



CHAPTER 5

EMPOWERING AND DREAMING THE FUTURE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study it has been argued that people accord interpretations to experiences in their life which are influenced by various traditions of interpretation. Through integration with various disciplines which can support traditions of interpretation in terms of various viewpoints, they can deconstruct their interpretations and reinterpret them. Lucia, Nolas and de Zeeuw (2008:14) consider that through a re-organisation of experience, people become more than what they know. Within the process of deconstructing and reinterpreting their life experiences, they will gain deeper understandings as to how they interpret their life stories and may open up the possibility of discovering alternative interpretations that may be different from the first.

In the previous chapter, the influences of certain traditions of interpretation upon the co-researchers were discussed and alternative interpretations have emerged through an interdisciplinary framework. According to Müller (2005:11), a newly emerged understanding of a narrative is different from generalisation. “It is rather a case of doing contextual research with such integrity that it will have possibilities for broader application.” (Müller 2005:11). The newly emerged alternative interpretations stemming from the interaction with various disciplines may offer the potential to understand the stories of the co-researchers more broadly and differently. However, these are not generally applicable and/or fixed interpretations for all the



cases of the life stories. Within the social constructionist paradigm, the alternative interpretations may also display possibilities of being deconstructed and reconstructed for the purposes of a continually better understanding. Therefore, the alternative interpretations may represent another starting point to be deconstructed again. The narrative approach to life stories never ends. It is a continual process to assign meanings and to create better possibilities for the future.

In this chapter, the reflections of the co-researchers upon the alternative interpretations which emerged will be presented. The reflections are not intended to evaluate these other interpretations but to open up possibilities for the preferred future. After the reflections on the alternative interpretations, the reflections upon the whole research process between my co-researchers and I, shall be discussed as well.

5.2 REFLECTIONS OF THE CO-RESEARCHERS ON THE ALTERNATIVE FINDINGS

Four months after the last session of the present research interview, I had the privilege of meeting with the co-researchers again. Here we shared the alternative findings and reflected on them together. The alternative interpretations that we shared as follows;

- 1) Keeping the faith
- 2) Hatch out!
- 3) We are not powerless!

I will represent the reflections of the co-researchers upon each of the alternative interpretations.



5.2.1 Keeping the faith

Within the present research interview sessions, the co-researchers frequently pointed out the effect of the lack of understanding, of believers with Christian family, upon those who have non-Christian relatives. The co-researchers felt their non-Christian family background to be a major disadvantage in their faith life; thus, they were depressed and easily felt powerless in the relationship with other believers who have Christian family. Moreover, in comparing the two worlds, Christian (the church) and non-Christian (the non-believing family of the co-researchers) the co-researchers tended to be very sensitive in feeling their painful faith life.

While discussing the meanings and influences of the above traditions of interpretation, the co-researchers realised that they also lack understanding concerning their own non-Christian family. The former began to think about their own family relationships with these relatives. To understand how the latter feel about having a different religion in the family and why they badly affect the co-researchers' Christian faith helped the co-researchers to think differently about their relationships with their non-Christian family and to deal with their faith life more seriously. The co-researchers identified their painful faith life with their non-Christian family as 'keeping faith', which means that their struggling faith life is not just concerned with difficulties but with keeping or losing faith in the painful and problematic relationships with their non-Christian family. In the unique Korean Confucian patriarchal family system, to practise a different religion in the family means to resist the power and right of the father who is the patriarch of the family. At the same time,



the co-researchers are facing the social prejudice against Christianity which influences the attitude of the co-researchers' non-Christian family.

Mainly Agape (A) and Happy (H) expressed the above alternative interpretations. All of the co-researchers reflected on the above alternative findings together.

A: When I was in the most difficult tension with my family, my efforts to keep my faith were a really serious and important problem for me. I thought that to keep my faith in the difficulties with my non-Christian family is the most important mission in my life. However, after interpretation of it and sharing it in the research interview sessions I have found that people's levels of feelings about their painful life stories are different. Within similar circumstances but with a different personality, the level of the feelings of people can be different. For instance, within the non-Christian family I felt the pain that came from the conflict with my family quite deeply, but some of the co-researchers in this interview seemed to ignore and/or to not care seriously about the conflict with their non-Christian family.

H: Yes, I agree with this. I also have found it in the interviews with other co-researchers as well. Other co-researchers' attitude to their difficult relationship with their non-Christian family helped me to think back on my relationship with my non-Christian family. I think that I focused on negative responses of my non-Christian family to my Christian faith too much; thus, to keep my faith in the difficulties was my major concern. Of course, keeping my faith is really important but after then? How can I keep faith in a difficult situation? I did not



think about the question.

A: I think that we need to focus on the way of keeping our faith more deeply instead of focusing on the pain of keeping faith.

Agape and Happy reflected that they have focused on the pain of retaining their faith much more than on the way to maintain their faith within those hurtful difficulties with their non-Christian relatives. They transferred the value of the painful stories with their non-Christian family onto the stories of keeping faith, which, it seems, were not actually for the purposes of expressing their painful stories but for placing value on their 'efforts at keeping the faith'. When they focused on the painful stories with their non-Christian relatives, they were powerless people and victims in their family relationship and in the relationship with other Christians who have believing family, but when they valued their stories of keeping faith, they became active people who are making efforts to retain their faith in the difficulties with non-Christian family and in terms of the socially negative prejudice towards Christianity. For this reason the co-researchers do not need to concentrate on the pain in the relationship with their non-Christian family and on the responses of other Christians who have believing family any longer; rather, they need to focus on making efforts to overcome the difficulties with non-Christian relatives as regards retaining their faith.

Through Agape and Happy's story of keeping faith, Blue Bell (B) and Green Temptation (G) reflected on their faith life.

B: In the previous days, I was not serious about troubles with my non-Christian



family. I knew that they did not like my Christian faith and sometimes there were some conflicts in the relationship between me and my parents because of my Christian faith. But I did not concern myself about it seriously. Sometimes the conflicts with my non-Christian parents bothered my faith life, but I did not care about it. I just ignored the influences of the conflicts with my parents on my faith life. Through reading and hearing other co-researchers' stories, I could think about my faith life within a non-Christian family again. I think that I need to be sensitive about my faith life. When I ignore the influences of my non-Christian parents on my faith, my faith would be weakened or be lost unconsciously. In fact, sometimes it happened to me. Sometimes, I become too lazy to attend the service, Bible study group, or prayer meetings in the church. There is nobody to support my keeping faith in my family.

- G:** Through other co-researchers' stories I realised that I am not a special case and there are people who have more serious difficulties with their non-Christian family than me. Especially the stories of Agape and Happy: I thought that they had a really respectable faith but did not know that they have difficulties with their non-Christian family. Their amazing stories helped me to look back on my faith life and to think about my relationship with my non-Christian family again. I also agree with Agape, people can feel their pain differently and I am also not quite serious about conflicts with my non-Christian family. Nevertheless, the stories of Agape and Happy stimulated me to focus on the faith life and the family life much more. In fact, I was indifferent to my family's emotions about my different religion. I was just busy with my painful emotion.



Blue Bell and Green Temptation were also able to consider their difficulties in a non-Christian family differently through Agape and Happy's alternative interpretation of 'keeping the faith'. They could perceive their problematic stories within a broader framework.

Additionally, Green Temptation mentioned the insufficient understandings of other believers who have Christian relatives.

G: I think that other Christians who have Christian family also have difficulties in their faith life with Christian family. People tend to feel their own pain as more important and bigger than [that of] other people; thus, we usually focus on our own problems much more and hardly listen to other people's painful stories. If we have more opportunities to share our stories and to listen to other Christians' stories such as this opportunity that we have had for the research, we could understand each other much more and could make the gap smaller between ourselves and other Christians who have Christian family.

Green Temptation pointed out the reason for the inadequate understanding offered by other Christians who have Christian family: the result of the lack of conversation with each other. The other co-researchers also agree with Green Temptation's opinion and hoped for opportunities to discuss their situations with other believers who have Christian relatives. This attitude of the co-researchers to the latter was quite different from the attitude that the co-researchers had shown in the previous interview sessions. The co-researchers were no longer powerless in the relationship with other Christians



who have believing relatives. They tried to make efforts to improve their relationship with other Christians for themselves instead of complaining about their disadvantages and/or envying other believers' advantages stemming from a Christian family.

5.2.2 Hatch out!

The idea held in common by the co-researchers was that the salvation of their non-Christian family is their mission from God; thus, they tried to endure all the sufferings which arise from conflicts with their family. The co-researchers generally choose the method of keeping silence and unconditional endurance in the difficult relationship with their non-Christian family. However, this method appeared to make the co-researchers' faith life more difficult. The co-researchers still did not feel comfortable in the relationship with their family and experienced the major burden of evangelising their non-Christian family.

As explained, in the Korean culture, the young adults generally live with their parents before their marriage, and thus are still under the strong influence of their parents. However, the co-researchers are in the period of emerging adulthood in which they need to prepare to be an adult emotionally, physically, and economically. Even though under the influence of their parents, the co-researchers who are preparing for full adulthood need to alter their relationship with their parents to maintain their own faith life.

B: I think that my family relationship is as important as my faith life. Usually, the



parent-child relationship of people with non-Christian parents seemed to be more difficult than the parent-child relationship of people with Christian parents. In fact I had an uncomfortable relationship with my parents because of our different faith and troubles in another part of life as well, but tended to put all causes of the conflicts down to having different religion. These days, I have stayed in the house much more than the previous time because of studying to get a job. With the time in the house, I could have spent some more time with my parents and could have understood them better. I think that I just tried to escape from the difficult relationship with my parents without any efforts to deal with it; thus, the relationship seems to have been more serious. I think that, sometimes, the conflict could create a more familiar relationship with my parents.

- A:** I thought that only I have this specific difficult relationship with my non-Christian parents and only I live with such a big burden. However, through this research interview I could realise that some Christians also have similar problems with their non-Christian family. It helped me very much not to feel isolation. Therefore, I think that if we can share our own difficulties with each other without any prejudice such as in the present interviews we can reduce misunderstandings and hurtful emotions in the relationship with people. While I do present research interviews, to tell my stories and to listen to other co-researchers' stories gave me really major help in itself. I also would like to do this for my non-Christian family. Within the relationship with my family, I would like to have an open mind toward them, to listen to their stories and to gain deeper understandings even though I have a different way of thinking and



a different religion. Sometimes I feel that my attitude toward my family is too narrow, such as if they were other non-Christian people. I think that God really wants to have a beautiful family relationship in harmony; thus, to consider how I can create harmony with my family from now on will be the important task that I have.

H: I also tended to be blunt in the relationship with my family. The uncomfortable relationship with my family makes it worse. I would like to change my attitude toward my family. In fact, I tend to lay the burden of my non-Christian family on my younger sister because she is also a Christian. I expected her instead of me to create intimate relationships with other family members and I was careless about my younger sister's difficulties in the relationship with other non-Christian family.

The co-researchers agreed with the necessity to alter their relationship with their non-Christian family. From just enduring sufferings within the difficult relationship with their non-believing relatives, their sense of value altered to one of making active efforts for a better family relationship.

5.2.3 We are not powerless!

In the relationship with other believers who have Christian family in the church, the co-researchers seemed to feel powerless because of their unique family background, that of a non-Christian family. The co-researchers tended to hesitate to share their difficulties with other Christians and to feel envy of other Christians who do have



believing relatives.

Within the web-activity, the co-researchers could read each other's stories and could reflect on these. Through the activity, some of the co-researchers began to value their non-Christian family background as the stimulation for their growth within their faith life. They thought that sharing their painful stories with non-Christian family could also be helpful for other Christians who have similar problems with their non-Christian family.

H: I did not want to share my painful stories in the beginning of these interview sessions. Actually, I thought that there was no ultimate solution for the conflicts with my non-Christian family. Moreover, I did not want to remember the painful times with my family again through telling the stories in the interview times. However, after the interviews I could realise that I have been just too busy to ignore the difficulties without any efforts to deal with them. I also realised my weakness in the relationship with my family and felt the necessity to overcome it. Generally, I did not like to share stories of my weakness with other people but now I can share my stories out of this interview time as well. I would like to help other Christians who are in similar conflict with their non-Christian family to keep their faith life happier by sharing my painful stories.

Happy was not powerless after all, when he realised that he could influence other Christians who have similar difficulties with their non-Christian relatives. He dreamed of a better future in which he might help other Christians who are struggling



with keeping faith in a non-Christian family by telling his story.

G: I was not concerned about other Christians who have difficulties with their non-Christian family, like me in previous times. I thought that sharing my problems is meaningless and may make me weaker. However, reading and listening to other co-researchers' stories in these research interview sessions have influenced me to look back at my faith life again and changed my mind to have courage to share my painful stories with other Christians. I am leading a small Bible group that consists of several teenagers. There are also some teenagers who have non-Christian family in their household. I realised that they are also struggling with their non-Christian family to keep their faith and need some attention like me. I think that a small interest in their difficulties will be a great help for them and I want to be a person who can stand in the same position by sharing similar stories.

Green Temptation also discovered her value as a person who is able to influence other people who experience similar difficulties with their non-Christian family by attending to their painful stories and sharing her stories.

5.3 EMPOWERING

Rappaport (1995:796) remarks that the practice of a narrative approach leads us "... to listen to, amplify, and give value to the stories of the people we serve to discover their own stories, create new ones, and develop settings that make such activities possible ...". By attending to the co-researchers' stories, the researcher may guide the co-researchers to accord value to their stories of powerlessness. Once the stories have



meaning in the co-researcher's life, they can be reinterpreted and new meanings can be developed which may contain possibilities for the future. Müller and Schoeman (2004:8) explain the process of giving meanings and developing new meanings as the 'intervention' within the narrative research process. They describe the relationship between narrative research and intervention as follows: "Intervention is not only intended, but is an integral part of the research process" (Müller & Schoeman 2004:8). Within the narrative research process, the researcher focuses on uncovering new meanings from the structured discourses in the co-researchers' stories. The aim of the intervention is 'to empower the powerless' (Müller & Schoeman 2004:8) through the narrative research process.

Throughout the research journey with the co-researchers, I could sense that they feel powerless within their specific family background: a non-Christian family. They felt like victims themselves, both in the relationships with their non-Christian family and with other Christians who have believing relatives. Therefore, I have focused on giving value to the co-researchers' stories of marginalisation by attending and listening to their stories in the research interviews. Through the process of telling and retelling the stories, the co-researchers could be empowered and may develop new meanings for their stories which might offer hope for the future. When the co-researchers can find, create or develop this new meaning which could support their personal life in a positive fashion, the goals of empowerment may be enhanced. (Rappaport 1995:796)

The following reflections by the co-researchers on the present research process should demonstrate the influence of such empowerment within the narrative research

paradigm.

A: I could feel that somebody wants to listen to my stories and focus on them in the present research interview sessions. The attitude in which people are willing to listen to my stories without any judgement is really important to make me to tell my stories without any hesitation. When I tell about my difficult stories in my life with other people, I usually have an uncomfortable feeling about the listener. I often worry that ‘when I tell this story, how will he/she think about me?’, ‘he/she may try to teach me and give some directions for the problems’, and ‘he/she may form a clear definition with one word about my complex emotions and problems.’ However, I did not encounter any of the above uncomfortable attitudes within these interview times; thus, I could tell my stories comfortably and could tell them fully. It is quite hard to find someone who will concentrate only on my stories and can focus on listening to them. Amazingly, after telling my painful stories in the present interviews, I could realise that the painful stories do not exist as a problem in my life any more. I do not know what is going on. When I just hid the difficult stories in my mind, it was a really painful part in my life; thus, I could not face the stories at all. Nevertheless, after having courage to tell those stories and after telling the painful stories, I could recognise them as a part of my life and could interpret this as a thankful story which enabled me to become stronger.

By attending to Agape’s stories, she became empowered to tell them. She remarked that the listeners’ passionate attitude in listening to her stories without any judgement helped her to narrate these more fully. This is connected with the narrative



researcher's role as an enthusiastic listener in the narrative research interview. The comforting atmosphere of the interview empowered her to tell her stories fully and after interpreting her painful stories, she could discover possibilities for finding new meanings in them.

Agape also reflected on the process of interpreting and reinterpreting the stories to find new meanings.

A: In the interview, I was consistently encouraged to tell my stories. While telling my stories, I could find myself; who was telling the same stories again and again. I thought that my sufferings are really deep and unlimitedly big, but I could realise the size of the sufferings. The sufferings were limited and smaller than I felt. From this time, the pain with my non-Christian family did not have important meaning in my life any more. It became just one of the stories in the past.

Agape gave a new meaning to her painful stories with non-Christian family. Using this she is able to reinterpret her stories, which could lead her to a more satisfied future. This is the goal of empowerment in the present narrative research.

Happy also mentioned the influence of the empowerment in the narrative research process.

H: When I told the stories that are connected with my non-Christian family to other people, I tended to choose words and/or events for telling these to



prevent unexpected negative prejudice towards my family. I did not try to hide the painful stories intentionally, but I could not tell my difficult stories comfortably to people. I was worried about so many things. However, I could tell my painful stories sincerely in the research interview sessions.

Happy was also empowered to tell his stories fully in the narrative interview sessions; consequently, his stories could be heard. If he were still to be powerless regarding his painful stories, his stories might lose the opportunity to gain new meanings which could lead him to have hope for the future.

Riessman (1993:18) comments that: “Events become meaningful because of their placement in a narrative”. When the co-researchers interpreted their stories as a painful part of their life, their stories were distressing and meaningless, and it was difficult to dream the future, but when their stories were placed in an empowering position in their life by reinterpreting this with alternative findings, the narratives could take on meanings and offer hope for the future. In their dreaming of the future, the co-researchers may encounter the possibility of altering their difficult family relationships and influencing other Christians who are also struggling with their non-Christian family in order to retain their faith.

5.4 DREAMING THE FUTURE

Narrative research never ends with the conclusion of the research result. The last part of narrative research always offers possibilities to create new stories of the future. Müller *et al.* (2001:90) remark as follows concerning the end of the research process:



“Narrative research does not end with a conclusion, but with an open ending, which hopefully would stimulate a new story and new research”. In our lives there are no true endings. Our life consists of a past, a present and a future that shift continually. In the continuum of time, we discover possibilities for a better future, which we expect to be different from the present. Hence, our future is never closed and we need not be fatalistic. Our lives hold the promise of hope for a newly opened future. In the same sense, the present narrative research stories also never conclude with regard to our future. They can represent another starting point for dreaming the future.

5.4.1 Dreaming the future of the co-researchers with new stories

Here are the new stories which emerged amongst the co-researchers at the end of the present research process.

G: In fact, I have met with more serious opposition from my father these days. I am sometimes depressed because of the difficulties, but I am sure that I can make progress in the relationship with my father like other co-researchers did. Other co-researchers’ stories encouraged me to have hope for a better relationship with my non-Christian family. To spread the Gospel to our non-Christian family does not depend on my own efforts for it. Their salvation belongs to God; therefore, when I still keep my faith about God even though I have non-Christian family, I am sure that some day my family also will be saved. On the day, my family may feel regretful towards me. (All the co-researchers smiled.) I could not tell my difficulties to other people because it was too painful to do so, but now I can share the difficult times with my non-



Christian family comfortably in these interview times. In this way, I think that I also will be able to talk about the difficulties with my family after they have become Christian.

Green Temptation does not suggest any concrete solution to improve her difficult relationship with her non-Christian family. Nevertheless, she is dreaming a future in which she can be more satisfied with these problematic stories. Through telling her stories and listening to other co-researchers' narratives, Green Temptation is encouraged to nurture the hope for a better relationship with her non-Christian family.

Agape is also dreaming a future in which she can be powerful in the difficult problems with her non-Christian family.

A: I can tell my stories to other people who are experiencing similar difficulties in their non-Christian family these days. When I look back at my painful stories, it was a process of the training of God to make me stronger and a valuable part of my fruitful life. Through telling those stories of myself, I can encourage other Christians who have non-Christian family. Before beginning the research interview, I did not trust that other people could understand my painful situation sincerely and that just telling my stories could help to make me more comfortable. However, I could tell my stories about ambiguous emotions in detail and the painful stories became not an irremovable scar but a part of the stories in my life. These changes enabled me to think about the future. I do not want to be tied by structured thinking of the past. I want to make good progress for the future. I think that if I do not share and rethink my painful



stories, I am still under the negative influences of the stories.

Agape reflected that she could obtain the opportunity to reinterpret her painful stories through the research interview process by narrating them and this helped her to gain courage for dreaming a positive future even with these difficult narratives.

Happy also reflected on the research process.

H: I sometimes felt that my identity in the presence of God was not structured well. I did not know how I could deal with my difficulties with non-Christian family and with so many prejudices of Christians who have Christian family. I did not even try to find the way for it. I was confused about myself and my faith while I was struggling with conflicts with my non-Christian family. Sometimes, I thought that I was in these sufferings because of my weakness. However, I can say that God is giving me the opportunity to make bigger progress than other Christians. In the interview times, I could identify myself and my faith more clearly.

Happy reinterpreted the sufferings in the relationship with his non-Christian family as an 'opportunity'. Previously, the sufferings caused him to be depressed and to feel pain in his faith life, but he can reinterpret these in a positive manner which might provide certain possibilities for the future.

From the reflections of the co-researchers I could realise that the pain in their life stemmed from the lack of knowledge about their problematic stories. In their



inadequate understandings of the difficult conflicts with their non-Christian family, the co-researchers tended to experience their pain immediately and this prevented them from having hope for the future. When the co-researchers could identify and interpret their difficult stories, they were able to discover some space to reinterpret these for a more contented future.

The ending of narrative research is not always happy. It can be disappointing, but it is different from the beginning. (Müller *et al.* 2001:90) In this sense, we can hope that the endings described will stimulate a new story and new research (Müller 2003:15, 16). In our research work, we did not identify any powerful solution to make our stories better on the practical level. But the co-researchers and I agreed that our research work had surely stimulated our reinterpretation of the painful experiences with non-Christian family and would be inspiring for dreaming a future which might be better than the present. I hope that the new meanings and new interpretations will continue to be created continuously through this research work of telling and retelling, by writing this thesis and even by rereading this study. In a narrative perspective, our life story never ends and can never be closed. Our life story is open for the future.

5.4.2 Dreaming the future of the researcher with new stories

While carrying out the research interview and writing the present thesis, I have constantly been with the co-researchers in their journey. In so doing, I also could revisit my painful stories with my non-believing family. In remembering those difficult times, sometimes I could not stop crying and was unable to continue



recording the stories of the co-researchers. I have found that I also simply packed the painful stories away and put them in the cupboard with a special lock, as my co-researchers did.

Sometimes I shared my emotions and the stories of the co-researchers with my colleagues and friends in order to perceive our research work from various viewpoints during the writing of the present thesis. Of course, I shared those stories in our research work anonymously to preserve confidentiality. When one of my friends listened to my own painful emotions that arose from remembering my stories in attending to the co-researchers' difficult narratives, she asked me whether we could consult a professional person who could help us to be healed from the hurt.

However, in the narrative paradigm, there is no professional who can furnish the right directions to solve such problems. The researcher and the co-researchers collaborate to discover alternative interpretations that might lead us to our preferred future. Therefore, as the researcher and the co-researchers, we are all the professionals in our stories. Müller (1999:37) defines the task of the narrative researcher as a person who stands with the person or family 'on the rock in the middle of the stream'.

Through facilitating the telling of the story of the past, and together with the person, to re-tell the story in a creative way, we are able to literally talk the rock behind us into an approachable position. Through continuously telling the story of the past and through re-interpretation, we help in changing the rocks from being stumbling-blocks, into

footholds. (Müller 1999:37)

The task of the researcher is only to listen to the stories of the co-researchers, to facilitate the story of the past, and to stimulate retelling these narratives. Through this process, the researcher and the co-researchers can together accord new meanings to the stories.

During the journey with the co-researchers I sometimes felt their hurt but I could dream for the future with the co-researchers at the end of the research process. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:10) point out a danger in narrative as comprising ‘the Hollywood plot’ where everything goes well in the end. The purpose of narrative research is not to reach a dramatic ending in which everyone can live happily ever after, since a researcher who is working in the narrative paradigm is trying to be ‘truthful’ as regards the various viewpoints regarding the same events. (Müller & Schoeman 2004:8) Throughout our life, the purpose of being truthful in the narrative research process is never ending. Our alternative interpretations in the present research cannot be preserved as an exemplary answer forever. The co-researchers and I just wish to make a point in the world: to express our stories and to empower ourselves by presenting our research work, which may also be deconstructed and reinterpreted in the future.

5.5 SUMMARY

In the narrative research interview sessions, the co-researchers were empowered to tell their stories. In so doing, they could discover some space to reinterpret these in



terms of new meanings which might lead them to their preferred future.

The co-researchers dreamed a powerful future regarding their non-Christian family background at the end of the research process. They reinterpreted their painful stories by new meanings in which they are able to dream for the future: to conduct an easier relationship with their non-Christian family and to maintain their faith life fruitfully. There is no structured practical solution in this dreaming of the future, but through the telling and retelling process in the light of the narrative paradigm the co-researchers have been encouraged to uncover some space for reinterpreting their painful stories.



CHAPTER 6

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The narrative approach as a method for research has allowed me to think about and recognise my limitations and, at the same time, to discover unlimited possibilities. In the research interview sessions, I was only a small person, lacking ability to help someone else. I really was not an expert or a powerful person capable of enforcing change in other people's lives. I was just a participant who desired to listen to people's life stories and wished to approach those stories from a narrative perspective.

The co-researchers were apt to focus their concern on problematic stories and to judge their narratives on the basis of certain discourses/traditions of interpretation. These tendencies might lead them to close off and/or believe that their future is hopeless. Nevertheless, by participating in the narrative research process, the co-researchers could uncover possibilities for more satisfied lives. Events in one's life contain many different unheard stories. By giving a voice to an unheard narrative, people can reinterpret the event and accord new meanings in which they can dream another future. This is the part that I most enjoyed and valued during the work with the co-researchers.

In this chapter, I will furnish a number of critical reflections on the present research process to encourage a continually constructed research process in the future.



6.2 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON SELECTING THE CO-RESEARCHERS

I selected four co-researchers from the same church since I thought that they might feel more comfortable about telling their stories in the research interview sessions. They already knew each other, but were not aware of the non-Christian family background. For this reason, after they heard about each other's specific family background and difficulties they easily began to form a comfortable relationship with each other in the said sessions. They started to narrate their painful stories in a more relaxed fashion and reflected each other's stories actively.

The co-researchers also displayed a passionate desire to encourage each other to tell their painful stories. Even outside of the interview context, they shared their stories which had not been narrated before the research interview and tried to gain deeper understandings of them.

I suggest that using co-researchers from the same church context leads to the above advantages in conducting the research interview. However, if I were to select co-researchers from different church contexts, I expect that I might listen to more varied stories in their church life and the relationships with other church members.

6.3 CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE WEB-ACTIVITY

I created a website for the purposes of developing stories. On it, the co-researchers could read other co-researchers' stories, reflected on them and could pose a question



at any time. I also placed on it certain literature sources connected with their specific background and with the discourses that emerged for them, in order to help them achieve a more profound understanding of their painful stories and for the purposes of more effective story developing through collaborating with various disciplines. By means of these activities, the co-researchers could work with their stories more effectively. The co-researchers particularly mentioned the web-activity which caused them to feel secure to tell their stories freely and to listen to other co-researchers' stories more easily in the last session of the research interview.

In spite of the above positive aspects of the web-activity, it was difficult to encourage the co-researchers to join in it at the beginning. We had already held several individual interview sessions for the co-researchers to tell their stories by the time I created the website for the purposes of story developing. However, some co-researchers did not understand the process of narrative research well; thus, they were not interested in the process of story developing and did not participate actively in the web-activity at the beginning.

Moreover, some co-researchers experienced certain difficulties in writing their stories on the website. In fact, for the co-researchers, writing their own stories was different from telling them. I took the utmost care to secure our website very strongly, so that nobody could enter it or read our stories. Moreover, the co-researchers already enjoyed close enough relationships with each other to be able to tell their stories comfortably before starting the web-activity. Nevertheless, when the co-researchers wrote their stories on the website, the possibility existed that they re-read their previous stories even after reinterpreting those stories. Some co-researchers



seemed to be ashamed of the previous narratives, because they developed new interpretations of stories, with which they could feel better, during the retelling process. Viewing this problem positively, the feeling of shame may have stimulated the co-researchers to accord new meanings to it, but on the other hand, it may have hindered them from telling their stories more fully.

I discussed these problems with the co-researchers, and we decided to hold several individual interview sessions and group interview sessions during the web-activity process in order to understand the narrative research process much more fully and to encourage the relaxed telling and writing of stories. The attempt was aimed at fostering more active story developing through the web-activity. After experiencing these group and individual interview sessions with the web-activity, the co-researchers could understand the necessity of the process of story developing in the narrative approach, could tell their stories more actively and seemed to enjoy the collaboration work with other co-researchers' stories on the web-site.

6.4 CRITICAL REFLECTION ON 'THE DIFFERENT VOICE GIVERS'³¹

For the story developing process, I wanted to allow some more people, who could express different voices regarding our research work, to join. I attempted to select these 'different voice givers' from various contexts such as people with Christian relatives, who are adults, who are ministers and so on. But the co-researchers permitted only three persons to join in our web-activity.

³¹ See, p. 55, 56.



In the web-activity with the different voice givers, it was not easy to encourage them to read the co-researchers' stories, to reflect on them, and to tell their own stories actively. Our research work sometimes proceeded too slowly and we sometimes seemed to experience confusion in the process of developing the stories, but I did not interrupt the natural research stream by chasing or pressing the co-researchers. I wanted them to be able to reinterpret their stories and discover new meanings for them. However, for 'the different voice givers', to wait patiently during the long process of the co-researchers and reflect on it seemed to be difficult. Nevertheless, I could not force them to continue their role on the web-site because the implications might be that I was controlling the stream of the research process. I obtained the different voice givers' and the co-researchers' agreement for myself to join the different voice givers on the web-site, and sometimes carefully recalled their role to their mind. Eventually, one of the different voice givers resigned from his role.

However, the other two different voice givers travelled with us until the end of the research process. In particular, one of the different voice givers was a young believer with a Christian family. He told so many interesting stories and reflected on the co-researchers' stories from his different viewpoint. I did not introduce his stories in the present study, but his stories have influenced the co-researchers, to understand other Christians who have Christian family, much more fully.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

During the research process, I was surprised that so little literature was related to the present research context. Especially in the Korean context, I could find hardly any



studies concerning young believers who have non-Christian family. Korean Christianity has existed for about 120 years. In this short history, I would estimate that the proportion of families that transmits Christian faith from one generation to the next might be smaller than the proportion of families where all the members practise Christian faith. Nevertheless, research on the people who have different religions in their household has been marginalised until now. When further research is able to accord more attention to this problem, readers should gain a more profound understanding of believers with non-Christian relatives and many more programmes in the pastoral care context could be developed to help them. In the present study I perceive myself as merely drawing a point on hitherto untouched paper. When many more points can be drawn on the paper and they can be linked by further researchers, I hope that we will be able to see the beautiful picture on it.