

## **Chapter 4: INTERPRETING EXPERIENCES AND HAVING THE DIFFERENT NARRATIVES CONVERSE WITH EACH OTHER**

We have described a specific context and we have listened to the narratives and experiences of various co-researchers. In the previous two chapters we have already started to interpret the experiences. All the co-researchers had the opportunity to reflect on their narratives and to give some input on my reflection. This is a good illustration of how research processes work. They don't always follow the steps that are set out in the design directly. The processes overlap, and listening to narratives often opens up the phase where they are developed further and are reflected upon.

In this chapter we are continuing the research process by moving to the next stage of my research design. We will interpret the experiences and narratives with the co-researchers. This will be done in a group discussion and I will also reflect on this discussion. We will bring our different reflections in conversation with each other. We will thicken our interpretation through interdisciplinary investigation. The interdisciplinary investigation will not be discussed as a separate stage but will overlap with the interpretation process. It will be integrated into our reflection.

The experiences and how they are informed by various traditions of interpretations will be discussed. These discourses have already been identified in the previous chapters, but I am going to group them together and describe them in general for this specific context. Then we will reflect on the religious and spiritual aspects, as it is understood in this context. We will ask how God is present and how it is understood.

In this chapter we are focussing on getting to a point of the research where we could easily move to the last stage of this process. This is an important chapter to open new interpretations and bring us to conclusions that can take us beyond the local.

## **1. INTERPRETATIONS THICKENED THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION**

At the beginning of this section it is important to give some background on the interdisciplinary investigation that forms part of our reflection process. Within our positioning and research design it is of cardinal importance that other disciplines are consulted and that their contributions form part of the interpretation process. I discuss this here because the contribution of the interdisciplinary conversation is integrated in the next sections without dedicating a specific section to the contents of the conversation.

### **1.1 An interdisciplinary conversation**

Mentorship is a theme that involves a number of other disciplines. I decided the best way to integrate interdisciplinary contributions to this research was not only to have a look at literature but also to have a conversation about mentorship with scholars from other disciplines. For this conversation I invited the following scholars from different fields:

Dr H Steyn	Life coach, mentorship in the business context
Prof H de Beer	Human Resource Management/Industrial Psychology
Dr C Human	Psychologist
Mrs P Barnard	Social Work
Prof J Müller	Practical Theology

In order to have a meaningful discussion we made use of a process developed by Müller (2008). In this process general conversation and theorising is avoided

by focussing on a specific moment of praxis or narrative. This narrative is used as a basis for discussing four questions formulated by Müller:

1. When reading the narrative, what are your **concerns**?
2. What do you think is your discipline's **unique perspective** on this narrative?
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**?

The narrative of Coenraad and Carina (in interview form) was sent to each participant together with the questions. They had time before the discussion to read through the interview and think about the questions. We worked through the questions and had a good discussion on mentorship.

The various aspects of the conversation will be used during my interpretation process and the contribution and views of each of the disciplines integrated where applicable. In summary of our conversation there were a few aspects that all of the disciplines agreed upon as well as aspects that we differed about or would approach differently. I list them here:

### **Mutual agreement**

- From the viewpoint of all the disciplines, everyone was concerned about Coenraad as the mentor in this particular narrative. They were concerned about his struggle in defining his various roles in the relationship.
- All the disciplines feel strongly about the relationship as the central focal point in mentorship.
- Growth is the basic aim of mentorship.

- There should be a very clear definition about mentorship and how it is understood.
- The aims of the programme should be clear.
- Most of the disciplines emphasises knowledge, abilities, life experience and wisdom as prerequisites in becoming a mentor.
- Expectations should be clear in terms of aims and definitions in the programme. The gap in expectations creates anxiety and tension.

## **Differences**

- Notions about the aim of the programme and mentorship in general differ between the various disciplines.
- The context of this particular programme and that of most of the disciplines differ substantially.
- The definition of mentorship also differs. In the business world the definition of mentorship can be totally different from that in the church context.
- The way mentorship is approached in each discipline also seems to differ.

## **1.2 The contribution of interdisciplinary conversation**

By positioning oneself postfoundational, the emphasis on interdisciplinary conversation is one of the major contributions to this process. After becoming aware of the confines of any discipline, it now almost seems unethical not to engage in some form of dialogue with other disciplines. To my mind this also entails more than just consulting literature. The experience of being in physical conversation together, with the same narrative or concrete praxis as basis, is much more rewarding than just consulting literature. Conversation is a dynamic process, that in this case made a valuable contribution to the research.

The insight from the conversation helped the process by posing new questions from different perspectives. This helps with the reflection on the narratives in this chapter. The questions that were asked during the conversation might come from a different context but it helps to open up a process of deconstruction in this process and to explore alternative understanding..

It is however a challenging conversation. There are various differences in terms of epistemology. This is apparent even though it was not discussed. This makes it a challenging environment to “stand your ground” without taking a position against the various perspectives. The concept of transversal reality, as discussed earlier in chapter 1 comes into play. The process also proves the lack of universality as seen in Müller’s paper (2008). There is not one universal agreement on knowledge, but a number of contributions to the conversation. This doesn’t mean that the various disciplines have so little in common that conversation is not possible. How this conversation is conducted and integrated seems to be the biggest challenge.

In terms of the research process thus far, it is comforting to see that the same themes that arose from the different narratives we listened to in this process, are the same themes that came to the fore in the conversation. The approaches differ but the same issues arise. This helps to give legitimacy and integrity to the process followed here. It also confirms that local knowledge points beyond the local.

There was a concern about the mentor in the narrative of Coenraad and Carina. This was a significant perspective. One would expect a focus on the mentee, but in this case the concern was for Coenraad.

In the conversation critical questions were raised with regards to the context of the church as institution. Is the aim of the programme to “mentor” young people into the power relations and formalised ideas of the institution? How is it

understood? Is theology offended by such questions? This was to my mind a valuable contribution to the conversation. It helps to keep up a critical reflection on our own discipline and it helps to see how it fits in within the practical work of the church. It reminds one of the work of Foucault and Derrida that was discussed in chapter 1.

The last general remark that I want to make here concerns the similarities of the issues discussed in the interdisciplinary conversation and the themes that are raised through Hanlie's narrative. A lot of the discussion on structure, definitions, aims and general programme and process issues are at the level of the way the programme is structured. This comes into play in Hanlie's narrative about the programme and how it developed. Although the conversation was specifically structured with the focus on a specific narrative, a lot of the conversation became applicable to the issues from the narrative, but also related to the programme as a whole.

This leads to the decision to integrate the contents of the conversation as another voice within the reflection that follows. The aim of the interdisciplinary conversation is to thicken the interpretation.

## **2. MAKING INTERPRETATIONS ABOUT EXPERIENCES AND THE NARRATIVES TOLD**

### **2.1 Deciding on how to involve the co-researchers in this process**

It is very important within my research approach to try and keep the co-researchers part of the reflection and interpretation as much as possible. This was always an ideal for me. Many of the co-researchers are busy people and do this research with me as volunteers, without any remuneration for it. That is why I was sensitive not to ask too much of their time, but rather to find creative ways for them to be part of the process and be informed about my own reflections.

I decided the best way was to communicate with them via email. I sent the interviews to them and they reflected on their own narratives by themselves. After I wrote my reflections I sent it to them to keep them informed. The same will happen with the reflection in this chapter. I will send it to them and if they want to change anything or add to the reflection, they are welcome to do so.

But this process also has limits. In a sense it is easy to just read what I have written and accept it without necessarily thinking a lot about it. On the other hand I trust them enough to know that they will give input where they feel it is important. The interviews, conversations and feedback were done with each co-researcher or couple on their own individual narrative. They never had a chance to hear the other narratives of the whole group.

I decided that it was necessary to do this. This could also be a very interesting and important part of the research to bring the group together as a whole. This way there could be interaction, there could be reflection as a group and they could be part of the process where we try and come to a communal narrative about mentorship in this context.

The group came together and I led the group in an open conversation, in which we identified various aspects and themes that the group felt was a good reflection of all the narratives.

## **2.2 Notes on the group discussion**

During the conversation in the group I helped a bit with some of the general themes and then asked if the group agreed with my compilations and reflections on the narratives and experiences. We talked about it and they added to each theme from their own narratives. This was a memorable experience in my

research and I think it was a positive experience for the group to be in conversation with each other.

I list in bulleted form the themes and aspects the group decided upon, together with the very short notes I made during the discussion about certain of the aspects. In the next section we will look at all of these in depth with regards to the themes we have already focussed upon.

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

- There are unique things that play a role in each person's choice of a mentor. These differ from person to person.
- Personalities play a role.
- Many of the mentees think about it carefully and many don't think about it at all – some make the easiest choice they can.
- The question remains – how do you choose? Someone said that maybe there is a “psycho-dynamic thing” underlying your choice in all of us. We connect to certain people and then we choose them.
- Hanlie tells the story of someone who couldn't make up his mind and chose two mentors. She also tells about the father who was chosen to be his son's mentor and then came to the training. After the first session he decided that he was not going to be a good mentor for his son, and next time he brought another mentor along with him that would now be the new mentor for his son.

### ***Commitment, time and loyalty to each other***

- These are some of the most important factors that make a mentorship relationship work.
- The more time you spend together the better.



- The more time you spend together, the more focussed you are in the relationship.
- It is not a good thing for a mentor to have more than one mentee. Then they don't spend enough time on a mentee and the relationship suffers.
- There needs to be loyalty and commitment to the relationship.

### ***Different relationships and roles***

- When you are living in the same house and you are related, then the various roles as parent, child or sibling play a bigger role than in other mentorship relationships.
- It is not really about the different roles, but rather about the relationships.
- When it comes to the relationships between relatives, the phase and emotional situation must be taken into account.

### ***Surprises***

- A lot of times the relationships work out differently to what was expected.
- There are a lot of expectations and then when these aren't met as expected people are surprised.
- The grade 11s are more valuable in the process than we thought – they meant a lot to the mentors.
- The mentors as a group also formed closer bonds than expected.

### ***The grade 11s***

- In the group and the research there are a lot of emphasis on the grade 11s and the importance of the programme for them.

### ***Busyness***

- People are very busy in our context. Young people are even busier at school and it is difficult to get time with them in their busy schedules.

### ***Content and structure***

- The need for structure in terms of conversations depends a lot on the mentor and the mentee that you have.
- In general there shouldn't be a rule about structure and how the content should be.
- It is good to have more structure and content prescribed in the beginning of the process, because it is new to some of the mentors and mentees and they need the guidance.
- It also depends on the experience of the mentor and if she or he has been part of the programme.
- It needs to be kept informal.
- Ideas and suggestions are more helpful.
- There needs to be enough guidance in the programme during the year.

### ***More than one mentor in your life***

- Many people have more than one mentor in their lives and they are not necessarily within the context of a formal programme like this one.

### ***Ideas and perceptions about mentorship***

- These play a very strong part in how people enter into the relationship.
- Some people have a fear that the mentor will be an authority figure who is strong when the mentee is weak.
- Others see it as something that steals your time.
- Not all the mentees are at the right phase in their life to have a mentor when they are part of the programme.
- It is still better that the programme is compulsory.

- Therefore guidance is good for the people who do it for the first time.

### ***Marginalised stories***

- When the relationship did not work out a mentor might feel as if he or she had failed the mentee.
- You feel “in” when it worked and “out” when it did not.

### ***Creativity***

- There are a lot of stories in which creativity plays a role.

### ***God and religion***

- The religious experiences are tied to advice and moral questions. A lot of these experiences have to do with the questions about wrong and right.
- There is a lot of honesty in our experiences about church and our spiritual lives.
- Ethics play an important part in our conversations about our faith.
- Christa tells the story of how spirituality is becoming a part of the workplace and how much people talk about religious matters at work. In the past this seldom happened.
- There is not really a separation between my faith as a Christian and the secular world.

### ***Group discussions***

- All the group discussions are positive and help a lot.

### ***Individual worlds and each other***

- Each person has his/her own world and in sharing this with each other in the mentorship relationship we learn a lot.
- We also become co-responsible for each other in the process and help each other where we can.
- It is an uplifting experience!

## 2.3 Bringing all our reflections and notes together

In this section we will only focus on the themes that came from the narratives. In the next sections we will look at the spirituality and religious aspects separately, as well as at the traditions of interpretation or discourses.

### 2.3.1 Listing the themes

I decided to list all the different themes that came to the foreground from the narratives and see what patterns emerge. These themes were not necessarily listed under headings in my reflections after each narrative, but if marked here, they were part of the contents of that particular narrative. I also added the themes that came out in the group's reflection to give us a complete picture. I list them here in the following table:

(H = Hanlie; CC = Coenraad and Carina; CB = Christa and Barry; RJ = Roeleen and Jeané; V = Valize; G = Group)

Themes	H	CC	CB	RJ	V	G
Process / Growth	✓					
<b>Surprises / Expectations</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
<b>Time / Commitment</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creativity	✓					✓
Aim of the programme	✓				✓	
<b>Structure and content</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

<b>Choosing a mentor</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feedback / Group discussions	✓			✓		✓
<b>Marginalised narratives</b>	✓					✓
<b>Meaning</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Background		✓				
<b>Relations / Roles</b>		✓	✓	✓		✓
Spirituality and experiences of God		✓	✓	✓		✓
Setting goals				✓		
Grade 11s						✓
Individual worlds and each other						✓

**TABLE 1**

### 2.3.2 Deciding on which themes to discuss here

There are a lot of themes here and I had to make a decision about which of them to discuss. The one line of thinking would be that those who are the most prevalent are the “winners”. But I think that if a theme only emerged out of one of the narratives it doesn’t necessarily mean that it is not important to the research. At the end we are trying to come to conclusions based on all the contents, experiences and narratives. There are obviously narratives that are stronger and that everybody agreed upon as the main narratives or themes from our research. This will be concluded in the final chapter.

I did however decide that my criteria for selecting only certain themes to bring into conversation with the other narratives here, will be the themes that need to be discussed in general. All of the themes have been discussed and reflected on after each narrative. But those who are prevalent in most of the narratives have to be reflected on from the perspective of each individual narrative’s contribution to it. In this manner we can get some general ideas and reflection on these specific themes that are most prevalent. This will be done here.

The interdisciplinary conversation will be another voice during the interpretation process.

Based on these criteria I decided to discuss the themes that are in bold type in Table 1.

### **2.3.3 Making interpretations**

#### **Surprises and expectations**

It seems that in all the narratives there are aspects about the expectations people have about the mentorship relationship. Mentors expect certain things, or are chosen and do not know what to expect. The grade 11s and leaders have certain expectations or are not sure what to expect when they are asked to be in the programme. There are expectations about what would work and what not from the programme's perspective. There are certain ideas about particular combinations of mentors and mentees and how they are related to each other. There are certain narratives where there are certain reservations about the potential of a relationship and how it is expected to work out.

The gap between expectations and the actual relationship was discussed in the interdisciplinary conversation. The group felt that this could cause anxiety if the gap exists. People can feel uncertain about what awaits them when entering the mentorship relationship, or mentors can act differently to what is expected from a mentor, which has a negative effect on the mentee.

It seems that these expectations are linked to various other aspects. It is linked to the traditions of interpretation that exist and how mentorship is understood in general. It is linked to their own contact with mentorship or previous experiences or narratives that they have heard. It is linked to the narratives in the programme and that has become well-known in the context of the church.

The question should be asked how expectations are managed and understood. Many other disciplines would try and minimise the gap between expectations and reality.

The co-researchers commented positively on expectations in the sense that it sometimes creates the space to be surprised. This is positive. These surprises come when certain things happen differently than expected. Sometimes there are surprises with regards to relationships that work when they were expected not to. Some are surprised about things that turned out well for them instead of bad. Some are surprised when the whole experience of mentorship turned out more positive than they thought. Some are surprised about what they learned from each other in the process. There are various narratives about surprises.

In working within a postfoundational approach this comes as no surprise. The narratives bear witness to our understanding that we are not working within the framework of seeking some universal truth for mentorship. Within a foundational approach we would seek a universal definition that would cancel out variations on the definition or different perspectives. Will this however minimise the gap between expectations people have about mentorship and the way it plays out in reality? People's definitions and expectations differ in any case – no matter how universally mentorship is defined.

The narratives help us to understanding that every relationship seems to be unique. We do not find any specific rules about how a mentorship relationship may or may not look. This applies to relations, generations, experiences, and so forth.

Does this mean that there is no space for foundation, or a general idea about mentorship (which we will discuss later) or no process of minimising anxiety caused by the gap in expectations?

The interdisciplinary discussion helps to sensitise us to the negative effects of not being clear on issues like definition, aims and expectations within the programme. The more mentors and mentees know what is expected of them and what to expect of the process, the less strenuous the process can become for them. Opening up space for unique understanding and individual expectations, even though they might differ from the rest, opens up the possibility of surprise in the process.

If considered from a social-constructionist perspective, the conclusion I would make is that even though there is (from our epistemology) no universal definition or structured universally accepted programme, the group (or in this case the members of this particular process) should be clear on all the aspects in the programme that creates certain expectations.

Discussing expectations and deciding together on certain issues help to create certainty within individuals and minimise anxiety.

### **Time and commitment**

The one theme that seems to have the most agreement from all the voices is time and commitment. All the co-researchers and the interdisciplinary group agree that the more time and effort is put into the relationship, the better the relationship develops and adds meaning. In all the narratives of the co-researchers, the programme's narrative and the conversation with the other disciplines this theme arises more than once.

The differences will be in actually how much time should be spent. From the narratives of the co-researchers who live together one would hear that a lot of time is necessary. From a narrative like Barry and Christa's it became clear that they felt that their time together (that was less than the others) was adequate.



Although it was less, there was definitely commitment to the relationship and they saw each other often.

The narratives told during the research process where there was little or no contact all concluded that those relationships did not work or grow into something.

This research process will conclude that commitment and time put into a relationship is a prerequisite or non-negotiable value that needs to be present in a relationship without ascribing a specific value to the amount of time spent.

### **Structure and content**

This is a theme from the narratives and the interdisciplinary conversations (and literature) that had various perspectives.

If we revisit the narrative of Hanlie, we see that the programme participants have certain ideas and perceptions about the structure of the programme . This would specifically refer to contents in terms of conversations. What kind of contents should be described? Are there certain topics that should be discussed?

The interdisciplinary group had a lot of concerns about structure. They wanted a very clear definition of what mentorship is, a very clear aim of the programme and a very clear process.

The programme is positioned within a more postmodern or social constructionist approach to content. Content is provided in terms of suggestions and tools that can be utilised. The metaphor of a scaffold is used to describe the process to the mentors. There are guidelines and elements, which the mentors must use

for their conversations (the scaffold) but the content and agenda must be built on their own with the mentee (the building).

In the business world there are vary strict guidelines and aims in coaching or mentoring programmes. From their perspectives this provides a process where outcomes can be measured. Measurable outcomes are important for business to determine success, et cetera.

The issues on the table from the various voices in this section can be summarised as follows:

- Definition
- Aims
- Measurability
- Content structuring (material and process for conversation)

These themes overlap with some of our other themes that are discussed here, as well as some that were discussed in chapter 3.

What did the narratives of mentorship from this local situation tell us about these themes? This is the question that is this study's primary concern. We can summarise the conclusions from the narratives as follows:

- Hanlie's narrative speaks on the one hand about the need for more structural content in the form of suggestions without forcing prescribed agendas or material.
- On the other hand Hanlie's narrative doesn't say anything about clear definitions or aims for the programme, but neither does it say that it is not necessary.

- Coenraad and Carina’s narrative doesn’t comment much on content but there was an uncertainty in terms of clear definitions and expectations about mentorship.
- Christa and Barry did not want more structure and were clear about their relationship.
- Roeleen and Jeané followed the suggested material and participated in a process where they set goals for themselves and kept to it.
- Valize says that she had different ideas about mentorship and that this was not really clear for her in the beginning. She also says that many others have different ideas as well.
- The interdisciplinary conversation pleaded strongly for a lot of structure and content that can correspond with the aim and must be measurable.

It is clear that experience and personalities also play a big part in the need expressed by mentors for more or less content and structure. Mentors at the beginning of the process tend to feel more uncertain and therefore find security in better content and stronger process suggestions.

Mentees that have a better idea of mentorship, know what to expect and will know better how to participate in the process.

The fact that there isn’t a prescribed curriculum that needs to be worked through is received positively. There is no need from the narratives for a church agenda to be discussed and tested, in order to gain “acceptance” for confirmation. This seems to be positive. The remarks from the interdisciplinary conversation about an “agenda of the church” to mentor the young people into an institution (that is forceful and denies them true freedom) emphasise this approach.

In conclusion the narratives tell us the following in terms of structure and content:

- A clear understanding of mentorship, the aims of the programme and other aspects of what is expected is positive.
- Content and suggested structure of the process is positive. There can be more content and structure. The fact that it is not prescribed but suggested as guidelines is positively received. (What this is and how it is interpreted in terms of the process must be discussed.)
- There is no mention of measurable outcomes in terms of the agenda of the organisation. This is a challenge in terms of the interdisciplinary conversation, but the narratives do not reflect on this.

### **Choosing a mentor**

This is a major theme in all of the narratives as well as in the interdisciplinary discussion. The programme started out by assigning mentors to mentees. This did not work. The commitment was low and too many mentees was assigned to a mentor. The programme's narratives have reflected positively on the fact that mentees got the chance to choose their own mentors.

There are certain guidelines given on the choosing of a mentor. A young person may not choose someone from the opposite sex unless that person is at least 10 years older (unless it is a relative). There are guidelines given about why you should choose someone and what you should take into consideration. There are a few more examples. There are also narratives from the programme where some young people just made the easiest and most convenient choice without really thinking about it, others put a lot of effort in the process of choosing a mentor.

The co-researchers who chose a relative felt very positive about their choice. There can be questions about roles in such cases and what the content of the mentorship relationship is. Barry and Christa expressed their positive experience with their relationship. Barry chose Christa almost randomly and it

worked out well. Valize chose someone she thought would be a good mentor and whom she trusted. This relationship did not work out.

It seems that there are no set patterns from the narratives of the co-researchers concerning the type of choices made. Some worked and some didn't.

It was clear from the conversation with the various scholars that most feel strongly that a mentor should be someone who is selected or at least well screened and trained. They felt that a mentor should be someone who has more knowledge, wisdom, life experience and abilities than the mentee. Therefore a mentee cannot choose a mentor at all, or if they choose, the mentor should fit these criteria. For some, age also plays a role. It can be dangerous to have a mentor who does not fit these criteria in such a programme with young people.

This brings various questions to mind, some of which were already asked in the narratives:

- Who can be a mentor?
- What are the criteria for being a mentor?
- Who decides on these criteria?
- Must the mentor be more knowledgeable? Is knowledge the key to being the mentor?
- What metaphor lies behind this thought? Is the mentor the expert with all the knowledge?
- Is a mentor always older than the mentee?
- What would be different in the programme if a mentor were assigned to the mentees? How would it change the dynamics?
- What are the benefits of choosing a mentor yourself?
- What is success in terms of a mentorship relationship and which type of person will be a mentor that achieves this?

These questions can be discussed at length and different answers will be given depending on your epistemology and perspective.

The narratives help us to reach a point where meaning is attributed to the fact that mentees can choose the mentor themselves. The context plays a vital role in the way we look at this issue. This programme doesn't have a set of outcomes that need to be achieved or a certain amount of knowledge that needs to be transferred. It seems that the main aim of the programme for young people who are starting out on this mentorship experiment, is just to have the relationship and experience it. If choosing the mentor yourself is meaningful to most, from the narratives this seems like a positive act.

From the perspective of other disciplines there are certain ethical concerns about the process that are valid and contribute to the thinking process behind the narratives. One has to agree that the definition and aims of the programme have a large influence on the way the choosing process takes place. The processes of matching a mentor and mentee, the aims and the definition have to align.

The question could arise from the perspectives of other disciplines that within their understanding of mentorship, a relationship like that of Coenraad and Carina, or Roeleen and Jeané does not qualify to be called a mentorship relationship. I will have to reflect on this in the final chapter.

What the narratives and the interdisciplinary conversation would agree upon is the importance of matching the correct mentor with the mentee. This process is central in terms of its importance within the whole programme. If the mentor is assigned or a mentor is chosen, or any approach within these options is followed – it is important how this is facilitated and explained. There is a strong case to be made out on ethical grounds that even if the choice is given to young people to choose a mentor, there should be some sort of screening process. By whom and how can be discussed later.

## Marginalised narratives

Within a narrative positioning that is informed by deconstruction and social constructionism, the question about unheard narratives is in the centre. The critical question here is – are there any narratives from this context that are not heard or are marginalised? Who are the marginalised in this narrative?

In the discussion with the co-researchers various answers were given to this question:

- Some say they can't think of any marginalised narratives, except the narratives that they are obviously not aware of and are therefore unheard.
- The initial narratives that one would suppose are the unheard or marginalised narratives are those narratives where the relationship did not work. But in the conversation with the co-researchers they felt that people would say if they had a negative experience with the mentorship process (like Valize). These narratives are also told in the programme Hanlie said.
- Valize made the interesting contribution in her own reflection that maybe the mentors are sometime the marginalised ones, or feel marginalised when the relationship do not work out. You feel like a failure and then you are marginalised.
- It also seems that the dominant narrative is the one where people have a positive experience with mentorship and the programme and therefore those who did not have such an experience feel "out". The "in" thing is to enjoy it. This is a marginalised narrative.
- Hanlie felt that the one narrative that she does not hear enough is the narrative of the mentees. They could speak to the pastors or to someone else, but in terms of the programme their voice is less prominent than

those of the mentors. I also experienced their voice as less prominent in the interviews.

- From the interdisciplinary conversation very little was said about this, except the comment mentioned earlier about the church system taking away true religious freedom by mentoring the young people into the system that has the power in this case.

In this research there was no dominant marginalised narrative that strongly came to the fore. In previous research I had done in the context of HIV/AIDS there were strong marginalised narratives and unheard voices. If I compare this study to that context, there is no dominant narrative of marginalisation here.

It is however a question if there is no marginalisation at all. From the narratives it seems that there is marginalisation present in some individual's narratives or at least some co-researchers suspect it.

The voices that need to be stronger and listened to more are those of the mentees, mentors who had a negative experience and those who felt left "out".

## **Meaning**

Meaning lies in any narrative. This can be positive, negative or even just neutral. Meaning can relate to emotion, value, logical outcomes, experiences, previous narratives and growth. From a narrative perspective the person telling the narrative first interprets meaning (usually on his/her own). There can be a process in which meaning is also developed by telling the narrative or by listening to the narrative. There can be more people involved in this narrative and more meaning is added.

In terms of this research process the co-researchers firstly interpret the narratives themselves. Meaning is conveyed and listened to, as they understand



it themselves. This process is seen within the social-constructionist approach to knowledge. The meaning is also socially constructed within the process of which I am a part. In the particular research project most of the co-researchers were working with me in pairs. They could construct the meaning to their narrative together. I listened with integrity and kept on involving them in this process, which could be called narrative development, or describing experiences.

Meaning is an important aspect of this research. Meaning is also linked to language. In the first chapter we visited the whole concept of language. Language constructs an experience. The language available to us constructs the way we describe or name an experience.

In my reflection on the meaning of the relationships I ask a lot of questions on where the meaning lies.

In terms of Coenraad and Carina's relationship it seems that the meaning lies in the growth between them as brother and sister living together and where they are in the specific phase of their relationship. The language they used to describe this process is mentorship (which they mostly learned from within the programme's context).

Roeleen and Jeané commented a lot on their spiritual growth together and the meaning of that in their lives, as well as their relationship as mother and daughter and the phase they went through then.

Christa and Barry's meaning lies in their unforced, spontaneous relationship, which, they felt, added value in general to their lives.

Valize's narrative had meaning on various levels. On one level it was a negative experience, on another level it was positive to reflect on her understanding of mentorship and her believing in it.

The language used consistently through their narratives was mentorship language.

The interdisciplinary conversation had questions on whether this is mentorship within the general understanding of the language of most disciplines? I also reflected on this during the process – what makes a relationship a mentorship relationship? Can mentorship language be used to describe all of these narratives? Who owns the language? If the co-researchers use the language of mentorship to express their experiences, is it wrong? Or should the “correct” language be used to describe the meaning for them? Who can do this?

These are important questions. It seems that your positioning on knowledge would play a vital role in the way you would react to these questions.

The reflection on meaning also led to the conclusion that in most of the co-researcher’s narratives, the mentorship process added meaning or extended existing roles and relationships. The mentorship process “facilitated” growth or transitions in relationship phases. In the case of Barry and Christa there was no previous relationship, so the mentorship opened up a new relationship. In the case of Valize it had a negative effect on an existing relationship.

There were two aspects of mentorship that the interdisciplinary group agreed upon – the focus and importance of relationships and the overall aim of growth.

It seems that this corresponds to the narratives of the co-researchers. All the narratives speak in some way about growth and all the narratives speak about relationships and the importance thereof.

The question remains if this is necessarily the truth only for mentorship, or for any relationship in general. When can such a relationship be described with mentorship language and when not? What determines it?

### **Relations and roles**

Since the beginning of the research the theme of relations or family ties was central to the research. The programme is careful about relatives being asked as mentors. The concern was the phase in which many of the relationships find themselves, especially in the confirmation leg of the programme. Roles might be difficult when parents become mentors in the programme without being in a friendship phase in the relationship, like in the case of a student with his or her parents.

From the narratives of the co-researchers the emphasis was placed more on the issue of roles. Parent-child relationships and brother-sister relationships were mostly seen as positive and even a recommendation to some. There are obviously narratives of relatives in mentorship relationships in the programme that didn't work out, but the co-researchers would conclude that lack of commitment and time would be the reason for the problems, and not the fact that the mentors and mentees were related.

The focus on roles was apparent in most of the narratives:

- Coenraad and Carina had a phase where they had to figure out the various roles between them in their situation: father-child; mentor-mentee; brother-sister. The interdisciplinary group reflected on this and pointed it out as potentially creating anxiety.
- Barry and Christa are not related. There were elements of “tannie”-young man roles, or even mother-child roles in the background. But mostly it seemed that they functioned within the role of mentor-mentee.

- Roeleen and Jeané were in a mother-daughter role. This was also in a transition phase of becoming more like friendship. They made specific time for the mentor-mentee role.
- Valize had a student-teacher role with the mentor she initially chose.

The first thing I noticed about the narratives of the co-researchers was the lack of a particular pattern. From the narratives in this study it doesn't seem that one can draw the conclusion that one particular type of role or relationship (family relationship) is good or bad in general. There are no generalisations in this sense.

The narratives tells us that at least in this particular context roles are a given. Even if mentors are assigned to mentees one will find some elements of roles. It is therefore important to deal with roles and to be clear about roles, how they are managed; when it is good and when it is bad. The misunderstanding or misrepresentation of roles can cause anxiety or even become unethical in certain situations.

The question should be asked if the overlapping of roles is bad or if it should be avoided. Is it possible to avoid it – to jump from one role in one situation to another in another situation? What guidelines can be given about this? From the narratives there seems to be a need for better clarification on how to handle the overlapping of roles. It does not seem possible to truly put yourself in different roles completely. There will always be overlapping roles.

Should this minimised as far as possible by being in a mentorship relationship with a mentor where there is no chance of overlapping roles, because there is no relationship outside of the mentorship relationship? This needs to be discussed in the final chapter.

### **3. TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETATION**

### 3.1 Deciding on the traditions of interpretation that are most relevant to this research

One of the aspects of my research design that did not turn out as planned was the role my smaller PhD group would play. Initially the PhD group functioned as a reflection group but later ceased to exist. Therefore I needed to find a different means to decide on which traditions of interpretation need to be discussed further.

#### 3.1.1 Listing the discourses

I start by listing the various discourses in the same manner as in the previous section.

(H = Hanlie; CC = Coenraad and Carina; CB = Christa and Barry; RJ = Roeleen and Jeané; V = Valize; G = Group)

Discourses	H	CC	CB	RJ	V	G
Confirmation	✓					
<b>Mentorship</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Who qualifies to be good mentor?</b>	✓			✓	✓	
Structure	✓					
<b>Time and culture of busyness</b>	✓	✓		✓		✓
Compartmentalised lives	✓					
Church	✓		✓			
What is success?					✓	

**TABLE 2**

### **3.1.2 Deciding on which discourses to discuss here**

If I use the same criteria as in the previous section, the discourses listed in bold would be selected. In our reflection up to now it has become clear that certain of the discourses are related to each other and certain ideas are connected to the context of this particular study. These can be grouped together.

Within the research design the discourses that are discussed primarily come from the narratives of the co-researchers. This has been reflected on together with the co-researchers.

To further aid me in this discussion are the various themes and content from the interdisciplinary discussion and what was discussed there. Although discourses weren't discussed specifically, there were certain discourses present in that discussion as well.

I also discussed this in more detail with one or two scholars and decided that the discourses I want to focus on specifically are:

- Mentorship in all its aspects
- The culture of being busy – linked to time

## **3.2 Describing and interpreting these traditions of interpretations**

### **3.2.1 Mentorship**

It is clear from the narratives that there is not one singular particular view or discourse about mentorship. It is also clear from the narratives that the definitions and tradition of interpretations are fragmented and differ slightly throughout the narratives. Some people aren't really sure how mentorship is

understood. It is a wide term and there are many aspects or variations attached to it that are linked to the context in which it is placed. The word “mentor” is also sometimes replaced with a word like “coach”. It almost reminds one of a landscape of overlapping views of the term.

In general it seems that most people think about a mentor as someone older who transfers knowledge or skills to someone. A mentorship relationship has something to do with advice or growing in some way.

From the narratives certain themes arise that are all connected to this discussion about the discourses about mentorship:

### **The idea that a mentor needs to be an expert**

In many discussions about mentorship one hears an expert-student metaphor for mentorship. The mentor is someone with knowledge and skills and gives advice to the mentee. The mentor or coach (from the interdisciplinary world) is trained and selected on this basis. The whole aim of mentorship is then the transference of this knowledge to the next person. The mentor needs to be able to answer all the questions of the mentee and is an excellent giver of advice.

One hears something here of the tradition that fathers and grandfathers would pass on knowledge to their sons. One also hears something like a master and apprentice relationship or a teacher and disciple metaphor.

Together with this it is expressed more than once in the narratives of the co-researchers that it is a big responsibility to be a mentor.

This idea also links to the notion that a mentor needs to help you grow.

This idea is not so strongly found in the programme. The narratives we have listened to do not explicitly use this metaphor or idea, but many elements of it are found in the narratives of the programme. Various mentors that come to the programme come with this idea. This idea also places pressure on them to be the expert.

### **The idea that mentor needs to be older**

Linked to the previous idea, a mentor should be someone older. The older someone is, the more knowledge and life experience they have. The interdisciplinary conversation felt strongly about the fact that mentors should have some life experience before they can be mentors.

The narratives that we listened to had older and younger people in mentorship relationships, as well as younger people with a mentor from the same generation. The reasons given from each narrative on why they felt this worked well would be different. Jeané enjoyed the fact that her mother was older. It was no problem to her. Carina felt she would rather choose Coenraad as a mentor, as opposed to someone older for the reason that he would be closer to her world, understand it better and therefore give better advice as her mentor.

### **The idea that a mentor must have experience and skills within the same field that the mentee is trying to grow in**

Valize gave the example of where she heard about mentorship the first time. She came into contact with the concept on a website. Here a mentor was explained in the context of sport where a hockey-goalie gets a more experienced hockey-goalie to be her mentor or coach. In the coaching world this is also a common view of mentorship.



This discourse becomes apparent in the programme when mentors feel inadequate to be mentors to the young people within the context of leadership and church. In order to be a mentor in the church one must have had some sort of theological training to be a successful mentor.

### **The idea that a mentor gives advice**

This is a strong idea about mentorship that is prominent in many of the narratives of the co-researchers. A mentor must be someone that gives advice. This is linked to the idea that a mentor has more life experience and knowledge. Receiving advice from your mentor figured dominantly in the relationship between Coenraad and Carina as well as Roeleen and Jeané.

### **The idea that a mentor can also learn from the mentee (reverse mentoring)**

In all of the narratives from the programme it was mentioned that the mentor also learned from the mentee. Most people tend to start out thinking that the mentee will learn from the mentor. Almost all the narratives in the programme as well as the narratives of our co-researchers spoke about reverse mentoring. Some would go as far as to say that they had learned more from the mentee than the mentee had learned from them. In the narratives where different generations were involved, the older person would attribute this learning to the fact that the mentee was younger and listening to a younger person taught them a lot.

In the programme when people are asked to think of a metaphor for mentorship, they would often use metaphors like a journey, partners, different roles but equal responsibilities, et cetera. All of these support the idea that mentoring is not only one-sided.

### **The idea that a mentor needs to be selected and specifically trained**

In Hanlie's narrative we hear about the one mentor who asked her how someone else she knew could become a mentor in the programme, because this person had too many of her own personal problems.

This supports the idea that a mentor should be selected and trained also discussed in the interdisciplinary conversation. The mentor should be the right person. It seems from this conversation that not everyone can be a mentor.

In the programme mentors are selected by the mentees. This has been discussed in our reflection.

There is however an understanding or tradition of interpretation in which a mentor has to qualify in some way to be a good mentor.

### **The idea that mentorship is a structured process with measurable outcomes**

We have discussed the issue about structure in our previous section. The interdisciplinary conversation strongly worked within this idea that the process should be structured and also measurable. This sounds especially familiar from the world of coaching where there is a strong emphasis on a process with outcomes. The business world needs to measure the outcomes of the process to see if it was successful.

From our narratives in this research study there was no mention of measurable outcomes. All the narratives had outcomes, which were described in growth terms.

## **The idea that a mentor is someone you can trust and be comfortable with**

This came out strongly from the reasoning Carina had to choose Coenraad. It is also present in all the narratives. For the co-researchers, in listening to the narratives, the fact that the relationship should be open and comfortable was one of the most important reasons why it worked out well. There was spontaneity and trust in the relationship.

This seems to be agreed upon in all the narratives and the interdisciplinary conversation.

### **Concluding remarks**

In our initial reflection on Hanlie's narrative it was clear that many of the ideas about mentorship that people in general bring to the programme differs from the idea of mentorship in the programme. There are various discourses on mentorship and they affect people differently.

There are many questions that can be asked about these discourses from a deconstructionist point of view. Just by asking who has the power in the mentorship relationship in some of these ideas or discourses, one can have a lengthy discussion about their value and meaning. They can be understood in various ways, which can be interpreted positively as well.

From this discussion I draw the following conclusions:

- The various and fragmented discourses and variations on mentorship cannot be ignored.

- Decisions need to be made where one positions oneself in terms of mentorship and the approach to it.
- These decisions need to be well-founded and explained.
- These ideas are strong and will have an effect on the way the mentorship is experienced and practiced

### **3.2.2 The culture of being busy**

In most of the narratives of the co-researchers there is the idea that people are busy and don't have a lot of time:

- Hanlie says that in the programme everyone doesn't always participate in the feedback or groups because they are too busy. Others say they can't get hold of the mentees because they don't have time for the mentorship relationship.
- Hanlie tells narratives of how some mentors had to be creative enough to do certain out of the ordinary things in order to spend time with the mentees.
- Coenraad and Carina said that if they did not live together they would not have had the time to spend in the mentoring relationship. Some other friends of Carina whose relationships did not work out, said that it was due to the fact that they were too busy and did not spend enough time together.
- Barry and Christa made regular appointments to see each other.
- Roeleen said they had to make special appointments to make sure they saw each other, even though they stay in the same house. They also commented on other stories where participants did not have enough time to see each other. If you don't diarise this you won't have time.
- Valize said that people say they have no time, but if something is important enough you will make time for it.

- Hanlie said that the mentees don't always make time for it because they don't understand the importance of the mentorship.

The reason that I list this as a discourse is due to my listening to the narratives in this programme and in the community over the past few years. It seems that the idea that we are busy and do not have enough time has become a grand narrative or even a culture or idea we believe in, even though some people have physical time open, they will still say “we are busy”.

This discourse leads to the comments about which priorities play a central part in the way that you live your life in this context. Mentorship can either be seen as something that takes up your time or as a priority.

Who gains from a “being busy” discourse? Do people feel more important if they are busy? What does this discourse do to the way our study is conducted?

### **3.3 Further study into these traditions of interpretations**

In conversation with my supervisor and the narratives of the co-researchers, I think it is important to also look at literature on the whole topic of mentorship. This is the main discourse from our narratives as well as the theme of this research. Within the different fields it is clear that various traditions of interpretation exist.

We will look at mentorship literature in the next chapter.

## **4. REFLECTING ON THE RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF OUR NARRATIVES AND EXPERIENCES**

In this final section of the chapter we will specifically reflect on the religious and spiritual aspects of the narratives. We do so within the movements of our research design and also because this is a postfoundational practical theological study.

#### **4.1 Describing the spiritual aspects that came from the narratives**

We have discussed spirituality after each narrative in chapter 3. In this section we will revisit a summary of these descriptions.

##### **Coenraad and Carina**

In their narrative the spirituality was linked to morality. The idea that a mentor gives advice and has to give opinions on what is right and wrong is connected to religion and church. Carina chose Coenraad because he is involved in church activities. She felt, that because he is involved in church activities and he is serious about his faith, he would be able to give good Christian advice.

The need for advice is strongly connected to their idea about mentorship. A mentor must give advice and understand the context it is given for.

Their mentorship relationship only developed the year after Carina was in confirmation class. For them there was no connection really between the church programme and their relationship except for the fact that Coenraad was involved as a leader at the church.

They don't specifically reflect on spirituality or tell narratives of any spiritual experiences.

##### **Christa and Barry**

In our reflection process Christa wrote these words herself about her spiritual experiences:

Although I felt an emotional connection with Barry immediately and did not hesitate to accept his mentor request, I felt humbled by this. The presence of spirituality was there. I contemplated and reflected on this new assigned 'role' and prayed for guidance on how to handle this new relationship. I am not used to adolescent boys (I'm the mother of 2 girls) and now I had to deal with the world of a 17-year-old boy. From my side I was very well aware of God's presence in this relationship: the relaxed easiness of the relationship, the peace when I lead in prayer, the comfort to experience his confirmation at the end of the mentor year. Even now, long after the mentoring, I experience this Divine presence in the relationship.

Christa also said in the telling of her narrative that she felt a connection between them. This connection was emotional for her and she links it to a spiritual experience. They had a relaxed and open relationship in which she did not force "faith stuff".

Christa prayed with Barry and prayed about Barry even when she wasn't with him. She spoke to him about church and wondered where he would go to church when he was older and how he would experience it.

Their relationship was initiated within the context of the confirmation year and the mentorship programme. This was their agenda in a sense and without forcing certain issues or prescribed material they did speak about faith and church and discussed questions that arose from it.

Christa and Barry have an active spiritual life that is unforced and forms part of their lives. This would naturally become evident in their relationship. Christa also said that faith and spirituality is becoming something that you don't only speak about at home or in private, but even at work in a secular context spirituality is discussed.

### **Roeleen and Jeané**

The main theme in their narrative was spiritual growth. The language used in their narrative boasts of spiritual terms and religious descriptions. They prayed together, felt that God answered their prayers and shared this with each other. They prayed together for other things they shared, read the material on spiritual disciplines and did Bible study. Their relationship grew from the spiritual experiences that they shared and this was the most important meaning of their time together.

They easily reflected on this in the telling of their narrative and were open about it.

### **Valize**

Due to the fact that Valize did not get into a mentorship relationship she felt that was difficult to reflect on the spiritual experiences in the relationship.

## **4.2 Reflection**

What does the God-talk in these narratives tell us about spirituality and religious experiences from this particular moment of praxis? What kind of language is used to describe these experiences? How is God's presence felt and understood?



In my reflection on these questions during the whole research process a few key concepts or words help me to come to a greater understanding about spirituality here:

### **Honesty and authenticity**

In the group discussion the comment was made that there is a lot of honesty in the narratives about spirituality. In the programme many mentors would comment on the fact that the young people speak much more freely about spirituality than they would have when they (as mentors) were younger. People are not afraid to disagree or to say that they struggle with a certain aspect of religion or do not believe in the same way.

From the narratives this is also clear. Each narrative and experience about spirituality and religion is authentic. There is a movement away from only one view of spiritual experience to space for different experiences and ways to tell these narratives.

### **Morality and ethics**

In Coenraad and Carina's narrative morality and ethics play a particular central role in their understanding of spirituality. This is not only the case in their narrative; there are many narratives in the programme and also from the context that I work in, that links morality with faith and spirituality – especially for younger people.

This is positive in terms of people's lives and living out their religious beliefs. The fact that people are connecting morality to faith is well-known in many circles. It tells the narrative of people who have a need for guidance and this guidance is still connected to faith and the understanding of wrong and right from a certain religious perspective.

From a theological perspective I am concerned about this. In Pauline theology the imperative comes from the indicative. In texts like Romans and other writings Paul explains that we live from our identity as a Christian and that influences our ethics and the way we live our lives. We are no longer under the law (asking questions about right and wrong) but under the Spirit. The Spirit fills us, changes our identity and we live accordingly in each situation.

If our theology is reduced only to asking questions about right and wrong, is this not the same as living from the law? Or when we are busy thinking about ethics and morality should it not come from a pneumatology that is deeply rooted in our identity?

In this particular context the lack of new language to express our connections and understandings of identity and ethics might be the reason why people explain it in this way. I cannot say.

### **Connection and relationship**

It is clear that spirituality is connected to our relationships and the way we connect to each other. The experiences of God and spirituality are all connected to relationships in the narratives. “I felt a connection”, “I am in a relationship with Him” are all examples of language that is connected to spiritual experiences.

### **Holism and openness**

In the narratives there is no mention of a separation between church/spirituality and the secular. The co-researchers did not seem to connect the mentorship programme with the church exclusively. Neither was there any narrative about confirmation and mentorship that was somehow compartmentalised. The

language used was language of integrating spirituality with their lives as a whole.

The co-researchers speak about spirituality and religious experiences, as they understand it from their lives. Some of it is related to church, some to their workplace, some personal, some in conversation, some at home and some in their general day-to-day living.

This is a positive movement from the idea that God is only experienced in church or religion and spirituality has only to do with church.

### **The lack of dogma and institutionalised language**

There is no emphasis in the narratives we have listened to on dogma or the correct understanding of theology. There is no mention of working through an agenda or curriculum in order to gain access to the church or to be confirmed.

The language used is not the institutionalised language of the church or theological terms that are difficult to explain. Various informants, of whom the church is one, influence the language. The language is plain and spirituality is explained and reflected upon in a practical sense and in the ways the co-researchers have integrated it into their lives.

This does not mean that good theology is not necessary or present. A lot of the co-researchers would say that the church plays a vital role in their understanding and questions about faith and spirituality. But in the moment of praxis the language speaks of a more practical and simple way of understanding God's presence.

### **Spiritual expressions and acts**

The way spirituality is expressed in the narratives of the co-researchers also tells us a lot about the way they understand the presence of God in their everyday lives:

- Prayer (individually and together)
- Reading (material, books or the Bible)
- Conversation (face to face and through other means)
- Questions about faith and religion
- Reflection on what happened to them spiritually

These are the ways the co-researchers would express their understanding about God practically.

### **Imago Dei**

Although the question was not raised specifically, one could ask how God is perceived. What is the image of God from this narrative?

In the narratives God is not portrayed as far, but close. God is not judgemental, but compassionate. God is sometimes not even mentioned, but if asked, He is present in some way. There are elements of mystery. He is important enough for the co-researchers that they would try and live ethically sound lives according to their understanding of His will.

Can God be seen as a mentor from these narratives? The idea of mentorship would also influence the way you understand God then – what the Imago Dei is.

## **5. IN CLOSING**

This is an important chapter in our research process. Various voices were listened to in this chapter:

- The interdisciplinary conversation was listened to.
- The group discussion of the co-researchers was listened to.
- The themes from the narratives of the co-researchers' narratives were brought into conversation with each other.
- The traditions of interpretation were described.
- The experiences about spirituality and God were described.

It is clear from this chapter that most of the themes complement each other in the discussion with the scholars as well as the co-researchers. We also see that there are connections between some of the aspects of the research narrative that we are busy writing. Many questions can be formulated and discussed further.

In this chapter we have seen the formation of some of the bigger narratives that helps us to move to our final stage in the research design.

Before we get to this stage, we will first listen to the voices coming from literature on mentorship in the next chapter.