

TRANSVERSAL RATIONALITY AS A PRACTICAL WAY OF DOING INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK, WITH HIV AND AIDS AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper starts of with the story of Sizwe and his hesitancy about testing for HIV and AIDS. The story is used as a case study to illustrate an interdisciplinary process. The author proposes postfoundationalism and especially transversal rationality as a practical way of guiding the interdisciplinary discussion. Six scholars from different disciplines were asked to respond on the story of Sizwe. The author then reflects on these responses in an effort to create practical guidelines for an interdisciplinary process of transversal rationality. The reflection in this paper represents a third movement of reflection. The first was done in a paper delivered at a congress¹, and the second in the article that was published.²

1 SIZWE'S THREE-LETTER PLAGUE STORY

A section of the story of Sizwe, as narrated by Jonny Steinberg (2008:12–15) reads as follows:

¹ Third International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, 22–25 July 2008, Prato, Italy.

² Postfoundationalism as a practical way of doing interdisciplinary work, with HIV and AIDS as case study. Published by CGpub ishers.com. A Practical Way of Interdisciplinary Dialogue: Narrative research on HIV and Aids

Sizwe appeared just as we were about to leave. At first he did not see us. He came into the shop, walked past us, stopped, turned around, and looked at us inquiringly.

He was strikingly beautiful. He had a wide face, his cheekbones high and carved, his mouth thick and full. He took us in with eyes that suggested he feels comfortable in his skin; that he has no urge to drift or to wander. His hair was braided into thick dreadlocks that fell off the sides of his face over his ears and onto his shoulders.

He shook our hands solemnly, took three plastic chairs from the shop, and put them out in the sun. We sat, and I told him my business: that I was writing a book on AIDS, that I wanted to meet his father and get his views on the virus, that I sought to ask his father if I could watch him work.

When I had finished speaking he held out his forearm and shaped his hand to hold an imaginary syringe. "I have not tested," he said. "My girlfriend is pregnant and she went to the clinic to test. She's negative. Do you think that means I'm definitely negative?" I was taken aback by his openness. "If you want to know, you must test," I said. "I know," he replied. "But I'm scared." He smiled at me and laughed, got up, motioned us to get up, too, and took our three chairs back inside.

I met him the following day at the same place, and we walked into the village together....

I spent the following two days with Buyisile, Sizwe's father....

At the end of our second afternoon together, we were sitting in Buyisile's rondavel, about half a dozen of us, listening to him talk of the forests and the medicines it harboured. He told us of how, when he was a boy, his own father would take him into the forest and teach him about herbs, how his father's mother had done the same, how his knowledge of Ithanga's forests was the inherited knowledge of several generations.

Sizwe and I were sitting close to each other on a bench. I asked him if he too would one day take his unborn child to the forest to teach him about herbs.

"I am not sure how much longer I can live here in Ithanga," he said quietly.

I looked at him, my surprise at his sudden declaration clearly showing in my face.

"Where do you want to live?" I asked.

"Somewhere I am not known. Where you are known, you cannot run a business. People see you through your parents and your grandparents and they judge you. They ask how a man can be successful when parents are poor."

"You want to come to Johannesburg?"

"No, people go to the city and they live in shacks alongside strangers and they come home sick. I am not going to the city."

"Where then?"

"In Lusikisiki, but another village: somewhere I am not known."

"What are you afraid of? What is it you think people might do to you?"

"There have been things happening in my sleep," he said, looking down at the floor. "Twice now, I have woken up in the morning and I have been wet and sticky. I am twenty-nine. Wet dreams are for boys, for when you are maybe thirteen or fourteen. I have Nwabisa sleeping next to me. I am a man."

"So what is happening to you when you sleep?"

"Some people have maybe sent a demon to have sex with me: a demon with HIV. That is why I am scared to test. I think I will test positive."...

2 POSSIBLE PERSPECTIVES FROM WHICH ONE CAN RESPOND ON THE SIZWE STORY

Depending on the epistemological position that one takes, a number of possible reactions are possible:

2.1 A foundationalist or universal perspective

The foundationalist approach takes it for granted that absolute truth is available to all of us. This would be a perspective faithful to the true foundation and which therefore would provide us with the “God’s eye view.” A theory built on such a presumption could be referred to as a “universal rationality.” This is a rationality that is based on the idea of a universe of knowledge that functions as an overarching frame of reference. Accordingly there is only one theoretical truth and that must be pursued.

Such an epistemological position can easily lead to an overestimation of one’s own discipline and its possibilities. Scholars tend to take the rationalities of their own disciplines for granted. It seems to be quite natural to use your own expert knowledge as the unquestioned starting point and then to engage the other rationalities from there.

Interdisciplinary work by means of this position is made extremely difficult, if not totally impossible, because it leads to a process of assimilation, through which the other’s point of view is integrated into one’s own domain of knowledge. With this approach the ideal is a unified perspective, with the aim to achieve and strengthen a universal rationality. A combination of perspectives into a collage of different meanings is regarded as a threat to the truth.

As a theologian coming to the table of interdisciplinary discussion, I am very much aware of how universal rationality becomes a barrier in the discussion between theologians and the natural scientists. One of the most well-known examples is the conflict between theories of creation and evolution. In these discussions you would often find theologians who are willing to incorporate scientific viewpoints, but with the provision that it is not in opposition to their interpretation of the Bible. If it does contradict the Bible, it is merely rejected as false.

Natural science scholars often apply the same rationality. By accepting their own scientific theories as the God’s eye view, they would try to assimilate the Bible story as far as possible. When it becomes difficult, like when the six-day creation theory is in conflict with evolution theory, they produce (sometimes with the help of some theologians) strange interpretations of the Bible story. It might seem like an effort to harmonise the Bible with scientific theories, but in reality it is a process of assimilation.

With a foundationalist approach the only possibility is to seek for a universal perspective and therefore work towards assimilation and incorporation.

2.2 A nonfoundationalist or diverse perspective

This can be regarded as the opposite to the previous position. Where the previous approach works with the ideal of a universal position that provides the answer to all problems, this approach takes it for granted that foundations or fundamentals don't exist and that we only have a diversity of opinions:

In our times the concept of a universal truth is no longer accepted. The challenge raised by postmodern theories, such as Foucault's understanding of knowledge/power, cuts at the foundationalist assumption of the "universality." Perhaps a so-called "multiversity" takes no assumption for granted and is continually critical even of itself in a scheme of multiple rationalities and democratic organization, devoted to reducing the force of the power/knowledge matrix (Tatusko 2005:114).

The non- or anti-foundational position makes the interdisciplinary discussion even more difficult, because there is scepticism about any effort to create mutual understanding. Understanding or knowledge according to this approach is always diverse. More tolerance with interdisciplinary differences can be expected here, but constructive discussions are difficult in a situation where everything is relative and subjective.

2.3 A postfoundationalist or transversal perspective

This approach is sceptical about both the above-mentioned positions. Both these claims of reaching a complete "multiversal rationality", and a "universal rationality" are regarded with suspicion. The post-foundationalist approach is sensitive for the danger of relativity and subjectivity in a multiverse rationality, and of the rigidity and false claims of the universal rationality. Therefore it consists of an effort to move beyond both foundationalist and nonfoundationalist claims.

For that reason it is called *post*-foundationalism and not anti- or non-foundationalism.

From radical hermeneutics we learn that [for humans] there is no truth at the bottom of being, no final, bedrock, correct interpretation [because of the limits of understanding and of expression] that supplies the *Letztebegründung*. The search for such is misguided . . . On the other hand, the hurried and facile claim of relativism that every interpretation is as good as every other, is equally misguided. As no finite mind is privy to an absolute, strictly univocal, and timeless interpretive truth, so no finite mind can achieve a vision of *all* interpretations, which is required for the judgment that all interpretive claims are relative (Schrag 1992:75).

The notion of “transversal rationality” is a proposal by Schrag, Van Huyssteen and others. It is a way of providing a responsible and workable interface between disciplines. In the words of Van Huyssteen (2007:19):

In the multidisciplinary use of the concept of transversality there emerge distinct characteristics or features: the dynamics of consciousness, the interweaving of many voices, the interplay of social practices are all expressed in a *metaphor* that points to a sense of transition, lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting, and conveying without becoming identical.

The postfoundationalist approach forces us to firstly listen to the stories of people in real-life situations. It hasn't got the aim of merely describing a general context, but of confronting us with a specific and concrete situation. This approach, although also hermeneutical in nature, moves beyond mere hermeneutics. It is more reflexive and situational embedded in epistemology and methodology. According to Van Huyssteen (2006:10) “... embodied persons, and not abstract beliefs, should be seen as the locus of rationality. We, as rational agents, are thus always socially and contextually embedded.”

This way of thinking is always concrete, local, and contextual, but at the same time reaches beyond local contexts to transdisciplinary concerns. It is contextual, but at the same time in acknowledgement of the way in which our epistemologies are shaped by tradition. Van Huyssteen (2006:22) refers to the postfoundationalist notion as “a form of compelling knowledge”, which is a way of seeking a balance between “the way our beliefs are anchored in interpreted experience, and the broader networks of beliefs in which our rationally compelling experiences are already embedded.”

Van Huyssteen (2006:21) refers to Schrag and argues for *transversal rationality*. He says:

Transversal rationality is now fused with consciousness and self-awareness, and this consciousness is then unified by an experience of self-presence, emerging over time from a remembering self-awareness/consciousness in which diverse past experiences are transversally integrated as we reach out to others.

Talk about the human subject is now revisioned by resituating the human subject in the space of communicative praxis. Thus the notion of transversal rationality opens up the possibility to focus on patterns of discourse and action as they happen in our communicative practices, rather than focusing only on the structure of the self, ego, or subject.

The shift of emphasis from individual to social, from subjective towards discourse, which constitutes a new epistemology in the social sciences, is also part and parcel of the postfoundationalist movement.

The idea of socially constructed interpretations and meaning is clearly part of the postfoundationalist approach. Van Huyssteen (2006:24) argues: “Because of our irrevocable contextuality and the embeddedness of all belief and action in networks of social and cultural traditions, beliefs, meaning, and action arise out of our embedded life worlds.”

Contextuality is a key concept in the postfoundationalist approach. Experience is situated and experience is always interpreted.

According to Van Huyssteen (1997) a postfoundationalist notion of rationality should open our eyes to an epistemic obligation that

points beyond the boundaries of our own discipline, our local communities, groups, or cultures, toward plausible forms of *interdisciplinary dialogue*. In his Gifford Lectures, *Alone in the world?* (2006:25) he says: “A postfoundationalist approach helps us realize...that we are not the intellectual prisoners of our contexts or traditions, but that we are epistemically empowered to cross contextual, cultural, and disciplinary borders to explore critically the theories, meanings, and beliefs through which we and other construct our worlds.”

Van Huyssteen (2006b:147) repeats the very important notion of a “democratic presence” for Christian theology in an open, postfoundationalist conversation. Theology shares the interdisciplinary standards of rationality, which will not be hopelessly culture- and context bound, but will always be contextually and socially shaped. In this interdisciplinary conversation with other sciences, theology will act as an equal partner with an authentic voice in a postmodern situation.

3 TRANSVERSAL RATIONALITY AND THE SIZWE STORY

Postfoundationalism implies a form of transversal rationality, as opposed to both universal and multiversal rationality.

The following section is an attempt to demonstrate transversal rationality as an interdisciplinary process. As was said above, this approach forces us to firstly listen to the stories of people in real-life situations. In this case, we are confronted with the Sizwe-story.

In an effort to use the Sizwe story for this interdisciplinary process, I have formulated four questions on the basis of my understanding of the theories of transversal rationality. These were the questions asked to the participants.

As participants, I have chosen scholars from the four disciplines, Sociology, Psychology, Social Work, and Practical Theology. I have approached people whom I know and whom are actively involved in the different disciplines. They were quite willing to openly participate in this process. They are:

Prof Dr Antoinette Lombard, Social Work, University of Pretoria	R1
Prof Dr Jerry Streets, Social Work and Pastoral Theology, Yeshiva University, NY.	R2
Dr Lourens Human, Psychology, University of Pretoria	R3
Dr Jaco Hofmann, Sociology, Oxford University, UK.	R4
Rev Zander van der Westhuizen, Doctoral student and Minister of a church in Pretoria.	R5
Dr Marinda van Niekerk, Church minister and director of a NGO, PEN, in the inner city of Pretoria.	R6

The following questions have been posed to all of them, with the request that they should answer from the perspective of their specific disciplines:

1. When reading the story of Sizwe, what are your *concerns*?
2. What do you think is your discipline's *unique perspective* on this story?
3. Why do you think your perspective will be *understood and appreciated* by people from other disciplines?
4. What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline *might not be taken seriously*?

4 THE PROCESS OF TRANSVERSAL RATIONALITY AS DEMONSTRATED IN THE RESPONSES ON THE SIZWE STORY

The aim of this section of the paper is not to reach conclusions about the understanding of the Sizwe story, but rather to reach a better understanding of the concept of transversal rationality. The Sizwe story is a case study and the different responses on the story are used to reflect on the process of transversal rationality and not on the content as such.

The respondents' complete texts, without any editing are quoted. It is systematised under four headings according to the questions that were asked. At the end of each section I have formulated some reflections. My initial comments were sent back to them for feedback and corrections, which are already included in the formulations below.

4.1 Concerns

R1

- Sizwe's lack of identity as a person in own right as opposed to being defined through this father and family. His struggle with his self-esteem.
- His fears about what 'appears to be' uncontrollable events that impact on him.
- His uncertainty about what his future holds – lack of skills to deal with these uncertainties.
- His disempowerment to take control and pride in who he is and what he can achieve. He believes that he is trapped because of his father's poverty. Lack of vision. Uncertainty about how he can use his father's wisdom and the support within the community to assist him to be successful in life?
- Ignorance about his body, HIV/AIDS. He still holds on to traditional belief system regarding the cause of HIV.
- His fear to know his HIV status and the impact this has/might have on him and his girlfriend. He needs encouragement to do the test and information on the benefits of knowing his status. Knowing goes along with finding coping skills as opposed to the constant fear that is created by not knowing.
- Lack of social capital (social cohesion) in the rural community where he lives. Where is the UBUNTU? The lack of community inspired initiatives to build a strong community with supportive networks that could facilitate integrated economic and social development is a concern.
- The lack of support in making decisions about his life. What implications are there to start from scratch in a new community? What are the pro's and con's compared to stay where he is?

R2

What is the nature of Sizwe's fears? Fear in and of itself is a coping mechanism and can be an appropriate response to a given circumstance. There also appears to be a struggle/effort on Sizwe's part to define himself in light of his relationship to his parents/family- particularly his father and his family traditions and village history/conditions. I would want to know more about the character and style of his attempt to define himself. I would also want to know more about his understanding of HIV/AIDS and his specific avoidance about getting tested. He is obviously affected by HIV and AIDS but not necessarily infected by HIV/AIDS. A specific fear is that he is HIV positive and will not either get that confirmation in time to take the proper treatment and begin the long journey of integrating his status into his life and identity in a healthy way. My second concern is that if he is not HIV positive that he may become so if he does not adopt the necessary behaviors to protect himself from becoming infected with HIV.

R3

The main concerns from a psychology point of view would be:

- Sizwe being scared to go for an HIV/AIDS test.
- Sizwe being viewed through the eyes of his parents.
- Sizwe's experience of a demon having sex with him.
-

R4

The disjuncture interest and concern me...

I picture Sizwe as a young, with-it, self-assured and modern man (see para 2), This, however, is soon juxtaposed with him as an insecure, pre-modern man plagued by demons...

The above can possibly be related to another disjuncture, namely between the generations....and their respective knowledge basis': The story dwells in considerable detail on the earlier intergenerational connections between Sizwe's father and his relations with all sides of his extended families – giving him the basis of his identity, status and knowledge. It is, however, as if Sizwe missed out on this...

Moreover, even if he would have been initiated in this inherited knowledge, the question still is: whether this knowledge would have been relevant in dealing with this new situation (HIV).....? Thus, leaving - on the one hand - the older generations, in spite of their inherited wisdom, quite isolated in relation to the younger generations; and on the other hand, leaving the younger generations quite unprepared and vulnerable to successfully deal with new situations / information...

R5

I understand this question to mean concern in the sense that it worries me, or make me want to think about it more.

I think the first thing that concerns me is Sizwe. He is a human being that is scared of the possibility that he might have HIV. He wants to move somewhere where he is not known. He experiences dreams filled with a demon. My first concern would be for him. The way he is described in the beginning of the excerpt differs completely with the description in the end. Beauty vs Scared. Controlled vs Fear.

The second concern would be the effects of the virus on our society and the real life-threatening experiences people have that are infected or affected by HIV.

This story hints in the direction of the end of generations that carried certain knowledge due to the changing times. It seems that there are various reasons for this from the story.

You also hear about poverty in this story. There is a link to shame it seems. He doesn't want people to know who he is, because then you can't start a successful business if your parents are poor.

At the end of this excerpt he connects moving away again to being scared of what people might do to him if they found out that he might have HIV. Stigmatization plays a very serious part of Sizwe's life. This also concerns me.

R6

I am concerned about Sizwe's decisions he is about to make in his own life. How will he deal with his life, in the context of his family and his community? It seems to me as if he will struggle to get the

necessary support and information he will need to make informed and responsible decisions.

His father deals with feelings of inadequacy and guilt. He is concerned about his future in the community and about his status. He will need support in dealing with these feelings. He might also need help in dealing with his son; to give him guidance and security. The community needs to move to new places of dealing with people who are HIV positive. In a life-changing experience, there are opportunities to do things differently than in the past. To reach new places of doing and being, spiritual inputs can be very needed and important. Someone must be able to journey with this family, as a guide or someone who may sensitize them to new options.

Reflection on concerns

The responses of the different scholars reminded me strongly of the words by Van Huyssteen (2006:21), which were quoted earlier:

Transversal rationality is now fused with consciousness and self-awareness, and this consciousness is then unified by an experience of self-presence, emerging over time from a remembering self-awareness/consciousness in which diverse past experiences are transversally integrated as we reach out to others.

Talk about the human subject is now revisioned by resituating the human subject in the space of communicative praxis. Thus the notion of transversal rationality opens up the possibility to focus on patterns of discourse and action as they happen in our communicative practices, rather than focussing only on the structure of the self, ego, or subject.

Reading through the formulations of the respondents I was struck by how all of them ...

- reached out to Sizwe with compelling empathy
- were able to situate the person in the space of communicative praxis
- have identified patterns of discourse and action
-

It was an eye-opener to see how the responses speak the same language and how scholars from different walks of life could be united in their *concerns*. The responses might have been quite different, if the first question was formulated in the language of analysis and hypothesis. Van Huyssteen (2006b:148), also uses the term *wide reflective equilibrium* to point to the optimal, but fragile communal understanding we are capable of in any given moment in time. A postfoundationalist notion of reality enables us to communicate across boundaries and move transversally from context to context, from one tradition to another, from one discipline to another. He continues that in this wide reflective equilibrium, we finally find the safe but fragile public space we have been search-

ing for, a space for shuttling back and forth between deep personal convictions and the principles that finally result from interpersonal judgements.

These responses have strengthened my impression that transversal rationality is possible on the basis of concern and compassion (“reach out to others”) and that through transversal rationality this safe, fragile space can be created for a communal understanding. The perspective of concern provided common ground to the respondents.

4.2 Unique perspective

R1

Looking at his social functioning within the various roles he plays in relation to his environment. Thus: His interaction - within the various roles he fulfils (e.g. boyfriend, son, business partner, community leader...) with the systems and structures in his family and the community. How does, e.g. poverty, lack of support, lack of education, spiritual beliefs, low self esteem, doubt about the future ... impact on his life and his next-of-kin. I also see an opportunity for community development and community economic development within the community and building social capital/cohesion as well as economic capital as a collective – given the poverty stricken nature of the – assumed from the case study. Life skills’ training is an important component in empowerment and building his capacity.

R2

Social work would address his fears, his identity formation struggle and relationship with and understanding of his father/family/community and its traditions. Pastoral care would consider the psychosocial aspects of his history and identity but also emphasize and explore with him his understanding and self perceptions influenced by his cosmic views and notions of spirituality and his connection to his ancestors.

R3

This is a difficult question to answer, as psychology has many perspectives, for example, the developmental perspective, personality perspective, psychopathology perspective, and social perspective. For the sake of this case study, I shall work from the psychopathology perspective, although I don't work with psychopathology from a positivistic point of view (within people), but more from a social constructionist position (between people).

Working within the confines of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) the following will be of importance:

- Sizwe being scared to go for an HIV/AIDS test - possible anxiety
- Sizwe being viewed through the eyes of his parents - possible depression
- Sizwe's experience of a demon having sex with him - possible psychosis (delusions).
-

R4

The intergenerational, life-course perspective on a life lived, essentially deals with the whole experience in all its dimensions and relations.... always exploring the connections / lack of connections....

R5

I think my perspective would be to ask how God is involved in this story. How is God experienced in this story? What spiritual meaning would there be attached to the story and how do we understand it?

As a practical theologian my interest would lie in how this narrative is linked to a bigger spiritual narrative. What is the spiritual or religious narrative in this story? Is there one?

It is difficult to answer this question within this short excerpt of the story, but it seems to me that the dreams Sizwe has, gives him some form of spiritual connection to the greater religious narratives that he knows. Here is a demon that has sex with him to give him HIV. There is a connection with evil that he experiences as very real. Real enough to be scared. People might have sent this demon.

This means to him that this is possible – that people can summon demons onto someone.

R6

To value each person's own experience and expertise in this situation. To find unique outcomes that will bring them to a richer experience of their lives. Also to contribute my own experiences of God's love and concern for this community and these people. It will be great to create space for the community to share their wisdom with each other, especially in a spiritual context. The spiritual richness and diversity is an age-old well from which communities can drink to enrich their lives and to inform their daily decisions.

Reflection on unique perspectives

Reading through the formulations of the respondents it became evident that there are indeed unique perspectives and that the different disciplines provide us with enriching, but alternative understandings:

- *Social Work* asks for insight in the interaction between Sizwe and the broader community.
- ***Sociology*** asks for the understanding of relations and connections/lack of connections.
- *Psychology* leads us to see that even with a social constructionist approach, there still are possibilities of psychopathology.
- *Practical Theology* asks for the considering of the role of spirituality in the construction of one's reality.

4.3 Understood and appreciated by other disciplines?

R1

Social work is a profession that looks holistically at the person (in all possible roles – work; family; marriage; peer; community, culture ...) in relation to his/her environment. We work with all possible

contexts that human beings find themselves in – assisting them to adapt; effect changes to the situation and/or challenge changes in the environment through policy development; social justice and/or human right claims.

Social workers work with the total spectrum of the life cycle – from the infant, child, adolescent; adult; the aged; people with disabilities; people trapped in social ills such as drugs; poverty; unemployment; death and illness; offenders and victims of offenders and ...

Social workers are trained as generalists who can engage in prevention, rehabilitation; protection work (e.g. child abuse) and development (addressing poverty and structural causes of poverty and inequalities) and can specialise within this ‘person in environment context’ and then be of particular assistance to specialised fields, such as health professions. Understanding this young man in his cultural context, his role, his confusion regarding the illness, him feeling trapped in the modern world and the traditional African world is of importance when educating him about HIV.

In summary: the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being at the point where people interact with their environments.

R2

Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by people from other disciplines? They perhaps would be better understood and appreciated if presented in a more holistic approach – the psychosocial and theological or spiritual care perspectives together.

R3

When working from a psychopathology perspective a diagnosis is made. Although this is criticized by some, it may also empower people as they now have a “name” (although psychiatric in nature) for what they are experiencing. Furthermore, the language used in the diagnosis creates a common language amongst professionals, for example psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, and which

can then be used to direct the chosen interventions, and to synchronize interventions.

R4

In general an intergenerational perspective refers to all relationships between generations (within the African context, provision ought to be made for those generations that already passed away – ancestors / deceased former generations – as well as those who will exist in future but who are not yet born – unborn future generations) and the life-course to all possible events / situations that impact on the life lived till that point.

Without being ideological, it offers a holistic approach to the “intergenerational-self”....pulling together the past and the future; all relationships as well as events / situations into the present / current situation.....It is about exploring the connections and disconnections between local patterns in relation to the wider transformations as well as the micro unit with the larger contexts within which it is embedded.

R5

I think if any discipline reflects with integrity and joins in the interdisciplinary conversation, it will be accepted. Not all disciplines would acknowledge the same beliefs, but I think most disciplines acknowledge that humans have certain beliefs and most of these beliefs that connect to meaning and the spiritual world, links to religion and therefore theology.

Reflection on religious narratives and how people understand them can add value to the study of a story. This would be appreciated if it is not forced or put forward in a manner that would offend other disciplines but try and take part in a bigger conversation.

R6

A Practical-theological perspective viewed from a Narrative viewpoint, can help other disciplines to consider the communities influence in a contextual way. The role spirituality plays in an African community, is usually a very important one. This can contribute to bring options of choice to the story, which would otherwise not have been on the table.

***Reflection on being understood and appreciated by people
other disciplines***

It seems as if the respondents have a deep-seated confidence that the different emphases and perspectives would not undermine the common ground. They verbalise different interests, but are well aware of the fact that the disciplines are not working in isolated silos.

In these responses they have yet again been guided by their common concerns. They experience rationality within their disciplines, but which they believe is transversal in nature. They have argued their own positions in a compelling and convincing way. On the other hand they all seemed to have argued within a framework of theories that is shared by the others.

4.4 Concerns if the discipline's perspective is not taken seriously

R1

That the concern/issue that is dealt with is not approached in a holistic manner. An individual, irrelevant of the nature of the concern; HIV/AIDS; spiritual or poverty always stands in relation to other people, either in a family or community (residence community; work community; church community ...) context. What happens to a person always has an impact on him/herself and other people.

Social justice and human rights for all inspire us, and we are committed to tackle inequalities and discriminatory practices through policy development. If e.g. young people in communities are consistently exposed to social ills, HIV infections are high – social workers engage in interventions but also challenge and influence policies to be effected to address these concerns.

R2

What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline might not be taken seriously? That Sizwe as a person and a person-in-relationship to others, history and a culture is not taken seriously.

R3

If I had to relate this question to the possible anxiety, depression and psychosis, my concerns are the following:

- Sizwe being scared to go for an HIV/AIDS test - possible psychological interventions (e.g. Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy) and psycho-pharmacological interventions may be missed.
- Sizwe being viewed through the eyes of his parents – possible psychological interventions (eg Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy) and psycho-pharmacological interventions may be missed.
- Sizwe experience of a demon having sex with him - that the demon might only be interpreted from a religious point of view, and that Sizwe might be losing contact with reality, and that this will not be treated as a reality.
-

R4

We might then lose out on understanding Sizwe's important remark: *"People see you through your parents and your grandparents and they judge you."* Events (metaphysical/physical), the self, the management of care as well as livelihoods in Africa are indeed relationally/(inter) generationally interpreted.

A good example of this generational disjuncture can be found in the age/generational segregated nature of many developmental projects dealing with so-called HIV/AIDS orphans. This, despite the fact that 60% of HIV/AIDS-orphaned children in Southern Africa live in grandparent-headed multi-generational networks....The assumption that HIV/AIDS is a disease only affecting younger generations has led to the situation where most national and international data are only compiled up to the age of 49 years. The result of this perspective was and still is that educational programmes, from the start, heavily focused on younger generations to the exclusion of older persons with the result that they were not in a position to gain the necessary knowledge to morally influence and support their children and grandchildren. Not even to mention protecting themselves from infection...

R5

If we are not taken seriously I would be concerned that we are not taking part in the conversation in a way that we add value to it. As soon as theology adds value to a conversation I don't see how it cannot be taken seriously. If it is not, then I think we should try and look for the reason it is not.

So my major concern would be integrity and adding value.

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That the story and the contribution of the community will not be taken seriously. It might happen that a unique outcome might be overlooked if the spiritual stories are not taken serious. Especially in the context of illness and possible death, of feelings of guilt and needed forgiveness, can theological perspectives on family care and communal love be conducive. The well of spiritual opportunity must be pointed to, as a place of new resources.

Reflection on concerns when scholars feel that their discipline is not taken seriously.

More than one of the respondents asked for a holistic approach, and yet all of them are of the opinion that they and their specific discipline can make a unique contribution. They all claim a place at the table of the interdisciplinary dialogue. They do it with the assumption that rationality is neither universal nor diverse, but transversal in nature.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This paper allowed only for the beginning of the interdisciplinary process on the basis of transversal rationality. It was a starting point on the basis of which follow-up discussions can be conducted with the six respondents. While the emphasis of this paper was on the process of transversal rationality, a further dialogue with the participants could move towards a better understanding of the Sizwe story.

I hope to do a follow-up paper, which will focus more on the content and not so much on the process.

I would like to conclude that the paper illustrated the usability and effectiveness of the postfoundationalist approach, and more specifically the implementation of the concept of transversal rationality. My conclusion is based on the way in which the process unfolded, and which can be summarised as follows:

1. The process started and developed out of a real, local, and contextualised narrative. In other words, the rationality that unfolded was situated and contextual. The dialogue that was initiated was not based on abstract ideas and concepts, but on a real-life situation.
2. The question about concerns provided a platform for transversal understanding between the different disciplines. All were concerned about Sizwe, although from different angles.
3. In reaction to all four questions the respondents were able to formulate their own concerns and the perspectives of their disciplines in such a way that it provided a unique contribution, but was communicable to the others.
4. The differences, but also the similarities became evident.
5. The process illustrated that a universal truth about Sizwe doesn't exist.
6. On the other hand, the process also illustrated that the "truth" about Sizwe is not so diversified that communication is impossible. Transversal communication was possible.

The process described in this paper illustrated and embodied the statement by Van Huyssteen (2000a:211):

Human rationality...always grows out of social, political, and historical contexts, yet always again surfaces in diverse yet overlapping modes of knowledge.

And Van Huyssteen (2000b:239):

Each of our domains of understanding may indeed have its own logic of behaviour, as well as an under-

standing unique to the particular domain, but in each the rich resources of human rationality remain (cf Bottum 1994:379). When we discover the shared richness of the resources of rationality without attempting to subsume all discourses and all communities under one universal reason, we have discovered the richness of a postfoundationalist notion of rationality.

5 SECOND REFLECTIVE MOVEMENT

A group of eight people attended my paper/workshop. I invited them to participate in an informal discussion, which they did in a lively and constructive way. The group had an international flavour with persons from the USA, Canada, Australia, and South Africa attending. A number of disciplines were represented, for example Social Work, Sociology, Health Sciences, and Philosophy.

I experienced the discussion as very helpful. On the one hand it was encouraging because the participants were supportive of my approach. On the other hand it was challenging because of honest, critical questions and comments.

Very important issues have been raised and therefore I have decided to add this epilogue to the original paper and in the process then transform it into a paper for publication. At least two of the comments that were made, were of such importance for the theme of this paper that I have decided to reflect on them in this section.

5.1 Bias

The first has to do with my selection of the participants, who I have invited to react on the Sizwe story. The question that was raised was about the effect of this selection on the conclusions. The person who raised the question made the comment that the respondents seem to be all colleagues of mine who support my point of view. How different would it have been with other respondents who don't share the same point of view?

This question corresponds with what Osmer (2006: 343) said about selectivity and the transversal model. One of his points of concern about the "model" is the lack of a principle of selection. He says: "At present, no comparable principle of selectivity has been articulated in the discussion of transversal interdisciplinarity." At the

same time, Osmer acknowledges the fact that such “rules” are contradictory to the philosophy of postfoundationalism. My remark to the question should be seen as a consequence of my position within this philosophy.

I immediately acknowledged my own bias in selecting the respondents and in interpreting their remarks. But I reiterated that this was never meant to be an experiment. I didn’t try to prove anything, but rather to demonstrate how transversal rationality works and how it can be used in any interdisciplinary discussion. That’s why I haven’t concentrated so much on the content of their responses, but on the process that developed. The process, to my mind, would have developed in the same way, whether the respondents were in agreement with the underlying theories of the paper, or not. Even though the participants in this paper are colleagues of mine, I do not think that it had an influence on the result of this paper. All the participants are embedded in their specific social and historical context. This is illustrated in the words of Van Huyssteen (2006b:151):

...in interdisciplinary dialogue the rather a-contextual terms ‘theology and science’ should be replaced by focussing our attention on specific theologians, engaging in specific kinds of theologies, who are attempting to enter the interdisciplinary dialogue with very specific scientists, working within specific sciences on clearly defined, shared problems.

5.2 “The most dangerous question”

The person who asked the question, labelled it as “most dangerous” even before it was verbalised. It was indeed a very important critical question, with serious (dangerous?) consequences: *What would Sizwe’s concern be and how would he react on the questions?*

All of us agreed that Sizwe’s own interpretation should be taken into account and that interpretations shouldn’t be made for and on behalf of him. But how and when must it be included in the process? Should it be part of the interdisciplinary process?

In my reflection afterwards I asked myself three more questions:

- Why didn’t any of my respondents voice concern about Sizwe’s own concerns? None of them was concerned about

the possibility that Sizwe's own interpretation might not be listened to.

- Why didn't the postfoundationalist theory and the transversal process of rationality lead me to this "dangerous" question?
- Is this an indication of a dangerous flaw in the postfoundational approach or is it an indication of a dangerous mistake that I have made in conducting the interdisciplinary process?

A previous paper which I have co-authored with Karlijn Demasure³ is relevant here. In this paper postfoundationalism was put forward as one of three perspectives, which belong together and which constitute the narrative turn in pastoral theology. The other two are hermeneutics and social-constructionism.

I believe that the interdisciplinary process which I have created was true to the theories of the postfoundational approach. But the possibility that I haven't captured the whole scope of the postfoundational theory and that I have missed something in translating it into an interdisciplinary process, must also be kept in mind.

Postfoundationalism emphasises contextuality and therefore the listening to in-context experiences. The question is whether it also guarantees an inclusion of the in-context experiences in the formulation of interpretations. It seems as if one can work postfoundationally and reach conclusions without the inclusion of the interpretations of the so-called research subject

The postfoundationalist process does require committed listening to the "in- context experiences" of Sizwe, but is it also committed to the inclusion of Sizwe's own understanding of his story?

In order to create a narrative research process of integrity, we have to be informed by all three components, namely hermeneutics, social-constructionism, and postfoundationalism. While hermeneutics and postfoundationalism provide us with a good epistemological basis and even methodological direction, we need social-constructionism to a co-creation of the research.

³ Demasure, K & Müller, J. 2006. Perspectives in support of the narrative turn in pastoral care. *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif* 47(3&4):410–419.

Postfoundationalism helps us to develop our knowledge contextually and base our theories in very specific and concrete local situations. It doesn't provide us with a socially constructed research process. In short and in summary: Transversal rationality does not necessarily include Sizwe's rationality. And without Sizwe's rationality even transversal rationality can become yet another universal truth. A truth that functions as God's eye view on Sizwe.

I have started this paper with the Sizwe story. What I have learned is the importance of keeping Sizwe in the story of research instead of just reflecting on his story.

6 THIRD MOVEMENT OF REFLECTION

I have written this section about six months after the second reflection. In order to help me to reach a better reflection, I have included other practical theologians in the discussion. This brought me to the conclusion that the critique which I have expressed against transversal rationality in the second reflection was perhaps unfair. I should rather have been more self-critical about the way I have executed the process. Wildman (2008), in his critique on, and Van Huyssteen's answers serve as a valuable soundboard against which a more balanced reflection could develop.

Wildman (2008:489) states that the transversal method demands that the presence and effects of special interests should be acknowledged as a condition of dialogue, but that it is incompletely done by Van Huyssteen. He doesn't have a problem with the method but how it is employed. He thinks that if the method was more systematic, and less exclusively dependant on impressionistic moments of transversal insight, there would be more of a basis for detecting these failures of impartiality. According to Wildman, the transversal method desires to honour the substantial autonomy of both science and theology in a way that is more artistic than philosophically rigorous. It is encouraging the exploration of favoured transversal connections while allowing unfavourable ones to pass unexamined or muted in their effects. Wildman (2008:490) thinks that by remaining confident in his theological tradition, Van Huyssteen finds in the transversal method an ideally congenial or compliant method.

In his response to similar, earlier criticism by Wildman, Van Huyssteen (2007: 421) writes that transversal reasoning is not about arbitrarily opening ourselves up or closing ourselves off to other

viewpoints (for instance the viewpoint of Sizwe?), but rather what it means to discover an epistemic space that allows for the kind of interdisciplinary critical evaluation that includes a critical self-evaluation and optimal understanding. There are also natural limits to dialogue between disciplines. In the transversal, interdisciplinary moment rich resources could be shared, but after this moment, a postfoundationalist approach points back to the contextual, natural, intradisciplinary boundaries of our own disciplines. Van Huyssteen (2007:422) maintains that transversal reasoning means that we have to be alert to *degrees of transversality* and that different theological approaches could have different degrees of success in interdisciplinary dialogue. It is however most important that theology and sciences can share concerns and can converge in their methodological approaches on specifically identified problems.

Looking back now, I realise that it wasn't the approach or method of transversal rationality that created limitations. The limitations have rather been created by my own short-sightedness in the way I formulated some of the questions. The responses of my participants could have developed much differently if I had replaced question 1 (When reading the story of Sizwe, what are your **concerns?**), with the following:

- When reading the story of Sizwe, what do you think would his concerns be?

If I had formulated the question around Sizwe's own concerns, I would have been more in line with the philosophy of transversal rationality. I could have created a higher *degree of transversality* by facilitating a mode of empathetic reflection on Sizwe's situation, and it would have been a logical consequence of transversal rationality.

I believe that the total process as it has developed, including all three rounds of reflection, can be described as a safe and fragile space created by the wide reflective equilibrium. If Sizwe could have been directly part of the conversation, the equilibrium would have been even wider, safer, but also more fragile.

In conclusion then, I would propose only three questions as good open-ended questions for the beginning of an interdisciplinary conversation based on transversal rationality. The first one has been changed as was discussed above. The original fourth and second questions have been merged into one question (2).

Original questions	Reformulated questions
1) When reading the story of Sizwe, what are your <i>concerns</i> ?	1) <i>When reading the story of (Sizwe), what do you think would his/her concerns be?</i>
2) What do you think is your discipline's <i>unique perspective</i> on this story?	2) <i>How would you formulate your discipline's unique perspective on these concerns and why is it important that this perspective be heard at the interdisciplinary table?</i>
3) Why do you think your perspective will be <i>understood and appreciated</i> by people from other disciplines?	3) <i>Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by researchers from other disciplines?</i>
4) What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline <i>might not be taken seriously</i> ?	

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