

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH PARADIGM CONSIDERED

The simple fact is that no measurement, no experiment or observation is possible without a [paradigm].

(Ilya Prigogine, 1982)

The intelligibility of our accounts of the world derive not from the world itself, but from our immersion within a tradition of cultural practices.... If our accounts conform to these conventions of intelligibility they will make sense; if they violate the traditions we cease our participation in the tradition. Thus, it is from our relationships within interpretive communities that our constructions of the world derive.

(Gergen & Gergen, 2000b, p. 1026).

This chapter explores the current theoretical context of mainstream psychology in order to justify an appropriate contextually sensitive approach to present a discussion of the various stories which is given in the next chapter.

The Climate of Research Methodologies

Social science, a set of disciplines originating in the western world, has for the large part in the past, in terms of knowledge production, relied on hypothetico-deductive methods whereby empirical data is used to either support or falsify previously formulated theories (Schwandt, 2001; Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The general idea is that, over time, certain theories will stand as being “true”, not having been falsified. This method is based on logic, objectivity and empiricism.

This scientific method works fairly efficiently for establishing and

developing a knowledge base within a particular paradigm. Problems arise, however, when the perspective, or paradigm from within which the research is conducted, changes or differs from the epistemology of the observed population. Different observations can be made, different results obtained and different conclusions drawn depending on the perspective of the researcher. Thus, questionable results may be obtained from research when the researcher and target population operate from within different epistemologies. This is how knowledge bases can affect the production of knowledge within different cultures or communities. Also, it can be said that the usefulness of the particular approach taken by the researcher depends very much on the purposes of the research. The recognition of this has led, more and more, for contextual influences on research to become prominent considerations especially in the social sciences (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Nevertheless, research in psychology continues to produce knowledge on a paradigm continuum ranging from the positivism and certainties of the hypothetico-deductive empirical methods favoured by the natural sciences; to the uncertainties, "quantum leaps" (Naisbitt, 1982, in Lincoln & Denzin, 2000) and restless art (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Richardson, 2000) of the interpretative and socially responsive methods. Yvonna Lincoln and Norman Denzin (2000, p. 1062) have named this latter approach "civic sociology" - a trend they predict for the future whereby researchers interact intensively with communities in order to effect changes in societies as well as knowledge production. Knowledge production by this latter approach would yield less generalisable results but far more relevant, specific knowledge useful for the communities within which such research is undertaken. However, currently researchers tend to polarise on the continuum and there remain critics at both ends - of both ends.

Researchers working within a western paradigm, with western populations, have generally leaned towards a scientific method, it being western in origin; while those working outside the western paradigm, or with non-western populations, generally prefer or seek methods more congruent with the home cultures.

One such researcher, Enriquez (1997), working in the Philippines, critical of western dominance in psychology, calls for a move away from natural scientific methods in psychological research, finding them inappropriate for developing and producing psychological knowledge:

As the science of man [*sic*], psychology models itself after the natural sciences but it is part of the cultural sciences tradition. Wilhelm Wundt, the 'father of scientific psychology', observed that psychology is heavily conditioned by language, custom and myth...thus clearly illustrating the limits of the uncritical use of natural science methods in cultural research (p. 40).

Furthermore, it is chiefly knowledge produced by natural science methods, through formal research, which obtains endorsement from socially recognised institutions such as universities, professional bodies, publishing houses and peer reviewers. However, in the absence of similar institutions, non-western cultures have devised other ways of acknowledging the validity of new knowledge within their own cultures. Some of these other ways are intimated briefly below.

Research Approaches and Approaches to Research in Africa

Research in psychology during the modernist era of the 1950s and 1960s in southern Africa entrenched the Euro-American domination in the discipline (Bakker, 1999; Nsamenang & Dawes, 1998). In the period thereafter, a post-colonial approach began to emerge which opened up debates over the ideological issues but has not really defined alternative and more appropriate methods of research to fit prevailing socio-ontogenic contexts from within which research emanated.

The development of the discipline of psychology in Third World countries and, in Africa specifically, has probably been hindered by the lingering effects of colonisation and further impeded by the ensuing political instabilities that have rocked these nations. Researchers have noted traditional and folk wisdom to have been sidelined by Euro-American domination of psychology within research and training institutions in the sub-continent of southern Africa (Nsamenang, 1995, 2000; Peltzer, 1998), and, indeed, globally (Lira, 2000; Prilleltensky, 2000; Sampson, 2000; Sloan, 2000; Ussher, 2000). It is here suggested that precepts and phenomena of traditional and folk wisdom may be inaccessible to western scientific techniques and it has been recommended that ethno-sensitive methods be employed to tap into ‘African’ knowledge (Gergen, Lock, Gulerce & Misra, 1996; Nsamenang, 1995; Peltzer, 1998). It is also here suggested that even the more recently developed qualitative methods may not necessarily fit with the epistemologies of the context of this study, their having been developed from within the Euro-American paradigm. Researchers have called for the development of a new appropriate philosophy of psychology theory, research methods and assessment techniques (Nsamenang, 1995; Nsamenang & Dawes, 1998; Peltzer, 1998). In a discussion on the role of cultural context in the social sciences, Gergen et al. (1996) call for “further efforts at opening psychology to diverse traditions at all levels of inquiry, particularly in the areas of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and praxis” (p.8).

Praxis

Praxis is defined by Joseph Dunne (1993, in Schwandt, 2001) as a

Type of human engagement that is embedded within a tradition of communally shared understandings and values, that remains vitally connected to peoples’ life experience, that finds expression in their ordinary linguistic usage, and that, rather than being a means through which they achieve outcomes separate from themselves, is a kind of enactment through which they

constitute themselves as persons in a historical community (p. 207).

Praxis has elsewhere been defined as a relationship between practice and knowledge in a mutually reflective interaction (Freire, 1970; Potter, 1999), and a catalytic one (Kelly, 1999).

The kind of knowledge pre-requisite for praxis is termed *phronesis* (Schwandt, 2001). Schwandt explains *phronesis* as being “intimately concerned with the timely, the local, the particular, and the contingent” (p. 208).

A Reflexive Approach and Learning Posture

In accordance with these concepts, Agar (1986, in Nsamenang, 1995) proposes that appropriate research methods for “an African psychology” (p. 735) may require intense personal involvement on the part of the researcher. This notion of closer personal involvement is more generally reflected in later postmodern writings (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Postmodernism will be discussed in greater detail below. An intense personal involvement in the context of study, on the part of the researcher, would also fit with the communal living approach generally found in many African societies (Mwamwenda, 1999; Ncgobo, 1999; Ndaba, 1999; Nsamenang, 1999; Wiredu, 1991). Such an intensely involved approach on the part of the researcher may require a shift away from the rigorous scientific and objective approach of mainstream quantitative Euro-American research methods. Again, this is congruent with a postmodern position.

Among various suggestions for an alternative appropriate research framework come those of both a cultural-psychology and an eco-cultural framework (Nsamenang, 1995). Nsamenang suggests that either of these could contribute to the indigenisation of psychology and also to the development and enrichment of the discipline of psychology as a whole. However, Nsamenang also goes beyond this in calling for

a kind of innovation that defies the status quo...the adoption of a learning posture...an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher's making (1995, p.735).

Bakker (1999, p.167) criticises writers in the field for continuing to deliver arguments from within the western modernist paradigm and, in a search for a relevant psychology, calls for the hearing of the silenced voices of Africa:

The dominant view of "Africa" in this discourse is often that of traditional Africa - a discourse about the lives and "worldviews" of ordinary people, but filtered through intellectuals of whom most were trained at western universities. The dominant African discourse of resistance against western domination has emerged from "the margins of African contexts...its axes as well as its language have been limited by the authority of this exteriority" (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 176). Mudimbe (1994) draws our attention to its "unconscious" (p. xiv) - the primary, popular, local discourses of African peoples that have been silenced, converted, or translated by conquering western discourses. At the centre of efforts to liberate them, the mute remain largely mute.

Echoing this view is Nsamenang (2000) who also bemoans the fact that, in his opinion, contemporary Africa has been swayed by academic acculturation, implying that current researchers may already be successfully colonised by Euro-American ideologies. Successful colonisation results in the non-critical emulation of the colonisers by the colonised.

On the whole it can be read that two central ideas emerge from debates on psychological relevance in cultures other than Euro-American. One is that

appropriate approaches need to be developed for both research and practice; secondly, the hegemonic voices of the western dominated disciplines need to make space for the local voices to be heard.

A Postmodern Position

A brief discussion of postmodernism will follow. The purpose of this section is not so much to define postmodernism as to present and discuss the theoretical and attitudinal context within which this study is situated.

As has been briefly mentioned in chapters two and four of this study, the intellectual period known as modernity, has its roots in the Enlightenment, and ended some time around the 1960s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). Modernity had as its cornerstone an attempt to describe the world and to view knowledge in rational, empirical and objective terms. It was characterised by a positivistic search for a truth and an accumulation of knowledge (Kvale, 1992a) that could be uncovered, in variously prescribed ways, especially through the scientific method.

Postmodernism, as its name suggests, is generally considered to have emerged as, and manifested in, movements beyond modernism, sometimes in contradistinction to (Olesen, 2000), and sometimes inclusive of, modernism (Richardson, 2000). Denzin & Lincoln (2000a) identify it as “a contemporary sensibility, developing since World War II, that privileges no single authority, method, or paradigm” (p. 24).

On the whole, postmodernism can be said to be that *sensibility* (to use Denzin & Lincoln's term) which rejects the positivist confidence of the modernist era of knowledge (Agger, 1991; Jameson, 1991, Kvale, 1992a; Richardson, 2000). Postmodernism is generally not regarded as a style (Jameson, 1991) nor a paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a), but as “a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features” (Jameson, 1991, p. 2).

Conceived of as such, postmodernism becomes a historical term rather than a defining style or paradigm. However, certain themes run through the various paradigms that are sympathetic to postmodernism and some of these occur frequently enough to have become almost synonymous with postmodernism, although they may not in themselves comprise postmodernism. These themes include a rejection of what Lyotard (1984) referred to as the *grand-narrative* (Agger, 1991; Gamson, 2000) or *meta-narrative* (Sey, 1999), a rejection of the totalising tendency of positivism into universal truths (Agger, 1991; Kvale, 1992a; Richardson, 2000; Sey, 1999); a focus on the cultural other, the oppressed and marginalised (Sey, 1999) and the local (Agger, 1991; Richardson, 2000). Agger refers to Lyotard's position on the subject of post-modern social theory thus:

One cannot tell large stories about the world but only small stories from the heterogeneous "subject positions" of individuals and plural social groups (Agger, 1991, p. 109).

This position implies that a unifying social theory about people in the world is problematic, but that the diversity, multiplicity and different subjectivities should rather be recounted from the transparent perspectives of the researcher, in culture and time. The perspective of the researcher takes on a different significance in the postmodern position. The epistemological stance of the researcher moves from a scientifically objective and detached observation of the positivistic position (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) towards a suspicious, overt political, and constructionist position of the postmodern (Richardson, 2000; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999); in a more interpretive and reflexive orientation (Lyotard, 1984; Sey, 1999); or as what Cromby and Nightingale (1999, p. 9) refer to as "relativism", as opposed to the "realism" of positivism.

In the light of the above discussion, notions of "African" versus "western" form part of a meta-narrative dialectic, that belongs to the modernist frame. Using the dialectic as platform this study proposes a shift to a dialogue wherein the smaller local stories are able to be spoken. The academic stories of chapter five are seen to form part of the local stories although they are still

positioned within the dialectic opposite the more globalising universal academic stories of chapter four.

A Postmodern Position for a Context of Discovery

As previously stated in this thesis, the objective is not to iterate and reify an alternative hegemonic paradigm for psychology in Africa, but to open possibilities for a more inclusive epistemology for praxis, as defined earlier in this chapter.

Having discussed, in chapters four and five, the effects of western hegemony on development, cultural practices, African philosophies and debated psychologies in Africa, the usefulness of a postmodern position may become more apparent to the reader, as it has become to the author.

Bakker (1999, p.169) recommends a postmodern approach as being appropriate for the researcher exploring the complex African context of modernising flux:

The postmodern world is characterised by a process of decentring and of a multiplicity of relationships, where each individual forms part of multiple communities and cultures, and where what is considered to be real varies between these contexts. This also applies to Africa, where people are exposed to different realities and move continuously between them.

It has been stated above that postmodernism in the social sciences promotes the notion of multiple subjective voices, rather than the positivistic approach of a universal voice – that which Lyotard (1984) refers to as the grand metanarratives of western reason. The universal voice, or metanarrative, effectively silences the voices which fall outside of the predominant mainstream (Bakker, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 2000), credentialed culture (Agger, 1991), through the promotion of class, race, and gender biases (Agger, 1991). Agger

(1991, p. 111) refers to this as "secret partisanship" through "universal reason". From this aspect, the paradigms of postmodernism are able to challenge the universal voice of western science in creating space and recognition for the local and subjective to be discovered.

Methodological Issues in Postmodern Research: Pros and Cons

Because postmodernism is not a paradigm in itself, and if it is accepted as an historical perspective, a cultural dominant, seeking to present diversity and multiplicity, it can inclusively embrace aspects of modernism, positivism and reflexive paradigms. According to Agger (1991, p.112) "this has the advantage of challenging singular methodologies, whether quantitative or qualitative. It would seem to argue for multiple methodologies".

In reaction to the positivist ideal of neutrality and objectivity of the scientific text, the postmodern text allows the deliberate transparency, subjectivity and creativity of the researcher. There are those postmodern authors who proclaim to expose institutionalised science for using methodology to disguise bias (Feyerabend, 1985; Foucault, 1972). Such authors suggest integrity is to be gained in approaching methodology as amplitude to the discourse of the text itself (Chenail, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1995; Feyerabend, 1975; Foucault, 1972). Such authors recognise and acknowledge the reciprocal legitimising relationship between the data of the text, and the paradigm employed to gain it.

Criticism of Postmodernism

A body of criticism has been built up against the hegemonic positivist approach to psychology as can be noted in any qualitative journal or books containing research writings purported to be alternative to the mainstream (Phillips, 1987). Positivism is sometimes criticized for remaining largely associated with the distant objective researcher seeking fundamental truths from within a rigorous scientific framework. However, the alternative paradigm researcher working within the newer epistemologies of systems thinking and the

postmodern movement is associated with and criticised for a lack of rigour, a lack of methodological sophistication, non-generalisable findings and questionable results (low validity) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Vydich & Lyman, 2000). That this dichotomous approach to the discipline is still taken by some writers is apparent.

Ironically, criticism of the postmodern approach has included commentary on the detachment of the observer from predominating social norms and values, and the marginalisation of the researcher from his/her subjects. Vydich and Lyman (2000, p.59) call Spretnak's critical comments on postmodernism "comprehensive and useful" while presenting this quotation from her writings (in Vydich & Lyman, 2000, p. 59):

A sense of detachment, displacement, and shallow engagement dominates deconstructive-postmodern aesthetics because groundlessness is the only constant recognised by this sensibility. The world is considered to be a repressive labyrinth of "social production", a construction of pseudoselves who are pushed and pulled by cultural dynamics and subtly diffused "regimes of power". Values and ethics are deemed arbitrary, as is "history", which is viewed by deconstructive postmodernists as one group or another's self-serving selection of facts. Rejecting all "metanarratives", or supposedly universal representations of reality, deconstructive postmodernists insist that the making of every aspect of human existence is culturally created and determined in particular, localized circumstances about which no generalizations can be made. Even particularized meaning, however, is regarded as relative and temporary.

While a postmodern attitude and post-experimental research methods may go some way towards addressing the concerns prompted by a traditionally

scientific approach to research, Lincoln & Guba (2000) regret that certain texts in and beyond the postmodern, in the future, may never reach general academic readers, as they will be produced for local indigenous purposes only. The price of postmodern texts, in their search for local relevancy through interaction with the objects of research rather than the use of conventional scientific methodologies, which do reach scholars, may remain "messy" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.184), uncertain, private and unscientific (Kvale, 1992a).

Beyond the Criticism

Yvonna Lincoln (2000) argues that the traditional focus on the (western) scientific method in psychological research has led to a schism in psychological knowledge. She identifies a divide between research and praxis come about through the history of psychology due to the quest for objective knowledge in the laboratories. The consequences of this quest has been the severance of any great focus on the unobservable - "the most beautiful in human life: feelings, emotions, 'callings'" (Lincoln, 2000, p.5). The need to dissolve this division and move towards alternative methods of knowledge creation in psychology has been a movement growing for some decades (Bakan, 1971; Chenail, 1990b, 1992; Gelso, 1985; Keeney & Morris, 1985a; Keeney & Morris, 1985b; Lincoln, 2000; Misra & Gergen, 1993; Newton & Caple, 1985; Tomm, 1983). This need is acknowledged for reasons varying from a perception of the limited usefulness of the scientific method in the social sciences (Bakan, 1971; Chenail, 1990b; Lincoln, 2000; Misra & Gergen, 1993); a call to integrate praxis with research (Chenail, 1990b; Gelso, 1985; Keeney & Morris, 1985a, 1985b; Lincoln, 2000); changing world views (Newton & Caple, 1985; Tomm, 1983) and a changing world (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000), to name a few.

However, postmodernism has paved the way for true post-experimental research and a move ultimately to a more spiritual, ethical and morally responsible mode of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Fals-Borda, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Describing their vision of future (beyond 2000) social science research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000a), as does Kvale (1999a),

foretell a certain measure of local relevancy and social action as opposed to the modernist search for knowledge for knowledge's sake. Departing from Spretnak's (referred to above) 'detached' perspective of the postmodern approach they predict that “the future ... is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities.... The social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, p. 3)

*A Postmodern Paradigm for Research:
Social Constructionism*

Postmodernism developed in contradistinction to the purism and analytical clarity of the positivist scientific trends of modernism. As such, postmodernism leans toward eclecticism and has evolved a strong constructionist thrust. Burr (1995) and Gergen (1999) describe how social constructionism illuminates the idea that the content of psychological study is created in the very process of identifying it, like the snake that eats its own tail. Constructionism rejects traditional empirical research methods in favour of a transcendence of orthodox schools and models effecting the crossing of disciplinary boundaries to a freedom of thinking not possible within traditional paradigms. Conducting the research from within the postmodern framework will permit the study to move towards its stated aims while avoiding the epistemological constraints of traditional research models.

As social constructionists began questioning conventional scientific texts, some turned to the narrative, the interpretive and storytelling, to uncover local realities. These postmodern scholars adopted a stance as participant-observers (Vydich & Lyman, 2000) in a search for *thick descriptions* (Geertz, 1973) of lived experience through the deconstruction of texts and discourse.

Initially, social constructionists confined their focus to language in its various forms (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). Later social constructionists (Parker, 1999a) extended their relativist arguments about the nature of

information and our knowledge of the world, to include both verbal and non-verbal (Burkitt, 1999; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999b Parker, 1999a), or, as Vivien Burr puts it - the "extra-discursive" (1999, p. 113), or "knowledge-in-performance" (1999, p. 119).

Narrative Approaches

In writing of *life history* (as a postmodern challenge) as a strategy for inquiry in social science, William Tierney (2000), advocates the use of the *testimonio* to give voice to the silenced populations of oppressed cultures, whether they be gay, lesbian, black, women or disabled or any other marginalised group, either by identity or circumstance. He refers to John Beverley (1992, in Tierney, 2000), who

has observed, the *testimonio* "is by nature a protean and demotic form not yet subject to legislation by a normative literary establishment" (p. 93).

Life history and the *testimonio*, as forms of narrative within the postmodern tradition, seem to be particularly suited to exploring areas which lie to the 'other' of the researcher and general mainstream social science domain (Beverley, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Other marginalised paradigms using strategies of inquiry in the postmodern framework also emphasise the importance of avoiding reification and entrenchment of delimited perspectives, in favour of bringing forward the particular and subjective as unique stories: cultural studies (Frow & Morris, 2000); critical ethnography (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000); critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2000); and queer theory (Gamson, 2000).

Positioning the Study

If this research is to attempt to reflect congruent research methods for the area of this study, it was projected that a largely improvisational, flexible and innovative approach needed to be adopted. Also, because psychology as a discipline remains in a nascent stage in Africa, the selection of appropriate

research methods would need to be largely experimental. Lincoln & Guba (2000), refer to an experimental approach by feminists such as Laurel Richardson. Thus, in the process of re-searching for indigenous coping processes, it became necessary to search simultaneously for a fit-ting methodology that would be determined by the social and human ethics of the context. In this way research methodologies would emerge from the very heterogeneous cultures in which the study re-searches. Such an approach implies the engagement of communities in participatory re-search through the “adoption of a learning posture”, as recommended by Nsamenang, above. Bakker (1999, p. 179) supports the suggestion of a participatory research design in the quest for African relevance in psychology:

This psychologist [the researcher] is personally involved as a person among other persons, not as an élitist expert who objectifies others. He or she would include, rather than exclude, persons of all walks of life in the task at hand, and work with others towards the construal of resolutions to problems that are co-defined by all participants.

Knowledge gained through the employment of specific methods is inevitably limited to the bounds of the epistemology out of which the methods were evolved. It was considered desirable that the emergence of “other” philosophies, methods and perceptions needed to be enabled. While it is recognised that to presume to ‘work outside’ an epistemology is paradoxical, the challenge for this study was not to attempt to ‘outwit’ any epistemology, but to record in a participatory manner meanings from the contexts themselves. It is suggested that this approach enhances the integrity of the study by promoting congruency and isomorphy within the research. As a starting point from which to approach the study it seemed proper to take a post-modern/critical psychology stance and draw on participatory research principles and methods. This tentative approach is supported in the literature:

Other qualitative researchers feel that particularities of each research project are so unique that they require a distinctive method for every study. They may identify research tradition(s) which inspired their method for a specific project, but they will also allow each study to have its own project-specific method which emerges from the special characteristics of the project. (Chenail, 1992)

Gergen, Lock, Gulerce, and Misra, (1996) suggest that their call for diversity in all areas of psychology may be served by more interpretive and more practical orientations to the research process. Bakker (1999, p. 177) proposes that a relevant research would turn to the community context itself, forsaking the academic history (narrative):

It requires focussing on the specific situation at hand, not the rituals, preconceptions, and doctrines of either psychology or the field of "African studies". It calls for a new kind of psychologist.

The Research Process

To inform it, the study draws from stories told by members of the community in which the researcher has worked. This includes academic stories in chapters two, four and five, and narrated stories such as The Story in chapter one and the Other Stories of chapter three. The Stories are presented with some artistic licence by the author who also makes allowance for artistic licence in the narrating. That is not to say that the stories are fictional, but an imaginative approach is taken in their presentation rather than an attempt to replicate the 'truth'. Gergen and Gergen (1997) suggest that a more literary form of research reporting may stimulate dialogue among a wider audience, leaving the audience some leeway to interpret meanings for themselves.

Such methods have been recognised as valuable and informative for

qualitative research by researchers such as Chenail (1992). Fals-Borda (2000), commenting on his own explorations of local relevant knowledge among the marginalized common peoples of his native Colombia, notes that artistic expressions carry and contain the emotionalism necessary for the retention of human dignity and cultural recognition.

Locally, examples of such literary and artistic methods have been explored over the last five years through the initiatives of a group of qualitative researchers. Together with several international researchers this group have evolved the “Loose Methods” approach which is not a formulated methodology but rather alternative approaches emerging from a forum of researchers exploring philosophies of knowledge (Hook, Bowman, Smith & Terre Blanche, 1999). This study has drawn inspiration from this approach that would seem to partly address some of the concerns raised by this study.

In exploring ‘otherness’ in a philosophy of knowledge, the Loose Methods group have drawn extensively from Foucault’s discourses on the relationship between knowledge and power. The Loose Methods approach is unconcerned with uncovering scientific truth but rather seeks to produce ‘political usefulness’ in a quest for new forms of knowledge. These authors further state that method, as the platform for knowledge production, may allow for the emergence and operationalisation of new concepts and practices when new methods are employed:

New systems of process and method are as important as an awareness of the ideological functioning of unquestioned and un-interrogated means of practice.
(Hook et al, 1999)

In formulating conclusions from the research information provided by *The Story and Other Stories*, this researcher interacts with the material through reflective eco-systemic descriptions in chapter seven. These reflections are made in an inter-cultural dialogical fashion. Ultimately, it is anticipated that this inter-cultural recursive dialogue will allow the researcher to peek into the

cultural cracks.

In terms of the narratives, existing information as well as new information has been drawn on in contracting the research process. Existing information takes the form of narrative case notes from several years of counselling in a South African township and adjacent communities. While these case notes were compiled from within the researcher's epistemological methods at the time, the cases evoked many of the questions culminating in the proposal of this study. New information has been drawn from other narrative material in consultation with members of community and some is autobiographical.

The Narratives of this Study

Three of the Stories are presented as much as possible in the words of the participants themselves. Other stories are autobiographical and others are case reports. All of them are prefixed by some form of diagnostic explanation from a positivist frame. This has the effect of allowing multiple voices to be heard in the text so that they may be contrasted with each other in content and approach in terms of their usefulness. Multi voicing (Gergen & Gergen, 1997, 2000a) avoids presenting a single dominant voice, facilitating varying ideas to emerge. The idea that language (voices) can possibly never completely represent the territory under study because they emerge from within particular historical cultural contexts (Gergen & Gergen, 1997, 2000b) gives credence to a multi voiced text.

A link to Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative approach to research, rather than a methodology, such that researchers and subjects participate outside the traditional expert/subject hierarchy. The fundamental principles of PAR address many of the concerns discussed above with regard to paradigm and ecological issues. Thus, it is regarded as important to present PAR here in some detail.

A fundamental assumption of PAR is that it contributes to social improvement and the general enhancement of the human condition especially within the Third World where PAR has been used to combat oppression (Bhana, 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). That PAR has been used at times as an activist's tool is a fact that distinguishes it from most other research paradigms.

PAR is seen to have evolved out of Action Research, introduced by Lewin and made increasingly popular among social science practitioners since the 1940's (McTaggart, 1997b; Montero, 2000). One of the primary aims of Lewin at the time was to include an attempt to become closer to the research subjects (Montero, 2000). When Action Research was implemented in Latin America in the 1950's, the distance between researcher as both expert-knower and owner of the research process was relinquished to the full participation of the community in which change or knowledge was to be sought. Along with the participatory element of PAR, Action Research as the research process was then known, was used to effect social change and so the emancipatory value of PAR was emphasised. Researchers such as Fals-Borda in Colombia in the late nineteen-fifties rejected an 'epistemology of distance' in research and in so doing further evolved the new research paradigm in which PAR embeds itself (Montero, 2000).

Montero (2000, p.132) quotes Fernández Christlieb on the 'epistemology of distance':

'Subject and object are two separate instances, two things apart from the other, distinct and alien.' And in that distinct relation, one of the poles knows, has ideas, intentions and will, while the other one is an object to be known, therefore inert, quiet, thoughtless and without ill and feelings.

In Latin America and France in the late nineteen-fifties and sixties, social science researchers working within the PAR paradigm took up a political commitment in their practice allowing a rejection of the ideological neutrality of

science to be made more explicit. In particular Montero (2000) refers to the works of Cordoso and Faletto in Latin America, and to Lucien Goldman and Joseph Gabel, two Hungarian Marxists living in France. These contributions sharply aided the development of a distinctive PAR paradigm. Later writers such as Paulo Freire working in the nineteen sixties and seventies in Brazil introduced dialogical elements into PAR and gave identity to his participants who usually remain anonymous in the research report writings (Montero, 2000).

Implementing PAR

While opinions on what characterises PAR as a distinctive research process is reasonably consensual, recommendations as to how to operationalise PAR differs to some extent among writers on the subject. Greenwood & Levin (2000) warn against an assumption that action research be equated with exclusively qualitative techniques. This emanates from a still widely held assumption that the methodology determines the paradigm, while, Greenwood & Levin argue, it is the paradigm that might suggest a methodological approach but would not necessarily prescribe one.

Major Principles of PAR

Without any attempt to be comprehensive or totally inclusive, several major principles from the sets of principles and guidelines identified by major theoreticians in this field (Goodley & Parker, 2000; Granada, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McTaggart, 1997c) are found to be common and useful as principal (and principle) guidelines for PAR in this research:

1. Knowledge is social: PAR leads to the creation of new knowledge and the co-creation of knowledge & learning through social interaction.

The participants in the narratives of this study were all approached for their everyday experience and not for any perceived *expertise* on their part. The conversations held with them were informally structured. Where case notes were drawn on it was to

present information gained during personal dialogue. The researcher was provided with information, during each of the conversational processes, which can be considered social knowledge as opposed to expert or formal knowledge.

Other knowledge included in this study to inform the discussions in chapter seven is taken from ‘African’ authors drawing from their writings on customs within their own cultures. This may be described as a more formal contribution to local knowledge discourse.

2. Communication is central: there needs to be a mutual exploration between researcher and community participants of the discourse of communities. The significant social role played by language is recognised.

The Stories shared by the participants and presented in this study formed part of a dialogue between the researcher and participants. Some of them explicitly included The Story and some included aspects of other stories in a mutual exploration of and search for further useful meaning.

Some of the information emerging from The Stories linked with information gained through the discourses explored in chapter five.

3. The power of the expert knower is relinquished - power relationships are equalled out.

The researcher entered the dialogues with the participants from a position of humility in the face of knowledge not yet available to her such as in the “learning posture” of Nsamenang (p. 735, 1995). The researcher remained aware of the fact that her position was that of an ‘other’ in a cultural sense, but also that of an equal in a human sense.

4. The process is aimed at real social change, political values are central – political neutrality is not possible.

This fourth idea is central to the study which aims to give voice to the silent in the academic dialectic of relevance in psychology in South Africa. Through allowing the voices to be heard it is anticipated that a dialogue may replace the dialectic.

McTaggart (1997c) stresses that principles identified as such are guiding principles only. To enforce them would prove contradictory to the philosophy of the participative co-creation of the process.

The Spiral Process of PAR

Several authors refer to a "spiral" or "cyclical" process characteristic of PAR. Among these are:

- "a spiral of self-reflecting cycles", Kemmis & McTaggart (2000, p. 595)
- "spiral design of action and research", Karlsen (1991, p. 155)
- "critical subjectivity...[develops]...through the cyclical process of co-operative inquiry", Reason (1994b, p. 46)
- "process of action-reflection-action" and "assessing-reflecting-deciding", Montero (2000, p. 138-139).

The Story of chapter one can be said to have initiated the study, some fourteen years ago. The Story is autobiographical of the author's early experience of working in the township. The Story acted as a perturbation to a critical reflective thought process for the author that in turn inspired further conversations, actions and more reflections.

The Other Stories in chapter three, are narratives occurring interspersedly over the next fourteen years. Three of them were the result of conversations held with this specific study in the making. All of them were held

in some point of a long cycle of action-reflection-action process of psychology praxis in the township community.

Knowledge as Part of the Spiral

Kemmis & McTaggart (2000) expand on what they mean by the “spiral of self-reflective cycles”. Because knowledge, action, change and new knowledge are all deemed to be social according to the PAR paradigm, all of the stages of the process of PAR need be validated by social consensus. This is where local knowledge, language (discourses) and an understanding of local social structures (cultural, economic, political) play a significant role in determining the further progress of the process. Fals-Borda (1997, p. 108), refers to this social consensus as a

rite of communion between thinking and acting human beings, the researcher and the researched. The usual formality and prophylaxis of academic institutions had to be discarded and given space to some sort of down-to-earth collectivization in the search for knowledge. This attitude I called *vivencia*, or life-experience (Erlebnis).

More distinguishing of the paradigm than any specific methodological processes are the ethical principles behind PAR. Reason and Bradbury propose some of these principles:

A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being – economic, political, psychological, spiritual – of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of

which we are an intrinsic part. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2)

From the above it can be inferred that central to the tenets of PAR is the critical co-exploration of local knowledges. In addition, the two adjectival components of the name of the research paradigm give evidence to its focus: participation and action, or some form of community or collective pro-activity, as opposed to the more usual passive recording of observations in a traditionally non-obtrusive style (Cole, 1991). This pro-active participation is frequently aimed at elevating the condition of socially low ranking communities through their full engagement in the research process (Bhana & Kanjee, 2001; Goodley & Parker, 2000; Kelly & van der Riet, 2001; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Montero, 2000; Potter & Kruger, 2001; Reason, 1994b; Whyte, 1991). Numerous projects employing PAR (Reason, 1994a; Whyte, 1991) have shown how this alternative research paradigm, which effectively eradicates the traditional hegemony of the social scientist, renders simultaneously new information as well as real system change.

Processes Discovered

In her winding path along the process of this study, the researcher looked for new knowledge to inform her further praxis within this community. There were times when she searched in libraries but her conclusions were that the content nature of information in mainstream books was not as useful as the descriptions of processes she found in writings from the margins. These issues have been expanded on in the previous chapters of this study. The writings of persons working in similar circumstances inspired her to recognise her own marginality of praxis and to allow the ecology of the context to inform her.

Some discussion on the value of an ecological approach has been presented earlier in this thesis. It is suggested that many of the guiding principles of PAR allow the research process to emerge from the ecology of the context of the study at hand. Part of the ecological sensitivity is the recognition

given to local knowledge, or popular knowledge (Fals-Borda, 1997).

Local and Popular Knowledge

The relationship of traditional African knowledges to western hegemony in academia, and knowledge establishment in general, was introduced in chapter four. Here local or popular knowledge is referred to in the context of PAR and other previous research writings where it takes on a significant relevance. The nature of local and popular knowledges will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Introduction to Local Knowledge

Local knowledge as a concept is said to have originated from Russian cognitivist psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the nineteen-twenties (Kelly & van der Riet, 2001). Vygotsky was of the opinion that all higher mental functions, - and among these he includes knowledge acquisition, skills and survival strategies, - are socially determined.

By virtue of many of its fundamental assumptions, PAR (and its recognition of local knowledge) can be placed very much inside the postmodern movement. As has already been discussed above, the postmodern position brought an attempt to break from the traditionally entrenched positivist empiricist image of psychology and in particular that of psychological research (Phillips, 1987).

Orlando Fals-Borda (1997) explores the relationship between knowledge and reason. While he acknowledges that western mainstream science has in a Newtonian tradition placed what he refers to as artificial parameters on legitimised knowledge, he recalls that there is an older tradition in western thinking which gave cognisance to "common people's knowledge (popular or folk science), based on practical reason and communicative socialibility" (p.108). Fals-Borda recalls that this opinion was shared by Galileo, Descartes and Kant. In relinquishing the dominance over knowledge, through his work in

Colombia with the peasants and common people, Fals-Borda found that a commitment to the social values and the natural order of these people led him to "look for and respect the wisdom [of] peoples who had been forgotten, neglected or despised by academia and elite groups in general" (1997, p. 108).

Fals-Borda's work in this area, and his examination of similar work by other researchers in other countries, led him to propose that PAR opened a new paradigm for the social sciences.

The Relationship Between PAR and Local Knowledge

Kemmis & McTaggart (2000, p.572) state that PAR developed as a deliberate resistance to what they refer to as a "colonization" of research and science by power structures existing within agencies and lodged within policy agendas not involved with the communities in which the research is done. McTaggart is particularly clear in his criticism of social science research as having taken a hegemonic political stance up until now promoting predominantly positivistic approaches (McTaggart, 1997b). Orlando Fals-Borda (1997, p. 107) describes how, in his search for a "concept of science, more ethical and pertinent to the daily vicissitudes of the common people" he resigned from the constraining strictures of his university post where he found little understanding of the dialectics between theory and practice. He claims that the academic world of Colombia of the nineteen-seventies had fallen "victim to the fatal belief in science as a fetish with a life of its own" (1997, p. 107). Fals-Borda came to the conclusion that the traditional schism between theory and praxis, thought and action, was artificially imposed by academia and that the natural order of things was to see practice as theory-in-action. Fals-Borda, echoing the predictions of Lincoln, Guba and Denzin (referred to above), takes an ethical stance on this view in reminding the academic world of Sir Francis Bacon's words: "science, like the life of a just man, can be judged mainly for its deeds" (1997, p. 108).

Debunking Formalities and Elitism Around Knowledge

Anil Chaudhary (1997) discusses her own realisations about the role of knowledge in economies and maintaining and controlling social strata. India has its own history, similar to other Third World countries, of using knowledge as a power instrument for the benefit of the protection of the privileges of the elite. Chaudhary describes how in our current technological age knowledge provides a gateway to better paid jobs, money and the privileges and power that wealth brings. In the past formal knowledge was openly kept from the under-classes and women through laws. Democratic government policies have supposedly changed this, making knowledge available to all. However, the reality is that formal knowledge still remains exclusive to some, but the gatekeepers of the present have taken on different personas from those in the past. If it is not money, gender or class that bars the gate to formal knowledge in the present age, then it is language or culture (Chaudhary, 1997). Chaudhary criticises the formal knowledge institutions for pandering to the demands of big industry most of which have strong western links and thus funding is directed to those projects and curricula that expound the contents and themes pertinent to large scale developed-world industry. In this way local needs are not met and local knowledge is bypassed.

Yet, Chaudhary maintains (1997), local knowledge continues to exist parallel to formal systems of knowledge, and local knowledge is generally passed on in some form of oral tradition. In the passing on of common, or local knowledge from generation to generation the knowledge adapts itself to the current social situations and times. Thus, local knowledge is enhanced through the process of transference. Chaudhary refers to formal knowledge and its use as the "dominant mode" and the local knowledge as the "popular mode" (p. 118). Knowledge found in mainstream psychology texts would be the dominant mode of professional psychologists, and was the one used by the protagonist of *The Story* in her practice at the time. The researcher, through a spiralling process of reflexive praxis, incorporated more and more popular knowledge into the practice of her discipline. This is apparent in stories such as *Alice and Doozy* in chapter three.

Clear differences characterise dominant knowledge and popular knowledge according to Chaudhary and she identifies several thematic differences, which are presented below.

- *Dominant knowledge is isolating while popular knowledge is interactive.*

This isolation is directly apparent in the stories told by persons such as Seedat (1997) and Alice (Alice and Doozy).

- *Dominant knowledge is an individualistic pursuit while popular knowledge is collective.*

The author's experiences were such that her private academic learning did not adequately prepare her for working with the people of Mamelodi. The knowledge she gained from interacting with clients in the township led her to embark on this study. The narrator of The Story found herself in a similar position of not having enough knowledge from the context in order to be able to engage in a more useful therapeutic relationship with Lesaka.

- *Dominant knowledge is accumulative while popular knowledge is disseminative.*
- *Dominant knowledge is concerned with abstract issues and sectional interests while popular knowledge is concerned with concrete and common issues.*

The narrator of The Story discovered that she lacked popular knowledge at the time of the events of The Story. Cabangile showed herself to be well immersed in the needs and expectations of her community. Her wish to find solutions for the healing need she saw in the community in which she lived, threw her into ambivalence. She sought answers in academic texts and western professional rules of game.

- *Dominant knowledge is controlled centrally while popular knowledge is situated within the community where it is formed and used.*

- *Dominant knowledge perpetuates its own 'status-quo' while popular knowledge seeks transformation.*

Chaudhary (1997) concludes that PAR has its epistemological roots in popular (local) knowledge production. Any transformative process addressing issues such as enablement, empowerment and accessibility must take a consultative form. A transformative process in psychology must therefore consult with popular (local) knowledge. The stories of this study attempt to tap into some popular knowledge about local understanding of human behaviour.

Beyond the Knowledge Agenda of Research

Because much has been said in the literature about power relationships and knowledge, and because this thesis seeks new knowledge from among the previously politically disenfranchised, the currently economically disempowered, and the educationally marginalized, it would be unethical to omit discussions around politics, knowledge and research. Thus, some of these issues are presented below.

In his discussion of PAR as confronting western traditional scientific methods, McTaggart (1997b) describes PAR as a "church", "movement", or "family of activities" (p. 1). All of these terms carry connotations of solidarity, morality, the intensity of personal involvement and commitment as well as the idea of political agenda that he asserts that all research carries. According to him research methodologies, by their nature, redefine power relationships between researcher and the researched communities. Often this power manifests itself in the hearing of the research results, the control of the channels of publication.

While the subjects of the PAR project shift to becoming involved participants, the researcher herself is also required to shift: from a neutral stance, to a take on an activist role of a positioned participant (Cole, 1991). Reason

(1994b) refers to his own work in human inquiry as "an approach to living based on experience and engagement" (p. 9). He completely rejects the notion of a neutral researcher in his assertion that "complete personal engagement, passion and profound risk-taking are central to inquiry, and that science and life are not separate" (p. 9).

Reason (1994c) argues that participation (as in PAR) goes beyond mere political co-operation to, what this author infers as the realms of the co-creation of consciousness. Reason (p. 16) quotes Mumford:

Every transformation of [the human species]...has rested on a new metaphysical and ideological base; or rather, upon deeper stirrings and intuitions whose rationalised expression takes the form of a new picture of the cosmos and the nature of [humanity].

Reason takes up Mumford's idea in suggesting that his (and by implication all) PAR writings seek not to establish truth, but to "fashion a myth" (p. 16) which is to be used as a map for collaborative researchers to find their way through the territory of their researches, and is to be distinctive from any "positivist truth" (p. 16). He describes how he distinguishes three phases of development of consciousness of humanity to the present date. The first phase saw humankind merged with primeval forces of irrationality and nature. In the second phase, the modernists separated themselves from their environments in an attempt to make sense of the world and gain some control by seeking scientific truths with which to deal with immediate world problems. However, Reason reminds us that human consciousness associated with modern science is founded on "an essential foundation of tacit knowledge" (p. 16). This kind of consciousness is typical of present mainstream western thought and leaves the individual alienated from community and environment. The third phase which Reason suggests is at this stage more intimated than actual, will see a new intentional and reflexive participation with the world. It is this form of participation that Reason suggests researchers should strive for in PAR.

When participation takes on the value of the nature of human consciousness as advocated by Reason above, in the third phase, then neutrality becomes impossible. Thus, the researcher finds herself living the research by adopting an activist's role. It is this value that prompted this researcher to search out the dissenting voices in the literature, and to present the stories which could not fit into a mainstream paradigm of psychology with any real success as far as treatment is concerned.

Cole (1991) makes the point that while it could be argued that, in accordance with the Heisenberg Principle, the act of participatory (or non-participatory) observation will influence the research results, thus nullifying the PAR argument, thorough commitment to the research process calls for total involvement. He uses a quote from C. W. Mills to describe and justify his own activist role as researcher in organisations:

The most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community...do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other. (Cole, 1991, p. 160)

This sentiment is echoed in Cabangile's story as she immerses herself in her work in psychology, and also Founder who could not go on living in his work in the old way. He felt impelled to seek a new way of working which was different from the mainstream.

(Local) Knowledge, Research and Responsibility

Despite the criticisms aimed at a postmodern position (these have been discussed in an earlier section), some postmodern researchers view relevance as taking priority over rigour especially in a search for knowledge useful to the practitioner (Argyris & Schön, 1991; Reason, 1994b). The still dominant mainstream psychology (Goodley & Parker, 2000) is criticised for separating out practice from research aspects (Poetter, 1997) thereby hindering any real

progressive transformation of the discipline.

Writing from a research perspective, Greenwood & Levin (2000) are uncompromising in their criticism of mainstream university academia which they believe maintains the distance between social change and university research programmes. They advocate that social science researchers either adopt an action research approach or make their distance overt and thus relinquish any social responsibility.

Local knowledge plays a major role in various types of action research besides PAR. In a discussion on the origin of universities as institutions of knowledge, Greenwood & Levin (2000) acknowledge the potentially mutually enriching dialogical relationship between formal knowledge such as is created and disseminated by universities, and the popular knowledge of the common people when used in action research:

Action research is built on an interaction between local knowledge and professional knowledge. Whereas professional social research and consulting privilege professional knowledge over local knowledge, action research does not. Action research is based on the premise that professional knowledge is important and can be valuable, but local knowledge is a necessary ingredient in any research. Only local stakeholders, with their years of experience in a particular situation, have sufficient information and knowledge about the situation to design effective social change processes. Action research does not romanticize local knowledge and denigrate professional knowledge. It is a cogenerative research process precisely because both types of knowledge are essential to it (p. 96).

The Stories in this study present some popular understandings and locally created meanings for making sense of human problems. The author

presents these in a context of academic discourse. The effect of this is to contrast local and professional knowledge leading to an opening of a dialogue between the two paradigms in an attempt to facilitate new useful knowledge for praxis in local contexts.

The Relationship Between Knowledge and Control

Parker (2000, p. 2) explains how academic control over information minimises possibilities for new, different and ‘other’ information and knowledge:

The psy-complex as a web of theories and practices to do with the mind and behaviour and how they may be governed contains many surfaces of emergence for the recombination of old ideas and the production of new ones (Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985). Psychological journals are one such site, and the rules that govern them determine what can be written and said and how we write and read things, and absorb or dismiss them.

Foucault (1980) refers to this process as the establishment and perpetuation of ‘regimes of truth’ through discourse. It is Lacan (1991, in Parker, 2000, p. 5) who takes this criticism of hegemonic discourses a step further and takes the notion of discourse beyond language to the realms of relationship, particularly in reference to the bureaucratic relationship between the university and cultures of knowledge:

Lacan makes it clear that discourse is not something that should be reduced to speaking and writing. It is, he says, ‘a necessary structure that goes well beyond speech’, and it ‘subsists in certain fundamental relations’. These fundamental relations are maintained by language, but they are, he argues, much larger, they go much further than effective utterances. (p. 2)

The academic discourse of universities and mainstream research not only controls knowledge production, but also establishes rules of etiquette for the expression of new ideas. Effectively, change on a paradigmatic level thus happens within strictures. It becomes apparent that the potential for such changes is minimised. As Parker (2000, p. 16) frankly states it:

(The university) is the kind of disciplinary apparatus that strips ideas of their radical potential. The university will speak of sexuality but in the best possible taste and it will study revolutions as long as it does not have to reflexively position itself in a revolutionary process. 'Paradigm revolutions' in psychology have actually, as you may know, been the most genteel of affairs.

Ownership, Production and Recognition of Knowledge

This hegemonic control over knowledge by university administrative systems and funding institutions is one that operates beyond language and is a relatively recent development (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). Universities as they exist today were first established by Humboldt around the turn of the eighteenth century in Prussia. Primary to Humboldt's establishment was the freedom of thought and inquiry, un-reined by political or religious strictures. However, in its attempt to maintain independence from state and church, universities set up what Greenwood & Levin refer to as "autopoetic" research circles (2000, p. 88). Thus the schism between the research circles of the universities and the broader society was founded.

Since the establishment of universities, the development of knowledge and science has come to take on a life of its own, as Fals-Borda's "fetish with a life of its own", referred to earlier in this chapter. Vygotsky (2001a) identifies five stages of development of scientific knowledge (in psychology, here; and detailed further down in this text) that expand on his idea:

It can be said of any important discovery in any area, when it transcends the boundaries of that particular realm, that it has the tendency to turn into an explanatory principle for all psychological phenomena and lead psychology beyond its proper boundaries into broader realms of knowledge (p. 11).

Vygotsky (2001a, p. 11) explains this patterned development by referring to three links from which he suggests that all knowledge arises:

(1) The general sociocultural context of the era; (2) the general conditions and laws of scientific knowledge; (3) the objective demands upon the scientific knowledge that follow from the nature of the phenomena studied in a given stage of investigation (in the final analysis, the requirements of the objective reality that is studied by the given science).

The five stages identified by Vygotsky are summarised as moving from an initial significant factual discovery (an idea) of magnitude enough to influence adjacent areas of knowledge from within which it lies, to take on, in the second stage, an abstraction, while simultaneously weakening its links with its contextual origin, becoming an idea or concept with a life of its own as a verifiable scientific truth. During the third stage the idea permeates the discipline and in so doing becomes itself changed to some extent as a formulated principle acting "in concert" (p. 12) with the entire discipline and fighting for supremacy among other disciplines. According to Vygotsky (2001a, p. 12), at this stage "the fate of the idea is completely tied to the fate of the discipline it represents and which is fighting for supremacy."

Eventually, in the fourth stage the idea transcends its boundaries to become possibly a worldview included in a philosophical system. Vygotsky (2001a, p. 13) describes the conclusion as such:

This (idea), inflated into a world view like a frog that has swollen to the size of an ox, a philistine amidst the gentry, now enters the fifth and most dangerous stage of development: it may easily burst like a soap-bubble.... It is only now, when the idea has entirely separated itself from the facts that engendered it, developed to its logical extremes, carried to its ultimate conclusions, generalised as far as possible, that it finally displays what it is in reality, shows its real face. However strange it may seem, it is actually only now, reduced to a philosophical form, apparently obscured by many later developments and very remote from its direct roots and the social causes that engendered it, that the idea reveals what it wants, what it is, from which social tendencies it arose, which class interests it serves...it reveals its social nature...which...was hidden under the mask of the neutral scientific fact it impersonated.

It is possible to acknowledge this process in action in the now frequently referred to concepts “African worldview”, “African philosophy” or “African knowledge”, as if the label “African” defines a unitary paradigm for all of Africa. This inflated worldview originated in the notion that there are local knowledges and traditional ways of thinking in Africa that are different from recognised mainstream western ways. However, the idea of a unitary African worldview is possibly just another “swollen frog” remote from the sociocultural roots which spawned it. A more useful picture of what exists in Africa as knowledge may be one of a fecund pond whose ecology supports the varying life cycles of many different species of frogs. In order to understand the frogs better they need to be studied in the field, within their ecologies.

When Alice was diagnosed with and treated for allergic asthma and Thabo with PTSD, only certain aspects of their problems were addressed. Their problems needed to be addressed with an awareness of the dynamics of their

ecologies so that they could successfully adapt when returning to them. It can be said that the problems indicated perturbations within the ecologies.

Researching for Relevance

Vygotsky, along with other notable writers who will be discussed below, places his optimism for the future relevance of psychology as a discipline, on applied psychology. He writes (2001b, p. 1):

The leading role in the development of our science belongs to applied psychology. It represents everything of psychology which is progressive, sound, which contains a germ of the future. It provides the best methodological works. It is only by studying this area that one can come to an understanding of what is going on and the possibility of a genuine psychology.

At the time of his writing in 1983, Clifford Geertz, foretold a shift away from the social sciences, as hard science, to a more accepting recognition of the significance of cultural systems as holding relevant research. Geertz (1983) lists among those who reject a "technological return" to the social sciences, the philosophers Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and social scientists Burke, Frye, Jameson, Fish, Foucault, Habermas, Barthes, and Kuhn.

This opinion echoes the voice of Vygotsky as discussed above, in that Geertz does not foresee the social sciences unifying into a discipline with clear fundamental principles, in fact he declares that it "is scattering into frameworks" (1983, p. 4). A scattering of frameworks suggests a focus on diverse phenomena, to some extent only loosely linked theoretically. There are merits other than those of scientific analyses that bring enrichment to the examination of local knowledge. The researcher, when working with foreign cultures, needs to realise that her understanding is limited by her personal epistemologies. To subject cultural observations to scientific analyses from a western mainstream epistemology may be much like assessing other cultures with foreign

psychological tests and expect the results to be comparable to the results of the normed population.

Working with other cultures therefore begs the study of local knowledge and an acceptance of local knowledge as being the key to understanding, intervening, collaborating and introducing change. Geertz (1973) takes a semiotic approach to the study of culture. He is of the opinion that people co-create their own cultures within a societal context and the researcher's task is to decipher these societal contexts.

...man [*sic*] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973, p. 5).

Chapter three presented the narratives (Other Stories) of research participants from contexts that form the majority of learners, clients and, possibly in the future, practitioners, of professional psychology in South Africa. As has been explained above, the oral tradition is firmly entrenched in Africa as a recognised way of establishing and communicating knowledge. The narrative methodology, thus, through a link in the instrumentality of stories and histories, arguably fits well with the context of establishing knowledge in this thesis. The words of Mary and Kenneth Gergen are repeated below in support of the decision to take a narrative approach:

One of the most widely employed means of sharing authority is by enabling research subjects to speak for themselves - to tell their own story. Narrative methodologies are now many and varied (see, for example, Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; 1994; Lieblich & Josselson, 1995; Sarbin, 1986; Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983). Some researchers will feature the single autobiography; others will interweave the voices of several participants,

and still others may draw selective fragments of discourse to generate a more variegated theoretical tapestry. (Gergen & Gergen, 1997, p. 4)

Conclusion

Having explored possibilities for an analysis of the stories in this chapter, chapter seven will take up a discussion of the stories in a way that may prove useful for thinking about reflexive practice in psychology especially in non-western communities. This particular notion will be expanded on in the following sections of this study.