

**A NARRATIVE JOURNEY
WITH THE HOMELESS YOUTH DISCOVERING THE IMPACT
OF ECONOMIC FACTORS
IN THEIR DISCOURSES OF HOMELESSNESS**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Renjan John, declare that A NARRATIVE JOURNEY WITH THE HOMELESS YOUTH DISCOVERING THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THEIR DISCOURSES OF HOMELESSNESS is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

April 2007.

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ABSTRACT

Human realities are formed in particular contexts, and can be understood through telling the story of experiences related with these realities. Homelessness is a reality for many in various parts of the world. The condition of homelessness involves various discourses, each of which can be dominant in different people. Dominant discourses bring with them inherent understandings which in the case of the reality of homelessness can negatively influence the daily activities and future prospects of homeless people. These dominant discourses define the experiences of the homeless people and cause them to assess themselves negatively. This study is in the field of Practical Theology, based on a social constructionist paradigm which holds that meanings are socially constructed and there is no single “Truth”. The processes of telling stories, listening to these stories and constructing new meanings make up a narrative approach to counselling, which I use in the context of interactions with homeless youth at the Street Centre run by Pretoria Community Ministries. My approach is qualitative, and the data are evolved from narrative interventions and unstructured interviews with homeless youth. As this process is a journey into the experiences and stories of these young people, empirical sampling is irrelevant.

Listening to the stories of the young people from the streets filled me with enthusiasm to take this narrative journey with them through their stories. Examining the impact of economic factors in their discourses and narrations gave me new understanding of their meanings and challenged me, because many of these were unpredictable. The epistemological approach of postfoundationalism used on this journey allowed a wide range of knowledge types and interactions, which I elucidate through interdisciplinary investigation and identification of the traditions that inform the dominant discourses. The seven-movement methodology used for this work is relevant in the context of the homeless youth, because it allows me as researcher to continue the full length of the journey with

the homeless youth, leading eventually to new possibilities. On the way certain themes evolved and their meanings constructed. Listening for the discourses and identifying their economic factors helped me to deconstruct these discourses, and so guide the stories into more hopeful channels.

Of course, constructing alternate stories and acknowledging the importance of economic factors will not alone change the future of these young homeless people. Economic restructuring of society is needed. This possibility challenges jobless, homeless individuals not to acquiesce in the negative patterns of society, but rather to work with conviction to create new possibilities.

In this project I listened to the stories of ten homeless young people, for each of which two sessions are presented in this report. These stories show that the story tellers are the real researchers, who create new alternate stories of hope in the course of this project. “God-talk” and the discussion of “God-experiences” throws light on the role of God in their lives and in their stories.

The research journey charted in this report describes first the theological context and research model, and then the particular context of these young people’s lives. This is followed by descriptions of the discourses. Description of the context of the stories and interpretation of the stories themselves moves into assessment of the stories in their individual context. Interdisciplinary investigation and identification of the traditions that inform the discourses thicken our understanding of the realities experienced by these young people, and deeper interpretations arise which are applicable beyond the local context. Each petal of this flower blooms with new colours of understanding and new fragrances of possibility. The findings of this project are not the final end of this journey, but rather lights for future journeys into the experiences of homeless youth.

KEY TERMS

1. Homelessness
2. Social constructionism
3. Post-modernity
4. Narrative approach
5. Postfoundationalism
6. Interdisciplinarity
7. Dominant discourses
8. God-talk
9. Economic realities
10. Co-researcher.

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