

CHAPTER SIX

GROWING UP: IN PERSON AND IN RESEARCH

Closure is an important aim to accomplish at the end of this research process.

I need to critically reflect on the research process and to evaluate my own methodology and evaluate if I succeeded to do research with integrity up to the end.

1. THINGS I WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY

- I wish I had the time and opportunity to write every young person who participated in the main group sessions' life story in detail. I think it would have given a much deeper understanding of the impact HIV has on their lives.
- I feel I could have done more regarding the feedback process. The time lapse I experience because of my pregnancy hindered the social constructional process. The teens that started the group with me have left school by the time I finished my research. I missed an occasion to give feedback to the whole of the original group.
- I was advised in the beginning of the process, to start keeping a research journal. I did not do that, and I am disappointed that I didn't.

2. AN ETHICAL REFLECTION (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 520-530):

- One of the ethical issues I experienced was the theme of my research, doing research about infected and affected adolescence. The group was

as far as I know, not infected during the time of the research. It made me question the validity of the title of my research. I wondered if I should change the title in the end.

- I made the decision to keep it as it was, because many of our discussions were about infection. Many of the stories that were shared were about infected people. My decision to keep to the original heading in the end was based on the stories shared by the group.
- Other ethical issues I had to reflect upon through out the sessions and the writing down of the process, were:

- permission of the parents: I dealt with this by asking the parents to fill in a permission form
- talking to the young people about sex and HIV/AIDS: I shared this information with the parents beforehand
- using information shared in the sessions: I explained the process to the group and I explained to them the implication of their participation. They signed an agreement, giving their permission. I specifically asked permission to record the sessions (group sessions and individual sessions)
- the question of who will benefit from the research, is an important question that needs answering:

To be honest, I must say that I am benefiting from the research in different ways. I get acknowledged as someone doing research on HIV/AIDS with young people. That brings a certain benefit;

When I finish the research, I might get an academic acknowledgement, and lastly I benefit in merely having the honour to be part of a learning process. I definitely am benefiting.

I sincerely hope that the co-researchers have benefited as well.

They have acknowledged the benefits in the sessions as learning a lot about HIV/AIDS, being part of a group of friends to share their lives with, having done the drama, most of them expressed joy and fulfilment as a result of that, they went on trips and outings together and they get the recognition in the writing down of the process, as true co-researchers.

3. FUTURE FOCUSES FOR RESEARCH

Literature tells of an African based communal philosophy of which I have not experienced a lot in the inner city. I am challenged to learn more about this. I would like to search for an inner city incarnated African philosophy.

Research can be done on the communication of the role sex plays in marriage life.

Research can be done on the impact of a violent society (especially the inner city) on the incidences of child rape and abuse.

4. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

There are different criteria to evaluate a qualitative research process. Babbie and Mouton (2001:141-143) use the terms *reliability and validity*. Reliability meaning that the same result must be acquired if the same technique of measurement is applied more than once. With validity is meant "*if an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration*".

4.1 Reliability

Reliability is a difficult question to ask of a narrative process, because the person doing the research will not necessarily be the same every day and if research is repeated, a different researcher would not necessarily acquire the same results even if the same technique is applied.

4.2 Validity

Validity can be used as a criterion for this research. It is possible to determine if the research was done in a valid way. The sessions with the teenagers are verbatim and readers can make their own assessment if the report and reflections are valid or not.

To my opinion I tried to report in the language of the co-researchers. My aim was to listen to their voices and take their stories serious. Meaning given was a social constructionist process, brought back to the co-researchers in a reflective team situation.

Guba (1981:80) talks about credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency) and confirm ability (neutrality).

4.3 Credibility

Credibility is often done through member checking or checking interpretations with other people in the broader group.

My evaluation of this process is that it was done throughout. Taking into consideration what I said in my reflection on “things I would have done differently”.

4.4 Transferability

This is difficult to evaluate in a narrative paradigm because the aim of the research is not to be transferable. Having said that, I must add that there are definite principals and wisdom to be found in narrative research that will be transferable to other contexts and other situations. In my writing of care narratives, I tried to contribute some of the transferable wisdom from this research.

4.5 Consistency

Was explained through the concepts of reliability and validity.

4.6 Confirm ability

This concept is associated with “objectivity”. I have explained extensively that narrative research do not pretend to be objective, but are comfortable in an admittance of total subjectivity. But then, *subjectivity with integrity*.

Strauss and Corbin (1998:265) say that “*every mode of discovery develops its own standards and procedures for achieving them*”.

I feel it is necessary to find own criteria of evaluation of this specific research. Strauss and Corbin (1998:267) makes the statement that research must speak for the population the research was done with and the results must be applied back to them.

This concept makes sense to me, to ask what narratives the research brings back to young people living in the inner city of Pretoria. This can be evaluated by it adding value to their own understanding of their world and their experiences or not. It must help them to reframe their own stories about themselves and their identity.

This evaluation was started by the process of bringing narratives and my own reflection back to the reflection teams. The process will continue in the making available of the research to the adolescent community in the inner city.

Baart (2003:147-148) did a short evaluation on the criteria of validity and of the research project in a more general sense. He says: “*Most researchers do not thoroughly account for their data collection, the selection from the raw data, their interpretation, analyses, etc. It is not in keeping with the Post-modern approach, but most of them do offer a thick description or quote from their sources.*”

Besides that, we find some basic measures to promote interjudgemental reliability”: the research process, the sources and interpretations are discussed repeatedly in workshops, focus groups and team meetings: that contributes to the reliability and validity of the outcomes.

According to him, the criteria of reliability and validity are hardly applicable (Bart 2004:148): *“In this type of research they are replaced by the criteria of plausibility, truthfulness to life, richness of meaning and details, recognisability to immediately involved people, the use of different sources, communicative symmetry, usefulness, faithfulness to the original language and expressions, etc”.*

On the issue of generalization (Bart 2004:149), he says: *“We justified the claim of a much broader generalization; our narrative researchers need not be too modest, although some aspects of their research can be strengthened.”*

5. NARRATIVE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Narrative questions I would like to critically reflect upon are the following:

5.1 Did the research create space for new stories and for restorying?

I would like to answer, yes. We did get new stories told throughout the process. New stories were not only told but also developed. Even the research narrative is a developed story. I would have liked to spend more time on the process of restorying. I did not have the opportunity to take enough time and let the re-visioning process come to its full potential.

5.2 Did the researcher have integrity in listening to and reporting the stories?

I have previously (Chapter 2) reported on the difficulty of not understanding the young people’s mother language. This was a definite hindrance. It would have been very different to do this whole process in Sotho. It took time to be

introduced into the “sub-cultural language” of the young people. Eventually I caught on to this. I tried to report the stories with as much integrity as these circumstances allowed. Integrity to me is measured through my trying to be transparent about my own story, my own discourses and prejudice.

5.3 Did the researcher interpret or ask for interpretation?

Sometimes I did interpret. I tried to remind myself not to fall into this trap. Methods of member checking, triangulation (According to Krefting 1990:219) “*convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data to ensure that all aspects of a phenomenon have been investigated*”) and peer examination (discussions with colleagues who have experience in narrative research) was used to help me to do this consistently.

5.4 Did the research process bring transformation/reframing?

I believe that the written experiences, reflections and narratives are adequate witness to transformation that took place.

5.5 How is the researcher going to disseminate the research?

- Some dissemination was done through a workshop held in conjunction with SANPAD who sponsored the broad research project regarding HIV/AIDS and care.
- A business breakfast was planned for October 2004, where some of the collective implications for policy makers have been reported. The target group who was invited was people of government, related to HIV/AIDS issues and policies and business people sponsoring many of the HIV/AIDS research and care projects.
- The drama performed by the original group of teenagers, will be performed again by a new group.

6. IN CLOSING

My own spiralling journey of doing research in the Narrative paradigm, using the ABDCE methodology, can be described in the metaphor of sailing:

My husband and I have a Dart sailing boat, not a very general boat to use for sailing. It is a boat with a double hull, a foresail and a mainsail. The structure of the boat is very important to look after properly, because the boat must be able to bear the pressures of the wind. Especially in strong wind, the boat lifts on to one hull and must be very secure. When you sail on the one hull, a specific expression is used: sailors call it, "*flying the hull*". This is the ultimate achievement in sailing a Dart: you need perfect balance, perfect control and good teamwork. The result is fast sailing and ultimately, movement.

The two hulls are kept secure by the trampoline, therefore it must be checked every time you go sailing, to make sure the knots are tied properly and the bolts are fastened.

To me, the structure of the boat is metaphorical of the research positioning and methodology. The structure of research had to be good and strong to carry the weight of the wind when I felt confused and not sure what to do next.

Sailing requires skill: in tying the knots, in reading the wind, in managing the sails. The art of hearing and reporting data, also require some skill. To be comfortable in the narrative paradigm, took me a long time: time well spent in learning the concepts, and making the paradigm shifts needed. It requires skill to really do what you set out to do, consequently.

Sailing is a very delicate art: you must manage the sails and adjust the sails and the rudder to the wind all the time. The wind can change any minute. If you are not totally tuned into the wind, a strong unexpected wind can capsize the boat instantly. Sailing teaches you to negotiate the changing wind all the time.

To get to your destination in sailing is no simple task. All the time, you are manoeuvring to stay in the wind. You turn left and right all the time (tack and jibe), but eventually you end up more or less in the middle of left and right. Sometimes you get blown right off course.

This experience in sailing helped me to stay in focus while turning left and right in the research process, I had more or less an idea of the direction I planned to go. The ABDCE method helped me to know what to do next, even though I sometimes felt off course and never felt hundred percent sure exactly where I would end up. All the time, I was confronted with the delicate of art listening, restorying and reporting.

The wind, the water and your sailing skills combined, leads ultimately to movement: sometimes a very gentle float and sometimes a great adrenaline rush brought on by the sheer power of the wind and the feeling of the bulging sail under your hand. In the end, you always move. I definitely moved in this research process. There were times of gentle floating and times of the adrenalin rush: but movement, never the less.

The wind is always the unpredictable factor. From a gentle predictable breeze, to a surprising unexpected gush. There are many factors that carry the characteristics of the wind in the research journey: the co-researchers, the literature contribution, the reflection process and the unplanned encounters.

Even when you feel you are managing all the skills in sailing, you still can end up where you did not intend to go. The combination of negotiating the wind, reading the water, respecting the structure, taking care of the ropes and the knots, still can not guarantee anything.

I can merely thank God for the wonder of experiencing this research, sailing and life... I will keep aiming to "*fly the hull*" in my spiritual life, as a Practical Theologian and as person.