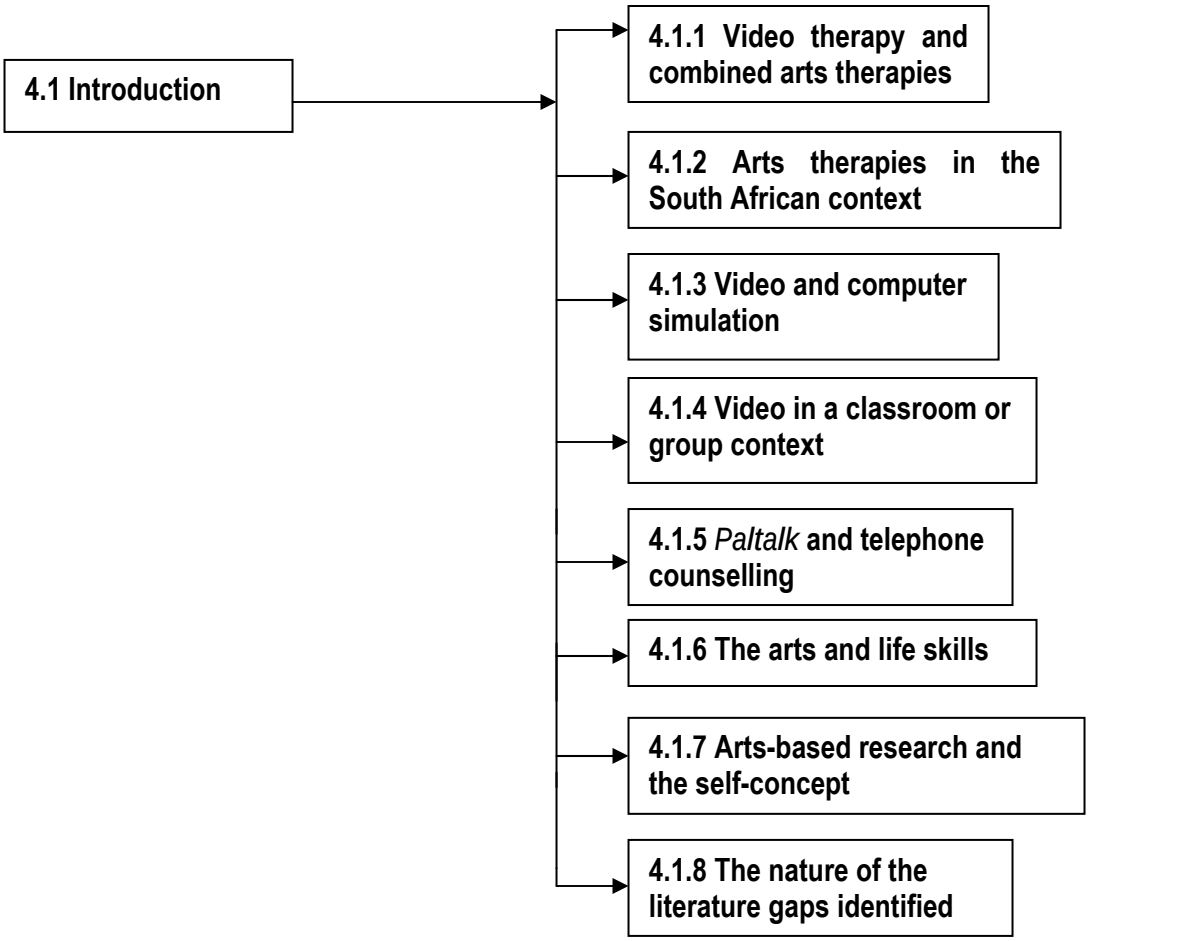
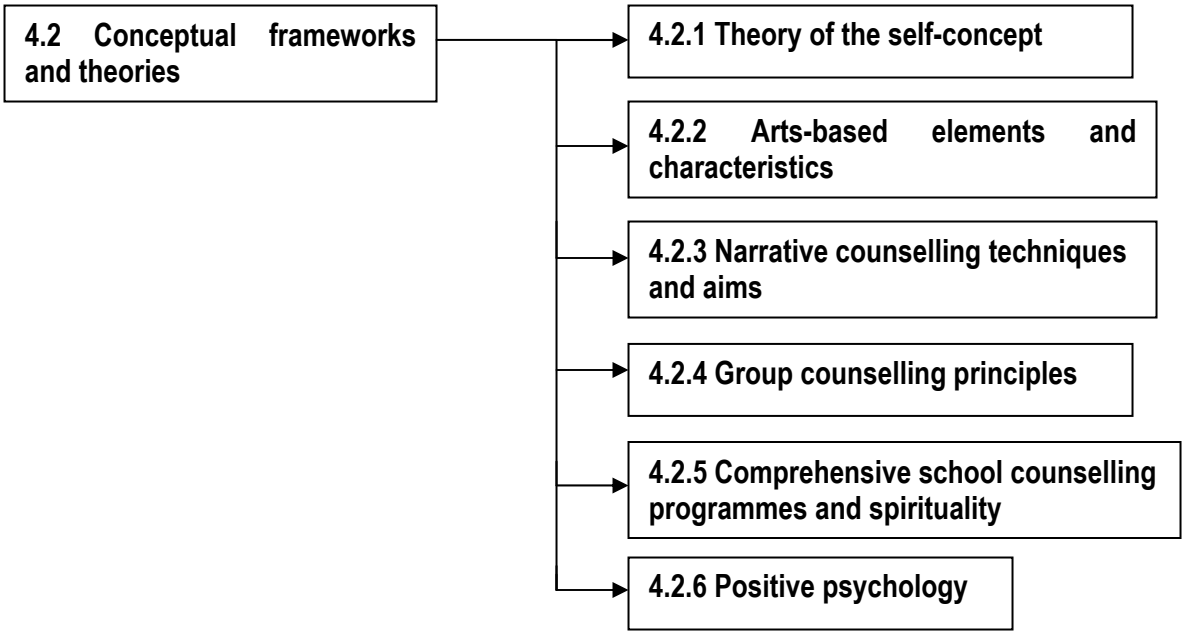
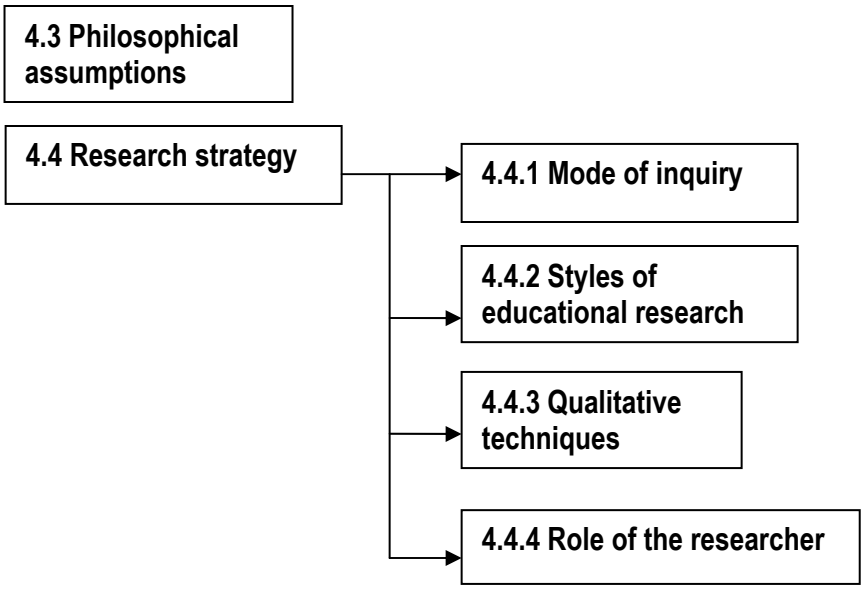
Chapter 4

CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY



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Chapter 4

4 Conceptual orientation, research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

In 2003, when I embarked on the literature search for my Master's degree I discovered that information on the separate modalities of the arts therapies was "readily" available, but that information on the application of **combined arts** therapies – which is my interest – for the counselling field was scarce. Sections 4.1.1 to 4.1.7 will discuss aspects of the arts, arts-based research, and video and technology pertaining to this study in order to contextualise the research and to reveal gaps in literature that contrast with the focus of the study. Section 4.1.8 will highlight clearly the gaps in the literature.

4.1.1 Video therapy and combined arts therapies

In my Master's study I made use of **video** as an integrating medium in order to render an aesthetic (pleasant, even humorous) edited (movie-format) **overview** of the counselling journey and personal growth of the individual client. It had not been possible to locate this particular application of video or a similar approach anywhere else. The literature on video therapy (and its applications) usually deals with adverse psychotherapeutic scenarios (and the immediate playback function) and do not include editing, music and inspirational aspects. During September 2005 I did academic searches to review the video literature. The databases revealed existing literature responses similar to those of 2003. My PhD study will thus be an attempt to extrapolate the methodology I used previously – with regards to video and the combined arts therapies approach on the individual level – to a group-counselling environment and a group-learning or group-guidance environment.

4.1.2 Arts therapies in the South African context

It is important – and on this I base the rationale and justification for my study – to note that local (South African) studies (I could trace in 2005) employed **one arts** modality only. For example, the study by Steenberg (1995) aimed at establishing the impact of a therapeutic **art** programme on the psychological functioning of children in an orphanage. Smit (1999) investigated the effect which art as a therapeutic aid had on the treatment of the adolescent suffering from anorexia nervosa. My aim (as stated earlier) is to employ **multiple arts modalities** within a group guidance (or group

counselling) context. (Internationally speaking I could not identify an approach with the exact multiple focus and combinations which I intended using.)

The title of my study reads: THE IMPACT OF **NARRATIVE ARTS ACTIVITIES** ON THE **SELF-CONCEPT** OF GRADE 9 LEARNERS IN **GROUP** CONTEXT. As stated earlier I could not discover much that resembled my aims of employing the arts to help "ordinary" learners to get to know themselves and others better (in a colourful – even humorous way) by **positively** and actively expressing themselves through the arts within a group context. Most of the recent and "exciting" journal articles pertaining to the literature searches were overseas articles and the local few which I did uncover in the library concerned social work perspectives that did not fit my requirements exactly. I decided to focus on innovative thinking pertaining to **group** work – as revealed by recent overseas journal articles – especially in respect of the use of technology (computers, internet or telephone).

4.1.3 Video and computer simulation

Smokowski (2003:9) argues that *there has been less emphasis on using technology such as video and computer programs within group sessions as a part of group activity* and he proposes the incorporation of a combination of **video** and **computer simulation** to assist in building skills within the group context. The core of the processes described by Smokowski (2003) pertains to video modelling within a group work context. This may either be facilitated by watching existing videos of actors demonstrating a scenario (this leads to passive spectators) or by giving group members the opportunity to write, act and film their own behavioural modelling scenes (this leads to active participation). The ideal situation could be a combination of both where the group leader first facilitates a broader discussion by referring to "universal" truths, and then allows the group to tackle particular issues within the group context. Smokowski (2003) suggests interesting techniques, for example, assigning the camera a role as an "actor" which means that the camera becomes more than merely a recording device.

Computer simulation would be a challenge to me, simply because I lack the knowledge and skill (at this stage) of the particular electronic or technical demands posed by computer simulation. According to Smokowski (2003) the simulation process is not that difficult and merely entails

employing specific simulation software that will receive and manipulate particular rehearsed video scenes (by the group members). The benefit of utilising simulation is it allows the integration of text, transitions and programmed decisions.

I really enjoy Smokowski's (2003) technological appeal, but, from previous experience with technological devices (including video editing), although the end-results are indeed exciting, these devices necessitate access to specialised video editing rooms and professionals – unless you are an able computer expert yourself, and versed in editing. The scenario described by Smokowski (2003) appears to be a location equipped with every electronic device which is available and accessible, and it would seem that the group members themselves had had hands-on experience with the technology. Although ideal, this is rarely the case in practice. Perhaps at this point it might be relevant to contrast briefly the particular approach with video used in this study with that mentioned above.

4.1.4 Video in a classroom or group context

The plethora of technological advances described above will not be available in this study as the study takes place within the context of the classroom, and the focus is on artistic expressions and its implications for group interaction. The video camera will capture specific moments – joined together in a studio at a later stage when the teacher-researcher will edit the video with the help of a video editor. It is only at the end of the process that the group will see themselves in the edited format. However, it will be possible to show "raw" recordings to the group during the process to stimulate dialogue, to ask for a representative of the group to be present in the editing room and to suggest the preferred music. The point about the application of video in this study is that it was employed as an "artistic" medium striving to capture a colourful and beautiful experience. The true "cinematic" beauty of the video process with all its special effects will be revealed only at the culmination of the guidance (or counselling) process. The group members will not be involved with the technological aspect of this approach – they will be actors per se.

Adolescents in affluent environments have access to virtually all technological (digital) devices available and imaginable, and interesting options that might be considered during the arts-based research process could include the following:

- Inviting participants to feed digital cell phone images or videos into the data bank,
- Allowing participants to contribute significant personal video footage, and
- Permitting personal computer art and slide shows to serve as footage for the group profile.

To conclude the discussion surrounding Smokowski's (2003) suggestions: *Further research is needed to investigate how technological activities are most effectively integrated into face-to-face groups. Before proper research can be done, however, practitioners must feel comfortable using technologies such as video and computer simulation in group work practice* Smokowski (2003:21).

4.1.5 *Paltalk* and telephone counselling

Another interesting application of (telecommunications) technology takes place on the Internet. Page, Jencius, Rehfuss, Foss, Dean, Petruzzi, et al. (2003) describe a study carried out on the experiences of students in being part of an online discussion group, *Paltalk*. It would seem that the experience was beneficial to most participants, but the major problem at the end appeared to be of a technical nature and concerned the quality of the Internet connection itself. Without a proper connection the audio quality was poor and the tones or nuances in the voices lost. Rosenfield (2002) described another application of telecommunications technology, namely, telephone counselling. She regards telephone counselling as a completely different activity to the hotline service provided by a layperson. She is of the opinion that true telephone counselling as a procedure undertaken by a qualified health professional is to assist a client over an extended period at pre-arranged times in order to resolve personal matters.

4.1.6 The arts and life skills

The focus will now be on the arts aspects of the study and possible connections with life skills. McAlevey (1997) conducted a series of **art** *(singular)* **therapy** classes with a group of nine youths (16-19 years of age) who were in foster care. McAlevey (1997) linked the art therapy lessons or exercises to the conveying of "intangible" life skills (i.e. problem-solving, communication abilities, teamwork and self-esteem). Apparently the success was not overwhelming, but the lessons brightened their moods and created an amicable space for playful competition. The intended approach in this study emulates the life skills aspects of McAlevey's (1997) approach, but incorporates **multiple arts** therapies within the group-counselling context.

Chen, Noosbond and Bruce (1998) advocated the therapeutic document model as an active agent of change for groups. This model relates to the **narrative** aspect of the approach used in the study. The conceptual framework of this model stems from combining the language element of social constructionism with narrative co-construction. The essence of the approach entails presenting the client at the end of the session with all the counsellor's notes (recorded during each session) for scrutiny. The language must be clear and comprehensible to the client. There is a possibility that discussions may ensue. The therapeutic document (or therapeutic letter) will reveal the aims of narrative counselling from the viewpoint of the counsellor in respect of the client's situation – the result of group interaction that took place during the note taking exercise. These documents are kept by either the counsellor or the client, and become the linking agents between sessions. One of the advantages for the client is that the document stimulates reflection, and the counsellor models transparency. The approach adopted in this study differs from the therapeutic document model in the following ways: Firstly, the therapeutic letter writing is carried out by each individual member and shared with a fellow group member, and secondly, additional arts (documents/) applications also serve to capture narratives.

4.1.7 Arts-based research and the self-concept

Numerous research projects have focused on the self-concept, but it would appear that none have linked the self-concept to a combination of narrative and arts-based components. Fraser (1989), for example, conducted a study that linked the development of the self-image in orphaned children to play therapy techniques. Section 4.1.8 will discuss the nature of the gaps in the literature that could be filled (partially at least) by key components of this study.

4.1.8 The nature of the literature gaps identified

In the light of the background sketched above the focus of this study could make valuable contributions (or suggestions) to a number of aspects listed below that were found to be missing in the literature:

- **How the combined arts modalities (or multiple therapeutic arts) impact on the self-concept of the adolescent within a group scenario** (which is the primary focus of this study).

- The value of a multiple arts modalities approach for an educational group setting over a two-month period (within a South African setting).
- The merit of applying video as an integrative and affirming cinematic medium within an educational environment.
- The potential of a multiple arts modalities approach in the facilitation of the teaching of life skills.
- The potential of the arts-based approach to convey and portray a personal narrative according to the principles of narrative counselling.

4.2 Conceptual frameworks and theories

The basic components in **figure 4.1** (and their most important sub-elements) as pertaining to this research process will be explained in order to substantiate the inclusion of the particular theoretical and conceptual constructs, and to advance the rationale for conducting this study.

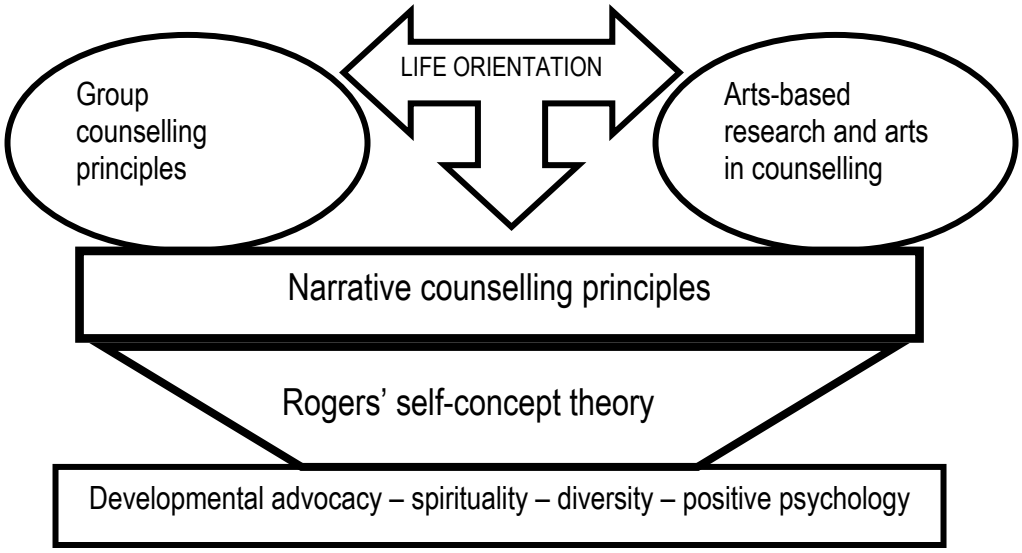

Figure 4.1: Conceptual framework components

4.2.1 Theory of the self-concept

Rogers maintained that a person experiences stress when the ideal self (concerning dreams, values and life goals) is in conflict with the perceived self. Rogers associated himself with the humanistic-phenomenological school and, in essence, his theory expresses belief in the potential

of the individual to attain goals and to change. The subjective experience the person has of himself impacts on the self-concept and the personality. The environment may either facilitate or inhibit positive personal growth, but the individual himself is the only person who is able to actualise personal potential. An atmosphere in which unconditional acceptance prevails is the ideal space within which the individual may actualise his potential optimally. The counselling approach, advocated by Rogers, attempts to assist the client to focus inwardly in order to initiate the progression towards self-development, which will eventually culminate in self-actualisation (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989; Sharry, 2004; Van Niekerk & Prins, 2001). The self-concept and its facets were discussed at length in chapter 3.

In the next section the core aspects of the arts therapies will be discussed – these should be viewed as possible building blocks with which to facilitate change within the self-concept.

4.2.2 Arts-based elements and characteristics

The arts and their therapeutic value were discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 (see 2.5), but the core aspects will be summarised briefly. It is not always easy to capture the gains or benefits of the arts-based elements, because it is no easy task to package the arts into neat descriptions and manageable understandings and therefore it is easily overlooked. The aim is to employ the arts because of the deep personal benefits they offer the client or "art participant" (as was illustrated in 2.5.3). Involvement in the arts may lead to, among others, a cathartic experience, an awakening of creativity, healing of emotional wounds, the presentation of metaphors, and the enrichment of the spiritual life.

4.2.3 Narrative counselling techniques and aims

Narrative therapy was discussed in detail in chapter 2 (see 2.2 – 2.5.2), but the main aspects pertaining to narrative therapy will be briefly stated here. Narrative therapy aims to uncover the lost resources within the person and his or her milieu by revealing the true nature of the problem through externalisation. The narrative therapist assists the client to unravel the negative influences of the problem and to value those areas in which the influence exerted by the problem is minimal or of no significance. The basic narrative process entails telling the story, allowing alternatives to emerge, adopting a worthier story, making the implementation of the new story known and inviting support (see 2.4.3).

The key feature of narrative therapy is in its methodology – the externalising privilege – which affords the client an opportunity to engage with the problem from a new vantage point and from the perspective of emotional distance. Externalisation creates a space between the client and the problem and, through externalising dialogues, the client grasps that his identity is actually linked with the lives of others who share related dreams and hopes. A reconnection with the interpersonal environment may thus be established (see 2.4.5). The reconnection with the cultural or interpersonal landscape may be further enhanced by the involvement of the appreciative audience accompanying the client (see 2.4.6).

4.2.4 Group counselling principles

Certain of the advantages of groupwork with adolescents may be found in the ability of the group to facilitate peer learning in peer culture, it may lead to the establishment of friendships and render supportive and accurate peer information. The driving force of the group stems from the individual differences represented in the group, and personality may be revealed through this "tension". The adolescent group methodology is characterised by the balancing of activities and discussion, and includes a very real element of fun which serves as reward for the serious aspects of groupwork (Chazan, 2001; Sharry, 2004).

A fundamental assumption in groupwork is that new social skills will be imparted during the interaction with peers in a safe environment and the opportunity to help others foster self-help skills presents itself. The existence of group cohesion as a bonding force makes group identification, co-operation and mutual goal orientation possible. The information provided by the group is easier to accept than the suggestions of the individual counsellor – the opportunity for mutual strengthening prevents the group counsellor from manipulating the environment (Billow, 2003; Rose & LeCroy, 1991).

Certain elements of the type of group "counselling environment" (in the study more a group learning scenario with counselling principles) that were emulated in order to conduct the research are to be found in Smith's (1995) description of an expressive or creative group:

- Clients are given the opportunity for self-expression through symbolic media, such as drama or art, in order to assist the verbalisation of abstract personal issues.
- Explicit self-disclosure is replaced by opportunities for "pretending".
- Videotaping is carried out for group viewing without formal interpretation.

Chazan (2001), in discussing Group Analytic Therapy and referring to the systems element in group therapy, makes an "obvious", but thought provoking statement, to the effect that, when the reader is reminded that, whilst group members are individuals, they may only act in a particular way within the group because of the group – the group allows them to assume peculiar and specific roles. The group environment provides the possibility of experiencing symmetry, which implies that each member may take on the role of helper, helped, therapist and needy member.

In their discussion on the way in which to teach students to carry out group work from an ecological perspective Conyne and Bemak (2004:9) suggest a very novel concept: *We suggest that group work needs to stand independently as a major type of mental health practice. It should not be considered an extension of individual work, no more than a reduction of organisational or community work. In order for groups to be more synchronous with the changing world, we advocate that group work assume its unique identity.* The "ecological" concept implies that a group is situation bound, and a live social structure in which information is continuously being produced and processed within a contained environment of fluctuating forces. The group is never seen in isolation, but always as an agent that affects its environment, and as a receiver of influence due to factors inherent in the situation (Conyne & Bemak, 2004).

The next section will reveal the need for a more comprehensive perspective on school counselling in order to afford the participant a spiritual dimension which will heighten the effectiveness of the counselling experience.

4.2.5 Comprehensive school counselling programmes and spirituality

It was decided to devote a section to comprehensive school counselling and spirituality because recent literature has revealed that these elements appear to be missing in counselling. This resonated and it clarified the aims concerning the arts-based research process. The intention is for

the arts-based experience to touch the lives of the participants on various levels and, in this way, alleviate certain of their developmental and spiritual needs.

According to McLeod (2003) little research has been carried out in non-counselling settings by nurses, social workers, teachers or the clergy. He maintains that the reason for this is that counselling is under pressure to establish itself as an autonomous profession separate from nursing, teaching, social work or theology. McLeod (2003) is also of the opinion that counselling needs to be frequently reconstructed or reinvented in order to keep up with the pace of social change so as to be able to deliver relevant therapeutic ideas. The aim of this study is to ascertain ways in which a type of group "arts counselling" could function in the South African Private Schools system (initially) and how the image of the school "counsellor" (or Life Orientation teacher) could possibly be improved or built up.

It is the aim of this study to meet certain of the developmental needs of the students by giving them the opportunity to socialise within the research context – which will also incorporate elements from their Life Orientation programme. Thus, the aim becomes to engage them constructively in a "non-threatening" process that will include colourful, manageable and meaningful tasks. Galassi and Akos (2004) reviewed the American models of school counselling and proposed developmental advocacy as the approach for school counselling in the twenty-first century. The incorporation of positive psychology, resiliency and positive youth development into school counselling programmes in order to facilitate the comprehensive developmental approach will replace the remaining elements of the *disease-oriented model of human functioning* (Galassi & Akos, 2004:7).

What is particularly significant about the above-mentioned perspective is the fact that it releases the school counsellor from his obscure role within the school so that he is able to serve as an advocate and secure meaningful educational opportunities for all students. Galassi and Akos (2004) discuss various frameworks that could benefit the counselling arena in respect of those aspects which they perceive to be lacking in the present. The frameworks that could possibly lend support to this study are **resilience** (fostering resiliency and academic, social, and vocational competence) and the **development of competence** (the ability to have meaningful interactions

within a changing environment and thus acquire competence). Aspects of these frameworks will form part of the research process.

According Galassi and Akos (2004) if it were possible for counsellors to implement the role of developmental **advocate** the following benefits could result:

- The focus would shift from prevention and repair to the promotion of development.
- The skills, knowledge and attitudes associated with healthy youth development, competence and thriving would be emphasised.
- Environments and social contexts enhancing positive development would be promoted
- Justice for all students would be mediated.
- Policies and environments not conducive to the development of students would be identified.
- Other professionals within the school would collaborate to improve service to students.

The reason for referring to this article by Galassi and Akos (2004) is to place the intended research within the broader counselling context and to support the rationale for the arts-based narrative approach. To conclude, Galassi and Akos (2004) maintain that developmental advocacy underlines proactive approaches in order to further the asset-building capacity of the educational environment. The intended research process will draw heavily on the assets of the pupils and the school. The possibility of assisting students – at least to a degree – with the resources within them and also of tapping the present manpower of the school meaningfully will be investigated.

Sink (2004) advocates the incorporation of the spiritual element into the comprehensive (developmental) approach because this incorporation of the spiritual element could be seen as a means of assisting students to develop a sense of purpose in life and to cope with challenges. It is suggested that space be allocated for meaning-making and self-energising activities (that voice morals and values) in order to channel emotional expression and, in the process, enhance the spiritual state of the students. Sink (2004) argues further that, because the link with spirituality is obvious, the school counsellor could uncover this spirituality of the students within individual and group settings, and employ it as a resource in order to stimulate personal-social development, problem solving, healing and wholeness. In the environment in which the study takes place a specific version of a faith-based spirituality prevails, to which the researcher also adheres. This

would allow the use of the suggestions of problem solving and meaning-making activities, but there would also be freedom to address the relationship with the source of the spirituality within the school in particular, and to discover how it fits into their culture.

John Swinton (2001) is another voice pleading for the introduction of spirituality into mental health care and he argues that spirituality (even though currently on the periphery) is of crucial importance to the recipients of therapy. It would therefore be to the advantage of both client and caregivers if this spirituality were recognised. Swinton (2001) acknowledges the fact that it is not easy to define spirituality (he makes a clear distinction between spirituality and formal religion) and maintains that spirituality evokes the need to answer existential questions and to uncover the meaning of different life aspects. Spirituality also establishes the need for human connectedness and prompts the willingness to transcend the self in significant ways.

According to Sharry (2004) the following comprise certain developmental characteristics of the adolescent (11-16):

- An ability to think about the world in far more complicated ways than they did in earlier stages.
- Exclusive use of language with which to express themselves.
- A struggle to become independent of their parents.
- Sexuality, self-identity, peer pressure and academic pressure are important issues.
- Friends become the desired support structure.
- Certain adolescents may become more private, self-conscious and awkward.

Sharry (2004) maintains that the developmental level should be viewed as an opportunity rather than as a hurdle and concedes that, even though adolescents may be articulate, the counsellor must not overrate the value of conversation. The counsellor must ensure that activities which awaken other expressive modes and provide other knowledge form part of the process. The research process in this study will take place in the classroom during the normal school hours in the Life Orientation periods.

The design of the arts-based process emulates the values of Life Orientation as suggested by the curriculum for Grade 9. The next section encapsulates the essence of the South African Life Orientation perspective.

4.2.5.1 South African context and the Life Orientation curriculum

Broadly speaking Life Orientation within the South African context aims at enhancing existing knowledge of human rights and HIV and Aids – it embraces inclusivity and strives for environmental and social justice. In order to foster the growth of these Life Orientation ideals the teacher needs to assume various roles ranging from advocate of democracy to facilitator of interpersonal skills – aiming at a learner-centred approach. In order to maximise the learning experience for the learners learning content takes place "within" learning activities so as to enable learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

The teacher should be able to assist the individual and the group as a whole to become aware of the skills, resources, talents and dreams within, to be able to name these specifically and to motivate the parties involved in a manner that is non-threatening and beautiful. The afore-mentioned sentence describes part of the eco-systemic model (Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001), and captures the "heart" which the practical part of the research process intends to instill in the learners (and the researcher).

A brief overview of the holistic, integrated and dynamic eco-systemic model, according to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001), will be presented. Human beings are creative, spiritual beings who are endowed with a body, mind and soul. A successful Life Orientation programme should embrace all these elements in order for it to be termed holistic. The network of interrelated life skills components and processes are seen as an integrated broad system that may be broken up for teaching purposes. The micro-system of the individual is seen as being in dynamic interaction with the internal and external environments, this dynamic interaction is perceived as the element that ensures human survival.

4.2.5.2 Diversity

According to Smith, Richards, Mac Granley and Obiakor (2004:4), who address multiculturalism within the context of counselling and psychology, *culture and power are omnipresent at multiple levels in every human interaction. They are therefore fundamental to the dynamics of every therapeutic relationship, whether or not the therapist or client acknowledges them. Optimally, culture and power should be recognised in all therapeutic relationships, but it is usually the contrasts in inter-racial or inter-gender relationships, for example, that heighten awareness of cultural and power dynamics that impact treatment.*

The reason for devoting a section to diversity is that the research site is multiracial or "multicultural" in terms of race/culture. However it is not as rich a site in respect of diverse religious backgrounds. As was indicated in the introduction the research site is a private faith-based school with pupils from various groups. The majority of the students are South African, while a few students are from Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and China. Within the school there prevails a healthy atmosphere of friendships across racial barriers, but certain students do occasionally claim that there are teachers who do not understand their culture. The power base in the school consists of white teachers with a middle class perspective. I realised that it would be beneficial for the study at least to familiarise myself with the demands of a counselling scenario which is characterised by diversity.

The following quotation by Sharry (2004:7) was found to be extremely apt in respect of the previous paragraph: "It is important to note that non-discriminatory or multi-cultural practice is not limited to working with clients from different ethnic groups. There are many other groups in society that have distinct sub-cultures which require understanding and appreciation." This research investigates a particular faith-based subculture.

According to Smith, Richards, Mac Granley and Obiakor (2004) the essential aim of multiculturalism (or diversity) is neither contrasting nor being aware of differences, but instead enriching the interpersonal relationships of all concerned. Growing relationships demand change, and the multicultural relationship also necessitates change as newly formed perspectives replace old questionable views. Competence in diversity is linked to the character and personality of the therapist, who should value others, be an attentive listener, and be willing to minimise reactivity and

prejudice. Vaughn (2004) differentiates between a colour-blind approach and a mindful approach. If the therapist employs a colour-blind approach the needs of the client will be seen from a monocultural perspective, while, on the other hand, if the therapist adopts a mindful approach the viewpoint of the client will be taken into consideration with compassion in order to discover the treatment preferred by the client.

4.2.6 Positive psychology

"The aim of positive psychology is to catalyse a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life" (Seligman, 2002:3). According to Compton (2005) broadly speaking the aim of positive psychology may be seen as building human strength and nurturing human talent. Seligman (2002:7) maintains that, in positive psychotherapy, strengths such as: *courage, interpersonal skill, insight, optimism, realism, capacity for pleasure, putting troubles into perspective, futuremindedness* and *finding purpose* are addressed.

Positive psychology investigates "the adaptive, the creative, and the emotionally fulfilling elements of human behaviour" (Compton, 2005:3). Compton (2005) differentiates between three levels or dimensions of positive psychology: firstly, the *subjective level* which scrutinises the happy emotions, secondly, the *individual level* that hones in on the positive individual traits (such as honesty and wisdom), and, thirdly, the *group or societal level* that regards various aspects of positive institutions. Compton (2005) maintains that the distinguishing feature of positive psychology is its emphasis on the type of life that results in the greatest sense of fulfilment and contentment.

4.3 Philosophical assumptions

> *The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis)* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:18).

The explanation which McNiff and Whitehead (2002) provide regarding the ontological, epistemological and methodological stances to which action researchers adhere was found to be enlightening and resonating (even though this study is based in phenomenology). As I was reading

it I realised that aspects of my personality or my outlook on life find encouragement or affirmation within the descriptors outlined by McNiff and Whitehead (2002). I therefore "agree" with McNiff and Whitehead (2002) and want to link the episodic arts-based component of my research project to their base of "assumptions" or beliefs – also because certain of their statements ring true within the positive psychology arena. In brief McNiff and Whithead (2002) state that action researchers believe:

- **Ontological issues:** people are creative beings who construct their own identities according to various values, whilst they also grant others the freedom to do the same
- the future could be better than the present if we live to improve relationships in the present – however small the effort
- action research deals with issues relating to truth (e.g., social justice and tender approaches to life)
- **Epistemological issues:** knowledge is an act of doing – a live process by means of which people generate personal knowledge by the living and learning principle
- the learning experience may be hastened by critical awareness aided by the subconscious awareness
- **Methodological issues:** action researchers do target harmony, but rather create space in which differences are tolerated through negotiation
- reflection on action is valid only when it is embedded in relationships of dialogue as secured in the community
- action researchers employ their work as a vehicle to optimise life-affirming growth and learning for the self and others

Certain of the above-mentioned action research philosophical assumptions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) are echoed by the five qualitative philosophical assumptions of Creswell (1998). The content in **Table 4.1** is a slightly abbreviated version of that of Creswell (1998:75).

Table 4.1: Creswell's qualitative philosophical assumptions

Philosophical assumptions with implications for practice			
Assumption	**Question**	**Characteristics**	**Implications for practice**
Ontological	Nature of reality?	Subjective, multiple reality – participant view point	Participant quotes and themes reveal differing perspectives
Epistemological	Relationship between researcher and participant?	Researcher distance minimised	Insider spends time with participants in setting – insider perspective
Axiological	Role of values?	Biases and values acknowledged	Values shape narrative openly, interpretation is shared by researcher and participants
Rhetorical	Language of research?	Personal presence and literary informal style	Engaging style, possibly in first person.
Methodological	Research process?	Inductive logic, topic seen in context, design emerges	Details are contextualised, and analysed – regular revision of questions

4.4 Research strategy

> *A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that the researcher employs as he or she moves from paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put paradigms into motion. At the same time, strategies of inquiry also connect the researcher to specific methods of collecting and analysing empirical materials* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:22).

4.4.1 Mode of inquiry

Essentially this study will be an **interpretive**, **interactive**, **qualitative** (case study) and **idiographic** inquiry, predominantly employing the **phenomenological paradigm**, but elements of **postmodernism** could also feature. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) **interactive qualitative** inquiry is a detailed or "rich" study that employs face-to-face data collection techniques with which to study people within their natural settings. The researcher prefers the perspectives of the people in order to understand the phenomena under investigation. The aim of the **qualitative** researcher is to build a comprehensive and holistic picture with the aid of the narratives or descriptions of the information.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007) **qualitative** research is a research methodology that focuses on understanding the processes and cultural and social contexts which support behavioural patterns. It emphasises the "why" questions. **Qualitative** research therefore endeavours to highlight the *quality and depth of information* (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:51), and not the range of information determined by quantitative research. Nieuwenhuis (2007) maintains that an **idiographic** inquiry is a constructivist approach that aims at determining those aspects which are peculiar to a particular scenario.

4.4.2 Style of educational research

The study will employ two (complete) classes of Grade 9 learners – at one site – for the duration of a 10-week period. The participants will engage in an interactive narrative arts activity process. The data collection process implied by the arts-based narrative approach necessitates the engagement in episodes of arts activities in order to generate constructs for reflection from which most of the data for this study will originate. These episodes will also enable the teacher-researcher to establish what aspects were enjoyable and what needs to change in order to facilitate optimal group engagement and individual and collective self-reflection in future applications. The narrative arts activities that will form the basis of the data collection process are similar to the methods of assessment suggested by the Life Orientation Learning Programme, namely: "action research, projects, written tasks/tests, practical demonstrations/performances, assignments, debates", and "role play" (p 25 of the Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes).

4.4.2.1 Case study

In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 1994:1). According to Cohen et al. (2000) researchers usually employ case studies in order to work interpretively and subjectively so as to gather rich descriptive data. The employment of critical theory in case study research in order to gather political and ideological elements of the context is still a novel idea with untapped possibilities. In the intended research process the aim is to gather rich description, but also, if possible, to further the "democratic" ideals of the "ideal speech situation" that is prevalent within critical theory. No "procedures" that are truly from critical theory will be utilised, but brief reference

has been made to the democratic ideals of critical theory simply because of the positive idea of allowing everyone an equal opportunity within a group[7]. The next quotation supports the argument in favour of using the case study approach.

> *Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in the real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects ... Further, contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance* (Cohen et al., 2000:181).

Case study affords the researcher the opportunity to allow the research environment to speak for itself without "over-interpretation". It also provides sufficient space to substitute quantity with quality and forcefulness, thus dividing the clarifying particular from the obscure collection. The concentration on the relevant and meaningful only enables the researcher to develop an insight into the real dynamics of the scenario and its role players (Cohen et al., 2000).

Qualitative case study procedures allow researchers the opportunity to spend lengthy periods of time in close, personal contact with the role players in the case environment under investigation in an effort to derive relevant meanings from the process of personal, disciplined reflection on the specific experience. The case study genre regards human systems as unique units that develop peculiar degrees of cohesion, and assume a "personality" of their own. This is in contrast to the view of the human system as a mere fragmented collection of traits (Stake, 2000; Sturman, 1999).

According to Stake (2000) a case study may often run the risk of not achieving academic significance simply because it lacks generalisation. It may be argued that case-by-case "uniqueness" contributes little to growing scientific theory because the focus is too inward. The responsibility is thus on the case study researcher to maintain a balanced interest during the reporting phase. This may be accomplished by deciding to what extent the complexities of the case will be scrutinised and which issues need to be raised. It is ultimately the responsibility of the researcher to determine the ultimate, over-arching narrative of the case described in his own style, even should it infringe on loyalties to certain personalities in the case study.

[7] Even though critical theory is not a key feature of any aspect of this study, I found the idea of the "ideal speech situation" (a singular aspect of critical theory) inspirational, something I wanted to create within the small groups that pertain to critical theory.

Sturman (1999) suggests the following factors for raising the credibility aspect of the case study:

- Explain data collection procedures
- Display collected data and be prepared for a re-analysis
- Report negative instances
- Acknowledge biases
- Document fieldwork analyses
- Clarify the relationship between assertion and evidence
- Distinguish between primary and secondary evidence, and description and interpretation
- Diarise the actual happenings during the different phases of the study
- Ensure there are methods in place to check the data quality

In conclusion, and also taking into account the views of the above-mentioned writers, the primary goal (apart from the specific rich details that will emerge – or the particular group narrative) of the study is to establish, within the case study format, the viability of the group context to facilitate the arts experience. During the process, with the help of the arts-based episodic exercises or activities (which share certain characteristics with an action research process), the aim is to determine which "universal factors" in the arts-based approach could be of interest to counsellors or facilitators outside the immediate research text, and in this way attempt to achieve a measure of "generalisation".

Within this case study scenario certain values prominent in action research will be employed. The data collection in the study will be based largely on reflections linked to the arts activity experience and the "products" or expressions attached to them. As these artistic episodes progress an attempt will be made to determine ways in which future activities could be improved – this will be done by probing the participants. This knowledge will largely be for my own benefit, thus activating reflective practice in me, the teacher.

As suggested earlier the process of collecting the data, bears a resemblance to certain aspects of action research. A brief discussion of action research as described in the literature will be included in order to reveal certain values or ideals which were found to be inspirational. Thereafter the

intended arts-based episodic process will be briefly contrasted with accepted action research practice.

> *As a methodology for individual and social renewal, action research holds promise as a resource for people to imagine and implement plans for their individual well-being, and also to authorise the collective to negotiate their own interpretation of a common good* (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000:113).

> *Action research is a way of working that helps us to identify the things we believe in and then work systematically and collaboratively, one step at a time, to making them come true* (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996:38).

The challenges which schools will face in the future will inevitably lead teachers to processes that will involve greater negotiation with students in order to facilitate uncertain contradictory risk taking scenarios. The environment will become conducive for action research as where teachers and students will be interacting "naturally" while they participate in a dynamic culture of teaching and learning. Action research will enable teachers and students within the educational setting to create their views of society (Posch, 2002).

Action research may be used in a variety of areas, for example, improving teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluative procedures, attitudes and values, continuing professional development of teachers, management and administration (Cohen et al., 2000). This study will attempt to enrich the teaching and learning domains primarily by attempting to introduce the participants to the untapped resources (possibly) dormant within the self with the aid of arts-based interventions, and also to contribute to the professional development of the teacher-researchers involved.

Action research is not a mere theoretical or abstract discipline – it is used by action researchers who strive to make the present a richer lived experience than the past. Action research demands action, and not merely words, in order to realise its potential for personal-social renewal. It involves the study of the actual, existing and lived practices which people utilise in case specific scenarios (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McNiff & Whitehead, 2000). According to McNiff and Whitehead (2002) action research may only constitute a vehicle of social change if the researcher discards the role of unaffected outsider or observer and assumes a more humble role, namely, that of an honest

practitioner – who also makes his own position on values and hopes transparent – in order to provide accountable reflections of all the participants in the action research scenario.

What separates action research from good professional practice? Action research is distinguished by the presence of praxis. Praxis is knowledgeable (informed) dedicated action that takes cognisance of the opinions of other people and promotes or generates understanding (/knowledge) – thus it encompasses more than the mere pursuit of successful deeds. The intention of action researchers is to align themselves with concepts that are derived from deep-rooted morals that will sustain the intervention (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996).

To conclude the episodic arts process may be viewed as a case study scenario on its own, therefore strengthening the case study rationale. The interactive elements inherent in the episodes highlight teacher-researcher (insider) participation, esteeming, and incorporate the voices and reflections of the participants – thus providing a resemblance to the "democratic" environment prevalent in action research. The aspect of the intended research approach that differentiates it from action research is the fact the arts episodes are progressively linked (constituting a narrative journey) as opposed to a single cycle that is repeated in order to perfect the practice of that single cycle. Furthermore, in the data analysis, the emphasis is not on the detail of the episodes but rather on the experiences of the participants, and thus the arts episodes may be likened to data generators. This study does not describe the inner workings of the cyclical action research process in which the emphasis is on ensuring that relevant informed teaching practice transmits the desired knowledge content or understanding.

4.4.3 Qualitative techniques

This study hopes to provide equal opportunities within a group environment for all the participants from culturally diverse backgrounds. The aim is to allow them to discover more about themselves and others in a "levelled" or "democratic" situation, and to foster the feeling of community within the classroom, thus making this truly a study of certain aspects of the "seventh moment" on a smaller scale. "The seventh moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:3).

Qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of certain phenomena within the natural state in which they occur. The aim is to describe or discover as carefully as possible the "exact" meanings or "values" the participants ascribe to these phenomena. In order to construct a "correct" interpretation of meanings as conveyed by the participants the researcher employs a range of interpretive practices that support the aims of the research. The research is thus characterised by a multi-method focus (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Creswell (1998) agrees with Denzin and Lincoln (2000) but emphasises that it is necessary to add that the researcher will be building a "complex, holistic picture" of the particular focus of the research. This study will comprise an "organised" setting as one class will form three groups, and therefore, to some degree, the setting could be regarded as an "altered" reality.

4.4.3.1 Video techniques

The visual component of the study will also rely on imagery (artworks, photographs, video clips) with which to build the data collection and analysis. Imaged-based research does not receive the recognition it deserves for the simple reason that it does not have epistemological roots in the quantitative disciplines.

The reason why images are neglected as possible contributors to the data representation is because quantitative epistemology is still very prominent, and, even in the qualitative paradigm, the use of images is hardly ever used to convey what words and numbers do in any substantial sense (Prosser, 1998).

> *Although phenomenologists often use literary sources (poetry, novels, stories, plays, etc.) as case material and as textual resources for phenomenological writing, non-discursive artistic material is commonly used for phenomenological human science. Of course, each artistic medium (painting, sculpture, music, cinematography, etc.) has its own language of expression. Objects of art are visual, tactile, auditory, kinetic texts – texts consisting of not a verbal language but a language nevertheless, and a language with its own grammar* (Van Manen, 1997:74).

In respect of the non-verbal element McMillan and Schumacher (2001) add that, for qualitative studies, the analysis of body motion and its messages (*kinesics),* or non-verbal communication, is a vital important aspect. The non-verbal data may triangulate with the verbal data, but it is

important to realise that body movements have different connotations for different cultures. The interpretation of non-verbal communication is, therefore, a process that requires caution.

Elliot (1991) advises that, when an action researcher (or in this case a reflective practitioner) uses video in the classroom, it is advisable to ask a colleague or "consultant" to assist with the video recording. If the teacher-researcher operates the video camera himself the video camera could easily become a distraction, and, if the camera is merely fixed in position it will not record the required intricacies of the interactions within the situation. It would, therefore, be expedient to employ an assistant (or video observer) who has been informed about the important aspects of the data collection process in order to arrive at good video footage. According to Czarniawska (2004), many researchers employ video equipment to prevent the loss of cues resulting from the exaggerated reliance on verbal reports. The incorporation of video does add an obtrusive element to the interview scenario, but, according to Czarniawska (2004), there are no entirely unobtrusive methods.

As Jones (2002) points out analysing video clips is no easy matter. It becomes difficult during the analysis phase to watch, listen and make notes simultaneously. The pace of recorded classroom events does not allow adequate time for instant reflection. Thus it becomes essential for the researcher to draw up a framework in advance in order to steer observation during the analysis phase. In this study video analysis will not be undertaken as described here, but the edited video will be played to the classes who participated in the Life Orientation research and their reactions to or feelings about the video will be recorded. The images of the video as such will not be analysed, but will be used "indirectly" to garner the perceptions of the pupils about the video imagery.

4.4.3.2 Photographic techniques

Photography captures changes over time, reveals the progression in engagement, makes recall possible, provides evidence, assists in bringing personal memories to life, and stimulates conversations during interviews. According to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) the best way to reveal reality is by videotape recordings because they capture both verbal and non-verbal messages.

4.4.3.3 Artworks and supplementary techniques

As mentioned in the research process and data collection plan individual and group artworks may be used to capture detail in order to stimulate focused group interviews. Video is able to capture aspects of the group interaction about the individual and group artworks, as well as the experience as a whole. These artistic items may also be included under the heading **supplementary techniques**. The incorporation of supplementary techniques into a research process increases the validity of the initial results and lends credibility to the study as a whole (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

4.4.3.4 Audio techniques

McNiff et al. (1996) regard the audiotape recorder as the most popular apparatus for action research and liken its functions to that of a camera. The researcher may also use the audiotape recorder to record informal conversations about the research and also as a talking diary. However, McNiff et al (1996) caution that those conversations only that are regarded as being of crucial importance should be transcribed in order to avoid having to control an unmanageable volume of transcriptions. Cohen et al. (2000) mention the disadvantage of using a tape recorder and alert the researcher to the fact that it might constrain the interviewee. Serious thought must be given to the use of the tape recorder in order to secure meaningful data within a secure environment.

4.4.3.5 Personal and written documents

The research data collection process provides the opportunity for the respondents to compose written, personal documents. Personal documents are narratives in the first person that reveal individual understanding and personality. These documents may take many forms, such as diary entries, personal letters and humorous memories. As indicated in the research process the researcher usually either discovers these, or they may intentionally form part of the research process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

4.4.3.6 In-depth and focused interviews

Interviewing will establish the “phenomenological experience” of the individual within the group setting. The view of Czarniawska (2004:49) of the narrative in an interview scenario is worth

mentioning. She says: "An interview is not a window on social reality but it is a part, a sample of that reality."

An in-depth interview is similar to conducting a conversation with a goal. The researcher will initiate it with a general interview guide (an almost open agenda) that covers the general issues to be discussed, but does not contain precisely worded questions to be used for all respondents. The interview structure thus leaves room for the respondent to indicate the paths he wishes to follow. The interviewer will then probe these issues. These interviews could last up to an hour and they are usually tape-recorded and transcribed to reveal common themes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:42). In order to conduct a focused interview the researcher will study the prior lived experiences[8] of the subjects and design the interview structure around these lived-experiences of the respondents. In this research study the interview will follow what happened in the group and other issues might flow from that which the respondent may wish to discuss. The focused interview enables the researcher to gather the values respondents attach to a lived-experience by eliciting their personal associations and beliefs, and thus ascertaining whether the experience was either marginal or meaningful for them (Cohen et al., 2000).

This study will use a combination of the more "rigid" in-depth interview and the focused interview. The reason for this description is that a list of specific questions (that allow deep personal responses) for the participants to answer will be used, and, once a particular question has been answered, the interviewer may allow the participant the freedom to embroider further in an "in-depth" manner should he or she so choose. The participants will also answer questions about the class scenario (as well) that they experienced as a group, and this calls to mind the methodology of the focused interview.

4.4.3.7 Group interviews vs. focus group interview (FGI)

According to Cohen et al. (2000), group interviews save time and cause minimal disruption. They naturally also group a collection of opinions. A further advantage is that group interviews are a very approachable method when working with children. Focus groups are an adjunct of group

[8] **Prior lived experiences** for this research project refer to the small group narrative arts activities that the participants will experience, and about which they will be interviewed. The data analysis process will reveal the impact of these **prior lived experiences**.

interviewing, but are used when complete strangers constitute a discussion forum. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) regard focus groups as a confirmation technique used by participant observers and in-depth interviewers. The fact that the participants in the research process do know each other negates the focus group option.

Gaskell (2000) describes the features of the group interview as follows:

- The social interaction stimulates a co-operative ethos that transforms the group into an entity that is more than the sum of its parts.
- It provides an opportunity to study group process, the influence of attitude, opinion changes and opinion headship.
- Emotional involvement may come to the fore – which is not possible in one-to-one interviews.

Group interviews with each class will be conducted at the end of the two-month narrative arts Life Orientation process. A further group interview may take place once the edited video has been be screened. The aim of these group interviews is to ascertain the general feeling in the classes and to learn about the views of the pupils (when peer pressure is present). The data gathered during these interviews will not be of major "significance" – it will be merely be regarded as a gauge with which to determine the general emotive responses which the classes as groups wish to voice about the process and the video screening respectively. This information may either support or contradict the statements made by the fourteen individual participants during the interview process.

4.4.3.8 Participant observation

The researcher (a facilitator in the group process), the video recorder assistant and a non-participant observer will record observations during the research process. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) participant observation requires a measure of participation on the part of the observer over an extended period to enable him to write up field notes from which hypotheses may arise inductively. It is important that the researcher describe his role as accurately as possible and he needs to stipulate the way in which his presence may affect the data and findings. The field worker usually maintains an "objective" distance from the participants, but extended involvement will decrease that stance, and it is possible that friendly rapport may exist. As the researcher

remains within the field he will start to learn from his own experiences in the setting. In participatory research the researcher shares the role of the participants and will form part of the researched "community". It is therefore important for each researcher to establish his role at the beginning of the study and to record and gauge it throughout.

According to Cohen et al. (2000) the concern of the educational researcher is the world of people, which is a very subjective domain with various meanings for different people. It is often the task of the educational researcher to reveal the way in which shared meanings keep the social order intact, and, for this purpose, (long-term) participant observation is helpful because:

- It reveals non-verbal behaviour.
- It records the important aspects of repetitive behaviour.
- It leads to intimate and informal relationships with the observed.
- It is the least reactive data-gathering method.

4.4.4 Role of the researcher

The researcher has multiple roles to play – the group "leader" or teacher-researcher who will also function as the narrative facilitator who will supervise the Life Orientation class environments, arrange competent observers, interviewers, and a video crew and organise the logistics of the process.

The teacher-facilitator-researcher aspect ideally requires incorporating the suggestions of the participants into the process cycle. However in the study a predetermined structure or **learning programme** that might be altered (slightly) at certain moments to facilitate improvement will be used. As suggested by Elliot (1991) an outsider (the non-participant observer) will conduct certain of the individual (focused) interviews, because it may become difficult for children to reveal their true thoughts about a scenario to the teacher who holds an authoritative position.

It is a demanding aspiration to conduct arts-based research at the institution where the researcher works, because personal gains accompany personal discomforts. It is hoped that the fellow colleagues who will be co-group leaders or facilitators will co-operate. This will demand honest discussions and clear communication on the part of the researcher as he eventually

exposes/discloses his teaching practice to himself and colleagues – thus ensuring that the environment fosters mutual trust (Strauss, 2002).

McNiff et al. (1996) emphasise that the researcher is the focus of an action research process (in this case this is "partially" true because the study is not an action research process, but is linked to teacher practice, and the researcher/teacher will lead the arts episodes). Therefore, the researcher needs to record his personal thinking and behaviour and describe the significant changes over time. The thinking and behaviour patterns of thee significant others also need to be represented. However, it is not merely a matter of recording – the researcher's perceptions about others need to be discussed with them to ascertain whether the conclusions drawn by the researcher are valid.

Furthermore, the researcher wishes first to establish change within himself in order to exert a positive effect on the situation. In order to claim that he did indeed exert an influence on the situation the researcher needs to record the reactions of the participants towards him so as to prove that it was indeed the case. Data collection, clear criteria for measuring the improvement, specified data pieces, correlating the records with the initial research focus, and allowing peers to validate the improvement would confirm or enhance the validation of the claims. Relevant signatures and authorisation forms are needed in order to authenticate the data (McNiff et al., 1996).

4.5 Data gathering and analysis procedures

As described in 4.4.4 the researcher will play multiple roles in leading the learning programme and in securing data for the study. The intention is to generate and analyse the data according to the procedure steps listed in **table 4.2.** Please note that the information included in **table 4.2** refers to the experiences of the 14 participants as well as the data collection and analysis issues pertaining to them. (The class learning programme should always be kept in mind as the background to the data collection and analysis of the narratives of the participants.) The processes I explain in **table 4.2** correspond to the process described by Creswell (1998) in **table 1.3** and the qualitative data analysis procedures listed by McMillan and Schumacher (2001). Chapter 5 will provide more detail regarding the interpretation and coding of the participant responses.

Table 4.2: Data gathering and analysis issues

Procedure	Description
1. Participant interviews	I will arrange the times to suit the interviewers and the participants and supply all the recording equipment. There will be four rounds of interviews with the fourteen participants.
2. Transcriptions of interviews	I will transcribe 24 of the 56 interviews and will employ a typist to assist with transcribing the other 32.
3. Organising participant portfolios	I will compile a portfolio for each of the fourteen participants (at the end of the two-month learning programme) in which I will keep a copy of all their written class work, copies of their narrative arts creations – of which I took digital photographs – and copies of the interview transcriptions. This portfolio will enable me to view the journey of each participant logically.
4. Numbering and interpreting interview responses	Once the portfolios have been completed I will start numbering and interpreting the participant responses in reply to the interview questions. I will do that for all 56 interviews.
5. Coding the responses	After studying the collective responses I will establish dominant codes for the responses suitable to the five self-concept categories identified in chapter 3, namely, academic, social, personal-emotional, physical and moral.
6. Organising participant responses and master tables	I will reorganise all the participant interview responses in a table format in order to group together and place under the correct category heading the responses pertaining to a particular code. I will compile a master table for each participant that will contain all four interviews. This will provide insight into the categories and codes affected. This master table will be available as an appendix.
7. Combining the responses according to gender	For each round of interviews I will combine all the boys and girls separately in order to ascertain whether there are significant gender self-concept differences or changes (see 3.10) during the narrative arts process. I will also compile a master (collective) table for the boys and girls that will be available as an appendix.
8. Compiling a picture or image-based portrait	In order to assist the reader and myself to form (and remember) a clear and distinct picture of each participant I will compile an initial and cumulative image-based portrait of each participant by using their exact self-descriptive words. (This method is termed my "intuitive" data analysis approach.) The initial image-based portrait will be presented at the start of the "rigorous" data analysis approach and the cumulative image-based portrait – which includes the initial portrait – will be used as a mechanism to aid teacher-researcher reflections regarding the unique narrative of each participant at the end of the data analysis chapter.
9. Using colour to indicate self-concept categories	The four rounds of interviews will produce four rounds of narratives pertaining to each participant and, in order to assist the reader and myself to discern the self-concept domain or category affected, I will assign a colour to each of the five categories. This colour will be used in the text as the narrative of each participant is being recounted.
10. Imagery	The nature of this project has at its core colourful expression and it is therefore

	crucial that this colourful expression be visible during the data analysis discussion. I will incorporate digital images or photographs of individual or group expressions to enrich the text and to provide evidence of the process and its activities.

4.6 Delimiters and limitations of the study

This section will list the major delimiters and limitations that could be evident in the study or could emerge as the study progresses. **Table 4.3** deals with the limitations and **table 4.4** will indicate the delimiters.

Table 4.3: Limitations

Topic or limitation	Limitation considered
1. The school periods and school environment	This research will take place in school time during the Life Orientation periods, and this could hamper the depth of the group (Life Orientation or "counselling") issues. Each lesson will have to be carefully structured to ensure that it is completed during the exact time frame. The school schedule will also impact on the participant interviews because the ideal would have been to conduct the participant interviews immediately after the lesson, but time (even a week or two) will elapse between the lessons and the interviews.
2. The technological assistance, media and materials	The video recordings and the videographer, and the logistics and application of the art materials could affect the spontaneity of the situation. The teacher-facilitator will, to some degree, have to manage all these aspects. As the main researcher I will arrange and organise everything.
3. The content of the arts-based process	I chose the exercises simply because I know they are manageable in practice, but, having done that I have excluded many other more colourful and demanding options that could have delivered different results pertaining to expression and self-concept vacillation.
4. School ethos	As has already been indicated the school is a private faith-based school that uphold certain principles pertaining to moral conduct and faith. The data that will be generated could differ remarkably from that which would be collected at either government schools or other private schools in which the specific faith-based subculture is not dominant.
5. The personalities of the teacher-facilitators	Three teachers (including myself – known to the participants) will participate in the research process. The perceptions of the participants and their reactions to the particular teacher personalities will play a role. Certain teachers will be more at ease than others with the arts-based data collection process.
6. Grade 9 learners	The population consists of Grade 9 learners and their experiences will be studied. This grade was chosen because it suited my teaching scenario and professional commitments, and was, therefore,

	convenient sampling. A population of older or younger learners could result in different sets of data and interpretations.
7. Non-participant observers and video recorder assistants	The presence of these assistants could affect the experiences of the participants and the preferences of these helpers could influence the data. They will be able to make independent decisions and record what they regard as important.
8. The arts-based expressions or artworks/ constructs	The measure of success which the participant experiences in expression could become an indicator of his appreciation for the process – this could affect the development of the self-concept.
9. Group dynamics	Group dynamics could influence participation in a positive way, or peer pressure could hamper individual self-growth.

Table 4.4: Delimiters

Delimiters	Delimiter considered
1. Paradigms • **Interpretive** • **Phenomenology** • **Postmodernism**	The interpretive paradigm will frame the study as a whole while the other paradigms will pertain to specific aspects as indicated. The "multiple" paradigm point of view will impact on data analysis and presentation, and must be born in mind during each stage.
2. Arts-based thinking	This aspect may result in colourful but "awkward" data that requires new modes of presentation, or it could add a humorous slant to the presentation of data.
3. Group interaction	This could be both liberating and strenuous for the individual and, because of the dynamic element, will require control.
4. Narrative principles	Each person has a different story; therefore diverse personal accounts will be the result.
5. Case study scenario presented for research	This will be contextualised in the school in which I teach and will have implications for the whole school and the subculture whilst the research process is in progress.
6. Episodic arts process	This aspect of the study may only be scrutinised whilst the "art action" is in progress and may lead to unforeseen changes and requirements in order to serve the participants better and render better teaching practice and data.
7. Teacher-researcher-facilitator role	The fact that the participants know me well, and that I will become even more involved in the group context, could lead to familiarity problems, which may be balanced by the presence of the non-participant observer and the videographer.
8. Participants' reactions to the presence of non-participant observers and video equipment	The Hawthorne effect might play a role because these participants are naturally prone to acting and might want to enhance the effect of their presence. (Video recording will be done selectively and not throughout.)

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the conceptual framework, philosophical assumptions, research strategy, intended data analysis procedures, delimiters and limitations pertaining to the study. The important theories or principles comprise the following: the theory of the self-concept, principles of arts-based research and group counselling, comprehensive school counselling considerations and the perspectives of positive psychology.

The philosophical assumptions which I esteem place value on people as creative beings who are able to progress to a better future as they learn from their actions. As the researcher I regard the multiple perspectives of the participants as the most important source of information and will endeavour to minimise my influence or voice by contextualising the statements of the participants regularly. I will attempt to interpret from the perspective of the participants as carefully as possible. The limitations and delimiters are focused on the Life Orientation classroom within the school scenario.