

CHAPTER TWO: PARADIGM / METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

After looking at various social (human) sciences that could assist me in gaining a better understanding of the stories of adolescents in remarried families, I adopted a narrative social construction paradigm, which is in harmony with an imaginative pastoral approach. This falls under the umbrella of postmodernism. In terms of postmodernism, this approach is like a string of beads that include deconstruction, post-linguistics, qualitative research and practical pastoral theology.

As I mentioned earlier, in Chapter 1.3 “Stimulus Three: Problems of existing research on the issues of the remarried family”, a traditional paradigm is not very helpful in research on the issues of adolescents in remarried families, since the purpose of this research is neither to analyse the gathered data, nor to formulate an institutional and therapeutic programme, but to understand in depth the subjective world of adolescents in remarried families and their influence on the family, by listening to their stories. Stories and experiences retold show how their protagonists make sense of each individual’s identity, personality, lifestyle and relationship(s), and are socially constructed. Therefore, by using a narrative social construction and an imaginative pastoral approach, true to a postmodernist paradigm and practical theology, the stories of adolescents in remarried families and their position in the family can be understood better and amplified.

2.1.1 Paradigm shift

One cannot deny that today we live in a postmodern era, at least in the sense of a transition from the modern to the postmodern period. It does not matter whether people agree to its thinking in their lives or not. Theologians and researchers undergo paradigm shifts in every era; today we are confronted with the shift from modernism to postmodernism. This shift invites us to a new understanding of the world, the self, and its structures. This shift is not a chronological or sequential change of modern discourses, as a successor of modernism, but is an attempt to change the whole. A metaphorical explanation by Müller (s.a.:22) helps us to understand this shift: it is like a person who has played golf and done well, but suddenly she or he tries to learn polo and play; then the person has to throw aside the rules and norms of golf, and has to undertake a total shift in terms of game rules and patterns and learn the whole system of polo.

In this sense, views on remarried families and their adolescents have also been subjected to a complete paradigm shift. In the postmodern era, remarried families are no longer seen demographically and socially as strangers; rather, they are, in Ganong and Coleman's (1994:152) view, "one of the protagonists of postmodern families". Thus far, family life was expected to conform to the traditional view of a first marriage, but this model no longer fits the phenomena of this era (Belovitch 1987:3). In other words, only in postmodern thinking is the structure of a remarried family approved as such. Another point, in favour of this

paradigm is that members of remarried families can have ownership of their stories as protagonists. Thus, a modernist epistemology on remarried families has to be changed. Also, traditional approaches based on modernism have had to be rejected in this study. The main characteristics of postmodernism are articulated as below.

2.1.2 The birth of modernism

In the Renaissance, the belief emerged that humankind was the centre of reality and was able to control nature in various ways, as humankind discovered the patterns and structures of nature. These patterns and structures were from “out there”. Renaissance thinkers have been called humanists, due to the fact that they pursued human values, emphasizing the necessity for a return to the ancient classical writings (Burgess 2001:50). The term “Renaissance” was derived from French, and it means “rebirth” or “revival”. Grenz (1996:58) expounds its characteristics saying that “it involved a rebirth of the classical spirit exemplified in the ancient Greek and Roman civilization, and it brought a revival in learning after the so-called ‘dark ages’...[It] rekindled an interest in the workings of the world around them, thereby establishing the foundation for the modern scientific enterprise”. The Renaissance humanists did not yet have the concept of the individual ego and the self-determination (Grenz 1996:60), which was only later developed by the existentialists. Renaissance humanists thought that knowledge was power, able to bring with it an understanding of the world and to change the world.

Building on the Renaissance, the Pre-Enlightenment or the “Age of the Reason” (Grenz 1996:61) developed the thoughts of Renaissance in relative intellectual independence from the authority of the church. One essential aspect was “the rise of an awareness of individuals as autonomous personalities”, and speculation on the human condition became more free and sophisticated than before.

To enhance their enterprise, Enlightenment thinkers strongly emphasized the notions of reason, the use of science and natural rights that were crucial and would be applied to solve the human condition and its problems (Burgess 2001:58). These thinkers believed that humankind was capable of exploring, via reason as well as science, the purpose of God and His values for creation, which was teleologically and lawfully governed. The notions of reason and science focused on analytical and mathematical techniques and on quantifiable results. These ideas were applied to various disciplines, such as the natural sciences and the human sciences in this era (Grenz 1996: 66).

In short, according to Erickson (2001:15), the “pre-modern understanding of reality was teleological. There was believed to be a purpose or purposes in the universe, within which humans fit and were to be understood. This purpose was worked out within the world. ...There had to be reasons for things, and these were not limited to efficient or ‘because of’ causes, but also included final or ‘in order that’ causes.” The mindset of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment paved the way for modernism.

2.1.3 Modernism

Modernism or post-Enlightenment, the successor of pre-modernism, is a worldview concerned with the ways in which people deal with particular principles of understanding their realities, truths, identities and the like. Briefly, the main characteristic of a modernist's mindset is a tendency to vehemently objectify knowledge, as a result universalizing the experiences of people in the name of science and thereby generalizing an inalienable fixed "truth" which the modernists believed in. This belief is a fictional proposition that the dynamic and diverse lives of people take place in a certain fixed form and pattern and according to criteria that are observable and give directions to human awareness. The key terms which emerged from these propositions were "objective", "universal", "validity", "criterion", "reliability", "rule", "scientific", "empirical", "expertise", "stable and control", "quantitative" and "datum". The main peculiarities of this movement are discussed in detail below.

2.1.3.1 Knowledge

In all modernist propositions, the main assumption is the relation between knowledge and truth, and reality that all knowledge is derived from verifiable facts or certain basic truths (Graham 1996:15). In other words, knowledge as such mirrors an objective, external, recognizable world which human beings are able to comprehend (Staver 1998; Watzlawick 1984). Therefore, knowledge is obtainable by means of empirical research and observation that can be verified universally. The process of the application of knowledge, according to modernist

presuppositions, takes the form of the schema in Figure 2.1. This pattern is hierarchical.

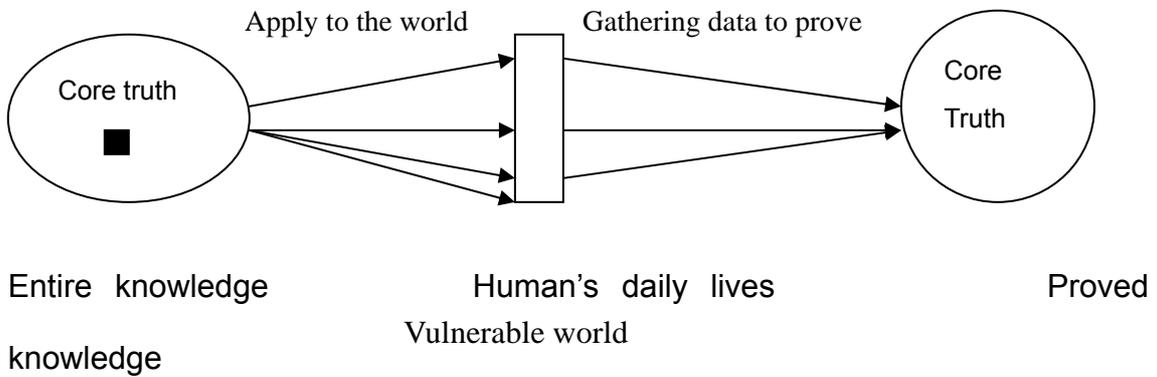


Figure 2.1: The feature of universal knowledge (modernist perspective)

2.1.3.2 Reality and truth

The epistemology used by modernists is that ultimate truth and reality exist independently of human beings. Modernists believe that the ultimate truth is ready to be found, on account of the fact that it represents entirely the reality, apart from the knower. Truth can be proven by completely rational objectivity, without emotion (Grenz 1996:5). This truth and reality are fixed, certain, stable, objective and inherently good.

Because of that assumption (and regrettably so), modernists operate under the illusion that, as Gergen and Kaye (1992:167), who reject this view, put it, “a good society can be erected on the foundations of empirical knowledge”. This assumption is often applied even for a dynamic life experience (Müller s.a.:23) and to drive human relationships, and it has provided a basic ideology to society

and those of its members with power. As a result of this ideology, powerful members of society can successfully establish a hierarchical society, separate some individuals from others, and stress that individuals are responsible for themselves (Foucault 1982:212). Linstead (2004:24) quotes Knights' who says that this is "at the heart of 'free'-market economics".

The beliefs of modernism are invasive and affect all matters regarding human beings. They are dominant over other beliefs, systems, cultures, methods and the like. In that sense, I assume that almost all the issues of adolescents in remarried families are caught up in modernist discourses. Most modernist discourses concerning remarried families disregard the idea that the stories of adolescents in remarried families relating to their roles in the family can only be articulated case by case. In this context, their lives are widely propagated as those or modernist of commercialized families (Kearney 1988:32).

2.1.4 Postmodernism

The mood and thinking today has shifted to postmodernism, which is inclusive of all matters regarding human life. This shift is highly influential for family structures and studies on them. Thanks to this radical shift, the structural genre of remarried families is embraced for what it is.

The shift from modernism to postmodernism is not simply part of a chronological sequence: it is a "total paradigm shift" in a new era (Müller s.a.:23). It moves from the objective to the subjective, from the universal to the particular, from

validity to subjective integrity, from the individual to the communal, from control to participation, from the quantitative to the qualitative, from datum to subjective experience. It does not agree with the notion of the existence of any unity and universality or look for a unifying worldview in the universe, because in postmodernism all is diversity and difference with its own value. Although postmodern thinkers have tried hard to define the term “postmodernism” (Gottschalk 2000:19), at best some key characteristics of the concept of “postmodernism” can be summarized as openness, indeterminateness, multi-interdependency and a concern with and for the marginalized. Grenz (1996:49) calls this phenomenon “the beginning of a revolution in knowledge”. Postmodernist thinking about the nature of knowledge, reality and truth is set out below.

2.1.4.1 *Knowledge*

Unlike modernists, who objectify and universalize knowledge, postmodern thinkers argue that no knowledge, including scientific knowledge, can be objective and universal, because all knowledge is socially or consensually constructed, as people obtain it in a process of continual reflexivity. That is why it is provisional and transitory (Freedman & Combs 1996:20-22; Lowe 1991:43; Smith & Nylund 1997:3). Thus, universal, objective and totalizing knowledge no longer exists, but rather, we acknowledge that there are socio-cultural and local and situated knowledges (Freedman & Combs 1996:332) that are worthwhile in the postmodern enterprise. Polkinghorne (1992:149) insists that "knowledge

should be concerned with these local and specific occurrences, not with the search for context-free general laws". Postmodernism recognizes that humankind has a limited ability to explain the universe, and that it is difficult to find universally applicable knowledge in any way (Freedman & Combs 1996:21; Gerkin 1997: 228). It recognizes that a person or group cannot achieve an objective universal truth via knowledge which is to be suitable and applicable to others. Also, there is an increasing awareness that there are many different worldviews, so that one group or person's worldview and method should not be regarded as better than that of others.

The feature of local knowledge is that this pattern is circular, as depicted in Figure 2.2.

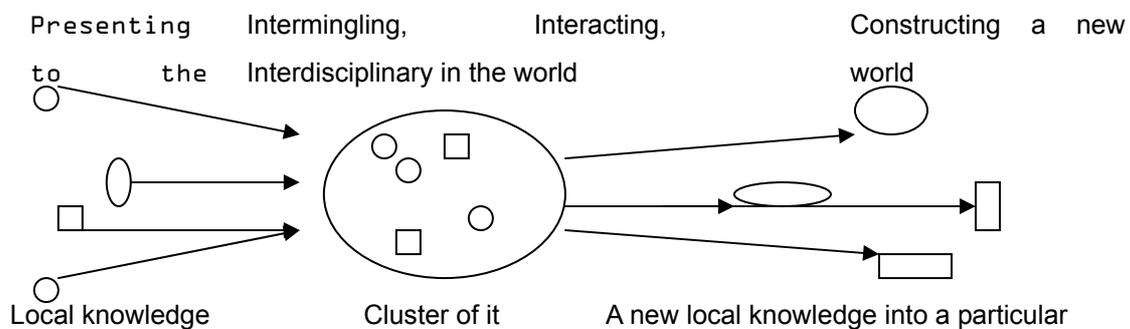


Figure 2.2: The features of local knowledge (postmodernist perspective)

Postmodern thinkers argue that local knowledge can only be applicable to a particular context in a particular time and space. When this knowledge is presented to the world, it interacts, intermingles and works together with other knowledge. Then they create new avenues for specific contexts. Accordingly, in

postmodern thought, knowledge of remarried families and their children as a local knowledge is welcomed and respected as worthy in its own right. With a view to reinforcing their local knowledge, this study's interest rests upon the subjective experience and meanings of adolescents in such families, instead of on general and disembodied propositions.

2.1.4.2 Reality and truth

The interest of postmodern thinkers is neither to establish an expert knowledge realm, nor to find an absolute truth or reality, but to pursue approximative truths or realities along with a local knowledge in a particular time. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:5) agree with Guba, saying, "reality can never be fully apprehended, only approximated". In other words, it is not referable to the view that humankind can fully reach "the real", because people do not have perfect perceptions to access reality, but only that which they produce as their own constructed reality. Postmodernists argue that truth is not fixed, universal and certain, but personal, relational, historical, cultural, conditional and incomplete (Grenz 1996:43; Linstead 2004:68). Truth is a truth for a specific community that is relative to the background of that community.

According to modernist thought, there might be a perfect knowledge fully revealing the fixed reality, which might be governed by certain rules and criteria. However, this mindset is no longer approved in postmodern thinking. Postmodern practitioners agree that all is diverse and that difference has its

own value. As far as its practice is concerned, knowledge is applicable only case by case. Indeed, they respect the specific values of an individual(s) and group(s), and support them to enlarge these value systems.

2.1.4.3 *Questioning*

Instead of applying expert knowledge to a “reality” and establishing and finding certain rules and criteria, postmodern thinkers interminably question all declared “truths” and “realities” supported by socially constructed rules, criteria and empirical results (Glanville 1993:39). Questioning is one of the key characteristics of the postmodern stance, and is a critical method also used in a pastoral narrative approach. Morgan (1999:203) states: “Questions are informed by particular ways of thinking.” Postmodernists’ questioning is based on a healthy suspicion of the meta-narratives of modernity (Lyotard 1984:xxiv) and skepticism regarding modernists’ nostrums (Lundin 1993:4). The Latin prefix “meta -” connotes the meaning behind or underneath. In this sense, the narratives of modernity are a basic layer of people’s cognitive ability or people’s daily activities. The meta-narratives are the meanings behind them and underlying them.

Accordingly, postmodern questioning digs out meanings behind narratives and from underneath stories which have constructed human value systems and their cognitions, constraining people in their daily lives. These thinkers question the limitations of theory, and consider the consequences of transgression (Linstead

2004:5). Then again, these practitioners inquire which points of view are useful individuals and groups in a particular time and space (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:18).

In the same manner, postmodern research does not go along with the notion of predominant and inextricable “truths” and “realities” surrounding remarried family members, but questions first where the “realities” that are taken for granted come from, and then speculates on which are more useful views and alternative truths for the individuals concerned. In this research, this activity of questioning enables the researchers (my co-researchers and me) to catch exceptions from their stories in the process of telling them. The exception sometimes plays a great role in individuals’ telling stories ability to rescue themselves from their bondage, if any.

2.1.5 Social constructionism

In order to interpret the stories of remarried families and their adolescents, I consulted with the co-researchers with the notion of social constructionism in mind. Social constructionism (Bruner 1990; Gergen 1985, 1994, 2001; Shotter 1993), which accords with a postmodern view, was most useful for this research. The perspectives of social constructionism can readily be linked to a postmodern view. This approach goes noticeably well with a narrative approach. Social constructionists argue that realities are socially constructed via societal processes (Freedman & Combs 1996:16), maintained through narrative

(Freedman & Combs 1996:22), and perceptions of the result that people interpret their own world when they encounter the world (Gergen 1985:266; Watzlawick 1984:17). Through social processes, knowledge is also produced by the relation between one person and others, the persons and their social context. What is created in the social process is a series of ideas and shared beliefs, a social context where the boundary of what one is cannot be easily separated from what others are (Stevens 1996:222).

Whereas constructivists argue that an individual family is a sort of self-contained system that is affected to create private meanings about the world, social constructionists believe that meanings are socially constructed, which in turn force and maintain the widespread beliefs, ideologies or discourses shared in any given culture (Dallos 1997:31). Dallos (1997:142) says:

This sensitivity to how families are immersed in the reality of their culture highlights how constructivism, in contrast, tends to isolate families from society. Instead of simply exploring new narratives, for instance, a social constructionist approach to therapy tries to consider how an individual family's creativity is shared by dominant narratives, what is co-constructed in therapy must engage with this wider societal systems of beliefs.

In terms of this assumption, social constructionists focus on what is emergent, contextually discursive, multiple, relational and mutual.

I assume that the daily practices of adolescents in remarried families regarding their emerging issues such as emotions, intimacy, roles, upbringing and the like

are socially instructed, constructed and somewhat distorted in many areas, due to the influence of dominant stories and discourses on them. Therefore, in using a social constructionist approach, in this research on adolescents in remarried families, I used deconstructive techniques of interpretation to reformulate their stories.

2.1.5.1 *Deconstruction*

Social constructionism and postmodern theory use deconstructive techniques (Erickson 2001:18; Gergen 1994:250, 2001:30; Grenz 1996:43). Deconstruction deals with text analysis. According to Gadamer (1984:261), with a text itself, meaning is not inherent but rather emerges only as the reader converses with the text, because no one can enter into a dialogue with a text without her or his own pre-understanding(s) and perspective(s). Thus, deconstructionists try to discern any implicit and hidden meaning in a text, and how the text relates to other texts and sub-texts. In other words, they attempt to reveal the assumption(s) on which a text is based. The text, any written or oral discourse, whether political, social or philosophical, lies in the field of operation of deconstruction. One purpose of deconstructive work is to reveal the ambivalence and self-contradictions that lie latent in any text (Linstead 2004:39). Cooper and Burrell (1988:98) borrowed Derrida's idea to explain that "terms contain their own opposites and thus refuse any singular grasp of their meanings...difference is thus a unity which is at the same time divided from itself, and, since it is that which actually constitutes human discourse (Derrida

1973)".

Furthermore, deconstructive work is an endeavour to “undo” the text through a process of dissecting a text into its component parts for better understanding (Lester 1995:128). A characteristic of the process of dissecting a text is “the effect of erasure” (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:34). This process is critically helpful for practitioners to think of “what is and of what is not in whatever is stated or indicated” (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:63). This process renders possible not only reclaiming, revising and reformulating claimed truths and theories, but also undermining knowledge of onside, privileged and valued over that of the other. This does not mean that to deconstruct privileged knowledge is to destroy or reject it, but that marginalized knowledge is valued alongside of dominant knowledge. In the practical arena, a remarkable therapist, White (Epston & White 1994: 121), applies this deconstructive method, and he says:

According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called “truths” that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons’ lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them.

Thanks to this recognition, pastoral caregivers and researchers who adopt a narrative social constructionist approach reject the popular view of “functional or

dysfunctional”, “healthy or problematic” and “accurate or inaccurate”. These words are associated with constructed discourses in social phenomena. As a narrative social constructionist, I assumed that there are many unheard stories to be told by adolescents in remarried families about their influence on their family within the family, which should go through a re-selective process and reinterpretation. Thus, I enthusiastically applied deconstructive techniques in this study.

2.1.5.2 *Discourse*

All individuals are either consciously or unconsciously caught up in socially constructed negative and positive discourses, which are arranged in meta-narratives within social processes. In this context, some are ineluctably marginalized, while others are dominant in society at the expense of those who are marginalized. I argue that, this being so, adolescents in remarried families are generally surrounded by socially saturated stereotypical stories and discourses. Their family structure can be also characterized as marginalized in modern meta-discourses. Consequently, my co-researchers and I have co-operated to expose as many kinds of discourses surrounding us as possible.

According to Hall and Gieben (1992:291), a discourse is “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - e.g. a way of representing - a particular kind of knowledge about a topic.... It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed”. Scott (1990:135) conceptualizes discourse

as a “historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs”.

Discourse is, first of all, “a cultural activity”, which implies that it is not only a product, but a process (Lowe 1991:144; Talbot 1995:24-25). To put it another way: it is a meaning conveyer in a process of conversation in a concrete cultural context.

Secondly, a discourse is indirectly manifested at the centre of conversation, always in the background, and it is not directly queried (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996:63-64). The reason is that there is a tendency in our mind to believe that discourse as an appropriate representation of experience, especially in therapeutic conversations.

Thirdly, discourses are susceptible to manipulation to create structural power in one way or another, via its various communal processes. Talbot (1995:26) exposes this schema, believing that it is an outcome of interpretation by specific people in specific institutional and broader social contexts. He adds:

Institutional and social structures always impinge upon discourse, bestowing specific social identities and power relations upon interactants and giving them different resources: different access to language, to representations of knowledge/beliefs. (It follows from this, incidentally, that these resources are not mutually accessible to all; these resources should not be confused with any notion of

‘mutual knowledge’.) (Talbot 1995: 26).

This phenomenon can take people away from their experience, or have them make sense of their experience passively against a standard (Zimmerman & Dickerson 1996: 69).

2.1.5.3 *Power and discourse*

Structural power with its establishing discourse is, as such, oppressive and abusive, and is very influential with regard to the ways in which individuals understand their lives and their culture (Morgan 2000:9). To analyse the nature of power, Fillingham (1993:143) adopts Foucault’s notion that power is knowledge and vice versa. According to this argument, *knowledge* is always exerted in and through practices of power (Graham 1996:106). This power is also relational (Townely 1994:7). This power is “always already there and that one is never outside it” (Gordon 1980: 141). Flaskas and Humphreys (1993:35-48) describe this power as “being seen in everyday communication,...in the structuring of the relationship between people,...in the physical use of space and architecture,...in the actual discipline of bodies,...and in the creation of ways of thinking,...forms of subjectivity,...and forms of knowledge”. Thus, where there is power, there is a certain truth claimed as an objective knowledge which bestows power on those who control the knowledge.

In this sense, society with its various discourses has created a model of remarried family life and the children in such families that normally compares with or comes from ideas of the biological family. Gergen (2001:26) demands

that we pay attention to the unfavourable phenomenon that “when claims are made to truth’, ‘objectivity’ or ‘accuracy’ in reporting”, we should be aware that we are only being exposed to “one way of putting things”. Thus, one task of research on remarried families and their adolescents, using a narrative social constructionist approach, is to emancipate people from socially constructed identities, ambivalent or contradictory images of themselves, such as masculine fathering, the “superwoman” syndrome, fairy tale families or commercialized families. In this research, one way of accomplishing this task was to implement a social constructionist approach, which is in accord with a narrative approach. With this approach I also tried hard to disempower my positional authority, so as to avoid my preconceptions in various ways. In a Addition, a pastoral narrative approach, including imaginative work, helped the participating adolescents to emancipate themselves from the power of some meta-narratives.

2.1.6 Narrative

Social constructionists cannot help but emphasize people’s subjective experience by constructing their realities, which are organized and upheld by narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996). What social constructionism is to the narrative paradigm, a needle is to thread in this research.

A narrative paradigm is a worldview that tries to understand the ways in which people deal with or use particular methods of thinking their “realities”, “truths”, “identities” and the like. Bruner (1986:69) asserts that “our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense

of others in the social world around us”.

Narrative research assumes that the dynamic and diverse lives of people take place in a narrative form that gives meanings to and creates understandings of human experiences (Lester 1995:27). According to White (2000:9), narratives as people’s expressions of life are units of meaning and experience.

2.1.6.1 *Meaning*

In this research, understanding some of the meanings of stories is much more important than compiling or analysing data about remarried families and their adolescents. People’s lived experiences, as they are, cannot be changed in the moment, here and now, but they can be altered in terms of making meanings, in being told. From a narrative point of view, life cannot be meaningful unless it is narrated. Stone (1988:244) states that our “meanings are almost always inseparable from stories, in all realms of life. And, once again family stories, invisible as air, weightless as dreams, are there for us”. Narrative practitioners believe that meaning is dependent on social discourses (Graham 1996:29). Hence they are very concerned with meaning (Freedman & Combs 2002:141) in terms of social constructionism, and are aware that meaning does not result from something out there, but is a constructed part of responding to each other, as an essential interdependence.

Characteristics of meaning are a personal, relational, and cultural achievement, for it is constructed through processes of negotiating with communities of

people and within the various terms and institutions of culture. Meaning is not radically invented or created independently from people's mindsets as a mere production of their speculation (Morgan 2000:9). Meaning is derived from experiences, and is ascribed to them. In turn, people make sense of their experiences in terms of such meaning (Wetherell & Maybin 1996:276).

In terms of such a perception of meaning, the questions of who the adolescent is and what the structure of the remarried family is are not critical to a narrative approach; instead, the question of what meanings are given to their life and stories in the family is of great significance. Thus, this research searched for the meaning(s) of experiences in the stories of adolescents in remarried families rather than gathered data from or about them.

2.1.6.2 *Experience*

Narrative theory is very serious about people's subjective experience, whereas traditional paradigms and methodologies concerning the self and family issues have relied mainly on naturalistic or systematic concepts such as focusing on biological elements, the mind, behaviour, or systemic features. In addition, traditional paradigms allege that their studies are a natural science which is objective and precise by nature. However, narrative practitioners emphasize that their studies should be a moral science (Shotter 1996:22).

People's subjective experience is essential to making sense of being. Stevens

(1996:149) questions precisely that idea: “Imagine yourself as a person without subjective experience or consciousness. In what ways would you be different? What would you be unable to do that you can do now? To what extent do you think that such an individual could be regarded as being a person?” He adds that, without subjective experience, we would have no awareness of emotional elements, nor could we read, learn or connect with the subjectivity of others (Stevens 1996:149). Without it there are no conscious memories of the past or expectations of the future within people and subjective experience is then excluded in research.

In terms of practice, therefore, White and Epston (1990:10) state that “experience [or subjective experience] must be storied and it is this storying that determines the meaning ascribed to experience”. No story can be meaningful unless it is narrated. In particular, to create a better future story, one must undertake the process of telling and retelling of the past experiences. In the light of that recognition, this research has had to listen for the experienced stories of remarried families and their adolescents, rather than observe or analyse their information. Therefore, their stories were an essential part of this research.

2.1.6.3 *Story*

Stories and experiences have a special relationship, for “experience only becomes useful if we can succeed to turn it into a story form” (Müller 1999). Plummer (1995:173) validates the merits of stories by saying that they are

“maps for action, they look into the future, tell us how we are motivated, guide us gently into who we will be. They make certain worlds more plausible. They signpost directions to be taken”. A story, conveying values and themes, helps us understand and talk sensibly about the continuity of life (Epston 1998:12).

2.1.6.4 *Tense of story*

The foundation of a story consists of three elements in terms of tense. Story lies in the present, the past, and the future. These three are the storyteller’s abiding truth and personal reality, present existence and future (Müller 1999). The past is the invisible foundation of the story that underlies personal beliefs, values, and norms in accordance with social and cultural discourses. The past story operates through the present story, which offers the audience the characteristic and the healthy condition of the story as the metaphor of the tree (See Figure 2.1). The present storytelling is a transforming act. The impetus of the past and the present story lie in the future story, which is the hope of the storyteller (Müller 1999). In hopelessness, the present storytelling has no impetus to bear its fruit.

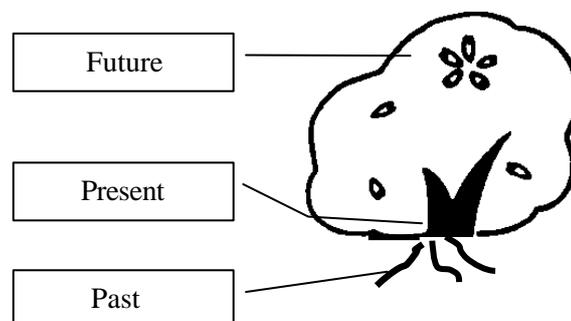


Figure 2.3: The tree as a metaphor for the tenses of a story.

From a narrative point of view, with regard to the story tense, the story always begins here and now, and moves to the past and to the future. To make sense of past experience and to develop future-oriented stories, the story begins with the present. Müller (1999) articulates it as follows: “Stories are not about what happened, but about what is developing on the basis of what happened.”

He adds:

In the stories we tell, the future becomes the already-present and the past becomes the still-present. The past and the future combine to form a suspenseful and powerful NOW. The stories that are remembered and the stories that are expected inform the present reality... Within each story there is a tension between what is experienced in the present on the one hand, and the past and the future on the other (Müller 2004c),

One’s story is a rich life resource informing the self, which was constructed in the past and is in being now, constructing ideas about one’s family, and helps one to see different ways of interpretation. In mining remarried families’ rich life resources, researchers have to recognize that there is no need for ultimate fixed norms and roles in the family to apply them.

2.1.6.5 Three forms of story

The forms of the story were significant for this research, because they characterized the methods of this research. A narrative therapist, Roberts (1994:81-122), categorized story forms in three groups: spoken, written and enacted. They can overlap. Spoken stories are real as “one of a kind” when they are told.

- *Telling one's story*

- Story-go-rounds: One person starts the story, then each person in turn picks up from where the previous teller leaves off and adds to it.
- Giving back stories: Another person tells what they hear of someone else's story.
- Sharing mirror stories: Stories that mirror issues in one's life or someone else's life we shared.
- Structured storytelling: The tellers speak as if writing a letter, creating unfinished fables, listening and telling from behind the one-way mirror.

- *Written story*

Written stories are powerful ways to disseminate or pass on “this is the way things are”, and they become fixed. They tend to lose some of the potency of spontaneous words when spoken. They can take the following forms:

- Mini stories: affirmations, appreciations, thank you notes.
- Reading others' stories.
- Writing a letter.
- Writing one's own story.
- Co-writing care reports and documents.

- *Enacted story*

The last category is enacted stories. This means that they are acted out in the therapy room, with clients either playing the parts of themselves or others. They help people tell the story and are in the story at the same time:

- Acting out the story.
- Sculpting.
- Using puppets and other props.

These three story forms were earnestly employed in this research. In an attempt to access the full stories of adolescents in remarried families as fully possible, we used conversational interviews (spoken stories), written reports handed in (written stories), and imaginative work by my co-researchers (enacted stories). In this process, language plays a key role (Müller 1999). It is not a “mere messenger from the kingdom of reality” (Gergen 2001:11), but through it people also engage in a social process of constructing particular realities.

2.1.6.6 *Language*

Whenever language is used in a conversation, it contains meaning, understanding, imagery and information in itself, conveying one to the other. It is used to develop meaning and to interpret experience (O’Connor 1998:55). Events, experiences and surroundings as such may be physically the same at any one moment in time and space, and yet how they are selected to be acted

upon, to be made sense of by people, depends upon people's use of language (Shotter 1996:2). That does not mean that people can fully express their meaning through language and they use it merely as a representation of the tellers' thoughts, feelings and lives. Instead, language takes up the interactive ways in which the words people use influence the ways in which they think and feel about the world. In turn, the ways in which they think and feel influence what they speak about (Winslade & Drewery 1997:33). In other words, language is relational and generative, because it influences how people conceptualize what they see and how they position themselves in relationships with others. It does not reflect just on nature, but creates the natures people know (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:378).

Language is cultural, social, historical and relational. It is also constitutive of reality when it takes place in conversation. In conversation the words and phrases people use connect them to their immediate and historical legacy of ideas and meanings (Dallos 1997:142).

Gordon (1980:141) agrees with Foucault that language is an instrument of power. Those who manipulate and control the language used in various social discourses have power. By holding that language, they can maintain their power in society. One example is the language of scientists, which represents their knowledge and practice, not only in their academic world, but also in their society. Their language also reflects social structures of power (Graham 1996:29). On the other hand, "by breaking the silence, by using this most

powerful instrument, language, we can participate in empowering people to be survivors instead of victims” (Müller 2004c).

2.1.6.7 *Exploratory language*

Who uses what kind of language is a matter of who represents what and for whom. As mentioned above, language relates to social discourses, which connect directly and tightly with power practices. One characteristic of a postmodern narrative approach is “a flight from authority” (Glanville 1993:39). One way of practising “a flight from authority” in this research was to avoid using explanatory or expert language such as “healthy” or “unhealthy”, and “functional” or “dysfunctional”. These words are just the explanatory language of some expert groups. Story-telling should not be turned into a kind of explanation (Fee 2000:253, 257).

Instead of using explanatory language, research from a narrative social construction approach considers exploratory language that is similar to the concept of descriptive or externalizing language as used by narrative therapists. Co-researchers use exploratory language to describe the present, to visit and revisit the past, and to pursue the future. With exploratory language, the researchers can formulate their exploratory questions and imaginative work. Also, it is used to fill the relational and emotional gap between the researcher and those being researched. Miller, Hubble and Duncan (1995:54) emphasize its effectiveness in therapy by saying that their clients often experience an

empathic connection with therapists when the therapists use the clients' "language and worldview...rather than...the terminology".

In short, language expresses one's identity and one's system and culture (Tietze, Cohen & Musson 2003:5-14). Thus, to holistically understand my co-researchers' world, I needed to participate in their culture with exploratory language, which contains various images as a catalyst for telling and retelling stories and which they use in conversation.

2.1.7 Imaginative work

Imaginative work was an integral part of this research. Imaginative work enlivened the stories of my co-researchers, to be fulfilled and developed by themselves. This imaginative work always begins its task and starts from "here and now stories". Thus, starting from the here and now, I argue that in our daily life, activity and communication take place in some form through our imaginative work, which is referred to social, historical, cultural and personal experiences in a particular time and space.

From a narrative perspective, stories are "full of gaps which persons must fill in order for the story to be performed....These gaps recruit the lived experience and the imagination of persons" (White & Epston 1990:13). Moreover, these stories cannot be told fully through language, because of its own limitation to express (Graham 1996:21). Therefore, in order to fill the gaps, to employ

imaginative work is to attempt a holistic approach to people's life. Gerkin (1991: 67) is aware that ordinary life tends to be governed by imagination rather than reason.

Consequently, to amplify the stories of adolescents in remarried families and of their influence on the family, imaginative research in conversation with them was of great importance for this research. In this study, I do not use the term imagery to mean "mental imagery" (as developed by behavioural psychological scientists); rather, I believe that the use of imagery is an extraordinary faculty of human understanding and that it carries the capacity of human thinking patterns.

2.1.7.1 Imaginative work and Social constructionism

Traditional psychologists believe that "imagery" is a production of the mind by nature or "as the creative faculty of mind" (Lamarque & Olsen 1994:243). They call it "mental imagery", which is a type of non-logical thinking (Epstein 1989:3). They think that "our minds have their own discoverable, natural principles of operation which owe nothing either to history or society for their nature" (Shotter 1996:22). They think of imagination as individual phenomena or activity, but that view is not acceptable (Riikonen & Smith 1997: 61) to social constructionists.

However, in the light of social constructionism, imagery can be seen as derived from lived experiences in accordance with a social network. This imagery does not pop up either out of the right hemisphere of the human brain, nor from "out

there". Linstead (1993:116) thinks that imagery is produced as a result of and is also influenced in shape by social construction. It has already been constructed through culture and its communities. In that sense, the modernist's belief that an imaginative work is a person's original creation or authentic expression is no longer acceptable to postmodern thinkers, who believe that an imaginative work is a result of a reproduction of a social community. According to Kearney (1988:4), the "individual subject is no longer considered the maker or communicator of his own images. There is a growing conviction that the images we possess are reproduced copies of images already there before us".

In postmodern culture, a key concept is that there are neither transcendent realities nor original realities. Thus, it is no more important to distinguish between the real or the original reality and the imaginary reality. The very bond between imagination and reality can be comprehended not only as inverted but also as subverted altogether (Kearney 1988:3). The imaginary is a construction form in which people describe reality around them. Thus, a task of the social constructionist is "not to supply reality but to invent allusions" (Lyotard 1984:82) via the imagination, which is alternative with stories. Imagination is wider and more flexible than a mere story. In the light of narrative theory, fictional narratives can show how the world is presented to the reader, and they can be seen as imaginary resolutions of real contradictions (Talbot 1995:6).

2.1.7.2 *Imaginative work and narrative*

Imaginative work can be effectively used with a narrative approach in ways in which it accords with narrative to fill gaps in stories and to bring forth possibilities for alternative stories. Indeed, by means of imaginative work, people are able to render their stories to be amplified and performed. To fill their story gaps, they are required to take on the lived experience and their imagination (White & Epston 1990:13). Stories are often not only direct narrations of life events but also concern imaginary lives. Stories can be real or imaginary. This imaginary aspect helps individuals see presumable worlds, transposing themselves there. “These imaginative stories contain similar life changes to the reality worlds...” (Cattanach 2002:8).

A story is a form of representation of what people have known, conveying the meaning they attach to their life through it; and yet sometimes it does not offer a way of providing the possibility for alternative story (Hudd 2002:170). Müller (2004a) states the problem that “stories are often presented with very thin meaning and from the problem perspective”. However, imaginative work engenders other possibilities, stories and perspectives, and brings them forth. Through imagination as a human act, people can catch a credible mode of knowing and it “does yield a possible ‘home’ [a story] when we accept a participating role as ‘home-maker’ [storytelling]” (Brueggemann 1993:13). Imaginative work, in Brueggemann’s (1989:5) terms, fictional or poetical work, does not disappear effortlessly; rather, it walks to the edge of alternatives “not yet available” to people. Through imagination people can access “all kinds of possibilities to make new meanings and place ourselves differently in

relationship to a story” (Roberts 1994:72). Doing imaginative work in this research is not only to evoke lived experiences to embark through them upon the present, but also to draw preferred alternative stories into the present.

2.1.7.3 Imaginative work and therapy

Because of the effectiveness of imaginative work, many therapists employ it in their therapeutic work in the light of a narrative social constructionist approach such as drama therapy and play therapy (Cattanach 1992, 2002; Fox 1982; Freedman et al. 1997; Gil 1994; Jones 1996; Roberts 1994; Smith & Nylund 1997). There are many merits of the use of imagination in therapeutic rooms. Firstly, by means of imagination in therapeutic conversation, people, especially young persons, are encouraged to access their own unique skills and knowledge (Johnson 1999:211). They can facilitate their fictional imagination to start thinking another, healthier reality.

Imaginative work, moreover, creates a safe and secure space in conversation, especially for usually silenced or stigmatized stories, just as narrative play therapy does (Vay 2002:35). People, especially children, can find alternative ways of expression in a safe and secure space created in the conversation, and they are able to make a presumable reality in which they have a sense of it as the protagonist of it in the now. In doing so, they are able to enjoy their time and space. It is their time to create multi-stories to choose multi-interpretations looking back on past events and towards an open-ended future.

2.1.7.4 *Imaginative work and research*

“Listening to people talk in their own terms about what had been significant in their lives seemed to us far more valuable than studying preconceived psychometric scales or contrived experiments” (Josselson & Lieblich 1993: ix).

I argue that narrative research should not only rest on facts and concerns about factualism, but should also embrace imaginative outcomes. By contrast, quantitative research and traditional research deal with information, data, and empirical objects which are accepted as facts in terms of their view. Pastoral narrative research has to consider, for instance, subjective experiences and meanings which are incommensurable and subjective. Methodologically, the research takes on the form of largely unstructured conversation. The reasons are set out below.

- Facts and factuality:

In modernism, it is a tendency that propositions, claims and statements of science are very often respected as **facts**. Also, modernist thinkers believe that facts are empirically discoverable. Consequently, they stick to the mindset that research has to do only with facts.

However, Gergen (2001:238) does not believe that all scientific statements are based on actual cases. He thinks that it is dangerous that these

statements purport to inform us about the nature of reality and are used to make predictions. Shotter (1996:80-81) is also suspicious of the nature of facts which are claimed to be empirically identified by scientific communities, because “we must take it that our statements (whether true, false or meaningless) are not always about real things: sometimes what they refer to is imaginary; and there can be (... false and meaningless) statements about imaginary things”.

In fact, scientific claims are another form of story. These claims are narrated out of sequence of events all the time (Talbot 1995:3). Talbot (1995:3) gives us a good illustration: “A child writing up a science experiment in school has to produce a report of the series of actions she has undertaken...[to write her report] scientific discourse requires her to depersonalize by using the passive tense of the verb...to make her report-writing seem more objective. But she will continue to produce stories in her reports.”

Unfortunately, this kind of statement (a reported story) becomes the “truth” about what is empirically experimented on. It finally becomes a belief, which represents a principle or a norm. Yet, this “truth” and belief is a belief of community tradition (Browning 1991:177) or constructed ideas (White & Epston 1990:19). The actual mindset of the scientific statement or proposition as a belief or principle “is to hold it to be true and to have the disposition to assert it as true” (Lamarque & Olsen 1994:244).

In postmodern culture, not all scientific propositions and beliefs are rejected; the possibilities of these are approval. However, the notion is rejected that all claims are applicable to any situation and case. Fee (2000:253) acknowledges the unique ways in which science describes the general patterns of the world. He simultaneously warns that “human (conscious) activity does not have those characteristics; or, at the very least, they are not essential to it. It is a fundamental betrayal, carried out in the name of science, to insist that it must”. Thanks to the above recognition, one of the purposes of postmodern movements is to consider narratives as “container[s] for our constructions” (Paré 1995:7). Bruner (1986:15) says, “narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative”. In other words, stories including imaginations come from real lives which become sources for telling and making stories. Thus, pastoral narrative research emphasizes imaginative work because this research relies on real lives.

- The characteristics of subjective experience:

It is imperative that this research be aligned with imaginative work. The first reason is that without the teller and listener’s constant imaginative work in their conversation, the attempt to understand subjective experience is inconceivable, because subjective experience consists of beliefs, feelings, ways of making sense and evaluating the world as perceived (Stevens 1996:150), which require imaginative descriptions to be manifested. Stevens (1996:150) argues that “we cannot measure [subjective experience], at least not without losing its richness and the quality which gives it its authentic feel. Nor is it usually relevant to set up experiments to test hypotheses which try

to explain actions in terms of cause-effect laws”.

- The characteristics of language:

According to O'Connor (1998:55), the language used in conversation contains meaning, understanding, imagery and information in itself, conveying one to the other. In this respect, while traditional research with its measure box has no space to reveal the content of the language of the researched in depth, imaginative work from a pastoral narrative research is very helpful in that it provides people with multiple descriptions in their language.

In addition, people tend to stick to their daily descriptive language while they are presenting or explaining something, especially if they are sensitive to other people. In this situation, whenever words as descriptive tools are used in conversation, meaning is restricted and thereby cannot be fully revealed. However, by implementing people's imaginative depiction, they are able, not only to express more fully what they experience as possible, but also to think of alternative interpretations of their experience. Therefore, for this research, imaginative work was one of crucial methods to help my co-researchers, remarried families and their adolescents, to develop their stories.

- Alternative possibilities:

Furthermore, in contrast to traditional research, narrative research embraces imagination(s) because it has to do not only with present and past stories, but also with possibilities for the future stories of the researched that cannot

be factual, but only imagined. Therefore, this research adopted imaginative work. Roberts (1994:71) says: “We can fill out the past, project future; imagination is essential for moving stories through time, speaking in different voices, and elaborating memory.” One task of narrative research is, according to Shotter (1993:81), to make new connections, possibilities or more productive metaphors visible.

In short, in as far as research is concerned about its subjects and facts, traditional research has no room for imaginative work. By contrast, pastoral narrative research cannot help but emphasize the importance of imaginative work, because it works on stories, and the feelings and emotions in the stories. It is imaginative work that helps the researched to thicken their stories and the researchers to understand the told stories and to empathize with them during the moment of conversation.

- Practical examples:

In imaginative research, various things could be used, such as colours, tastes, small stones or graphs. For instance, a colour could be representative in that it describes a person’s mood in a specific situation, or tells of her or his anticipation of the future. This colouring offers various poetic interpretations and alternative pictures in the mind that gives the person the privilege of being a multi-self rather than a fixed self. This colouring also cannot be apart from one’s cultural boundaries. A Western person might say his feeling was blue, and the meaning may be different

from a Korean person's view of blue. In Korean culture, a person may think of blue as positive like hope, or cool.

Taste can also be used to represent one's memory. A person may express her or his memory of the past as bitter, which normally means awful and terrible, so that she or he would not want to look back on it. By contrast, another person could say the bitter was painful but an effective medical substance for the future. These are examples of putting imaginative work into research. Through imaginative work, people can concatenate their events from now to yesterday, from today to tomorrow, from factual events to imaginable events, and vice versa. This imaginative research was nowhere more effective than when applied to a narrative social construction approach. By implementing imaginative work in this study, children from the remarried families were not only able to express the fullness of their emotions and moods, but also to build their beautiful future house.

2.2 THEOLOGY

The shift from modernism to postmodernism has taken place not only in theory but also in the theological field. Whereas modernist theologies have tended to reinforce dominant social discourses and support them as an underlying pivot, the mandate of postmodernist theologies is to make marginalized discourses livelier and to give a voice to marginalized people. All the above theoretical stances go well with practical pastoral theology based on the mindset of Minjung Theology. In this study, as I am aware of the historical tendency in the

theological field for such terms “practical theology” and “pastoral theology”, including the attempt to distinguish the concept of pastoral care and pastoral counselling (O’Connor 2003), to be conceptualized and developed differently in terms of practice and discipline (Graham 1996:11). Yet, for the purposes of this study, it is not very important to distinguish between the terms “pastoral” and “practical”, because this study is both pastoral (inclined to counselling for individuals), and practical (to do with paradigms and methodologies for the study).

2.2.1 Practical pastoral theology

In order for adolescents in remarried families to establish a theology, my theological stance is consistent with the following suggestive definition Gerkin (1986:61):

Practical theology is the critical and constructive reflection on the life and work of Christians in all the varied contexts in which that life takes place with the intention of facilitating transformation of life in all its dimensions in accordance with the Christian gospel. Practical theology, seen from a narrative hermeneutical perspective, involves a process of the interpretative fusion of horizons of meaning embodied in the Christian narrative with other horizons that inform and shape perceptions in the various arenas of activity in which Christians participate.

In this definition, Gerkin (1986), on the one hand, does not lose the position of

understanding where the theological work starts, that is, a concrete *habitus* (Graham 1996:103). Müller (2004a) single-mindedly insists: “Practical theology is only possible as contextual practical theology. Practical theology cannot function in general. It is always local, concrete and specific.” Postmodern practical theology is not the application of theory which is categorized by traditional disciplines, studies of biblical theology, systematic theology and church history (Fowler 1999:75); rather, it is constructed from the question of what is happening here and what is going on in this situation (Gerkin 1991: 61). On the other hand, practical theology does not underestimate the dialogical relationship with other horizons in the postmodern era, namely, interdisciplinary work (O’Connor 1998:47). This interdisciplinary work can create a developmental stage for a number of possibilities which are transformable. Thus, in order to explore the influence of various socially constructed discourses on remarried families and their roles in the family, I propose to consult with narrative social constructionism for both interdisciplinary and epistemological work. The formula of practical theology is practice (a naive understanding of a concrete context), theory (a critical conversation from a narrative hermeneutical perspective), practice (a new praxis) (O’Connor 1998: 105) in dialectics.

According to Müller (2004a:s.p.), “practical theological research is not only about description and interpretation of experience. It is also about deconstruction and emancipation....to develop into a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community”. To be regarded as

practical theological research, both deconstructive and emancipative, this research had to take on both a narrative approach and a social deconstruction process. In doing so, the co-researchers in the practical theological research aspect of this research were remarried families and their children as a concrete *habitus*, myself as a research facilitator and God as the mysterious “Other” (Carlson & Erickson 2002:235, Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:175).

The central purpose of practical pastoral theology in this study was to make dialogue possible between the stories of remarried families’ here and now, and God’s story, in order to make them work together to go further toward creating new meaning and new life. It is best to achieve that purpose by means of a transformable and re-interpretive interaction of their stories (Gerkin 1991:59). Elsewhere, Gerkin (1997:13) articulates the notion that a pastoral caregiver has the responsibility to facilitate the maintenance and further development of the person’s spiritual or faith story and the dialogue with its tradition, and to facilitate the growth and creative development of particular life stories.

2.2.2 Minjung Theology

As Müller (1999:s.p.) says, “with our stories we take a position”. Hence, throughout my experience of personal and communal events and incidents in a particular area of Korea, I have spontaneously consulted Minjung Theology as a practical theology born in particular circumstances in Korea. It is a Korean indigenous theology and one way of doing theologies. It focuses on the stories

of the marginalized, rather than on those of dominant power groups. Some theologians understand it as a version of Liberation Theology, but that is not accurate. Unlike Liberation Theology, takes on board Marxism, and thus bars religion and culture as an opium, but Minjung Theology rejects that view (CCA 1989:xv). Also, while the former rejects dialogue with Christian traditional stories, the latter enthusiastically converses with those stories by deconstructing them.

2.2.2.1 *For the marginalized*

This theology is often referred to as the “Minjung Story”. It has gained its other name among its theologians since it started with marginalized people’s storytelling (Chung 1991:104). The extreme case is that some insist that it give up its categorization as a discipline, for they believe that a story is only a story. That is why they call it the “Minjung Story”, instead of the “Minjung Theology”. Its practitioners believe that human history and society have been engendered, has flourished and has been constructed with the blood of the marginalized, which cannot be perceived from a dominant group’s position, and that their stories were often sadly buried in the name of “truth” by power groups’ dominant ideas. Minjung Theology pursues political, economic, social and systemic change.

In a hermeneutic sense, it strives to see people’s context and the Bible from the eyes of the marginalized in the here and now (Kwok 1995:17). Its thinkers suggest that a “dialogical imagination” is an alternative way of interpreting a

biblical truth from the perspective of the marginalized (Kwok 1995:8). The marginalized implement the way, the dialogical imagination, to find out their preferred future stories from both biblical stories and their own people's stories. The dialogical imagination is like a bridge between biblical stories and people's stories, each of which has its own gaps. It is a way to close the distance between both stories.

2.2.2.2 *Dialogical practice*

I regard dialogue as so important that I draw on dialogue as an idea for doing practical theology into my own theology. To take up a dialogue form is to encourage practical theologians to shift the ways in which they strive for a better understanding of objects, to how they genuinely understand each other. According to Shotter (1993:6), this is "a shift from an interest in epistemology to one in practical hermeneutics". This shift leads me to take up a "not-knowing" position, and to apply a researcher's ethics in the process of research and counselling, as well as in pastoral narrative research, which compels that position and ethics. Social interactions and conversations are maintained through dialogues which construct a person's inner development and internalizes it to a greater or lesser degree. The internalization of dialogue is fundamental to the development of all forms of mental function: memory, learning, perception, attention and problem-solving (Dallos 1997:63).

Etymologically, in Greek, the word "dialogue" is derived from *dia* (thought) and

logos (word; meaning; to gather together) signifying the flow of meaning. Particularly, in Scharfenberg's view of pastoral care, the root the word in Greek expresses the idea of "talking through" one's problems and difficulties. Genuine dialogue is practised in openness, receptivity and flexibility to allow a flow of meaning in communication. Dialogue renders possible communication between diverse communities, traditions, cultures and social discourses. This dialogical work between them makes possible good pastoral work (Gerkin 1991:19). To develop his model of pastoral ministry, Gerkin (1991:70) borrows an idea from the Old Testament scholar Brueggeman that a continuing dialogue between contemporary life and the tradition must be fostered. Browning (1991:70) comments on "dialogues that advance the best reasons possible for our positions". He acknowledges a concept of ministry as dialogue to synthesize both individual and social transformation in one model (Browning 1991:247).

2.2.2.3 *Servant leadership*

Practically, in terms of servant-hood, also called "servant leadership", dialogical theology is supportive and facilitative, rather than used to force people. This servant leadership cannot but emphasize team-ship. In practising team-ship in terms of servant leadership, the leader of a team is only a team member among team members and his or her talent is leadership (Cladis 1999:89). This servant leadership is organic team-based leadership rather than a mechanical structure. In this sense, a leader does not lead the whole project of his or her team, but is a facilitator for the flow of the team's project. The underlying principle of team-

ship has several things in common with the participatory method in qualitative research.

In light of that, team-ship is crucial in this research, for this research is inclined to a participatory approach with my co-researchers rather than a mere observational approach. In a team for this research, I am a facilitator and leader in general, but each team member and each of my co-researchers is a leader in a specific story, a particular situation and step in the process of this research. This team-ship prompts this study to take on incarnational care to be culturally participatory. One missionary expounds the incarnation in this way: Jesus, who came as a helpless infant, was a learner, became 100 percent Jew and gave up His position to communicate with people (Lingenfelter & Mayers 1986:125).

2.2.2.4 *Text dispute*

The last part of dialogical servant-hood theology deals with text dispute. Its pattern of doing theology is practice-theory-practice. I believe that God is not sleeping in the Bible and did not merely make sense in biblical times; rather, He is still actively working here and now. It is imperative that the Bible as story is capable of being many texts at once, but that we also consider God's work place and time and the people we study to be a crucial text. In his model for pastoral care in an eco-hermeneutical pastorate, Müller (1991:84) clearly states:

...we work with two texts. We try to understand people as 'texts'...

We listen to them and pay attention to their stories. On the other

hand, we try to understand the gospel in its significance for a specific situation. The aim of interpretation is to understand what text means for people living their lives here and now within a certain ecosystem.

Therefore, with this view, I have the personal responsibility to reconstitute socially constructed religious ideas regarding the stories of adolescents in remarried families and to reinterpret teachings on remarriage in the Bible. Also, fulfilling the purpose of practical pastoral theology from a narrative approach has to do with the social and political dimension of care (Graham 1996:50). In doing this work, Christian narrative, pastoral care and counselling are able to abundantly sustain the everyday life of remarried families and their children.

2.3 RESEARCH CONCERN AND METHODOLOGY

2.3.1 Research gaps

Among the problems surrounding existing research as presented in Chapter 1, I found two critical issues in terms of research gaps in the field of remarriage family studies.

- the subject of research issue; and
- the paradigm and methodology issue.

In the field of family studies and therapy, remarried families are a relatively new issue. Research on issues concerning remarried families and its name in research have only fairly recently begun to be constructed (Carter & McGoldrick

1998:417). Specifically, adolescents in remarried families, who are most significant role-players in the family, have not received sufficient attention from practitioners in the field.

Besides, even though some traditional researchers and therapists have paid attention to them, at best, they have tended to put the adolescents into their “toolbox”. As a result, they failed to approach them holistically, have overlooked their strengths, and have not included their own points of view on their family potencies. Therefore, my research endeavoured to fill the research gaps in the way in which it focused on adolescents in remarried families, listening to them in depth by means of the leverage used, a pastoral narrative approach.

2.3.2 Research question

I was interested in two pivotal questions, namely

- the strengths; and
- the points of view of adolescents in remarried families on their families.

2.3.2.1 *Strengths*

What strengths do adolescents in remarried families have? How have adolescents in remarried families woven their stories to engender their developmental future stories in their particular situation, even though their surroundings tend to stigmatize them?

2.3.2.2 Points of view of adolescents in remarried families on their families

How do the participating adolescents see their families and lives apart from meta-knowledge? How and with what knowledge do they help our communities to flourish with their stories?

2.3.3 The aims of the study

In this study, I had two aims, namely,

- to provide a space and time for adolescents in remarried families to tell their present, past and future stories, thereby reconstructing their past stories and amplifying their present and future stories by implementing a pastoral narrative approach; and
- to bring together the outcomes of their told stories (local knowledge) to their community and the academic world.

Through my studies, I have realized that good research requires a thorough consideration of how the research opens up space for new possibilities and how it helps people look at their worthwhile self. On this basis, the foremost aim of this research should be to be meaningful and useful to the participants involved in the research, rather than to achieve the researcher's interests at the expense of the participants (Cattanach 2002; Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001). Secondly, the concern of how we can aptly enliven their specific knowledge (called "local knowledge") (Geertz 1983:168) in our communities and academic worlds should be an additional interest of this study. Therefore, the following

questions are of less importance: Is the research applicable to any other adolescents in remarried families in any other situation? Is it representative enough? This research is deeply embedded in the local.

2.3.4 The researcher's attitude in this research

I strove to maintain the following attitudes during the research:

- the joy of empathy;
- respectfulness; and
- subjectivity.

My shared story in Chapter 1 and my choice of the story from my past has been identified with me, showing some of who I am now, and it is this that leads me to take on certain methodological positions, such as a not-knowing, qualitative, participatory stance, and to use imaginative conversational interviews, a research processor-oriented rather than controller-oriented, a subjective rather than objective, method. Briefly, I looked back on my remarried family life and my upbringing of children, and these experiences have influenced my attitude toward this study, which explores the stories of two adolescents in remarried families living in South Africa, and my attitude spontaneously became humble and respectful.

- *Joy of empathy:*

My initial response to this field was the joy of empathy with remarried families, for I identify my remarried story with their stories. The joy of empathy draws me magnetically into their companionship, which I am part of.

I am also part of what they will present and what we want to achieve in this study. It enables me to be part of them as a whole and to immerse myself in their stories. Without this, according to Müller (1999), a genuine meeting between people is not possible.

- *Respectful:*

My attitude towards other stories is respectful; each of my co-researchers is the main actor as an expert and a protagonist of her or his stories, which are unique and meaningful to her or him. In this research, I centre “people as the experts in their own lives” by positioning myself in a respectful and non-judgmental position (Morgan 2000:2). Therefore, the not-knowing position is of great significance in this research (Anderson & Goolishian 1990, 1992; Kotze et al. 2002). By means of a narrative approach, we develop respect for each other’s stories, and therefore we may also bring our stories of skeletons of guilt out of the closet (Müller 2004c).

- *The subject-to- subject:*

My story, as well as other remarried family stories, has been objectified at least once for the sake of research. Therefore, it is imperative that each of us be subjective and have a sense of neutrality. I do not seek to gather mathematical data, which focuses on a matter of how many numbers the research includes and what the mathematical and statistical outcome of it is, but rather, I pursue an understanding and the meanings of subjective experiences. Being observed and objectified by data in research is not

suited to subjective matters such as feelings, moods, sensitivities and beliefs about a perception of a world. For that reason, using a subject-to-subject approach in this research is both to invite and to be invited into each other's stories. Subject-to-subject relationships are inclusive, not exclusive, in the process of the research.

2.3.5 The ABDCE formula

With regard to the methodological process, I adopted the metaphor of Fiction Writing developed for narrative research by Müller, et al. (2001:76-96), namely the A B D C E formula: Action, Background, Development, Climax, and Ending. All the abovementioned paradigms and theologies can be activated in the formula of ABDCE Fiction Writing used in narrative social construction research. For that reason, first of all, the flow of Fiction Writing research entrusts itself to the plot of the story, which is not to be intruded on by the intended plans of the researcher. Secondly, narrative research deals with stories being moved back and forth from the present to the past and vice versa and from the present to the future and vice versa. It contains story-telling, listening and interpreting, and is full of a story developmental dialectic. That process can almost be attained by the pattern of Fiction Writing research. Thirdly, as the name, Fiction Writing, suggests, this method readily welcomes imaginative work in certain areas. The process is facilitated to mark a milestone at each stage of the Fiction Writing research. Lastly, it encourages co-researchers to lead this research, to interpret the outcomes of this research and to decide what should be included and

excluded.

2.3.5.1 *Action*

This phase is about the “here and now” of the co-researchers’ stories. The researcher must stay in the now; not the last now, not the next now, but *this now*, being described, as the very first step in the research.

2.3.5.2 *Background*

In this moment, the background to the co-researchers’ now story (in terms of its historical, socio-political and economic panorama) is explored in a manner which invites the researchers and co-researchers to visit and re-visit the memory rooms of their past.

In order to substantiate the information for the background of this action, I watched television shows, sitcoms and various explanations of African families and collected books and journals on issues concerning remarried families. The main source remained my co-researchers’ accounts. All the stories they reported passed through my understanding, which then allowed feedback to and from my co-researchers and my reflection group.

2.3.5.3 *Development*

As the story plot develops, for a unique outcome to be reached, the researcher

and co-researchers try to integrate the narrative(s) of various people within existing narratives. Every story has a plot, a rising action, which is busy making sense of the past story from the point of view of the present and is also re-authoring the future story.

In this stage of the research, narrative researchers need to be patient and curious, to wait for the plot development and its outcome. That does not mean they have to be passive in this phase; rather, they take a de-centered active role (Freedman & Combs 1996:284). This role is an embodiment, according to White (2000:75), as “to embody one’s interest in other people’s lives is to situate this interest in the context of those people’s expressions, in the context of one’s own lived experience, in the context of one’s imagination and curiosity, or in the context of one’s purposes”.

With regard to raising the different stories in conversation, I first introduced what I had collected to my co-researchers. Afterward, I let the stories develop and let them tell stories to each other rather than my clarifying or intervening in their dialogue. That is critical for my understanding their stories. At this stage, the *not-knowing* position should still be maintained with curiosity and exploratory questioning.

2.3.5.4 *Climax*

As a manifestation stage, everything comes together in the climax. The climax

in a story is the turning point which is found in the culmination of the story, yet not even the reader knows what it will be before it manifests. Likewise, nobody can predict what the climax of my co-researchers' stories will be. In this sense, all one can do is just to be sensitive. The researcher never tries to manipulate the climax in this phase.

In general, I had an expectation that my co-researchers' stories would transcend what they had woven with their stories and that they would change impossibilities in the stories to future-oriented possibilities. My curiosity in this phase of their stories was this: could I work for my co-researchers so that they could see that they are in their stories and they are able to see themselves within their stories? Have they satisfied their stories through telling their stories? What are the healthy and developmental resources they have received from the process of this co-researching? Have they found their bondage in their stories? Have they recognized that if they have any, then their bondage(s) has (have) been made up of their possessed stories? In other words, bondage, which restricts a person, does not come from an external source, but from within the person's story, and so, releasing hers or his bondage is her or his responsibility. However, I was very careful in asking questions to remember that it is a prerequisite and imperative in a narrative approach to be patient and to await the climax of their stories without manipulating the climax.

2.3.5.5 *Ending*

Every story has its ending, which is already intended and created by the author in her or his outline of the story. The ending is also formulated by brainstorming before starting the story as traditional research has been doing; the purpose of such research is to prove its hypothesis or suggest ideas. However, an ending in Fiction Writing research is the ending of the story, “where we are left with a sense of what happened” (Müller *et al.* 2001:76). In other words, we, my co-researchers and I, followed the flow of our story toward the ultimate ending of our story. The endings of my co-researchers’ stories would be an envelope of secrets waiting to be opened to a new, next story in their own contexts. If we as narrative social constructionists truly practise what we preach, we have to envision that there are few wrong ends to any form of story, but there are many right answers to end most stories.

2.3.6 Qualitative research

In order to research in depth stories of remarried families and their adolescents, stories which are subjective and somewhat abstract, quantitative methods are not suitable. Traditional research is at fault in the way that it gathers data or conceptualizes the outcomes of research interviews: the subjects of the research undertake passive roles and are being manipulated (Limerick, Burgess – Limerick & Grace 1996:449). Their subjective experiences have been discarded from quantitative research in favour of norms, representativeness, validity, reliability and objectivity in the name of science.

Therefore, in order to avoid this trend, I implemented a qualitative approach,

involving conversational interviews as possible *modi*, which is appropriate to listening for the stories of adolescents in remarried families and for positioning them in a subjective role in the research because stories, as already mentioned, cannot be objectified by observing or measuring data:

For us, the aim of the research is not to bring about change, but to listen to the stories and to be drawn into those stories. While the structuralist researcher has objectivity in mind by trying to be an observer from outside, and by trying to bring about change from the outside, the narrative researcher has subjective integrity in mind and strives for participatory observation (Müller *et al.* 2001:67).

Thus, a qualitative conversational interview is more appropriate to amplify people's stories than any other method, since one task of qualitative research is that the research should be beneficial to the participants. Also, a qualitative researcher can be more aware of the need for humility, credibility and anticipation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:150-151). Moreover, its method allowed my co-researchers' vivid voices and personal experiences to be heard in the process of the research and the conclusion of this study. It was my task to let the voices of my co-researchers be alive and robust. I consulted mainly the method of Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as set out in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research 2000*.

Qualitative methods primarily share analogous epistemological mindsets with narrative social construction in terms of the desire to understand the nature of

knowing, social reality, and procedures for comprehending phenomena (Bryman & Burgess 1999:46). People experience sensory worlds as well as cognitive ones. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:2), qualitative methods “generally examine people’s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways, to more clearly represent the situation as experienced by the participants”, who are called co-researchers.

By using the word “co-researchers”, qualitative research clearly shows a trend, that is, establishing a subject-to-subject relationship, as in the process of this research. In other words, this relationship is based on “inter-subjectivity”. This inter-subjectivity makes it possible to reduce the distance between the researcher and those who are interviewed, and to maintain the effects of subjectivity (Bishop 1996:27). Narrative practitioners form an opinion on the term “co-research”, that co-researching is to foster a collaborative attitude, to value emotional experiences and reflections, to engage in empowering relationships and to diminish the effects of existing hierarchies (Smith & Nylund 1997:358-359). The participation of co-researchers is always respected as “doing” research with the researcher, rather than being researched, constructing the meanings that become data (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:166). In the mindset of narrative researchers, every person’s story (so-called data) and individual contribution is valuable and unique. A pastoral narrative research and qualitative research are therefore not inherently contradictory.

2.3.6.1 *Participatory*

To become part of the co-researchers' stories, I had to take a collaborative and participatory stance that was true to a narrative social construction approach and practical theology. Being participatory means to participate in a system (Kotzé *et al.* 2002:149), and the participants share tools: co-creating and reflecting conversations or re-authoring narrative conversations (Kotzé *et al.* 2002:153) In the process of participatory research, the researcher and the research participants continually tell their own stories, which are lived out in a collaborative mode (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:265).

Participatory research encourages the participants to address non-rational influences on the researcher and research openly and honestly, especially when presenting findings (Jorgensen 1989:9). Through participation, Jorgensen (1989:12) says, "it is possible to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why at least from standpoint of participants things happen as they do in particular situations". That is why participatory research is called "community-based research", so as to expand and maintain social and personal interaction (Stringer 1999:28). The participants can learn from each other via the research process.

2.3.6.2 *Co-regulation*

Participatory research is coherent with co-regulation, as collaboration helps participants to recognize alternative ways and unknown possibilities. It takes

place while people's joint actions come together to achieve a unique and mutually created set of social actions (Fogel 1991:6). Fogel (1991:34) articulates the meaning of co-regulation as "a social process by which individuals dynamically alter their actions with respect to the ongoing and anticipated actions of their partners.... As a consequence of co-regulated interaction, a consensual social pattern is created and elaborated over time". Through this collaborative joint action, we, my co-researchers and I, tried to find preferred future stories. In a co-regulation process, we needed spontaneity without any explicit planning or design, and creativity characterized by a stance of openness to the other, a willingness to help events to be elaborated and to be shaped by the process (Fogel 1991:29-32). In this mode, my story could be changed and the conclusion of this study depends upon what they presented.

2.3.6.3 *Concerning cultural boundaries*

My perceptions of remarried families and their children, as well as those of my co-researchers, may be culturally constructed. Accordingly, I have attempted to cross some cultural boundaries affecting my co-researchers to learn about their culture in advance and to bring our socially saturated concepts, ideas and thoughts into our conversation in the process of this research. In order to achieve a crossing of cultural boundaries, Müller (1999) advises, first of all, that we need to be as honest as possible concerning our own prejudices. Secondly, it is unusual that we can openly verbalize these prejudices. I have also enthusiastically been reflected on by my co-researchers and constantly had to

remind myself of my own influential position, namely one of authority, by questioning my views which are shaped by what I have studied and experienced (Hare-Mustin 1994:33). In doing so, I had to keep in mind the need for openness, flexibility and receptivity for in-depth conversation to take place.

2.3.6.4 *Subjective integrity*

In this study, it is of great significance to maintain the researcher's subjective integrity, characterized by an ethical commitment in which the researcher's practice and her or his chosen paradigm and methodology must not be contradictory, but must conform to each other. As explained above, there has been a paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism, away from a view of research that relied on assumptions and hypotheses concerning reliability, validity and representativity. This shift is one from "scientific objectivity" to "subjective integrity".

- Ethics and subjective integrity:

Subjective integrity is an ethical consideration with regard to the process of the research and the relationship between its participants, including the researcher. This is the question: what is the ethical consideration of narrative research? For what and for whom is this consideration? What is the measurement of this consideration? To construct these ethical boundaries in the research is not an easy task.

The reason for this is firstly that the difficulty that an ethical consideration is not a mere selection of right or wrong and good or bad. Instead, research ethics is a way of establishing relationships between participants. Secondly, the researcher confronts an ethical dilemma. For instance, transparency, the boundary between intervention and encouragement, and between pure curiosity and intended curiosity can be ambiguous or arguable. No one can really be objective when researching. As a result, encouragement can be naively and one-sidedly offered. Pure curiosity in questioning can be seen as intended questioning. In terms of confidentiality, gleaning information from the research is very necessary, and yet a research participant may not want to reveal information.

According to Müller (2004a), the “narrative paradigm and conversational method do not guarantee a sound ethical relationship.... The power relations in a therapeutic context [research context] can be obscure and covert, but they are nevertheless present... To be aware of the developing pastoral-therapeutic relationship [research relationship], which includes the politics of power, is the greatest ethical challenge.”

Lastly, ethical consideration has to do with context, which is sometimes unpredictable. When a researcher is compelled to an ethical choice in a particular context, she or he has to face up to an unpredictable situation.

In this regard, therefore, I used four underlying principles: the not-knowing

position, curiosity, confidentiality and heartfelt compassion. By positioning my research and myself within these principles, an atmosphere of openness could be created (Jones 2003:7).

- Not-knowing position:

First of all, the main purpose of the narrative research was to understand the co-researchers' telling of their stories so that the researcher could "understand", not to "above or beside-stand" them. Thus, a not-knowing position (Anderson & Goolishian 1990:157) is significant. This not-knowing position is a way of showing respect and approval for other people's local knowledge, which has been developed in very different ways, according to themselves, within their culture. This position does not indicate that "I don't know, you know", but that I am aware of my background, preconceptions and knowledge. In Müller's (2004a:s.p.) words, it "comprises an awareness of the dynamics of power relations". The position of being not-knowing means that my co-researchers and I do not know where we will "end up, but know... that we are creating meaning through collaboration" (Kotze *et al.* 2002:154).

A position of not-knowing required me to establish team-ship with my co-researchers as we progressed towards the future story. One way of establishing an ethical relationship in team-ship was by questioning my co-researchers and myself. Positioning myself in a not-knowing position was a way to maintain transparency in the process of research, to stay away from the pitfalls of my own values, judgments and popular fixed discourses. To

create a condition of transparency, I had to get feedback on my understanding of interviewees' stories from them, situating it in the context of their experiences, imagination and intentional states.

- Curiosity:

This position is maintained by questioning, or curiosity (Monk *et al.* 1997:26). According to Epston and White (1994:146), curiosity “evokes ‘concern’; it evokes the care one takes for what exists is and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential.” To practise curiosity, one of the essential strategies is questioning. Morgan (1999:203) says: “Questions are informed by particular ways of thinking.” However, narrative questions are not rhetorical or pedagogical (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:34).

- Confidentiality:

Furthermore, I took up confidentiality because my co-researchers could tend to feel inhibited in telling their stories due to their peculiar situation. In order to facilitate it, I have reported my co-researchers' names using the imagery that they created. If they did not want their stories to be written in my writing, I accepted. If a finding was very significant but they rejected using this finding, I compromised with them in some way.

- Heartfelt compassion:

Lastly, the pastor's heartfelt compassion, which prompted me to be active, is a most essential part of subjective integrity. In servant leadership, compassion is clearly the most significant element. It enabled me to be part of them as a whole and to immerse myself in their stories.

2.3.7 Brief summary

Unlike traditional researchers who focus on pathology, firstly, I focused on my co-researchers' strengths and their open-ended future stories (Monk *et al.* 1997:42; Gerkin 1986:41). I believe this approach makes it possible to find a new identity, one that is distinct and separate from the problems of the co-researchers.

Secondly, my chosen method does not manipulate the co-researchers with expert knowledge and categorical assessment as the traditional approach tends to do, rather, it inclines me and them to listen for detailed and context-specific narratives (Freedman & Combs 2002:19) that may even change me as the researcher. Whereas general and popular approaches try to solve problems as quickly as possible (Müller 1999), one aspect of my approach is to wait to solve problems from my co-researchers' own systems and to wait on the Lord. Müller (1999) emphasizes that "we will have to cease wanting to achieve and contrive in [the] pastoral situation. True pastoral work is not result-oriented, but rather wait-oriented."

Thirdly, doing participant research gave me the joy of empathy, warmth and genuine interest in my co-researchers' own creativity. A narrative researcher shares the above experience (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:29). Overall, my paradigm, in contrast to a traditional one, sought to shift from explanation into interpretation and understanding, theory into narrative (Browning 1991: 83) and technology or methodology into ethics (Kotzé et al. 2002:26).

2.3.8 The possible *modi*

As a follower of narrative social constructionism and Minjung Theology, I preferred to use conversational interviews. A merit of the conversational interview is that it helps the researcher to understand better the meanings that people weave into their everyday life. However, without establishing a non-hierarchical relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, the purpose of the interview cannot be achieved. Qualitative in-depth interviews take place more aptly in conversation (Marshall & Rossman 1999:108).

2.3.8.1 The characteristics of conversation

Conversation is a way of understanding a conversational partner's knowledge within her or his context, of building certain relationships so as to affect or to be affected between conversational partners. This is apart from the result of the conversation, regardless of whether it is "good" or not. As MacIntyre (1981:197) remarks, "[c]onversation, understood widely enough, is the form of human transactions in general". Through conversation, people attempt to portray to

others their understanding of the world and the meaning of their experience.

When conversation occurs, power emerges in a conversational relationship to change the relationship. For instance, Winslade and Monk (2000:138) accept Cobb's notion that, when the first speaker in a conversation says something to the other(s), his or her story has power to influence what the other can speak about afterwards. Whoever starts speaking first is then elevated in the power relationship, and this position had to be abandoned in this research. In this sense, my position in the conversation with my co-researchers was one of a reactor rather than of a first speaker who tries to draw certain responses from the other. I mean that being a reactor in a conversation is to be an active listener who must be responsive, in that the listener has to attempt to clarify what he or she hears in order to respond. Bakhtin (1986:68) explains the attitude of an active listener as follows: "...when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it.... And the listener adopts this responsive attitude for the entire duration of the process of listening and understanding, from the very beginning sometimes literally from the speaker's first word."

Furthermore, whoever uses words in conversation involves her or himself in a power relation to create a new relation with her or his partner. Shotter (1993:2-3) gives a good illustration of this; the notion of what he calls a "linguistically constructed relationship": if a person says, "I love you" to the other person, such

a verbalization can function to reconstitute the whole character of the speaker's relation with the other, and thereby, to create a new kind of reality. Following his notion, I used descriptive words and questionings to prompt my co-researchers' imaginations. These descriptive words included references to colours, tastes and images.

2.3.8.2 *Unstructured conversational interviews*

In order to broadly understand the meaning of telling of stories and the cross-cultural boundaries of the co-researchers in the conversational interviews, an unstructured mode was formulated. This structure was non-linear, incoherent and fragmental (Tietze *et al.* 2003:59). An unstructured interview does not mean that I accessed adolescents in remarried families using an empty-handed, unprepared approach, but instead, as Bellah *et al.* (1985:301) put it, "we sought to bring our preconceptions and questions into the conversation and to understand the answers we were receiving not only in terms of the language but also, so far as we could discover, the lives of those we were talking with".

The content of questioning has emerged from an unstructured conversation (Kotzé *et al.* 2002:154). All the questions advanced were not known before the co-researchers responded to previous questions. In this approach, the process of conversation and its relationship was more focused than the content of the conversation. The equal voices of the conversational partners, a sense of solidarity with them, and putting aside the use of any authoritative position had

to be practised in the process of the interviews (Browning 1991:203).

2.3.8.3 *Semi-structured interviews*

It is possible that people may be unwilling to reveal their stories, even sometimes extremely defensive in their conversation (Müller 1999), or it could be that they do not know what they should talk about when interviewed. Therefore, I intended to draw on a semi-structured interview so as to, first of all, create an open space for my co-researchers by telling my own story or using various images, analogies and comparative situations. Secondly, I used similar questions in each co-researcher's interview to elicit common themes.

In any interviews, the questioning, one of the key characteristics of narrative research, was based on the following self-reflexive questions first. Freedman and Combs (2002:8) use some of these ideas when they consult with couples:

- *What am I tending to assume here?
- *How might my gender be influencing what I am attending to and what I am not attending to?
- *Am I in any way imposing my beliefs about what intimate relationships should look like?
- *How can I clarify the preferences, beliefs and values that the people consulting me hold about their relationship?
- *How can I provide the opportunity to those consulting me to unpack their own assumptions about their relationship?

In terms of my pastoral view, I questioned myself in a similar way (Gerkin 1997:12):

- *What was it about that pastoral care experience that made it an experience of care for me?
- *What, if anything, about the experience identified it as pastoral care?
- *What associations does the word pastoral conjure in your memory and imagination?
- *Is it significant to me that the care I recall was offered by a Christian pastor?
- *If so, how and why was that significant?

2.3.8.4 *Using letters*

By using letters, I planned to let my co-researchers bear in mind what they had worked on in telling their stories in the previous interview. A letter helped them to think thoroughly and reflect on how I had listened to their stories. I agree with Epston (1994:31), who sees therapeutic letter writing as “extending the conversation”, and believes that is applicable to research as well. He says: “Conversation is, by its very nature, ephemeral... But the words in a letter don’t fade and disappear the way conversation does, they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalizing it.”

My research letters could also help my co-researchers to think ahead for a next section, contributing to evoking alternative imaginations for the future. Morgan

(2000:104) acknowledges that “letters assist people to stay connected to the emerging alternative story that is co-authored in narrative meetings”. Not only did I expect all of the above effects, but I also wanted to let the letters be re-read, told, and re-told, like “a heroic story of adolescents” or “family tales” in the family (Freedman et al. 1997:112).

2.3.8.5 *Using language to describe*

The use of language is a critical issue in a narrative social construction approach. Who uses what kind of language is the subject of who represents what and whom. In short, language expresses a person’s identity and her or his system (Tietze *et al.* 2003:5-14). Thus, to understand my co-researchers’ world holistically, I needed to participate in their system through the explorative and descriptive language they have used in conversation. If this is not done, Derrida and Caputo (1997:13-30) warn, I would close down many possibilities and prevent my co-researchers from going on a journey to create a new world. Hence, I make use of the first person singular voice in this dissertation when describing my co-researchers’ voices, which is not commonly accepted in many popular journals and writings (Pienaar 2003:66).

2.3.8.6 *Recording*

In order to preserve stories told to me by my co-researchers, I used audio recordings which were used for making notes and documents. One merit of an audio recording is that equipment is readily obtainable, relatively inexpensive,

and easy to operate, which facilitated the recording of their stories easily and without disturbance (Jorgensen 1989:101).

2.3.8.7 *Note-taking*

To make notes, I divided my notes into four sections.

- The first section was a brief description of the action field, which was used for settings, such as surroundings, activities and the characteristics of my co-researchers.
- Another section was for semi-structured themes of stories, such as happiness, roles within the family, coping with conflict, and social discourses.
- The third section was my feelings and impressions of field involvements, that is my understanding and interpretation of their meanings.
- Finally, I wrote reflective notes. These notes were evaluated by my co-researchers and analysed using a narrative social construction approach and my theological viewpoint.

2.3.9 Interpretation

A pastoral narrative approach in the research never tries to analyse the work, but allows for interpreting discreetly. In my case in this study, I wanted to follow a narrative therapeutic model, Müller (2004b:s.p.) insists that “I do not even want to attempt to interpret this story. As my ‘therapist’, it is your task”. In a similar manner, I did not attempt to make one final, clear-cut interpretation, but rather, I tried my best to understand the stories I heard. As in Fiction Writing, which

suggests that there is no ultimate ending of a story, there is no ultimate grand interpretation in this research. To interpret the stories I heard, I have simply let the stories be interpreted by stories.

2.3.9.1 *Interpretation steps*

My method of understanding what I was told in each interview can be described as a pentagon. The lens of my understanding was narrative social construction in accordance with imaginative work. This work took place in the third section of my note-taking (see to 2.3.8.7 above). This idea first came from Anderson's homiletics (Anderson 2001), but I varied his idea for the purposes of my work.

- First: "What's?" This phase as an integration phase was meant to help me to experience with my heart the context of "now" to feel the context: the main character, who, what, mood.
- Second: "What's what?" This phase dealt with the holistic capturing of the context in my head: this phase was an analogical and oppositional approach towards deconstructing information. What is the point of view of the storyteller in my understanding, what is my point of view about "the told story", and how would others interpret that story? This work was meant to comprehend the context, and synthesized my de-conceptualization of the context.
- Third: "Aha but if!" This phase was subjective and imaginative in reconstructing, and found the hidden meaning of the told story within my heart and head. I applied the result of the second step to myself through an

“if” question: if I were them, if I were in their situation, if I had and so on.

- Fourth: I produced a written form of my understanding, which was not final though, to be able to hand to my co-researchers so as to get reflections from them.
- Fifth: I left this phase till last to receive feedback from the storytellers. The conclusion could be received only after the reflection section had been done and would be formulated by my co-researchers. In effect, their conclusion was not an actual ending, but the beginning of a new story.

2.3.9.2 Reflection phase and format

In order to reach the set purpose of this study (reconstructing and deconstructing socially saturated stories on remarried families and their children, and creating ways of reflection and feedback, which is of great significance), I did triangular cross-examinations with my co-researchers' reflections on my understanding, my co-researchers, my focus team and myself. The merit of reflection is to move us closer towards communal ways of working (Cattanach 2002:211).

At an ethical level, to disembody my positional power from my understanding of the data, self-reflective questioning was critical and would get reflected again by all the participants and edited according to their language in the beginning of each section. To facilitate this reflection, I handed in my written report to my co-researchers. If my co-researchers felt uncomfortable about commenting on my

understanding in front of me, I used an online-reflection system (mainly e-mail) in anonymity. When they would like to secretly talk about their honest opinion or complexities with some anonymity, online was best. Also, on the internet they were able to participate more individually rather than in interaction with others (White 2000:59).

- Reflection format: In regard to a critical reflection format on the preliminary findings, this formula was: Finding common understanding in our conversation → (evaluating) → Findings from existing discourses, literature and research → (distilling) → Conclusion → (discussing) → Application. Once we found certain common themes in and understandings of our stories, we evaluated existing and published thoughts, and then we distilled our own conclusions from that work.

2.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

True to a postmodernist perspective, to better understand adolescents in remarried families, I enthusiastically adopted a pastoral narrative approach for this research in accordance with social construction. This approach allows remarried family members to explore in person their unique significance and to account for their experiences. It also involved imaginative work and creative thinking, which is very important in this research, unlike traditional approaches which collect information and perform experiments.

In order for this approach to work fully, I implemented a conversational mode as

the possible *modus* to interview the co-researchers. These conversational interviews consisted of unstructured and semi-structured interviews. My main method in conducting the conversational interviews was questions formulated during the conversation. When themes emerged from conversations, I did not attempt to interpret them, but rather let them be interpreted by the storytellers. In the next chapter, we meet the co-researchers and listen to them.