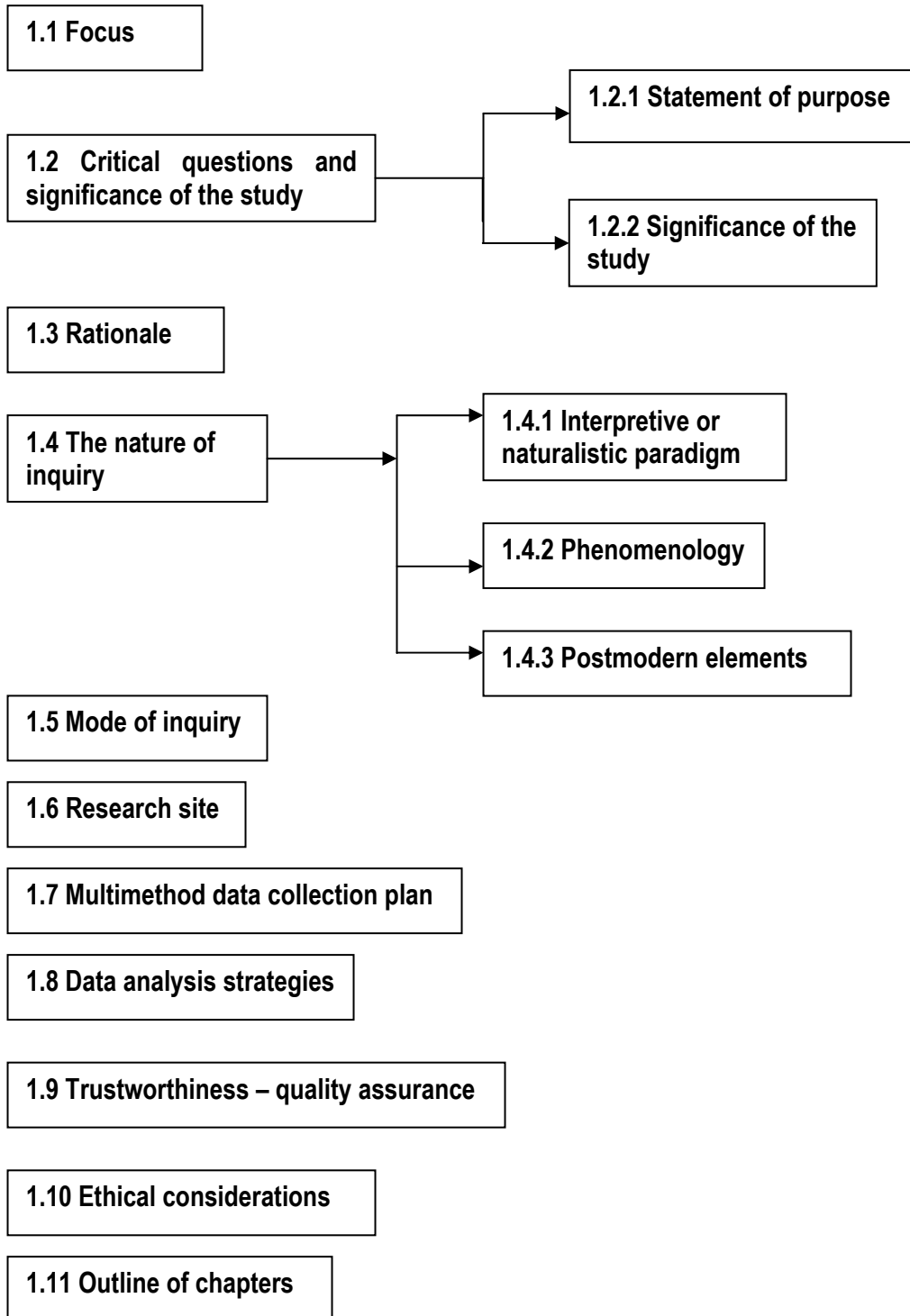




## Chapter 1 Background and orientation





## Chapter 1

### 1 Background and orientation

#### 1.1 Focus

The purpose of this study is to determine the degree to which narrative arts activities (or learning tasks designed to allow the portrayal of a personal story according to the ideals of narrative therapy) are meaningful in the facilitation of possible self-concept development or growth in Grade 9 learners – guided by particular outcomes of the Life Orientation and Arts and Culture curricula. The site of the study is a private faith-based school in Gauteng (South Africa). The process will utilise the cooperation of fellow teachers as data-collectors. This project will attempt to explore the potential of narrative arts activities in the possible self-development of the individual learner – and the effect these types of activity have on group functioning.

This research project could possibly make a contribution to the existing pool of arts-based literature in the following ways: firstly, it is, unlike other studies, an **arts approach** (a combination of arts modalities) and therefore not an **art** (only) approach; secondly, this study **removes the therapeutic arts experience from the separate or privileged counselling environment** and thrusts this therapeutic arts experience into a classroom or educational context – with legitimate curriculum aims – in which learners may engage freely with the arts in a non-therapeutic environment in an attempt either to enhance or to alter personal insight whilst interacting with others, and, thirdly, the two-month learning programme written for this study **uniquely combines the aims of narrative therapy, the therapeutic arts and the adolescent self-concept**.

This application of narrative arts activities spanning a two-month period is a methodologically novel idea within the existing body of current arts-based studies. The Grade 9 school context, I believe, places the study within a more approachable environment for teachers who might possibly be interested in emulating the work done within the confines of this study. I coined the concept of **narrative arts activities** for the purposes of this study and am of the opinion that this concept may contribute to vocabulary or to conceptual frameworks and become a useful phrase for linking the therapeutic arts-based contexts and educational environments. However, I am also of the opinion that the concept is applicable to a wider range of scenarios.

## 1.2 Critical questions and significance of the study

### 1.2.1 Statement of purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of narrative arts activities in order to facilitate change in the self-concept of the individual within a diverse (or multicultural) group context and to investigate the following (critical) primary and secondary research questions.

The focus is primarily on the experience of the individual learner (as esteemed by phenomenology). However, this focus broadens to embrace the secondary elements of importance, namely, the group narrative and functioning, and also other aspects pertaining to the particular educational environment under investigation.

Primary research question:

- How is an individual's self-concept affected<sup>1</sup> by narrative arts activities within a group context?

Secondary research questions:

- How do individuals from diverse backgrounds respond to narrative arts activities?
- How does the arts-based approach impact on group dynamics?
- How does the facilitator (teacher-researcher) experience the arts-based approach?

### 1.2.2 Significance of the study

This study should, at least, affect the following aspects of the educational environment and educational practice (initially only at the site where the research took place):

- Lead to an awareness of the potential of the arts to stimulate personal growth and open up democratic group processes.
- Contribute to the existing literature on the facilitation of group work.
- Introduce innovative facilitation practices.
- Contribute to the literature on teacher facilitation skills.
- Enhance the teaching practice of those teachers who participated in the research.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not an impact study in the quantitative sense of the term. Instead the word "impact" is used to denote a possible "bearing", "impression" or "influence".

- Affect the teaching methods relating to certain aspects of Life Orientation.
- Contribute to methods or literature pertaining to the nurturing of the development of a positive self-concept in learners.

### 1.3 Rationale

I hold a generic view of counselling and concur with Schoeman and Van der Walt (2001) when they describe counselling (or *guidance* within the context of this study) as a procedure that necessitates interviewing, “walking alongside someone” and suggesting specific options in order to solve problems that could have an impact on the future progress of the individual. My reason for stating this is that I wish to make clear my stance as an artist-counsellor-teacher who has learned through personal experience that I may not prescribe, but that I may only assist the individual to discover the “beautiful” or “possible”, and that thereafter I need to trust the individual to position himself or herself.

For the past nine years I have been teaching art in the junior and senior primary, and in the junior secondary phases, and this has fostered my interest in art as a tool for self-enhancement. In my Master’s degree I explored the possibilities of including multiple activities – gleaned from certain visual and expressive arts therapies – in order to enhance the counselling experience for the individual learner. In my doctoral study I decided to enlarge my individual learner and arts counselling focus to serve a larger population, and it was for this purpose that I decided to situate my study within the context of the Life Orientation classroom, in which my research interests and teaching obligations or capacities naturally align and complement each other in the serving of curricula outcomes.

Within the educational environment in which this explorative study will be conducted, the Life Orientation curriculum does not make mention of counselling per se, but it does highlight **guidance** within the context of this area of learning. However, as a qualified educational counsellor (not an educational psychologist) I do feel competent to state that the learning outcomes guiding this study suggest or imply that the foundational aspects of counselling – and even psychotherapy – could be supportive elements to further aspects of self-development. It is for this reason that I consulted the literature pertaining to these fields and incorporated them into the conceptual framework.



Throughout this study it is my intention that, in the light of my previous qualifications and interests, the reader views **counselling** as a premise I employed on which to build my rationale and conceptual framework. (I successfully completed the following degrees: a B. Ed Educational Guidance and Counselling and a M. Ed Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling. I am a registered specialist narrative counsellor.) However, in order to suit the current Life Orientation scenario, counselling must also be seen as an element that is **fused** into “learner support”. I am of the opinion that the (guiding) arts activities I intend employing could be used equally effectively in counselling or perhaps even in pure psychotherapeutic interventions – void of any attempt to facilitate learning outcomes. I am also of the opinion that the group context which I intend to create with the narrative arts activities should facilitate dynamic group learning, and that it will also constitute a group counselling scenario (which will not form part of this study).

For the purposes of this study I will wear my teacher-researcher “cap”, but I will also be functioning – consciously or subconsciously – as a qualified educational counsellor known to the participants as “their” art teacher. Thus my aim is to enable learners to engage in the arts in order to enhance various aspects related to positive self-development. At this point it seems relevant to quote the outcomes (and assessment standards) as described in the Revised National Curricula Statements for Life Orientation and Arts and Culture for Grade 9 (2002) which I intend to employ as the parameters of the proposed study.

The idea of combining the Life Orientation and Arts and Culture learning areas may be found on page 29 of the *Teacher’s guide for the development of learning programmes* (2003) of the RNCS (Revised National Curriculum Statement) for Life Orientation in which integration across learning areas is advocated. (I intend to combine outcomes 3 and 5 of Life Orientation with outcome 3 of Arts and Culture in this research project.) **Table 1.1** is a verbatim quote from the government documents – which are still valid in 2008.

**Table 1.1: Relevant Life Orientation and Arts and Culture outcomes**

Learning outcomes: Life Orientation	Assessment standards
<b>Outcome 3: Personal development</b>	We know this when the learner: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyses and reflects on positive personal</li> </ul>



<p>The learner will be able to use acquired life skills to achieve and extend <b>personal potential</b> to respond effectively in his or her world.</p> <p>Adolescence is marked by emotional and physical changes. The learner needs to continue the formation of a <b>positive self-concept</b>. Acceptance by the peer group is still very important. The learner needs opportunities to develop further life skills. It is necessary to develop emotional intelligence to empower the learner in order to cope with challenges.</p>	<p>qualities in a range of contexts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critically discusses own rights and responsibilities in interpersonal relationships.</li> <li>• Responds appropriately to emotions in challenging situations.</li> <li>• Explains what has been learned from a challenging personal interaction by critically reflecting on own behaviour.</li> <li>• Applies goal-setting and decision-making strategies.</li> <li>• Critically evaluates own application of problem-solving skills in a challenging situation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome 5: Orientation to the world of work</b></p> <p>The learner will be able to make informed decisions about further study and <b>career</b> choices.</p> <p>While study skills and work ethics are addressed in the earlier phases, in the Senior Phase the learner needs to make choices for further study or the world of work. In order to achieve this successfully, the learner needs a realistic understanding of own <b>abilities, interests</b> and <b>aptitudes</b>. The learner should be aware of various career options and the implications of choices. The learner needs to be informed about a range of options for further study, and be oriented to the world of work.</p>	<p>We know this when the learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researches study and career funding providers.</li> <li>• Motivates own career and study choices.</li> <li>• Critically reflects and reports on opportunities in the workplace.</li> <li>• Discusses rights and responsibilities in the workplace.</li> <li>• Outlines a plan for own lifelong learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning outcomes: Arts and Culture</b></p>	<p><b>Assessment standards</b></p>
<p><b>Outcome 3: Participation and collaborating</b></p> <p>The learner will be able to demonstrate <b>personal</b> and <b>interpersonal</b> skills through individual and group participation in <b>Arts and Culture activities</b>.</p> <p>This learning outcome focuses on attitudes and values and emphasizes the importance of personal and social development – the development of the ability to work individually and collaboratively in arts activities and towards the fostering of healing and nation building.</p>	<p>We know this when the learner:</p> <p><b>Drama</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumes leadership role in small group dramatic exercises and role-plays, showing awareness of the need for co-operation, sharing of responsibilities and the effects of domination on the group.</li> </ul> <p><b>Music</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes on the role of conductor, singer, musician, manager or accompanist in ensemble activities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Visual arts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transforms sensory experiences of power in social relationships into visual artworks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Media additional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes a video or other media product based on a topic of choice. The product should show:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of the medium chosen;</li> <li>• Competent use of technical skills;</li> <li>• Clear exposition of plot or issues;</li> <li>• Appropriate use of design features;</li> <li>• Understanding of the target audience.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



As a primary school art teacher I made certain interesting professional discoveries, and, while enjoying these incidental discoveries, I could also, in my mind's eye, see the usefulness of certain art exercises in terms of motivational work within the teenager and adult populations<sup>2</sup>. I realised that these art exercises would require only a slight adjustment in order to accommodate a symbolic or metaphorical **inner scenario**. This, in turn, triggered an interest in **artistic expression as a counselling tool**.

As an artist I know that artistic expression allows the doer the opportunity to focus and also to silence the many sources of distraction that compete for attention. I believe that one needs to come to terms with oneself as a person and that, at times one will find the answer within oneself. Artistic expression is one medium (presumably there are others) that could aid a diverse population in its quest for self-insight. I therefore became interested in investigating the modifying of certain arts activities in order to render them more accessible to counsellors and group facilitators. As an art teacher (and qualified educational counsellor) who had built up a repertoire of ideas relating to the teaching of art I decided to explore the potential that self-expression holds for individual self-reflection within a group.

As a teacher I am reminded daily of the fact that most teenagers are more likely to listen attentively to what their friends have to say than to what their teachers are hoping to convey to them. I started to ponder on the possibility of employing strong/effective peer dialogue (peer group dynamics) as a "bridge" to facilitate self-growth and to convey life skills (e.g. developing a positive self-concept, and becoming a group role player who respects others) and to use art activities to steer the learner-centred process.

The next quotation refers to art therapy only, but is very applicable to the multiple arts approach I intend to follow:

*Art therapy [... arts activities for guidance purposes in this instance ...] is an ideal choice as a vehicle to teach intangible life skills because the goal of many art therapy tasks naturally fits within a life skills framework ... Group art therapy directly promotes teamwork, time management, and communication skills. Tasks can be tailored to promote self-awareness, problem-solving, and goal planning.*

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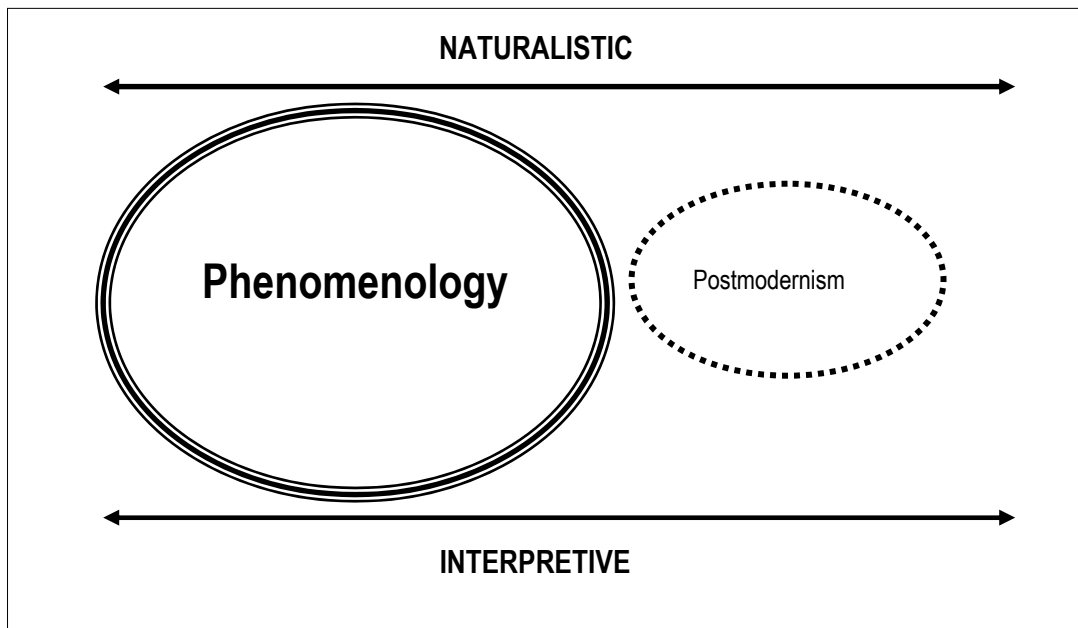
<sup>2</sup> I discovered that pupils responded favourably in my classes to art activities that involve easy constructions that become impressively looking end results or products. I saw potential in these activities to portray personal information.

*While art therapy cannot be used to instruct clients on all life skills, it can be used as a vehicle to teach the intangible skills which should not be ignored (McAlevy, 1997:48).*

I hope, with this research project, to contribute to the self-growth of others and also of myself, to align myself with better teaching methods and, perhaps, to make a contribution to the general environment of dialogue between teachers and students. It would be an added advantage if, in accordance with the suggestion made by Van Niekerk and Prins (2001:iv) that “counsellors should themselves become involved in developing policies and procedures, as well as prevention programmes and programme evaluation models relevant to promoting psychological well-being in our society” this research could eventually assist in bringing about broader positive changes.

#### 1.4 The nature of inquiry

The aims of my study compel me to draw upon **three major** paradigms. The size of the fonts linked to each paradigm in **figure 1:1** is indicative of the prominence of each of the paradigms. These paradigms are not in opposition, but are complementary to each other. The issues or elements investigated in this study necessitate an acknowledgement of these paradigms.



**Figure 1.1: Three prominent paradigms**

At this point it might be beneficial to summarise briefly the main components of the intended study and to link these components to the appropriate paradigms:





- The narrative aspect necessitates a survey of the postmodern paradigm.
- The lived experiences of the individual child in group context, of the collective group, and of the teacher are paramount, thus introducing the phenomenological dimension. (In the presentation of the analysis of the phenomenological data the emphasis will be primarily on the experiences of the individual. The experiences of the collective group and of the researchers will be secondary and will, where possible, support the individual narratives.)
- The interpretive or naturalistic paradigm, with its arts components and human interactions, frames the study as a whole.

The following quotation regarding **radical relativism** (which I have not used as a paradigm) summarises something of what I hope to convey with the paradigms that I intend employing. This quotation also succeeds in describing certain of my personal beliefs about life and truth, and it also describes the way in which one paradigm may complement another:

*Radical relativism. Here the principle is that the world or reality cannot exert a specific influence on the mind. In short, it is up to us to how we see the world...All versions of truth are equally valid...each mind creates its own world without reference to the way other minds create their worlds. In short, observational data are never considered theory-neutral, but always mediated through structures, paradigms and worldviews. Furthermore, these latter are not just epistemological frameworks but normative beliefs about how the researcher would like the world to be. The implication is that no one framework is superior to another and that we simply have to live with such value disagreements... (Scott, 2000:13-14).*

#### 1.4.1 Interpretive or naturalistic paradigm

*The interpretive paradigm grew out of the hermeneutic tradition ... Reality, it is suggested should be interpreted in terms of participants' understandings. Human inquiry came to be seen as the study of people in terms of interpretation of their own lifeworld experiences (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000:161). Interpretivist knowledge must involve a knower (a social being) who constructs the knowledge socially. Interpretive research is mediated information because it comprises the researcher's account of other people's accounts by means of a chosen medium. The fact that the emphasis is on the interpretation of the researcher may easily overshadow the standing of the original informants during the reporting phase. The rich descriptive element of interpretivist research may be inspirational, but it does not affect change (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000).*

Language is the medium by means of which we construct meaning. Sharry (2004) expounds on this in his explanation of the social constructivist paradigm which highlights certain interpretivist ideals. It is for this reason that I have chosen to include some of Sharry's (2004) views regarding the social constructivist paradigm, although it is not a paradigm which I intend employing. The ability to be both self-reflexive and self-critical is a key aspect of the therapeutic relationship, and therefore this relationship becomes a collaborative co-construction between therapist and client. It relies heavily on the client as an expert on his own life. Language is the means used to convey the meanings and beliefs that people construct in the course of continual dialogue, whether through individual interactions or the collective media. However, as language does not provide a neutral version of reality it becomes instrumental in shaping and creating reality (Sharry, 2004). According to Sharry (2004) social constructivism alerts the counsellor to the necessity of being non-discriminatory in multicultural practice. It awakens self-awareness in the counsellor to consider (even his own) cultural biases and to be sensitive to the impact of the particular identities and cultural backgrounds of the clients on the counselling scenario.

I have positioned the interpretive element of my study to align with the structure described by Guba and Lincoln (1999). Guba and Lincoln (1999) describe the naturalistic paradigm with the aid of the following axioms:

- **The nature of reality**

Naturalists acknowledge multiple realities which are predominantly cognitive formulations by people, and these abstractions therefore demand not only a methodology of enquiry that is very broad, but that is also at times somewhat peculiar and specific. This variety of multiple realities will lead to a divergence of enquiry methods. Naturalists acknowledge the presence (reality) of objects and events, or processes, but it is the interpretations which people attach to these elements that are of interest to the social/behavioural investigator.

- **The enquirer-participant relationship**

The naturalist assumes that it is inevitable that the researcher and respondent will influence each other as happens in any other human interaction. Care should be exercised in both directions of interaction to minimise this influence in a responsible way, but because it is a given, the interaction influence needs to be utilised fully in order to serve the purpose of the enquiry.

- **The nature of truth statements**

Naturalists declare that the purpose of a particular study is to provide knowledge that pertains to the specific individual case only and that this knowledge is summarised by a set of “working hypotheses”. Therefore, this context-bound knowledge is not transferable to a wider arena, and this is in keeping with the assumption that human behaviour is bound to a specific time and a specific context.

- **Causality**

Naturalists believe that to determine a cause-effect relationship is a futile exercise because it is the network of factors, occurrences and procedures that obscure the cause-effect sequence which sustains human relationships. Causality in a naturalist study may be illuminated by establishing credible patterns of power or influence.

- **Relation to values**

The naturalist argues that certain values (or factors) succeed in influencing the research because of the following:

- the investigator’s choice of problems, theories, instruments, and data analysis aids
- the assumptions embraced by the dominant guiding theory
- the basic premises of the desired methodological paradigm
- the moral standards of the participant population
- the possibility that exists of the above-mentioned factors affecting each other

#### 1.4.2 Phenomenology

*What then is the relation between language and experience? It seems that with words we create some-thing (concepts, insights, feelings) out of no-thing (lived experience), yet these words forever will fall short of our aims. Perhaps this is because language tends to intellectualise our awareness – language is a cognitive apparatus. What we try to do in phenomenological research is to evoke understandings through language that in a curious way seem to be non-cognitive (Van Manen 1997:xviii).*

Phenomenology explores the structures of consciousness during human experience. It stems from the philosophical works of Husserl, and the later works of Heidegger and Sartre. Creswell (1998) advocates the use of **psychological** phenomenology because it focuses on the experiences of the

individual – something which I also hope to explore. According to Creswell (1998) the major procedural issues when employing phenomenology are the following:

- The researcher needs to be acquainted with the philosophical viewpoints of the approach which pertain to the phenomenon concept. The researcher needs to set aside personal preconceived ideas in order to understand the perspectives of the participant.
- Research questions target the meanings which individuals attach to common lived experiences.
- Lengthy interviews with individuals who lived through an experience as a method of collecting the data.
- A phenomenological report leaves the reader with a clearer understanding about the lived experience because it reveals the underlying “structures” that individuals attached to the experience.

Creswell (1998) is of the opinion that the difficulty pertaining to phenomenological research lies in the fact that the researcher is not able to separate his own experiences from the experiences of the respondents. This issue does not appear to be of concern to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:490) who merely state that the data which stem from the respondents and the researcher eventually constitute the *composite description* and *essence* of the occurrence. The following quotation by Van Manen (1997) echoes certain aspects raised by Creswell (1998) regarding the “ego” of the researcher that could constitute a “phenomenological” problem:

*The ego-logical starting point for phenomenological research...My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are. However, the phenomenologist does not want to trouble the reader with purely private, autobiographical facticities of one's life. The revealing of private sentiments...are matters to be shared...in the gossip columns of life. In drawing up personal descriptions of lived experiences the phenomenologist knows that one's experiences are also the possible experiences of others (Van Manen, 1997:54).*

All phenomenological studies are essentially explorations into the various lived experiences within the structure of the human environment. Van Manen (1997:101–104) proposes four *existential* life-world themes common to the environments of most people to guide the reflection during the research process, namely, *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality).”



- **Lived space** (spatiality) defines the way we feel about the space in which we find ourselves, and the effect that a particular space exerts on the range of activities in which we may possibly engage.
- **Lived body** (corporeality) refers to the fact that we experience everything through our bodies (or at least our senses – a body function). Our bodies reveal or conceal – whether we are conscious of it or not – something about ourselves.
- **Lived time** (temporality) denotes our subjective experience of time – attached to each phase of life – as opposed to clock time.
- **Lived other** (relationality or communality) points to the interpersonal space we share in our “corporealities” when we are with others.

#### 1.4.3 Postmodern elements

*The postmodern impulse is to deconstruct therapy, to strip away its claims to privileged scientific knowledge/power/certainty and to reveal the core of therapy as an arena for telling personal stories* (McLeod, 1997:23). Words such as disintegration, uncertainty, and loss of certainty capture elements of postmodern thought. Postmodern thinking is, in essence, against any form of labelling, and creates a dilemma when it involves reasoning about something without a label. Postmodernism advocates a dismantling of all that has gone before, for example, the certainty of truth, the unavoidability of development and the achievements of human thinking. The changes in society implicate profound changes with regard to the way in which people live their lives, and it has been suggested that concepts such as history, time, objectivity and self-knowledge need to be “redefined”. Postmodernist thinking shares the same political arena as critical theory because it also strives to expose discrimination, to grant the oppressed the opportunity to speak, and to alter the familiar deliberately (Day, Elliot, Somekh & Winter, 2002; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000).

According to Hollinger (1994) and to Marshall and Peters (1999) postmodernism exposes or unnerves the idea that our lives are somewhat “accidental” or “uncertain” and are extremely inconsistent – even with regard to values. Therefore postmodernism urges mankind to regard self, society, communal issues, and prevailing history from a different perspective. The postmodern way of ensuring effective reconceptualisation of these pertinent issues is to negate all forms of

sentimentality and utopian ambitions. Postmodernism is against Enlightenment with its confrontational stance against the positivistic assuredness of neutral, utopian, and total truth, but furthers its ideals in its zeal to uproot redundant doctrines, uphold honesty, respect criticism and analysis, and probe current assumptions. Postmodernists study the ways in which language, authority, collective ideals and history affect our perceptions of reality, what constitutes truth and characterises knowledge, and in this way alert people to the multiplicity of reason, and the onslaught of current power and technocratic reasoning.

### **1.5 Mode of inquiry**

This study is an interpretive, **qualitative** (case study) and idiographic inquiry, employing mainly the phenomenological paradigm that (in this case) could resemble principles of action research. It is possible that elements of the postmodern paradigm could also feature in the study. The mode of inquiry will be further elaborated upon in section 4.4.1.

### **1.6 Research site**

The research will be conducted at the school of which I am a teacher. It is a private faith-based school in Gauteng. There exists a family atmosphere and students speak their minds freely. It is a culturally diverse school which is characterised by a sociable and casual atmosphere among the children. There is a predominant air of happy friendships and a natural affinity for the dramatic arts.

The school agreed that I would be permitted to conduct my research there in 2006. The research process covers work that forms part of the Grade 9 Life Orientation portfolio. Initially the idea was to use one Grade 9 class only that would be divided into smaller groups for the duration of a six-week period, and only thereafter for ethical reasons to expose the remaining Grade 9 class to similar interventions. The Life Orientation department head then made the decision that the research would be conducted simultaneously with both classes. In reality the research process comprised six small groups with which the same activities were carried out – this further enhanced the trustworthiness of the study.

Figure 1.2 illustrates the classroom scenario in which the group environment existed for the purposes of the research and where certain of the data was collected. <sup>3</sup>

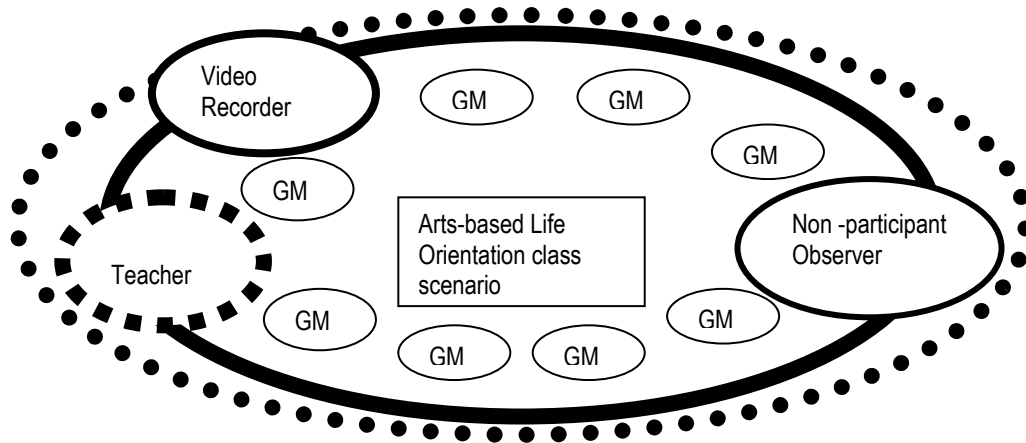


Figure 1.2: The small-group class scenario

### 1.7 Multimethod data collection plan

*The real purpose of qualitative research is not counting opinions or people but rather exploring the range of opinions, the different representations of the issue* (Gaskell, 2000:41). Data was collected mainly through arts-based activities, artefacts, written documents, video recordings and interviews. The arts-based episodic process was conducted over a 10-week period in the classroom situation. Two Grade 9 classes comprising approximately 23–24 children each were divided into six groups respectively. Three teachers each facilitated a group. One class only – with its three groups – participated in the activities per session. I coordinated the process and led one group myself. I hoped to use fellow teachers to assist with the gathering of data. I made the process part of the Life Orientation programme and conducted the research during school time.

This was an ideal opportunity to empower fellow teachers as fellow reflective practitioners and researchers, and it also served as in-service training for Life Orientation. As stated earlier this also enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. **Addendum A** illustrates the links between the individual and group narrative arts activities, and also indicates the sources of the data collection.

One of the features of this particular approach (which could also constitute its major contribution to existing literature) is to include strategic video recordings screened only at the end of the process

<sup>3</sup> GM means group member





in cinematic format on the big screen (of the media centre of the school) in order to build a visual collective narrative. These strategic video recordings could, whilst capturing the essence of the process, also be used for data analysis (group interviews and presentation) procedures. However, this will not be the case in this study. The video clips were taken to stimulate self-reflection (in group format) at the end of the process. In the next quotation, Sharry (2004) discusses video reflection (linked to video feedback), but in this study the learners watched themselves on the screen portrayed positively – in a 35 minute movie-format – three months after the process had been completed.

*Therapy is primarily a process of reflection. It requires someone to 'step out of' or back from an immediate problem and to reflect about themselves and others in the situation. The fact that you watch a video as part of an audience as opposed to being a participant in the drama encourage this process of reflection. The act of watching necessarily places some distance between the viewer and the watched events and thus invites opinion, comment and reflection. Watching a video generally encourages the process of self-reflection (Sharry, 2004:131).*

My intention with the screen experience was not video feedback (as advocated by Sharry, 2004), but to allow the learners the opportunity to reflect on their 10-week journey that had ended three months prior to the screening. I wanted them to have a positive cinematic experience without being exposed to troublesome issues that could have manifested within a therapeutic scenario.

As explained by Sharry (2004), it is also possible to incorporate these recordings into the narrative arts-based counselling approach, during which the counsellor uses video feedback in order to build on common strengths. Sharry (2004) mentions the following advantages of video feedback for the counselling or therapeutic situation:

- It may emphasise positive exceptions.
- Feedback is immediate and in context.
- Reflection is encouraged.
- Self-modelling is nurtured.
- Group members validate the experience.

As the process progressed through the activities scheduled for the 10-week period each learner received work sheets and assignments, which I marked and put into a portfolio for each of the 47



learners. The aim of the portfolio (or file) was to record the progress of the 47 learners (which included the 14 participants) and to have evidence of what the (arts-based) process entailed for the end of the year evaluation of the Life Orientation learning programme and the learners' reports. These portfolios also allowed me insight into the participants' perception of the arts-based process and its effectiveness for Life Orientation self-concept issues.

The possibility existed that the numerous aspects of the arts and the array of social or educational interactions that surround or constitute this study could confuse the reader and thus, in order to guide the reader, I decided to divide the multimethod data collection plan into three columns – data concern, data collection and researcher role – in **table 1.2**, and briefly to explain my role as the teacher-researcher. **Table 1.2** illustrates the four major sections of which the study is composed: the group process, the arts-based exercises, the narratives of the participants and the impressions of the researcher.

**Table 1.2: Basic data collection components and roles played by the researcher**

Data concern	Data collection	Role of the researcher
<b>Group narrative or process</b>	Group artwork Group interaction Group observation Group interview Group discussion Group video footage	Facilitator Participant observer Gather and record group narrative
<b>Arts-based elements in process</b>	Researcher reflections Participant suggestions	Research process leader Co-ordinates the research process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise consent and authorisation</li> <li>• Arrange video equipment and editing</li> <li>• Arrange tape recordings</li> <li>• Compile art materials</li> <li>• Contracts with media teams</li> <li>• Arrange non-participant observers</li> </ul> Teacher researcher
<b>Narratives of 14 Individual participants</b>	Individual artworks In-depth interview Focused interview Written documents Observation	Arrange a non-participant Interviewer Prepare recording equipment and cassettes for the recording of the interviews Transcribe interviews and analyse interviews



<b>Narratives of researcher and observers</b>	Field notes Reflexive writing Discussions with fellow group leaders	Record own narrative and narratives or comments of observers
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### 1.8 Data analysis strategies

*Data is not evidence. Data is the initial information which shows the situation as it is* (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000:208).

The research process has, as its primary focus, the **individual narrative** or the phenomenological aspect (of the 14 participants), while the **group narrative** (gathered through group artworks and interactions) may be regarded as the milieu within which the “self-concept journey” takes place. The group narrative will be referred to or sketched at appropriate moments during the data analysis which will, in turn, focus on the 14 individual narratives.

The data was analysed by means of a type of inductive data analysis process. A “truly” inductive process implies that categories, codes or patterns emerge from the data and are not predetermined (McMillan & Schumacher, 2000). The reason why I inserted the phrase *a type of* is because I investigated five predetermined self-concept categories or domains that emerged from a study of the literature pertaining to the adolescent self-concept, but the codes and descriptions that emerged from the data were in accordance with the definition of McMillan and Schumacher (2000).

Yin (1994:102) explains that *there are few fixed formulas or cookbook recipes to guide the novice* when analysing (qualitative) case study evidence. According to Yin (1994) the researcher’s innovative thinking, accompanied by sufficient evidence and consideration of the alternative interpretations, will determine the data analysis procedures. Apart from “a general analytic strategy in the first place” (Yin, 1994:103) the aims are to portray evidence fairly, to arrive at convincing analytic conclusions and to demarcate alternative interpretations.

According to Gaskell (2000:54) the data analysis process is not a purely mechanical process, because it depends on “... creative insights, which may well occur when the researcher is talking to a friend or colleague, or in those moments of contemplation when driving, walking or taking a bath”. Creswell (1998:149) illustrates in table format the data analysis and representation of five research

traditions that he discussed. Of these five I selected *phenomenology* and *case study*, as depicted in **table 1.3**. (The selection given comprises the exact text, and must thus be regarded as a quotation.)

**Table 1.3: The data analysis process according to Creswell (1998)**

Data analysis and representation	Phenomenology	Case study
<b>Data managing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and organise files for data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and organise files for data</li> </ul>
<b>Recording, memoing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes</li> </ul>
<b>Describing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the meaning of the experience for researcher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the case and its context</li> </ul>
<b>Classifying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find and list statements of meaning for individuals</li> <li>• Group statements into meaning units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use categorical aggregation</li> <li>• Establish patterns of categories</li> </ul>
<b>Interpreting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a textural description, "What happened"</li> <li>• Develop a structural description, "How the phenomenon was experienced"</li> <li>• Develop an overall description of the experience, the "essence"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use direct interpretation</li> <li>• Develop naturalistic generalisations</li> </ul>
<b>Representing, visualising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present narration of the "essence" of the experience; use tables or figures of statements and meaning units.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present narrative augmented by tables, and figures</li> </ul>

Chapter 4 presents a detailed explanation of the way in which the data was collected, organised and interpreted. In section 4.5 I explain how the data are analysed according to a process similar to the one explained by Creswell (1998) in the table above and also according to a process similar to the one explained by McMillan and Schumacher (2001). I use the word *similar* because, it is not possible to follow another's data analysis framework exactly. My data analysis procedures I believe align favourably with the data analysis procedures of the Creswell (1998) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001).



### 1.9 Trustworthiness – quality assurance

According to Guba and Lincoln (1999) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001) the following techniques or strategies enhance the trustworthiness (credibility) of naturalistic enquiries and qualitative designs:

- extended involvement in a research setting
- disciplined observation
- discussions with colleagues
- employing a variety of data sources – multiple researchers
- multimethod strategies
- constantly checking data and interpretations or member checking
- electronically captured data
- discrepant data
- low-inference descriptors

**Table 1.4** contains a description of the ways in which an attempt was made to uphold the trustworthiness of the study by implementing the techniques or strategies listed above as meaningfully as possible.

**Table 1.4: Trustworthiness strategies and implementation**

<b>Trustworthiness strategy</b>	<b>Implementation of strategy</b>
<b>Intensive involvement in a research setting</b>	I will be the teacher involved in the research environment for a period of two months – actively gathering the data and conducting the interviews. I believe it will be possible to minimise bias and misconceptions over this period and to reveal the aspects peculiar and particular to this situation.
<b>Disciplined observation</b>	I will record my own observations as a teacher-researcher, but will also employ a number of non-participant observers. Sharing the observation task in this manner could result in comprehensible characteristics and reveal dissimilar patterns.
<b>Discussions with colleagues</b>	I will be the research leader and will be able to consult my colleagues regarding the body of insights generated, methodological aspects, relieve personal anxieties and validate assessments made.
<b>Employing a variety of data sources – multiple researchers</b>	Two other teachers will conduct the exact same procedure with their respective groups – under my leadership – thus guaranteeing different viewpoints and securing triangulation.



<b>Multi-method strategies</b>	I will employ a variety of methods or strategies, ranging from art works to video footage and other “slice-of-life” pieces that will validate assumptions and claims, thus making triangulation possible in data collection and analysis.
<b>Constantly checking data and interpretations or member checking</b>	I will, if possible, at certain moments of the transcription and data gathering process, consult the members of the participant community in order to validate assertions. An independent academic (not involved with the study) will scrutinise the analysis and evaluate the data collection evidence.
<b>Electronically captured data</b>	I will record data electronically by means of audio recorders and video cameras – this will constitute evidence of data collected. For example, digital photographs of the learners will also be taken at a specific stage of the arts-based process.
<b>Participant review</b>	I will consult the particular participants to scrutinise the researcher’s synthesis of events in the transcribed interviews.
<b>Discrepant data</b>	I will reveal exceptions to emerging patterns
<b>Low-inference descriptors</b>	I will attempt to stay as close as possible to the precise terms of the situation and not dwell in my (own) abstract language.

With reference to **table 1.4**, and in light of the above discussion, I will assume that the intended arts-based research process – with its multiple teachers, observers, various data collection strategies, 10-week intensive research period, six small groups and different “paradigmatic” viewpoints – will ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

### 1.10 Ethical considerations

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) discuss ethical matters pertaining to qualitative fieldwork and it is in accordance with what they say that I undertook to do the following:

- Obtain from the management of the school in which I teach written consent to conduct the research – I had already obtained verbal consent.
- Obtain informed, written consent from all parents whose children were Grade 9 pupils at the school in 2006.
- Obtain an extra written consent form signed by those parents whose children were to participate in the individual interviews with the non-participant observer.
- Provide assurance to the individual participants who were to provide interview data that their accounts would be confidential and that they would remain anonymous in my texts.

- Describe verbally to the two classes of Grade 9 learners what the research process in essence entailed and explain the aims of the teacher-researchers in Life Orientation.

The intended arts-based research process was conducted in an educational setting with two classes of approximately 24 learners each, three teacher-facilitators, one videographer (who moved from group to group) and three non-participant observers. The latter rendered anonymity a rather “open” issue. It was difficult to keep all the other pupils of the school “ignorant” about what was happening. Fortunately, as far as I was concerned, the subject matter with which we dealt in the research group setting was Life Orientation material pertaining to self and social matters.

### **1.11 Outline of chapters**

Chapter 1. Background and orientation to this study.

Chapter 2. A discussion of narrative therapy and the arts.

Chapter 3. A literature overview pertaining to the self-concept.

Chapter 4. Conceptual orientation, research design and methodology

Chapter 5. Analysis and presentation of results

Chapter 6. Conclusions and recommendations

References

Addenda