

# Chapter 3: THE NARRATIVES OF THE CO-RESEARCHERS

In this chapter we narrow the circle by listening to the specific narratives of the co-researchers. The aim of this chapter is to listen to the narratives and try and come to a greater understanding of these unheard narratives. We will aim at making thick descriptions of the narratives and invite the co-researchers to participate in the reflections on the narratives.

## 1. THE SELECTION OF THE CO-RESEARCHERS AND LISTENING TO THEIR NARRATIVES

### 1.1 Deciding on the selection process of the co-researchers

I have explained the context of the programme in the previous chapter where it is apparent that the programme has had a large amount of mentors and mentees in the past few years. This made it difficult to decide on how to choose co-researchers. The second challenge was the fact that the group was only consistent for the period of a year. Then the whole group changed. Many of the mentors moved, or the mentees went on to study at other places and so forth.

Initially I also thought of selecting the co-researchers by using different categories. One category in which mentees and mentors presented themselves was according to generations and relational categories. This included mother-daughter, brother-sister, old-young, peer group mentors and other categories. I wanted to select co-researchers from each category.

I decided to focus only on three to five narratives, the reason for this being that in a narrative approach we would rather listen to fewer narratives and make

thicker descriptions of them, as opposed to working with a lot of narratives and compiling a vast amount of statistical data from the larger group.

I also decided that I didn't want to make the selection myself. This could compromise the selection from the start.

In the end, I decided not to force categories on the selection. These categories could be preliminary ideas in my own mind and would not allow for the research to develop on its own. This would also not exemplify a not-knowing position for me as researcher.

I also decided that it would always be possible to ask for more volunteers or conduct interviews with specific mentors if the narratives led me to that point.

I asked for volunteers to participate in the research in 2007. Many of these narratives started within the 2006 group. This way the co-researchers could reflect on the narratives with a bit of experience and time for the narratives to develop.

The only specific narrative that I asked a volunteer for was for a narrative where the mentorship relationship did not work out. I thought this would be an important narrative in the research. In the narrative research approach we are always on the lookout for the marginalised narratives.

In the end three mentors and mentees volunteered to take part in the research as co-researchers. A fourth mentee volunteered to take part that had an experience where the relationship did not develop as expected.

## **1.2 How did I listen to the narratives of the co-researchers?**

I basically used the same methods of listening to the narratives of the co-researchers than listening to Hanlie's narrative. I did not however have so many informal discussions with the co-researchers.

There were two ways in which I listened to their narratives. The first was to have formal interviews in which I used audio recordings and transcriptions in at least one. When I didn't use recordings, I made my own process notes.

I had two formal interviews with most of the co-researchers. Where it wasn't possible for them to have two, I had a longer session with them. These sessions took place at my home.

It was difficult for the co-researchers to always find time for the formal interviews. I was uncertain at first if this would be a problem, but it turned out that between the correspondence (which was much easier for them), the interviews and the group discussions, this would be enough for them.

The interviews that were conducted were completely unstructured. I did not use any specific questions during these interviews. It is important to note that the excerpts from interviews in this chapter are mostly not first interviews or discussions. Therefore some of the content of previous interviews will be implied in the questions.

The second method was reflecting on their own narratives and my own reflections on their narratives. I wanted to make sure that they truly were the co-researchers in the project and that what was written had their consent and input. This was achieved mostly by email.

I asked the co-researchers to reflect on one of their interviews. To help them with this I proposed a few questions for them to look at. These questions were formulated after the interviews that follow. I list them here as background to all

the narratives that are discussed, not because they were formulated prior to the interviews.

Some answered all the questions, others answered some of the questions and others wrote in general. In these sections you will find a compilation of their own feedback on their narrative. I suspect that in most cases only the mentor did this feedback. Some of them probably discussed it with the mentee.

Questions to facilitate the feedback of each of the co-researchers on their narrative:

1. What does your narrative tell us about mentorship? What do you hear about mentorship from this narrative?
2. What themes, narratives or elements from your own narrative captured your attention during the reading of the interview?
3. Is there something that surprises you? Is there something that you see now that you did not see before?
4. What do you think someone else would learn about mentorship from your narrative?
5. What do we learn together from your narrative?
6. What informs your narrative? What had an influence on your narrative?
7. Any general comments you would like to make about your narrative?

The final way in which I listened to the narratives of the co-researchers, was during the group discussion. The whole group came together for a reflection on of all the narratives. This was a positive experience for the group. I reflect on this in chapter 4.

### **1.3 The issue of language and confidentiality**

It is important to report here on the use of language and the issues surrounding confidentiality. I have stuck to the ethical guidelines of our PhD group and the university as discussed in the first chapter.

As regards the language (which we looked at extensively in the first chapter) I decided to do this thesis in English. The reasoning behind this is simply accessibility. This could have been a potential hindrance in the research process due to the fact that the co-researchers speak Afrikaans as a first language. They are however bilingual and did not have a problem with the English thesis. This helped me a great deal in the sense that I could send the translated transcripts to them and that they would be able to read it themselves. We did conduct the interviews and discussions in Afrikaans to enable them to do this in their first language, but for the purposes of the thesis it was translated and they could check it. Where there were certain words or expressions that expressed their thoughts and feelings better in the original language, I left it in Afrikaans.

Due to the nature of the topic and the fact that it not as sensitive as a topic like HIV/AIDS or related topics, the co-researchers decided that they wouldn't use pseudonyms or participate anonymously. They did however have the chance to edit or change any parts of their narratives or reflections.

## **2. THE NARRATIVE OF COENRAAD AND CARINA BEKKER**

Coenraad is 21 years old and lived with his sister Carina (19) during the period of the research project and parts of the mentor relationship. Both of them are currently studying and were part of the mentorship programme. Carina asked Coenraad to be her mentor during her confirmation year. Since then their relationship developed further after the formal programme. Their father lives in

KwaZulu-Natal and had remarried. Their mother passed away in the period of the research. She lived on her own in Pretoria. Coenraad took care of Carina during her secondary education.

## 2.1 Excerpts from an interview with Coenraad and Carina

I will also start by inserting excerpts of one of their interviews here, as a starting point to listen to their narrative.

5	Z <sup>3</sup>	And how did you decide to choose someone?
6	Ca <sup>4</sup>	I chose Coenraad, because I heard you could choose a brother. And I decided Coenraad was the best choice. Because I didn't know anyone else that could be a mentor for me.
15	Z	How long was it before you moved in together?
16	Ca	Half a year.
17	Z	Was the moving in together one of the biggest factors?
18	Ca	Yes, because we only saw each other on Sundays when it was at church. That was all.
19	Z	So the more contact, the better for the mentorship?
20	Ca	Yes, for sure.
21	Z	What can you remember specifically from that time?
22	C <sup>5</sup>	One thing that came up, and still does, is when me and my sister moved in together, my dad said I am now responsible for my sister. So I was sort of the father figure. And that was weird in the beginning. And I didn't really want to do that. Because I didn't want to say to Carina, you are not allowed to do this or that. That also played a big role. That I was this father figure, I was her mentor and her brother. And the brother part sort of faded away. And then

<sup>3</sup> Z - Zander

<sup>4</sup> Ca - Carina

<sup>5</sup> C - Coenraad

		recently my dad, Cariena and I had a conversation about it, and we decided the father figure thing didn't work in the house. The fact that I am only two years older than her, doesn't give me the right to make decisions for her. And with the mentorship it was very much amplified. The fact that I wasn't taking the head role. And when I got back to the role of just being her brother, it was a more difficult adjustment to go back to being her brother, because I am still her mentor and then it came back that I feel like a father figure again.
23	Z	So is the mentor role and the father role closer to each other for you than the brother mentor role?
24	C	Hmmm... yes in a way. Because the mentor role makes me feel that I have to be an example, like a father needs to be an example. And that is why.
25	Z	How do you connect the roles?
26	Ca	I don't like it really. Hmmm.....the father and mentor is probably close to each other in terms of example. But a mentor must be someone that you can share everything with. And with for whom you can share anything, any time.
27	Z	So is that closer for you to the brother role than the father role?
28	Ca	Yes, I think it must be like that. And it was difficult in the beginning, both, because he was now the father and I wanted to say something to my brother, but I can't, because I don't really have a brother, my brother is my dad. That was difficult in the beginning.
31	Z	Did you specifically make time for the mentorship?
32	C	Not at all.
33	Z	So what of the confirmation year experience did you connect to the mentorship?
34	Ca	Very little, I must say. Because it was very difficult for me in the beginning, because we never saw each other. I think it was just another thing we had to do, and I told him he must sign the forms for

		me. The mentorship thing only started to come through later. After the confirmation year. Because that is only when we started to get to know each other again. And when we lived in the same house again after three years. So the mentorship year was actually a year too early. Because we didn't live together.
41	Z	Did the mentorship thing at the church help you at all?
42	C	Yes, a lot. Because I started to be on the lookout more for my sister's opinion about things. And I must listen to what she thinks, because I must actually give her advice about it and tell her what I think. So I think this is where our bond grew stronger, because I showed more interest in how she feels about things, and not how I did.
43	Z	What do you think is the general idea of mentorship?
44	Ca	That it helps you grow.
45	C	Hmmmm.... the mentorship thing, I think also it helps you grow, and you also learn a lot about other people's choices. The mentor doesn't have to be perfect. The mentor can also make mistakes. You also learn a lot from the mistakes the mentor make.
52	Z	What type of things did you talk speakabout?
53	Ca	Anything. Whatever is important. Like if I have a problem with a friend. I would talk to Coenraad about it, and tell him, "this is the problem, what do you think?"
54	Z	Advice?
55	Ca	Yes. We ask each other a lot of advice.
56	Z	In what sense do you think the mentorship program has spiritual content?
57	C	I think it is connected to the advice. What is right and wrong. Then I am in this position, where Cariena tells me what happened, and then asks if this is right or wrong if I do this. And then it is not necessarily right, but it is the easiest option. And then we would talk speakabout

		those differences. What is the easiest, and what is right or wrong. UnconsciencelyUnconsciously you make the spiritual connectionof it is spiritual. It is from a Christian point of view.
58	Ca	(Agrees)
77	C	Yes. If I think about it. If she chose my dad, if he was living in the same house as us...
78	Ca	It wouldn't have been the same. I can't talk to my dad about the same things as with Coenraad. Where there are isother things I can talk to my dad about, but not with my brother.
79	C	I also think, it is about he age gap.
80	Z	Is it better that there is a smaller age gap?
81	C	It is a lot better. There must be a difference, but not to big.
82	Ca	For me, I feel that person must be on the same level as you and shouldmustn't have beenbe at school 20 years backago.. That when you talkspeak about school, he understands and doesn't gives advicse of 20 years agoback.

## 2.2 Coenraad and Carina's notes on their interview

I list some of Coenraad and Carina's own notes on their interview in bulleted form. This was done according to the questions listed in section 1.2.

- We realised that mentorship is a process that cannot be forced or hastened. It needs commitment from the mentor and the mentee. You have to let it run its own course from then on.
- The one theme that stood out for us was that our mentorship relationship began and grew when we lived together because we saw each other a lot.
- The mentorship programme made us more at ease with each other and we spoke more easily and openly with each other. There were times that we had arguments and a difference of opinion, but it taught us to be

aware of the fact that we do differ and that we should listen to and respect each other.

- You must choose someone that knows you well and understand you. Then you are already at ease and you don't have to spend time getting to know each other. We also learned that the mentorship relationship needs a lot of time and commitment to be successful.
- We also learned that the mentee can also give advice and that the mentor didn't have to be the advice giver all the time.
- The fact that we are brother and sister and that we stayed together was one of the big reasons the mentorship relationship worked for us.

### **2.3 My notes from conversations with Coenraad and Carina**

In the conversations I had with them and sometimes with Coenraad on his own, I made a few notes on certain themes that emerged from their narrative.

The relationship they have as brother and sister was frequently discussed. They would always give it a name, describe it in some way, or talk about their roles in the situation.

They never focussed on making specific appointments to have a mentorship discussion as many in the programme do. The fact that they stayed together helped them to see each other a lot. They would tell me how they would have discussions in the car when Coenraad picked Carina up after school or during dinnertime, et cetera. So they experienced different ways to get together and talk. There was no set way of having conversations.

They made a lot of the fact that they had an equal part to play in the mentorship relationship. Both had to listen to each other and both had to respect each other. I did not experience evidence of the expert-child relationship in any of our conversations.

I see a lot of them at church and at the back of my mind I always wondered what the difference between their relationship as brother and sister and their mentorship relationship was. Is it the same thing? Does it need to be? How does it link in their minds? When we discussed their relationship they would call it a mentorship relationship and simultaneously a brother-sister relationship. They regarded both relationships as something that developed naturally.

## **2.4 Reflection on their narrative**

I will try and reflect on their narrative by again looking at various themes arising from our conversations.

### **Background**

I think it is important to take the background of their narrative into account. Coenraad and Carina lived on their own after their parents' divorce. Carina stayed in the school residence and Coenraad in a flat. In Carina's final year at school it made more sense for them to live together. This had an influence on their relationship in a very significant way. They had experienced a lot in the last few years with regards to family and circumstances that changed. This was absorbed by this relationship that they would easily refer to as a mentorship relationship.

The one question I reflected on during the conversations with them has been the relation between their relationship as brother and sister and the mentorship relationship. Would their relationship be any different if there had been no mention of the mentorship programme? Was this not the narrative of any brother and sister living together? Is it even a good question to ask? The research I am busy with focuses on narratives of mentorship in the congregation. Does it matter if the programme specifically initiates it or not? This might not be a question for me as researcher but rather a question for me as the pastor of the programme.

What is important is the language they use in their conversations. On the one hand the relationship was never formed or significant at all in the formal year of Carina's confirmation. They didn't really speak about the programme at all during this time. When they spoke about the relationship it began having real meaning only after the confirmation year when they moved into the same flat. When asked if the programme had helped them, they said that it had. Coenraad was still part of the programme as a leader, but did not attend any training sessions.

They would refer to the relationship as a "mentorship" relationship and definitely from the context of the programme at church. This led me to conclude that we should not think about the mentorship programme in a confined or limited way. The narratives of mentorship do not necessarily develop within the confines or period of the programme, but also at later stages.

### **Choosing a mentor, relations and roles**

Carina was very clear that she chose Coenraad for the reason that he is her brother, he is involved at church and that she feels comfortable with him. She also mentioned later that he understands her world and issues, because he is only a few years older than she is. If she had chosen her dad it would have been different. She also said that she couldn't think about anyone else who could be a mentor for her other than Coenraad. Again the theme of who is chosen as a mentor presents itself as an important aspect. One reason why their relationship worked was because she chose her brother.

In the programme there is a lot of discussion on whether it is a good or a bad thing to ask a relative to be you mentor. In this case it almost seemed that for Carina it was the obvious choice, because of the fact that Coenraad was close to her. I am sure if she had other relatives that she wasn't as close to as

Coenraad, she would most probably still have chosen Coenraad, not because of the fact that they are related, but because of the trust and the relationship they share. To them it was important.

The significant theme from their narrative is the intense discussion on roles. Coenraad tells their narrative and refers a lot to his role as mentor, brother and at one stage, father. At the beginning he felt the responsibility to be the father figure in the relationship. He wasn't comfortable with this and it was difficult to understand his relationship with Carina in this way. They decided that they would rather stick to the brother-sister role, but this made it difficult again for him to see himself as a mentor. He says that in a way the mentor role was closer to the father role, because a father (like a mentor) has to set a good example. But they identified the brother role as the role played by someone who you can share a lot with, and that is how a mentor should be. It seems that from Carina's side it was easier to talk to her brother as a mentor, rather than talking to the father figure as the mentor. The association with the father figure was always about asking permission and submitting under his authority. She didn't want this association with her mentor.

### **Time and living together and commitment**

If you would ask them what the main thing was that made their relationship work, they would answer that you needed to spend time in the relationship and commit to it. For them this went hand in hand with the fact that they lived together. When they started in the mentorship programme, Carina did not live with Coenraad and this meant that they did not spend a lot of time together. This was why the relationship didn't work at first. Once they moved in with each other, they spent more time together and this led to a growing and successful mentorship relationship for them.

The main ingredient to make the relationship grow for them was time. When they spoke about the experiences their friends had, they would say that it did not work for them, because they only saw each other twice in the year. That would be the reason why it didn't work for their friends.

### **The connection to spirituality and experiences of God**

It is interesting that in their narrative spirituality is connected to advice. In this sense they mean it ethically. There are choices that need to be made in everyday situations and as a Christian you need advice from your mentor on how you could distinguish between right or wrong in a situation. Coenraad felt that he gave this advice from a Christian point of view. These ethical values are linked to the church and to being involved in the church. The church is also the place where you can learn to distinguish between wrong and right.

It seems that there was no connection between confirmation, the programme and spiritual contents for them. This only came later when the relationship developed. There was also no mention of other spiritual experiences in their narrative. I specifically did not ask them a lot about this, because in our narrative approach we don't want to force a topic or theme on the narrative.

I would like to reflect further on the connection between spirituality and experiences of God, and ethics. It would seem that the idea of Christianity and religious conversation is centred around what is right and wrong.

### **How they understand mentorship**

In terms of discourses, you could hear something about their general ideas about mentorship. There is a strong emphasis on responsibility. Coenraad saw a mentor as someone who needed to set an example and who had to take

responsibility for someone. That is why the decision about mentorship is a serious decision to make.

A mentor must be someone you can talk to and share. They have a beautiful narrative in terms of emphasising the openness and trust between them. That was why Carina chose Coenraad in the first place. The relationship needs to be comfortable and open. The mentor must also understand something of the mentee's world.

Mentorship must also help you to grow as a person and a mentor must give advice. This advice does not necessarily have to be taken. It is seen as an important opinion in your life. The mentor can also make mistakes and you can learn from those mistakes as well. For them there is a focus on learning in mentorship. That is why they would talk a lot about things that were problems or situations that arose where Carina would need Coenraad's opinion. That was also why her mentor needed to know about her world and context. Otherwise someone (like her father) who does not know her world, would not be able to give the correct advice.

## **Meaning**

I asked myself what the meaning in this narrative of mentorship was. I listened to the narrative and read their own reflections on their narrative and came to the conclusion that the meaning is to be found in the growth in their relationship as brother and sister.

It is almost as if the mentorship process which started at the church developed and grew so much between them in various stages, that this enhanced their relationship as brother and sister. It helped them to come to terms with each other, also to come to terms with the way Carina went from being a high school

child to a student and the influence of this on their relationship, and many other things.

Carina accepted Coenraad as a mentor and this was a good metaphor for their relationship as brother and sister, in their specific context. They attached a positive meaning to their mentorship experience for this reason.

### 3. THE NARRATIVE OF CHRISTA SMIT AND BARRY STEENKAMP

Christa Smit is in her fifties and is married to Quintus. She has two daughters and works at the University of Pretoria in the administration section of the Faculty of Engineering. Christa was trained as a social worker and practised before she started working at the university. Barry Steenkamp is currently a student. He attended Menlopark High before he started studying. It was during this period that Barry chose Christa as his mentor in the mentorship programme for the confirmation year. There is no relationship between them.

#### 3.1 Excerpts from an interview with Christa and Barry

I will start by inserting excerpts of one of their interviews here, as a starting point to listen to their narrative.

6	Z <sup>6</sup>	The interesting part for me from your story (cause we are deciding together what we learn from your story) is that one of the big themes from all the stories, is how you chose someone to be your mentor. What would you (Barry) say to other people about how to choose a mentor?
7	B <sup>7</sup>	(Laugh) You can't ask someone who just made a random decision

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<sup>6</sup> Z-Zander

		about who to choose! I don't know. Choose someone who you feel comfortable with.
8	Z	OK. Christa, you said there was this "connection"?
9	C <sup>8</sup>	Yes, for me. I don't know if he experienced it as a connection, but I was comfortable. I don't know if he would have come to me if it was different. When we met, we couldn't say, "today we talk about this". It wouldn't have worked. We don't have such a relationship.
18	Z	Last time we also discussed that you saw each other more during the duration of that year of the program and less after the program.
19	C	Yes.
39	Z	How do the others in the class think about the mentorship program?
40	B	I don't really know. I didn't really talk to them about it. They weren't really my friends. We were together in the class and saw each at school.
41	Z	And from your other friends that you know better?
42	B	Lots chose older brothers and sisters. But we didn't really talk about such things. We just sort of heard who is each other's mentor and that was that.
43	Z	Do you think it is a meaningful thing?
44	B	I think it was interesting and it helped me with the whole thing of going to stand in front of the pastors. I would have felt uncomfortable I think.
45	Z	So it was easier with the...
46	B	Yes. It was comfortable.
51	Z	The one thing I heard from you is that you wanted it to be comfortable. You used the word a few times. Are there other things that you would say is important?
52	C	It was never forced.

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<sup>7</sup> B - Barry

<sup>8</sup> C - Christa

53	Z	So comfortable, unforced...?
54	C	Spontaneous. These are all things that fit together. I cannot think that you can be in a relationship where you think: "Oh! Here is the aunt!" or "Here he is again!" I think there needs to be respect and trust!
55	Z	What about practical things?
56	C	Yes, I had to phone and say: "Let's get together". We didn't go out for coffee. We saw each other at our house. And then of course we live close to each other, so it was easy.
57	Z	So it was easy for you too?
58	B	Yes, it wasn't like we planned it every time. She would phone me and ask about a time and I would say yes.
59	Z	So how important was it for you guys so see each other regularly?
60	C	Well, we were fortunate to see each other about every Sunday. And if I didn't see him, I saw his parents and spoke to them. I still have this feeling that it was nice to visit with him
61	Z	You never felt that there is a shortage of an agenda?
62	C	No. Were we quiet? (to Barry)
63	B	No. We didn't really speak about the mentorship stuff. We spoke about whatever.
64	Z	Do you think there needs to be more of an agenda? Many people ask that in the program.
65	C	Given my background and the whole...it was important for me to communicate with him and pick-up what it is that bugs him. And I was on the lookout for that. I didn't say to him "Barry, tell me what is troubling you..." I mean which child is going to respond to that? It was more important for me to keep it at a conversation and then catch whatever I wanted to know. I don't know if all the mentors have the ability to do this. To take a cue from a hook he throws out and then talk about it. To me it comes unconsciously. I think it is a skill.
68	C	You know, and also faith stuff (this is what it is about). To try and talk

		about it, without saying “What do you say about the Dutch Reformed church’s...understanding of baptism...” If there were things that bugged him about this, I think I would have picked it up out of our conversations. And I did test him about it.
73	C	In a few year’s time, I would like to talk to him again about church. Because he was in Grade 11, when we spoke about it. I would like to ask how he experiences church. Is he closer? Is he further? What did he search and didn’t get? I don’t think he could say that to me in Grade 11 already.
87	Z	In general, do you think there are any other stories that are not told or marginalized stories? I ask everyone if they think there are unheard stories? Or stories of people who feel left out?
88	C	Not me. I think there are a lot of things between us that haven’t been discussed. But it is not a relationship that has ended. So it’s maybe for later. So it won’t be “come sit now and talk to me about faith and your student years”. It won’t be like that.
89	Z	What do you think is the general idea about generations and mentorship? If you think about your friends, and they choose brothers or sisters, do you think there is a general idea? Maybe a gap?
90	B	Maybe people go for younger people as mentors, because the older people have more of a formal approach. While having a young mentor it can be a casual type of thinking. But for me it didn’t work out that way.
96	C	To me it was important to be the one who came into his life. As I said in the video. It was an important learning experience to me. Because he is young and his head is open. I don’t know if the roles weren’t maybe the other way around, that I actually learned more from him, than he from me. But, I never saw him as a child. I felt we were on an equal footing and that I had just as much to hear from him and pick-up. And that connectedness...to understand it’s test, it’s choosing a career.

97	B	Yes. To me it wasn't an older aunt. You get those aunts who are "ou-tannierig" (old maidish) But it is like a friend, not....
98	C	Respect.
99	Z	Do you think you learned something from Christa's life?
100	B	Lots! (Laugh).

### 3.2 Christa and Barry's notes on their interview

I list some of Christa's own notes on their interview in bulleted form.

- I heard something of an informal relationship with value added to my own involvement in the process.
- I'm surprised at the way he conducts himself – he is so much at ease in the relationship with someone much older and actually a stranger.
- I think people would learn that – if not forced – it will be a medium of growing in yourself.
- For me the most important lesson is – be relaxed, do not force a mentor/mentee relationship.
- Our personalities played a major role in our narrative. Barry is at ease with himself and that reflects in his manner with people.

### 3.3 My notes from conversations with Christa and Barry

In my notes I focussed a lot on describing and listening to the narrative on how they met. During our first interview we spoke a lot about this part of their narrative. I was interested in the fact that they met and chose each other randomly and how good it turned out for them. I explored this during our discussion.

It was also interesting to me to observe how Barry and Christa interacted. In their own feedback they refer to their own personalities and how that played a

part in their relationship. This was indeed the case. For me they were comfortable and at ease. They made a lot of jokes with each other that is always a good sign of a healthy relationship to me.

Christa didn't worry too much about the input from the programme. She felt that she had enough to work with within the programme's guidelines and did not need more structure. She said that it was easier for her to do it unforced or without a specific agenda for conversations. But she did say that she could imagine that for other mentors who are new to this kind of situation, more input and guidance might be necessary.

The one thing that did concern me during the interviews was the fact that Barry did not speak much. This is why I tried to ask him a lot of questions directly to make sure that he had the chance to give his own input. This was the case with some of the other mentees as well. But I did however feel that he said what he wanted to and that he was very much at ease in the conversation.

### **3.4 Reflection on their narrative**

I will try and reflect on their narrative by again looking at various themes arising from our conversations.

#### **Choosing a mentor**

The first subject that came up in our conversations was the way in which Barry chose Christa to be his mentor. This was a wonderful narrative and very surprising to me. Barry went to a family camp of the church where Quintus (Christa's husband) was the pastor for the weekend. He saw her there for the first time and felt comfortable with her. Christa described it by saying that she felt a connection with him from the start. He had to choose a mentor during that time and decided that he would ask Christa. She immediately said yes. They

describe this relationship as open and comfortable from the start, without knowing each other at all before that.

This was a wonderful surprise to me. Most of the mentees would say that they preferred to choose someone they knew from the start. Barry chose someone he didn't know at all and had a wonderful relationship with her. Barry is a quiet introvert and in the interviews he wouldn't say a lot, but spoke a lot of sense when he did say something. To me this was a pleasant narrative to hear.

The one word that came up a lot in their narrative was the word "comfortable". It seemed that this was the most important aspect for them when describing their relationship. They could sit and talk (not really sure about what afterwards) and then two hours would have passed. It seemed that they really enjoyed their time together. They share a good sense of humour as well. They joked with each other and kept the interview informal. If you read the interview you see there is a lot of "(laugh)".

Christa and Barry are not related at all, and this seemed to work well for Barry. It didn't really bother him, nor did the fact that Christa was much older than he was. He did not choose a relative or someone he knew, or someone from his generation and it worked well for them.

## **Roles**

The one thing that I noticed here was the different roles that existed between them. In a sense they were only mentor and mentee. They were not related nor did they have a previous relationship. But in listening to them and the way they spoke about each other, I think Christa did fulfil a bit of a mother role – even if it was just in the way that she cared for him, the same as she would have done with her own children. It seemed that she spoiled him and cared for him in a "motherly" sense. Barry might not see it this way. In the Afrikaans culture any

adult woman would be called an aunt (“tannie”) when you address her, even if she wasn’t related to him. This always signified a closeness or family-like tone, as if you really knew someone well. Then she would be the nice “tannie” or the “tannie” that I would feel comfortable with. This was maybe the role that Christa played for Barry, and the reason he could relate so well to her.

### **How they understand mentorship**

Barry did not really discuss the mentorship programme with any of his classmates. He knew who chose who as mentor, that most were brothers and sisters, but that was all.

The mentorship relationship grew spontaneously for them. It was not very structured in terms of their conversations. Christa felt that with her background as social worker it was easier to let the conversation lead her. So she often said that she didn’t need structure in terms of the conversation from the programme. She preferred it more open and she felt comfortable with it. She didn’t want the subject matter or the contents to put Barry on the spot about anything. As things came up they spoke about it.

Christa said that she learned a lot from Barry and that there was reverse mentoring. She didn’t feel that there was a distance between them and that she was the one that always had to speak.

In terms of the practicalities it seemed that Christa had to take the lead and make an appointment or to invite Barry for coffee. They lived close to each other, so this was easy. She also kept track of how it was going with Barry by asking her husband about him. Barry attended his confirmation class.

### **The connection to spirituality and experiences of God**

Christa said that she wanted to talk to Barry about “faith stuff” without forcing certain questions on him or for instance giving him a lesson on baptism, et cetera. If there was something that bothered him they would talk about it. The connection to faith here was within the context of questions that might come up from confirmation class. Topics like prayer, dogma, baptism and the theology of the church was discussed and taught in the class. When they spoke about faith it would be church related.

She also said that she would like to talk to him about church and how he felt about it later on in his life if she got the chance. She would like to ask him where he was going to church then and how it turned out for him.

The fact that many young people go through with confirmation in the reformed tradition and then stop being involved in church is the background to Christa’s wish. She would like Barry to stay involved or at least to think about it.

Barry made a connection between the mentorship experience and how it prepared him better for his confirmation itself. It was better than just going to see a church council member once for an interview. This helped him. He was also positive about the fact that he was aware of Christa’s presence at the confirmation ceremony.

Christa said the ceremony touched her a lot. At the ceremony her mentee, for whom she felt responsible, was confessing his faith. And she felt happy about it, and felt that he really could do it wholeheartedly.

This meant that there was some kind of spiritual journey between them that led to Christa’s comment that she is at peace with his confession. It was not a statement that sounded as if she now “checked up” on him and his faith. It rather was a statement of trust and pride in their mentorship relationship.

## 4. THE NARRATIVE OF ROELEEN AND JEANÉ LEMMER

Roeleen is in her late forties and is married to Dewald. They have three daughters of which Jeané is the oldest. Roeleen works at a crèche in Pretoria. Jeané is a student at present and chose Roeleen as her mentor when she was in her confirmation year in 2006.

### 4.1 Excerpts from an interview with Roeleen and Jeané

The following are excerpts from one of their interviews.

1	Z <sup>9</sup>	The first question I would like to ask, is for Jeane. How did you decide to choose a mentor?
2	J <sup>10</sup>	Because I am a bit shy and I am not so comfortable with other people, I thought I would ask my mom. I thought it will be more comfortable for me.
3	Z	Being comfortable is an important thing?
4	J	Yes
5	Z	And how did it feel for you to be asked?
6	R <sup>11</sup>	I wondered if it is a good thing, because you can neglect it. If you have someone from the outside you know you have appointments, where if we have an appointment and something happens in the house, then I can always reschedule. So I was worried about that. On the other hand I felt good that she actually chose me. It was a compliment. And it really worked out well and it was very special to me at the end of the day.
7	Z	Because it was mother and daughter?

<sup>9</sup> Z - Zander

<sup>10</sup> J - Jeané

<sup>11</sup> R - Roeleen

8	R	Yes, and we have had a good relationship but this was...I am with my children all the time...but this was...(and our conversations were never less than 2 hours)...then we sat for two hours and it was just she and I. And it is at this time where they become an adult. So I think we actually got to know each other in a different way. It was focused. And you had a topic. So if I look back, it really worked well.
15	Z	So you spoke about anything really?
16	R	Anything. What made it easier, is that we knew each other. We didn't need to get to know each other. And if there is an issue, Grade 11 is a difficult year, then there might be something with friends or something, and she is the one that always listens to everyone, then we would talk about that. Because we now made time and we have the time to talk. Before we know, two hours have passed.
24	Z	What kind of aims did you set for yourselves?
25	J	The first time after "prayer" we said that everyday this week we would pray for someone in the family. And then at the end of the day we would go to my dad (if we for instance prayed for him that day) and ask him how his day was. Then he would say it was actually a good day.
26	R	We never told whoever we prayed for that we were praying for him. We both prayed for the same person. So the family didn't know whom we were praying for that day. So for example when she got out of the car I would say, "remember its Tasha today" and then Tasha would ask about it and we would say it's between us. Then Tasha would start getting jealous (laugh). And we would talk to her at school and say to her that dad has a tough day. So we have this connection now. We could speak about dad's tough day. It happened a few times that the day would then turn around (after we prayed), which uplifted us again. Because we prayed specifically for something and then afterwards he would say "the meeting went different to what I expected". And then we would just smile at each other and go again.

		We didn't want them to know about it. At the end of the mentorship we told them. And then felt special, but I think it meant more for our spiritual growth, to see there are answers to our prayers. That was very special. And things like service, where we had to do something for someone else, then I would ask her "did you do something for someone today?" At some stage we asked the Lord to send us a person for whom we can pray. And because we did it together, we would say to each other, "nobody came across my path today" and the next day "this stranger came across my path" or "mom, today this friend just opened up her heart to me".
29	Z	You obviously had this sort of spiritual side to your relationship, but do you think the mentorship helped you to grow spiritually?
30	R	Definitely yes. We were connected, but now we are more connected. We had a conversation just now where I asked her, "if we didn't have the mentorship, would it have changed anything. Did it have an influence?" And she said: "spiritual growth". And for me too. (Jeane) You said it made a difference, but on what level did it make a difference?
31	J	My own spiritual growth and the being togetherness.
47	Z	What do you think is the general idea out there about mentorship?
48	R	What did you think when you heard about it the first time? (Jeane)
49	J	We were a bit afraid, our friends. Because we weren't sure who to choose, but later when we started to do it, we thought it is nice. Mentorship is more 'help with problems', 'talk a bit'.
54	Z	How did you experience the age difference?
55	J	I wasn't a problem for me at all. It was nice.
56	Z	You are not in the same context the whole day. Was that good or bad?
57	J	It was good. Because you come together from two different worlds and the you can share from your world and she from hers, and then you can learn from one another. That was good.

73	Z	So what do you think in general are the stories about mentorship? Are there stories where it does not work?
74	J	I don't know stories like that. Except for this one friend for whom it was not so intense. But in the other stories they found it meaningful.
75	R	Maybe that one friend who said that mentorship is okay, but it doesn't feel to her if it was so important. That makes it difficult for you, cause the child chooses the mentor. Maybe the other problem was that the mentor had four students.
83	Z	What do you think is the culture of our society concerning this – going to sit with someone and just to be with them?
84	R	I think, it's bad to say, but if you don't put it into your diary, it isn't there anymore.
85	Z	But do you think people write it down in their diaries?
86	R	No, and you know what. If it was in the diary then it is very easy to cancel your family appointment for a work appointment. It is a choice of will. It is 'we as family made a choice to have one evening a weekend to ourselves'. Things like that.

## 4.2 Roeleen and Jeané's notes on their interview

I list some of Roeleen and Jeané's own notes on their interview in bulleted form.

- Our narrative says that we both experienced the mentorship programme very positive and that we gained a lot from the process. We both grew spiritually and we have a stronger mother-daughter relationship now.
- It was a new process for us, so we didn't really know what to expect. But if we look back we had a positive spiritual experience. We gained a lot.
- We really thought that we knew each other well, but after this year of intense conversations, we came to know each other even more intimately. We became aware of each other's deepest feelings and experiences.

- We learned that a mother-child mentorship relationship could mean a lot for their relationship. Mentorship is about relationships and it just makes it easier if a mother-child relationship already exists and you can build on it.
- It is not only about what the mentor can teach the mentee, but what you can learn from each other.
- We can really recommend a mother-daughter mentorship, especially if a good relationship already exists. The fact that you are in contact on a daily basis makes it easier and the goals for the month can be reached more effectively. You are more in touch with each other's feelings

### **4.3 My notes from conversations with Roeleen and Jeané**

The longest conversations with the most contents were with Roeleen and Jeané. When you read the interview you will see this. This made it easy to conduct a conversation with them and helped in making a thick description.

The first thing that caught my attention was the way that they spoke easily and freely about the spiritual aspect of their relationship. I know the family and know that they are committed Christians who are involved in many activities at church. They have an outgoing spirituality and therefore it would be natural for them to bring this into their mentorship relationship. They have their stories of praying together and for other family members. They prayed together about issues that came up and shared spiritual experiences with each other. This is one thing that stood out for me during our conversations.

I was worried about the fact that Jeané did not speak a lot in the interviews. She is a bit more of an introvert and but it seems that she speaks to her mom easily. Roeleen communicates well. This can be an obstacle in a research interview. I think I tried to involve her as much as possible by also asking her direct questions.

One thing from their narrative that I noted was that although they are living in the same house, they reserved special times for their conversations. They also made something special of it by sitting in front of the fireplace or next to the dam with a picnic basket. The other family members had to give them their space for this specifically. The family knew when it was mentorship time. This was something that I thought made Jeané's experience of the mentorship programme special.

They also showed commitment to the programme. During the year they tried to stick to the feedback times and also set goals for themselves. In the programme it is suggested that you decide together on certain things that you would like to focus on before the next conversation. The mentor will help the mentee by maybe giving more attention to behaviour, or a personal goal or a spiritual discipline like prayer for instance. Then the mentee would decide what that goal would be and the mentor would discuss this with him or her and follow this up. Roeleen and Jeané did this and experienced it very positively.

#### **4.4 Reflection on their narrative**

##### **Choosing a mentor**

Jeané said that she was a bit shy and that she would feel more comfortable with her mother as her mentor. She had a good relationship with her mother and therefore she asked her. Roeleen said that she worried at first if it would be a good thing to ask her, because in a household to lose track of the importance of the mentoring process. In that sense you could get into a situation where you did not make special time for it. But she felt that it was a compliment that Jeané asked her.

In chapter four this would turn out to be a topic that will form part of all of the stories. In a sense it seems that each situation is unique and the way that people think about it differs. Jeané took her personality into account and chose her mother with whom she has a good relationship. There was no other option in her mind and it proved to work out well for them.

## **Roles**

In this narrative we hear a lot about the mother-daughter relationship. They felt that this relationship was actually something that they would recommend to others. The mentorship process helped their relationship to become deeper and added value.

The question about the difference between a mother-daughter relationship and a mentor-mentee relationship again comes to the fore in my reflection. Is a mother-daughter relationship similar to a mentor-mentee relationship? Is it a problem if roles overlap? What makes it work as a mentor-mentee relationship at the end?

For the answer to these questions I again tried to turn to Roeleen and Jeané's own interpretation of their roles and relationship. If you listen to their narrative, Roeleen would say that their mother-daughter relationship was in a transitional phase; the phase where any teenage daughter starts to become a young adult. In the process the role of the mother also changes from being a mother to that of a friend, or a mentor. This was a time when Roeleen wanted to get to know her daughter in a different way, and it seemed that this mentorship relationship could facilitate this for them.

Roeleen also said that she distinguished certain actions as mentorship-like and others as mother-like. When she encouraged Jeané in terms of the contents of their mentorship discussions, that would be mentorship. In the general day-to-

day activities in the house, they would fulfil the mother-daughter role. In this way they experienced the two roles together.

In my mind the mentorship programme and the relationship that is “named” in it, seems to enhance or facilitate different roles and different relationships in very unique ways.

Jeané also said that the age difference wasn’t a problem for her, and she experienced the fact that they didn’t share the same worlds as positive.

### **Time and a busy lifestyle**

A lot of the general ideas about people and young people being busy also came out in our conversations. The fear that this relationship would slip away and vanish into the day-to-day household activities, the emphasis on diarising the appointments, setting goals and the comments on the culture of the day, all bear witness to this.

This brought the discourse about time and full programmes to the foreground again, something we heard a lot about in the narrative of Hanlie. Roeleen and Jeané made special time for their conversations. They also needed the feedback dates, so that they could make sure that they keep their appointments before these dates. They said that this was the culture that they lived in.

### **Commitment**

I got the impression that they were committed to this relationship and therefore they did put time aside in their schedules for it. This is consistent with the other narratives as well. Where there is commitment it will manifest in time allocated for it and going to a lot of trouble to make it special.

We see this in their narrative in the way they would set out candles, or sit next to the dam on holiday, or really make time where no one could bother them.

### **Setting goals**

One aspect of their narrative that stood out for me is how they worked through the material of the programme together and set goals for themselves. The programme gave the mentors some reading material on spiritual disciplines that could be used in conversations if they wanted to. Roeleen and Jeané read the chapters and highlighted things they thought was important. Then they would compare these notes with each other and discuss it.

They would set goals for themselves after discussing a topic like prayer. They would pray for someone every day that week and then discuss it again. They also spoke about service. Then would try and do something where they could perform a service for someone and then speak about that again. The fact that they saw each other a lot obviously helped. They could remind each other of a goal or tell each other what happened.

The fact that this was only kept between them, made their relationship special in a way. They shared something that the others in the family did not know about and this made it their secret.

### **How they understand mentorship**

Jeané said that in the beginning when she heard about the mentorship she and her friends were a bit scared of it. They didn't know who to choose and what to expect of it. But once it started she saw it more as "help with problems and talk a bit". Roeleen said she thought about it as a student-mentor type relationship where the mentor answered all the questions.

They started out by not being sure what to expect and with certain general ideas about it. It turned out that they later understood mentorship more as something where they both were in it together, and they spoke to each other about whatever interested them.

The one theme that I discerned from their narrative was that they spoke a lot about the growth in their relationship and growth as a goal of the relationship. The relationship went through phases where they spoke in a more structured way and worked through the reading material to being more open and not so structured. They also became more open to each other. They also described that they experienced spiritual growth.

In terms of the aim of the relationship, it struck me that they made an effort to grow together. Maybe in a sense the focus of this was more on Jeané but this was definitely the motivation for why they were together.

### **The connection to spirituality and experiences of God**

This narrative is filled with spiritual experiences. They had the experiences of praying for the father for instance and then he would say his day had turned out better than expected. They felt that this was then a way in which God answered their prayer, which encouraged them to continue growing spiritually.

When they spoke about their relationship they would also speak about it in spiritual growth terms. Prayer was an important part of it, so were the spiritual disciplines that they read as part of the mentorship programme.

In the interview they said that if they didn't have the mentorship programme, they would have missed out on the spiritual growth they experienced. This is linked to being connected and being together.

I couldn't help but ask myself why they had had such a spiritual experience in the whole process and others didn't speak about it in such a way. They felt that it was caused by the programme, but the programme was exactly the same as for others who didn't speak about spiritual growth at all. So again I think what it did was to enhance the spirituality that was latent in them before the mentorship relationship. They do have a certain narrative as individuals and as family in terms of spirituality. It seemed that the mentorship had emphasised this.

## **Meaning**

What happened in the next year gave me a glimpse of where the meaning of their narrative lies. They said that although the mentorship programme was in the past, the relationship they had built up remained intact. They felt that they were now more open to each other and shared more easily. They also felt that they had grown in all the ways we had discussed.

Roeleen related the instance where something was bothering Jeané and how she would close the door (like with the mentorship sessions) and they could speak about it and sort it out. This way the roles seemed to come together for them.

A lot of the meaning in their narrative lies here – in the growth in their relationship.

## **5. THE NARRATIVE OF VALIZE SCHOLTZ**

Valize is currently a final year student in engineering at the University of Pretoria. She is 22 years old. Valize has been a leader in the youth ministry for a few years and is responsible for communication and marketing. She is part of the mentorship programme because she is in the leadership group. In 2006 she

chose a mentor whose name she prefers not to disclose. The relationship didn't work out as hoped.

## 5.1 Excerpts from an interview with Valize

The following are excerpts from an interview with Valize.

7	Z <sup>12</sup>	And you then chose X, which you knew from school.
8	V <sup>13</sup>	I think that was one of the problems. When I was at school I saw her a lot and talked to her a lot. But in my first year it was difficult. And you sms and phone someone and ask if we can fit something in and then you try to fit it in. And if you have tried a few times or the person doesn't reply for days, then you give up after a while and the whole thing falls through.
9	Z	At what stage did you decide to rather leave it?
10	V	Not too long. Three or four months into the process. I think we actually got to see one another twice maybe.
11	Z	And how was it when you did see each other?
12	V	It wasn't bad. But it felt very forced to me. Yes, I kind of think the idea to say, "you are now my mentor and we now have a mentor conversation" is something that both must be able to do, but to me it was really forced.
19	Z	Have you kept contact since then?
20	V	A few times maybe. It basically died a quiet death. We never spoke about it afterwards. She didn't say sorry or I didn't say, "what happened to you" or anything like that. But I did see her once or twice. I think the conversations were a bit shallow, but it probably is that way with anybody that kind of fades out of your life, no matter how it happened.

<sup>12</sup> Z - Zander

<sup>13</sup> V - Valize

23	Z	So what was the meaning of this experience for you further on? Because the next year you sort of felt not to do it again due to this experience?
24	V	Because at that stage I definitely did not believe in the idea or the process anymore. And I think it doesn't help to try it, if you don't believe in it. So that definitely. And it didn't feel like there was anyone I could ask.
25	Z	If the scenario was different, if even after this first experience there was someone you thought would make a good mentor, would you have given it a second chance?
26	V	Definitely now. I think differently about it now and I know it is a very popular thing these days. Everyone talks about it. Everyone believes in it. Everyone thinks everybody should have a mentor. And I had a lot of cool conversations about it with people.
27	Z	Here at church?
28	V	In general. On the outreach in December there was this guy, Adriaan, who is actually also a very big fan of mentorship. And somewhere along the line I had a long conversation with him about it, and we had a prayer team as well. And the one girl in the team asked about it, because it was the first time she heard about it. So we talked about it.
35	Z	What is your general idea?
36	V	I first came across the word, while looking on the internet for stuff on hockey and goal keeping etc. And I found this funky site, where there was this idea that every goalkeeper had to have a goalkeeper mentor. This is actually where I came across the idea in the first place. It limits it a lot, because it creates the idea that a mentor actually did what you do now. The mentor walked the same road as you. What it probably is not. But that was my idea about it at that stage.
37	Z	Do you think the general idea about it in our Lynnwood context is positive or negative? What do you think?
38	V	I think it's actually kind of positive. Or it works for a lot of people.

		Maybe they are all lying (laugh) hmmm...I don't know. There are definitely a lot of people it does work for, where there comes a lot of good things out of it. But for many it is forced, and very unnatural and very weird.
41	Z	I think maybe the energy with the leaders group about mentorship has become less. I don't know if it is maybe because they are too busy for it now or if it just isn't a high priority?
42	V	I think one thing is that for many of them it isn't new anymore. They are now the group that has had mentors in their confirmation year. Because the leaders are either people who had mentors in their confirmation year or who have been a leader before. So for many of them it isn't new. So the novelty has worn off. And if it is busy, then one prioritizes.

## 5.2 Valize's notes on her interview

My narrative seems to emphasise a lot of negatives about mentorship. Firstly, it is important to believe in the process, to be open-minded about it. It says something about not just having a mentor for the sake of having a mentor, but genuinely believing that having a mentor-relationship with that particular person adds value to your life. Although it is not obvious from the interview I have a theory that a mentorship-relationship should almost develop naturally, up to a point where you officially ask that person to fulfil a mentorship role in your life. I think we each have a lot of mentors in our lives without necessarily regarding those people as official mentors. But it is important to choose the right person when you finally do choose someone.

I pick up something about perceptions of mentorship in my narrative. The business world uses the term, the sports world uses the term, and the Bible is littered with mentorship type of relationships. In each context it appears to have a slightly different meaning, although mentorship always seems to involve one person guiding another in some way. Some people have fixed ideas about

mentorship and stick to those ideas even when the context changes, some people just seem to have no clue of it at all. Mentorship has some kind of hype these days and somehow I wonder if the craze will blow over. But it has been around since the days of the Old Testament, so maybe it will not.

I also read something about commitment to the relationship, from the mentor and the mentee's side. I have been on both sides. I've struggled to see my own mentor as often as possible. I have also been mentor to a mentee that didn't buy into the idea and was not very keen to meet too often. People always claim to live busy lives, but if something really matters to you would make time to fit it in.

There are no real surprises. I think I have thought too much about mentorship and my previous mentorship relationships to really be surprised by anything. The only thing that maybe stood out is how much my idea of mentorship was shaped by things I read previously in a sports context and in business books.

Someone can learn not to go into a mentor relationship that they don't believe in when they look at my narrative. People should also learn that mentorship is a process that requires commitment from both sides. Someone looking at my narrative should also see the danger of getting caught up in perceptions about mentorship.

I think when looking at my narrative we can learn that mentorship is actually a more delicate process than we often make of it. It might be that such a fine balance makes the difference between working and not working. And then once again, you need commitment from both parties.

My narrative is probably influenced strongly by my own feelings of not having another shot at it until I'm 100% sure. If I had taken a chance in the past three years on a mentor somewhere along the line, I could have had a great success

narrative to write down today. Maybe my inability to confront my mentor when things started falling apart had the biggest influence of all. Maybe the relationship just needed more time that I didn't give it.

Something struck me while doing this reflection. In the interview you asked me about people being marginalised by the mentorship programme. It has since occurred to me that maybe it's the mentors who feel marginalised. It's frustrating when you get the feeling that you are not meeting your mentee's expectations, maybe not adding value to his or her life. Maybe it's the mentors that start feeling like failures when mentorship relationships don't work.

### **5.3 My notes from conversations with Valize**

When Valize said she would volunteer to become part of the research process I thought that it was a formidable thing to do. It is not always easy to join a group or speak about something that you perceive not to have worked or had failed. I never got the impression that Valize's narrative was about assigning blame to anyone, but rather to reflect on it and learn from it. This was an awarding experience for me to be part of as researcher.

Valize also chose not to include the mentor she chose or to reveal her name. So for the purposes of our discussion we will refer to the mentor as person X.

From the start of the programme I felt that this was an important narrative to have in the research. This was the only specific category that I identified. In hindsight this too might have been forcing a theme on the research in the sense that I labelled narratives that did not work as the marginalised narratives in my research. I am not so sure if this is true. I do however think that Valize's narrative became an integral part of the research for other reasons. The way she reflected on her own experience and wrote about it herself was a huge

contribution. Valize also has the ability to reflect very soberly on her own narrative and contributed to the research in a special way.

The process of having conversations and asking her to reflect on it, seemed also to give her a chance to reflect about the experience herself in her own way. This is also therapeutic in a way.

## **5.4 Reflection on her narrative**

### **Choosing a mentor**

Valize chose a teacher at school to be her mentor when she was finishing grade 12. This was part of the leaders' programme at the church. The relationship never really got off the ground and one would easily think that if you could repeat this choice you would choose someone different. But Valize said that she probably would make the same choice again if she had the opportunity to do it over, because she made the choice based on the relationship she shared with the teacher at that stage of her life. She enjoyed talking to her and had a good relationship with her.

It almost seemed that when they actually moved into a mentor-mentee relationship this changed. They didn't know how to handle it differently and it felt forced.

One can almost draw the conclusion that not all relationships are meant to be "turned" into a mentorship relationship. If the roles change, then it is difficult to adapt or move into this new way of looking at each other?

In Valize's own reflection she says that at the end it is very important to choose the right person to be your mentor – someone with whom you actually have grown into a mentorship relationship naturally.

## **Commitment and time**

The one thing that did seem to play a role is the fact that they were in a situation where they would see each other on a regular basis at school, and this changed when Valize left school. To see each other now took more effort and commitment. It also seemed that the effort to try and make this work did not come from both sides in this narrative. So when the relationship did not continue in this fashion they decided to terminate it.

They also never spoke about the mentorship relationship again or didn't try to make it work somehow. The mentor also never complied with the programme's feedback requests in that year.

Without the commitment from both parties and the time set aside that follows this commitment there cannot be a relationship that works.

## **How she understands mentorship or discourses on mentorship**

This theme is very strong in Valize's narrative. There is a lot of reflection on mentorship in her narrative.

She speaks a lot about first believing in mentorship and that it can add value to your life before trying to commit to it. She emphasises that it is important for her that you believe in something. In this way you will be open to it and put effort into it. Otherwise you are uncommitted and unmotivated about it from the start.

In terms of the discourses surrounding mentorship she tells about her association with it, coming from the sport environment. The mentor did what the mentee wanted to learn. For instance, a goalkeeper in hockey would get a mentor who is a good goalkeeper herself. In this way the mentor must coach you how to become a better goalkeeper.

The other comment Valize makes is that mentorship is a bit of a buzzword at the moment in this context. There is a lot of focus on mentorship in various contexts. It seems that the programme also contributed to this in the context of the congregation. She speaks about members of another church that she met on an outreach who also spoke about it. There are also slightly different ideas about what it means, but the most general seems to be that a mentor is someone who guides someone else.

I think Valize is not negative about mentorship after her experience. She has herself been a mentor to someone else that also seemed to be difficult. But when I asked her if she would go into a mentorship relationship again, she said she definitely would now.

One thing that we can learn from her narrative is that it is not only important to choose the right mentor but also to believe in it and understand it beforehand.

### **Marginalised narratives**

In reflecting a bit more on her narrative and the question about marginalised narratives, I realised again that there were more narratives in this research that came from the confirmation year, than from the leaders' group. Valize formed part of the leadership leg of the programme, but she was the only volunteer from this leg of the programme.

The leadership leg started out well, but it seems that the enthusiasm about the programme grew less as time went by and the church is not so strict about making the programme a prerequisite for the leaders. They are asked to do so, but many don't get to it where they formally take part in the programme as was the case in the past.

In the interview with Valize she said that maybe the leaders that were now part of the group have all had the experience of having a mentor, coming through the confirmation year leg of the programme. So it wasn't new to them. The question then arises if it wasn't so meaningful to them in their confirmation year why they do not participate in it anymore? This is maybe a topic on its own and falls outside the narratives we are listening to, but I also experienced myself that many of them actually do have someone in their lives who is a mentor to them but that they do not formally take part in the programme.

The second marginalised narrative that she refers to in her own reflection is that of the mentors themselves. Maybe they feel marginalised and frustrated when they are not meeting the mentee's expectations or the mentee is not committed to the relationship in the same way as they are. Many mentors in the programme do feel that they are not good enough or maybe don't have all the answers. Then it feels like they have failed themselves.

### **What is success in this context?**

I think that this is one question that needs to be asked. There are general ideas of what success constitutes. Is it a successful relationship when you spend a lot of time together? Is it successful when it achieved certain goals? Whose goals? What are the criteria for success?

These questions came to mind while reflecting on Valize's narrative. Is it correct to say that this was a narrative of an unsuccessful narrative? That is something that probably only Valize can determine. In one sense it was unsuccessful. In other ways she learned a lot from it and in that sense it was successful.

I think we mustn't jump to certain universal conclusions about success in any way. This would be untrue to my positioning and to me. The one thing that did

strike me from Valize's narrative is her description of mentorship as a delicate process that needs to be balanced.

Balance seems to be the key.

## **6. IN CLOSING**

When I started out with the research and had to decide on my research design, I was worried that choosing only three to five narratives would not be enough to make a thick description. Even when I was busy with the research interviews this worried me at times.

Writing this chapter proved me wrong. The process of reflection and actually writing down all of the information helped me immensely with my research. The unique outcome from this chapter was the way that certain themes almost formulated themselves. It might seem if you read this chapter that some of the themes were standard headings I used, but it wasn't. All the themes were taken from the narratives as they presented themselves. I just tried to group them together by using the same heading.

This process already points to our next chapter where we can bring the various narratives in conversation with each other.