Focus group.
Obs - Field notes.
* Recording

Cycle 2
Data

6
Analysis
* Emerging themes.
* Challenges.
* Identifying general findings

2
Refining the issue.

1
Information Gathering.
Re-engage with real world

4
Taking Action
Select Intervention.
Data Collection.
Apply to setting.

5
Reflection, Evaluation on Action
* Peer group.
* Co-facilitator.
* Participants.
* Research Journal
* Field Notes

3
Planning the Action
Instrument Design.
Intervention and Data Collection.
* Focus group laying.
* Capturing.

Cycle 1
Data set 1-4

6
Analysing
Generation of base themes.
Do-ability of research design.

2
Defining the issue.
* Base on initial observations
and individual Interviews
Diagnosis of

1
Information Gathering.
* Immersion in the community.
* Exploring existing mental models
in dominant and contextual discourse.
* Participants.

Cycle 1
Data set → Obs
Focus Group
Interview
Pre-
1st

Must remember [I] & DM are experiencing R.J. (2:5)
she is also participant [I] some tension   16 March
and affected by people

Session 4   DM → rattled → aggression in drumming
                                  → being confronted with
Mood →   unsettled   poverty → boy's lives.

                                                    → Bruno
          ↳ collars are up <
                                                    → Frankie

Good day / Group dynamic

empathy? ?   ? Group dynamic
              ↳ Chico is wearing a pants
broken @ crotch → nobody
commented or teased
                                  → I wonder if they
                                    want us to react
          ↳ ? Chico doesn't appear phased ✓

that he is wearing broken clothes → ?

What was that DM → struggles with empathic distance.
all about ↳ she has decided to bring some of
her son's clothes

              ↳ The boys response is strange
for people who like to tease - ? →
nothing
              ↓ ? either great empathy or
Maybe a set up ? ? ?
                    Changed activity → to music circle
                                          drawing →
⟹ Not very talkative today → not agg responsive
to probes.   → Pattern emerging → tied to Don's inability
Tied to ↳ Disrupted drumming circle → to play with both hands
more conf   → loud & aggressive
Drumming banging   → Not with us & not with
activity ↳ Poor eye contact   each other.
close eyes or look away when they disrupt.

APPENDIX 5

APPENDIX 6 a

I notice that Frankie's nail is long and comment on it:

Line no.	Speaker	Dialogue	Non-verbal	Code
1	Frankie	I asked Chico for a nail clipper to cut it.	looks at Chico	SE1 GDR1
			Silence	SD
2	Chico retorts	He is lying, he did not *Accountability.*		SE2 ? GDC ? *changing* *breaking ranks*
3			The group is silent. Heads bent	GDR2 → *going against group.*
4	Chico	But he did	Defensively looking around The group	GDC 4.4 → No-verbal Sanction. GDC 4.6
5	Lynne	But no one said anything		GCD P.
6	Chico	But they are looking at me.	he looks around the group but does not focus on	GDC 4.6 GCP.4.2 GDC3 *Broken Code*

			anyone in particular	
7			Smirks from others.	GCP
8	Lynne	Who is looking at you?		GDC4b gc P. 4.2
9	Chico	Them		
10	Lynne:	Who is them?	He remains unresponsive.	GDC1
11	Frankie:	I am not the only one		Breaking Ranks
12	Lynne	Who else has a long nail		→ GCP ggedics 4.2
13	Frankie		Waves his hand around, pointing to no one in particular	svg 15
14	Chico	Who? Who?	jumping up and dashing from person to person	Distracting
15			Smiles and shrugs from Bruno and	

KI — teacher

I notice that Frankie's nail is long and comment on it:

Line no.	Speaker	Dialogue	Non-verbal	Code
1	KI 1	Hello Mam, good luck with this lot.		EE 2: 2.
2	Lynne	Why do you say that?		
3	KI 1	You are going to need it	Laughs	RTO K
4	Lynne	Why		→ EE2:2
5	KI1	They are in a class of their own. We have given up. They are always in trouble.		School People RTO: 1| EE:3: 1
6	Lynne	What kind of trouble		
7	KI 1	It would be easier if you asked what they don't get into. Then we can enjoy our coffee, because that will be a short conversation.	Smirks from others.	Labelling EE2: 2

APPENDIX 6 b

APPENDIX 7

Agency → A !
SA: housis t
SA: Visible
→ Identify / (SA & !)

Efficacy E

Group G

→ SE. 1 [Current]
→ SE. 2 [How acquired]
SG.3 [Maintained]

SE 4 [What impacts]

Social Cont. S & B
→ SEC 1 [Contextual Discourse ground/positioning perspective]
→ SEC 2 [Influences]

Svg 1 [nature]
Svg 2 [Why]
Svg 3 [maintenance]

Individual SE
→ SE. 1 (Current)
SE. 2 (changes)
SE 3 how
Peers / adults
Self [SE3:1]
[SE 3:2]
SE 4 [What impacts]

School EE
EE 1 [Academic]
EE 2 [Influences]
EE 2:1 [SELF]
EE 2:2 [Teachers]
EE 2:1 [PEEKS]
Dis-engagement → Practices
EE 3 [Engagement SE. 3:1]

Themes / Categories

Group in Social Context GSC
GSC 1 — Historical
GSC 2 — Current

RG / Cluster G

CG
CG 1 [History — evolution]
CG 1:1 Why on
CG 1:2 Why Stay

Group Dynamics GR
GDR [how related]
GDR 1 Rules / Roles
GDR 2 Decision Making
GDR 3 Intra group

Group

Relating to Others gRTO
gRTO 1 [Teachers] [Adults]
gRTO 2 [Research]
R.T.O.3 R.T.O.3
R.T.O.1.3 [Facilitator]
R.T.O.1.4 [others]
→ PEERS → RTO 2.1
RTO 2.2 → RTO 2.3

GDC 1 [Conformity]
GDC 2 Why
GDC 3 Code of Conduct Expectations
GDC 3:1 — Individual to group
GDC 3:2 Group to Individual
How Ensures

Group Sub cultural Practices GCP

GCP 1 Why/Purpose

GCP 2

Evolution GCP 3

GCP Influences

GCP 1 Objects

used in Group

Group

GCP 4 How it is GCP

GCP 4.2 Non Verbal

GCP: 4.2.1 Clothes

GCP 4.2.2 Gestures → Expression → GCP 4.2.2 Botox

GCP 4.2.22 Tatoo

GCP 4.2.2.1 Smokie nail

GCP 4.2.2.4 Postures

GCP 4.1 Verbal

GCP 4.1.1 Language

GCP 4.1.2 Para- language

Decision Making & dm E.1

Engaging Egg

GS:I vs Influence E.1

Group vs Individual G: I E.2

E.2.3 How ? E.2.3.2 Non-V / E.2.3.3 Verbal

E.2.23

E.2.2 vs E.2.1 Shifts Why

E.2.2.2 When G:I Other

E.2.1 R How it is regulated

E.2.3 H-V How visible

Activities EA

EA F- Direction from Facilitator

EAF2 Shifts

EAF1 How initially

EA:1

EA1.2 Individual

Novel Experiences

EA1.1 Group

APPENDIX 8

A SAMPLE OF THE CODING FRAMEWORK

Theme	Categories	Sub-categories	Code
Efficacy	Individual/self-efficacy	Current	SE 1
		Changes	SE2
		What impacts	SE3
	Group	Current	GE1
		How acquired	GE2
		How Maintained	GE3
		What impacts	GE4
	Individual in relation to group	Nature of relationship	SvG1
		What influences	SvG2
		Maintenance	SvG3
	Social Context	Contextual Discourse	SEC 1
		Influences	SEC2
	School	Academic	EE1
		Influences:	EE2
		Self/personal variables	EE2.1
		Teachers	EE2.2
		Peers	EE2.3
		Engagement	EE3
		Disengagement Practices	EE3.1
Group	Groups in Social Context	Historical	GCS1
		Current	GCS2
	Research cluster group	History/evolution	CG1
		Reasons for joining	CG1.1
		Reasons for staying	CG1.2
	Group Dynamics	Roles	GDR1
		Decision Making	GDR2
		Intra Group Relations	GDR3
	Conformity	How group ensures it	GDC 1
		Why	GDC2
		Code of conduct	GDC3
		Expectations from individ	GDC3.1
		Expectations group to ind	GDC3.2

APPENDIX 9a

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

PARENTAL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Enhancing a sense of self in a group of socially marginalised adolescent boys through participatory action research.

Your son/ward has been asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Lynne Damons**, a Ph D student from the **Department of Educational Psychology** at Stellenbosch University. I have selected him to be a participant in this study because he has been referred to a programme that works with boys who have been identified as having behavioural, social and scholastic challenges. I am studying the influence that friends can exert on each other and I have therefore invited your son/ward and his school friends to be part of this study.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the influence the marginalized peer group exerts on the individuals in this group.   I argue that by gaining insight into the role the group plays in assisting these at risk youth in dealing with their unique challenges, a window of opportunity may open that transforms an atypical group dynamic into a health promoting one.

2. PROCEDURES

Data will be collected through focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, observations, drawings and written reflections.

If you agree to allow your son/ward to participate in this study, we would ask them to do the following things:

- **Attend weekly group sessions for 1 and a half hours on a Friday afternoon**
- **Participate in group and individual activities during these sessions**
- **Agree that the sessions be recorded with the understanding that only the researcher, her supervisor and examiner will have access to these recordings.**

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This research aims to contribute to the general well-being of people. As such great care will be taken by me that your rights will not be abused for the purpose of gaining information and knowledge. Should the researcher, participant(s) or guardians view it necessary, participants will be offered psychological support by the researcher (a registered Educational Psychologist) or a referral to another psychologist will be made.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

There will be no financial benefits for participation. However the findings of this study may help your child/ward as well as other young men who are dealing with the same challenges and could contribute to research that can be used to implement new practices to assist young people who are experiencing behavioural, social and scholastic challenges. There are no costs for participating in the study other than the time your child/ward will spend in the weekly sessions.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms for your child/ward. Their names will not be known. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping all records of your participation (the interview recording, field notes, written reflection and the signed consent form) locked away at all times, I will destroy all audio recordings after the research is completed.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your child/ ward's participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to allow them to be in this study, you still have the right to support their decision to withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still have your child/ward remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw your child/ward from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor. My contact details are:

- Lynne Damons
  Student number: 14125277
  Cell phone: 0827858058
  Email: lynnedamons@yahoo.co.uk

I am accountable to Prof. Doria Daniëls, my supervisor at Stellenbosch University.

- Her contact details are:
  Telephone: (021) 808 2324
  Fax: (021) 808 2021
  Email: Doria@sun.ac.za

8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by **Lynne Damons** in **Afrikaans** and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative   Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I   declare   that   I   explained   the   information   given   in   this   document   to _____ *He*/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX 9b

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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

Addendum 9b: Participant Assent
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Enhancing a sense of self in a group of socially marginalised adolescent boys through participatory action research.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Lynne Damons**, a Ph D student from the **Department of Educational Psychology** at Stellenbosch University. I have selected you to be a participant in this study because you have been referred to a programme that works with boys who have been identified as having behavioural, social and scholastic challenges. I am studying the influence that friends can exert on each other and I have therefore invited you and your friends to be part of this study.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the influence the marginalized peer group exerts on the individuals in this group.   I argue that by gaining insight into the role the group plays in assisting these at risk youth in dealing with their unique challenges, a window of opportunity may open that transforms an atypical group dynamic into a health promoting one.

2. PROCEDURES

Data will be collected through focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, observations, drawings and written reflections.

If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- **Attend weekly group sessions for 1 and a half hours on a Friday afternoon**
- **Participate in group and individual activities during these sessions**
- **Agree that the sessions be recorded with the understanding that only the researcher, her supervisor and examiner will have access to these recordings.**

-

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This research aims to contribute to the general well-being of people. As such great care will be taken by me that your rights will not be abused for the purpose of gaining information and knowledge. Should the researcher, participant(s) or guardians view it necessary, participants will be offered psychological support by the researcher (a registered Educational Psychologist) or a referral to another psychologist will be made.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

There will be no financial benefits for participation. However the findings of this study may help you as well as other young men who are dealing with the same challenges and could contribute to research that can be used to implement new practices to assist young people who are experiencing behavioural, social and scholastic challenges There are no costs for participating in the study other than the time you spend in the weekly sessions

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by

law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms for you. Your names will not be known. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping all records of your participation (the interview recording, field notes, written reflection and the signed consent form) locked away at all times, I will destroy all audio recordings after the research is completed.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to be in this study, you still have the right to withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor. My contact details are:

- Lynne Damons
  Student number: 14125277
  Cell phone: 0827858058
  Email: lynnedamons@yahoo.co.uk

I am accountable to Prof. Doria Daniëls, my supervisor at Stellenbosch University.

- Her contact details are:
  Telephone: (021) 808 2324
  Fax: (021) 808 2021
  Email: doria@sun.ac.za

8.   RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by **Lynne Damons** in **Afrikaans** and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative   Date

---

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ *He*/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX 9c

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Addendum: 9c Key informant assent

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (ADULT)

Enhancing a sense of self in a group of socially marginalised adolescent boys through participatory action research.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Lynne Damons**, a Ph D student from the **Department of Educational Psychology** at Stellenbosch University.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the influence the marginalized peer group exerts on the individuals in this group.   I argue that by gaining insight into the role the group plays in assisting these at risk youth in dealing with their unique challenges, a window of opportunity may open that transforms an atypical group dynamic into a health promoting one.

2. PROCEDURES

Data will be collected through focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, observations, drawings and written reflections.

If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to; **Participate in an individual semi-structured interview. We would also ask you to agree that the interview be recorded with the understanding that only the researcher, her supervisor and examiner will have access to these recordings.**

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This research aims to contribute to the general well-being of people. As such great care will be taken by me that your rights will not be abused for the purpose of gaining information and knowledge.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

There will be no financial benefits for participation. However the findings of this study may help young men who are dealing with challenges and could contribute to research that can be used to implement new practices to assist young people who are experiencing behavioural, social and scholastic challenges There are no costs for participating in the study other than the time you spend in the interview.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms for you. Your name will not be known. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping all records of your participation (the interview recording, field notes, written reflection and the signed consent form) locked away at all times, I will destroy all audio recordings after the research is completed.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to be in this study, you still have the right to withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor. My contact details are:

- Lynne Damons
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I am accountable to Prof. Doria Daniëls, my supervisor at Stellenbosch University.

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  Email: Doria@sun.ac.za

8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research,, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by **Lynne Damons** in **English** and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Subject/Participant

_____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative   **Date**

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ *He*/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and Afrikaans.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX 9d

Gweneth Fisher
Pr. No: 0221368

_____

Psychologist / Sielkundige
MEd (Psych) US

_____

21 March 2012

VERTROULIK / CONFIDENTIAL

I am cognizant of the purpose of the proposed study by Lynne Damons, related to enhancing a sense of self in a group of socially marginalised adolescent boys through participatory action research.

I agree to provide psychological support to any of the participants referred by Ms Damons. I understand that the referral may be as a result of a request from the researcher, the participant or their guardians. Any referral and engagement with minors will be done in compliance with the Health Professionals Council of South Africa's guide lines for ethical practice.

I agree that no costs will be incurred by participants for any consultation.

Should you require any additional information please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Gweneth Fisher

_____
ROOMS:
✉ 3 Solway Street, Bellville, ☎(021-949 1567)
Fax: (086 589 5760)
① 084 801 1989
E-mail: gwen_fisher@telkomsa.net

APPENDIX 9e

Western Cape Government

Education

Directorate: Research

Audrey.wyngaard2@pgwc.gov.za
tel: +27 021 476 9272
Fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20120319-0023
ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Ms Lynne Damons
37 Gordon Villas
Gordon's Bay
7151

Dear Ms Lynne Damons

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: ENHANCING A SENSE OF SELF IN A GROUP OF SOCIALLY MARGINALISED ADOLESCENT BOYS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH
Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:
1.   Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2.   Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3.   You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4.   Approval for projects should be confirmed by the District Director of the schools where the project will be conducted.
5.   Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
6.   The Study is to be conducted from **10 March 2012 till 28 February 2013**
7.   No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
8.   Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
9.   A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
10.   Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
11.   A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
12.   The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:
       The Director: Research Services
       Western Cape Education Department
       Private Bag X9114
       CAPE TOWN
       8000
We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.
Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: 19 March 2012

APPENDIX 10

Risk and Protective Factors, by Domain

Domain	Risk Factor Early Onset (ages 6–11)	Risk Factor Late Onset (ages 12–14)	Protective Factor*
Individual	General offenses Substance use Being male Aggression** Hyperactivity Problem (antisocial) behavior Exposure to television violence Medical, physical problems Low IQ Antisocial attitudes, beliefs Dishonesty**	General offenses Restlessness Difficulty concentrating** Risk taking Aggression** Being male Physical violence Antisocial attitudes, beliefs Crimes against persons Problem (antisocial) behavior Low IQ Substance use	Intolerant attitude toward deviance High IQ Being female Positive social orientation Perceived sanctions for transgressions
Family	Low socioeconomic status/poverty Antisocial parents Poor parent-child relationship Harsh, lax, or inconsistent discipline Broken home Separation from parents Other conditions Abusive parents Neglect	Poor parent-child relationship Harsh or lax discipline Poor monitoring, supervision Low parental involvement Antisocial parents Broken home Low socioeconomic status/poverty Abusive parents Family conflict**	Warm, supportive relationships with parents or other adults Parents' positive evaluation of peers Parental monitoring
School	Poor attitude, performance	Poor attitude, performance Academic failure	Commitment to school Recognition for involvement in conventional activities
Peer group	Weak social ties Antisocial peers	Weak social ties Antisocial, delinquent peers Gang membership	Friends who engage in conventional behavior
Community		Neighborhood crime, drugs Neighborhood disorganization	

  * Age of onset not known.
** Males only.

Source: Adapted from Office of the Surgeon General, 2001.

APPENDIX 11

Critical Friends semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview was used to guide reflective conversations with critical friends as part of ensuring the trustworthiness (Schwandt and Haplern, 1988).

- What had guided inquiry decisions and when methodological shifts were made were they justified?
- The degree to which past experience and expectations might have influenced or biased what I focused on.
- We also considered ways in which I could have possibly influenced the process and participants.
- In the analysis, we looked at the extent to which my findings and themes were grounded in the data. Are the findings grounded in the data; were they logical, how I had accommodated the potential for researcher bias in the lens I was using for analysis.